

T H E G R E A T B O N D S

Nature, Law and Grace

in

King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra
and *Macbeth*

Thesis

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PREFACE

By looking at the world inhabited by those characters who partake of the dramatic action in King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra and Macbeth,¹ and the relationship of these characters to their world, or universe, it is hoped to establish how certain factors affect the genesis, development and resolution of the tragedies in which they play their roles. This will be done by an examination of what Shakespeare sometimes called the "Bonds,"² which, as we shall see, derive from the mediaeval concepts of Nature, Law and Grace that were current in his time.

This thesis does not claim to offer a complete or exclusive solution to the problem of the critical interpretation of these three tragedies: one of the dangers of literary criticism has always appeared to the writer to be that of maintaining that the approach adopted is the

¹All quotations from and references to King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra and Macbeth are to the Arden editions of these texts cited in the Bibliography. References to other Shakespearean works are to the Tudor edition (ed. Peter Alexander) cited in the Bibliography.

²The words Bond and Bonds have been capitalised throughout the thesis when they have been used in the sense conveyed in the title.

Shakespeare's use of the word Bond ranges widely, from the legal metaphors of the Merchant of Venice to the "bond of marriage" in Julius Caesar II.i.280, the "bond of childhood" in King Lear II.iv.180, the "bond of duty" in Henry VIII III.ii.188, the "bond and privilege of nature" in Coriolanus V.iii.25, the "bond of life" in Richard III IV.iv.77, the "bonds of heaven" in Troilus and Cressida V.ii.154, and to the "great bond" in Macbeth III.ii.49 that keeps him "pale." Almost without exception, however, the Bonds represent duties, commitments, obligations, rights — all those facets that are discussed in the Introduction, and form the subject of this thesis.

only one and of attempting to demonstrate that the theory coincides at every point with the work — admitting of no inconsistencies or alternatives, and thereby making nonsense of a theory that does have considerable validity.

Similarly, it is with considerable hesitation that names have been given to the various Bonds discussed. Once one names them and applies a certain range of definitions to these names, it is difficult to stress that the names and definitions are not static or rigid. The Bond of Nature, for example, although it has a central core of meaning common to all three tragedies, is not treated from the same viewpoint in King Lear as it is in Antony and Cleopatra or Macbeth.

Three considerations have prompted the writer to select this subject for the theme of a thesis. Firstly, the hypothesis that some failure, violation, misunderstanding or inadequacy of the Bonds lies at the heart of the tragic movement does appear to augment existing concepts of the nature of tragedy and help us better to understand the Why? How? and When? of the tragic process.

Secondly, the concept of the principles of Nature, Law and Grace as determinants of the Bonds, which occurs so frequently in Elizabethan thinking,¹ does seem to offer us a unified approach to their treatment of man and the world he inhabits at any particular point in history. By quoting from a wide range of sources dealing with this subject, the writer hopes to demonstrate that such a concept did exist, and that it was relatively consistent and generally accepted by Shakespeare and many

¹The word "Elizabethan" has been used throughout this thesis to cover a period rather wider than its strictly historical meaning would allow.

of his contemporaries. It is, moreover, a system of thought that can embrace within its ambit such diverse materials as the great chain of being; the microcosm and the macrocosm; the nature of the soul; the structure of the family, the clan or the nation; the concepts of sin, damnation and life everlasting; the four elements; and the humours — and assign to these and many others a proper nature, place and function in the overall scheme.

Thirdly, the writer was prompted to select this subject for a thesis because no critical writing to date appears to have dealt fully with the subject of the Bonds and their relationship to these principles of Nature, Law and Grace in Shakespearean tragedy.¹ There have, it is true, been critics who have dealt with facets of these principles,² and there have been critics who have commented on the violation, misunderstanding or inadequacy of various Bonds,³ but none of them seems to have dealt with the subject as a whole.⁴

¹Among the more modern works providing the most useful insight into the nature of the tragic process or vision (particularly that of Shakespearean tragedy) are the following: John Lawlor, The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare (2nd imp.; London: Chatto & Windus, 1966); Herbert J. Muller, The Spirit of Tragedy (A Borzoi Book; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968); Moody E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy (Midland ed.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); and Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

²John F. Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of "King Lear" (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), for example, does comment on certain aspects of the treatment of the Bonds of Nature in King Lear.

³So, for example, A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on "Hamlet," "Othello," "King Lear," "Macbeth" (reprinted; London: Macmillan & Co., 1962), has, in his study of Macbeth's character and the torment and terror he suffers, provided us with a masterly study of what happens when the Bonds are violated — although he does not identify the Bonds themselves.

So, for example, the works of Tillyard,¹ Bamborough,² Lovejoy³ and Curry⁴ contain lucid and carefully researched expositions of the 'world picture' inherited or evolved by the Elizabethans, or the philosophical bases of this world picture; but most of their comments deal almost entirely with concepts that fall under the ambit of the principle of Nature. As explained in the Introduction, however, Nature is one of a trinity of principles, which is completed by the equally important principles of Law and Grace – all of which derive from the Eternal Law.

Similarly, by pointing out crucial images and investigating significant image clusters, critics such as Spurgeon⁵ and Clemen⁶ have provided us with new insights into Shakespeare's dramatic method. Yet, as far as can be established, neither they nor any other critics of note have attempted to show the relationship between this imagery and the Bonds that operate in each tragedy, or the principles of Nature, Law and Grace, which determine the Elizabethan view of such Bonds.

Nor can references to these concepts be found in works on

¹E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943).

²J.B. Bamborough, The Little World of Man (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952).

³Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: The History of an Idea (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950).

⁴Walter Clyde Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (2nd ed.; Louisiana: State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1959).

⁵Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us (Cambridge: University Press, 1935).

⁶Wolfgang Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (reprinted; London: Methuen & Co., 1953).

the individual plays, such as those of Paul¹ and Heilman,² or works dealing with Shakespeare's sources and his use of these sources, such as those of Noble,³ Bullough⁴ and Muir.⁵

Since this is so, it is hoped that this thesis can, perhaps, provide some further —and largely complementary rather than contradictory — insights into Shakespeare's dramatic method.

The method of the thesis itself is as follows. In the Introduction, the general nature and function of the Bonds is examined in relation to the role they play in the tragedy, and the Elizabethan concept and classification of them is dealt with briefly. Since this leads, inevitably, to a certain dangerous degree of generalisation, a more detailed discussion of these Bonds has been reserved for the introductory discussion in the chapter on King Lear, where it is possible to relate the subject more closely to the tragedy itself. As a result, most of the subjects discussed at the commencement of this chapter are not dealt with in the same detail in the chapters on Macbeth and Antony and Cleopatra — unless a particular aspect requires further elaboration in the context of these tragedies.

¹Henry N. Paul, The Royal Play of "Macbeth": When, Why and How it Was Written (New York: Macmillan Co., 1950).

²R. B. Heilman, This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear" (Louisiana: State University Press, 1948).

³Richmond Noble, Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge and the Use of the Book of Common Prayer as Exemplified in the Plays of the First Folio (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935).

⁴Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957—), Vols I-VI.

⁵Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare's Sources, Vol. I: Comedies and Tragedies (London: Methuen & Co., 1957).

From an initial discussion of the Bonds which form the framework of values in each tragedy, we move to an examination of the genesis of the tragedy, and its development. It then becomes possible to examine the relationship between the action and the imagery and the Bonds, and to discover the role that these play in the resolution of the tragedy.

Throughout the thesis it has been attempted to reserve for the main body of the work the writer's own interpretations and quotations substantiating them, as well as quotations from other source materials that appear to cast further light on the subject under discussion.¹ The footnotes have, therefore, been liberally used to represent the views of other critics, to quote references, and to provide supplementary quotations from source materials.

The order in which the tragedies have been dealt with has been largely determined by the key Bonds that are considered to operate in them.² Thus, King Lear, dealing as it does with the Bonds at their most basic, familial level in a world which is specifically pagan and controlled mainly by the Bonds of Nature, seemed a logical starting point. Antony and Cleopatra follows because it deals with the Bonds of Nature and Law

¹ However, unless it is specifically stated that the writer intends to do so, no attempt has been made to claim or prove that Shakespeare used any of these works as reference material for his tragedies. Quotations from such works are used only to cast further light on the subject under discussion, or to indicate that certain concepts appear to have been current in the Elizabethan period.

² The writer is aware that the order in which the plays have been dealt with is not the same as the order in which they are generally considered to have been written. Although there is some disagreement on the precise dating of the tragedies, it is usually accepted that Macbeth fell between King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra. As stated, however, it proved more suitable for comparative purposes to modify this order.

(both human and Divine) at a period in history when they were about to be superseded by the Christian Bond of Grace . And Macbeth concludes this study because it is set at a time in history when the earlier Bonds of Nature and Law operate concomitantly with the specifically Christian Bond of Grace .

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INTRODUCTION

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine.¹

If one asks, "What is man?" and discards those definitions that concern only his physiological nature, one realises that, no matter how else one attempts to reply to this question, the answer is almost always in terms of man's relation to the world around him. As Donne points out, man cannot be regarded as an entity isolated from all intercourse with his surroundings.

Man does not inhabit a vacuum, he inhabits a world, has antecedents and surroundings, a present, a past, and a future. Therefore, the action of which Aristotle speaks² is not confined to him alone, but must exert some form of ripple effect on his environment. Even if the action concerns the individual himself, any change in his condition represents a change in the total aspect of the scheme. Moreover, however a man is seen, his state of being or acting has meaning or significance only in terms of a scheme of reference in accordance with which he acts or feels. This scheme of reference has many touchstones against which one can judge the individual man: one can define him in terms of his physical or spiritual nature, look at him in relation to his own identity,

¹ John Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions (1624), ed. John Sparrow (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), p.98.

² Aristotle Poetics, trans. John Warrington (London: Dent, 1963), 1449^b, p.12.

his family, his society, his laws, his beliefs, his religion, his country, or his customs. And he can be defined in negative, positive, or neutral terms. But, if, for example, we say he is a good man or a bad, then we are comparing him against a (perhaps arbitrary) standard of reference in terms of the world he inhabits, in terms of the world from which we regard him, or in terms of the standard of some other world. At all times, whether we call him a father, a Christian, a Roman, or a Stoic, we are setting him in perspective against some order of values or classification.¹

For want of a better or more inclusive word for the qualities or laws according to which we see a man being or operating, the writer has chosen to call these modes of relationship the Bonds. It is a decision supported by the fact that Shakespeare was not alone among Elizabethans in using the words "Bond" or "Band" to define the manifold commitments of human social existence.² Richard Hooker, for example, writes as

¹It is worth noting that many of the Elizabethans wrote about the standards of reference against which men could be judged. Thomas Fuller, The Holy State (3rd ed.; London: R.D. for John Williams, 1652), is typical in this respect. Under such headings as "The Good Father," "The Good Child," "The King," "The Traytour," and "The Tyrant," he sets out the characteristics of each relationship, then proceeds to illustrate it by examples from the lives of noted historical figures with such qualities.

²Sir Walter Raleigh uses such terms frequently in The Historie of the World (reprinted; London: for Walter Burne, 1671). See, for example, Bk I, Pt I, chap.i, p.15: "And if there be a natural loving care in men, and beasts, much more in God, who hath formed this nature, and whose Divine love was the beginning, and is the bond of the Universal." See also Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, p.211, and p.216: "That this law of Nature binds all creatures, it is manifest; and chiefly Man; because he is endued with reason: in whom as reason groweth, so this band of observing the law of Nature increaseth." It is interesting also to compare Montaigne's use of these words: "He [man] is bridled and fettered with and by religions, lawes, customes, knowledge, precepts, paines, and recompences, both mortall and immortall; yet we see him, by meanes of his volubility and dissolution, escape all these bonds" (The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne, Translated by John Florio [London: George Routledge & Sons, 1891], Bk II, chap.xii, p.285.).

follows:

. . . the natural inclination which all men have unto sociable life, and consent to some certain bond of association, which bond is the law that appointeth what kind of order they shall be associated in.¹

Let us, therefore, examine in slightly greater detail the nature, origin and meaning of the Bonds.

All mankind is tied to the animal instincts and needs: the need for food and sleep and shelter; the instincts of self-preservation and procreation. But man controls these needs and instincts; he refines and channels them: builds houses and forbids incest and cannibalism, looks after his young beyond their age of helpless dependence, and is in turn cared for by his young. He marries, and buries his dead. Through custom, law, rationalisation and self-control, he raises himself above the barbarous and bestial to live in an organised society. The Bonds thus constitute the highest moral and spiritual common denominator of civilised societies. As Hooker points out, human society is founded upon human self-interest, since,

forasmuch as we are not by ourselves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things needful for such a life as our nature doth desire, a life fit for the dignity of man; therefore to supply those defects and imperfections which are in us living single and solely by ourselves, we are naturally induced to seek communion and fellowship with others.²

Men are thus independent and interdependent. Ideally, the Bonds delimit and define the boundaries of both types of behaviour. They are the harmonising agents between these often contradictory pulls, the

¹Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (London: J.M.Dent & Co., 1954), Vol. I, Bk I, p.221.

²Ibid., p.188.

"hoops" of which Yeats speaks,¹ the laws which regulate man's relationship with the world. They do not so much bind man in shackles of proscription as order the world around him.² Miguel de Unamuno explains this seeming paradox when he says:

For true liberty is not to rid oneself of the external law; liberty is consciousness of the law. Not he who has shaken off the yoke of the law is free, but he who has made himself master of the law.³

The Bonds cement and unite; they represent the orderly loves and duties which are the price man pays for his civilised liberty; the obligations and commitments which are rewarded by rights and privileges. It is through the Bonds that man is assured a means of fulfilling his physical and spiritual needs, identifying his private and public nature. They give his metaphysic the necessary morality and determine his code of values — either by virtue of the fact that he subscribes to or rejects the commonly-accepted values.

The Bonds can be imposed, as in law, or they can operate by agreement, as in love, or be a combination of both, as in marriage. They can be man-made or derive from a god. The specifications of particular Bonds are sometimes written, but they can also be unwritten, ultra-rational, and impossible to measure in terms of quantitative scales.

Essentially, the Bonds impose upon individual and corporate human life a pattern of significant meanings. They enable man to ask and

¹William Butler Yeats, "Meru," The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan & Co., 1961), p.333.

²See Nature, Vol. CCXXVIII, no. 5266 (1970), p.97, for an interesting definition of intelligence: "Intelligence is that faculty, of mind, by which order is perceived in a situation previously considered disordered."

³Miguel de Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life [trans. J.E. Crawford Flitch] (Fontana Library; London: Collins, 1962), p.279.

find a satisfactory answer to the questions, " Who am I?" "What is man?" "What is the nature and purpose of human life?" "Why has this happened?" and "Where are the gods?"

Let us now impose upon this proposition an hypothesis. Let us assume that, as long as the Bonds are understood and adequate in their various spheres of control and as long as men and societies act in compliance with the dictates of these Bonds, there can be no tragedy: as long as the questions man can ask about himself and his world can find their answer in established, adequate and normative relation to self, other, and the gods, there can be no tragedy.

Why then does tragedy occur? When does it occur? How does it occur?

Logically, one should seek the roots of the tragic course in some failure of the Bonds: either in the Bonds themselves, or through the agency of persons who enact their lives within the scope of the Bonds concerned. The individual man or woman, who fails to recognise the real nature of these Bonds, who does not appreciate them, or finds them inadequate for his or her needs, who misinterprets them, rejects or violates them, could be opening the way for tragedy to follow. The society in which the real nature of the Bonds is misunderstood or misinterpreted, in which the Bonds are rejected or violated, or are inadequate for the needs of some or all of its members, could precipitate tragedy within itself or within the lives of some of its members.

In this regard it is interesting to note a section of Aristotle's Poetics that rarely receives critical attention. This is the section on "the aim of tragedy and the conditions on which its effect depends." Here, he includes the following statement:

Though the poets began by accepting any tragic story available, in these days the finest tragedies are invariably written on the story of a few families, on that of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, or any others that may have been involved, whether as agents or sufferers, in some hideous deed.¹

A closer examination of the history of these families shows that in each case the tragic genesis is to be found in some failure or violation of the Bonds of family, society, or religion. The tragedy of Oedipus, for example, hinges on the fact that the entire family becomes tainted by its violations of the Bonds. It begins with attempted infanticide, and its repercussions include patricide, incest, and civil war.² So also, Thyestes' tragedy originates in the seduction of his brother's wife, and culminates in his brother's revenge, which leads him to eat the flesh of his own children at a gruesome banquet.

If one turns to look at more modern tragedies, it becomes apparent that the Bonds which obtain or which are trespassed against are of crucial importance to their origin, development and resolution. Faust trespasses against the Bonds of Christianity by selling his soul to the

¹Aristotle Poetics, 1453 a, p.22. A point perhaps requiring further mention here (and a topic that is also discussed by critics such as Lawlor, Sewall, and Muller) is this question of tragic "agents or sufferers." As we shall discover in our discussions of the three tragedies, it is a fact of the tragic process that violations of the Bonds cannot be contained, or restricted to a single person or act and its consequence; moreover, although the tragic suffering of the protagonist is never entirely unmerited, the consequences of his violations or misunderstanding of the Bonds (or the insufficiency of the Bonds themselves) often seem almost disproportionate to the original trespass. The sins of the fathers are often visited upon the children, and even innocents such as Cordelia and Lady Macduff do not escape unscathed from the general suffering that springs from the breaches made in the Bonds.

²Dr A. de Villiers of Rhodes University suggested to the writer that, for the average Greek spectator, the dislocation could perhaps be seen to begin with Cadmus and the dragon's teeth, that is, the taint goes further back in history than the conventional beginning of the tragedy.

devil. Almost all Ibsen's tragedies are concerned with the relation of the individual to his social milieu and the limitations to his complete self-realisation as a result of the restrictions of certain Bonds (particularly that of women bound in marriage) — Hedda Gabbler is a perfect example. So, too, we find Bertolt Brecht using historical themes to investigate the "Unstimmigkeiten im gesellschaftlichen Leben der Menschen"¹ — as the Leben des Galilei, which shows Galileo Galilei in conflict with the established values of his times, so painfully demonstrates.

The Bible itself is full also of examples of man's tendency to bring about social and personal catastrophe by his waywardness and falling away from God, despite all His guidelines for the fulfilment of the social and personal needs of the creature He has created. Indeed, the Bible presents us with the archetypes of men who sin and who suffer through the failure of individuals and groups to accommodate themselves to the fulfilment of the Bonds required of them. The list is lengthy: the first trespassers against the Divine Commandment; the first murderer and his victim; the child who deceived his father into giving away the birthright of his elder brother; the adulterer; the prostitute; the city that would not repent of its evil ways; those who would not obey the warnings of God to turn away from their sins and were destroyed by the flood; the traitor; the slayer of innocents; and sinful mankind that slew the Son of God. Right up to Doomsday we are shown a picture of mankind failing to observe the Bonds of God and man. And all are the workers of their own tragedy, or suffer for the sins of the transgressors.

¹ Ed. H.F. Brookes and C.E. Fraenkel (London: Heinemann, 1958), p.1 of the Introduction to Leben des Galilei.

This hypothesis also explains why we do not regard as tragic events that are of the deus ex machina or fortuitous type. Death or calamity divorced from a breaking of the Bonds is seldom tragic. We may be moved by a sense of waste, or grief, or distress, but we are not moved by a sense of the tragic, when a tree falls on a man, or a ship goes down, or a brilliant scientist dies of a heart attack.

We have said that the Bonds control human life by suppressing the primaeval animal in man, enabling him to live in peace with his neighbours, enabling him to understand himself and his world in ordered and comprehensible terms. It then follows that once the Bonds cease to be valid all the forces of lawlessness, social and personal upheaval and disruption that pre-existed their acceptance are again unleashed.

This is the "How?" of tragedy. It explains our concept of evil as a "falling away from." And when the tragic character reaches this state, he is faced with the agony and terror of a return to the original questioning upon whose answers an organised society has been built. All the moral and spiritual houses in which man has lived his orderly life crumble and fall, are razed. He can then no longer count upon a known response — or the response militates against him — and he is left alone with doubt, uncertainty, insecurity, and an inability to cope with the situation in a responsible or customary way.

Professor Butler uses the image of a map to explain man's ordered knowledge of the world around him, and goes on to explain:

What happens in tragedy is a failure of maps. Man finds himself in a primitive country which he has been led to believe his grandfathers tamed and civilised: or the landscape undergoes an earthquake: or the map is simply inaccurate, or does not go far enough, or has been allowed to get mildewed round the fringes. But whether our maps be good, bad, or merely indifferent, we are

perpetually prone to mistake them for the country itself. We accept the metaphor for the thing, the generalisation for the reality.¹

The cessation of the normal functioning of the Bonds in respect of the tragic protagonist is the primary stripping or loss that accompanies the development of the tragedy.² Dramatically, it is usually accompanied by a stripping or loss of the material and spiritual accoutrements which often hide the "real" nature of man. We are also frequently made aware that this entire process causes intense anguish which is, indeed, often felt as physical pain.³ As a character becomes more involved in the developing tragedy, wealth, honour, status and esteem, love, power, strength, or a sense of self ("I" value) tend to melt from him, are withheld, or forcibly torn from him. We then come to see the "real" man beneath these civilised trappings, come to see the tragic character as "the thing itself"⁴; naked, afraid and alone, lost in a world that does not conform to his maps.⁵

¹F.G. Butler, An Aspect of Tragedy (inaugural lecture delivered at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1953), p.8.

²For a discussion of the manner in which this takes place, see the relevant sections of the discussion on each of the tragedies.

³Critics such as Spurgeon, pp.338-343, and Clemen, pp.152-153, have noted that King Lear, for example, is filled with such images of mental and physical suffering — without really explaining how or why this comes about. See also the relevant sections of the chapters on the three tragedies discussed.

⁴King Lear III.iv.109. On p. 148 the point is made that it is, however, unaccommodated man who is like this, that is, man without the Bonds.

⁵See the above quotation from Butler's work, and compare, for example, Antony's words in III.xi.3-4:

I am so lated in the world that I
Have lost my way for ever.

A fascinating point that emerges from an examination of the three tragedies (and one that is typical of many others) is the frequency with which, despite this stripping, loss, and isolation, the tragic protagonist insists that he is still what he was, clutches at his old name and titles and all that they implied.

It is at this stage that the tragic characters begin to "raven and rage"¹; and from this agony that they are forced to try and find again an answer to the questions, "Who am I?" "What is human life?" "What are the Bonds?" This ravening and raging — as Yeats calls it — is the eye of the tragic hurricane. And it is here that ever-incipient madness, terror, fear, isolation and chaos break loose and become tragic realities.² This is also the stage at which the pity and terror (the feeling with and fearing for), by which the audience is involved, is at its most crucial and intense. It is the crux from which the catharsis can spring. During and through this isolation and violent dismemberment individuals and societies sometimes arrive at a reaffirmation of the ultimate values and supra-rational truths, travel through the "desolation of reality"³ to the knowledge and the revelation. Although man might reject or violate the Bonds, he cannot do without them and, unless he rediscovers them (perhaps in a more advanced form), he faces the fate of a Cain, or a Judas, or a Mr Coertz.⁴

Kurz

¹Yeats, "Meru," p.333.

²Compare Butler, p.10:

"In fact, once a character starts doubting who he is, once the chorus starts asking "What is Man?", once the events on the stage raise this basic uncertainty in the minds of the audience we are, potentially, in the world of great tragedy: the world not merely of physical deprivation and nervous fear, but of spiritual panic, anxiety, suspense. This raises the pity and terror proper to tragedy — a tearing asunder, a falling apart in a protracted crisis, which threatens to conquer, and sometimes does conquer, the self."

³Yeats, "Meru," p.333.

⁴Lawlor, although he is writing from the more positive angle, approaches the present writer's view when he maintains that "Shakespeare's greatest single gift is an unwearied sense of the natural tie — the utter punishment of separate existence, on the one hand; on the other, the endlessly fruitful possibilities once the human circle holds" (p.182). Macbeth, perhaps more than King Lear or Antony and Cleopatra, plumbs the depths of this utter isolation in the manner of Cain.

So far we have discussed in general terms the relationship between tragedy and the Bonds which obtain in the world in which it originates and runs its course. Let us now turn and look briefly at the manner in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries approached these concepts.

If one looks at the number of Elizabethan plays, sermons, essays and treatises, etc. which deal in full or in part with subjects pertaining to the Bonds, it becomes apparent that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were fascinated by the problems which the types and functions of the Bonds raised. Raleigh dealt with them in his Historie of the World, as did Hooker in his Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity; John Bale devoted a whole play to them¹; they appear in Florio's translation of Montaigne; Fuller sets them out in detail in his Holy State; and Bishop Hall discusses them in his sermons.² In the space of this Introduction, the writer cannot hope to present a detailed exposition of the range of Elizabethan thought on the subject. At most, it is possible to indicate some general trends, and hope that an examination of King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra and Macbeth will cast further light on the subject.

In general, the poets, preachers, historians and dramatists of this period distinguished between three principles or laws in accordance with which the Bonds could be seen to operate: the principles of Nature, Law, and Grace.³ Although these three principles form the basis of

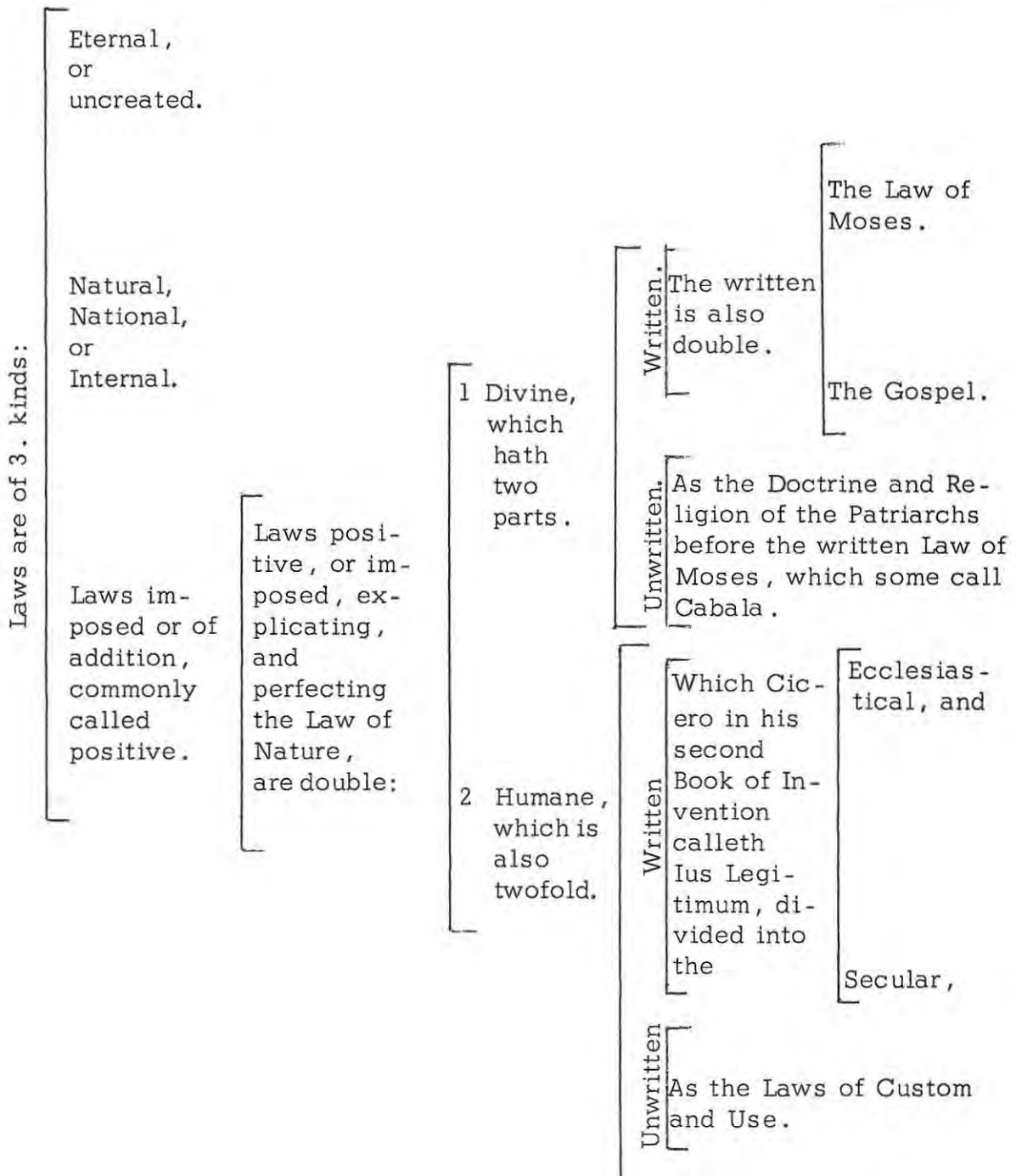
¹John Bale, "The Three Laws of Nature, Moses and Christ," The Dramatic Writings of John Bale, Bishop of Ossory, ed. John S. Farmer (Early English Dramatists Series; London, 1966 facs. of 1907 ed.)

²Bishop Hall, Works (London: C. Whittingham, 1808), Vol. X.

³The nomenclature does vary. Montaigne, indeed, comments cynically upon the many names given to the laws that are supposed to bind man (see Bk II, chap. xii, p. 297).

Christian thinking at the time, they do not all derive exclusively from the Christian ethos; some of their tenets can as easily be traced to classical thinking on the subject. This explains why men such as Hooker or Raleigh could quote from sources such as Plutarch and Plato in support of their definitions of such Bonds and the necessity of such Bonds for the ordering of human life.

Perhaps one of the clearest expositions of the various laws in terms of which the Bonds can be seen to operate is to be found in the table set out in Raleigh's Historie of the World, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p.212:



Hooker defines a law as

that which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure, of working, the same we term a Law.¹

In terms of his definition, laws are at the basis of all the operations of the world. In other words, they must also determine the nature of the Bonds that operate in any given society:

In each commonwealth most high pre-eminence
Is due unto laws, for such commodity
As is had by them. For, as Cicero giveth sentence,
Whereas is no law can no good order be
In nature, in people, in house, nor yet in city.
.....
Like as Chrysippus full clerkly doth define:
Law is a teacher of matters necessary,
A knowledge of things, both naturall and divine;
Persuading all truth, dissuading all injury;
A gift of the Lord, devoid of all opprobry,
A wholesome doctrine of men discreet and wise;
A grace from above, and a very heavenly practice.²

The first law Raleigh mentions, however, is one that is beyond man; it is the Eternal or Uncreated Law. What is this law?

Before the creation of the world, the Prime Mover, or God, laid down the first and overriding law, which is called the Eternal Law and which guides this divinity in all His works. As Hooker explains,

This law therefore we may name eternal, being "that order which God before all ages hath set down with himself, for himself to do all things by."³

And the basis of this law is the love of God, which "is the perpetual knot, and link or chain of the world, and the immovable pillar of every

¹ Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, p.150. Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, deals with the "name and meaning of the words, Law and Right."

² Bale, "The Three Laws of Nature, Moses and Christ," Prologue, p.3.

³ Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, p.154.

part thereof, and the Basis and foundation of the Vniversall."¹ God, however, does not limit Himself by setting down this law in accordance with which He will do all things, because, knowing all things from the beginning, He cannot unwittingly have set out a law which would limit Him.²

It is from this eternal master plan, this omni-present Bond of the Creator, that all earthly systems are derived. Man has no power over this Eternal Law; he cannot alter or violate it; he does not even know it fully, catches only glimpses of it, as "thorow a glasse darkely,"³ In its general aspect, therefore, it does not concern us in our investigation of the relationship between the functioning of the Bonds or Laws and the development of tragedy — except in so far as it is the master-key to the specific Bonds we discuss.

There is, however, an aspect of this Eternal Law that does concern us here, and that is the question of the Divine Providence and its relation to human fate or destiny.

It is Raleigh who points out that Creation itself implies some form of Divine Providence,⁴ since God could not have created without some plan according to which He executed His will, and he goes on to

¹Raleigh, Bk I, Pt I, chap. i, p.15. It is worth noting that Raleigh is here quoting from Plato.

²See, for example, Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, pp.151-155, which contains a justification of this comment, and goes on to define the other Laws which are the subject of our discussion.

³I Corinthians 13 : 12 (1599 version).

⁴Raleigh, Preface.

define Providence as follows:

Now Providence (which the Greeks call Pronoia) is an intellectual knowledg, both fore-seeing, caring for, and ordering all things, and doth not onely behold all past, all present, and all to come, but is the cause of their so being.¹

Providence is, therefore, that part of God's will that operates in history. Despite this foreknowledge of the course of human history that is possessed by the Creator, and despite the fact that everything takes place in accordance with the Divine Plan, man's life is not locked inalterably into a set course. His free will remains an inalienable right granted to him by the Creator— is indeed considered to be the chief reason why he fell away from God when he sinned in Paradise.

This apparent paradox seems to have been the subject of a great deal of debate in Elizabethan times. A common approach appears to be that of defining the Divine Providence, setting out the range of human free will, and reconciling the two by implying that, whereas the Divine Providence operates in the overall historic development of the world, the fate of the individual is largely the effect of his own thinking, feeling and dealing, and his interaction with the society he inhabits— tempered by his constitution and the working of the stars.² Antony and Cleopatra presents us with an almost perfect example of the workings of both the Divine Providence and the individual's fortune or destiny.³

If this were not so, if the Divine Providence were considered

¹ Ibid., Bk I, Pt I, chap.i, p.14.

² This subject is dealt with more fully under the relevant sections of the chapters that follow.

³ See pp.182ff. and 223ff.

to impose a certain course of necessity upon individuals, we would not have tragedy: we would only have calamities of the deus ex machina type mentioned earlier.

Let us turn now to look at the second main kind of law set out in Raleigh's table: the Law of Nature.

In simple terms, this is the Law of Kind. It is derived from the Eternal Law and is, as it were, the code imprinted in every single thing that occupies a place in the created universe. It determines "thingness." Unlike the positive laws such as the Divine and Human Laws, the Law of Nature is not imposed, but inherent. And in terms of this Law, every created thing has its peculiar quality, potential and place, which is an intrinsic part of its nature.

All natural phenomena have their niche in this harmonious order and control, which is the foundation of the Divine plan for the world, part of the Divine Providence. Man can read it in the turning of the planets, in the ebb and flow of the tide, and in the natural growth and reproduction of the plants and animals, each according to its kind. It is also to be seen in manifold but ordered combinations of the elements, for Nature is

the vicaire of the almyghty Lord,
That hot, cold, hevye, lyght, moyst and dreye
Hath knyght by evene nombres of acord.¹

One of the central concepts of this orderly operation of Nature according to its Laws is to be found in all those comments on the theme of degree that are so much a part of Elizabethan literature. It appears as

¹Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1957), "The Parliament of Fowls," ll. 379-381.

well in Troilus and Cressida,¹ as in Spenser,² or Hooker.³ Let us look, for example, at what Elyot has to say on the subject:

Behold the four elements whereof the body of man is compact, how they be set in the places called spheres, higher or lower according to the sovereignty of their natures, that is to say, the fire as the most pure element, having in it nothing that is corruptible, in his place is highest and above other elements. The air, which next to the fire is most pure in substance, is in the second sphere or place. The water, which is somewhat consolidate, and approacheth to corruption is next unto the earth. The earth, which is of substance gross and ponderous, is set of all elements most lowest.

Behold also the order that God hath put generally in all His creatures, beginning at the most inferior or base, and ascending upward. He made not only herbs to garnish the earth, but also trees of a more eminent stature than herbs, and yet in the one and the other be degrees of qualities: some pleasant to behold, some delicate or good in taste, other wholesome and medicinable, some commodious and necessary. Semblably in birds, beasts, and fishes, some be good for the sustenance of man, some bear things profitable to sundry uses, other be apt to occupation and labour; in diverse is strength and fierceness only; in many is both strength and commodity; some other serve for pleasure; none of them hath all these qualities; few have the more part or many, specially beauty, strength and profit. But where any is found that hath many of the said properties, he is more set by than all the other, and by that estimation the order of his place and degree evidently appeareth; so that every kind of trees, herbs, birds, beasts, and fishes, beside their diversity of forms, have (as who saith) a peculiar disposition appropored unto them by God their creator: so that in everything is order, and without order may be nothing stable or permanent; and it may not be called order, except it do contain in it degrees, high and base, according to the merit or estimation of the thing that is ordered.⁴

¹Troilus and Cressida I.iii.85ff.

²See, for example, Edmund Spenser, The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. J.C.Smith and E.de Selincourt (reprinted; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), "An Hymne of Heavenly Beavtie," pp.596-599.

³See, for example, Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, pp.165-167.

⁴Sir Thomas Elyot, The Book Named the Governor, ed. S.E.Lehmberg (Everyman's Library; London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1962), Bk I, pp.3-4. Note that he is using this as an example of the qualities of degree that are to be found in the State.

What, then, is man's place in this "Chain of Being" as it is frequently called?¹

Although we shall deal with it in greater detail in King Lear, it seems useful to set forth its main outlines here.

Man is the only creature on earth with a dual nature: he partakes both of the earthiness of other created things and the spirituality of the angels and the Divine. He inhabits a body, with its bodily needs, and he has a soul, with its spiritual needs. St Augustine explains that God made man's nature

as a mean between angels and beasts, that if he obeyed the Lord his true Creator, and kept his behests, he might be transported to the angels' society; but that if he became perverse in will, and offended his Lord God by pride of heart, he might be cast unto death like a beast, and living the slave of his lusts, after death be destinate unto eternal pains.²

Because of this duality in him, and because of all creatures he only has the faculty of reason, which should enable him to reach higher than they can, man can attain a threefold perfection (as he can be guilty of a threefold sinning against his nature):

Man doth seek a triple perfection: first a sensual, consisting in those things which very life itself requireth either as necessary supplements, or as beauties and ornaments thereof; then an intellectual, consisting in those things which none underneath man is either capable of or acquainted with; lastly a spiritual and divine, consisting in those things whereunto we tend by supernatural means here, but cannot here attain unto them.³

¹ See, for example, Tillyard, chaps iv and v, pp.37-102 ("The Chain of Being"), and Lovejoy's book with the same title.

² St Augustine, The City of God (De Civitate Dei), trans. John Healey, ed. R.V.Tasker (reprinted; London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1957), Vol. I, Bk XII, chap. xxi, p.366.

³ Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, p.205.

All political systems grow in part out of this Natural Law,¹ as do the relationships of family, kin and society: they are part of the Divine and Natural order, the copies of the holy family and the heavenly society. And man fulfils the Bonds of the Natural Law when he does those things that are "natural," "proper," and "seemly"² for him in so far as he is a man and endowed with the gift of reason. As John Bale explains:

But, as touching me the first law natural,
A knowledge I am whom God in man doth hide,
In his whole working to be to him a guide,
To honour his God and seek his neighbour's health.³

Because God has hidden in man this knowledge of the primary Bonds, because He has empowered him by choice to place a restriction upon his animal desires and to regulate his life in terms of a code that considers others, man can — despite his fall from the perfection of Nature⁴ — still aspire to a measure of redemption if he will live according to the better part of his nature and reject the "worser" elements in himself.

Man is, however, not only made in the image of God, he is also the seed of Adam and continues to sin in the manner of Adam: tragically falling away from God by evildoing. He violates the Natural Bonds with God, with himself, and with his neighbour; he allows "passions and affections brutall"⁵ to rule his reason, and unleashes disorder and

¹This is, for example, the principle upon which Elyot bases his concept of the State.

²See later discussion of this subject in the chapters on the three tragedies.

³"The Three Laws of Nature, Moses and Christ," A.II, p.10.

⁴See, for example, the quotation on p.22.

⁵See, for example, the quotation from Raleigh on p.115.

disruption in society and in himself. So, by allowing that part of him which is sensual or material in the manner of beasts to rule that part of him which is spiritual, he also becomes the victim of fortune and the effects of the operation of the stars.¹

We come now to the first of the Positive or Imposed Laws set out in Raleigh's table: Human Law.

Human Law is, ideally, derived from the principles underlying the Bonds of Nature. Its object is the ordered welfare of particular societies or nations, and it is made by man for man. Like the Positive Divine Law, its commandments cover both the ceremonial (or religious) and the moral rights, duties and obligations of men within a particular group. And, like the Positive Divine Law, its precepts can either be imposed upon men by decree (or legislation),² or established among them by the traditions of custom and usage. Human Law should, moreover, be framed in accordance with the dictates of human reason and, according to Raleigh, should possess the following four properties:

First, as it is drawn out of the law of Nature; so every particular of the humane law may be resolved into some principle or rule of the natural.

Secondly, it is to be considered as it is referred unto, and doth respect the common good.

Thirdly, it is to be made by publick authority.

Fourthly, concerning the matter of the law, it prescribeth and directeth all humane actions. And so is the law as large and diverse, as all humane actions are divers, which may fall under it.³

In the sense in which the Elizabethans use it, Human Law can refer either

¹ *Ibid.*, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p.214 (quoted on p.227).

² See *ibid.*, the table reproduced on p.12.

³ *Ibid.*, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p.227. Unlike the Law of Nature, Human Law can be both written and unwritten.

to the codes governing the relations of nations , states or countries with each other (in which case it is often called the Law of Nations) , or to the codes governing the domestic harmony of a particular group .¹

The Elizabethans did , however , encounter a problem in this concept of Human Law: if all human laws were framed in accordance with the dictates of Nature , how was it that there was such a divergence between various societies' concepts of right and wrong? Montaigne is a principal sceptic in this regard.² Men such as Hooker answered this criticism by replying that certain societies operated according to false interpretations of the Bonds of Nature , which corruptions were not questioned because they had become established , or because the observers of them were themselves corrupt or evil.³

The Eternal Law , the Natural Law , and Positive Human Law are all concepts that can as easily be defined by recourse to classical philosophy as to Christian thinking. When , however , we come to consider the Divine Law set out in Raleigh's table , we find ourselves dealing with a peculiarly Christian ethos . If we are to understand the underlying tenets of the Bonds of Grace , we shall have to examine their place in Christian history .

That there was a very clear Christian concept of the forms and development of the Bonds becomes apparent when we consider John Bale's exposition of them . In his play , "The Three Laws of Nature , Moses and

¹There is also frequently a distinction drawn between civil and criminal offences .

²See Montaigne , Bk II , chap .xii , p.297: "There is nothing wherein the world differeth so much as in customes and lawes ." See also the examples he gives .

³Hooker , Vol. I , Bk I , pp.182-187 .

Christ," he defines four periods in human history:

We consider that, for as concerning man,
 Four several times are much to be respected,
 Of Innocency first; of his transgression than;
 Then the long season wherein he was afflicted;
 Finally the time wherein he was redeemed.
 Of pleasure is the first, the second of exile,
 The third doth punish, the fourth doth reconcile.¹

In the first time of all, Adam and Eve lived in Paradise in perfection of Nature; before the Fall man fulfilled the Natural Laws completely, without falling away. By eating the forbidden fruit, however, he sinned against the Bonds between himself and God, and was exiled from Paradise, subject to sin and death. He did not, though, lose all traces of Nature in himself.²

¹ Act I, p.6.

² See, for example, the following quotation from Samuel Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes; Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1905-1907), Vol. I, pp.14-15:

"To know a mans selfe aright is annexed to the knowledge of God (in whom wee live, moove, and are, of whom and for whom are all things) not his essence, but his expressed Image thereof in his workes, of which, Man is in this World the principall; what hee hath received, what he hath lost, what he retaineth by Nature, and what he recovereth, and more then recovereth by grace, in and of that divine resemblance. In the first state of all men had a naturall right in common over the creatures. But the Devill (the great Incloser) by sinne inclosed these Commons of Humanitie, and altered their tenure from Fee Simple to meere Villenage: yet so (God in justice remembering mercie) that some ruines remaine since the fall, not only in the faculties and substance of bodie and soule, but in the personall rights also over torpid, vegetative, and all unreasonable creatures, continued to him by that Charter of Reason, which . . . could not but have beene confounded, if both the immortall and spirituall part in himselfe, should not have exercised dominion in some kind over the mortall and bodily; and if in the greater World, the reasonable should not have disposed of the unreasonable. As for the conformitie of mans will and actions to God and right, using of that right over the creature, to the sole glory of the Creator . . . this was by the cracke of our earthern Vessell in Mans Fall lost, and as a more subtile and spirituall liquor, ranne out. Yet still remaine in this defaced Image some obscure lineaments, and some embers raked up in the ashes of Mans consumption, which being by naturall diligence quickned, give lively expressions of God . . . "

In Christian history, the rule of Nature operated over the Jews from the period of exile from Paradise of Adam to Noah, and from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses.¹ Operating parallel with it, however, was God's Unwritten Imposed Law, which guided the Patriarchs. But, God found that the Bonds of Nature and the tenets of the Unwritten Law were insufficient to keep His people from sinning, so He gave to Moses the tablets on which were inscribed His Written Law, both moral and ceremonial. This was a law of explicit commandment and prohibition, spelling out the Bonds that man of his nature should obey — were it not that sin had corrupted his better nature. And this Law had dominion over man, and more especially over the Jews, from the time of Moses to the time of David, and from the time of David to that of the Jews' exile, and from thence until the time of Christ.² And under this Law the only justification for life eternal was by works.

Man, however, trespassed continually against the Bonds of this Law as well. So God sent His son into the world to redeem mankind from the burden of his sinning by the efficacy of the Bond of Grace. The Divine Grace which was given to man by the death and resurrection of the Son is a symbol of God's infinite good will toward man whom he has created; it is the Divine favour of God to men — not accorded in terms of the strict and implacable measures of justice and desert, but of a free and spontaneous nature. Grace is the ultimate reconciler of all opposites

¹ See, for example, Bale, "The Three Laws of Nature, Moses and Christ," Act I, p.7. Note that this is Nature corrupted by Man's Fall.

² Ibid., pp.7-8.

and contraries; the well-spring of the Beatitudes. Through Grace the whole of mankind is saved from the consequences of its trespasses against the Law and against Nature.

It is, however, made clear that the Bonds of Grace do not cancel the operation of the Bonds of Nature nor the Bonds of the Written and Unwritten Divine Law.¹ Moreover, all the Bonds imposed by God upon man are, as it were, an explication of the Bonds of Nature.² So it is that the Heathen, who do not have the advantage of God's explicit Laws to guide them toward the fulfilment of the Bonds, can attain blessedness if they can fulfil completely the Bonds of Nature imprinted in them. Although this is difficult, it is not impossible, and they are not condemned to death of the soul in accordance with the tenets of Imposed Laws which they do not know.³

The manifestations of the Bond of Grace—the mercy, love, pity, charity, forgiveness, etc., for whose enactment Christ set the pattern⁴—are the highest qualities man can aspire to cultivate in himself and to show toward his fellow men. Once the reign of Grace has supplemented the Bonds of Nature and the Law, that Christian who breaks these Bonds between himself and others is trespassing not only against individuals and societies, but against Christ himself. This is clearly the philosophy

¹ See Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, pp. 218-222.

² It is interesting to note that, in terms of Raleigh's table, the Bond of Grace is set out in the Gospel.

³ See further discussion on pp. 32-34.

⁴ See, for example, the exhortations from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6 and 7.

underlying the following quotation from the Judgement play in the York Cycle:

Jesus. Caitiffs, as oft as it betid
 That needful aught asked in my name,
 Ye heard them not, your ears ye hid,
 Your help to them was not at home,
 To me was that unkindness kid.
 Therefore ye bear this bitter blame;
 To least or most when ye it did,
 To me ye did the self and the same.¹

However, as long as man has the faith to cast himself upon the Divine Grace, he can yet be saved from the terrible weight of his sins. It is the man who violates this Bond of Grace by despairing of the Divine Charity for himself, who casts himself into the abyss of absolute tragedy.²

For man, life on earth is the lease of nature, and, accordingly as he has tenanted this mortal body, so shall his habitation in the after-life be determined by God. And it is this view of human life that gives Christian thinking its peculiar emphasis. The Christian has no second chance to return to earth and attempt to raise himself to a higher level of being; he only has one life and one body and, unless he is redeemed by Grace, he loses all hope of a blessed afterlife if he has misused this earthly life. The Christian's sights are directed specifically to the after-life: life itself is merely a pilgrimage to this end, as Purchas explains:

Thus is Mans whole life a Pilgrimage, either from God as Cains, or from himselfe as Abels.³

¹Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays, ed. A.C.Cawley (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1956), p.202.

²On the subject of despair, see, for example, Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1932), Pt III, Sec. 4, Mem. 2, pp.394ff. Thus it is that, if Grace operates, there can be no tragedy in the true sense of the word — unless man despairs of or violates this Grace.

³Purchas, Pilgrimes, Vol. I, p.138.

This brief examination of the manifold Bonds that obtain in the Elizabethan world picture brings to an end this Introduction to the questions that will be considered within the scope of this thesis. Before we turn to the tragedies themselves and attempt to discover in how far these considerations have meaning or relevance in the contexts of King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, and Macbeth, there is a final point to be stressed. Although it is possible to prove that Shakespeare's contemporaries and predecessors thought in terms of the Bonds imposed upon men and societies in accordance with the principles of Nature, Law, and Grace, and although it is possible to substantiate this claim by quoting from their works, no attempt has been made to prove that Shakespeare deliberately borrowed from Elizabethan writing on the subject. Those references from other works that have been cited have not been cited with the intention of proving or substantiating any claims that Shakespeare studied them as reference material and consciously employed the philosophical patterns embodied in them. There appears little justification for regarding the imaginative process as functioning in this manner — except, perhaps, in the case of a relatively small number of didactic writers. Often, indeed, Shakespeare's supposed "borrowings" are more interesting in their additions and omissions than in their echoes. The value of using parallel references appears to the writer to lie primarily in the fact that they reveal a popular body of thought or a philosophical tendency which helps to elucidate the working of Shakespeare's dramatic strategy.

KING LEAR

Thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.¹

The family is the basic unit of human social organisation, a sphere where the Bonds operate at their most elemental level. It seems appropriate, therefore, to commence a study of the role played by the Bonds in the origin and development of tragedy with an examination of King Lear, which contains more central references to the family in all its aspects than any other Shakespearian tragedy.² The vast body of Elizabethan writing on the subject, and the many references to what constitutes a good parent, a good child, a good husband or wife, to the nature and purpose of the family, and to the dangers inherent in the family structure seem to indicate that this subject might prove a fruitful source for an examination of what happens when the Bonds go awry.³

¹ II.iv.179-181.

² See Appendix A.

³ Some of these references will be dealt with in the course of this chapter. Those quoted represent, however, only a small fraction of the total body of references on this subject. It is interesting to note that Aristotle, 1453b, p.24, had this to say on the family as a theme for tragedy: "But whenever the deed is done within a family - when murder or the like is committed or meditated by brother on brother, by son on father, by mother on son, or by son on mother - these are the situations of which the poet should take advantage."

First, however, we shall have to define what we mean by a family. The simple family usually comprises a husband, wife, and their legitimate children. This simple family thus hinges on three key Bonds: the marital Bond, the parent-child Bond, and the sibling Bond. In essence these Bonds operate rather like the links of an infinite, intricate chain, whereby each is bound to the link before it and to the one which follows, while still remaining in itself an unbroken circle. Each new link in this chain is forged either by the marriage of a man and a woman, or by the birth of a child to them. In time the children marry and become parents, so forging new links. Thus, most individuals belong to two families in the course of their lives: the family into which they are born, and the family they found when they marry.

An interesting point that must be made here, and one that has a certain import for King Lear, is that the father's blood ties with his children are far more ambiguous than those of the mother. The fact that the mother is indeed the mother is demonstrable by the process of gestation and giving birth. Even with modern medical techniques, however, it is far less easy to demonstrate that the father is indeed sire of the children that he calls his. Whereas the mother's relationship with her children is an inescapably physical one, the father's relationship is more socially-determined.¹ This perhaps also explains why the bastard, although he must have had both a father and a mother, is often excluded from the socially-accepted simple family group. It is interesting to note,

¹Indeed, some primitive societies recognise only a social father, not a genetic father.

Another point of interest in respect of the family situation in the tragedy is that Lear has no male heirs —only daughters and sons-in-law. (See also pp.54-55.)

then, that the mother is noticeably absent from both the families dealt with in the tragedy: is, indeed, only referred to in an important context when this question of parentage is raised.¹

To this basic family are knitted all those who comprise the wider family by reason of blood or marriage ties. The family can thus be seen to form a vast web of more or less clearly defined relationships, depending on the distance of those concerned from the nodal point under discussion. So, for example, the Bonds between a son and his own father are usually more precisely defined than those between his sister-in-law and his father.

The concept of the family can thus be expanded to become a microcosm of the clan, the kingdom, or the entire social order. And the norms, values and sentiments that regulate the family tend to be analogous to those which regulate the entire social structure.² Indeed, many economic, political, or religious systems operate through the family, or can be traced to a form which originates in the family structure. Thus, a family is a group with its own internal organisation, and is at the same time a unit in the organisation of the wider society.

What then is the purpose and function of the family and the family Bonds?

Generally, it is through the family that elemental physiological functions in man, such as mating and the care of the helpless human

¹See pp.111-113.

²See, for example, Roland M.Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.123: "Luther affirmed the common consensus that without order and obedience in the home, there could be no peace or stability in nation, for the family bond is the most basic of all the bonds of civilized society."

infant are translated into socially-defined relationships. In general, too, these relationships are regulated by some form of marriage, some solemn undertaking between a man and a woman – for marriage is the cornerstone on which the family rests. It is within this family based on marriage that the individual first experiences, and continues to experience, a necessary sense of identity and belonging. The human family also provides its members with a source of food, shelter, and clothing, with affection, a place and a status, a code for living by, and a set of values. Thus, not only the needs basic for man's physical welfare, but also his extra-physical needs, are fostered in an orderly, patterned, reciprocal way within the family structure.

Essentially these family Bonds are reciprocal. Each member of the family has his or her proper status and function in the structure of the family, and written and/or unwritten codes determine what this status and function will be. The family Bonds thus encompass both rights and duties, and range from the practical considerations of provision for material welfare to rules of conduct or moral systems. The family tends to be identified at the same time with the gratification of an individual's needs and with the gratification of intimate and durable inter-personal relationships. Through the tutoring influence of parents upon their children, the family becomes a socialising force, and a means of transmitting from generation to generation the values of the society in which it operates.

As long as the Bonds which govern this socialised behaviour are fulfilled and adequate, the family, and the society in which it has its place, will function and perpetuate itself in an harmonious order that is likely to fulfil most of the needs of its individual members. However, if these Bonds are breached in some way, the family or the society is

likely either to experience cataclysmic upheaval, or to act in its own defence and bar from its communion those who seek to undermine it.¹

Ideally, then, the family places man in a perspective relationship with his world. At the same time, however, we must also understand the universe in which the Bonds operate, for this world will determine which particular form the Bonds will take – and the particular form of the Bonds that is considered proper, due, or natural, or legal will vary with the standpoint of each society.

When we turn to King Lear, we shall be struck increasingly by the fact that it is a tragedy in which almost every point of view about the world, and about man who inhabits this world, finds expression. It is a tragedy full of questions that are answered differently by characters who represent different approaches to the central problems, a tragedy full of propositions and counter-propositions, all of which determine not only the attitudes, but also the actions, of the people involved. Indeed, the tragedy hinges on opposed interpretations of man's proper relationship with others and the world, his proper nature and proper function in society. It therefore becomes necessary first to establish a broad general view from which we can work, if we are to evaluate and interpret specific viewpoints with any measure of success.

King Lear is not a Christian play in the normal sense of the word: in the entire length of the tragedy there is not a single specific reference to Christ or to the God of the Old and the New Testaments.

¹Indeed, one need look no further than the nearest newspaper to find examples of the social turmoil that accompanies the breakdown of the Bonds between husbands and wives, or between parents and their children.

Indeed, Shakespeare has omitted from the play all those direct Christian references that occur in some of the other versions of the Lear story.¹

Yet, even though the world of King Lear is supposedly pagan, we shall find ourselves becoming increasingly aware that it is written with the hindsight of the seventeenth century. Time and again, we shall realise that Shakespeare (as did many of his contemporaries) often represents the great human problems and questions in terms that derive ultimately from the Christian ethic that colours the world picture of his own time.²

The first point to be made, then, is that, although the world of King Lear is a supposedly pagan one, the Elizabethans would still regard it as having its place in the Divine scheme: God did not only create Christian man, he created all men. And, since God has imprinted in the heathen, too, the human nature that should lead them to maintain and

¹ See, for example, the frequent references to "God" in a specifically Christian sense in The Chronicle History of King Leir, ed. Sidney Lee (London: Chatto & Windus, 1909). Here, for example, IV.i. is set "outside a Church in Gallia." And Cordelia prays as follows in IV.i.29-32:

Yet God forgive both him, and you, and me;
Even as I do in perfit charity.
I will to church, and pray unto my Saviour,
That ere I die, I may obtain his favour.

In IV.vii.251 we find Lear referred to as the "high anointed of the Lord," and II.323-324 read as follows:

No worldly gifts, but grace from God on high,
Doth nourish virtue and true charity.

² At the same time we must remember that the great Christian themes are also often universal themes, to be found in literature and philosophy throughout the ages. It is only the viewpoint and the terminology that sometimes differs: the great human problems themselves have an archetypal relevance. Lovejoy, for example, traces many key concepts of mediaeval Christianity to classic sources. Ernest T. Sehr, Vergebung und Gnade bei Shakespeare (Stuttgart: K.F. Koehler Verlag, 1952), p.9, has this to say about Shakespeare's treatment of Christian themes: "Das tragische ist bei Shakespeare nicht christlich, aber es weist zum Christlichen hin."

fulfil the Bonds that were considered to operate naturally in all men, the Law of Nature operates for and in all men, whether Christian or heathen.¹ The heathen also suffer under the corruption of that perfect accord with the Laws of Nature that was brought about by the transgression of Adam and Eve.² They cannot know the explicit commandments of God that form his Written and Unwritten Law, for God has not revealed the terms of these laws to them,³ but, by the power of the reason with which God has endowed them, they should be able to discover and obey the principles of these explicit laws from the Law of Nature that operates in them.⁴ In the same way, they may ultimately become partakers of the Divine Grace if they fulfil the Law of Nature in themselves, although Grace has not been revealed to them as it has to Christians.⁵ And the Human or Positive Laws

¹See, for example, Luther, A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia (quoted from Frye, p.99): "Would to God that the majority of us were good, pious heathen who kept the Natural Law." See, also, for example, Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.260:

"Heathen histories acknowledge dignitie, order, justice, prodigies, and oracles, employed for their benefit and instruction in their fabulous religion; God of his mercy daining, peradventure, to foster by his temporall blessings the budding and tender beginnings of such a brute knowledge as naturall reason gave them of him, athwart the false images of their deluding dreames."

²See p.22.

³See pp.23-24 for a description of the origin and nature of God's Written and Unwritten Law.

⁴Thus, for example, Romans 2 : 14-15 (1599 version) sets out the position of the heathen as follows:

"For when the Gentiles which have not the Lawe, doe by nature the things contened in the Lawe, they having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves.

Which shew the effect of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witnes & their thoughts accusing one another, or excusing."

Gloss (1) adds that "this knowledge is a naturall knowledge."

⁵The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, for example, deals at great length with the position of the heathen in regard to the Divine Grace.

that they evolve for the government of their societies should reflect the dictates of this Law of Nature.¹ If this is not the case, their society cannot be considered civilised, and their laws will be "unnatural" and corrupt, running counter to the Nature imprinted in them by God. One must note, however, that this is the ideal view of what man should be. As Montaigne so often points out, man seldom attains this fulfilment of the Laws of Nature that should operate within him, and his reason becomes debased to mere conceits or vain philosophy and puffed-up-ness. As we shall discover in King Lear, human nature is weak, human reasoning fallible, human justice miscarries, human love is often lust, and man on his own a feeble, fallen creature. This is perhaps also the essential difference between the viewpoints of Montaigne and Hooker: Hooker is concerned with the ideal which man should seek to realise, Montaigne examines the realities of man's condition.

From the above summary it becomes apparent that the Law of Nature is the one most likely to be seen to operate in respect of the Bonds in King Lear. Our next question must therefore be: what aspects of the Law of Nature would seem to be relevant to the origin and development of the tragedy in King Lear ?

As we saw in the Introduction,² the Elizabethans tended to see all nature as an ordered part of God's universal plan, and everything in the universe as having its proper place in this scheme. The simplest

¹See pp.20-21 for a definition of Human or Positive Law and the principles to which it should conform.

²See pp.16-19.

order is that of inanimate things,¹ the most highly evolved is that of the angels. Man himself has a heterogenous nature. There is a part of him that is animal, and there is a part of him that is spiritual. Like the animals he can perceive things by the "sensible capacity"² which he has in common with them. In common with the angels, however, he has the ability to reach "higher than unto sensible things."³ But, whereas the angels do this intuitively, man must struggle to achieve this state through the reasoning capacity which should distinguish him from the beasts.⁴

At the same time, like the animals, man is tied by the needs of his body: he needs food and shelter and sleep; he grows in stature, procreates,

¹The position occupied in this Chain of Being by animals and inanimate things does not necessarily imply total inferiority. Any created thing that wholly fulfils its nature is pleasing to God, and each order has its own particular virtue, as Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, pp.166-167, points out: "Beasts are in sensible capacity as ripe even as men themselves, perhaps more ripe. For as stones, though in dignity of nature inferior unto plants, yet exceed them in firmness of strength or durability of being; and plants, though beneath the excellency of creatures endued with sense, yet exceed them in the faculty of vegetation and of fertility: so beasts, though otherwise behind men, may notwithstanding in actions of sense and fancy go beyond them; because the endeavours of nature, when it hath a higher perfection to seek, are in lower the more remiss, not esteeming thereof so much as those things do, which have no better proposed unto them." Indeed, as Montaigne points out (see later quotation on p.118), animals often fulfil their nature more perfectly than do humans.

²Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, pp.166-167.

³*Ibid.*, p.167. See also John Locke, Essays on the Law of Nature, ed. W.von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p.149:

"It is this reason by means of which mankind arrives at the knowledge of natural law. The foundations, however, on which rests the whole of that knowledge which reason builds up and raises as high as heaven are the objects of sense-experience; for the senses primarily supply the entire as well as the chief subject-matter of discourse and introduce it into the deep recesses of the mind."

⁴See, for example, Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, pp.161-164.

grows old and dies.¹ Like the angels, however, he also needs spiritual food and a spiritual home.² Thus, Batman comments as follows upon the nature of man:

A Man is of all other creatures neerest in likenesse vnto God, milde after kinde by the lawe of reason, receiuing doctrine and skill, hauing the Image of God by the might of knowledge, and the likenesse in power of louing. . . . And first of ye worthier kind, ye is the soule, by the which man agreeth with Angells. For by the soule man is lift vp to heauenlye thinges, aboue the kinde of bodie. . . .

And as the eye is in the bodie, so is the intellect vnderstanding in the soule, and it hath free aduisement and will, and is changeable by couenable will.³

The soul referred to here is the rational soul—which is possessed by man alone among earthly creatures. There are, however, two further divisions of the soul, which he has in common with the beasts. The first of these is the vegetable soul, which is concerned with growth, nutrition and reproduction. The second is the sensible soul, which apprehends or moves: the apprehensive quality can be inward (common sense, phantasie and memory) or outward (touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting

¹ See, for example, the point made by Montaigne, Bk II, chap. xii, p. 236:

"The manner of all beasts breeding, engendering, nourishing, working, moving, living, and dying, being so neere to ours, what ever we abridge from their moving causes, and adde to our condition above theirs, can no way depart from our reasons discourse."

² Danby, p. 28, has this to say on the subject of man and nature: "One last great thing might be pointed to in the Elizabethan view of Benignant Nature. It is this — Man's nature is not a minimum to which man can be reduced; it is not the skeleton Housman's Lad will give birth to in the grave; it is rather a maximum which man must attain, and this maximum will involve the successful and willing co-operation of man and his world before the richest image of man will be realized."

³ Stephen Bat [e] man, Batman vppon Bartholome, His Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum . . . (London: Thomas East, 1582), Bk III, chaps i-iii, pp. 12^a-13^a.

and perhaps titillation or speech).¹ Within the limits of God's universal, providential plan, man thus has the choice of his actions for his own good and ill. When he breaches the laws of his operation or nature, he does so of his own volition, and must bear the consequences.²

There are two further major aspects of the Law of Nature which concern all living things, and especially man. Both are important for an understanding of what happens in King Lear. The first concerns the relationship of the individual with his own self, the other concerns the individual in his relations with others. Hooker deals explicitly with these two Bonds when he deals with voluntary agents³:

That which hitherto hath been spoken concerneth natural agents considered in themselves. But we must further remember also, . . . that as in this respect they have their law, which law directeth them in the means whereby they tend to their own perfection: so likewise another law there is, which toucheth them as they are sociable parts united into one body; a law which bindeth them each to serve unto other's good, and all to prefer the good of the whole before whatsoever their own particular.⁴

In terms of the first principle of this Law of Nature, man should strive towards spiritual perfection as the best means of fulfilling himself. Once again it is Hooker who points out the discourse by which human reason

¹See Burton, Pt I, Sec.I, Mem.2, for a more detailed discussion of the concepts of the nature of the soul in Elizabethan times.

²See pp. 14-16 for a discussion of the part played by Providence, and pp. 111 and 171 for a discussion of the question of choice in King Lear. Lawlor, pp.168f., adds the following important rider to the question of choice in tragedy: "Choice has consequences, and those consequences, being in a world of real men and women, pass beyond our control."

³Involuntary agents, such as stones, cannot choose but fulfil the nature implanted in them. See, for example, Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, p.159.

⁴Ibid., p.161.

should arrive at this conclusion:

First therefore having observed that the best things , when they are not hindered , do still produce the best operations , . . . when hereupon we come to observe in ourselves , of what excellency our souls are in comparison of our bodies , and the diviner part in relation unto the baser of our souls; seeing that all these concur in producing human actions , it cannot be well unless the chiefest do command and direct the rest. The soul then ought to conduct the body , and the spirit of our minds the soul. This is therefore the first Law , whereby the highest power of the mind requireth general obedience at the hands of all the rest concurring with it unto action.¹

When man tends instead to satisfy only the physical aspects of his being and his physical needs alone , he trespasses against this principle of the Bond of Nature. And , because he does this despite the divine faculty of reason , which should tell him that such a course is unnatural for him as he is a man , he sinks lower than the animals who have no reason to guide them to things spiritual.²

The first moral virtue for man is , therefore , to learn control of the passions and desires of the flesh such as sex , hunger , thirst , anger and fear by the application of the virtues of self-discipline , measure and temperance , so that he can rise above seeking only the purely unthinking satisfaction of the primary urges which he shares with the beasts.³

Measure and degree are the watchwords , but , as Montaigne points out ,

brute beastes are much more regulare than we , and with more moderation containe themselves within the compasse which nature hath prescribed them.⁴

¹ Ibid. , p.179.

² For discussion of the treatment of this theme in King Lear , see pp.115ff.

³ See earlier quotation from St Augustine on p.18.

⁴ Bk II , chap.xii , p.237. Montaigne goes on to add , however , "but not so exactly but that they have some coherency with our riotous licenciousnesse."

Those men who are able to control the appetites of their senses by the power of their reason are less subject to every "gale and vary" of Fortune:

For the body . . . hath undoubtedly a kind of drawing after it the affections of the mind, especially bodies strong in humour and weak in virtues; for those of cholerick complexions are subject to anger, and the furious effects thereof; by which they suffer themselves to be transported, where the Mind hath not reason to remember, that the passions ought to be her Vassals, not her Masters. And that they wholly direct the reasonless mind, I am resolved: For all those which were created mortal, as birds, beasts, and the like, are left to their natural appetites; over all which, celestial bodies (as instruments and executioners of Gods providence) have absolute dominion. What we should judge of men, who little differ from beasts, I cannot tell; for as he that contendeth against those inforcements, may easily master or resist them; so whosoever shall neglect the remedies by virtue and piety prepared, putteth himself altogether under the power of his sensual appetite.¹

In terms of the second principle of this Law of Nature, man is, like all other things in the world, part of a body or society. By his very nature, man is a sociable being, and consideration for others must form part of his way of life if he is to find satisfaction and fulfilment in this life. Once again, too, it is his reason that should demonstrate to him the necessity of fulfilling the Bonds between himself and others, as Hooker points out:

The like natural inducement hath brought men to know that it is their duty no less to love others than themselves. For seeing those things which are equal must needs all have one measure; if I cannot but wish to receive all good, even as much at every man's hand as any man can wish unto his own soul, how should I look to have any part of my desire herein satisfied, unless myself be careful to satisfy the like desire which in undoubtedly in other men, we all being of one and the same nature? To have any thing offered them repugnant to this desire must needs in all respects grieve them as much as me: so that if I do harm I must look to suffer; there being no reason that others should shew greater measure of love to me than they have by me shewed unto them. My desire therefore to be loved of my equals in nature as much as possible may be, imposeth upon me a

¹Raleigh, Bk I, Pt I, chap. i, p.12.

natural duty of bearing to them-ward fully the like affection. From which relations of equality between ourselves and them that are as ourselves, what several rules and canons natural Reason hath drawn for direction of life no man is ignorant.¹

As we shall see, the violation of this principle will have a direct bearing on the course of the tragedy in King Lear.

It is also from this principle and from this need that the organisation of society springs:

We see then how nature itself teacheth laws and statutes to live by. The laws which have been hitherto mentioned do bind men absolutely even as they are men, although they have never any settled fellowship, never any solemn agreement amongst themselves what to do or not to do. But forasmuch as we are not by ourselves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things needful for such a life as our nature doth desire, a life fit for the dignity of man; therefore to supply those defects and imperfections which are in us living single and solely by ourselves, we are naturally induced to seek communion and fellowship with others. This was the cause of men's uniting themselves at the first in politic Societies, which societies could not be without Government, nor Government without a distinct kind of Law from that which hath been already declared.²

Thus, the Law of Nature also operates in the state, and is added to by Human or Positive Law. Indeed, Locke looks to human society for proof of the existence of natural laws:

The fourth argument [to prove the existence of the laws of nature] is taken from human society, since without this law men can have no social intercourse or union among themselves. Indeed there are two factors on which human society appears to rest, that is, firstly, a definite constitution of the state and form of government, and, secondly, the fulfilment of pacts. Every community among men falls to the ground if these are abolished, just as they themselves fall to the ground if the law of nature is annulled.³

At the same time it becomes clear that Hooker, for example, derives this

¹ Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, p.180.

² Ibid., pp.187-188. Quoted in part in the Introduction.

³ Locke, p.119.

law of the state from the outgrowth of those laws that direct the family in all its operations:

To fathers within their private families Nature hath given a supreme power; for which cause we see throughout the world even from the foundation thereof, all men have ever been taken as lords and lawful kings in their own houses. Howbeit over a whole grand multitude having no such dependency upon any one, and consisting of so many families as every politic society in the world doth, impossible it is that any should have complete lawful power, but by the consent of men, or immediate appointment of God; because not having the natural superiority of fathers, their power must needs be either usurped, and then unlawful; or, if lawful, then either granted or consented unto by them over whom they exercise the same, or else given extraordinarily from God, unto whom all the world is subject. It is no improbable opinion therefore which the arch-philosopher was of, that as the chiefest person in every household was always as it were a king, so when numbers of households joined themselves in civil society together, kings were the first kind of governors amongst them. Which is also (as it seemeth) the reason why the name of Father continued still in them, who of fathers were made rulers; as also the ancient custom of governors to do as Melchisedec, and being kings to exercise the office of priests, which fathers did at the first, grew perhaps by the same occasion.¹

This brings us clearly to Lear, the King-Priest-Father. And to the question of order and degree that is at the root of this system: for, without degree, there can only be discord and a return to primaeval chaos.²

How, then, does the concept of the family system and of the Bonds necessitated by blood and marriage ties fit into this picture?

Firstly, the Elizabethans saw all mankind as part of God's

¹Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, p.191.

²It is interesting to note, for example, that many of the themes and images presented in the famous degree speech in Troilus and Cressida I.iii.85ff. are expanded and developed in the action and imagery of King Lear. For further treatment of the relationship between degree and chaos, see my text, p.17, and Elyot, Bk I, p.2.

Sewall, p.69, penetrates to the heart of such a vision: "This 'great chain of being' was, moreover, a sensitive affair. Disorder in any of the parts might affect the whole; weakness in any link might cause a vital break, even to cutting man off from God and the hope of salvation."

universal family.¹ All men are the children of Adam,² and God is the father of Adam – and, through him, of the whole human race.³ Thus, all humanity is bound by this common parentage; all families, whether Christian or pagan, are "named" by God⁴; and all marriages are the re-enactment of the first marriage of Adam and Eve.⁵ Marriage and the family that springs from it thus have a tremendously powerful Divine sanction, purpose and blessing:

Now that which is born of man must be nourished with far more travail, as being of greater price in nature and of slower pace to perfection, than the offspring of any other creature besides. Man and woman being therefore to join themselves for such a purpose, they were of necessity to be linked with some strait and insoluble knot. The bond of wedlock hath been always more or less esteemed of as a thing religious and sacred. The title which the very heathens themselves do thereunto oftentimes give is holy.⁶

¹ See, for example, Hooker, Vol. II, Bk V, p. 227: "So that all things which God hath made are in that respect the offspring of God."

² Ibid.: "We are by nature the sons of Adam. When God created Adam he created us, and as many as are descended from Adam have in themselves the root out of which they spring."

³ See Ephesians 6 : 1, gloss (a) in the 1599 version: "For the Lord is the author of all fatherhood, and therefore we must yeeld such obedience as he will have us."

⁴ See Ephesians 3 : 14-15 (1599 version):
 "For this cause I bowe my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Of whome is named the whole familie in heaven and in earth."

⁵ Compare Jeremy Taylor, The Whole Sermons of Jeremy Taylor and The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1840), Pt II, sermon xvii, pp. 106-107:

"The first blessing God gave to man, was society: and that society was a marriage, and that marriage was confederate by God himself, and hallowed by a blessing; and at the same time, and for very many descending ages, not only by the instinct of nature, but by a superadded forwardness, (God himself inspiring the desire,) the world was most desirous of children . . . "

⁶ Hooker, Vol. II, Bk V, p. 391.

The purpose of this marriage is , as mentioned earlier , to channel and regulate the sexual urge which man shares in common with the beasts by satisfying , yet containing , it within the Bonds of a permanent union . At the same time , this permanent union satisfies man's need for care , food , shelter , clothing , education and love under the aegis of the family that is founded in accordance with the Bonds of marriage .

This view of marriage presupposes , however , that mankind naturally loves and seeks to care for the issue of its own body ; that the parent will not devour or cast out its young ; that the young will love those who care for them ; that the reciprocal Bonds of love , honour and obedience will knit the family through all its generations . Raleigh's comments upon the fifth commandment are worth noting in this respect :

The first of the second Table , to honor our Parents , with whom we are one and the same , is a gratitude which Nature it self hath taught us towards them , who , after God , gave us life and being , have begotten us , and born us , cherished us in our weak and helpless infancy , and bestowed on us the harvest and profit of their labours and cares .¹

Normally , therefore , the family Bonds should tend to promote order and harmony . However , if one accepts the image of the various family ties as links in a chain , one can expect that the weakening of any link in this chain could cause disruption of the whole .

If we are to demonstrate that tragedy can arise if the Bonds go awry , we should perhaps seek , as the most likely sources of such disruption , those points or stages in the growth of the family where such weakness is potential or actual . Thus , any period of transition , where the characters become involved in new Bonds or must adjust to a change

¹Raleigh , Bk II , Pt I , chap .iv , p.223 .

in the form of the old Bonds , would seem the most probable source of a tragic disruption in or a collapse of the family Bonds .

One of the most important of these shifts of authority and responsibility occurs when the child becomes an adult and sets out to marry and found a family of its own . At this point the old parent-child Bond undergoes a radical shift in emphasis . Normally , a parent binds his young to him as a result of two factors: their dependence on him , and the emotional or moral ties that are generated within the family structure . However , as children grow up , they become less dependent upon their parents for the fulfilment of their physical and spiritual needs – although the parents , ironically enough , probably grow more dependent upon their children as their own power fades . At this stage , unless a parent can bind his children to him by , for example , their hope of inheriting , or their sense of gratitude for his past actions to them , or the strength of their affection for him and the social forces that operate to reinforce these attitudes , he faces a diminution in their need to fulfil the Bonds between them and him . As long as the parent still controls those functions that bind his children to him , he can demand his dues . Once he has relegated his power , or the children have challenged his wonted authority over them by being able to provide for themselves , only the tie of filial affection or a sense of social obligation can keep his children true to the Bonds between them . At the same time , if a parent refuses to acknowledge the calls made upon his children by the new marriage Bonds they are entering into , continues to ask the same qualities of the earlier Bonds that he could expect when they were dependent upon him , or seeks to violate their new marriage Bonds , we could expect tension and disruption to follow .

The young adult who is about to marry must leave the father and

mother in a certain sense in order to be able to enter freely into the new marriage Bond with its spouse. Henceforth, too, its primary commitment must be to the new Bond, although the parent-child Bond is never entirely abrogated.

Before we turn to examine the play itself, it must be stressed that, although the various strands of the tragedy are dealt with in turn, they are all interwoven, dependent one upon the other. Lear himself is both a king and a father, and his actions and attitudes in one role affect his actions and attitudes in his other roles. The actions and themes of the subplot also have a direct bearing on those of the main plot, and vice versa. We are dealing with events in a world, not with events in a vacuum, so that, like a stone cast into a pond, any action sets up waves of action and reaction that are reflected, multi-faceted, in the imagery as well.

As we look at the opening lines of the main plot of King Lear, it becomes apparent that we are indeed examining what happens when a particular family reaches the transitional stage just discussed. Here we have an old father with three adult daughters, of whom two are already married, and the third stands on the brink of marriage to one of her suitors. At the same time we have a father who is about to make his children economically independent of him by awarding each daughter her share of the inheritance. We are therefore faced immediately with a challenge to the three Bonds of the family mentioned at the commencement of this chapter: the Bonds between a parent and his offspring (now adult), the Bonds between women and their husbands (or, in Cordelia's case, her husband-to-be), and the Bonds between siblings.

As pointed out earlier, marriage is the foundation on which the family Bonds are built. It is therefore interesting to note that it is in this

respect that Shakespeare introduces a fundamental departure from the common versions of the Lear story. In none of the other versions are Goneril and Regan already married, nor is Cordelia on the point of marrying one of her suitors.¹ Thus, it is only in Shakespeare's King Lear that we discover two diametrically opposed interpretations of the Bonds that should exist between husband and wife – in addition to the differing interpretations of the Bonds between parent and child and the Bonds between siblings that also occur in the other versions.

Since it is unlikely that Shakespeare introduced this variation fortuitously, let us examine more closely his treatment of the subject of marriage in the opening scene in the hope that we shall discover what implications this has for the origin and development of the tragedy. For this purpose let us use as a point of reference the traditional Elizabethan form of the marriage lines¹: not so much to establish whether the opening of the tragedy can be correlated point for point with the prayerbook form of the marriage service, as to establish whether there is anything in the essential form and meaning of these marriage lines and their common

¹ See, for example, the versions contained in the following sources:

- i. The Chronicle History of King Leir;
- ii. Holinshed's Chronicle as Used in Shakespeare's Plays, ed. Allardyce and Josephine Nicoll (reprinted; Everyman's Library; London: Dent, 1963);
- iii. The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum, re-edited S.J.H. Heritage (The Early English Text Society; London: N. Trübner & Co., 1879);
- iv. Spenser, "Faerie Qveene," Bk II, Canto X;
- v. Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Higgins. (The only version of this text that was obtainable is contained in an excerpt on pp. 238-243 of an Appendix to the Arden edition of King Lear. All references in this thesis are to this source.)

² The texts cited are from the Book of Common Prayer of 1549 (privately reproduced in facsimile form for Mr G. Moreton; Kent, 1896).

interpretation that can enable us better to understand what happens in King Lear.

As we compare Act I, scene i, with the marriage rites, we shall notice that in outward form they are very similar. It will, however, become apparent that the development of the ritual in that part of Act I, scene i, of King Lear that bears the main plot becomes a terrible parody of the true meaning and purpose of the marriage ritual.

The form of the rites of marriage can be divided into several parts: the gathering of a congregation; an announcement of the purpose of the meeting and the reasons for the institution of matrimony; injunctions to the congregation and the celebrants; questions and responses; the "giving away" of the daughter by the father; an exchange of vows and tokens; and the pronouncement of a series of blessings upon the couple. Closely tied with these rites are the physical and spiritual preparedness of the couple about to be married; the preparedness of those concerned to enter into new Bonds and to accept a change in the old Bonds of the family; and the material provisions that enable the young couple to set up a new family (which often take the form of a dowry or marriage gift).

Let us watch what happens in King Lear.

Lear enters, accompanied by his daughters, sons-in-law and attendants. The necessary congregation is assembled. If for a moment we disregard other issues, we note that Lear then announces the purpose of the gathering: the impending marriage of his daughter, Cordelia, to one of her suitors, and the settlement of a dowry upon her and her married sisters.¹

¹I.i.41-48.

Were the ritual to continue in its pre-ordained course, Lear should, out of the love he bears her and her sisters, award the dowry to them, set out for Cordelia and her husband-to-be the purpose of marriage, and enjoin them to affirm that they do indeed wish to take each other as husband and wife.

However, Lear's words reveal the first violation of the essential meaning of marriage:

Tell me, my daughters,

 Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
 That we our largest bounty may extend
 Where nature doth with merit challenge.¹

Lear is thus making the award of the dowry contingent upon a protestation of love for himself. But, Goneril and Regan are already married, and Cordelia is about to be married. The two elder daughters have therefore presumably already sworn to forsake all other and cleave only to their husbands, and Cordelia is about to swear the same, for this is one of the essential requirements of the marriage service.² Lear has likewise "given" Goneril and Regan "away" to their husbands and should be ready now to give Cordelia away. Knowing this, he yet demands an extravagant protestation of love for his own person.

It is at this point, then, that the first clash in the interpretation of these marriage vows takes place. Goneril and Regan apparently have no qualms about fulfilling Lear's demands. As we shall discover later,

¹I.i.48-53. My underlining.

²See the Book of Common Prayer. See also Ephesians 5 : 31 (1599 version): "For this cause [marriage] shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twaine shall be one flesh."

they do not regard the sanctity of the marriage vows in the same light as Cordelia does. Cordelia, however, points out to her father and to her married sisters that such protestations are a travesty of the meaning of marriage. She sets out clearly what the requirements of married love are:

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty;
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.¹

The nature of the marriage Bond outlined here by Cordelia is that which is undertaken in terms of the oath of avowal in answer to the priest's questions:

N. Wilt thou haue this man to thy wedded houseband, to liue together after Goddes ordeinaunce, in the holy estate of matrimonie: wilt thou obey him, and serue him, loue, honor and kepe him, in sickenes and in health: And forsaking al other kepe thee onely to him, so long as you both shall liue.²

Essentially, therefore, this marriage vow ensures that the primary love, care and obedience of the respondent is transferred from the parent to the spouse. At the same time, the parent must be prepared to abdicate his central position in his child's affections in favour of the spouse. Lear refuses to do this.³ Cordelia thus rightly refuses to give her father the

¹I.i.99-104.

²The Book of Common Prayer.

³Compare "Tancred and Gismunda," A Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed. Robert Dodsley, rearranged by W. Carew Hazlitt (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), Vol. VII. Here, in I.iii, pp.34-35, Tancred's love of his daughter is so jealous, that he wishes to be both father and husband to her:

Impartial death thy husband did subdue,
Yet hath he spar'd thy kingly father's life:
Who during life to thee a double stay,
As father and as husband will remain.

And, in II.ii, p.45, we are told that "over-love his judgement hath decay'd."

absolute love that he demands, for, as she can only give her father the love due to a father, so must she also give to her husband the love due to a husband.¹

Incensed and humiliated, Lear, the priest-father, then withholds the dowry and declares, "Thy truth then be thy dower."² He calls for her suitors and makes it clear to them that she will be "dower'd with our curse"³ only, that is, she will bring with her neither her father's blessing, nor a marriage gift.

Let us now turn to Cordelia's two suitors and examine what their revealed attitudes towards these marriage Bonds are.

When faced with the prospect of taking to wife a dowerless daughter who has also incurred her father's wrath, Burgundy hesitates to accept Cordelia on the terms of the marriage oath that states that it is an undertaking for "better, for worse, for richer, for poorer."⁴ He hums and haws that "election makes not up in such conditions."⁵ And, since "respect and fortunes are his love,"⁶ Cordelia acts in accordance with her view of the meaning of marriage and declines his suit; for issues such as these are not central to her interpretation of the nature of married love.

Lear has, however, painted Cordelia's transgressions so blackly, that France is moved to say that her "offence / Must be of such unnatural degree / That monsters it."⁷ If this were indeed so, if

¹See I.i.95-104.

²I.i.108.

³I.i.204.

⁴The Book of Common Prayer.

⁵I.i.206.

⁶I.i.248.

⁷I.i.218-220.

Cordelia had indeed committed some monstrous crime, this would be an impediment to a lawful marriage and must be disclosed before the marriage is solemnised, for the priest is required to warn the couple that

if either of you doe knowe any impedimente, why ye maie not bee lawfully ioyned together in matrimonie, that ye confesse it. For be ye wel assured, that so manye as bee coupled together otherwaies then Goddes woord doeth allowe: are not ioyned of God, neither is their matrimonie lawful.¹

This explains why Cordelia hastens to ask her father to make known that

It is no vicious blot, murther or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonour'd step,
That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favour.²

That is, Cordelia has not been guilty of any offence that could legitimately be an impediment to her marriage. Her only offence has been to displease her father by insisting on a true interpretation of the Bonds of marriage and the family.

Upon hearing this, France points out that

love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stand
Aloof from th' entire point.³

He thereby confirms Cordelia's attitude to Burgundy who, apparently, loved her partly for the material benefits that she could bring with her. France maintains that Cordelia is "herself a dowry,"⁴ that is, her intrinsic merit is of greater consideration in the scales of married love than worldly goods. He formalises his acceptance of Cordelia as his wife as follows:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd !

¹The Book of Common Prayer.

²I.i.227-229.

³I.i.238-240.

⁴I.i.241.



Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon;
 Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
 Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
 My love should kindle to inflam'd respect.
 Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
 Is Queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.¹

This speech reaffirms the purpose and nature of the marriage vows that have been so travestied by the other characters. In it, France plights his troth in terms very like those contained in the marriage lines:

I N. take thee, N. to be my wedded wife, to haue & to holde from this day forwarde, for better, for wurse, for richer, for poorer, in sickenes, and in health, to loue, and to cherishe, til death vs departe: according to Goddes holy ordeinaunce: And therto I plight thee my trouthe². . .

With my body I thee wurship: and withal my worldly Goodes I thee endowe.³

It is a love which sees Cordelia as "unpriz'd," "precious,"⁴ because there is no absolute price or value that can be set upon her in terms of such love: unlike the love expressed by Goneril and Regan for their father, which has definite connotations of saleability in words such as "dearer,"⁵ "what can be valued rich or rare"⁶ and "prize me at her worth."⁷

¹I.i.250-257. It is interesting to note that this declaration of love also bears a marked resemblance to that definition of true Christian love that enspirits the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3-11 or I Corinthians 13).

²It is interesting to note the chain of related images in the play itself. Cordelia says that she is "true." Lear exclaims in reply, "Thy truth then be thy dower." This exchange occurs immediately after Cordelia has spoken of "that lord whose hand must take my plight." In the same way her "plighted trouthe" and her sister's "plighted cunning" are opposed.

³The Book of Common Prayer.

⁴I.i.259.

⁵I.i.56.

⁶I.i.57.

⁷I.i.70. See also pp.57-59.

Thus, as Max Lüthi points out,¹ Cordelia is freely given that unconditional love that Lear has attempted to bargain for with the promise of a dowry. Lear himself, however, is unable to appreciate that, in loving France as a wife should, she does not diminish the filial love she bears her father. Nor, as we shall see, can he differentiate between the quality of the love his elder daughters offer him and the quality of the love which Cordelia offers him. As a result of this misunderstanding, Lear refuses to fulfil his proper role in the marriage ritual. Not only does he give his daughter's hand in marriage to her successful suitor, but he also gives "her father's heart from her."² His parting words to the couple represent the final subversion of the purpose of the ritual. Instead of the blessings upon the couple and upon their issue (such as he had given Goneril and Regan) that should form the culmination of the marriage service,³ he banishes France and Cordelia "without our grace, our love,

¹Shakespeares Dramen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1957), p. 95 :

"Cordelia aber, die Verstossene, erlangt gerade das, was Lear ersehnt und vergeblich sich zu ertrotzen sucht, und sie erlangt es eben durch die Verstossung: Frankreichs König schenkt ihr seine Liebe, er liebt sie um ihrer selbst willen, während der unechte Bewerber, der Fürst von Burgund, dem es um die Erbin ging, zurücktritt."

²I. i. 126.

³See, for example, the blessings set out in the marriage service in *The Book of Common Prayer*:

"Almighty god, which at the beginnyng did create oure firste parentes Adam and Eue, and dyd sanctifie and ioyne them together in mariage; powre vpon you the rychnesse of his grace, sanctifie and blisse you, that ye may please hym bothe in bodye and soule: and liue together in holy loue, vnto you liues ende."

These are the blessings Lear pronounced upon Goneril and Albany, and upon Regan and Cornwall, and their issue, but refuses France and Cordelia.

our benison."¹

Let us turn now from an examination of the Bonds of marriage that lie at the core of this first scene in King Lear and look more closely at the treatment of the parent-child and sibling Bonds that run parallel to the theme of marriage, in an attempt to examine how and why they too are violated.

Now the dowry is not only a marriage gift; it is also a means whereby the economic traditions of a family are perpetuated, and a tie between the old family and the new. Through the award of a dowry, a parent seeks to bind to himself not only his own offspring, but also his offspring by marriage— his sons-in-law. Lear apparently realises this, and the statement of his intention can be partly justified:

We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now.²

By making his wishes in this respect public during his life-time, Lear clearly hopes to ensure that they will be binding and perpetual. It is interesting to note three things. The first is that he addresses this intention to Cornwall and Albany,³ his sons-in-law. The second is that he has already divided the kingdom into three parts.⁴ The third is his reiteration

¹ I.i.265.

² I.i.43-45. My underlining.

³ I.i.41-42. Note, too, that he calls them both "son."

⁴ I.i.37-38: "Know that we have divided / In three our kingdom." See also pp.75-80 for comments on the implications of such a division of the kingdom.

of this concept of an enduring decree.¹

In so far, then, his intention falls within the scope of the family Bonds. Lear, however, commits several errors which run counter to this avowed purpose. His first error is to demand, in exchange for a portion he has already decided upon, an extravagant verbal profession of love from each daughter in an attempt to discover which of his daughters is most worthy of her portion.² His second error is to introduce that very element of rivalry between the children that could lead to the strife he wishes to avoid. His third error lies in the fact that, by giving all his possessions to his children, he becomes wholly economically dependent upon them. If we examine some of the maxims in Fuller's chapter on the Good Parent, the extent of Lear's error becomes apparent:

He beginneth his care for his children not at their birth but conception This care he continueth til the day of his death, in their Infancy, Youth and Mans estate. . .

.
He observeth Gavel-kind in dividing his affections, though not his estate. He loves them (though leaves them not) all alike. Indeed his main land he settles on the eldest: for where man takes away the birth-right, God commonly takes away the blessing from a family. But as for his love, therein, like a well-drawn picture,

¹See, for example, I.i.66-67: "To thine and Albany's issues/ Be this perpetual"; and I.i.79: "To thee and thine, hereditary ever." In the same way he will cast Cordelia off "for ever" (I.i.116). Note also the emphasis on the inheritance being passed on to their heirs. As the tragedy progresses, an ironic fact will become evident, that is, that man cannot legislate for a future over which he has abdicated the only controls he possessed.

²There is also a curious anomaly here. Either Lear has divided the kingdom into three pre-determinedly unequal portions, which he has already decided to allocate unequally in order to give those daughters he has decided love him most a larger share, or, if all three portions are equal, there can be no question of any sister "meriting" a larger portion.

It is worth noting, too, the manner in which the anomaly is sustained. The portion conferred on Regan is "no less in space, validity, and pleasure / Than that conferr'd on Goneril" (11.81-82). But, when it is Cordelia's turn, Lear asks her what she can say to "draw / A third more opulent" (11.85-86) than her sisters have.

he eyes his children alike, (if there be parity of deserts) not parching one to drown the other.

.
He doth not give away his loaf to his children, and then come to them for a piece of bread. He holds the reins (though loosely) in his own hands, and keeps to reward duty, and punish undutifulness: yet on good occasion for his childrens advancement he will depart from part of his means. Base is their nature who will not have their branches lopt, till their bodie be fell'd; and will let go none of their goodes, as if it presaged their speedy death: whereas it does not follow that he that puts off his cloak must presently go to bed.¹

It is interesting to note how many of the images that we find here are images that we shall encounter in the course of King Lear.

Perhaps it is because, until the moment when he casts Cordelia off, Lear's transgressions against the Bonds are more the compounded product of folly, vanity and error, than an actual criminal act such as Macbeth's murder of his king, that it is so much more difficult to pinpoint just where his fault lies. Indeed, to a certain extent, the fault lies as much with Goneril and Regan as with Lear. As we saw, Lear's intention could be partly justified. They, however, cannot justify the excessive terms in which they declare their love for him in violation of the love they should bear their husbands.

Bearing in mind Fuller's maxims, let us look, for example, at the questions of love, nature and merit which are intertwined.

Unless he thereby intends only to ask which of his daughters loves him most in the way a daughter should love her father, Lear no longer has the paternal right to demand:

Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
 That we our largest bounty may extend
 Where nature doth with merit challenge.²

¹ Fuller, Bk I, chap.v, pp.11-13.

² I.i.51-53. My underlining.

While they were still young and unmarried, Lear could expect that they would naturally love him more than any other person in the world. Now that they are married, however, part of this love is due to their husbands. Goneril and Regan's fault lies in the fact that their extravagant professions of love exceed the love that is due to their father. Lear's fault lies in the fact that, by making the award of their dowry-inheritance contingent upon a show of love for him, he is in fact not rewarding them for true dutifulness shown to him. Instead he is taking the word for the deed; allowing their protestations to obscure the real nature of the love they bear him.

If one looks more closely at the love professions of Goneril and Regan, it becomes apparent that they have interpreted Lear's question of merit in terms of value. Their expressions of love for him are all in terms of values, weights, prizing:

Gon. 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, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found¹;
 A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.²

Reg. I am made of that self metal 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: that I profess
 Myself an enemy to all other joys
 Which this most precious square of sense possesses,

¹This line is interesting because it shows Goneril using the terminology of familial love to express the extent of the love she bears her father — an irony that will only later become apparent.

²I.i. 55-61. My underlining. See also the discussion of love (including Goneril and Regan's passion for Edmund and the fact that they tend to express it in terms drawn from the marriage Bonds) on pp. 159ff.

And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.¹

Lear and his elder daughters commit the error of attempting to define the love between parents and their children in terms that rest ultimately on almost material considerations, on quantifications. It is in a similar way that we see Lear setting out Cordelia's worth when she has displeased him:

When she was dear to us we did hold her so,
But now her price has fallen.²

As France and Cordelia point out, love is a quality; it is an emotion that does not depend on the concepts of merit or worth in their marketable sense; nor can it be measured in degrees of more and most. Where the family Bonds are duly fulfilled, this love will be evident— is in fact considered so natural that it is almost beyond discussion. The terrible irony that will later become apparent is that Goneril and Regan's love for their father rests essentially on considerations of advantage to be obtained, and is not intrinsic or selfless.

It is in answer to this valuatory approach to human worth that France expresses a love for Cordelia that takes no cognisance of such considerations. Lear and his elder daughters translate the Bonds of love into the terminology of the exchange, the market place, the book of accounts; they use it as a counter with which to bargain. Cordelia, as

¹I.i.69-76. My underlining. Note that this is sensual love that they are offering him. It is also interesting to note that Regan speaks of her "deed" of love. Ironically, her deeds will not reflect this love, whereas Cordelia, who could not profess so largely, will demonstrate the true nature of her love in her succour of her father. See also pp.159ff. for a further discussion of the various types of love.

²I.i.196-197. My underlining. Compare also 1.202 ("those infirmities she owes"); 1.208 ("I tell you all her wealth"); and 1.211 ("avert your liking a more worthier way").

we shall see, refuses to buy or sell love. Rather, like the Grace of the New Testament, is her love given as a "free gift," regardless of desert; and finds its truest expression in deeds, not in words.

Lear, however, is satisfied with the public avowals of love given him by Goneril and Regan and proceeds to fulfil his intention of rewarding them for this "dutifulness" by allotting to them and their heirs and spouses a pre-determined share of the kingdom. This is his next error. We saw that Fuller emphasised that a father should retain the reins of economic power in his own hands in order to be able to reward or punish his children. He stressed that a parent should not give everything to his children and thereby become economically dependent upon them. This consideration is, in fact, in the mainstream of a great deal of debate in Elizabethan times on when and to what extent a father should give his estate to his children. As we shall later see, this subject also forms part of Edmund's plot to turn his father against Edgar: Edmund maintains that Edgar claims fathers should give up the management of their estates in favour of their children.¹ Montaigne supports such a view, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

As for mee, I deeme it a kind of cruelty and injustice, not to receive them [children] into the share and society of our goods, and to admit them as Partners in the understanding of our domestical affaires (if they be once capable of it) and not to cut off and shut-up our commodities to provide for theirs, since we have engendred them to that purpose. . . .

.
 . . . And if any shall answer mee, as did once a Gentleman of good worth and understanding, that he thriftily endeavoured to hoard up riches, to no other purpose, nor to have any use and commodity of them, than to be honoured, respected and suingly sought unto by his friends and kinsfolkes, and that age having bereaved him of all other forces, it was the onely remedy he had left to maintaine himselfe

¹See pp. 74-75 on this subject.

in authority with his household, and keepe him from falling into contempt and disdaine of all the world That father may truly be said miserable that holdeth the affection of his children tied unto him by no other meanes than by the need they have of his helpe, or want of his assistance, if that may be termed affection; A man should yeeld himselfe respectable by virtue and sufficiency, and amiable by his goodnesse, and gentlenesse of manners No age can be so crazed and drooping in a man that hath lived honourably, but must needs prove venerable, and especially unto his children, whose minds ought so to be directed by the parents, that reason and wisdom, not necessity and need, nor rudenesse and compulsion, may make them know and performe their dutie.¹

There are two reservations implicit in Montaigne's thesis. The first is that the father must know his children sufficiently well to be able to judge whether they do in fact yield (and will continue to yield) him the love and respect which nature, reason and the due of his age demands. The second is a corollary of the first: his children must in fact love and respect him for qualities other than his financial power.

It is at this point interesting to note that, in Holinshed's version, Lear does not give all the land to his children immediately, but wills that his land be divided between the two sons-in-law — half of it to go to them immediately, and the other half after his death.² And, in the version of Higgins, Lear wills that the kingdom shall be allotted to his two elder daughters after his death.³ In Shakespeare's version, however, we are shown the father resigning all his real rights to his daughters and sons-in-law, thereby also abdicating his power as an economic

¹Montaigne, Bk II, chap.vii, pp.193-194.

²Holinshed (Dent ed., p.226). Despite this precaution, however, the sons-in-law become impatient and seize their remaining half shares from Lear as well.

³Higgins (p.240 in the Appendix to the Arden text). In this version, too, Lear's precautions prove fruitless.

provider. He now has no means of making his displeasure felt.

The crux of the tragedy is reached at the moment when Lear turns to his youngest and favourite daughter, from whom he hopes to receive most flattery in exchange for the largest portion of the inheritance. Cordelia shatters his ceremonious division of the kingdom by her uncompromising honesty, her inability to embroider with words the nature of her love for her father, and her conviction that the due love she bears him cannot be given weight in speech. She refuses to give him the dutifully empty verbal adulation that his ceremony requires:

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your Majesty
According to my bond; no more nor less.
.....
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.¹

Cordelia thus points out the true nature of the Bond between herself and her father. She emphasises that she cannot love Lear more than the Bond allows, nor will she love him less. The word "bond" here describes the due love in the parent-child relationship — which is the only one they are entitled to maintain, or capable of maintaining — and the fulfilment of this Bond can only be seen in the reciprocal performance of duties (not in protestations), just as the responsibilities borne are the measure of the affection that underlies the Bonds (not wordy avowals of love). The Bonds exist to regulate the love, honour and obedience fitting to the relationship: to exceed or fall of short of what they allow is to trespass against them. Lear, however, tragically underestimates Cordelia's love for him. She states that she cannot love him more nor less than the Bonds

¹I.i.91-98. My underlining.

allow: he interprets this to mean that she does not love him to the same extent as her sisters claim to do.¹

It is on this contrary interpretation of the nature of love within the scope of the Bonds that the tragedy hinges. Lear's subsequent actions will take place in accordance with his interpretation, and only time will reveal that Cordelia's actions do speak more truly of love than her sister's empty declamations.² It is in part Cordelia's tragic inability to deviate

¹ Compare Cordelia's words in the Chronicle version I.iii.78-81:

I cannot paint my duty forth in words,
I hope my deeds shall make report for me:
But looke what love the child doth owe the father,
The same to you I bear, my gracious lord.

See also Holinshed (Dent ed., p.226):

"Knowing the great loue and fatherlie zeale that you haue alwaies borne towards me (for the which I maie not answere you otherwise than I thinke, and as my conscience leadeth me) I protest vnto you, that I haue loued you ever, and will continuallie . . . loue you as my naturall father. And if you would more vnderstand of the loue that I beare you, assertaine your selfe, that so much as you haue, so much you are worth, and so much I loue you, and no more."

In the Higgins' version (Appendix to the Arden text, p.240), Cordelia tells her father that she and her sisters love him for the goods he has, in order to show up the falsity of Goneril and Regan. Compare the quotation from Raleigh on p.43 for parallels with the terminology used by Cordelia.

² See Clemen, Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, p.134:

"The first [scene] shows us Lear still in possession of his power; he is still a member of society. He makes decisions, gives orders and makes plans, addresses the other characters of this scene, his daughters, Kent, France, etc. But the very first scene gives us a hint of how Lear is going to lose contact with this natural relation to his environment. The dialogue which he carries on with his daughters is at bottom no true dialogue, that is, a dialogue based on a mutual will to mutual understanding. Lear determines in advance the answers he will receive; he fails to adapt himself to the person with whom he is speaking. Hence his complete and almost incomprehensible misunderstanding of Cordelia. Lear takes no pains to understand what Cordelia is really trying to say; he does not consider whether her words could not have quite another meaning. He catches up only their superficial form and, because he had expected another answer, different from this, he repels the one person who in reality is nearest and dearest to him."

one word from the truth to satisfy her father's vanity that leads to this clash between them.

It is at this point, too, that Lear commits his first major trespass against the Bonds that bind a family together. Lear attempts, out of his hurt pride, to annul and cancel the Bonds between himself and Cordelia.¹ So incensed is he, and so humiliated, that he strikes back angrily and attempts to hurt the daughter who loves him in the most painful way he knows: Lear declares that he is no longer prepared to acknowledge Cordelia as his daughter. In so doing, he violates not only the socially and legally determined Bonds of parenthood which tie him to her, but, in fact, attempts to disavow the natural tie of blood that makes her his daughter, flesh of his flesh, and blood of his blood. Ritually, he pronounces a curse of excommunication from the family upon her:

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation menses
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.²

¹ Compare the Chronicle version, I.iii.86-89, where Lear's reaction reveals a similar sense of insult:

Why how now, minion, are you grown so proud?
Doth our dear love make you thus peremptory?
What, is your love become so small to us,
As that you scorn to tell us what it is?

² I.i.109-120. Lear is himself acting very like the "Scythian"—see pp.116ff. for further discussion of this imagery.

Not only is Lear disinheriting Cordelia — cutting her and her heirs off from any continuing financial benefit from him — but attempting also to deny the indissoluble knot that binds them as father and daughter. A quotation from a similar case in "Tancred and Gismunda" throws an interesting light upon the nature of Lear's trespass against these Bonds between a father and his child:

My daughter is to me mine only heart,
 My life, my comfort, my continuance;
 Shall I be then not only so unkind
 To pass all nature's strength, and cut her off?
 But therewithal so cruel to myself,
 Against all law of kind to shred in twain
 The golden thread that doth us both maintain?¹

It becomes clear that Lear's trespass goes against all the laws of kind — that which is natural for man in regard to his offspring. Excommunication from the family, like matricide, patricide, fratricide, or incest, is an act that strikes at the core of the family's being.

It is from this trespass against the laws of Nature that bind the family together that the tragedy will spring. As we shall see, Lear's curses will rebound upon himself. His other daughters will do the same to him as he has done to Cordelia. They will ignore the ties of blood and love which should bind them in honour and duty to their father, and become like the barbarous Scythian or cannibals in their treatment of him. It is Lear himself who will be neither neighboured, pitied nor relieved by Goneril and Regan, for his daughters will follow his example and disclaim all their filial care in the same way as he has disclaimed all paternal

¹"Tancred and Gismunda" (ed. Dodsley, Vol. VII) IV.ii. p.65. Note the references to "unkind," "nature's strength," and to the "law of kind."

care of Cordelia. As he violated Fuller's maxims of what the Good Father should be, so they will violate the offices due of children — will be unlike Fuller's Good Child, who

reverenceth the person of his Parent though old, poor and forward. As his Parent bare with him when a child, he bears with his Parent if twice a child¹; nor doth his dignity above him cancell his duty unto him . . .

He observes his lawfull commands, and practiseth his precepts with all obedience . . .

He is patient under correction, and thankfull after it . . .

He is a stork to his parent, and feeds him in his old age. Not onely if his father hath been a pelican,² but though he hath been an estridge unto him, and neglected him in his youth. He confines him not a long way off to a short pension, forfeited if he comes in his presence; but shows piety at home, and learns (as S.Paul saith the 1 Timothy 5.4.) to requite his Parent. And yet the debt (I mean onely the principall, not counting the interest) cannot fully be paid, and therefore he compounds with his father to accept in good worth the utmost of his endeavour . . . ³

It is interesting to note that, even when Lear is disowning Cordelia, he uses imagery connected with the concepts of the family to express his attitude, speaks of hoping to have "set my rest / On her kind nursery,"⁴ or calls Cordelia "new-adopted to our hate."⁵

When Kent intervenes to point out the error of Lear's actions and to point out that Cordelia's love in terms of the Bonds is not wanting, that she does not love him "least," nor are those "empty-hearted whose

¹ See how they later refuse to bear with him when he is childish.

² See later discussion of this image on pp.118-119.

³ Fuller, Bk I, chap.vi, pp.13-14.

⁴ I.i.124.

⁵ I.i.203.

low sounds / Reverb no hollowness,"¹ the king angrily banishes Kent as well. Lear will brook no correction and casts himself headlong into a course that will have tragic consequences.² His final words to Cordelia and France are, as we shall see, larded with bitter irony:

Thou hast her, France; let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again.³

When he most needs the loving care of a daughter, it is Cordelia's face he will see, for his other daughters will have cast him off.

There is another factor that perhaps plays a role in this family tragedy: that of sibling rivalry. And, it is Lear himself who introduces into the tragedy this element of sibling rivalry⁴ that can be such a destructive force in the family structure — as the relationship between Edmund and his brother amply demonstrates. Fuller pointed out that a father should love his children "all alike." Yet we find Lear making it clear that he loved Cordelia most.⁵ In this he transgresses against the family code which requires impartial affection to be shown to one's children if their merit is the same. Cordelia refuses to compete with her sisters for her father's affections — and is banished for her refusal. Goneril and Regan are aware of his partiality — "He always lov'd our sister most"⁶ —

¹I.i.152-154. See also discussion on p.166.

²See p.82 for a discussion of his headstrong pride.

³I.i.262-264.

⁴See I.i.51: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" and I.i.85-86 [to Cordelia]: "What can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?"

⁵I.i.82-83 and 123.

⁶I.i.290.

and this might even contribute towards their lack of reciprocal feeling for Lear.¹ But let us not embark on psychological mystification in this regard!

If Lear cannot see through his elder daughters, Cordelia can; and her final words to her sisters reveal the extent of her knowledge of the emptiness of their professions of love:

I know you what you are;
And like a sister am most loth to call
Your faults as they are named. Love well our father:
To your professed bosoms I commit him:
But yet, alas! stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
.....
Time shall unfold what plighted² cunning hides;
Who covers faults, at last with shame derides.³

Cordelia here correctly anticipates Goneril and Regan's future attitude toward Lear, who is now entirely dependent upon them. She also correctly forecasts the end that will overcome them.

We have seen how Lear misinterpreted the Bonds of the family and deliberately violated them by rejecting his daughter, Cordelia. We have established the role of marriage and the terms of its solemnisation in the pattern of the family duties and obligations, and identified the fact that Goneril and Regan trespass against the spirit of their marriage vows. Let us not turn to the other family in the tragedy and start once again with the father, Gloucester.

¹It is interesting to note that Edgar is "no dearer" in Gloucester's "account" than his bastard brother, Edmund (I.i.20-21).

²There is an interesting parallel in this scene between their plighted (plaited) cunning and the love they have plighted (promised or professed) to their father.

³I.i.269-281

If, as it is hoped has been demonstrated in the foregoing pages, the family question lies at the core of the tragedy, then it is surely no accident that the opening lines of the very first scene announce an aspect of the main theme: the relationship between a parent and his children. The dialogue between Kent and Gloucester which opens the play is important because it deals with the first flouting of the normal and accepted code of familial behaviour, the first disruption in the normal order and cycle of the human family: the attitude of a married man to his bastard son. Let us look more closely at the following lines:

- Kent. Is this not your son, my Lord?
- Glou. His breeding, Sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him, that now I am braz'd to't.
- Kent. I cannot conceive you.
- Glou. Sir, this young fellow's mother could; where-upon she grew round-womb'd, and had, indeed, Sir, a son for her cradle, ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?
- Kent. I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.
- Glou. But I have a son, Sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account: though this knave came something saucily to the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged.¹

Gloucester thus provides us with the first example in the play of the flouting of the normal Bonds of marriage and the family. His trespass against these Bonds has been threefold: he has violated the marriage Bond between himself and his wife, the mother of his legitimate son; he has embarked on a sexual relationship outside the marriage Bond with the mother of his illegitimate son; and he has fathered a son who is excluded

¹I.i.8-24. My underlining.

from the normal family by his illegitimacy. Gloucester thereby also violates Fuller's maxim that a father's care for his children should commence not at their birth but at their conception. Indeed, by fathering this son outside the Bonds of marriage, Gloucester violates the purpose for which marriage was ordained, for marriage is not to be undertaken

vnadusedlye, lightelye, or wantonly, to satisfie mens carnal lustes and appetites, like brute beastes that haue no vnderstanding: but reuerently, discretely, adusedly, soberly, and in the feare of God. Onely considering the causes for the whiche matrimonie was ordeined. One cause was the procreacion of children, to be brought vp in the feare and nurture of the Lord, and prayse of God. Secondly it was ordeined for a remedie agaynst sinne, and to auoide fornicacion, that suche persones as bee married, might liue chastlie in matrimonie.¹

In contrast to this ideal, his procreation of Edmund was an act of lust, characterised only as "good sport at his making,"² not as the result of chaste marital love; it was an extra-marital adventure undertaken neither "reuerently, discretely, adusedly, soberly," or in the "feare of God." That such a relationship violates what is considered to be the better nature of man within the Bonds of the family structure is clearly brought out by the contrast in the marriage lines between the chaste married love of a man and a woman, and that carnal satisfaction of lust which is like that of "brute beastes that haue no vnderstanding."

At this early stage of the tragedy, then, we have an implied contrast between the fulfilment of the better part of human nature within the scope of the family Bonds, and behaviour which is a violation of these Bonds and reduces man to the level of unreasoning animals. It is also

¹The Book of Common Prayer.

²I.i.23-24. See also R.W.Chambers, King Lear (The First W.P.Ker Memorial Lecture, 1937; Glasgow: Jackson & Co., 1946), p.29: "It is with a similar recklessness of his child's feelings and of the rights of human personality that Gloucester gloats in retrospect over his sin."

interesting to note that, in his description of Edmund's procreation, Gloucester refers to the furniture of the married household — the cradle and the bed — in a manner which underlines their misuse.

At the same time, it becomes clear that, although Gloucester now claims to be "braz'd" to the acknowledgement of his bastard son, Edmund's presence does cause him social embarrassment: Edmund is the living reminder of his transgression against marriage and the family Bonds that it establishes. Thus, although Gloucester tells us that he himself is as fond of this illegitimate son as he is of his son Edgar who, born within the law, is more socially acceptable,¹ he also hints that he will have to send this illegitimate son out of the country again.² As we hope to prove, it is the circumstances brought about by his fathering of a child outside the law, who rivals that son born within the law, that will bring about Gloucester's tragic downfall. At the end of the play, Edgar will be able to point out that the "dark and vicious place" where his father begot Edmund has "cost him his eyes"³ and will lead to his tragic death. We dare not forget, however, that the origin of Gloucester's tragic downfall lies partly, like that of Lear, in his lack of insight into the true natures and affections of his children. The "credulous father" will become an easy dupe for Edmund to practise upon — and as over-hasty as Lear in casting off the child who displeases him.

¹See I.i.19-24. Edmund knows that his father loves him as dearly as he loves Edgar — see, for example, I.ii.17-18; "Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund / As to th' legitimate."

²I.i.32-33.

³V.iii.172-173.

What, then, is Edmund's transgression? At this stage of the tragedy,¹ Edmund has not yet transgressed against the Bonds of his own volition. He is, rather, the innocent victim of his father's violation of the Bonds of marriage. As a result of this transgression by his parent, his position is equivocal and precarious. His birth links him by blood to the legitimate family, but the timing of his birth places him outside the socially-acceptable family. Edmund's attitude suggests that he realises that illegitimate children have no normal right to their father's estates, unless the father expressly wills that they be awarded a portion.² And there is a strong indication that, like Lear's elder daughters, Edmund transgresses against the family Bonds partly for acquisitory reasons.

This slur of illegitimacy and the inequality imposed between Edmund and Edgar, the legitimate son, will, as we shall see, be the main reason why Edmund becomes one of the centres of the disruptive, anti-social and ambitious forces in the play. Edmund is fighting against the society that is loath to give him the place he might deserve by ability or be naturally entitled to: if he had happened to be legitimate.³ The only

¹I.i.

²See II.i.67: "Unpossessing bastard." See also the textual notes to this line and to ll.84-85 on the question of whether or not a bastard was considered capable of inheriting.

³It is interesting to note that the Bible denies bastards several of the rights enjoyed by those who are legitimate. See, for example, Deuteronomy 23 : 2 (1599 version): "A bastard shall not enter into the Congregation of the Lord." Danby, p.44, makes the point that "bastard" is the Elizabethan equivalent of "outsider."

Lawlor, pp.163-164, however, makes a point that is important for an understanding of the development of the tragedy in King Lear: "Edmund steps into a society where the illegitimate is given its full sway. . . . Edmund is given the rarest of all opportunities: a world where all is 'turn'd the wrong side out' is a world in which, inevitably, 'the base Shall top th' legitimate'."

means by which he can seek to consolidate his position is to prove by whatever means he can that he is more natural towards his father than the legitimate son. Thus, Edmund must discredit Edgar if he is himself to gain recognition. Moreover, since Edmund is, willy-nilly, set outside the system, there is no advantage to him in operating within the system which denies him an acceptable place. This perhaps explains why Edmund is the protagonist par excellence of a sceptical approach to the norms and values of the society represented in King Lear.¹ He will use the reliance of others upon this system, use its norms and values, to attain his objectives, without himself subscribing to them.

When Edmund characterises social norms and values as the "plague of custom" and the "curiosity of nations,"² he is striking out directly at views such as those propounded by Hooker and Raleigh on the workings of Human Law in societies. Two laws in particular are attacked here. The first is the Law of Custom, which is "by use and continuance established into a law,"³ and rests upon the following basic principles:

Two defences are necessary in all laws of custom; the one, that it be not repugnant to the law Divine, and Natural; the other, that the cause and reason be strong, proving a right birth, and necessary continuance.⁴

¹ Compare Jan Kott, Shakespeare Heute, trans. Peter Rachmann (München: Albert Langen, Georg Müller, 1964), p.182;

"Ein Bastard hört auf, Bastard zu sein, wenn er sich selbst nicht mehr als Bastard anerkannt, aber in diesem Fall muss der Bastard der Teilung in Bastarde und rechtmässige Kinder umwerfen. Er wendet sich in diesem Fall gegen die Grundsätze der sozialen Ordnung oder entmystifiziert sie zumindest."

² I.i.3-4.

³ Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, p.226.

⁴ Ibid.

The second law attacked by Edmund is the Law of Nations , which

properly taken, is that dictate or sentence, which is drawn from a very probable, though not from an evident principle, yet so probable, that all Nations do assent unto the conclusion.¹

It is against these laws in particular that Edmund voices his discontent, for it is by them that he is excluded from a normal place in society. His sceptical approach to these laws that govern society is one that bears a striking resemblance to the attitude of Montaigne in his Apologie of Raymond Sebonde²:

But they are pleasant, when to allow the lawes some certaintie, they say that there be some firme, perpetuall and immoveable which they call naturall, and by the condition of this proper essence, are imprinted in mankind. . . . Now is the generalitie of approbation the onely likely ensigne by which they may argue some lawes to be naturall; for what nature had indeed ordained us, that should we doubtless follow with one common consent; and not one onely nation, but every man in particular should have a feeling of the force and violence which he should urge him with, that would incite him to contrarie and resist that law. Let them all (for example sake) shew me but one of this condition. . . . It is credible that there be naturall lawes, as may be seene in other creatures, but in us they are lost: this goodly humane reason engrafting it self among all men, to sway and command, confounding and topsi-turving the visage of all things according to her inconstant vanitie and vain inconstancy.³

The scenes in which Edmund dupes his father into casting off his legitimate (and innocent) son, Edgar, reflect a preoccupation with the same questions as those raised in the corresponding scenes between

¹ Ibid., p.227.

² It is sometimes claimed that a Montaigne-like scepticism pervades the entire play. We detract from Shakespeare's total approach to the human dilemmas that can arise when the Bonds or Laws are differently interpreted if we regard the tragedy as the vehicle for a single approach only. Certainly, though (as it is hoped to demonstrate), the pragmatists such as Edmund, Goneril and Regan appear closer in their viewpoints to Montaigne than to writers such as Hooker.

³ Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, pp.297-298.

Lear and his daughters. Whereas, however, Lear violates the laws underlying the Bonds through anger and through misunderstanding the true value of the love and duty offered to him in terms of these Bonds, Edmund violates them deliberately and knowingly – perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Edmund deliberately manipulates the Bonds that are considered to obtain between a parent and his children, and between siblings. So, for example, we see Edmund setting himself up as the virtuous, dutiful child, and the brother who cares for the welfare of his brother.¹ We hear him tell his father how "loathly opposite" he was to Edgar's "unnatural purpose,"² and how he warned this brother that

the revenging Gods
'Gainst parricides did all their thunder bend;
Spoke with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to th' father.³

However, in the letter that he maintains was given to him by Edgar, we have a more true delineation of his real attitude towards Gloucester :

This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny, who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffer'd.⁴

It is a standpoint which is more in line with Montaigne's comments on

¹ See, for example, I.ii.179-183:

"Brother, I advise you to the best. I am no honest man if there be any good meaning toward you; I have told you what I have seen and heard; but faintly, nothing like the image and horror of it; pray you, away."

² II.i.49-50.

³ II.i.45-48.

⁴ I.ii.47-52. His remarks in I.ii., for example, also show clearly his real attitude to his brother.

the subject,¹ than, for example, those of Fuller.²

From this brief analysis of the actions and attitudes of the Gloucester family, it becomes apparent that the sub-plot complements Shakespeare's treatment of the marriage Bonds, the parent-child Bonds, and the economic relationships of the family in the main plot. Gloucester's reaction to the apparent undutifulness of Edgar and the seemingly filial behaviour of Edmund rounds out the correspondence. As Lear cast off Cordelia when she appeared to violate the Bonds between them (in his eyes at least), so Gloucester, too, declares of Edgar: "I never got him."³ Both, then, are guilty of violating the blood tie between themselves and their offspring without first investigating the evidence on which they undertake such a drastic step. Both also react with exaggerated gratitude towards those children whose words and deeds appear on the surface to be so truly filial.

Now that we have examined the various aspects of the family Bonds that are represented in King Lear, let us turn and examine the Bonds which exist in the wider sphere of social organisation: the kingdom or state.

The Elizabethans thought in terms of states or kingdoms, each ruled by a king, whose divine right must be substantiated by an adequate execution of his duties. And, as the father is head of the family, so the king is the divinely-sanctioned father of his kingdom.⁴ Just as the father

¹ Compare the quotation from Montaigne on pp. 59-60.

² See the quotation from Fuller on p. 65.

³ II. i. 78.

⁴ See, for example, the quotation from Hooker on p. 41 for an exposition of the parallel between the rights and duties of a father and those of a king.

must fulfil his share of the Bonds in order to be worthy of the name of father, so the king must fulfil those duties he owes his subjects in order to be worthy of the name of king. Both he and his subjects are bound by an oath of loyalty, a promise to honour and serve each other— in the same way as the marriage service binds a husband and wife to love, honour, and obey each other. The king is bound as much by the oath as his subjects are, and the Bonds can only be expected to operate reciprocally as long as both parties perform their due share of duties.

Lear therefore makes a farce of the quality and nature of kingship when he attempts to resign his obligations and still maintain the glory and the status of a king:

Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death.¹

He fondly hopes that he will be able to retain the name and additions, the reverence, regard, obedience and honour, which appertain to kingship, whilst at the same time shifting the burden of government and responsibility to other shoulders:

I do invest you jointly with my power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
That troop with majesty. Ourself, by monthly course,
With reservation of an hundred knights
By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
Make with you by due turn. Only we shall retain
The name and all th' additions to a king; the sway,
Revenue, execution of the rest,
Beloved sons, be yours; which to confirm,
This coronet part between you.²

¹I.i.37-41.

²I.i.130-139.

It is this reluctance on his part to relinquish the name and additions to a king¹ that distinguishes Lear from the ruler considered to be so admirable by Montaigne:

The worthiest action that ever the Emperour Charles the fifth performed was this, in imitation of some ancients of his quality, that he had the discretion to know that reason commanded us to strip or shift our selves when our cloathes trouble and are too heavy for us,² and that it is high time to go to bed when our legs faile us. He resigned his meanes, his greatnesse and Kingdome to his Sonne, at what time he found his former undanted resolution to decay, and force to conduct his affaires to droop in himself, together with the glory he had there-by acquired.³

There is something to be said on behalf of the ruler who abdicates when his powers begin to fail him, but the abdication must be complete. The title and the function cannot be divorced to suit the vanity of the ex-incumbent.⁴

Lear's mistakes are several. Firstly, he does not realise that the ceremonial only exists to make rule efficient by reinforcing the status of the ruler.⁵ If the underlying Bonds which require that the king must rule are not fulfilled, ceremony becomes purposeless, and its tenure and

¹Kott, p.185, makes the point that "er hat geglaubt, ein König könne nicht aufhören König zu sein. . . . Er glaubte an die reine Majestät, an die reine Idee des Königs."

²See pp.140ff. for a discussion of the imagery of clothing and stripping.

³Montaigne, Bk II, chap.viii, p.195.

⁴There remains, however, the question whether a divinely-elect king has the right to set aside the duties laid upon him by God. Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy (London: Methuen & Co., 1960), pp.118-119, comments as follows on this question:

"Lear's resignation of his throne and division of his kingdom would have been regarded by a Jacobean audience with a horror difficult for a modern audience to appreciate, for these acts were a violation of the king's responsibility to God, and they could result only in the chaos on every level of creation which is the subject of the play."

⁵See Gloucester's words in I.ii.24-25: "And the King gone tonight! prescrib'd his power! / Confin'd to exhibition."

observance is likely to be short-lived.¹ Secondly, he apportions the kingdom according to his degree of satisfaction with the answers his daughters give to his demand for a profession of love: he exchanges the crown for a protestation of love for his own person, not for the state or for himself as head of the state. That is, he confuses his roles as father and as king.² Thirdly, the Elizabethans tended to be monarchists, solidly behind the rule of one; the division of the kingdom into several parts is, therefore, a crime against the unity of the realm, a violation of the natural boundaries. It is, moreover, not only a cartographical division, but implies a divided rule, divided subjects, a divided royal house. All these considerations appear, for example, in the following extract from "Gorboduc":

To part your realm unto my lords, your sons,
I think not good for you, ne yet for them,
But worst of all for this our native land.
Within one land, one single rule is best;
Divided reigns do make divided hearts.³

¹Just as Lear cannot resign the dutiful care of a father and still retain the respect of his children.

²Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, "Gorboduc," Five Elizabethan Tragedies, ed. A.K. McIlwraith (World's Classics Series, reprinted; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), deal in considerable detail with this question. See, for example, I.ii.150-160:

As for dividing of this realm in twain,
And lotting out the same in equal parts
To either of my lords, your grace's sons,
That think I best for this your realm's behoof,
For profit and advancement of your sons,
And for your comfort and your honour eke.
But so to place them while your life do last,
To yield to them your royal governance,
To be above them only in the name
Of father, not in kingly state also,
I think not good for you, for them, nor us.

³Ibid., I.ii.256-260.

Lear symbolises the unnatural division by giving his coronet to be parted between Cornwall and Albany. Like the ring of the marriage service,¹ the crown is an unbroken circle, symbolic of perfection, completeness, harmony, concord and order.² It is the outward sign of the status and function of its wearer, and it stands for the preservation of the state as the wedding ring stands for the preservation of the family in terms of the oaths exchanged. One can as little wear a divided ring as one can wear a divided crown, and the division of the coronet is an image of the unnatural quality of Lear's actions.

As Cordelia pointed out to her father the nature of the parent-child Bonds and the fit responses required in terms of these Bonds, so Kent now steps forward to point out the violation that the king is doing to the Bonds which exist between him and his subjects and between him and his royal heirs:

Kent.	Royal Lear,
	Whom I have ever honour'd as my King,
	Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,
	As my great patron thought on in my prayers, --
Lear.	The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft.
Kent.	Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
	The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly,
	When Lear is mad. What would'st thou do, old man?
	Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak

¹See Hooker, Vol.II, Bk V, p.394: "The ring hath always been used as an especial pledge of faith and fidelity. Nothing more fit to serve as a token of our purposed endless continuance in that which we never ought to revoke."

²Compare the following excerpt from a discussion on love by Burton (Dent edition), Pt III, Sec.I, Mem.1, Subs.2, p.17:
 "[Love is] circulus a bono in bonum, a round circle still from good to good; for love is the beginner and end of all our actions, the efficient and instrumental cause, as our poets in their symbols, impresses, emblems of rings, squares, etc., shadow unto us."

feeds the fire of Lear's anger, so that Lear, wounded in his majesty, heaps evil upon evil by banishing Kent for pointing out what he had felt duty-bound to do. The consummate irony of course is that Lear makes claim upon the very kingship he has just relinquished in order to banish Kent. Lear is no longer king, yet he calls upon the allegiance whose Bond he has himself unloosed in an attempt to make Kent obedient to his will:

Hear me, recreant!
On thine allegiance, hear me!
 That thou hast sought to make us break our vows,
 Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
 Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good, take thy reward.
 Five days we do allot thee for provision
 To shield thee from disasters of the world;
 And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
 Upon our kingdom: if on the tenth day following
 Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
 The moment is thy death.¹

Lear calls Kent "recreant," allegiance-breaker, yet it is Lear himself who has broken faith with his subjects by ceasing to perform the duties of a king and still wishing to retain the glories of kingship. He has already given away the potency and the power he has recourse to in his banishment of Kent, already broken, too, the "vows" which "we durst never yet." By his abdication from the function of a king, he has broken those formal Bonds which bound his subjects to him: now, like his children, only their love can keep them loyal to him.

Once again the irony of this situation will only later become apparent — it will be that Kent whom Lear has banished from his sight as a traitorous subject who will remain loyal to him throughout his adversity.

¹I. i. 166-178. My underlining.

Thus it is that, by the end of the first two scenes, we have witnessed several violations of the Bonds which bind the family and the state. And this examination of the ways in which some of the primary Bonds have been violated, rejected, misinterpreted, or misunderstood brings us to the next questions we shall have to ask: What are the tragic consequences, if any, that spring from these breaches of the Bonds? How are they depicted in King Lear? And how does the imagery mirror or reveal these effects?

Let us begin by working on the hypothesis that when man violates the Bonds he releases within himself and within society those elements of potentially tragic chaos and disruption that are normally contained and ordered within the scope of the Bonds.¹

It is interesting to note, then, that immediately after we have become aware of Lear's violation of the Bonds and the fact that Gloucester, too, is guilty of acting outside the Bonds, we are presented with two predictions. The first is spoken by Gloucester:

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 scourg'd by the sequent effects. Love
cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities,
mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces,
treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son
and 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.²

¹ See the Introduction for an elaboration of this hypothesis.

² I.ii.107-120.

Gloucester lays the blame on the stars: we hope to prove that the actual source of these disasters is largely those human actions which violated the natural Bonds and the Bonds established by custom and law. It is interesting to note in this regard that it is Edmund, who does not believe in the effects of the stars upon men's lives,¹ who rounds out this prediction of crumbling and cracking human relationships:

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 maledictions against King and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation² of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

Both these predictions have already been fulfilled in part. Lear has cast off and banished Cordelia, there's "father against child"; banished his friend, Kent, and dissolved his ancient amity with France. Cordelia has been needlessly diffident about her love for her father. Gloucester has fathered an illegitimate son and been gulled upon the flimsiest of evidence into believing that his legitimate son is plotting against his life and estate, and into casting him off from the family as a result.

At the same time, the positioning of the predictions reinforces the importance of the issues raised during the first scene in the structure of the tragedy. Since they are already partly true, one can expect that the future events they refer to will also come to pass. We can expect to

¹See I.ii.124ff. We shall return later to discuss in how far man's actions are attributable to the effects of the stars or fortune upon him. For the present we shall confine ourselves to the effects of the violations of the Bonds.

²I.ii.150-156.

find Nature "scourg'd" by the "sequent effects" of the initial violations of the Bonds; to discover "unnaturalness" between the child and the parent; expect to see love cooling, nuptial breaches, divisions in the state, etc.

The first consequences of Lear's violation of the Bonds in respect of Cordelia are to be seen in the gradual breakdown of the entire system of family Bonds between Lear and his elder daughters. This breakdown in the family relationships is paralleled by a breakdown in the Bonds that existed between Lear and those who were his subjects, and is the consequence of his violation of the Bonds of kingship by his own abdication and by his banishment of his loyal subject, Kent.

Yet Lear, who cast Cordelia off from all familial Bonds, denied her all family succour, still clings to those Bonds he feels should exist between himself and his daughters, and tries to close his eyes to the fact that they no longer exist. So, too, although he has renounced his kingship, he still expects the treatment due to a king — will not believe that men could treat him with less respect than they did before.

When Goneril, with whom he has elected to stay first, no longer offers him the honoured recognition he had hoped for,¹ he waits until one of his knights points it out to him as a matter of duty, before admitting that he was aware of this coldness toward him :

Knight. My Lord, I know not what the matter is;
but, to my judgement, your Highness is not
entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as
you were wont; there's a great abatement of kind-
ness appears as well in the general dependants
as in the Duke himself also and your daughter.

¹This is part of a deliberate plan on Goneril's part— see I.iii.

Lear. Thou but rememb'rest me of mine own conception: I have perceived a most faint neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness.¹

As Oswald's attitude (which gives rise to this conversation) shows , he is no longer King Lear , but relegated already to the position of "my Lady's father."² Thus , the first diminution that affects him is one that concerns his kingly status . The additions to a king that he had sought to retain have evaporated with his loss of power over those who were his subjects .

Concomittant with his loss of royal regard is a diminution in the filial love which his elder daughters show toward him . As we saw in Act I , scene i , Lear is a man to whom the ceremony is important . Goneril and Regan appeared willing to grant him the ceremonious trappings of affection that he needs as confirmation that he is indeed loved . Now , however , it becomes apparent that they regard this need as a childish whim , and refuse to pander to it .

Cordelia's last words to her sisters were a plea to them to "love well our father ,"³ to which Regan replied by bidding Cordelia "prescribe not us our duty."⁴ Hardly , however , have France and Cordelia left before the two sisters are plotting together to arrange how best they can keep their father in check and ease the filial burden of caring for him.⁵ As we shall see , their interpretation of filial love and duty will be narrowed

¹ I.iv.60-74 .

² I.iv.84 .

³ I.i.271 .

⁴ I.i.276 .

⁵ See I.i.283-308 and their later exchange of letters .

down to the meanest limits that can still be termed dutiful and loving. It will be a duty unlightened by any larger interpretation of the love of a child for its father.

Lear will gradually be forced to realise that he has erred by confusing the two types of love: avaritia and caritas. His eldest daughters' love for him was — as he discovers too late — motivated almost entirely by their desire for material gain. Once this desire has been satisfied, there is no longer any need for them to show him further love.¹ Now that he is dependent upon their caritas or selfless love, he discovers that they feel no such love for him.

Fuller's maxim was that a child should bear with its parent though he be "twice a child."² Goneril, for example, sees her duty to her father differently. She considers that he is an

idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again, and must be us'd
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abus'd.³

Like Edmund, Goneril and Regan only respect power. Since Lear is no longer able to enforce their obedience, respect or love, they can find no logical necessity for continuing to make obeisances to his whims.

¹As he discovers too late, Cordelia's love for him was not motivated by any such considerations.

²See quotation on p. 65.

³I.iii.17-21. See also I.iv.245-260, where Goneril accuses her father of perpetrating childish pranks and excesses, which she will not tolerate. Compare also the discussion on pp. 99ff., where we deal with the Fool's insights into the deteriorating family relationships, and pp. 91ff., where we discuss Lear's expectation that — even if all other Bonds fail — those about him will yield him the honour due to one of his advanced age.

This divergence between Lear's expectations and that which Goneril and Regan are prepared to perform leads inevitably to a confrontation between the two generations and to the crux of the tragedy.

Let us look more closely at the confrontation that takes place between Lear and Goneril and between Lear and Regan in an attempt to discover just how the Bonds of love, care, obedience and duty are progressively eroded and unloosed.

The confrontation between Lear and Goneril takes place as a direct result of a policy of coolness towards Lear and his retinue.¹ In fact, Goneril makes the question of Lear's retinue the subject of her quarrel with her father.² The sister who told Cordelia that "you have obedience scanted,"³ in respect of their father, now challenges his authority to such an extent that she threatens him with summary dismissal of his train unless he yields to her wishes and dismisses some of them himself —

Be then desir'd
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train.⁴

Goneril, however, will justify this as politic necessity rather than as a lack of filial affection, or a scanting of filial duty:

I had thought, by making this well known unto you,
To have found a safe redress; but now grown fearful,
By what yourself too late have spoke and done,
That you protect this course, and put it on
By your allowance; which if you should, the fault
Would not 'scape censure, nor the redresses sleep,
Which, in the tender of a wholesome weal,
Might in their working do you that offence,
Which else were shame, that then necessity
Will call discreet proceeding.⁵

¹I.iii.

²I.iv.209ff.

³I.i.278.

⁴I.iv.255-257.

⁵I.iv.213-222.

Cursing such an unloving child, Lear storms off to cast himself upon Regan's greater filial love for him; only to find that she and Goneril have reached agreement on the best way to treat this foolish, fond, difficult old man, their father. In her own eyes, neither Goneril nor Regan is deliberately unfilial. Regan makes this clear by echoing her sister's reasoning in the following exchange with Lear:

Regan. I pray you, Sir, take patience, I have hope
You less know how to value her desert¹
Than she to scant her duty.

Lear. Say? how is that?

Regan. I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation. If, Sir, perchance
 She have restrain'd the riots of your followers,
 'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
As clears her from all blame.²

There is a double irony here. Lear, who earlier judged Goneril and Regan's merits as higher than those of Cordelia, has indeed not known how to value Goneril's deserts or those of her sister, Regan.

As mentioned earlier, much of the conflict in this tragedy depends on the interpretation given to words such as love and duty. Lear, as we saw, interpreted Cordelia's use of these words to mean less than they did. Now it is his turn to be injured by the narrow interpretations given by his elder daughters to the love and duty a child should bear its father.

Thus it is that, throughout this period of confrontation, several words and phrases reoccur and are shown being used with different meanings according to the attitude of the speaker: daughter, father, son, child,

¹ Compare Lear's words in I.i.51-52: "That we our largest bounty may extend / Where nature doth with merit challenge."

² II.iv.139-146.

love, duty, natural, kind, obligation, all can be interpreted according to different definitions of the Bonds that delineate them. Their literal meaning bears little relation to their evocative or subjective use.

Let us use Lear's words to Regan as a starting point for an examination of the attitudes towards them that are revealed by their various users:

No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse;
 Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
 Thee o'er to harshness; her eyes are fierce, but thine
 Do comfort and not burn. 'Tis not in thee
 To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
 To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
 And, in conclusion to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in: thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude;
Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endow'd.¹

Each time a crux is reached in the development of the tragedy, there is specific reference to the Bonds at question. Here, for example, we see Lear referring to that same Bond between a child and its parents that was referred to by Cordelia in I.i.93 and by Gloucester in the prophecy of I.ii.113-114. The irony of course is that he found this concept of the Bond inadequate when it was cited by Cordelia. Now that Gloucester's prophecy is coming true, and the Bonds between himself and his elder daughters are cracking, Lear discovers that the Bond referred to by Cordelia does cover all that he wished for in his relationship with his children, and he cites it as one of the fundamental reasons why Regan should not treat him as Goneril has done.

¹II.iv.172-183. My underlining.

Thus, even at this late stage in the deterioration of the parent-child relationship, Lear is calling for a fulfilment of the Bonds between his daughters and himself. Indeed, throughout this process of alienation, he uses the words "father" and "daughter" and "child" almost as an incantation, a charm which should evoke the desired response from those he has sired.¹ He expects Goneril and Regan to continue to show him a "child-like office"² — despite the fact that he has himself violated these Bonds in respect of Cordelia. Whenever he is dissatisfied with their attitude toward him, he invokes the parent-child Bonds.

Moreover, even if they will not yield him this love and obedience because he is their father, Lear expects that they will at least do so out of respect for his age. Time and again he calls attention to his white hairs, which are the badge of his advanced years, and which should ensure that he receives the reverence and honour due to an elder of society,

¹See, for example:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| I.iv.79-80: | "Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her." |
| I.iv.197-198: | "How, now, daughter! what makes that frontlet on?" |
| I.iv.227: | "Are you our daughter?" |
| I.iv.244: | "Your name, fair gentlewoman?" |
| I.iv.262-263: | "Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee:
Yet have I left a daughter." |
| I.iv.314-315: | "I have another daughter,
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable." |
| II.iv.58: | "Where is this daughter?" |
| II.iv.101-102: | "The King would speak with Cornwall; the dear
father
Would with his daughter speak." |
| II.iv.155: | "Dear daughter, I confess that I am old." |
| II.iv.220-221: | "I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad:
I will not trouble thee, my child." |

²Said of Edmund in II.i.106.

a venerable patriarch.¹ So also, for example, we find Plutarch maintaining that just as the law places diadem and crown upon the head, so nature puts grey hairs upon it as an honourable symbol of the high dignity of leadership.²

As becomes apparent, however, it is only characters such as Cordelia who feel this way about Lear:

Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Did challenge pity of them.³

Others, such as Edmund, Goneril and Regan, see in Lear and Gloucester only silly, tiresome old men clinging to their scraps of power, trying to exercise a waned authority.⁴

And, as Lear's words to Regan show,⁵ if all these other Bonds cease to make his children care for him as they ought, he yet expects that Goneril and Regan should at least be kind to him for the lands and wealth he has given them.

¹ See, for example, I.iv.310 ("Old fond eyes"); II.iv.23-24 ("'Tis worse than murder, / To do upon respect such violent outrage"); II.iv.155-156 ("Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; / Age is unnecessary"); II.iv.191-194:

O Heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old,
Make it your cause; send down and take my part!

and III.ii.21-24:

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.

² Plutarch Moralia (Loeb Classical Library; London: William Heinemann, 1962), Vol.X, p.113.

³ IV.vii.30-31. Compare also Albany's words in IV.ii.40-42.

⁴ See, for example, the letter that supposedly comes from Edgar, and Edmund's rehearsal of his brother's standpoint on this matter (I.ii.49ff.). See also, for example, II.iv.147-151 and 236-238.

⁵ See quotation on p.90.

Instead, it is gradually borne upon him that this gratitude is non-existent. When he plaintively reminds Regan that " I gave you all Made you my guardians, my depositaries, / But kept a reservation to be follow'd with such a number,"¹ she coolly interjects, " And in good time you gave it."²

Some comments by Montaigne on the nature of parent-child love and on gratitude seem to cast a useful light on the position here:

If there be any truly-naturall law, that is to say, any instinct, universally and perpetually imprinted, both in beasts and us, (which is not without controversie) I may, according to mine opinion, say, that next to the care which each living creature hath to his preservation, and to flie what doth hurt him, the affection which the engenderer beareth his off-spring holds the second place in this ranke. And forasmuch as nature seemeth to have recommended the same unto us, ayming to extend, encrease, and advance the successive parts or parcels of this her frame; it is no wonder if back-again it is not so great from children unto fathers. This other Aristotelian consideration remembred: that hee who doth benefit another, loveth him better than hee is beloved of him againe; and hee to whom a debt is owing, loveth better than hee that oweth.³

In contrast to Montaigne's view, however, Lear maintains that the ingratitude of his children is an unnatural act.⁴ It becomes apparent

¹ II. iv. 252-255.

² II. iv. 252.

³ Bk II, chap. viii., p. 192. See also Bk II, chap. xii, p. 240 for comments on the gratitude that even animals demonstrate. The views of Montaigne and Fuller (see quotation on p. 65) seem to clash here, like the opposed views to be found in the tragedy.

⁴ Compare Elyot, Bk II, p. 152 (note how Elyot uses the word "unkind" to express ingratitude in much the same way as Lear does) :

"The most damnable vice and most against justice, in mine opinion is ingratitude, commonly called unkindness. Albeit, it is in divers forms and of sundry importance, as it is described by Seneca in this form. He is unkind which denyeth to have received any benefit that indeed he hath received. He is unkind that dissimuleth, he is unkind that recompenseth not. But he is most unkind that forgetteth In this vice men be much worse than beasts. For divers of them will remember a benefit long after that they have received it."

that Lear gave his children their share of the kingdom not freely and generously, but as part of an economic pact or bargain in return for which he expected a certain quantity of love. Goneril and Regan, however, feel no such obligation on their part, and Lear's "generosity" will be shown up most clearly by the generous forgiving love of Cordelia who, owing her father nothing — in fact, deprived of all by her father — yet continues to love him without counting the cost or expecting recompense.

It also becomes apparent that Lear has, just as he confused the two types of love, confused the two types of possession: those that can be given away, bought or sold, and those that are intrinsic, unmerited, not to be bought or sold, and not to be lost without a tragic wrench or cataclysm. Hearts cannot be given away except in the metaphorical sense. And, although Lear could withhold his love from Cordelia as the cost of his displeasure, he cannot cast off her heart from him, nor force her sisters to love him in any other way than that in which they do.

Lily B. Campbell quotes the following comments on gratitude from Arthur Golding's translation entitled, The worke of the excellent Philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca concerning Benefyting, that is too say the dooing, receyving, and reguyting of good Turnes:

For the Lawe of benefyting betweene men is this: That the one must forthwith forget that he hath given, and the other must never forget what he hath received. For the ofte rehearsall of good deservinges, dooth greatly frette and greeve the mynd.¹

¹ Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (reprinted; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), p.193. See also ibid.:

"The first cause of unthankfulness Seneca found to be 'that wee choose not worthie persones to bestowe upon', as was indicated above. And it would seem that here was indeed the first cause of unthankfulness in the life of King Lear, for he did not choqse worthy persons upon whom to bestow his favours, and his benefits were lost in the giving."

She goes on to comment as follows upon this text :

Thus in King Lear we find that the law of benefiting is not observed by either party, for the King never ceases to recount the good he has done and the gratitude that is owed him, while his undutiful daughters forget altogether the benefits they have received and fail to be grateful for them.

Both the giver and the receiver are here guilty, then. And of the giver it is necessary to ask further with Seneca for what reason he did the good turn for which gratitude is due. Did he do it to profit the one benefited? Or did he do it to delight himself? In the case of Lear there can be no doubt that he gave, not that which he prized for himself, but that which he wished to be rid of. Gratitude was not, therefore, due to him for his good turn.¹

Lear, tiring of the burden of kingship, wished to shift it onto younger shoulders so that "we / Unburthen'd crawl toward death."² Thus, as Campbell points out, he is not justified in expecting lasting gratitude for a gift that cost him nothing to give. The writer would, however, add a qualifying rider to Miss Campbell's comments. There is a form of gratitude due to Lear, not for the material enrichment of his children, but for the fact that he is their parent, for the love and care and pains he has expended in bringing them into the world and raising them to the status of adults. Fuller made the point that children owe their parents a natural filial gratitude for this love and care.³

A quotation from "A Merry Knack to Know a Knave" gathers up some of the threads woven into the fabric of King Lear:

But as the tall'st ash is cut down, because
It yields no fruit, and an unprofitable cow,
Yielding no milk is slaughtered, and the idle drone,

¹ Ibid., p.193. Compare As You Like It II.vii.174ff.

² I.i.40-41.

³ See quotation on p.65. The earlier quotation from Montaigne on p.93 points out that it is understandable if this is not so.

Gathering no honey, is contemned;
 So ungrateful children, that
Will yield no natural obedience, must be
Cut off as unfit to bear the name [of] Christians,
Whose lives digress both from reason and humanity.
 But as thou hast dealt unnaturally with me,
 So I resolve to pull my heart from thee.¹

When Lear fails to elicit the desired response from his daughters by appeals to the Bonds that should operate between them, his next move in the family crisis is a resort to the family curse.

We first saw Lear using a family curse against a child who thwarted him when he dowered Cordelia with his curse for failing to give him the profession of love he required from her. At that time he was prepared to bless his elder daughters and their issue, because they had fulfilled his requirements. However, when Goneril and Regan anger him, he is just as quick to bestow his curses upon them and their issue.

It becomes apparent that Lear attempts to use blessings and curses as a form of parental control to enforce the upholding of the parent-child Bonds. However, he once again misjudges the effects his actions will have upon his children. Cordelia cares about the parental blessing, and one of her first actions when she and her father are reconciled is to ask him to "look upon me, Sir, / And hold your hand in benediction o'er me."² But, the curse is only effective for as long as the children can be moved by the fear of it or the fear of a parental blessing withheld — as Cordelia is. Once Goneril and Regan break, or are prepared

¹In A Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed. Robert Dodsley, rearranged W. Carew Hazlitt (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), Vol. VI, p.523 (no Act and scene references). My underlining.

²IV.vii.58-59. We find Edgar reflecting a similar wish for the reinstatement of the parental blessing. See, for example, V.iii.194-195: "Not sure, though hoping, of this good success, / I ask'd his blessing."

to break, the parent-child Bond, his curse, or the withholding of his blessing, no longer has any power to make them obedient to his will. Indeed, Lear curses so loud and so often without immediately apparent consequences that his curses almost lose some of their dread strength. The Gods do not appear to come down and take his part, and he seems to be calling in vain upon Heaven,¹ while the objects of his curses proceed unhindered.²

At the same time it is worth noting that every curse that Lear pronounces is a retaliatory blow for his sufferings that strikes at the roots of the family structure, the wider social structure, or the growing, regenerating processes of Nature. In fact, the curse is often directed not so much at an individual, as at the offspring of that individual, that is, it is a wish that they might feel the torments Lear's own children have brought upon him. His curse upon Goneril is typical in this respect :

Hear, Nature, hear ! dear Goddess, hear !
 Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
 To make this creature fruitful !
 Into her womb convey sterility !
 Dry up in her the organs of increase,
 And from her derogate body never spring
 A babe to honour her ! If she must teem,
 Create her child of spleen, that it may live
 And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her !
 Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
 With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
 Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
 To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
 How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
 To have a thankless child !³

¹Perhaps Kent is right: "Thou swear'st thy Gods in vain" (I.i.161). Perhaps the gods will not take Lear's part because the fault is partly his own.

²See, for example, his curses in II.iv.163-169 and 191-194.

³I.iv.284-298. His blessings, too, usually concern the welfare of the family, the society, or Nature.

Here we see Lear striking at the heart of the purpose and function of marital and family life, calling forth a general doom upon his line.

Gradually, and especially in the storm, Lear's curses become very like Macbeth's conjurations,¹ a calling forth of every natural disaster upon mankind, the world; upon the very germens of Nature that give her life and order. He calls upon Nature to avenge him and to revolt against such "unnaturalness" as he sees around him. His curses become concerned with blasting, infecting, sterility. Indeed, on the heath in the storm, he curses the very life essences themselves; bids the thunder

Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That makes 'ingrateful man!²

Perhaps the storm itself is an answer to Lear's invocation of the wrath of Heaven. But, if it is, then it is upon Lear himself that the curse rebounds, Lear who must brave the fury of the elements outdoors, while his daughters keep snug inside.

As, earlier, Kent and Cordelia pointed out to Lear the error of his ways, so, now, it is the Fool who acts as choric commentator on the folly of Lear's actions in rashly casting off the only daughter who loved him truly, and depending on her sisters for the fulfilment of his physical and spiritual needs. Gradually, the Fool will lead Lear to the point where he is forced to acknowledge that he has been mistaken.

¹ Compare, for example, Macbeth IV.i.50-60.

² III.ii.7-9. Curry, chap.ii, pp.29-49, has some valuable comments to make on "nature's germens" in his discussion of Macbeth. Taken to its conclusion, such a curse as Lear invokes would involve a return to the chaos or nothingness that pre-existed creation; it is a tilt at the "informing spirit" itself.

Many of the Fool's comments upon the developing situation underline the degenerating family relationships by reversing truth and reality. Look, for example, at the following excerpt from an exchange with Kent:

There, take my cox-
comb. Why, this fellow [Lear] has banish'd two on's
daughters, and did the third a blessing against
his will; if thou [Kent] follow him thou must needs
wear my coxcomb. How now, Nuncle! Would
I had two coxcombs and two daughters!

.....
If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my cox-
combs myself. There's mine; beg another of
thy daughters.¹

Note, too, the way in which the Fool points out the inversion that Lear has brought about in the normal structure of the family authority. He tells Lear, for example, that he has been wont to sing such foolish songs since Lear

mad'st
thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gav'st
them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches,
Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung.²

He also warns Lear that his daughters will make him an "obedient father"³ — echoing Goneril's attitude that "old fools are babes again, and must be us'd / With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abus'd."⁴

The Fool's point of view is a counter-argument to that of

¹ I. iv. 106-115. My underlining.

² I. iv. 179-183. My underlining.

³ I. iv. 243.

⁴ I. iii. 20-21.

Montaigne,¹ who maintained that a father should relinquish his estate to his children, for the Fool points out that, in reality, this is only prudent when the father can be sure that his children do indeed love and respect him enough to continue in this when they no longer need to:

Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind,
But fathers that bear bags
Shall see their children kind.²

I can tell why a snail has a house,
.....
Why, to put's head in; not to give it away to
his daughters, and leave his horns without a
case.³

It is interesting to note that it is the Fool, symbol of foolishness, who points out to Lear the extent of his folly. It also becomes apparent that the Fool can see what Lear refuses to acknowledge: that his violation of the precepts underlying the family Bonds and the Bonds of kingship is leading to a deterioration in his relationships with other people. Moreover, that those who have no real power cannot afford to be autocratic, or to expect that others will concur in their valuation of themselves.⁴ This, for example, is the meaning underlying the Fool's metaphor of the egg and the two crowns.⁵ So, too, he spells out for Lear the erosion

¹ See quotation on pp. 59-60.

² II. iv. 48-51.

³ I. v. 27-32.

⁴ Compare Clemen, Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, p. 142: "The more Lear becomes a victim of self-delusion and madness, the more it becomes the task of the Fool to express in epigrammatic images the unreality of Lear's behaviour, his self-deception and error."

⁵ See I. iv. 162-171. He returns to comment on Lear's lack of "wit" in II. 194-196.

that is taking place in his status as the result of his loss of function and his dependence on his daughters:

Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no
need to care for her [Goneril's] frowning; now thou art an O
without a figure. I am better than thou art now;
I am a Fool, thou art nothing.¹

There is an ironic echo here of Lear's earlier caution to Cordelia that "nothing will come of nothing."² Now, as the Fool points out several times, it is Lear himself who is nothing, is nobody.³ As long as Lear functioned meaningfully in his various social roles, he was Lear the father, Lear the king. Now, he is only Lear the Fool in the eyes of others, although he still clings to his own estimation of himself, still sees the "marks of sovereignty, knowledge and reason"⁴ in himself. It becomes the Fool's task to point out to Lear that he has given away the "sovereignty" he seeks to wield, that his "reason" is madness, and his "knowledge," a lack of insight.⁵

¹ I.iv.199-202.

² I.i.90.

³ See, for example, I.iv.134-141:

Kent. This is nothing, Fool.

Fool. Then 'tis like the breath of the unfee'd lawyer;
you gave me nothing for't. Can you make no
use of nothing, Nuncle?

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

Fool. [To Kent] Prithee, tell him, so much the rent
of his land comes to: he will not believe a fool;

or I.iv.154-156:

Lear. Dost thou call me fool, boy?

Fool. All thy other titles thou hast given away; that
thou wast born with.

⁴ I.iv.240-241.

⁵ Prior, p.76, points out that "as Lear comes to the knowledge of the evil disposition of his two daughters, the Fool serves to draw to the surface the recognition of the error and folly which Lear strives to keep down, since that way madness lies."

It will be a long time of learning, however, before Lear can look at himself and say of himself,

I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind,¹

or before he can see in the image of the beggar running from the farmer's dog the "great image of Authority"² and realise the underlying truth that "a dog's obey'd in office,"³ that is, that the person of the ruler matters less than his effective functioning in his position — the bite he can give his aura of power.

Only characters such as Kent, who operate in terms of the Bonds, can at this stage still see in Lear something in his "countenance which I would fain call master"⁴ — authority. And only Kent expresses outrage at the insults to the "royalty"⁵ of Lear, and sees in the striking of the King's messenger "too bold malice / Against the grace and person of my master."⁶

¹ IV.vii.60-63.

² IV.vi.160.

³ IV.vi.161. There is an interesting parallel between this image and the following quotation from Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.227: "There are nations who receive and admit a dogge to be their king."

⁴ I.iv.29-32.

⁵ II.ii.37.

⁶ II.ii.131-132. Compare II.ii.145-147 :

The King must take it ill,
That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrained.

It is left to the Fool to point out, however, that — in terms of the values that now operate in the tragedy — Lear has no value, is nothing.

If we look more closely at the quotations used to demonstrate the deterioration of the family Bonds and the king-subject Bonds in the tragedy, it becomes apparent that, intricately interwoven with the Bonds invoked by words such as king, subject, father, daughter, son, child, husband, wife, love and duty, are the Bonds which have a meaning in terms of such words as natural, kind, proper and becoming, unnatural, unkind, man and beast. Let us therefore turn and look more closely at the treatment of Nature and the Bonds of Nature in the world of King Lear, in order to establish what role these concepts play in the tragic process.

Nature, as stated earlier, was thought by the Elizabethans to have a divinely created order in which each element of the universe, each human being, had its proper place and function. A violation of its proper nature by any created thing is a violation of the Bonds of Nature. This concept first appears in the tragedy when Lear claims that Cordelia has violated Nature, made her ashamed, by refusing to comply with his demands for a show of filial affection. This is the meaning of Lear's words to France:

Therefore beseech you
T'avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom Nature is asham'd
Almost t'acknowledge hers.¹

The fallacy of Lear's argument in respect of Cordelia is pointed out by France in the same scene:

Is it but this? a tardiness in nature
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do?²

¹ I.i.210-213. My underlining.

² I.i.235-237.

France thus points out that Cordelia's fault is not a crime against Nature, but that it is an intrinsic part of her character, or nature, to be reticent about setting forth verbally the acts she intends to perform. Cordelia is not being "unnatural." Her only fault is the, perhaps needless, diffidence referred to by Edmund.¹

The word Nature is thus often used in the tragedy to describe the character or self that is intrinsic to a particular person. So, for example, Edmund believes he will be able to dupe Edgar, a "brother noble, / Whose nature is so far from doing harms, / That he suspects none,"² and will later say of himself, "Some good I mean to do / Despite of mine own nature."³

Man's basic personality or inclination is determined in the Elizabethan view by the balance of the humours in him, and by the position of the stars at his birth. However, by virtue of his intelligence and the fact that he is a voluntary agent,⁴ he should be able to strike a mean between his reason and his passions. This is Cordelia's strength, of whom the Gentleman can say,

It seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.⁵

¹ See quotation on p. 84.

² I.ii.186-188.

³ V.iii.243-244.

⁴ Hooker discusses this at considerable length in Vol.I, Bk I.

⁵ IV.iii.14-16. This appears to be one of the main purposes of the Gentleman's lengthy description of the manner in which Cordelia receives the news of her father's condition. See also the discussion and quotations on pp.167-169.

In contrast, Lear's nature is ruled almost entirely by the dictates of his passions. He does not use "consideration" to check the "rashness"¹ of his impulsive actions — as even Kent is moved to point out to him.²

Goneril and Regan (who initially at least are guided more by reason and calculation than by feeling) have no patience with Lear's impulsiveness. At the outset of the tragedy Goneril comments as follows upon the infirmities of her father's nature:

The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look from his age, to receive not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.³

And Regan adds:

Such inconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.⁴

Throughout the remainder of the tragedy there are repeated references to Lear's indiscretion and weakness vis a vis the discretion, politic wisdom and rationality that Goneril and Regan discern in themselves. It is well

¹ I.i.150-151.

² We shall find a similar debate occurring in Antony and Cleopatra between the logic or cold reason of Rome and the illogical or impulsive reactions of Cleopatra. In this case, unlike Kent and Cordelia who appear able to harmonise these conflicting pulls in man, Antony is the man torn between the two.

³ I.i.295-299. It is interesting to note in this context that Raleigh, Bk I, Pt I, chap.i, p.12, points out that those of "choleric complexions are subject to anger." He goes on to maintain that, if they allow this inclination to determine their nature to the exclusion of reason, they become prey to the effects of the stars and fortune upon the course of their lives.

⁴ I.i.300-301. When they fall in love with Edmund, however, Goneril and Regan similarly lose this ability to divorce emotion from the decisions they make.

summed up, for example, in Regan's advice to her father —

Give ear, Sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you old, and so —
But she knows what she does.¹

This self is, however, often opaque to the other characters and, indeed, often opaque to the person himself. Lear neither knows himself² nor others. At every turn he misjudges himself and others. So, too, Cornwall can turn to Edmund (who has just betrayed his father and will later betray Cornwall too) and say :

Nature's of such deep trust we shall much need;
You we first seize on,³

Lear's lack of knowledge of himself causes him to fall victim to the flattery and guile of others, as Gloucester's lack of self-perception causes him to fall victim to the duplicities of Edmund. It is in this connection that both fall short of Bishop Hall's definition of the Wise Man:

There is nothing, that he desires not to know; but, most and first, himself: and not so much his own strength, as his weaknesses. . . . He is seldom over-seen with credulity: for, knowing the falseness of the world, he hath learned to trust himself always; others, so far, as he may not be damaged by their disappointment.⁴

¹ II. iv. 235-238. See also II. iv. 147-151:

O, Sir! you are old;
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine: you should be rul'd and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than yourself.

² See, for example, Goneril's remark in I. i. 293-294: "Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself."

³ II. i. 115-116.

⁴ Hall, Vol. VII, pp. 85-86. The speeches of Kent in I. i. are to a large extent concerned with pointing out these same lessons to Lear. The King, however, does not know himself or his weaknesses, he is over-credulous, and he will be damaged by the disappointment that Goneril and Regan bring him.

It is this same danger of a lack of self-knowledge that Plutarch warns against —

The only principal remedy to stop up the entry against all flatterers is to know ourselves well: for otherwise we shall have such array and ornaments hanged upon us, that we shall not easily perceive and discern who we are.¹

These are lessons that Lear and Gloucester will have to suffer much to learn.

The rational pragmatists in the tragedy, people such as Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Oswald, use what knowledge they have of others' natures for their own advantage. They flatter them when they ask for flattery, adapt their approach and mien to suit their audience, and prey upon the gullibility and weakness of others. This is Kent's indictment of men such as Oswald:

Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain
Which are too intrinse t'unloose; smooth every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel;
Being oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters.²

They are the calculators, the estimators, the weighers-up of the "politic" course.³ This is perhaps why their cruelty is so terrible: it does not spring from impulsive anger, but from deliberate decisions of policy.

¹Plutarch *Moralia*, trans. Holland (Dent ed., p.36).

²II.ii.74-80.

³In modern terminology one would perhaps say that the majority of characters in *King Lear* fail to communicate. See also, for example, Wolfgang R. Clemen, *Shakespeares Monologe* (Göttingen: van den Hoek und Ruprecht, 1964), p.60: "So wird das 'Aneinander-vorbei-Reden' zweier Gestalten, die auf verschiedene Weise zu einer monologischen Redehaltung gekommen sind, zur charakteristischen Äusserungsform für ganze Akte und Szenen."

Ultimately, however, almost every character in the tragedy (except perhaps Kent, Cordelia and the Fool) falls victim to his or her inability to differentiate reliably between the real and apparent nature of others. Even Edmund dies amazed at the fact that Goneril and Regan have, in their own selfish way, loved him.¹

It is also ironic that, in the world of King Lear, it is the plain-speaking characters such as Kent and Cordelia who are thought to reveal duplicity in their natures. So, for example, Cornwall has this to say of Kent:

This is some fellow,
Who, having been prais'd for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature: he cannot flatter, he,
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth:
And they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly-ducking observants,
That stretch their duties nicely.²

So, too, both Kent and Edgar are forced to adopt disguises in order to remain true to their natures and serve those whom they love³; Kent and Cordelia are banished because they will not colour the truth in violation of their natures; and the Fool is threatened with the whip if he tells truth.⁴

¹V.iii.239-241.

²II.ii.96-105. My underlining.

³For a further discussion of this subject see pp.142-144.

⁴See I.iv.189-191:

"I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are:
they'll have me whipp'd for speaking true, thou'lt
have me whipp'd for lying."

It is, however, the Fool who repeatedly points out to Lear that the only "truths" he wishes to hear are those that please and flatter him. Cordelia's "truths" were so unpalatable to him that he banished her for telling them.

At the same time, however, as "Nature" refers to the self, it also refers to the Laws of Nature which demarcate man's functioning and possibilities in the world he inhabits, and his relations with others. It is in this context that words such as proper, kind and unkind, natural and unnatural take on a double meaning in King Lear. Thus, proper, natural and kind, for example, come to be associated with that fulfilment of the Bonds of Nature applicable to man as he is a man, just as unkind, unnatural and degenerate can be seen to represent the violation of what are considered the responses, duties and codes proper to man in terms of the Bonds of Nature.

When Lear says of himself, "I will forget my nature. So kind a father!"¹ he is referring not only to his generosity, but also to the

¹I.v.33. Lear returns again and again to this theme. See, for example:

- I.iv.314-315: "I have another daughter,
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable."
- II.iv.135-136: "O Regan! she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here."
- III.ii.16-18: "I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription."
- III.iv.20: "Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all."
- III.iv.70-71: "Nothing could have subdu'd nature
To such a lowness by his unkind daughters."

It is interesting to compare a similar chain of images in "A Merry Knack to Know a Knave" (ed. Dodsley, Vol. VI), p.523:

No, gracless imp, degenerate and unkind,
Thou art no son of mine, but tiger's whelp,
That hast been foster'd by some lion's pap.

Compare this also with the discussion of the use of animal imagery in King Lear.

fact that (in his eyes at least) he has fulfilled the natural responses and duties due of a father . In return , Lear expects that Goneril and Regan will be "kind" to him , will fulfil their part of the Bonds , be as daughterly as behoves in terms of the Bonds of Nature .

It is the Fool who points out that Regan will be as "unkind" as Goneril was .¹ And it will be Lear's realisation that he was "unkind" in casting off Cordelia² that holds him back from casting himself upon her mercy — as Kent points out :

A sovereign shame so elbows him: his own unkindness ,
That stripp'd her from his benediction , turn'd her
To foreign casualties , gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters , these things sting
His mind so venomously that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia .³

His daughters' violations of the Bonds of family and of Nature bring home to him the fact that he had himself fallen from "bias of nature"⁴ by banishing Cordelia and refusing her the comfort and care he was bound to offer in terms of these Bonds .

¹ See , for example , I.v.14-18:

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

Lear. What canst tell , boy ?

Fool. She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab .

Note the play here on the meaning of the word "kindly ."

² The words of France in I.i.260-261 ("Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind: / Thou lovest here , a better where to find ") raise an interesting etymological link between "kind" and "kin ." It might not be too far-fetched to observe that Lear was "unkind" to Cordelia when he "unkinned" her — refused to recognise her as his daughter .

³ IV.iii.43-48 . See pp. 118-123 for a further discussion of images such as that of the "dog-hearted daughters ." (My underlining .)

⁴ I.ii.116 .

At the same time, however, as we observe the violations of the Bonds of Nature and the family taking place in King Lear, we become aware that a major theme of the tragedy is an attempt by character after character to discover the origins of and reasons for the unnaturalness that takes place: how it is that children who share a common parentage can yet be so different in their natures; why some children act in accord with the Bonds, and others violate them.

So, for example, we see Lear discovering the blame for the situation in which he finds himself in the machinations of an obscure power which has forced him from his natural or proper course:

O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature
From the fix'd place, drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall.¹

And Kent attempts to attribute the difference between Lear's elder daughters and Cordelia to a differing nature implanted in them by the working of the stars:

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions;
Else one self mate and make could not beget
Such different issues.²

Edmund, however, debunks such theories, declares that he would have been what he is, no matter what stars shone upon his begetting, for man is the sole determinant of his fate:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that
when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of
our own behaviour, we make guilty of our dis-
asters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were
villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion,

¹I. iv. 275-279.

²IV. iii. 33-36.

knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical pre-
 dominance, drunkards, liars and adulterers by an
 enforc'd obedience of planetary influence; and
 all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on.
 An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay
 his goatish disposition to the charge of a star!
 My father compounded with my mother under
 the dragon's tail, and my nativity was under
Ursa major; so that it follows I am rough and
 lecherous. Fut! I should have been that I am
 had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled
 on my bastardizing,¹

In his attempts to discover the blame for the present unnatural
 circumstances, Lear even considers the doubt that these children are of
 his own flesh and blood: for the Bonds of Nature would surely prevent his
 own children from treating him as Goneril and Regan do. Thus, when
 Regan says she is glad to see him, he replies:

Regan, I think you are; I know what reason
 I have to think so: if thou shouldst not be glad,
 I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
 Sepulchring an adult'ress.²

That is, if Regan were not glad to see him, her father, he would be forced
 to believe that she was not his own child, but the offspring of her late
 mother's adultery — for a child of his own flesh and blood should naturally
 be glad to see him.³ In the same tenor, he calls Goneril a "degenerate

¹I.ii.124-140. Compare the following excerpt from the Mirror
 for Magistrates, ed. by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: University Press,
 1938), p.171, ll. 7-12:

Our lust and wils our evils chefely warke.
 It may be wel that planetes doe enclyne,
 And our complexions move our myndes to yll,
 But such is Reason, that they brynge to fine
 No worke, vnayded of our lust and wyl:
 For heauen and earth are subiect both to skyl.

²II.iv.130-133.

³Once again we return to the marriage Bond and the family
 that is founded in terms of this Bond.

bastard"¹ when she treats him as no lawful child should treat her father. And it is in this context, too, that Lear is injured by the apparent fact that Gloucester's bastard son treats his father more kindly than his own children, "got 'tween the lawful sheets."²

Ultimately, Lear is forced to recognise that he cannot deny the fathering of his children; he is forced to acknowledge that "'twas this flesh begot / Those pelican daughters."³ The Bonds of kinship cannot be denied. But, in his distress at this realisation, he sees his unkind children as the externalisation of a disease that is within himself. Thus, when Goneril treats him unnaturally, he cries out:

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine: thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, or embossed carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood.⁴

In the same way, Gloucester looks at the relations of those bound by the ties of blood and cries out that "our flesh and blood my lord, is grown so vile, / That it doth hate what gets it."⁵ Yet, Gloucester has also been deceived by the son who appears such a "loyal and natural boy."⁶

¹ I.iv.262.

² IV.vi.119. See also pp.124ff. for a discussion of the sexual imagery in the tragedy.

³ III.iv.74-75. See pp.118-119 for further treatment of the pelican imagery in the tragedy.

⁴ II.iv.223-227. Note the images linking evil with disease. Later, for example, we find Lear returning to this question and saying, in III.vi.77-79: "Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?"

⁵ III.iv.149-150.

⁶ II.i.84.

Too late, he realises that the lawful child he outlawed was more filial to him than the illegitimate son who betrays him. Like Lear, Gloucester also finds it difficult to acknowledge that the blame for the unnatural relations that develop might lie partly with himself.

This unnaturalness within the family is not, however, without its repercussions. Those who violate and subvert all accustomed norms, values and relationships cannot expect to escape unscathed. Albany clearly points out what the effects of such actions must inevitably be:

That nature, which contemns its 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.¹

In the same way as Lear is suffering for casting off Cordelia, and Gloucester for casting off Edgar, Goneril and Regan are doing a mortal violation to themselves by casting off their father against all the dictates of Nature. A branch cannot be severed from the family tree without itself withering and dying, for the sap that nourishes it is that common blood which they share — whether they like it or not. As Calvin points out, "man cannot injure man, but he becomes an enemy to his own flesh, and violates and perverts the whole order of nature."² This is what we see happening in King Lear.

¹ IV.ii.32-36. This quotation also reflects the use of the imagery of withering as an effect of such anti-natural evil. See pp.338-339 for a discussion of similar images in *Macbeth*. Compare also the following quotation from "A Merry Knack to Know a Knave" (ed. Dodsley, Vol. VI), p.523:

He that disdains his father in his want,
And wilfully will disobey his sire,
Deserves, my lord, by God's and nature's laws,
To be rewarded with extremest ills.

² Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis 37 : 25-27* (quoted from Frye, p.125). Compare this with III.iv.149-150, quoted on previous page.

So far we have discussed Nature mainly in its relation to the Bonds of the family. It must be remembered, however, that, as pointed out earlier, human nature was considered to be dual. And King Lear is concerned to a large extent with conflicting interpretations of the Bonds of Nature and what can be considered natural for man.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, there is the more spiritual nature of man towards which, ideally, his natural reason and strivings should lead him, and there is the more physical nature of man, which he shares with the animals. This physical nature should be complementary to his higher spiritual nature, but, as Shakespeare demonstrates in this tragedy, it is often in conflict with that better or higher part of his being. And a good deal of the tragedy hinges on this dichotomy in man.

Raleigh points out the source of the conflict:

In Man this Law [of Nature] is double, corrupt, and incorrupt: corrupt, where the reason of Man hath made its self subject, and a Vassal to Passions, and Affections Brutal: and incorrupt, where time and custom hath bred in Men a new nature, which also, as is afore-said, is a kind of Law.¹

It becomes apparent, then, that there are several types of unnatural behaviour in the tragedy. There is that which springs from cold, calculating reason, unmitigated by any kinder "natural" feelings or emotions. And there is also that which, in contrast to the natural relationships of the family set out in the marriage service, is like that of "brute beastes that haue no vnderstanding,"² a purely physical or sensual satisfaction of human desire.

¹Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p. 214. Adam's sin first corrupted human nature.

²The Book of Common Prayer, quoted on p. 69.

Edmund, for example, applies his intellect or reasoning power almost entirely to the lower aspect of his nature. He uses his reason to discover and prey upon the weaknesses of others in order to satisfy his selfish objectives. Because society (as we saw) will not admit him as a full co-equal member, he chooses to fulfil his Bond and owe his service only to Nature. And the Nature that Edmund apostrophises¹ is that of self-care, personal lusts, ambitions, appetites and desires. Indeed, Edmund views social obligations, duties and commitments as the "plague of custom" and the "curiosity of nations,"² sees the father-son Bonds as an "idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny."³ He determines to use the commitment of others to this system to his own advantage: since he is unable to destroy the system from without, he resolves to undermine it from within.

Thus, as the actions of Regan, Goneril and Edmund demonstrate, savage and unnatural cruelty can be the product of purely rational thought and action unmoderated by the leavening effects of feeling or sympathy.

This savagery or unnaturalness can also, however, be the product of brute passions uncontrolled by reason. And it is significant that it is Lear himself who introduces this theme into the tragedy. When he refuses Cordelia all his "paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood,"⁴ he elaborates his violation of these Bonds in terms which refer

¹ See I.ii.1ff.

² I.ii.3-4. Compare the quotation from Montaigne on p.21. See also how these terms fit in with Raleigh's definition of Human Law cited on p.20.

³ I.ii.50-51. Quotation from "Edgar's" letter.

⁴ I.i.113-114.

to the barbarous Scythian and those who cannibalise their offspring:

The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.¹

Here, then, we meet with the first of a long chain of images depicting savage cruelty within the family. And the horror here is doubled because a savage or an animal acting in a cruel or predatory way is not guilty of a sin against the Bonds of Nature in the same way as civilised man. In the Elizabethan view, animals cannot think or plan or control their feelings in the same way as man is able to do; they only act according to their nature and kind. Man, who has the god-given gift of reason, is "worse than brutish"² when he acts unkindly.

It goes further than this. Time and again, the Elizabethans point out that animals and savages do not have the same clearly delineated duties towards others, yet often instinctively act more kindly to others than man does. Montaigne, for example, devotes a large section of his Apologie for Raymond Sebonde to a catalogue of the virtues shown by animals, which shows up how debased and perverted supposedly civilised man is by comparison. He points out that animals have no explicit Bonds which bid them care for their offspring longer than they are biologically

¹I.i.116-120. It is interesting to note a similar image in "Tancred and Gismunda" (ed. Dodsley, Vol.VII, p.76), V.i.:

Doth here King Tancred hold the awful crown?
Is this the place where civil people be?
Or do the savage Scythians here abound?

Note how, in both these quotations, civilised behaviour is implicitly contrasted with that which is barbarous, savage, and uncivilised.

²I.ii.77.

helpless — yet they will often die for them. According to Montaigne, animals also often exceed man in the degree of "trust and faithfulness"¹ they show; in their "gratitude and thankfulness"²; in the "mutuall societie and reciprocall confederation they devise amongst themselves"³; and in their "repentance and acknowledging of faults committed."⁴ Even in their sexual practices, he maintains, animals often show greater restraint and chastity than lustful man.⁵

As the tragedy progresses we shall, therefore, become aware that those who reject the Bonds of love, honour, duty, obedience and fellow-feeling that should bind families and societies do not so much become animal-like, but worse than animals. The imagery of Nature expands to include as an increasingly frequent descant the imagery of unnatural bestiality and brutality in those who break the Bonds of Nature and of man, trample on and tear to pieces the great Bonds that should join men in civilised community.

The irony is that Lear, the wrathful "Dragon," will eventually be preyed on his his own "pelican daughters,"⁶ for, as the Fool points out quite early on:

The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it's had it head bit off by it young.⁷

¹ Montaigne, Bk II, chap. xii, pp. 239-240.

² Ibid., p. 240.

³ Ibid., p. 241.

⁴ Ibid., p. 242.

⁵ Ibid., p. 245. See also the discussion on pp. 124ff. of my text.

⁶ I. i. 122 and III. iv. 75.

⁷ I. iv. 224-225.

Let us digress for a moment here and look at two versions of the Pelican legend, for there is much in them that is of relevance to King Lear. The first version reads as follows:

The Pellican loueth too much her children. For when the children bee haught, and begin to waxe hoare, they smite the father and the mother in the face, wherfore the mother smiteth them againe and slaieth them. And the thirde daye the mother smiteth her selfe in her side that the blood runneth out, and sheddeth that hot blood vppon the bodies of her children. And by vertue of the blood the birdes that were before dead, quicken againe. And in the Glose vpon that place of the Psalme [Psalm 102 : 6] Factus sum sicut Pellicanus. It is sayd that the Pellican slayeth her Birdes with her bill, and maketh sorrowe three dayes, and then sheddeth her hot blood vppon them, and maketh them aliue againe in ye manner.¹

The second version reads as follows:

And the Serpent hateth kindlye this Birde. Wherfore when the mother passeth out of the neast to get meate, the serpent climeth on the tree and stingeth and infecteth the Birdes. And when she cometh agayne, she maketh sorrowe three dayes for her Birdes. Then . . . shee smiteth her selfe in the breast, and bringeth blood vppon them, and reareth them from death to lyfe, and then for greate bleeding the mother waxeth feeble, and the Birdes bee compelled to passe out of the neast to gette themselues meate. And some of them for kind loue feede the mother that is feeble: and some be vnkinde and care not for the mother, and the mother taketh good heed therto, & when she cometh to her strength, she nourisheth and loueth those Birdes that fedde her at her need, and putteth away her other birdes as vnworthye and vnkinde, and suffereth them not to dwel nor liue with her.²

In these two versions of a popular legend³ we find several strands of action and imagery which parallel that of King Lear. So, we see an over-fond parent in conflict with his growing children; we also find references to attitudes that are kind and natural or unkind and unnatural in the family

¹ Batman, Bk XII, chap.xxix, p.186^b. My underlining.

² Ibid., pp.186^b-187^a. My underlining.

³ It is interesting to note that this legend is also referred to, for example, in The Mirror for Magistrates, p.448, ll.85ff. And the same distinction is drawn between the loving children and those who attack their parent.

relationships, as well as that quality of almost sacrificial love that is, ideally, to be found in the family — a subject to which we shall return later.

Let us now return to an examination of that behaviour which is considered unnatural and monstrous in man, and see how it is reflected in the imagery and action of King Lear. Calvin provides us with a useful starting point:

If the child disdain his father or his mother, he is a monster and every man will abhor him.¹

So, Lear's elder daughters' treatment of him, their unnaturalness and unkindness within the context of the Bonds of Nature that should operate in the play, becomes a symbol of all that is monstrous. In this regard it is interesting to note that this image first arises when France questions Cordelia's fall from her father's grace:

Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree
That monsters it.²

France cannot believe that Cordelia is capable of such offences against Nature. Her sisters, however, are monstrous, fiendish, savage in their cruelty.³ That is, their treatment of others takes a form alien even to the

¹ Calvin, Sermons on Deuteronomy 5 : 16 (quoted from Frye, p. 123).

² I.i.218-220. See also in the same speech, "This is most strange, / That she . . . commit a thing so monstrous."

³ See, for example, the usage of these images in
I.v.40-41 : "Monster Ingratitude!" (Lear.)
I.ii.97 : "He cannot be such a monster." (Gloucester.)
III.iii.7 : "Most savage and unnatural." (Edmund — hypocritically.)
III.ii.43 : "Most barbarous, most degenerate!" (Albany.)
IV.ii.62-63: "Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame,
Be-monster not thy feature." (Albany to Goneril.)

animal kingdom. Thus, Lear says of their treatment of him:

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous, when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea monster.¹

As the tragedy develops and Goneril and Regan pile cruelty upon horrid cruelty, the imagery expands to reveal the whole of womankind, all humanity in fact, threatened by the spreading poison of their evil if it is allowed to run unchecked.² We hear the third servant, horrified at Gloucester's brutal blinding by Regan, cry out—

If she live long,
And in the end meet the old course of death,
Women will all turn monsters.³

We also find Albany appealing to the heavens to put an end to such monstrous perversion, for,

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vilde⁴ offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.⁵

Goneril and Regan become "unnatural hags,"⁶ very like the witches of

¹I. iv. 268-270.

²It is worth noting that these images do not appear in this form in the other versions of the Lear story. It is also interesting to note that the pain Lear's children inflict on him is sharper than that inflicted by the biting of a serpent. There are several images linking Lear's children with the serpent, symbol of evil. See, for example, I. iv. 297-298: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child!" and II. iv. 161-162: "Struck me with her tongue, / Most serpent-like."

³III. vii. 99-101.

⁴See textual notes to this word and to ll. 49-50.

⁵IV. ii. 46-50.

⁶II. iv. 280.

Macbeth in their subversion of all normal womanly attributes. And, as Albany points out, the horror is that

Proper deformity shows not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.¹

Note the use of the word "proper." As mentioned earlier, Goneril and Regan are violating the self implanted in them by Nature as a result of their horrid actions and callous disregard for the sufferings of others. It is interesting to note that they are frequently referred to as "fiends," "witches," or "devils," that is, evil incarnate.

At the same time we have another thread of the imagery that underlines the abhorrent abnormality of such actions, making it clear that even animals would act more kindly than this. So, for example, we are presented with the moral implication that even the wild beasts would have treated Lear better than his daughters do:

A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugg'd bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.²

Man should not even treat a wild animal as callously as Lear's daughters treat him —

If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that dearn time,
Thou should'st have said "Good porter, turn the key,"³

or, as Cordelia points out,

Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire,⁴

¹ IV.ii.60-61.

² IV.ii.41-43. Note how the imagery works. We have the father and the gracious aged man, two qualities that should elicit a response in accordance with the Bonds, opposed to the barbarous and degenerate quality of those who do not respect the observance of these Bonds.

³ III.vii.62-63.

⁴ IV.vii.36-38.

and Kent remonstrates :

Why, Madam, if I were your father's dog,
You should not treat me so.¹

Man, then, when he acts contrary to what should be his proper nature in accord with the dictates of Nature imprinted in him, becomes more horrible than those beasts which prey upon others by instinct and out of necessity.² The wolf,³ the kite,⁴ the vulture,⁵ the fox,⁶ the boar,⁷ the tiger,⁸ are by nature animals that scratch and bite, rip, flay, rend, tear, fight and devour. When man acts as they do, he compounds the odium of his violation of the Bonds. This rending, clawing cruelty reaches its climax in the tragedy when Regan and Cornwall tear out Gloucester's eyes — surely one of the most terrible acts ever portrayed upon a stage.

¹ II.ii.136-137. Kent to Regan.

² Frye, p.127, goes part of the way in recognising the dramatic implications of this imagery: "In one sense, the entire tragedy is concerned with questioning the relation between human and animal nature."

³ See, for example, I.iv.316-317:

When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolvisish visage.

⁴ See, for example, I.iv.271: "Detested kite." [Lear to Goneril.]

⁵ See, for example, II.iv.135-136:

O Regan! she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here.

⁶ See, for example, III.vi.22: "Now, you she foxes!"

⁷ See, for example, II.vii.55-57:

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.

⁸ See, for example, IV.ii.40: "Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?"

In the same way, the sexual imagery in the tragedy becomes a reflection of man's unnatural violations of the Bonds. Animals are not able to restrain their sexual desires by the power of their reason. They supposedly indulge in the sexual act according to their instincts, without plan, care or forethought, for the satisfaction of their brutish appetites. Through the continency of marriage, however, society attempts to order, regularise and stabilise these desires in man, in order that the social structure may be harmoniously maintained and continued through the medium of the Bonds that marriage places upon him.

The marriage service maintains that a husband and wife shall worship each other with their bodies for the procreation of children within the framework of a social order, for mutual satisfaction and joy, and to the glorification of God. When a character such as Gloucester offers as his only reason for fathering Edmund the fact that his mother was fair and that there was "good sport at his making,"¹ he is merely satisfying an animal lust. Per se, sexual desire is not considered evil for humanity, but, in terms of the tragedy, it becomes evil when it is an end in itself, when it has no other aim than selfish gratification of the desires and appetites —

if the concupiscence and wicked affections overcome reason,
we must not marvel though men be blinded, and be like unto beasts.²

When man does not care for anything but the satisfaction of his own sexual appetite, then the existence of marriage and the family becomes mocked and meaningless.

¹I.i.23-24.

²Gloss (r) to Matthew 6 : 23 (1588 version).

The debate between lust and chaste love reaches its climax at the point where Lear feels that Gloucester's illegitimate son has been more natural to his father than Lear's own lawful offspring:

I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause? Adultery?
 Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No:
 The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
 Does lecher in my sight.
 Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son
 Was kinder to his father than my daughters
 Got 'tween the lawful sheets. To't, Luxury, pell-mell!
 For I lack soldiers. Behold yond simp'ring dame,
 Whose face between her forks presages snow;
 That minces virtue, and does shake the head
 To hear of pleasure's name;
 The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't
 With a more riotous appetite.
 Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
 Though women all above:
 But to the girdle do the Gods inherit,
 Beneath is all the fiend's: there's hell, there's darkness,
 There is the sulphurous pit— burning, scalding,
 Stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!¹

In his agony and horror at his daughters' treatment of him, Lear questions the validity of the entire system of morality on which marital love is based. For, if Gloucester's bastard son has indeed been kinder to his father than Lear's own legitimate children, then there would be no purpose in upholding chastity as an admirable virtue, or the married state as the best condition for raising a family.

Lear sees the entire world perverted: all practise the deception of morality, when, instead the cauldron of sexual appetite is seething within them. He worries at the nature of this dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh in man: the fact that his appetites, passions and desires can overwhelm his more spiritual, intellectual self, so that "but to the girdle do the Gods inherit, / Beneath is all the fiend's." As he sees it

¹ IV.vi.112-131.

now, mind and body, reason and feeling no longer complement and balance each other, but pull in contrary directions.

It is in this context that the "sexual" imagery in King Lear expands to contain all forms of sensual gluttony, excess and intemperance. Poor Tom, for example, mirrors Lear's preoccupation with the relationships between love and lust, the flesh and the spirit, unreined appetite and control. Setting out his catalogue of vices, Poor Tom tells that he was

A servingman, proud in heart and mind; that
curl'd my hair, wore my gloves in my cap, serv'd
the lust of my mistress' heart, and did the act of
darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I
spake words, and broke them in the sweet face
of Heaven; one that slept in the contriving of
lust, and wak'd to do it. Wine lov'd I deeply,
dice dearly, and in woman out-paramour'd the
Turk: false of heart, light of ear, bloody of
hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness,
dog in madness, lion in prey. Let not the
creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray
thy poor heart to woman: keep thy foot out of
brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from
lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.¹

See how here, as elsewhere, the metaphors for human bestiality again make their appearance and how here, too, the whore, the brothel, the whoreson, the bawd and the pander² represent the breaking of the sacrosanct Bonds. And, in sharp contrast to this view of man's depravity, we

¹III.iv.85-99. Note how this quotation appears immediately after Poor Tom has catalogued the statutes of society (ll.80-83):

"Take heed o' th' foul fiend. Obey thy parents;
keep thy word's justice; swear not; commit not
with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet
heart on proud array."

²See, for example, IV.vi.163 (whore); III.iv.98 (brothel); I.iv.253 (brothel); II.ii.20 (pandar); II.ii.16 (whoreson); II.ii.18 (bawd). See also Edmund's frequent references to his bastardy. Note, too, the coupling of these references with those of bestiality.

have Montaigne's claim that animals are in their own way more chaste and controlled than man, for,

whereas nature hath subscribed them certaine seasons and bounds for their naturall lust and voluptuousnesse, she hath given us at all howers and occasions the full reines of them.¹

Opposed to this, however, we have Edmund's view:

Why bastard? Wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed,
Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops,
Got 'tween sleep and wake? Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to th' legitimate. Fine word, "legitimate"!²

As we shall see in Antony and Cleopatra, this lust, these animal appetites, can be a vital, dynamic force.³ The human appetites and passions can enrich and make fuller the scope of human life; they represent human energy and the capacity for sensual awareness and response. But, as we shall see when we come to discuss the imagery dealing with the senses in King Lear, they must be exercised with restraint and moderation, must complement the working of man's reason, if they are not to blind him and make him "like unto beastes."

At the same time as we watch Lear worrying about the nature of this dichotomy in man, we see him questioning the justice of a society

¹ Montaigne, Bk II, chap. xii, p. 245.

² I. ii. 6-18.

³ See especially pp. 253ff.

which punishes those overt or discovered transgressors of its moral codes, whilst others of its members contravene or desire to contravene the system in private, in secret, in darkness. This is, for example, the intention of the following excerpt:

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her.¹

Moreover, if man is no more than a creature seeking only the fulfilment of its animal appetites and the exercise of its depravity, then Lear wishes all nature's germens spilled,² so that man can no longer breed such creatures to betray nature and defile the earth.

As we watch Lear moving through the tragedy, we watch the veneer of civilisation crumbling and cracking to reveal the discord, chaos and incipient madness that boil below the surface. When the Bonds of Nature are abused and abrogated, the discipline and order that are the normal course of Nature are usurped by the chaos and disorder that lurk beneath it. So, too, at the same time, the vital powerful force that Nature and the natural instincts can be is dissipated in unordered excess. We return to our earlier quotation from Calvin:

Man cannot injure man, but he becomes an enemy to his own flesh, and violates and perverts the whole order of nature.³

¹IV.vi.162-165. For a further discussion of the themes of justice and the transgressions that merit punishment, see pp. 157-158 and 169-172.

²See III.ii.1-9.

³See p. 114.

Thus, as in Macbeth, we see that Nature herself begins to reflect the overthrowing of all social norms and Bonds that should operate in the world of the play. As the storm clouds gather over Lear's head, so the storm builds up in Nature. And when Goneril and Regan have violated even the most basic of human Bonds by turning their father out of doors, the heavens open up and mirror in Nature's disturbance the cataclysm that has taken place in society. The madness that overtakes Lear on the heath is reflected in the furious raging of the elements; the hard-heartedness of his daughters finds its parallel in the uncaring buffeting of wind and rain.

Cast out of doors, Lear, who has lost the war with society, now pits his strength against that of the elements themselves. But, without the Bonds to give Nature form and meaning, she becomes an anonymous opponent, uncaring of his puny raging, so that we find Lear

Contending with the fretful elements;
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of;
Strives in his little world of man to out-storm
The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain.¹

Indeed, Lear uses words that are very similar to Macbeth's defiance of the worst the elements can do:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,

¹ IILi.4-11. On this whole subject, see Heilman—especially chap.iii, "Poor Naked Wretches and Proud Array," and chap.iv, "The Breach in Nature." Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, p. 146, points out that, at this stage, his "real partners in converse are the forces of nature."

Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
 Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
 That makes ingrateful man! ¹

Lear bears the elements no grudge. They owe him no love, honour, or duty, therefore he cannot tax them with unkindness.² But in his outcast state he sees them ranged with his daughters, impervious to the straw lance of his ranting and raging.³ Whereas, however, Lear is crying out to Nature for vengeance upon a world that has cast him off unnaturally, Macbeth is defying the vengeance of Nature upon him for his unnatural actions.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that in both King Lear and Macbeth we find characters pointing out that no such catastrophe or upheaval has occurred in living memory,⁴ that is, the events we are witnessing are extraordinary in their magnitude and in the size of the repercussions they are having on the world which the players inhabit.

¹ II.ii.1-9. Compare Macbeth III.ii.16 and IV.i.52-60.

² See III.ii.16.

³ Compare Clemen, Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, p.147: "Just as human nature overstepped its limits, so do the elements now transcend their boundaries — this is a fundamental idea, which appears in the imagery again and again."

⁴ See III.ii.45-48 :

Since I was a man
 Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
 Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
 Remember to have heard.

Compare also Macbeth II.iv.1-4 :

Threescore and ten I can remember well;
 Within the volume of which time I have seen
 Hours dreadful, and things strange, but this sore night
 Hath trifled former knowings.

This reaffirms the writer's claim that tragedy involves the overthrowing or breakdown of all those systems in terms of which man knows his world.

We must realise, though, that not only do Goneril and Regan act in a way which is unnatural, worse than brutish, but they also reduce their father to a condition that is lower than that of the beasts. Thus, as the tragedy progresses, we see a debate developing on what man needs to mark him as a man and not as a beast.

Without certain of the trappings of civilisation, man comes close to the beasts. So, for example, Edgar says,

I . . . am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast.¹

And in this shape he will roam from village to village, depending on charity for his daily bread, an outcast from society, recognised even by the dogs as an exile from the fellowship of their masters.

It becomes gradually clear that man has certain needs that must be fulfilled if he is to live and feel like a man. The vows of the marriage service normally ensure that the family becomes the place where man fulfils not only his basic physical needs, but also his more sophisticated requirements. Man needs the same as animals: he needs food, and sleep and shelter. To be a man, however, he needs more than the animals, for these requirements must be met in a way which accords with his state of culture and civilisation, his standing in society and his aesthetic standards. Montaigne disputes that man needs more than nature can provide for survival.² But King Lear demonstrates that survival is not enough if

¹ II. iii. 6-9.

² See Montaigne, Bk II, chap. xii, pp. 228-229. Here he points out on p. 228, for example, that "Nature hath generally imbraced all her creatures: And there is not any but she hath amply stored with all necessary means for the preservation of their being."

man is to gratify his aesthetic senses and his need for external symbols that will reinforce his status and position in the society he inhabits, and his vision of himself. Thus, for example, Hooker says:

The Apostle, in exhorting men to contentment although they have in this world no more than very bare food and raiment, giveth us thereby to understand that these are even the lowest of things necessary; that if we should be stripped of all those things without which we might possibly be, yet these must be left; that destitution in these is such an impediment, as till it be removed suffereth not the mind of man to admit any other care.¹

When Goneril and Regan attempt to strip their father of those things that give his life its accustomed dignity and meaning, they are stripping him to all but the "lowest of things necessary." This is why Lear says,

O! reason not the need; our basest beggars
Are in the poorest things superfluous;
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need..²

Lear is here pointing out that man's needs cannot be measured rationally; they are largely irrational and illogical, but no less real for being so. True need cannot even be measured in terms of material requirements, for it also consists of the psychological, sensual and aesthetic necessities.

However, as the Fool points out,³ it is Lear himself who

¹Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, p.188. Compare Timothy 8 : 8.

²II.iv.266-272.

³See the exchange between the Fool and Lear in I.v.25-32;

Fool. Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

Lear. No.

Fool. Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.

Lear. Why?

Fool. Why, to put's head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case.

initiated the circumstances whereby his daughters were placed in a position to deny him the material and psychological human wants. It was Lear who first introduced the imagery of stripping and renunciation. It was Lear who spoke of divesting himself of "rule, / Interest of territory, cares of state,"¹ who gave his father's heart away from his daughter, Cordelia,² who invested Goneril and Regan with the power and asked only to be "sustain'd"³ by them.

By giving his daughters control of the family, Lear has reduced himself to a state wherein he is dependent upon them for the fulfilment of his needs. Goneril and Regan now use rational measuring sticks to strip their father of all those additions that, in their eyes, are merely troublesome and unnecessary. They deprive him first of the psychological requirements he seeks from the family, refuse him respect and courtesy and the "ceremonious affection"⁴ that he had expected from them. As we saw,⁵ they reduce their love, honour and obedience to the lowest fraction that can be accorded with the narrowest definition of filial obligation. At the same time, too, they begin to begrudge him the satisfaction of his more material wants: like a shuttlecock they toss him between them, stripping him as they do so.

The final crisis in the gradual whittling away of Lear's accoutrements is precipitated as his daughters attempt to make him "disquantity" his "train."⁶ Cruelly, they haggle with him over the numbers of men necessary to serve him adequately, until they have logically calculated that

¹ I. i. 49-50.

² I. i. 126.

³ I. i. 134.

⁴ I. iv. 62.

⁵ See pp. 85ff.

⁶ I. iv. 257.

he does not even need one, when their own servants can serve him as capably.¹

Lear, however, does not need his following so much for the service they can do him as for the outward symbol they are of his status and personality. This is the bitterness underlying his ironic plea for the satisfaction of his material wants:

Do you but mark how this becomes the house:
"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

Rather than be brought to beg from his own daughters for the bare necessities of life, Lear chooses to

abjure all roofs, and choose
To wage against the enmity o' th' air;
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her!
Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought
To knee his throne, and squire-like, pension beg
To keep base life afoot,³

and rushes out into the storm.

Lear has at this point been stripped of all the trappings of normal social life, both those that are material and those that are psychological. Only his clothes still distinguish him materially from the animals — indeed, his condition is worse than theirs, for Lear is unaccustomed to this unaccommodated state, yet,

This night, wherein the cub-drawn bear would couch,
The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
Keep their fur dry, unbonneted he runs,
And bids what will take all.⁴

¹ II. iv.

² II. iv. 154-157.

³ II. iv. 210-217.

⁴ III. i. 12-15.

That is, on a night when even the animals have found shelter, Lear is unhoused, and must of necessity be grateful even for a hovel that will give him some shelter from the wind and the rain.¹ And we must note here that, in opposition to the views of Montaigne (quoted earlier²), Kent makes it clear that "the tyranny of the open night's too rough / For nature to endure,"³ that "man's nature cannot carry / Th' affliction nor the fear."⁴ As we shall see, the deprivation that Lear suffers is the crux of his tragic progress.

If one looks more closely at the imagery of the quotations from this section of the tragedy, it becomes apparent that, at the same time as Lear is being reduced to a state parallel to or lower than that of an animal, the furniture or commodities of human living are taking on increasingly the symbolic value foreshadowed in the first Act. The house, the hearth, the cradle, the bed, the door, food and clothing come to represent more than their actual qualities or the tangible forms they take and the purposes they serve.

Let us look, for example, at the bed. In Act I, scene i, we saw Gloucester picturing forth his violation of the marriage Bonds by referring to the son his mistress had for her "cradle," before she had a husband for her "bed."⁵ And we heard Lear speaking of hoping to set his rest upon Cordelia's kind "nursery."⁶ Later, when Edmund is attacking the system which brands him as illegitimate, we hear him speak mockingly of

¹ III.ii.61ff.

² See references on p.118.

³ III.iv.2-3.

⁴ III.ii.48-49.

⁵ I.i.15-16.

⁶ I.i.124.

in it, and thereby symbolises the Bonds that unite them under a metaphorical roof. Kent clearly underlines the parallels in King Lear between the real and the symbolic house when he speaks as follows to Lear:

Gracious my Lord, hard by here is a hovel;
Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest;
Repose you there while I to this hard house, —
More harder than the stones whereof 'tis rais'd,
Which even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in, — return and force
Their scanted courtesy.¹

So, too, we find that Goneril and Regan become a hard house, "from home" and "out of . . . provision"² when Lear seeks to stay with them. Eventually they "shut up" their "doors,"³ and "oppose the bolt" against his "coming in,"⁴ excluding him both from the comfort of their homes and the comfort of their affections. In the same tenor, both Lear and Gloucester speak of punishing or revenging themselves "home,"⁵ on those who are of their house but have treated them as strangers — worse than strangers, for a certain hospitality is due even to strangers.⁶

Lear's fall from the "grac'd palace"⁷ to the humble "hovel"⁸

¹ III.ii.61-67. See also III.iv.152-157.

² II.iv.207.

³ II.iv.306 and 310.

⁴ II.iv.178-179.

⁵ III.iv.16 and III.iii.13.

⁶ See pp. 280-281 for a discussion of the Bonds of hospitality that should operate in Macbeth. Note how Gloucester points out to Regan and Cornwall that he is their host and they his guests, and that "with robbers' hands my hospitable favours / You should not ruffle thus." III.vii.40-41.

⁷ I.iv.254.

⁸ III.ii.61, 71, and 78; III.iv.178; and III.vii.39.

thus comes to represent far more than a simple change of abode. Like the beggar and the madman, he is now a "houseless poverty,"¹ cast off by his house, belonging nowhere.

The images of food and feeding undergo a similar transition. It is therefore interesting to note that Batman maintains that

a father is called Pater, and hath that name of Pascendo to feede,
for he feedeth his children in their youth, and is fedde of them in
his age.²

This situation does not obtain in King Lear. When he gave his land away to his daughters, he asked only to be "sustain'd"³ by them: as the Fool points out, he kept "nor crust nor crum"⁴ for himself, and now must beg to keep "base life afoot,"⁵ since Goneril and Regan appear to begrudge him even this necessity.

Food is one of the fundamental needs of man, and is provided most often within the family setting. As a result, it tends to draw to itself connotations wider than its material form; food comes to represent not only physical nourishment, but also sensual satisfaction and spiritual nourishment,⁶ love, care and plenty.⁷ All of which are denied Lear. Not only is he denied the spiritual nourishment of his daughters' love, he is

¹ III. iv. 26.

² Batman, Bk VI, chap. xv, p. 75b.

³ I. i. 134.

⁴ I. iv. 206. Compare the quotation from Fuller on pp. 55-56.

⁵ II. iv. 217.

⁶ See pp. 343-344 for a discussion of the symbolism of food and feeding in Macbeth.

⁷ See pp. 204-206 for a discussion of this symbolism in Antony and Cleopatra.

also deprived of the food fit for a king — for a man —, companioned with
 Poor Tom,

that eats the swimming frog, the
 toad, the todpole, the wall-newt, and the water;
 that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend
 rages eats cow-dung for sallets; swallows the
 old rat and the ditch-dog; drinks the green
 mantle of the standing pool.¹

Parallel with these image undertones, however, are two other important strands of meaning. So, we find images of food and feeding being used to depict a lack of restraint and moderation, a gluttony in human sensual activity. Gloucester cries out to the Heavens for retribution upon the "superfluous and lust-dieted man, / That slaves your ordinance."² Goneril accuses her father of allowing "epicurism and lust"³ to be the chief characteristics of his train. And Lear, revolted by his treatment at the hands of those who sprang from his loins, exclaims that the beasts themselves do not indulge in sexual activity with a "more riotous appetite"⁴ than wanton man and woman — especially woman.

So also, we find the imagery of food and feeding expanding to contain references to the cannibalistic likeness of those who breach the natural Bonds and turn upon each other.⁵ Here we find the pelican daughters

¹ III.iv.132-137. See also ll.142-143 and III.vi.31-33.

² IV.i.67-68. The textual notes to these lines also contain some interesting comments on the subject. It is worth noting that Gloucester then goes on to raise, in ll.70-71, the subject of the proper degree or moderation that would be brought about by such retribution: "So distribution would undo excess, / And each man have enough."

³ I.iv.252.

⁴ IV.vi.125. See also p.126.

⁵ And it must be remembered that it was Lear himself who first introduced this simile in I.i.116-120.

who rip and rend and claw and fasten like vultures on Lear's heart,¹ so that he cries out in horror :

Filial ingratitude!
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to't? ²

And Gloucester, in his remorse at his treatment of his son, berates himself for his folly and calls on his "dear son Edgar, / The food of thy abused father's wrath."³

Clothes, too, are more than mere protection against the weather. When looked at from the rational standpoint of Montaigne,⁴ most clothes are, in fact, unnecessary or inadequate.⁵ But, Shakespeare makes it clear that, through his clothes, man denotes his status, his profession, his means; gratifies his aesthetic senses, his pride and his vanity. One need only look at some of the delightful Elizabethan or mediaeval paintings to see how the various types and trades can be identified by their characteristic clothing, or remember how we speak of the Crown, and mean the king, or the Gentlemen of the Robe, and mean lawyers.⁶

If one bears this in mind, one realises that the changes of clothing that Lear undergoes in the course of the tragedy reach further than the simple changes of costume they appear to be. Because he gives his

¹ See pp.118ff.

² III.iv.14-16.

³ IV.i.21-22.

⁴ Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, pp.228-229, for example, deals with this subject.

⁵ Compare Lear's remarks to Goneril in II.iv.266-272. See also pp.131ff.

⁶ See, for example, III.vi.37: "Thou robed man of justice."

crown to be parted between his children, the Fool offers him his coxcomb and motley as the sign of his folly.¹ Next, Goneril and Regan strip him of his train of men, who are an accessory of his kingly dress — and it is Lear himself who points out to his daughters how unbecoming it is to the house of Lear for him to have to beg "raiment" of them. When they turn him out of doors, he is forced to run "unbonneted"² in the storm, lacking both material and psychological protection against the fury that rages within and without him. We are then shown Lear attempting to reduce himself to the "loop'd and window'd raggedness"³ of the beggar, to strip himself of all the "lendings"⁴ that are the normal dress of man. And when his madness is at its peak, he again crowns himself — but with "rank fumiter and furrow-weeds"⁵ this time. It is interesting to note, too, that one of the first acts Cordelia performs for the father who is restored to her is that of clothing him in fresh garments while he sleeps.⁶

If one reads Lear's progress in conjunction with the following quotations from Montaigne and Fuller, its significance becomes apparent — as will his later insights into the state of man. The first quotation is

¹I. iv. 113-115.

²III. i. 14.

³III. iv. 31. Note how the imagery of the house merges with that of clothing. This is characteristic of the form of many of the images in King Lear. They are not compartmented into specific categories of meaning, but complement and run over into each other.

⁴III. iv. 111-112.

⁵IV. iv. 3.

⁶IV. vii. 21-22.

from Montaigne:

Truely, when I consider man all naked . . . and view his defects, his naturall subjection, and manifold imperfections, I find we have had much more reason to hide and cover our nakednesse than any creature else. We may be excused for borrowing those which nature had therein favored more than us, with their beauties to adorne us, and under their spoiles of wooll, of haire, of feathers, and of silkes to shroud us.¹

Fuller expands further upon the state of man, and points out that

he that is proud of the russling of his silkes, like a mad man, laughs at the ratling of his fetters. For indeed, clothes ought to be our remembrancers of our lost innocency. Besides, why should any brag of what's but borrowed? ² Should the Estridge snatch off the Gallant's feather, the Beaver his hat, the Goat his gloves, the Sheep his sute, the Silk-worm his stockings, and Neat his shoes (to strip him no farther than modesty will give leave)³ he would be left in a cold condition.⁴

And Montaigne concludes that

there is not any of us that will be so much offended to see himselfe compared to God as he will deeme himselfe wrong to be depressed in the ranke of other creatures So long as man shall be perswaded to have meanes or power of himselfe, so long will he denie and never acknowledge what he oweth unto his Master; he shall alwaies (as the common saying is) make shift with his owne: He must be stripped unto his shirt.⁵

The fantastic four who meet on the heath are all alike reduced from the normal state of man, stripped of normal social dress. The Fool's motley gives him licence to speak truth in jest. Kent's changed "out-wall"⁶

¹ Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.244.

² Compare Lear's use of the word "lendings" in III.iv.111.

³ Compare III.iv.65-66: "Nay, he reserv'd a blanket, else we had been all sham'd."

⁴ Fuller, Bk III, chap.vi, p.154.

⁵ Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.247.

⁶ III.i.45.

enables him to serve the master whom he loves. Edgar's rags hide him from those who seek his life. And, as we shall see,¹ Lear's nakedness enables him to see and feel in the moral sense.

Ideally, the outward garments of man should at all times suit his inward personality. But, as Lear finds out, the outward appearance can hide the real man beneath so that, to the man who lacks insight,

Thorough tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all.²

This is directly in line with Montaigne's comments on the subject:

When you will esteeme a man, why should you survey him all wrapt and enveloped? He then but sheweth us those parts which are no whit his owne, and hideth those from us by which alone his worth is to be judged. It is the goodnesse of the sword you seeke after, and not the worth of the scabbard A man should be judged by himselfe, and not by his complements Let him lay aside his riches and externall honours, and shew himselfe in his shirt. Hath he a body proper to his functions, sound and cheerefull? What minde hath he? Is it faire, capable and unpolluted, and happily provided with all her necessarie parts? . . .

. . . There is more difference than is betweene heaven and earth, and yet such is the blindnesse of our custome that we make little or no account of it. Whereas, if we consider a cottager and a king, a noble and a handy-crafts man, a magistrate and a private man, a rich man and a poore, an extreme disparitie doth immediately present it selfe unto our eies, which . . . differ in nothing but in their clothes.³

This standpoint is, however, only valid in respect of those who lack the insight⁴ to see through the robes and furred gowns to the real man beneath. It must also be remembered that both Kent and Edgar, for example, are forced by circumstances to take on an appearance other

¹ See pp.151ff.

² IV.vi.166-167.

³ Montaigne, Bk I, chap.xlii, p.129.

⁴ See pp.150ff. and 173ff. for further discussion of these questions of insight and understanding.

than their normal one; and in these rags they serve Lear and Gloucester better than those who go so warm and gorgeous. In them we see, too, that it is possible to dissimulate to good or evil purpose¹; man's clothes can hide the good that is within him as easily as they can hide the evil.

What, then, happens to Lear when he has been stripped of house, of bed, of food and clothing, and of the shelter, the ease, and the satisfaction and status that they symbolise?

When first we saw Lear, he was secure in his knowledge of who he was; and his status as king, father, and honourably aged man was reinforced by the general fulfilment of the Bonds incumbent on those about him who acknowledged his interpretation of himself. As the Bonds cease to operate, we notice that Lear begins to find it necessary to ask himself and those around him who he really is, in order to establish a new definition of himself and of his relations to others. Thus, we discover the following exchange between Lear and Kent:

- Lear. How now! what art thou?
 Kent. A man, Sir.
 Lear. What dost thou profess? What would'st thou with us?
 Kent. I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in trust; to love him that is honest; to converse with him that is wise, and says little
 Lear. What art thou?
 Kent. A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the King.
 Lear. If thou be'st as poor for a subject as he is for a King, thou art poor enough. What would'st thou?

¹ See Francis Bacon, Essays, ed. A.F. Watts and A.J.F. Collins (4th impression; London: W.B. Clive, University Tutorial Press, n.d.), pp. 24-27, "Of Simulation and Dissimulation." Bacon points out that dissimulation can be necessary and politic, and that there is a difference in the purposes for which men deceive their fellows.

Kent. Service.
 Lear. Who would'st thou serve?
 Kent. You.
 Lear. Dost thou know me, fellow?
 Kent. No, Sir; but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.
 Lear. What's that?
 Kent. Authority,¹

Lear is here as much trying to re-establish his own identity as to discover that of Kent. The dawning realisation that he has been wrong in his judgement of Cordelia, Goneril and Regan is throwing his own self-awareness out of balance. He must therefore seek to re-define his own estimation of himself and his relationships with others.

Similarly, when Oswald ignores his call, Lear demands that Oswald tell him who he is, so that he can thereby remind him of the duty and respect due to one such as he. However, when Lear asks, "Who am I, Sir?" Oswald replies in terms of another point of view, and relegates Lear to the position of "my Lady's father."²

This striving to place himself in a world where he can no longer be sure that others' attitudes will reinforce his conception of himself as worthy king and father can be seen again when, after Goneril has replied scantly to him, Lear asks,

Does any here know me? This is not Lear;
 Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
 Either his notion weakens, his discernings
 Are lethargied — Ha! waking? 'tis not so.
 Who is that can tell me who I am?³

¹I. iv. 10-32. My underlining. Note that Lear asks the questions, and Kent replies to them in terms of his own estimation of Lear. He is abetting Lear in the maintenance of a personal valuation that is no longer held by others — as is revealed immediately afterwards by Oswald's reply.

²I. iv. 83-84.

³I. iv. 234-238.

Lear becomes an asker of questions, increasingly demanding to know the Who? Why? and What? of events relating to him.¹ At this stage, however, only the Fool ventures a reply; and he maintains that Lear is become his own shadow, nothing, nobody.² And Lear discovers that there is now nothing to distinguish him from the commonality of men:

Even so the Emperor whose glorious pomp doth so dazzle you in public . . .

View him behinde the curtaine, and you see but an ordinarie man, and peradventure more vile and more seely than the least of his subjects . . . "One is inwardly happy; anothers felicitie is plated and guilt-over." Cowardise, irresolution, ambition, spight, anger, and envie, move and worke in him as in another . . . And feare, and care, and suspect haunt and follow him, even in the midst of his armed troupes . . .

Doth the ague, the megrim, or the gout spare him more than us? When age shall once seize on his shoulders, can then the tall yeoman of his guard discharge him of it? When the terror of ruthless-balefull death shall assaile him, can he be comforted by the assistance of the gentlemen of his chamber? . . .

. . . And then, where the body and the soule are in ill plight, what need these externall commodities? seeing the least pricke of a needle and passion of the mind is able to deprive us of the pleasure of the worlds Monarchy. The first fit of an ague, or the first gird that the gout gave him, what avails his goodly titles of Majesty?³

¹See, for example:

- I.iv.154 : "Dost thou call me fool, boy?"
 I.iv.227: "Are you our daughter?"
 I.iv.244: "Your name, fair gentlewoman?"
 II.iv.12-13: "What's he that hath so much thy place mistook,
 To set thee here?"
 II.iv.58: "Where is this daughter?"

²I.iv.239. Compare Montaigne's comments on man as a mere shadow, as nothing. See, for example, Bk II, chap.xii, pp.252 and 267.

³Montaigne, Bk I, chap.xlii, pp.129-130. Compare IV.vi.97-108 (quoted on p.152).

On this entire subject, a view that approximates most closely to that of the present writer is to be found in Sewall, pp.4-5:

"The tragic vision is in its first phase primal, or primitive, in that it calls up out of the depths the first (and last) of all questions, the question of existence: What does it mean to be? It recalls the original terror, harking back to a world that antedates the conceptions of philosophy, the consolations of the later religions, and whatever constructions the human mind has devised to persuade itself that its universe is secure . . ."

Lear's preoccupation, however, remains personal and selfish until he has been stripped of all the normal trappings of his rank and power and reduced to the state of "natural man": indeed, it is Lear himself who strips himself of the last vestiges of the trappings of civilised man, and moves from attempting to identify himself to attempting to discover the nature of man himself and of the world.

This transition is especially noticeable when he looks at poor Tom, who has only a blanket to keep him decent, a hovel to shelter him, and beggar's scraps for food. Lear looks at poor Tom and comments upon the whole state of man:

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 per-
fume. 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; ¹
unbutton here. [Tearing off his clothes.]

Once Lear is stripped, like Tom, of all the trappings of the sophisticated human environment and faced with the final dissolution of all the Bonds he had counted upon, he is cast back to a state where he can no longer identify himself or the world around him, or know himself, in terms of his customary place or standards, or through his ordered relations with others. And it is through this crumbling, cracking and tearing away process that he is driven to seek a re-definition of himself, of man, of the world, and the laws of this world. Bondless, he is tortured by the essential questions of tragedy: Who am I? What is man? What is the

¹ III.iv.103-112. Note how close this quotation is to the remarks of Montaigne and Fuller cited on pp.142-143.

real nature of the world and of human life in this world?

Destitute of all that distinguishes man from the beasts, Lear philosophises with those who are alike naked.¹ And his view of Tom is the truth of the world as he sees it in the tragic abyss. Tom is the "thing itself." In his agony, Lear comes to see man as nothing but such a parcel of "lendings," a feeble, poor, two-legged "animal." So, too, Gloucester looked at Tom in the storm and "such a fellow saw, / Which made me think a man a worm."²

This view of man is sometimes taken as the final definition in the tragedy of the true nature of man. Lear is, however, explicit even in his agony that it is "unaccommodated" man that is no more than such a poor naked animal.³ His view is valid for man without the ties of the Bonds, with his needs unfulfilled, brought by circumstances to the condition in which Lear, Edgar, the Fool, Kent and Gloucester find themselves. As we shall see, however, such a verdict does not take into account the reconciling loyalties of Kent and Edgar, or the love of such as Cordelia,

¹ It is interesting to note that Lear sees Tom as a philosopher, a knower of truths about man and the world. See, for example:

III.iv.158-159 : "First let me talk with this philosopher.

What is the cause of thunder?"

III.iv.161-162 : "I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban.

What is your study?"

III.iv.176 : "Noble philosopher, your company."

III.iv.180 : "I will keep still with my philosopher."

III.iv.184 : "Come good Athenian."

And, in regarding the witless, destitute Tom as the fount of wisdom and understanding of the world, Lear approaches Montaigne's attack on the pedestal to which philosophy and the powers of human reason are raised. See, for example, Bk II, chap.xii.

² IV.i.32-33. Compare also Job 25 : 6 (1599 version): "How much more man a worme, even the sonne of man, which is but a worme?"

³ Sewall, pp.4-5, moves towards the same conclusion in his analysis of the tragic vision.

which "redeems nature from the curse / Which twain have brought her to."¹ Ultimately, perhaps, Shakespeare reveals humanity as precariously balanced between the view of Hooker, which looks so much to the goodness of human nature, and the view of Montaigne, which is so sceptical of man's supposedly natural abilities and attributes (particularly the power of his reason).

This brings us to our next point. So far we have not discussed the final stripping Lear undergoes as the result of the deprivation he suffers: the loss of his reason. Let us, therefore, turn now and examine what role his madness plays in the scheme of the tragedy.

We saw earlier² that, in addition to the trappings of civilisation, man is differentiated from the animals by the power of his reason. Man can know things because he can rationalise the impressions conveyed by his senses.³ This method of reasoning and gaining knowledge is, however, fallible and limited: how much we know and understand depends on the manner in which we employ our senses, depends on our moral perceptiveness and sensitivity as well. It is interesting to look at some of the meanings given to the word "sense" by the Concise Oxford Dictionary:

Any of the special bodily faculties by which sensation is aroused; . . . person's sanity or ordinary state of mind regarded as secured by the possession of these.

Ability to perceive or feel or to be conscious of the presence or the properties of things, sensitiveness of all or any of the senses. Consciousness of.

Quick or accurate appreciation of, instinct regarding or insight

¹ IV.vi.207-208.

² See pp.35ff.

³ See, for example, Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.301: "The senses are the beginning and end of humane knowledge."

into specified matter or habit of squaring conduct to such instinct.
 Practical wisdom, judgement, common sense, conformity to these.

Meaning, way in which word, etc. is to be understood, intelligibility or coherence or possession of meaning.¹

In contrast to the meanings set out here, we have seen that Lear allowed himself to be deluded by the appearance of things, that his senses deceived him, that he was unable to perceive or feel the real properties of things, that he showed no "practical wisdom, judgement or common sense," that his interpretation of the meanings of words differed from those of others, and that his conduct has not squared with what should have been his natural instincts. As early as Act I, scene i, Kent pointed out to Lear that he was committing an error of sense or judgement, and advised him to

See better, Lear; and let me still remain
 The true blank of thine eye.²

And it was the Fool, symbol of a lack of rational sense, who reiterated such judgements upon Lear's own lack of sense, pointed out that the nose is in the middle of the face to "keep one's eyes either side's nose, that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into."³

¹Ed. H.W. and F.G.Fowler (4th ed. rev.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

²I.i.158-159.

³I.v.22-23. Compare also II.iv.68-69: "All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men." Goneril also has some pertinent comments to make on her father's poor judgement in I.i.288-292:
 "You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little: he always lov'd our sister most; and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly."

It is interesting to note how often in the imagery rational sense and the physical senses are interwoven or substituted for each other.

The physical senses come to be used as symbols of the moral senses. It is only when Lear himself is sans food, clothing, shelter, when he has been deprived of the love, pity and charity that he had hoped for, when he himself feels hunger, cold, and the fury of the elements upon his naked frame, that he comes to see and feel in the moral sense. It is only when Gloucester has been physically blinded that he gains an insight into his earlier moral blindness. Only when Lear is mad, when he has lost possession of his senses, does he have an insight into the true values of human life, the reality behind the appearance, the man beneath the tattered blanket or beneath the robes and furred gowns, the real meaning underlying the honeyed words.¹

Moreover, while Lear still had all the commodities of a normal man, his senses were dulled to moral feeling, because his main preoccupation was with his own comforts: "when the mind's free / The body's delicate,"² or, as Montaigne puts it:

Our senses are not onely altered, but many times dulled, by the passions of the mind. How many things see we, which we perceive not, if our mind be busied or distracted elsewhere?³

Gradually, however, as Lear suffers increasingly, he begins to recognise that it was this lack of insight or perception that blinded him to his

¹See Wolfgang R. Clemen, Schein und Sein bei Shakespeare (Festrede; München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1959), p.24: "Lear gerät also nicht erst, wie Othello und Macbeth, in einer Verblendung hinein, sondern er beginnt als Verblendeter."

²III.iv.11-12.

³Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.306. This brings us back also to the point made on p.82 that Lear's pride and anger are partly the cause of his downfall. Bamborough, p.47, points out that "the passions distorted the perceptive power and prevented the judgement from perceiving the true nature of things."

daughters' deceptions and made him an easy prey for their flatteries:

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 every thing
that 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 every thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-
proof.¹

Slowly he moves from being cocooned in the protective mantle of insensitive complacency to a realisation of the frailty of man and the stink of "mortality" upon his hands.² Lear becomes vulnerable, racked with feeling.³ And it is out of this new-found awareness that he speaks of exposing himself to "feel what wretches feel"⁴ and chides Gloucester, who says he sees "feelingly" how the world goes, as follows:

What! art mad? A man may see how this
world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears:
see how yond justice rails upon yond simple
thief. Hark, in thine ear; change places, and,
handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the
thief?⁵

¹ IV.vi.97-108. Compare quotation from Montaigne on p.146, and Bk II, chap.xii, p.232 :

"Touching strength, there is no creature in the world open to so many wrongs and injuries as man: we need not a whale, an elephant, nor a crocodile, nor any such other wilde beast, of which one alone is of power to defeat a great number of men; seely lice are able to make Silla give over his Dictatorship: the heart and life of a mighty and triumphant emperor is but the break-fast of a seely little worme."

² IV.vi.135.

³ Compare Clemen, Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, pp. 152-153: "Lear translates all feelings into bodily terms. His imagery thus conveys to us the impression of immense physical force or, if mental suffering is to be expressed, of immense physical pain."

⁴ III.iv.34.

⁵ IV.vi.151-156.

As Lear comes to feel, so Gloucester comes to see. Cruelly blinded, he is turned out to "smell"¹ his way to Dover. And, in this blindness, he sees for the first time the error of his ways in casting off the only son who loved him truly and depending of the falsity of Edmund. Now, he cries out with dawning insight:

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. Oh! 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.²

Despite these awakening insights, however, both he and Lear still see themselves as "abused" or "sinned against"—victims of, even if also perhaps part-instigators of, the tragic process in which they are enmeshed.

Montaigne points the moral for both Lear and Gloucester when he maintains that "we must be besotted ere we can become wise, and dazed before we can be led,"³ just as, in his madness, Lear confirms Montaigne's proposition:

What differences of sense and reason, what contrarietie of imaginations doth the diversitie of our passions present unto us? . . . Dares not Philosophie thinke that men produce their greatest effects, and neerest approaching to divinity when they are besides themselves, furious and madde? We amend our selves by the privation of reason, and by her drooping. The two naturall waies to enter the cabinet of the Gods, and there to foresee the course of the destinies are furie

¹ III.vii.92. Note how in almost all these quotations the imagery of the physical senses, reason, and insight are interwoven.

² IV.i.18-24. Compare the actions of Tancred in "Tancred and Gismunda" (ed. Dodsley, Vol.VII, p.93), V.iii., who, by putting out his eyes avenges himself upon himself for bringing about the death of his daughter through his blind parental jealousy. Note how Gloucester gathers up in the imagery he uses many of the threads of meaning discovered in our discussion of the human "commodities."

³ Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.249.

and sleepe By the dislocation that passions bring into our reason, we become vertuous; by the extirpation which either furie or the image of death bringeth us, we become Prophets and Divines.¹

As the Fool's folly has its kernels of truth, so Lear discovers truths in his madness, so that his madness becomes "matter and impertinency mix'd; / Reason in madness."²

It is also from this sharpened feeling, seeing, smelling and hearing that takes place when Lear has "lost" his senses that he moves towards a feeling for others, a sympathy and a compassion, that is reckless of self. Edgar echoes a similar experience when, in answer to Gloucester's question as to what he is, he replies that he is

A most poor man, made tame to Fortune's blows;
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,
Am pregnant to good pity.³

In Lear himself, this turning outwards to a concern for others begins, appropriately, at that moment when he acknowledges that he is going mad, losing all his normal senses:

My wits begin to turn.
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.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, pp.290-291.

² IV.vi.176-177. Compare the following quotation from Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.248: "In mad mens actions we see how fitlie folly suteth and meets with the strongest operations of our minde. Who knowes not how unperceivable the neighbourhood between follie with the liveliest elevations of a free minde is, and the effects of a supreme and extraordinarie vertue."

³ IV.vi.222-224.

⁴ III.ii.67-73.

This is the first time that Lear forsakes his preoccupation with himself, with his own woes and shabby treatment and poor condition, to spare a thought for someone else. As long as all was right in the world which he saw centred around him, he had no thought for anything but his own comfort.¹ Now, the external storm hardly affects him, so preoccupied is his mind with the unravelling of his spiritual anguish. The memory of his daughters' faults still blinds him to a certain extent to his own,² and he still speaks of himself as a "man / More sinn'd against than sinning,"³ but he does become more sensitive towards the needs and troubles of others, and he does begin to reflect on the nature and extent of his own transgressions against the Bonds. So, for example, he turns to Kent and the Fool and says:

Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own ease:
 This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
 On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.
 [To the Fool.] In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty,—
 Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep. [Fool goes in]
 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.⁴

¹ See earlier comments on p.151 (on III.iv.11-12 : "When the mind's free / The body's delicate ").

² See, for example, III.iv.12-14 :

This tempest in my mind
 Doth from my senses take all feeling else
 Save what beats there —filial ingratitude!

³ III.ii.59-60.

⁴ III.iv.23-36.

Like Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, Lear's madness is a physical sign of a spiritual disorder in the nature of the person, and, to a certain extent, it also holds good for Lear that "therein the patient / Must minister to himself."¹ Until Lear is prepared to acknowledge the nature and extent of the moral illness that besets him, no "physic" can cure him. Kent attempted to be the physician² who would cure Lear of the wrongs he was committing, but was banished for his pains. Heartstruck himself, the Fool laboured to show Lear the truth, but in vain: Lear only saw the illness in others. The beginning of Lear's moral healing comes when he does realise that his earlier disturbed senses of value and judgement were partly the cause of the breaches in the Bonds, and when, by exposing himself to suffering, he administers his own bitter medicine. Yet, as we shall see, neither Lear nor Gloucester are likely to have recovered their moral health without the solicitous care and the love of those who refuse to forsake them. The Fool, Kent, Cordelia and Edgar play an instrumental role in nursing them back to spiritual health.

In his madness, Lear also comes to regard the whole of suffering humanity with the compassion and understanding he denied Cordelia. This is true love and compassion, for he expects no return, and the personal expense no longer weighs.³ And the crucial point in this development in Lear's personality occurs when, for the first time, he prays for

¹ Macbeth V.iii.45-46.

² See I.i.163ff.

³ Compare Lüthi, p.102: "Vom Liebe Fordernden wird Lear zum Liebenden, der Weg zum Du ist gleichzeitig der Weg zu sich selber und der Weg zu Gott." It is debatable whether Lear does move closer to God in this way, but the first part of Lüthi's statement does seem valid.

all poor, naked wretches.¹

At the same time, however, as he prays for suffering humanity, Lear is concerned as well with the questions of human social justice. We must remember that, in society, the Bonds are not only formed in accordance with what is considered natural for man: there are also those Bonds that are formulated and implemented in terms of the Law. At best, though, that aspect of the Law which concerns man's judgment upon his fellow men is faulty and liable to corruption, depending as it so often does upon the appearance of things and upon the judge's own weaknesses. For this reason man must judge his own attitudes before he can condemn others, and, in his judgement of others, he must temper the Law with mercy, charity and grace.

We have seen that, in the beginning, Lear judged wrongly. It is only when he himself has been treated in what he considers an unjust manner that he comes to realise that the worst crimes are often hidden from the eyes of the human judge, that the judge himself is often as great a sinner, and that we most often judge more harshly in others those faults we are ourselves guilty of.²

¹It is interesting to note that Lear ceases to express his wishes as imperatives, but phrases them as requests. See, for example:
 IV.vii.59 : "Pray, do not mock me."
 IV.vii.71 : "I pray, weep not."
 IV.vii.84 : "Pray you now, forget and forgive."
 Gloucester similarly alters his tone and says in IV.i.47 : "Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure."

²Compare Chambers, p.34 : "Conscious of his own injustice, Lear comes to think of the sufferings of others, not of his own, and to see that what we call the 'injustice' of the gods is often in fact the injustice of men to each other." See also Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, p.252: "It was that which a Roman Senator said, that 'their predecessors had their breath stinking of garlike, and their stomacke perfumed with a good conscience'; and contrary, the men of his time outwardly smelt of nothing but sweet odours, but inwardly they stunke of all vices."

At the same time it is interesting to note that, even in his madness, Lear is concerned with the outward forms of justice. So, he appoints Edgar as the "most learned justicer,"¹ and calls upon him to take his place on the Bench with the Fool, so that they can be "o' th' commission."² Then, calling for evidence, he submits under oath to this assembly of tattered justicers that Goneril "kick'd the poor King her father."³ Even in this trial, however, there is "corruption in the place,"⁴ and the imaginary Goneril escapes her deserts.

When Lear, mad, tries his daughters for their injustice, he is in fact trying them for their violations of the natural and legal Bonds between themselves and their father. Gradually, too, the imagery dealing with the transgression of the Bonds of Nature and of man expands to contain not only breaches in the family Bonds, but references to all aspects of human depravity and vice. The usurer, the cozener, the adulterer of food, the thief, the murderer, the rapist, the scurvy politician and the slanderer form a backdrop to the action we witness. And all apparently thrive, unchecked by retributive justice. The Fool's prophecy will not

¹ III.vi.21. It is interesting to note that Cornwall, too, is concerned with the outward form of justice, whilst perverting it to his own ends. See, for example, III.vii.24-27:

Though well we may not pass upon his life [Gloucester's]
Without the form of justice, yet our power
Shall do a court'sy to our wrath, which men
May blame but not control.

Compare Goneril's reply to Albany's accusations in V.iii.158-159:

Say, if I do, the laws are mine, not thine:
Who can arraign me for't?

² III.vi.39.

³ III.vi.49.

⁴ III.vi.55.

be fulfilled in his time.¹

Before we move on to deal with the love, compassion and understanding that Lear learns, let us look at the question of love in relation to characters such as Goneril, Regan and Edmund, for their experiences in this respect are the descant to those of Lear.

Goneril and Regan both fall helplessly in love with Edmund. Whereas earlier they vied with each other in empty protestations of love for Lear in order to gain the larger portion of his estate, they now vie with each other for love itself. For love of Edmund, Goneril is prepared to commit adultery. Nay, more, to plot the deaths of her husband and sister. Both sisters, who withheld their love from Lear, now solicit with all the means available to them the love of Edmund. It is ironic that they, who had so little care of the Bonds, now have recourse to those very Bonds in their attempts to bind Edmund to them. So, we find Goneril, who does not love her lawful husband,² using the basic terminology of marriage in her letter to Edmund:

Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. You have many opportunities to cut him off; if you will want not, time and place will be fruitfully offer'd. There is nothing done if he return the conqueror; then am I the prisoner, and his bed my gaol; from the loathed warmth whereof, deliver me, and supply the place for your labour. Your wife, so I would say.³

¹See III.ii.79-96. For a catalogue of all that is vicious and depraved in human behaviour, see Lear's speeches in IV.vi.

²See, for example, Regan to Oswald (IV.v.23): "I know your Lady does not love her husband."

³IV.vi.264-270. My underlining. Note the use of imagery symbolic of the married state — the reciprocal vows, the procreative purpose, and the shared bed.

And Regan, questioning Edmund about his love for her sister, reminds him that Goneril is married, and her bed forbidden him by the laws against adultery:

Regan. Do you not love my sister?
 Edmund. In honour'd love.
 Regan. But have you never found my brother's way
 To the forfended place?
 Edmund. That thought abuses you.¹

Similarly, when Regan names Edmund "my lord and master,"² we find Albany revealing Goneril's treacherous and adulterous alliance with Edmund in terms that directly refer to the marriage ceremony:

For your claim, fair sister,
 I bar it in the interest of my wife:
 'Tis she is sub-contracted to this lord,
 And I, her husband, contradict your banes.
 If you will marry, make your loves to me,
 My lady is bespoke.³

At the same time, it is interesting to note that, although they increasingly use words connected with the family Bonds, such as husband, brother, wife, marry, bespoke,⁴ the love, the Bonds and the vows they are concerned with are almost exclusively sexual and physical. The love these two sisters feel for Edmund is one that is pre-occupied with the physical liaison they seek to establish between themselves and him. So,

¹V.i.9-11.

²V.iii.79.

³V.iii.85-90. See also Edmund's words in V.iii.228-229: "I was contracted to them both: all three / Now marry in an instant."

⁴See, for example: IV.ii.84 ("widow"); IV.v.23 ("husband"); IV.vi.270 ("wife"); V.i.10 ("my brother's way"); V.i.17 ("husband"); V.iii.62 ("brother"); V.iii.62 ("that's as we list to grace him," i.e. "husband"); V.iii.67 ("call itself your brother"); V.iii.71 ("if he should husband you"); and V.iii.85-90 ("sister," "wife," "husband," "marry," "bespoke") — quoted in note 3 above.

Goneril speaks with him as follows:

Gon. Decline your head: this kiss, if it durst speak,
 Would stretch thy spirits up into the air.
 Conceive, and fare thee well.
 Edm. Yours in the ranks of death.¹
 Gon. My most dear Gloucester! [Exit Edmund.]
 Oh! the difference of man and man.
 To thee a woman's services are due:
 My Fool usurps my body.²

It is in the same vein that she speaks of Albany's place in her bed (which she hopes Edmund will usurp) and cries out in jealousy to her sister: "Mean you to enjoy him?"³ The irony is that both the sisters frequently use the images of conception and fruitfulness, whereas their love will bear no fruit — Lear's curse still hangs over them.

Edmund's attitude towards their love for him is, initially, clearly that of the opportunist. He feels no real love for either them, but will ride the course of events, doing whatever is most politic, but giving nothing of himself:

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: to take the widow
 Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril;
 And hardly shall I carry out my side,
 Her husband being alive. Now then, we'll use
 His countenance for the battle; which being done,
 Let her who would be rid of him devise
 His speedy taking off.⁴

¹In a curious inversion of the promise of the marriage service to be joined until death they part, Edmund will, in fact, only be hers in death, (See n.3 on previous page)

²IV.ii.22-28.

³V.iii.79.

⁴V.ii.55-65. Note how the imagery of the married state is contrasted with the images of sexual union.

Edmund is ruthlessly ambitious, so totally lost in self-love, that he is incapable of feeling for others. It is only when he realises that, no matter how selfish he may have been, there are still people who love him enough to go to any lengths for him, that he undergoes a change of heart, and murmurs in amazement:

Yet Edmund was belov'd:
The one the other poison'd for my sake,
And after slew herself,¹

and resolves to do some good before he dies, "despite of mine own nature."²

It is tragically ironic that the love for which Edmund repents is a sad and shabby thing; one based on mere sexual desire and an adulterous perversion of the marriage Bonds. Yet it is love of a kind, perverted as it may be. Selfish as Goneril and Regan's love for Edmund is, it is yet a love which moves a little way toward caring enough for someone else to kill for it and to be killed for it. And, ultimately, Edmund's appreciation of this love is bought not by promises of material possessions and power offered to him by Goneril and Regan, but by their dying for him.

As we saw, Lear's great mistake had been that he attempted to purchase the love of his family with gifts of land, that he attempted to place upon relationships that cannot be measured, valued or estimated, the qualities of material measurement. He sought to rank degrees of love on quantitative scales — when love is essentially a qualitative experience. One cannot measure out the amount of love a person merits. Both Cordelia's love for Lear and her sisters' love for Edmund demonstrate that love does not look to merits; it simply is, even though the object of such love may not be worthy of it.

¹V.iii,239-241.

²V.iii.244.

Gradually, Lear begins to learn that love is not selfish, nor does it look for gain: like the vows of the marriage service, love is offered for "better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health."¹ The Bonds, while providing mutual comfort and happiness, demand self-discipline and sacrifice. Adult love should, essentially, be altruistic. Indeed, the greatest strength and weakness of people is in those whom they love, and in the quality of their love. And this love does not depend on the actions of others, nor can it be bought or induced. Cordelia continues to love her father despite his treatment of her. Kent continues to serve the master whom he loves, although his master has cast him off. Edgar still loves and succours the father in whose eyes he is discredited. On the other hand, nothing Lear can give Goneril or Regan will make them love him any more than they do — or, rather, as little as they do. The chink in Antony's armour is his love for Cleopatra: against this, even the seven-fold shield of Ajax provides no defence. The cool reason, the absence of sentimental fetters, on which Goneril and Regan pride themselves, are overthrown by their passion for Edmund.

Yet Lear, having experienced how those who should love him have treated him, still finds it difficult to believe that Cordelia — who has every reason for hating him — should still love him as much as ever. Look at the exchange between them:

Lear.	Do not laugh at me; For, as I am a man, I think this lady To be my child Cordelia.
Cord.	And so I am, I am.
Lear.	Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not: If you have poison for me, I will drink it. I know you do not love me; your sisters

¹The Book of Common Prayer.

Have, as I do remember, done me wrong;
 You have some cause, they have not.
 Cord. No cause, no cause. ¹

It is this awareness of his own transgressions against the Bonds of love between them that detains him from her, for

A sovereign shame so elbows him: his own unkindness,
 That stripp'd her from his benediction, turn'd her
 To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
 To his dog-hearted daughters, these things sting
 His mind so venomously that burning shame
 Detains him from Cordelia. ²

Cordelia, however, who has been so grossly wronged, returns to ask her father for the blessing he had withheld when he cast her off, begs him to "look upon me, Sir, / And hold your hand in benediction o'er me." ³ Between the two of them the parent-child Bonds are restored in the form in which Cordelia intended them: a form which Lear rejected until suffering taught him their true worth.

Cordelia's kiss is the kiss of forgiveness to "repair those violent harms that my two sisters / Have in thy reverence made." ⁴ Tolerance, forgiveness and forgetting become leit-motifs of the loving reconciliation between Lear and his youngest born. So, Lear begs her to

Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish, ⁵
 bear with me.

¹ IV.vii.68-75.

² IV.iii.43-48.

³ IV.vii.57-59. Note how in all three these quotations the various strands of the imagery discussed earlier are interwoven here and restated with new shades of meaning, because they are being used by characters who have learnt since then.

⁴ IV.vii.28-29.

⁵ IV.vii.83-84.

or promises that

When thou dost ask me blessings, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness.¹

It is at this stage perhaps necessary to digress for a moment and stress again a point made earlier.² This is that King Lear is not a Christian play.³ Normal redemptive Christianity such as we find set out in the New Testament does not operate in the tragedy. The repentant sinner has no hope of a grace here that will "redeem all sorrows,"⁴ nor is the sinful frailty of human nature redeemed by the birth of Christ, for he is unknown in the Lear world. There can be no Christian intervention in the scheme of King Lear, no justification by faith and grace or transcendence into eternal bliss from the sufferings of this world, for the Lear world still operates under the earlier Laws. Despite this, however, it becomes apparent that — although he is conscious of dealing with a

¹V.iii.10-11.

²See pp.31ff.

³Compare Sehart, p.9 :

"Die hohe Shakespearesche Tragödie ist an und für sich nicht Christlich; ihre Auswegslosigkeit steht im denkbar schärfsten Gegensatz zur letzten Geborgenheit des christlichen Menschen in Gott. Trotzdem hat es den Anschein, als ob gerade die Ausgesetztheit des menschlichen Dasein die nach 1600 bei Shakespeare einerseits zur unausweichlichen Tragödie führt, andererseits . . . den Ausblick auf die Notwendigkeit christlicher Weltvorstellungen und einer christlich begriffenen Transzendenz für ihn freigegeben habe. Das tragische ist bei Shakespeare nicht christlich, aber es weist zum Christlichen hin."

Compare also J. Stampfer, "The Catharsis of 'King Lear'," Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism, ed. Laurence Lerner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p.147:

"Indeed, part of the poignance in King Lear lies in the fact that its issues, and the varieties of evil that it faces, are so central to Christianity, while it is denied any of the mitigation offered by a well-defined heaven and hell, and a formal doctrine of supernatural salvation."

⁴V.iii.266.

pagan setting — Shakespeare does resort to the characteristics of the great Christian virtues and vices and the symbology of heaven and hell.

Thus, for example, the major part of Cordelia's reconciliation with Lear and his restoration by her love become an elaboration of the real meaning of the great Christian concepts. The nearest approaches to the redeeming, reconciling qualities of Christian Grace, Mercy and Love to be found in the tragedy are found perhaps in her nature and actions. She is, indeed, the figure of Love (or Charity as it is sometimes called):

Though I speake with the tongues of men and Angels, and have not love, I am as sounding brasse, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I had the gift of prophecie, and knew all secrets and all knowledge, yea, if I had all faith, so that I could remoove mountaines, and had not love, I were nothing.

And though I feede the poore with all my goods, and though I give my body, that I be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

Love suffreth long: It is bountifull: love envieth not: love doth not boast it selfe: it is not puffed up:

It doth no uncomely thing: it seeketh not her owne thing: it is not provoked to anger: it thinketh no evill:

It reioyceth not in iniquitie, but reioyceth in the trueth:

It suffreth all things: it beleeveth all things: it hopeth all things: it endureth all things.

Love doeth never fall away, though that prophecyings be abolished, or the tongues cease, or knowledge vanish away.¹

It is in this tradition that Kent earlier pointed out to Lear that Cordelia does not love him any less because her love doth not "boast it selfe,"

Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
Reverb no hollownes,²

and Cordelia herself similarly stresses that her actions in going to war against her sisters are not motivated by seeking "her owne thing," but

¹I Corinthians 13 : 1-8 (1599 version).

²I.i.153-154. See also Danby, pp.128-133, for a careful distinction between what could perhaps be called Cordelia's "selfhood" and what Lear calls "pride" — or "selfishness."

by love for her wronged father:

O dear father!
 It is thy business I go about;

 No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
 But love, dear love, and our ag'd father's right.¹

This grace, love or mercy is a quality which Lear lacked in the beginning of the tragedy, and finds through the selfless devotion of the Fool, Kent and Cordelia. And he learns something that we shall discuss again in Macbeth²: that this grace is essentially a gift freely given, not a reward for merit, as Lear's love purported to be. Portia in the Merchant of Venice outlines its essential human aspects in a manner that has great relevance for King Lear:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown;
 His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
 The attribute to awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
 But mercy is above the sceptred sway,
 It is enthroned in the heart of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself;
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, . . .
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this —
 That in the course of justice none of us
 Should see salvation; we do pray for mercy,
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy.³

Like the mercy which drops as the gentle rain from Heaven, the tears of

¹ IV. iv. 23-28.

² See pp. 353ff. Compare also the quotations of note 1, overleaf.

³ IV. i. 179-197.

Cordelia are the sign of its giving,¹ and the scalding tears of Lear are the sign of its receipt.² These tears also represent an opening of the self to emotion, to deep feeling with or for the misery of others, which is an aspect of the grace that Goneril, Regan and Edmund's cold logic denies them – an aspect that demonstrates an ideal reconciliation of human reason and passion, a deep understanding of the tragic predicament of man.³

At the same time, however, this mercy is most often seen in the tragedies in the figure of the "gracious silence,"⁴ the persons whose

¹See, for example, the Gentleman's description of Cordelia's reaction to the news of her father in IV.iii.13-25 :

Gent. And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
Her delicate cheek; it seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

Kent. O! then it mov'd her.

Gent. 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; those happy smilets
That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most belov'd,
If all could so become it.

This theme is continued with in ll.30-33:

There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
And clamour moisten'd, then away she started
To deal with grief alone.

It is interesting to note that the becoming nature of Cordelia's expression of grief accords with the reference in I Corinthians (cited on p.166) to the fact that love "doth no uncomely thing."

²See quotation on p.169.

³Compare quotation in n.1 above, and see also p.174.

⁴See Coriolanus II.i.166.

deeds are more loving than the words they can find to express their love. So, Cordelia is forced to "love and be silent,"¹ because she could not speak of her love as Lear wished to hear it. It is part of the tragedy in King Lear (and in many of Shakespeare's later tragedies) that these reconcilers of the Bonds of Nature and Law through the Bonds of Love and Grace are not powerful enough to avert the catastrophe precipitated by others. They represent the silent powers for the good who suffer in the worlds they inhabit through no fault of their own, but through their inability to dominate these worlds.²

This question of deserved and undeserved suffering lies at the heart of the tragic process. For characters such as Cordelia, Kent and Edgar its answer lies partly, perhaps, in the Christian belief that virtue is its own reward, that Heaven and Hell are within one — "Where we are is hell," says Mephistophilis in Act 2, scene ii, of Marlowe's Faustus. And it is probably in terms of such considerations that the imagery of Heaven and Hell gathers force and frequency as the tragedy moves towards its cataclysmic end.

Cordelia, for example, becomes associated with things heavenly and holy.³ Her love has the power to resurrect her father from the Hell into which his trespasses against the Bonds have plunged him:

You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave;
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.⁴

¹ I. i. 62.

² See Appendix B.

³ See pp. 166-168.

⁴ IV. vii. 45-48.

to hover outside the scope of the tragedy. Lear cried out in the storm to the great gods to seek out all those who sin against their Bonds and those of Man and Nature, and to revenge themselves against such sinners, but both Lear¹ and Gloucester² cry out to them in vain: there is no immediate and appropriate external justice in the world of King Lear. Rather does the entire play demonstrate that those who commit evil usually bring down upon themselves (and upon others who are innocent) the tragedy their trespasses set in motion.³ Thus, if one takes Gloucester's own trespasses into account, there is little justification for him to claim that "as flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods; / They kill us for their sport."⁴

This question of human trespass and culpability, of justice and judgement, is clearly underlined by the contrast in Galatians between the consequences of succumbing to the sins of the flesh or striving for the fruit of the spirit:

For brethren, ye have bene called unto libertie: onely use not your libertie as an occasion unto the flesh, but by love serve one another.

For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, which is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy selfe.

If ye bite and devoure one another, take heede least ye be consumed one of another.

Then I say, Walke in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the

¹ See, for example, II.iv.163-164; II.iv.228-230; II.iv.273-285; III.ii.49-60 and III.iv.33-36. It is interesting to note that Tancred ("Tancred and Gismunda," ed. Dodsley, pp.61-62, IV.ii.) similarly calls on the Gods for justice.

² See, for example, II.vii.64-65.

³ As we saw Edmund pointing out in I.ii.124-140. See also pp.111-112.

⁴ IV.i.36-37.

lusts of the flesh.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrarie one to another, so that ye cannot doe the same things that ye would.

And if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not vnder the Law.

Moreover the works of the flesh are manifest, which are adulterie, fornication, vncleannes, wantonnesse,

Idolatrie, witchcraft, hatred, debate, emulations, wrath, contentions, seditions, heresies,

Envie, murders, drunkennesse, gluttonie, and such like, whereof I tell you before, as I also have tolde you before, that they which doe such things, shall not inherite the kingdome of God.

But the fruite of the Spirit is love, ioy, peace, long suffering, gentlenesse, goodnesse, faith,

Meekenes, temperancie: against such there is no law.

For they that are Christs, have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lustes.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walke in the Spirit.

Let us not be desirous of vaine glorie, provoking one another, envying one another.¹

And we shall see the doom fulfilled. Edmund and Goneril and Regan, who fulfilled the lusts of the flesh, who bit and devoured one another, are consumed one of the other.² So, too, Tom lives in hell for the works of the flesh that he committed.³ But Lear, through the lessons of his suffering, and through the redeeming quality of Cordelia's love, wins through — though briefly — to the fruit of the Spirit.⁴ He comes to love, to patience, to humility, to temperance, and a brief joy.⁵ Edmund and Goneril and Regan, who made manifest the works of the flesh against the Bonds of love,

¹Galatians 5 : 13-26 (1599 version). This quotation is also interesting in the light of Gloucester's prophecy and our earlier discussion on the dichotomy in man between the spirit and the flesh.

²As Albany and the servant prophecied — see also pp.114-123.

³See quotation on p.126, and discussion on p.158 on the cataloguing of human vice and depravity.

⁴Just as Gloucester's heart "burst smilingly." See further discussion on p.178.

⁵It is interesting to note that Bradley, p.241, maintains that Lear dies in joy, believing Cordelia to be alive.

who committed adultery, who hated, who set kin at variance with kin, who murder, and are the workers of strife and sedition, come to "deadly use." Lear dies, too, for the sins he committed against the Bonds of love and grace, but he comes to understand the meaning of things, reaches a brief space of liberty where no physical discomforts or restrictions can harm him further, wins through to the liberty of the spirit, so that he can comfort Cordelia and say:

Come, let's away to prison;
 We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage¹:
 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: and we'll wear out,
 In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by th' moon.²

This victory over the things of this world, over mutability and suffering is, however, a tenuous one. How tenuous, and how dependent upon his reconciliation with Cordelia, is sharply underlined by his reaction to her death.³

The wisdom and understanding that Lear gains, though briefly, is that almost Christian fortitude which is "spirituall vnderstanding."⁴ It has nothing to do with collatable data or useful facts. Rather is it an

¹ Compare Hamlet II.ii.253-255: "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space"; and Cymbeline III.iii.42-44: "Our cage / We make a choir, as doth the prison'd bird, / And sing our bondage freely."

² V.iii.8-19.

³ See p.176.

⁴ Colossians 1 : 9 (1599 version).

insight into the "mystery of things." Like the mystery of matrimony, it deals with the purest form of the Bonds, which is supra-rational and holy. His revelation and restoration are not concerned with material things, they do not enable him to regain those powers he lost, do not even enable him to love happily ever after.

Unamuno (p.197) makes a point that is valid for King Lear :

There are two kinds of truth — the logical or objective, the opposite of which is error, and the moral or subjective, the opposite of which is falsehood. And in a previous essay I have endeavoured to show that error is the fruit of falsehood.

Both Lear and Gloucester fell into error because the premises upon which they based their actions were morally false. And it is through suffering and deprivation and through the consistent love offered to them in terms of the Bonds that they learn that wisdom and truth which should have been the natural product of their advanced age, but which they did not previously possess. And this knowledge is tempered by their insights into the frailty of human systems, the power of love and forgiveness, and the troubled path of man from birth to death:

We came crying hither:

Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.

.....

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.¹

¹IV.vi.180-185. Compare Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, pp.228-229 (including his translation from Lucr. I.v.222):

"Whereas man only (Oh, silly, wretched man) can neither goe, nor speake, nor shift, nor feede himselfe, unless it be to whine and weepe onely, except he be taught.

.....
An infant, like a shipwracke ship-boy cast from seas,
Lies naked on the ground and speechlesse, wanting all
The helpes of vitall spirit, when nature with small ease
Of throes, to see first light, from her wombe lets him fall,
Then, as is meet, with mournfull cries he fills the place,
For whom so many ils remaine in his lives race. "

Lear learns the lessons of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes:

And I gave mine heart to know wisdom and knowledge, mad-
ness and foolishness: I knew also that this is a vexation of the
spirit.

For in the multitude of wisdom is much grief, and he that
increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.¹

And in this sorrow with which knowledge afflicts man, there is a Job-like
patience to be learned.² Man may not despair nor seek by attempting to

end his life untimely, as Gloucester does, to shake his "affliction"³ off.

As Gloucester learns, man must "bear / Affliction till it do cry out itself /
'Enough, enough,' and die."⁴

¹Ecclesiastes 1 : 17-18 (1599 version). Compare also
Proverbs 9 : 10: "The beginning of wisdom is the feare of the Lord, and
the knowledge of holy things is vnderstanding."

²Note the increasing frequency with which the concept of bear-
ing tribulation patiently begins to appear in the later scenes of King Lear.
Compare Romans 5 : 3-4 (1599 version):

"Neither that onely, but also we reioyce in tribulations, know-
ing that tribulation bringeth forth patience,
And patience experience, and experience hope."

³See Gloucester's words in IV.vi.34-40:

O you mighty Gods!
This world I do renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my affliction off;
If I could bear it longer, and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff and loathed part of nature should
Burn itself out.

⁴IV.vi.75-77. See also Edgar's admonition in V.ii.9-11:

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all.

The textual notes to these lines contain a further discussion of the mean-
ing and implication of the image of "ripeness."

Yet we must not be deceived by this word "endure." As both
Lawlor and Sewall, for example, point out, endurance must not be equated
so much with a passive submission to the tragic experience, as with a
bearing of it, a tenacious wrestling with it. As the quotation in note 2,
above, makes clear, it is only in this way that the tragic character can
win through to experience, and hope.

At the same time, however, Lear's knowledge still remains to a certain extent earth-bound. It is too newly-won for him to be able to accept Cordelia's death in this life, so that he still cries out —

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all?¹

forgetting that this wisdom should also teach man the vanity of earthly life itself. Perhaps the message of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes is, again, the answer to Lear's anguished cry:

I considered in mine heart the state of the children of men, that God had purged them: yet to see too, they are in themselves as beasts.

For the condition of the children of men, and the condition of beasts are even as one condition unto them. As the one dieth, so dieth the other: for they have al one breath, & there is no excellencie of man above the beast: for all is vanity.

All go to one place, and all was of the dust, and all shall returne to the dust.

Who knoweth whether the spirit of man ascend upward, and the spirit of the beast descend downeward to the earth?²

¹V.iii.306-307.

²Ecclesiastes 3 : 18-21. See also Ecclesiastes 2 : 12 -16 (both from the 1599 version):

"And I turned to behold wisdom, and madnes, and folly: (for who is the man that will come after the King in things, which men now have done?)

Then I saw that there is profit in wisdom more then in folly: as the light is more excellent then darknesse.

For the wise mans eyes are in his head, but the foole walketh in darknesse, yet I know also that the same condition falleth to them all.

Then I thought in mine heart, It befalleth unto me, as it befall-eth to the foole. Why therefore doe I then labour to be more wise? And I said in mine heart, that this also is vanitie.

For there shall be no remembrance of the wise, nor of the foole for ever: for that that now is, in the dayes to come, shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man as doeth the foole?"

Though he has found (or assumes he has found) wisdom and understanding, Lear dies, as does the Fool. Sewall, p.78, points out that the tragedy "says nothing about salvation, only a wan restoration, after great loss, of a kind of order. . . . Lear, Gloucester, and Cordelia die, and they are as dead as Goneril, Regan, and Edmund."

The ending is only "cheerless, dark and deadly"¹ if one divorces it from the totality of the play, or expects Lear to recover enough physical and emotional stamina to be able to live happily ever after like the fairytale hero.² The catharsis does not lie therein. Rather, perhaps, does it lie in what has preceded this final dissolution.

Both Lear and Gloucester have had their visions of bliss: Gloucester's heart indeed "burst smilingly."³ They who have been stretched on the rack, mutilated and tortured, naked and afraid, have found understanding and consolation, have been helped to move from that desolate view of mankind that they saw in the storm, and come to appreciate the real nature of the Bonds in human society. They, who had never questioned the accuracy of the maps they superimposed on the real world, have been forced by the tragic process for which they were partly responsible to return to the fundamental terror of a raw world seemingly without Bonds. They have been made to ask again those questions on whose answers man's civilised world depends. And the answers they have found, although not complete or wholly accurate, have reinstated the Bonds as the highest human good. The gracious figures of the reconcilers, Kent,

¹V.iii.290. Compare Gloucester's "dark and comfortless" in III.vii.84. Both Lawlor and Sewall, for example, investigating the question of pessimism or cynicism in King Lear, find it overridden by the truths of the tragic vision. Sewall, p.79, maintains that "what keeps the atmosphere of the play still sweet is just that substance of traditional knowledge, relearned through agonizing experience, and affirmation in the face of the most appalling contradictions." Lawlor, pp.181-182, claims that "all this comes to a final truth. . . . As the greatest punishment is isolation, separate existence, so the greatest good is the holding of the natural bond, especially the gravely tender relation between parent and child."

²Compare the versions of Holinshed and the Chronicle History.

³V.iii.199. See Lear's vision of bliss in V.iii.8-19.

Cordelia, Edgar and the Fool, though not strong enough to right the wrongs of the world they live in, have been able to restore — though briefly — the parent-child, master-servant, and king-subject Bonds between themselves and Lear and Gloucester, as well as the more fundamental Bonds of Nature, and have assisted them to transcend the tragedy that overwhelmed them.¹

¹The following poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins in Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, selected and introduced by W.H.Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), p.61, provided the writer with considerable insight into the tragic process of King Lear:

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
 More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
 Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
 Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
 My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
 Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing —
 Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked "No ling-
 ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief."

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
 Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
 May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
 Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
 Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
 Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsic
Of life at once untie.¹

Like King Lear, the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra does not develop in a Christian environment. There is, however, an important difference. Antony and Cleopatra unfolds at the great watershed of Christian history — the years 40 to 30 B.C. To anyone endued with the hindsight of Christianity, this is the crucial period during which the world will be made ready for the coming of Christ. The tragedy thus takes place at a period of great transition when the old values and Bonds are about to be supplemented by the new Christian values and Bonds, and the conflicting facets of human nature shall be reconciled by the birth of the Son who will redeem mankind by His Grace.

Before we examine further the implications of this historical background for the imagery and development of the tragedy in Antony and Cleopatra, let us look briefly again at the Christian view of the history of the world.

In the beginning the world was perfect, and man without sin. Adam and Eve, however, trespassed against this natural innocence, and all humanity fell with them and was corrupted through them. So, human nature was no longer always in perfect accord with the Divine Laws of Nature implanted in it. God therefore introduced His explicit Laws to be

¹V.ii.303-304.

a guide to man in his operations. By his fallible and sinful nature, though, man trespassed against both the letter and the spirit of this Law as well. At last, God of His infinite mercy sent Christ into the world to reconcile by His Grace the war within human nature, and to redeem man from the fate of his sinning and from his inability to reconcile his being with that of the Divine ideal.

The Jews progressed historically from the state of Nature, which lasted from Adam to Moses, through the rule of Law, which was initiated by Moses, until they were redeemed by the birth of Christ, for

the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.¹

However, when Adam trespassed in Eden against natural innocence and perfection, all humanity fell with him, and when Christ died upon the Cross, all humanity was saved by him from the wrath of judgement according to the Law.² The fact that the Heathen did not know the Written Laws of God did not preclude them from operating according to the Law of Nature imprinted in them by God:

The Apostle St Paul having speech concerning the heathen saith of them, "They are a law unto themselves." His meaning is, that by the force of the light of Reason, wherewith God illuminateth every one which cometh into the world, men being enabled to know truth from falsehood, and good from evil, do thereby learn in many things what the will of God is; which will himself not revealing by any extraordinary means unto them, but they by natural discourse attaining the knowledge thereof, seem the makers of those Laws, which are indeed his, and they but only the finders of them out.³

¹John 1 : 17 (1599 version).

²See, for example, Romans 5 : 12-21.

³Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, pp.176-177. For a discussion of Cleopatra as a law unto herself, see pp.190ff.

In the Christian view the entire world is seen travailing and groaning, on the whole blindly and unknowingly, towards the birth of Christ, suffering mortally under the burden of its sins.¹ For, although God has not left himself "without witness"² in this period, and there are prophets and visionaries even amongst the pagans who have a premonition or glimpse of the Divine plan,³ only God himself fore-knows, foresees and provides for the readying of the world for the birth of the Redeemer.

It is important to remember that the Elizabethans saw the Divine Providence as that part of God's will, wisdom and care which operates in history towards this end. Philemon Holland, in his translation of Plutarch's

¹ See, for example, Romans 8 : 22 (1599 version) : "For wee know that every creature groaneth with us also and travaileth in paine together unto this present."

² Acts 14 : 17 (1599 version).

³ St Augustine, Bk XVIII, chap. xxiii, pp. 196-197, has some remarkable references to the Erythraean Sibyl and others:

"In those days a proconsul (some say) prophesied. There were many sibyls (says Varro), and not merely one. But this sibyl of Erythraea wrote some apparent prophecies of Christ For Flaccianus, a learned and eloquent man, . . . showed us a Greek book, saying it contained this sibyl's verses, wherein in one place he showed us a sort of verses so composed, that the first letter of every line being taken, they all made these words, . . . 'Jesus Christ, Son of God the Saviour.' . . ."

Now this Erythraean Sibyl, or (as some rather think) Cumaean, has not one word in all her verses (whereof these are a portion) tending to idolatry, but all are against the false gods and their worshippers, so that she seems to me to have been a citizen of the city of God. Lactantius also has prophecies of Christ out of some sibyl, but he says not from which. But that which he scatters in short fragments I think it is good to lay together, and make one large prophecy of his many little ones. This it is: 'Afterwards He shall be taken by the ungodly, and they shall strike God with wicked hands, and spit their venomous spirits in His face. . . .'"

It is interesting to note that Michelangelo, painting at the beginning of the sixteenth century, depicted upon the vault of the Sistine chapel five Sibyls as being among the numbers of those who prophesied the coming of Christ.

Moralia, clearly acknowledges the place of the Divine Providence in the ordering of Roman history — and, by implication, the destiny of Egypt:

If ever there were any State politike, in the rising, growth and declination whereof, we are to see & acknowledge the admirable providence of God, together with the strength and wisdome of man, certes the Romane empire ought to be set in the foremost range. The causes of the foundation and advancement of this great Monarchie, are otherwise considered by those whom the heavenly trueth (revealed in the holy Scripture) doth illuminate, than by the Pagans and Sages of this world, guided onely by the discourse of their reason, corrupted with sinne and ignorance of the true God. For when the question is, as touching the government of the universall world, although the soveraigne Lord thereof, use oftentimes, the spirituall and corporal vigour both of mortal men, for to execute his will; yet we may behold above it, and before any exploit of visible instruments, this great and incomprehensible wisdome of his; who having decreed in himself all things, executeth every moment his deliberations; so that in regard of him, there is nothing casuall, but all keepe a course according to his determinate and resolute will: but in respect of us, many things be accidentall; for that the counsells of that eternall and immutable wisdome are hidden from us, and appeare not but by little and little.¹

The Elizabethans thus saw the history of the world at this time especially as being ordered by God's moving hand. And, as part of this plan, it was "predestined that the government of all the world should fall into Octavius Caesar's hands,"² so that a universal peace should reign at the time of Christ's birth.

The difficulty for the Elizabethans, as for many of the early Christian thinkers, lay in explaining why the Romans (especially under Octavius Caesar) who were, after all, heathens, should have been so inordinately successful; why they should have been chosen as instruments of the Divine Providence; and why it was necessary that Egypt should be

¹ Microfilm excerpt of 1603 fol., p.627.

² Plutarch Lives (Shakespeare's Plutarch: The Lives of Julius Caesar, Brutus, Marcus Antonius and Coriolanus in the Translation of Sir Thomas North, ed. T.J.B. Spencer [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964]), p.245.

doomed to failure.

The first problem here is the relationship between human free will and Providence or Predestination. It is a question that is relevant to our understanding of Antony and Cleopatra, since, if the characters at the heart of the tragedy are merely the pawns of the Divine Will, with no right to exercise their own choice of action, they are merely victims of forces beyond their control, and not responsible in any way for the tragedy that enmeshes them.

As pointed out in the Introduction, this dilemma is usually reconciled by making God's Will to operate more largely in history, while allowing individual man his freedom of action. And, for example, Saint Augustine declares:

But howsoever the philosophers wind themselves in webs of disputations, we, as we confess the great and true God, so do we acknowledge His high will, power, and foreknowledge. Nor let us fear that we do not perform all our actions by our own will, because He, whose foreknowledge cannot err, knew before that we should do thus or thus.¹

So then, our wills are not useless, because God foresees what will be in them: He that foresaw it whatever it be, foresaw somewhat: and if He did foreknow somewhat, then by His foreknowledge there is something in our wills. Wherefore we are neither compelled to leave our freedom of will by retaining God's foreknowledge, nor by holding our will's freedom to deny God's foreknowledge.²

If one accepts this view of history and of human will and Divine Providence, then one must accept that the characters involved in Antony and Cleopatra are, therefore, responsible for their actions, and

¹ St Augustine, Bk V, chap. ix, p. 152.

² Ibid, chap. x, pp. 155-156. Compare Raleigh, Bk I, Pt I, chap. i, p. 14, quoting from Boethius: "Divine Providence (saith he) imposeth no necessity upon things that are to exist; for if all come to pass of necessity, there should neither be reward of good, nor punishment of evil."

must bear the effects that their actions and those of others have upon the course of their lives.¹

This brings us to our next question: why does God appear to be on the Roman side in the power struggle that takes place immediately before the birth of Christ? Once again, the Elizabethans were faced with a problem: that of an historical fait accompli. And it is a problem that we find St Augustine attempting to resolve under such headings as, "How the ancient Romans obtained this increase of their kingdom at the true God's hand, seeing that they never worshipped him"²; "Of the temporal rewards that God bestowed upon the Romans' virtues and good conditions"³; "That the true God, in whose hand and providence all the state of the world consists, did order and dispose of the monarchy of the Romans."⁴

The first point that emerges from St Augustine's discussion, for example, is that God is considered to have rewarded the Romans only

¹ Compare, for example, Walter Oakeshott, "Shakespeare and Plutarch," Talking of Shakespeare, ed. John Garrett (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), p.116:

"To allege that the characters in Greek tragedy were helpless victims of Destiny is to argue from a single play, the Oedipus Rex. In most, says Professor Thomson, the victims having been conquered by Fate, suffered for some human reason; for something in their own characters. So also if Antony had been a different kind of man and Cleopatra a different kind of woman their own history, together with the history of the world, would have been different. In this way too Shakespeare was approaching a Greek view of Tragedy, mediated to him not through Seneca but through Plutarch."

Such a view does not, however, fully take into account the Divine Providence which the Elizabethans saw operating in history.

² St Augustine, Bk V, chap.xii.

³ Ibid., chap.xv.

⁴ Ibid., chap.xxi. In Bk V, chap.i, however, Augustine makes it clear that this was the Divine Providence in operation, that "neither the Roman Empire nor any other kingdom had any establishment from the power of fortune or from the stars."

with temporal blessings and power:

Wherefore God, that only true author of felicity, Himself giveth kingdoms to good and to bad; not rashly, nor casually, but as the time is appointed, which is well known to Him, though hidden for us; unto which appointment notwithstanding He does not serve, but as a lord sways it, never giving true felicity but to the good.¹

As will become apparent in Antony and Cleopatra, Caesar's dominion is, moreover, only over the things of this earth, and only over the bodies of men, not of the kingdom of heaven or the things of the spirit. Rome's success is, therefore, limited.

This quotation from St Augustine raises another point that is crucial to an understanding of the Christian approach to human history: that of the "time appointed" for the rising and declination of various kingdoms. And the epoch we are dealing with in Antony and Cleopatra is that in which it is the turn of Rome to rise to the pinnacles of power. Samuel Daniel elaborates on this subject in his "Cleopatra":

O thou and I haue heard, and read, and knowne
 Of like proude states, as woefully incombred,
 And fram'd by them, examples for our owne:
 Which now among examples must be numbred.
 For this decree a law from high is giuen,
 An ancient Canon, of eternall date,
 In Consistory of the starres of heauen,
 Entred the Booke of vnauoyded Fate;
 That no state can in height of happinesse,
 In th' exaltation of their glory stand:
 But thither once arriu'd, declining lesse,
 Ruine themselues, or fall by others hand.
 Thus doth the euer-changing course of things
 Runne a perpetuall circle, euer turning:
 And that same day that hiest glory brings,
 Brings vs vnto the point of backe-returning.
 For sencelesse sensuality, doth euer
 Accompany felicity and greatnesse.

 When yet our selues must be the cause we fall,

¹Ibid., Bk IV, chap.xxxiii, p.141.

Although the same be first decreed on hie;
 Our errors still must bear the blame of all,
 This must it be; earth aske not heauen why¹;

and his Cleopatra says:

But what know I if th' heavens haue decreed,
 And that the sinnes of Egypt haue deseru'd
 The Ptolomies should faile, and none succeed,
 And that my weakenes was thereto reseru'd,
 That I should bring confusion to my state,
 And fill the measure of iniquity.²

Daniel thus makes it clear that Rome succeeded and Egypt succumbed not only because this was a part of the Divine Plan, but also because of the natures of the tragic characters concerned: just as the kingdom of Rome will yield to the kingdom of Christ, because the qualities represented by Octavius are no match for the qualities of Christ.³ Saint Augustine provides us with an elaborate list of the qualities of Rome that lead to its temporal success; he quotes Virgil on their "art of domination

¹Samuel Daniel, "Cleopatra," The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1885), Vol. III, p.51, ll.543-566.

St Augustine, Bk V, chap.xxi, p.171, has this to say:

"This one God, therefore, that neither stays from judging nor favouring of mankind, when His pleasure was, and whilst it was His pleasure, let Rome have sovereignty: so did he with Assyria and Persia who (as their books say) worshipped only two gods, a good and a bad: to omit the Hebrews, of whom I think sufficient is already spoken."

²Daniel, "Cleopatra," p.36, ll.99-104. Compare also Sir Thomas Browne, The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), Vol. I, Religio Medici, Pt I, p.27:

"All cannot be happy at once; for, because the glory of one State depends upon the ruine of another, there is a revolution and vicissitude of their greatnesse, which must obey the swing of that wheele, not moved by intelligences, but by the hand of God, whereby all States arise to their Zenith and verticall points, according to their predestinated periods. For the lives not onely of men, but of Commonweales, and the whole world, run not upon a Helix that still enlargeth; but on a Circle, where, arriving to their Meridian, they decline in obscurity, and fall under the Horizon againe."

and sovereignty over others,"¹ and goes on to say that,

These arts they were the more perfect in, through their abstinence from pleasures, from covetousness after riches (the corrupters both of body and mind), from extorting from the poor citizen, and from bestowing on beastly players.²

Ambition, Virtue and Honour also find a place in his list of their virtues, as does the fact that "all nations very near received their laws."³ These are the virtues of the soldier and the statesman, which are in strong contrast to the sensual excesses and the lust that Daniel catalogues as the contributors to Cleopatra's fall. It is also under the rule of Caesar that the wars that had racked the "world"⁴ for so long were brought to an end, and a "universal peace" reigned.

In part, therefore, we can expect to find that the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra is determined by the time in which they live. Their time is "out of joint,"⁵ is approaching the nadir set down for it; the line of the Ptolomies is coming to an end and will drag down with it all those who align themselves with its cause.

At the same time, however, those who are caught up in this process will, by their very natures, by the personal and interpersonal Bonds they fulfil or are unable to fulfil, by their decisions and deeds, and by the effects of these, be the agents of their tragedy or success.

¹ St Augustine, Bk V, chap. xii, p. 158.

² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³ *Ibid.*, chap. xv, p. 163. Note how many of these characteristics are represented in Shakespeare's treatment of the world of Rome.

⁴ That is, the world that is important in the context of Christian history.

⁵ *Hamlet* I.v. 189. This will be dealt with further later in this chapter — see, for example, pp. 233-235 and 264-265.

As we shall see, the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra is also, however, a tragedy about the different interpretations of the world. No other Shakespearean tragedy has, in fact, so many references to the world and its component elements.¹ And these interpretations tend to be largely conflicting and irreconcilable. On the one hand we have those who interpret the world according to the Bonds of Law, who see it as geographical and political unit, tangible, definable: the solid earth, the "three-nook'd world,"² the "moiety of the world,"³ the "third part of the world."⁴ This is the view of Rome and Caesar. On the other hand, we are made aware of the world interpreted according to the Bonds of Nature; seen in its rich created magnificence, with its fluxes, the ebb and flow of its tides, its "visiting moon."⁵ Here is the world of aesthetic experience and sensual delight, where messengers can be set in a "shower of gold,"⁶ and "realms and islands were / As plates dropp'd from his pocket"⁷; a world symbolised by the attitudes of the Egyptians, where Antony and Cleopatra are demi-gods, the light and the life. And into Caesar's mouth is put the analysis of all that is irreconcilable between these two ways of looking at the world and living in it. When they come to tell him that Antony is dead, he says,

I must perforce
Have shown to thee [Antony] such a declining day,
Or look on thine: we could not stall together,
In the whole world.⁸

¹ See Spurgeon, pp. 350-354.

² IV.vi.6.

³ V.i.19.

⁴ II.vii.90.

⁵ IV.xv.68.

⁶ II.v.45.

⁷ V.ii.91-92.

⁸ V.i.37-40.

There is, however, another world in this tragedy. And an understanding of its essence will, as we shall see, form part of the revelation of Antony and Cleopatra. It is the world of "dungy earth,"¹ the transitory terrestrial world, the finite, the limited world of humanity without the Bonds of Grace to reconcile the Bonds of Nature and of the Law to provide man with a means of escape to an eternal, spiritual world. And it is in terms of this world that we will understand why Antony's death makes no "greater crack,"² why both of them seek escape to another more infinite, immutable world through death.

As we saw in the Introduction, two key principles, in accordance with which man fulfilled the Bonds between himself and his society, operated in the world before the birth of Christ: the principle of Nature and the principle of Law. In Antony and Cleopatra we are presented with a dramatisation of these two principles at work. Rome comes to stand for life in accordance with the Bonds dictated by the principle of Law, and Egypt for life in accordance with the Bonds dictated by the principle of Nature.

However, just as in King Lear it became necessary to dissect into isolated components the various elements of the body of action and imagery that, functioning as a whole, makes up the tragic picture, so we shall similarly have to segment Antony and Cleopatra.

Egypt as the representation of the Bonds of Nature also partakes of the several interpretations given to these Bonds. There is, as we have seen, that Bond of Nature which has its place in the Christian view of the history of the world. At the same time, there is a view of the Bonds of

¹I.i.35.

²See V.i.14-19.

Nature whose roots lie in an amalgam of the literature and thought of Shakespeare's classic predecessors. We tend to try and compartmentalise this body of myths, beliefs, scientific observation and religious faith, forgetting that the Elizabethans happily formulated their general concept of the Bonds in terms embracing all these diverse origins. We shall see that, when Shakespeare deals with Nature in Egypt, he is dealing at once with the Christian view of the Law of Nature that operated among the Gentiles and with the classical traditions inherited by his time. So, too, the treatment of the Roman approach to the Bonds of Law cannot be confined entirely to the Christian interpretation of the Bonds of Law in society.

Much of what was said in the chapter on King Lear about the Bonds of Nature and Law, and about the dichotomy in man between body and mind and between natural instincts and reason, holds good for Antony and Cleopatra. The difference in Antony and Cleopatra lies in the manner in which these concepts take shape and meaning. Let us therefore look more closely at the worlds of Egypt and Rome in an attempt to discover what role Shakespeare's treatment of them plays in the origin and development of the tragedy.

Cleopatra and Egypt could perhaps be seen as the epitome of lawlessness, excess, lack of restraint and wanton lust. Such an approach would, however, be marred by bias towards the Roman view, and would ignore the key characteristics that define the life-style and nature of the Egyptians, and of their queen. Life in Egypt is dependent upon certain very clear principles, laws, or Bonds, which, although they differ radically from those that control the Roman way of life, are yet valid as laws. And the Bonds which operate in Egypt fall under the ambit of the Laws of Nature.

It becomes apparent, however, that, in dealing with the Bonds of Nature in Antony and Cleopatra, we approach them at a more elemental level than the Bonds of Nature operating in familial and social existence that we examined in King Lear. So, Nature in relation to Egypt is seen primarily as a creative principle, as the commingling of the elements, as flux and variety, as feeling and sense experience, as enspiriting force and essence. It is the Nature of seasons and cycles, of the moon's phases and the sun's solstices, of procreation, birth and death, ebbing and flooding, drought and plenty, sprouting, withering or coming to harvest. And in this world,

the Earth performeth her office, according to the Law of God in nature: for it bringeth forth the bud of the Herb, which seedeth seed, &c. and the Beast, which liveth thereon. He gave a law to the Seas, and commanded them to keep their bounds; which they obey. He made a decree for the Rain, and a way for the Lightning of the Thunders. He caused the Sun to move, and to give light, and to serve for signs, and for seasons. Were these as rebellious as Man, for whose sake they were created, or did they once break the Law of their natures and forms; the whole World would then perish, and all return to their first Chaos, darkness and confusion.¹

There is a tradition which maintains that Egypt was the cradle of creation, that life sprang from the operation of the sun upon the slime left by the overflowing Nile:

And thus saith Herodotus, The land of Egypt doth not onely owe the fertilitie, but her selfe also vnto the slimie encrease of Nilus . . .

 How that the world, being framed out of that Chaos, or first matter, the lighter things ascending, the heauier descending, the Earth yet imperfect, was heated and hardned by the Sunne, whose violent heat begat of her slimie softnesse certaine putride swellings, couered with a thinne filme, which beeing by the same heat ripened, brought forth all manner of creatures. This muddy generation was (say they) first in Egypt, most fit, in respect of the strong soile, temperate ayre, Nilus ouerflowing, and exposed to the Sunne, for to beget and nourish them: and yet retaining some such vertue, at the new slaking of the riuer, the Sunne more desirous (as it were) of this Egyptian Concubine, whom the waters had so long detained from his sight,

¹ Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p. 215.

ingendring in that lustfull fit many Creatures, . . . These newly-hatched people could not but ascribe Diuinitie to the Author of their humanity, by the names of Osiris and Isis, worshipping the Sunne and Moone, accounting them to be Gods, and euerlasting: adding in the same Catalogue, vnder dignified names of Iupiter, Vulcan, Minerva, Oceanus, and Ceres, the fiue Elements of the world, Spirit, Fire, Aire, Water, & Earth.¹

Ovid, too, writes of the fertility of the Nile and parallels the creation of the first creatures after the Flood with the creative force of the Nile slimes and the sun:

The lustie earth of owne accorde soone after forth did bring,
According to their sundrie shapes eche other living thing,
Assoone as that the moysture once caught heate against the Sunne,
And that the fat and slimie mud in moorish groundes begunne
To swell through warmth of Phebus beames, and that the fruitfull seede
Of things well cherisht in the fat and lively soyle indeede,
As in their mothers wombe, began in length of time to grow,
To one or other kinde of shape wherein themselves to show.
Even so when that the seven mouthed Nile the watrie fieldes forsooke,
And to his auncient chanell eft his bridled streames betooke,
So that the Sunne did heate the mud, the which he left behinde,
The husbandmen that tilde the ground, among the cloddes did finde,
Of sundrie creatures sundrie shapes: of which they spie'd some
Even in the instant of their birth but newly then begonne,
* * * * *
For when that moysture with the heate is tempred equally,
They do conceyve, and of them twaine engender by and by
All kind of things. For though that fire with water aye debateth
Yet moysture mixt with equall heate all living things createth.
And so those discordes in their kinde, one striving with the other,
In generation doe agree and make one perfect mother,²

Let us examine more closely the relationship between the various aspects of the myths quoted here and the Egyptian world depicted in Antony and Cleopatra.

¹ Samuel Purchas, Purchas His Pilgrimage, Or the Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in all Ages and Places Discovered, From the Creation Unto this Present; in Foure Parts (London: printed by William Stansby for Henrie Featherstone, 1613), Bk VI, chaps i and iii, pp. 470 and 470-471 (mispagination).

² Ovid Metamorphoses (Shakespeare's Ovid; Being Arthur Golding's Translation of the Metamorphoses, ed. W.H.D.Rouse [London: Centaur Press, 1961]), pp.30-31, ll.495-518.

Creation itself implies an ordering of chaos, a process of giving form and shape, which is the antithesis of lawlessness. It is interesting to note, then, that Cleopatra becomes the embodiment of this creative principle in Nature. Shakespeare links her clearly with the goddess Isis,¹ who

is the female principle in Nature, and that which is capable of receiving all generation, in virtue of which she is styled by Plato "Nurse", and "All-receiving", but by the generality, "The one of numberless names", because she is converted by the Logos (Reason) into, and receives, all appearances and forms. But she has implanted in her nature the love for the first and Supreme of all, the which is identical with the Good, and this she continually longs after and continually pursues: whereas the part that belongs to the Bad one she flees from and repels, though she is the field and material for them both; of herself she is always inclining to the Better one and permitting it to generate and discharge into herself emissions and likenesses, wherewith she rejoices and is glad to be impregnated, and to be filled with births — for birth is an image of existence in matter and that which is born is a copy of that which is.²

¹See, for example, III.vi.16-19:

. . . She
In the habilments of the goddess Isis
That day appear'd, and oft before gave audience,
As 'tis reported, so.

See also all the oaths that the Egyptians swear by Isis, and the comments of Michael Lloyd, "Cleopatra as Isis," Shakespeare Survey, No.12, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), pp.88-94.

Some aspects of popular mythology are perhaps worth noting here. Isis was traditionally the moon goddess, and it is interesting to observe how often the moon is depicted as Cleopatra's planet (e.g. V.ii.239-240: "Now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine"). There is also a myth which connects Isis with Io, who was turned into a cow by Zeus after Hera had accused him of infidelity with her. Hera then set a gadfly to sting Io and chase her all over the world. One version has Io finally coming to rest in Egypt, where she founded the worship of Isis. This might explain the strange image of Cleopatra as "Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt, — . . . The breeze upon her, like a cow in June," in III.x.10-14. (The textual notes define "breeze" as "gadfly.") It is also interesting to note that Set (whose symbol was the ass's ears: could this be Caesar, the "ass / Unpolicied" of V.ii.306-307?) and Osiris (whose symbol was the bull: could this be the Antony of III.xiii.126-128, who would "outroar / The horned herd"?) are the rivals in Egyptian mythology who contend for the favours of the moon-goddess, Isis. Set ruled the second half of the year and annually murdered Osiris, ruler of the first half: does the imagery of Caesar's rising and Antony's setting star fit in here?

²Plutarch Moralia (Loeb edition, Vol.V, pp.129-131).

This creative power springs , moreover , from the discordant harmony of the elements themselves . Through the melting , mingling , dissolution and regrouping of the opposed elements of air , fire , earth and water in Nature , Nature herself is able to produce an infinite variety of forms . And the sun and moon are catalysts of these myriad changes . Ovid's description of the teachings of Pythagoras stresses this mutability and creative flux:

And theis that wee call Elements doo never stand at stay .
 The enterchaunging course of them I will before yee lay .
 Give heede thertoo . This endlesse world conteynes therin I say
 Foure substances of which all things are gendred . Of theis fower
 The Earth and Water for theyr masse and weyght are sunken lower .
 The other cowple Aire and Fyre the purer of the twayne
 Mount up , and nought can keepe them downe . And though there doo remayne
 A space betweene eche one of them: yit every thing is made
 Of thesame fowre , and intoo them at length ageine doo fade .
 The earth resolving leysurely dooth melt too water sheere ,
 The water fyned turnes too aire . The aire eeke purged cleere
 From grossenesse , spyreth up aloft , and there becommeth fyre .
 From thence in order contrary they back ageine retyre .
 Fyre thickening passeth intoo Aire , and Ayër wexing grosse
 Returnes to water: Water eeke congealing into drosse ,
 Becommeth earth . No kind of thing keepes ay his shape and hew .
 For nature loving ever change repayres one shape a new
 Uppon another , neyther dooth there perrish aught (trust mee)
 Inall the world , but altring takes new shape . For that which wee
 Doo terme by name of being borne , is for to gin too bee
 Another thing than that it was : And likewise for too dye ,
 Too cease to bee the thing it was . And though that varyably
 Things passe perchance from place to place : yit all from whence they came
 Returning , doo unperrished continew still the same .¹

¹ Ovid , p.300 , ll.261-284 . Compare Bamborough , p.24 :
 "The elements thus formed as it were a circle with joined hands , continually kept in motion by their mutual attraction and repulsion . Again , a major characteristic of the elements was Mutability ; they were continually changing one into another by a process of rarefaction or condensation ."

Lovejoy , pp.93-96 , quoting from Fludd (Mosaicall Philosophy , 1659) , has some interesting comments on the principle of Good as "volunty , " growth , movement , plenitude , light and warmth , as opposed to Evil , which is "nolunty , " rest , cessation of movement and development , cold and dark — the abyss or vacuum .

In Antony and Cleopatra this creative force of Nature is symbolised in the world of Egypt by the ebb and flow of the Nile. The whole welfare of the land depends on the "o'erflowing Nilus,"¹ and their science is aimed at harnessing this abundance:

Thus do they, sir: they take the flow o' the Nile
By certain scales i' the pyramid; they know,
By the height, the lowness, or the mean, if dearth
Or foison follow. The higher Nilus swells,
The more it promises: as it ebbs, the seedsman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.²

This description is directly in line with the myths quoted earlier and in note 2, below. Moreover, as we shall see, this type of calculation and measuring differs considerably from that practised in Rome. It is also interesting to note that it is Antony, in his oath to Cleopatra by the "fire/

¹ I.ii.47.

² II.vii.17-23. Compare the following description from Purchas, Pilgrimes, Vol.VI, pp.19-20:

"In the midst of Nilus, . . . standeth the Ile called Michias, that is to say, The Ile of Measure; in which Ile (according to the inundation of Nilus) they have a kind of device, invented by the ancient Egyptians, whereby they most certainly foresee the plentie or scarcitie of the yeare following throughout the Land of Egypt Upon another side of the Iland standeth an house alone by it selfe, in the midst whereof there is a fouresquare Cisterne or Chanell of eigh- teene cubits deepe, whereinto the water of Nilus is conveyed by a certaine Sluce under the ground. And in the midst of the Cisterne there is erected a certaine Pillar, which is marked and divided into so many cubits, as the Cisterne it selfe containeth in depth. And upon the seventeenth of June when Nilus beginneth to overflow, the water thereof conveyed by the said Sluce into the Chanell, increaseth daily The foresaid device or experiment of the increase of Nilus, is this that followeth: If the water reacheth onely to the fif- teenth cubit of the foresaid Pillar, thy hope for a fruitfull yeare follow- ing: but if it stayeth betweene the twelfth cubit and the fifteenth, then the increase of the yeare will proove but meane: if it resteth betweene the tenth and twelfth cubits, then is it a signe that Corne will be sold ten Duckats the bushell: But if it ariseth to the eighteenth cubite, there is like to follow great scarcitie, in regard of too much moysture: and if the eighteenth cubite be surmounted, all Egypt is in danger to be swallowed up by the inundation of Nilus."

That quickens Nilus' slime,"¹ who underlines the parallel between these creation myths and Shakespeare's delineation of the world of Egypt.

It is in keeping with this tradition, too, that we find references to the seasonal cycle, to ploughing, reaping, harvesting, fruition and sowing in the life of Egypt.² The fortune-telling scene, for example, contains a running commentary on the fruitfulness and fertility of the characters concerned³ — Cleopatra depicts her idealised Antony, too, in terms that borrow from this tradition:

For his bounty,
There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping,⁴

and Alexas describes his mood as

Like to the time o' the year between the extremes
Of hot and cold, he was nor sad nor merry.⁵

This fertility of Egypt depends upon the interaction of earth and water under the warmth of the sun, depends upon a melting, a mingling, a dissolution and a rotting from which new life will spring.⁶ Essentially, therefore, the Egyptian life style is characterised by impermanence, by fluidity, instability, change, creativity and unpredictability.

¹ I.iii.68-69.

² It is also interesting to note that it is often the Romans who use such terms to characterise the Egyptian way of life.

³ I.ii.

⁴ V.ii.86-88. My underlining.

⁵ I.v.51-52. Note how Cleopatra describes this as a "heavenly mingle" (1.59), that is, the humours in him are commingled in the ideal proportions.

⁶ Note how often these words and images appear in the text as characteristics of the nature of Egypt, her people, and their way of life.

Cleopatra herself is the chief symbol of the Bonds of Nature in operation in the life of Egypt. As the "serpent of old Nile,"¹ her personality is very much like that of the crocodile discussed during the world-sharers' banquet. Like the crocodile, she is what she is:

Lep. What manner o' thing is your crocodile?
 Ant. It is shap'd, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.
 Lep. What colour is it of?
 Ant. Of its own colour too.
 Lep. 'Tis a strange serpent.
 Ant. 'Tis so, and the tears of it are wet.²

And in this respect her myriad-fold personalities, which we see in every facet in the course of the tragedy, are contrasted very strongly with one of the rare unfavourable comments on Octavia, who

creeps:
 Her motion and her station are as one:
 She shows a body, rather than a life,
 A statue, than a breather.³

Cleopatra is always herself, but this self has so many facets that it is elusive, and, like Isis, she is perhaps best called the "one of numberless names."⁴

¹ I.v.25.

² II.vii.40-49.

³ III.iii.18-21. Bamborough, p.95, points out that this description of Octavia characterises her as one of phlegmatic temperament. This is in strong contrast to Antony, in whom there is a "heavenly mingle" of the humours, and who, if anything, inclines towards the sanguine; "Merry, gentle, generous, quick-witted, brave, amorous, and fond of food and drink" (p.92).

⁴ See quotation from Plutarch on p.193. It is interesting to observe how many names Cleopatra is called: she is Cleopatra, a "gipsy" (I.i.10), a "strumpet" (I.i.13), a "witch," a "charm," a "spell" (IV.xii.16, 30, 47), she is Egypt (IV.xiv.15), a "queen" (see particularly the robing scene of V.ii) and "no more but e'en a woman" (IV.xv.13). See also discussion on pp.256-257.

In her ever-changing moods and forms and appearances, Cleopatra therefore comes to represent the "infinite variety"¹ of Nature. Her being is like the wax of which Ovid writes:

And even as supple wax with ease receyveth fygures straunge,
And keeps not ay one shape, ne bydes assured ay from chaunge,
And yit continueth alwayes wax in substaunce: So I say
The soule is ay the selfsame thing it was, and yit astray
It fleeteth intoo sundry shapes.²

Whether she be termagant, imperious queen, Niobe all tears, tender mistress, temptress, roistering chum, or creator of any other role, she is always Cleopatra.

She sums up in her nature, too, the whole birth-life-death cycle of Nature, and is capable of transmitting it to those with whom she comes in contact, so that

great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow
There would he anchor his aspect, and die
With looking on his life,³

just as

She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;
He plough 'd her, and she cropp'd.⁴

¹ II.ii.236. Compare Hooker, Vol.I, Bk I, p.152:

"The general end of God's external working is the exercise of his most glorious and most abundant virtue. Which abundance doth shew itself in variety, and for that cause this variety is oftentimes in the Scripture exprest by the name of riches."

For a further and more detailed discussion of the concepts of Plenitude and Variety, see the work of Lovejoy.

² Ovid, p.298, ll.188-192. Compare this with the quotation on p.197 concerning the crocodile, which, "the elements once out of it, it transmigrates."

³ I.v.31-34.

⁴ II.ii.227-228. Note the use of the imagery of harvesting. See also pp.200-201 for a discussion of her limitations in this respect.

And this is perhaps one of the secrets of her great fascination for the Romans, who are at one remove in their life-style from such vital elemental processes.

Cleopatra herself also has great celerity in dying upon occasion, and is as quickly brought back to life. Look, for example, at the exchange between Enobarbus and Antony upon this subject:

- Ant. I must with haste from hence.
 Eno. Why, then we kill all our women. We see how mortal an unkindness is to them; if they suffer our departure, death's the word.
 Ant. I must be gone.
 Eno. Under a compelling occasion let women die: it were pity to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause, they should be esteemed nothing. Cleopatra catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly. I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment: I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.¹

There is an accord or union between Cleopatra and the life processes, which can make of even death a lover. And it is a concept which becomes more meaningful when we remember the earlier quotations from writers such as Ovid and Plutarch on the perpetually regenerating cycle of Nature through the stages of birth-death-decay.

And there is in this unbridled force of Nature a power and a potency which contrasts strongly with the control that is exercised by those who rule their lives according to Positive Law or measure. It is

¹I.ii.129-142. There is a fascinating parallel between the latter section of this quotation and Antony's later image of himself running into death as into a lover's bed (IV.xiv.99-101), as well as between this quotation and their later deaths by suicide. Note, too, the characteristically Roman attitude of Enobarbus here: the choice between love for a woman and the necessities of a great cause should fall upon the great cause.

vividly summed up in the following description of Cleopatra:

I saw her once
Hop forty paces through the public street,
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
That she did make defect perfection,
And, breathless, power breathe forth.¹

At the same time, however, Cleopatra is unable to "quicken"² the dying Antony with her kiss and, indeed, her kiss is mortal to Iras.³ It becomes apparent that, as well as bringing life and abundance and fertility to Egypt, the Nile (and Cleopatra, its symbol) can represent death, dissolution and decay, can "blow" into "abhorring"⁴; the fecundity of Nature can bring forth both a fruitful harvest and idle weeds. The limitation of undirected natural energy in the life of Egypt and Cleopatra lies in the fact that it can be wasteful and purposeless, can "rot itself

¹ II.ii.228-232.

² IV.xv.39.

³ See V.ii.292: "Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall?"

⁴ See, for example, Cleopatra's references to such a fate:

Ah, dear, if I be so [cold-hearted],
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
Dissolve my life; the next Caesarion smite
Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey! (III.xiii.158-167)

Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me, rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring; rather make
My country's high pyramides my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains. (V.ii.57-62)

Note how many of the image themes discussed are caught up in these two quotations.

with motion"¹ in its yielding to the stream and flow of living. It is a problem which worries Antony, for example. He first refers to it when his duties in Rome are brought home to him as he dallies in Egypt. Thus we find him saying:

O then we bring forth weeds,
When our quick minds lie still, and our ills told us
Is as our earing,²

and he resolves that

I must from this enchanting queen break off,
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know
My idleness doth hatch.³

At the same time the life of Egypt, involved as it is with the Bonds of Nature at their elemental level, is concerned with a knowledge and awareness of the world gained through the medium of sense-experience, more than through the abstracting powers of human reason. In no other Shakespearean play is the kaleidoscope of the senses so fully exploited. Egypt is the field for the sensual experiences at their richest and most varied, and Cleopatra is its chief representative. The compendium of Cleopatra's appeals is put, surprisingly, into the mouth of Enobarbus; he describes her first meeting with Antony as follows:

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne
Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made

¹I.iv.47 — describing the public, "this common body."

²I.ii.106-108.

³I.ii.125-127. Bamborough, p.74, points out that "idleness sowed the seeds of mental and physical illness in the body as weeds grew in untilled ground" — an apt description of the foregoing quotation.

The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar'd all description: she did lie
In her pavilion — cloth of gold, of tissue —
O'er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her,
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.

.
 Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
 So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,
 And made their bends adornings. At the helm
 A seeming mermaid steers: the silken tackle
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
 That yarely frame the office. From the barge
 A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
 Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthron'd i' the market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.¹

There is a total appeal to the senses here, a total involvement in the Egyptian life-style, which is intensely demanding and intensely vital. It is interesting to note Shakespeare's image additions to the version given in North's Plutarch. Almost all his changes contribute to two main effects: they increase the sensual richness of her appearance, and they do this in such a way that they imply that even Nature herself was enchanted with her. The winds, the water and the air themselves were half in love with her, "amorous" of the oar-strokes of her barge, "love-sick." Sight, sound, touch, smell, all mingle in exquisite harmony.

¹ II.ii.191-218. My underlining. Most sections underlined also represent deviations from Plutarch Lives (trans. North, Penguin ed., pp.201-202). The reference to the "gap" in Nature is interesting, because it was a principle of the concept of the great Chain of Being that the continuity of the Chain was such that there was no gap or break in it. See also Lovejoy, p.95, quoting from Fludd, on Nature's "horror vacui."

According to Raleigh, these delights of the senses form part of the Natural Law which provides man with three appetites, of which the second is

of those things which appertain unto us, as we have sense. Whence, by the law of Nature, we desire the delights of every sense; but with such moderation, as may neither glut us with satiety, nor hurt us with excess.¹

Enobarbus replies, as it were, on behalf of Cleopatra:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her, when she is riggish.²

Let us, therefore, look more closely at these two quotations from Act II, scene ii, and examine some of the chains of imagery connected with sense-experience that they raise.

Essentially, the images of seeing, hearing, tasting and smelling³ that are so intrinsically bound up with the world of Egypt as we see it in Antony and Cleopatra are symbolic of an involvement in the world through sensual perception rather than through rational deduction — as the Romans practise it.⁴ The senses are also one of the key means by which the passions and affections are aroused. And this knowledge of things by the fact that they are experienced, by the fact that they are

¹Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, p.215. See also Burton, Pt I, Sec.I, Mem. 2, Subs.viii, on Appetite.

²II.ii.235-240.

³Burton, Pt I, Sec. I, Mem.I, Subs.vi, ranks the five senses in the following order under the outward part of the apprehensive faculty of the sensible soul: sight (which is the highest of the senses), followed by hearing, smelling, taste and touch — which is the "last of the senses, and most ignoble."

⁴See pp.210ff. for a discussion of the Roman characteristics.

felt, seen, smelt, tasted, or heard, is ultra-rational, instinctive and spontaneous: it is a part of the greatness of the Egyptian life, as well as a factor in its limitation. We must remember that, unlike reason, which is possessed only by man and not by beasts, this sense-awareness of man belongs to the lower part of his nature — that part of his nature which he has in common with the beasts.¹ Moreover, ever present in the Elizabethan attitudes towards this subject is the consideration that it was this sensuality that enabled the Devil to tempt Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and thereby condemned man to mortality.

We therefore find that the imagery dealing with the senses develops a wide range of meaning and symbolism in the play.

The imagery of tasting, food and feasting, for example, represents physical nourishment and sensual satisfaction; it represents plenty and abundance; it represents Antony's hunger for Cleopatra's delights; and the wide variety of tastes she can satisfy. Indeed, Cleopatra is often represented as a food. We hear that she was a "morsel for a monarch,"² that Julius Caesar grew "fat with feasting" in Egypt,³ and that

¹ See the discussion on pp. 35-36 of the chapter on King Lear, and Montaigne's claim in Bk II, chap. xii, p. 301, that the "senses are the beginning and end of humane knowledge." Compare also the following quotation from Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, p. 205:

"Man doth seek a triple perfection: first a sensual, consisting in those things which very life itself requireth either as necessary supplements, or as beauties and ornaments thereof. . . . They who make the first of these three the scope of their whole life, are said by the Apostle to have no god but only their belly, to be earthly-minded men."

² I, v. 31.

³ II, vi, 65. Note, too, her ability to feed the appetites of those whom she enchants without cloying or sating — see, for example, the quotation on p. 203.

Antony pays his heart for what his eyes "eat."¹ When he is away from Cleopatra, he longs for his "Egyptian dish"² again, and when he is disillusioned about her love for him, he sees here as the leavings of other lovers' feasting:

I found you as a morsel, cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher: nay, you were a fragment
Of Gnaeus Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out.³

Perhaps Tennyson's, "I will drink / Life to the lees,"⁴ could be taken as the motto for the Egyptian way of life, and it is a custom to which Antony readily conforms. It is also one of the Egyptian habits most decried by the Romans: Caesar frequently comments upon Antony's excesses in this respect,⁵ is horrified that Antony should "keep the turn of

¹ II. ii. 225-226.

² II. vi. 123.

³ III. xiii. 116-120. It is interesting to compare ll. 120-122 —

For I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is —

with the following quotation from Hocker, Vol. I, Bk I, pp. 229-230:

"But when we come to consider of food, as of a benefit which God of his bounteous goodness hath provided for all things living; the law of Reason doth here require the duty of thankfulness at our hands, towards him at whose hands we have it. And lest appetite in the use of food should lead us beyond that which is meet, we owe in this case obedience to that law of Reason, which teacheth mediocrity in meats and drinks."

There could hardly be a better summation of the opposed values of Rome and Egypt in this regard: on the one hand natural appetite unrestrained, on the other hand appetite restrained by the law of Reason.

⁴ "Ulysses," The Poems and Plays of Tennyson (reprinted; London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 89, ll. 6-7.

⁵ See, for example: "He fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel" (I. iv. 4-5); and "Antony / Leave thy lascivious wassails" (I. iv. 55-56). For a discussion of Caesar's attitude, see pp. 220-221.

tippling with a slave" and "reel the streets at noon."¹ At times, indeed, it almost appears as though Antony seeks to "drown consideration"² of his Roman nature and duties with the juice of Egypt's grape.

In the same way as the food imagery represents more than mere physical satisfaction, the visual imagery comes to mean more in relation to the Egyptian way of life than mere sight.

Egypt in some ways represents the exterior world of man in contrast to the inner realm of experience which we discover in Macbeth. Indeed, the greatness of Antony and Cleopatra depends to a large extent upon their having a sympathetic audience.³ Their actions take place in "the public eye,"⁴ and they have few secret emotions or experiences. The injunctions to "behold and see," and to "look,"⁵ assume, therefore, a double significance: they apply both to their co-actors and to the audience, so that the public becomes in a sense a participant in the spectacle. Their love affair is a public one, and seldom are they seen secluded from the gaze of their troupes of followers — even in Antony's vision of heaven, these followers form a part of the parade.⁶ Indeed, were it not that Nature cannot tolerate a vacuum, Nature herself would

¹I. iv. 19-20.

²IV. ii. 45.

³We shall return to this point when we discuss their horror of being seen as captives in Caesar's triumphal march. Antony and Cleopatra can also see only too clearly how unsympathetic eyes would regard them.

⁴III. vi. 11.

⁵See, for example, I. i. 10 and 13; I. iii. 83; III. xi. 51-54.

⁶IV. xiv. 51-54.

leave her space to gaze on Cleopatra.¹

In this chain of imagery dealing with visual awareness, Cleopatra's eyes become symbolic of the power she has of attracting people to her. It is the power of her eyes that can "nod"² people to her, that "beck'd forth"³ the wars that Antony fought for her sake, and might from "the bidding of the gods"⁴ command him to her side.

As we saw,⁵ the sense of sight, through the medium of the eyes, is the most powerful one. It is simultaneously, however, the most fallible of the senses. The lover, whose passion is usually aroused by the sight of his loved one, can be so deluded and confused, that he can be bewitched and beguiled. The following quotation from Burton illustrates clearly the position of contemporary thought on the subject:

Heliodorus lib. 3. proves at large, that love is witchcraft, it gets in at our eyes, pores, nostrils, ingenders the same qualities, and affections in us, as were in the party whence it came. Ficinus 10. cap. com. in Plat. declares it, is thus: Mortal men are then especially bewitched, when as by often gazing one on the other, they direct sight to sight, joyn eye to eye, and so drink and suck in love between them; for the beginning of the disease is the eye.⁶

It is interesting to note in this context how often Cleopatra is called a witch or enchantress, or how often Antony excuses his behaviour by claiming that he was enchanted.

¹ II. ii. 216-218.

² See III.vi.65-66.

³ IV.xii.26.

⁴ III.xi.60-61.

⁵ See p.203, n.3.

⁶ Burton (Blake ed.), Pt III, Sec. 2, Mem. 3, Sub. 2, p.522. Bamborough, p.34, also notes that the "cluster of thought 'eyes - influence - fascination - witchcraft - love' is of course almost painfully familiar in Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry."

Cleopatra's eyes are also the windows of her passion. Unlike the "dull," or "sober," or "modest" eyes of Octavia,¹ hers flash forth her every emotion and call forth emotion and response in others, so that Pompey would "make his eyes grow" in her brow and "die / With looking on his life,"² just as Antony "pays his heart, / For what his eyes eat only."³

The life of the senses is more, though, than a simple animal awareness. In Antony and Cleopatra it comes to represent also a yielding to the stream and flow of being; the senses are a gateway to the emotions, to feeling and awareness. And Egypt is the world of passions and unrestrained natural appetites with which the Roman world of rational deliberation and practical deduction is contrasted.

Cleopatra is capable of experiencing intensely a full and harmonious gamut of the passions. She is the "wrangling" queen,

Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep: how every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired.⁴

She reacts spontaneously toward people according to the dictates of the emotions they arouse in her. No Stoic she, with her passions tightly reined. And her passions are an intrinsic part of her nature, a mirror of that ever-changing, fluctuating world of Nature with which she is identified. Laughter comes to her as easily as tears; she can be quickly ill,

¹ IV.xv.27; V.ii.54.

² I.v.32-34.

³ II.ii.225-226. Note how the visual imagery and that of food, life and death are linked together in these quotations.

⁴ I.i.48-51.

and quickly well; can die at the least grief, and live again if her Antony will be kind.¹ It is in this context that she replies to Antony's upbraiding of her:

But sir, forgive me,
Since my becomings kill me, when they do not
Eye well to you.²

As we shall see, Macbeth does not do those things that "become a man"³; Cleopatra, however, always acts in a manner consistent with her nature, so that when Antony declares that she is "cunning past man's thought,"⁴ Enobarbus can reply:

Alack, sir, no, her passions are made of nothing
but the finest parts of pure love. We cannot call
her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are
greater storms and tempests than almanacs can
report. This cannot be cunning in her.⁵

¹Note how often Cleopatra feigns or threatens death when Antony is angry with or abusive towards her. See also quotation on p.199.

²I.iii.95-97.

³Macbeth I.vii.46. See also the discussion on pp.299ff.

⁴I.ii.143.

⁵I.ii.144-148. The present writer would therefore disagree to a certain extent with Ribner, p.171:

"The inconsistency so often seen in Cleopatra stems from the fact that Shakespeare for his larger thematic purposes drew upon three different attitudes towards Cleopatra, all of which were a part of literary tradition: (1) the symbol of lust and treachery, (2) the majestic queen, awe-inspiring in her beauty and magnificence, and (3) the faithful martyr to love who had followed Antony to the other world."

There is a fourth viewpoint from which Cleopatra can be seen: as the epitome of the Bonds of Nature in action. It is a viewpoint which partly embraces the other three and, at the same time, eliminates much that could be considered inconsistent in Shakespeare's portrayal of her. Her seeming inconsistency then becomes, in fact, a consistency with her true nature — as consistent as the ebb and flow of the tides, the changing moods of the weather, the seasonal cycle, the perpetual flux of the elements, the infinite variety of Nature.

So far we have only hinted in general terms at the contrast between the Egyptian and the Roman values and approach to life as revealed in Antony and Cleopatra. Let us now look more closely at those aspects of the action and imagery which deal with things Roman in order to establish their place in the tragedy.

Whereas Egypt is traditionally seen as the cradle of creation and the field for the life of Nature, it is in Rome that Law in its human shape is held by the Elizabethans to have originated. Raleigh supports this tradition when he maintains that:

The law now commonly called the Civil Law, had its birth in Rome; and was first written by the Decem-viri, 303. years after the foundation of the City.¹

He also points out that this Law is not as immediately derived from the Law of Nature as are the other laws which control human action — it is essentially of human fabrication.²

Shakespeare dramatically underlines the Roman connection with the concept of Law in several ways — gives it several facets — just as we saw him give the concept of Nature several aspects in its Egyptian form.

Law in relation to Rome is symbolised, for example, by the images of measure, order and control. And Antony is often used as the vehicle by which the contrasts between the Roman and the Egyptian way

¹Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, p.227.

²Ibid.: "Jus civile, or the civil Law, is not the same in all Common-wealths, but in divers Estates it is also divers and peculiar, and this law is not so immediately derived from the law of Nature, as the law of Nations is." The Laws which we are chiefly concerned with in our discussion of Rome are all those controllers of human action referred to as Positive Human Law in Raleigh's table quoted on p.12.

of life in this regard are dramatised.

Thus, in the opening lines of the tragedy, we are made aware of the fact that Antony's Roman friends, Demetrius and Philo, regard his "dotage" on Cleopatra as something that "o'erflows the measure."¹ That is, it is a love in excess of that which conforms to the Roman ideal of the reasonable amount of love that should be felt or demonstrated for a woman. A general can be permitted his dalliance, but it should not divert him from the ideal soldierly course.²

Similarly, Enobarbus comments scathingly on Antony's hope of drawing Caesar into single combat, by contrasting Antony's proposed action with the judgement, control or measure that he should bring to bear when weighing up his chances in such a venture:

Yes, like enough! High-battled Caesar will
Unstate his happiness, and be stag'd to the show
Against a sworder! I see men's judgements are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike, that he should dream,
Knowing all measures, the full Caesar will
Answer his emptiness; Caesar, thou hast subdued
His judgement too.³

As we shall see, judgement and evaluation are an essentially Roman characteristic, a key factor in their decision-taking processes, whereas instinct and feeling guide Cleopatra's actions and responses.⁴

¹I.i.2.

²See discussion on pp.220-221 and 236-237.

³III.xiii.29-37. The Roman ideal is moderation, which Elyot, Bk III, chap.xxi, p.210, defines as follows: "Moderation is the limits and bounds which honesty hath appointed in speaking and doing; like as in running passing the goal is accounted but rashness, so running half way is reproved for slowness." See also the discussion on pp.220-223 of the Roman attitude towards excess and waste — particularly of time.

⁴See pp.201ff.

The imagery delineating Rome and things Roman tends to be quantitative and concrete.¹ Caesar is seen as full, full-fortuned, high-battled. The Romans appear preoccupied with land and space; with conquering territories; and with architecture; with shaping, forming, building, designing, planning, that is, with imprinting their mark on the world; not yielding to the dictates of Nature, but framing their own laws.² The Nile o'erflows, but the Tiber is contained within its banks. The Egyptians are a rabble, but the Roman soldier forms brave squares.

It is interesting to note, for example, how frequently in the course of the play a Roman character will compile a list of allies, enemies, or countries and kingdoms annexed. And Antony is reviled because "those his goodly eyes, / That o'er the files and musters of the war / Have glow'd like plated Mars,"³ now see only Cleopatra.

¹So, for example, Antony becomes the "triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool" (I.i.12-13).

²See, for example, the following images:

- I.i.33-34: "The wide arch / Of the rang'd empire."
 I.ii.190: "The sides o' the world."
 I.iv.24-25: "We do bear / So great a weight in his lightness."
 II.i.48-49: "May cement their divisions, and bind up
 The petty difference."
 II.ii.63: "The third o' the world is yours."
 II.ii.115-116: "What hoop should hold us staunch from edge to edge
 O' the world."
 II.iii.6-7: "I have not kept my square, but that to come
 Shall all be done by the rule."
 II.vii.70: "These three world-sharers."
 III.x.6-8: "The greater cantle of the world is lost
 With very ignorance, we have kiss'd away
 Kingdoms, and provinces."
 III.xi.40: "The brave squares of war."

See also the contrasts between land (Rome) and water (Egypt) imagery that run as leit-motifs through the tragedy; and especially the question as to whether Antony should fight on land or at sea.

³I.i.2-4. See also, for example, the list of territories conquered by Labienus (I.ii.96-100), the list of kings being levied for the Egyptian cause (III.vi.68-76), and the list setting out the division of Antony's forces (III.vii.70-74).

An interesting sidelight on the conflict between the values of Rome and those of Egypt can be discovered by looking at the popular concept of the opposed tenets of the Stoic and Epicurean dogmas — or, rather, the simplified, somewhat distorted concepts of these tenets that were current in Shakespeare's day.¹

In terms of the popular view of these tenets, Egypt could be seen to represent best the Epicurean qualities. Such mottoes as "carpe diem" or "pleasure is the beginning and end of a happy life" seem particularly applicable to the Egyptian life style or approach to the Bonds. So, too, does the belief that the Epicureans emphasised self-interest and self-gratification, maintained that one becomes a member of a group for one's own interest, and claimed that there were no absolute rights or laws.

By contrast, Rome under Caesar perhaps approximates most closely to the popular concepts of Stoicism — the belief that it is man's duty to accept his fate and not indulge his passions; or the belief that man's social duties must be carried out first and foremost, and that the state is supreme over the individual.

Unfortunate Antony is torn between these two sets of values.² In Egypt, "Epicurean cooks"³ pander to his appetites, yet he Stoically

¹T.S.Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Shakespeare Criticism, ed. Anne Ridler (reprinted; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1951), pp.209-225, has some valuable comments to make in this connection.

²It is, however, almost as easy to see in these contrasted values the opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac — such is the risk of attaching labels. The Apollonian would be reason and the virtue of knowing oneself (see III.x.26-27: "Had our general been what he knew himself"); the Dionysiac would be the immersion of the self in the vital, intoxicating powers of nature (see, for example, the "Egyptian Bacchanals" of II.vii.103),

³II.i.24.

maintains that "things that are past are done, with me,"¹ and chooses suicide as an honourable way out of a life that has become tainted with defeat and dishonour.

One of the most dramatic contrasts between Caesar's standpoint and that of Antony is to be found at the world-sharers' banquet. Antony throws himself wholeheartedly into the feasting and carousing. Caesar, however, does not enjoy the banquet. He feels that the "graver business" for which they have met "frowns at this levity."² He dislikes the loss of self-control, this slurring of words and mental acuity, that is brought about by over-indulgence in wine. Indeed, he would rather "fast from all, four days, / Than drink so much in one."³ And the only time Caesar is prepared to feast his soldiers in the way Antony regularly does is when, by their conduct in battle, they have "earn'd the waste."⁴

¹I.ii.94. See also Bamborough, p.85:

"This temperament [of the ideal man] had, in its command of passion and its indifference to the blows of Fortune, points of contact with the Stoic or 'Senecall Man' . . . but in fact it did not preclude the experience of 'manly' emotion. As always, the key-note was temperance, rather than repression; sobriety and reasoned faith, rather than the self-sufficiency of rationalism."

Caesar, with his inability to demonstrate "manly emotion" never approaches this ideal. At his best, Antony does. (Note the strange exchange in III.ii.51-59, which deals with this subject.)

²II.vii.119-120.

³II.vii.101-102. It is interesting to note that Henry Peacham, The Compleat Gentleman (facsimile; The English Experience, no.59; Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1968), p.192, comments as follows on Caesar's habits: "We reade of Augustus that he was never curious in his diet, but content with ordinary and common viandes." Suetonius History of Twelve Caesars, trans. Philemon Holland in 1606 (introduced by Charles Whibley [London: David Nutt, 1899]), Vol. I, chaps 73-77, pp.143-146, similarly notes his frugality and abstinence — a vivid contrast to the sumptuous fare that delights Antony in Egypt.

⁴IV.i.16.

The difference between the world of Egypt and the world of Rome can also be seen in the different ways in which the protagonists of the two systems receive news. The Roman ideal is to receive both good and bad news with a certain Stoic quality. Things done are past, and the future must be shaped according to the changed situation — not trammelled by recriminations or self-questioning that is unproductive. Antony is clearly subscribing to this approach in the manner in which he receives the news of his first wife's death.¹ Similarly, Caesar immediately proceeds to act upon news he receives, having received it calmly and in full control of himself.² By contrast, Cleopatra reacts violently to both good news and bad. She does not attempt to hide from those around her her feelings on its receipt; and is not above belabouring the unfortunate bearer of bad news, or richly rewarding the bearer of news that pleases her.³ She will wail and rend her clothes, or laugh and smile with glee, as the content of the messages affects her. No Stoic concept of fortitude prevents her from giving vent to her passions.

A similar reaction can be found in their attitude towards the common people. Antony and Cleopatra will gaily mingle with the crowd,

¹See, for example, I.ii.115ff. He calmly proceeds to establish the Where? How? and When? of her death, and then moves to consider the "business" that this gives rise to. Under the influence of Cleopatra and his love for her, however, this ability is undermined.

²His receipt of the news of Antony's death is a good example. Having (V.i.) uttered the proper lament, he turns immediately to deal with the "business" raised by the messenger.

³The contrast is brought out in II.v, when they come to tell her that Antony has married Octavia. In her view, the messenger who brings such news should come "like a Fury crown'd with snakes, / Not like a formal man" (11.40-41). She promises him a "shower of gold" (1.45), if he will make his news more pleasant, and threatens him with "smarting in lingering pickle" (1.66) if he cannot.

without fearing that it will prejudice their majesty or their captainship. Indeed, as long as they are assured that the common people will view them sympathetically, they enjoy their forays into the crowds that smell of sweat, and the camaraderie of the troops.¹ This attitude does not, however, persist when they contemplate being the object of unsympathetic regard in Caesar's triumphal march through Rome.² Caesar, by contrast, has no love for the common people. He regards Antony's expeditions with disgust, and remains aloof and disdainful, very conscious of his "image."³

Another Roman characteristic that sharply shows up the difference between the approach of the Romans and that of the Egyptians to human relationships is the Roman emphasis on formal Bonds.

The Egyptians approach such formal Bonds with a certain degree of nonchalance. Extra-marital liaisons form the basis of a great deal of the ribaldry of the fortune-telling scene,⁴ just as the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra is joyously adulterous — sanctioned by no formal marriage Bond and violating that which should exist between Antony and

¹ See, for example, I.i.52-54 and Caesar's condemnation of such behaviour in I.iv.19-21.

² See, for example, V.ii.206-220. The writer would, therefore, disagree with M.W. MacCallum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background (reissued with new foreword; London: Macmillan, 1967), pp.344-345, who maintains that Antony and Cleopatra regard the common people with disparagement only.

³ See, for example, his condemnation of Antony's behaviour in I.iv.19-21; his indictment of the instability of the "common body" in I.iv.41-47; and his concern in III.vi.42-55 that he has been prevented the "ostentation" of his love for Octavia before the populace. Caesar realises the value of popular support, but this does not involve his loving or enjoying them. See also p.260 for a discussion of Caesar's inability to elicit love from others.

⁴ I.ii.1-75.

Fulvia or between Antony and Octavia.¹ There is also hardly a mention in the Egyptian world of formal pacts, treaties, or mutual obligations and duties.

In contrast, the Romans proceed according to a clear set of contracts and obligations. So, we find Lepidus requesting Caesar to keep him informed of the state of affairs, and hear Caesar reply, "Doubt not, sir, / I know it for my bond."² That is, Caesar is aware of his obligation to keep his partner informed. In the same way, we find Pompey speculating on the likelihood that Caesar and Antony will form a partnership, using words that denote the cementing of an alliance:

But how the fear of us
May cement their divisions, and bind up
The petty difference, we yet not know.³

And, in the confrontation between Caesar and Antony, one of Caesar's chief rebukes is that Antony has broken the "article of your oath,"⁴ just as he later maintains that,

If I knew
What hoop should hold us staunch from edge to edge
O' the world, I would pursue it.⁵

This brings us, then, to that strange scene in which the soldier-politicians cement their differences by the expedient of formally betrothing Antony to Caesar's sister. Marriage here has nothing to do with the

¹ See how often they are called "adulterer" and "whore." See also the discussion on pp. 252ff.

² I. iv. 83-84.

³ II. i. 47-49.

⁴ II. ii. 82.

⁵ II. ii. 114-116.

love between the parties, but is reduced to a formal union¹; entered into for politic and economic reasons — in direct contrast to the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra which is subscribed by no formal Bonds, offers the parties no economic or political gain, but is based solely on their affections for each other.

It is fascinating to examine the process by which the absent Octavia is married off. Agrippa, whose idea it is, first establishes that Caesar does indeed have a marriageable sister and that Antony, despite his escapades in Egypt, still remains officially a widower. He then makes his proposal to bind the two generals to each other by means of a convenient family Bond:

To hold you in perpetual amity,
 To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts
With an unslipping knot, take Antony
 Octavia to his wife; whose beauty claims
 No worse a husband than the best of men;
 Whose virtue, and whose general graces, speak
 That which none else can utter. By this marriage,
 All little jealousies which now seem great,
 And all great fears, which now import their dangers,
 Would then be nothing: truths would be tales,
 Where now half tales be truths: her love to both
Would each to other and all loves to both
 Draw after her. Pardon what I have spoke,
 For 'tis a studied, not a present thought,
 By duty ruminated.²

¹It is interesting to note Hooker's comments on the Roman marriage laws, Vol. II, Bk V, p. 397:

"The laws of Romulus concerning marriage are therefore extolled above the rest amongst the heathens which were before, in that they established the use of certain special solemnities, whereby the minds of men were drawn to make the greater conscience of wedlock, and to esteem the bond thereof a thing which could not be without impiety dissolved."

²II.ii.125-139. My underlining. Note also the use of words such as "duty," "studied," and "ruminated." Agrippa carefully lists all the advantages to be gained from such a socio-politic union.

Despite his supposed love for Cleopatra, which should prevent him from wedding Octavia, Antony readily agrees to this scheme in terms very like those of the Marriage Service¹:

May I never
To this good purpose, that so fairly shows,
Dream of impediment! Let me have thy hand
Further this act of grace: and from this hour,
The heart of brothers govern in our loves,
And sway our great designs!²

One could almost be excused for assuming that Antony is marrying Caesar not Octavia!

Poor Octavia, her brother "bequeaths" her to Antony to join their kingdoms and (almost as an afterthought) their hearts. Yet, almost in the same breath her betrothed confesses that he regards this only as a business deal, and reveals his real attitude towards this marriage Bond:

I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' the east my pleasure lies³;

or, as Menas phrases it :

I think the policy of that purpose made more in
the marriage than the love of the parties.⁴

Throughout these two scenes there is constant reference to the outward form of the Bonds: the knitting, binding and joining of hands; and the brother, sister, wife and widow involved in the foundation of these

¹ See the Marriage Service in the Book of Common Prayer, and the references in the chapter on King Lear for comment on the nature and form of the marriage Bond.

² II. ii. 144-149. My underlining.

³ II. iii. 37-39.

⁴ II. vi. 115-116. My underlining. See also the discussion of love on pp. 253ff.

familial ties. The marriage remains, however, merely a union established by law, not one founded on love, and we never see Antony lavishing upon Octavia the love he freely offers to Cleopatra.

Let us turn now from looking at one aspect of the Roman doctrine of Law to an examination of some of the other typically Roman attitudes and attributes.

Let us look, for example, at the Roman attitude toward time. As we saw, time in Egypt is both closely connected to the seasonal cycle and regarded as something that can be freely spent in the pursuit of pleasure or satisfaction. The time cycle in Rome is very different, and has different connotations of use and abuse. Perhaps the most illuminating comment on the Roman attitude toward time comes from Caesar when he speaks as follows of Antony's behaviour:

Let's grant it is not
 Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
 To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
 And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
 To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
 With knaves that smell of sweat: say this becomes him, —¹

 If he fill'd
 His vacancy with his voluptuousness,
 Full surfeits, and the dryness of his bones
 Call on him for't. But to confound such time,
 That drums him from his sport, and speaks as loud
 As his own state, and ours, — 'tis to be chid:
 As we rate boys, who being mature in knowledge,
 Pawn their experience to their present pleasure,
 And so rebel to judgement.²

¹For references to and discussion on Caesar's attitude towards consorting with the commonality, and his inability to elicit the type of love that Antony and Cleopatra do, see pp.215-216 and 260.

²I.iv.16-33. Note also the contrast Caesar draws between indulgence in sensual experience and the (to him) more commendable exercise of reason and judgement.

There is no confusion in Caesar's mind between the allowable waste of leisure time and the strong necessities of a political situation; filling one's "vacancy" with "voluptuousness" could perhaps be condoned in his view, although regarded as a foolish waste of time, but neglecting one's political duty is utter folly — the negation of all one's past experience in such matters for the sake of ephemeral pleasures that have no value in the scheme of things.

At the same time, it is worth noting that it is the younger Caesar who is old in this respect, and would chide the older Antony for such boyish irresponsibility.¹ In part, this clash between these two world-sharers is a clash between the youth who has time on his side, and whose powers are in the ascendant, and the aging soldier, Antony, whose strength is on the wane. Both Antony and Cleopatra speak almost mockingly of Caesar's youth and the new order he represents,² but they do so with an uneasy awareness that they themselves are no longer young, that the world is changing around them, that grey mingles with their "younger brown."³

¹ See quotation on previous page.

² See, for example, Cleopatra's taunt to Antony in I.i.20-22:

Or who knows

If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you.

See also Antony's challenge to Caesar in III.xiii.20-28:

To him again, tell him he wears the rose
Of youth upon him; from which, the world should note
Something particular: his coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child, as soon
As i' the command of Caesar: I dare him therefore
To lay his gay comparisons apart
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,
Ourselves alone.

³ IV.viii.19-20. Cleopatra's "salad days," too, are past.

Caesar, however, can afford to laugh at Antony's taunts from his position of growing strength¹: so that we have the irony of Antony's complaint that Caesar appears

Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am
Not what he knew I was.²

There is also in this theme of time the contrast between the Roman business or purposeful use of time³ and the Egyptian idleness or drifting with the course of events.

The Romans in this tragedy are seen to direct their activities towards some clear goal; and we see Caesar worrying that "Pompey / Thrives in our idleness."⁴ At the heart of this Roman approach to time is the belief that each moment of time has its duly allotted task, its due opportunity or fitting possibility. There are frequent references to the "necessity of time" that "commands,"⁵ the time that "calls upon's"⁶ or a "meeter season"⁷ for which the ostentation of Caesar's sorrow over

¹ IV.i.6.

² III.xiii.142-143. David Kaula, "The Time Sense in Antony and Cleopatra," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. XV, no.3 (1964), p.216, claims that "it may be said that for Caesar the most meaningful aspect of time is the future; for Antony, the past; for Cleopatra, the present." Although this has considerable validity, it is not possible to accept it entirely. Caesar, for example, is far too opportunistic to look only to the future, although his very youth makes the future a more promising time for him than for Antony and Cleopatra.

³ See how often the words "business" and "idleness" are used to contrast Rome and Egypt.

⁴ I.iv.75-76.

⁵ I.iii.42.

⁶ II.ii.158.

⁷ V.i.49.

Antony will be postponed whilst he attends to the more urgent matters at hand.

The Egyptian habit of turning day into night, of making the dark light with the lamps of their revels, of being drunk at noon, disturbs the Romans¹: Caesar sees it as "waste," and Enobarbus and Lepidus debate the subject as follows:

Lep. 'Tis not a time
 For private stomaching.
Eno. Every time
 Serves for the matter that is then born in't.
Lep. But small to greater matters must give way.²

As Caesar's comments also show, the Romans have a very keen awareness of priorities, of the activities that must at any given time take precedence over all others.

In this Roman attitude toward time also lies the key to an understanding of the workings of Fortune in the tragedy. Those, like the Egyptians, who yield themselves to the stream and flow of living without any deliberate goal, to the life of desire, are seen to become a prey to the influences of time, the stars, and Fortune. The Law of Nature is epitomised by a state of perpetual flux, for Nature herself is always changing from that which she was. This is what men commonly call Fortune; and those who live the life of Nature are subject to this continual alteration in the course of their lives. Like the seasonal cycle, the wheel of time and fortune is always turning, so that Antony, for example, can say of it:

The present pleasure,
By revolution lowering, does become
The opposite of itself.³

¹ See, for example, I.iv.4-5; I.iv.20; II.ii.177-178.

² II.ii.8-11.

³ I.ii.121-123.

If, as the Fool in King Lear points out,¹ one does not utilise the ascendant movement of the wheel, and let go when it is running downhill, one has no influence over the events that befall one. Or, if one looks upon the ebb and flow of the tide as a symbol of the movements of fortune, one loses power and momentum when one swims against the current of events. So, the "ebb'd"² Antony is unfortunate, and the "full-fortun'd"³ Caesar is riding high on the crest of events.

There is, indeed, a tradition that links the Fortune of Rome with the luck of the Caesars. Fortune is seen as the guardian spirit of Rome, and Plutarch's Moralia contains several references to the Fortune that looks benignly upon the Caesars — and more especially upon Julius and Octavius (who was later called Augustus). Let us look, for example,

¹King Lear II.iv.71-74.

²See Caesar's reference to the "ebb'd man" in I.iv.43. Compare Julius Caesar IV.iii.215-222:

We, at the height, are ready to decline.
 There is a tide in the affairs of men
 Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
 Omitted, all the voyage of their life
 Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
 On such a full sea are we now afloat,
 And we must take the current when it serves,
 Or lose our ventures.

Compare also Ovid, pp.298-299, ll.197-203:

In all the world there is not that that standeth at a stay.
 Things eb and flow, and every shape is made too passe away.
 The tyme itself continually is fleeting like a brooke.
 For neyther brooke nor lyghtsomme tyme can tarrye still. But looke
 As every wave dryves other foorth, and that that comes behynd
 Both thrusteth and is thrust itself: Even so the tyme by kynd
 Doo fly and follow bothe at once, and evermore renew.

Note how often the imagery of the tides occurs in the tragedy — see, for example, I.iv.41-47 and III.ii.47-50. See also the frequent references to the ebb and flow of the Nile.

³IV.xv.24.

at the following excerpts that deal with their luck. The first deals with Julius, the second with Octavius:

As concerning Julius Caesar, I would have bene abashed and ashamed to say, that through the favour of Fortune he was lifted up to that rare greatnesse, but that his owne selfe beareth witness thereof: for being departed from Brindois the fourth day of January, and imbarked for to pursue Pompeius, even at the verie height and in the heart of Winter, he crossed the seas most safely, as if Fortune had held in, the tempestuous weather of that season; and when he found Pompeius strong and puissant aswell by sea as land, as having all his forces assembled together about him in a set and standing campe, being himselfe but weake and accompanied with a small power; for that the companies which Antonius and Sabinus should have brought, lingered and staid behinde, he adventured to take sea againe; and putting himselfe into a small frigate, sailed away unknowen both to the master, and also the the pilot of the said barke, in a simple habit, as if he had bene some meane and ordinary servitor: but by occasion of a violent returne of the tide, ful against the current of the river, & withal, of a great tempest that arose, seeing that the pilot was readie to alter his course, and turne abast backe, he plucked away his garment from his head wherewith he sat hoodwinked, and discovered his face, saying unto the pilot: Holde the helme hard (good fellow) and be not afraid to set forward: be bolde (I say) hoise sailes, spred them open to the winde at aventure, and feare not, for thou hast aboard, Caesar and his Fortune. So much perswaded was he, and confidently assured, that Fortune sailed with him, accompanied him in all his marches and voiajes, assisted him in the campe, aided him in battell, conducted and directed him in all his warres . . .¹

What should I alledge the testimonie of his sonne, the first emperour surnamed Augustus, who . . . when he sent his nephew or sisters sonne to the warres, praied and wished at Gods hand for no more, but that he might prove as wise as Scipio, and as well beloved as Pompey, and as fortunate as himselfe; ascribing the making of himselfe as great as he was, unto Fortune; as if a man should intitule some singular piece of worke with the name of the workeman or artificer: which Fortune of his, was the cause that he got the start and vantage of Cicero, Lepidus, Pansa, Hirtius, and Marcus Antonius, by whose counsels, brave exploits and prowesses, expeditions, victories, voiajes, armadoes, legions, campes, and in one word, by these warres, as well by sea as by land, she made him everchiefe and principall, lifting him on high still, and putting them downe by whom hee was mounted and advanced; untill in the end, he remained alone, and had no peere nor second. For it was for his sake that Cicero gave counsell; Lepidus ledde an armie; Pansa vanquished the enimie; Hirtius lost his life in the field; and Antonius lived

¹Plutarch Moralia (trans .Holland), "Of the Romans Fortune,"

riotously in drunkennesse, gluttonie, and lecherie: for I reckon Cleopatra among the favors that Fortune did to Augustus, against whom, as against some rock, Antonius so great a commaunder, so absolute a prince, and mightie triumvir, should runne himselfe, be split, and sinke; to the end that Caesar Augustus might survive and remaine alone.¹ And to this purpose reported it is of him; that there being so inward acquaintance and familiarity, as there was among them, that they used often to passe the time away together in playing at tennis, or at dice, or seeing some pretty sport of cocks and quailles of the game, which were kept for the nonce to fight: when Antonius went evermore away with the worst, and on the losing hand; one of his familiar friends, (a man well seene in the art of divination) would manie times frankly say unto him by way of remonstrance and admonition: Sir, what meane you to meddle or have any dealing with this young gentleman, (meaning Augustus) Fly and avoid his company, I advise you; more renowned and better reputed you are than he; his elder you are, you have a greater commaund and seignorie than he, more expert in feats of armes, and of better experience and practise by farre; but good Sir, your Genius or familiar spirit is afraid of his, your Fortune, which by it selfe apart is great, flattereth and courteth his, and unlesse you remooove your selfe farre from him, it will forsake you quite and goe unto him.²

Caesar's luck is to a certain extent the manifestation of the workings of Fortune and Vertue, of which Philemon Holland has this to say:

Infidels and miscreants, who are not able to comprehend this secret [i.e. God's Providence] have imagined for governesses of man's life, Fortune and Vertue; meaning by Fortune, that which the common saying compriseth in these few words: in this world there is nothing else but good luck and bad; but so, if any man could skill how to manage his owne fortune, he might make if of bad, good and commodious: and this they mean by the word Vertue, which is an habitude or disposition of the mind and body; by the means whereof, he that is endued therewith might prevent and overthrow quite all the assaults of Fortune.³

¹ Compare, for example, III.x.25-26:

Our fortune on the sea is out of breath,
And sinks most lamentably;

and III.xiii.63-65:

Sir, sir, thou art so leaky
That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for
Thy dearest quit thee.

² Plutarch Moralia (trans. Holland), "Of the Romans Fortune," pp.631-632. Compare II.iii.14-29 (cited on pp.232-233).

³ Plutarch Moralia, "Of the Romans Fortune," the "Summarie" by Holland; see also the debate in this chapter between Vertue and Fortune as to who is the guardian spirit of Rome.

Essentially, the stars or Fortune control man through his appetites or desires. Those who can control their desires are not as much subject to the vicissitudes of Fortune; and those who are wise can read a little in "nature's infinite book of secrecy,"¹ or guess at the meaning of natural omens and portents in the light of prevailing circumstances.² So, we find Raleigh debating as follows on the effect the stars have upon men's fortunes:

But that the Stars and other celestial bodies incline the will by the mediation of the sensitive appetite, which is also stirred by the constitution and complexion, it cannot be doubted . . . And that they wholly direct the reasonless mind, I am resolved: For all those which were created mortal, as birds, beasts, and the like, are left to their natural appetites; over all which celestial bodies (as instruments and executioners of Gods providence) have absolute dominion. What we should judge of men, who little differ from beasts, I cannot tell; for as he that contendeth against those inforcements, may easily master or resist them; so whosoever shall neglect the remedies by virtue and piety prepared, putteth himself altogether under the power of his sensual appetite; Vincitur fatum si resistas, vincit si contempseris, Fate will be overcome, if thou resist it; if thou neglect, it conquereth.³

Raleigh goes on to agree with Plato that what men call Fortune is the working of prior causes and their effects; and points out that the men who accommodate themselves to the necessities of their time are more likely to be fortunate than those who do not (which also explains why good men

¹See I.ii.9-10. Compare Raleigh, Bk I, Pt I, chap.i, p.12: "The Starrs are not causes (meaning perchance binding causes;) but are as open Books, wherein are contained and set down all things whatsoever to come; but not to be read by the eyes of humane wisdom."

²See, for example, the portents of Egypt's downfall — the God Hercules who leaves Antony (IV.iii.15-16) and the swallows that build their nests in Cleopatra's sails (IV.xii.3-4) are among the more obvious. See also the fortune-telling scenes of I.ii, and II.iii.15-37.

³Raleigh, Bk I, Pt I, chap.i, p.12. Note the images which could be applicable to Cleopatra or the Egyptian way of life.

are often unfortunate, and why the apparently undeserving men are often seen to be blessed with worldly success);

So as whosoever will live altogether out of himselfe, and study other mens humours, and observe them, shall never be unfortunate; and on the contrary, that man which prizeth truth and virtue (except the season wherein he liveth be of all these, and of all sorts of goodness, fruitful) shall never prosper by the possession or profession thereof. It is also a token of a worldly wise man, not to war or contend in vain against the nature of the times wherein he liveth¹;

or, as Thidius points out to Cleopatra:

Wisdom and fortune combatting together,
If the former dare but what it can,
No chance may shake it.²

This is the aspect which the Roman, Caesar, knows of Fortune.

He believes that chance must be aided by calculation and care, that he who accommodates the demands of reality will prosper. His commands on the eve of battle against Antony are typical of his politic us of that, his "natural luck"³:

¹ Ibid., p.17. See also ibid., p. 13: "A wise man assisteth the work of the Stars, as the Husbandman helpeth the nature of the soyl." Perhaps this is Antony's error or sin of omission: he does not, or cannot, adapt his nature and his actions to accommodate the necessities of the time in which he lives.

² III.xiii.79-81. Niccolò Machiaevelli, The Prince, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), XXV, p.131, takes a similar stand:

"I also believe that the one who adapts his policy to the times prospers, and likewise that the one whose policy clashes with the demands of the times does not. It can be observed that men use various methods in pursuing their own personal objectives, namely, glory and riches. One man proceeds with circumspection, another impetuously; one uses violence, another strategem; one man goes about things patiently, another does the opposite; and yet everyone for all this diversity of method, can reach his objective. It can also be observed that with two circumspect men, one will achieve his end, the other not; and likewise two men succeed equally well with different methods, one of them being circumspect and the other impetuous. This results from nothing else except the extent to which their methods are or are not suited to the nature of the times."

³ II.iii.25.

Strike not by land, keep whole, provoke not battle
 Till we have done at sea. Do not exceed
 The prescript of this scroll: our fortune lies
 Upon this jump.¹

Thus, Caesar's luck is no indication that he is a better or a nobler character than the ill-starred Antony and Cleopatra — merely that, together with his luck, he also knows how to use to the best advantage those opportunities that present themselves to him.

It is interesting to note the workings of some of the references to Fortune in the tragedy — especially in so far as they deal with the development of the political situation in Antony and Cleopatra.

The first scene dealing with the processes of Fortune is, significantly, set in Egypt. We discover Charmian asking the soothsayer whether he is the man who knows things. His reply is consistent with the concepts of Fortune just discussed, for he amends her question by replying that:

In nature's infinite book of secrecy
 A little I can read.²

Like the witches of Macbeth, the soothsayer does not commit himself to definite answers; he cannot make Fortune, but can only outline the possibilities and probabilities.³ This is why he speaks, as the witches do, in prophetic riddles, leaving the characters to make their own choice as to the interpretation to be placed upon his words. Yet, dimly, we are made aware of the dark fate that awaits Cleopatra and those who consort with her. And, at the same time, her destiny (as opposed to her Fortune) is obscurely linked with the imminent birth of Christ by Charmian's

¹ III.viii.3-6.

² I.ii.9-10.

³ See pp.283ff.

cryptic references to the three kings,¹ to the child born to an old woman,² to the reign of Herod of Jewry and that of Octavius Caesar.³

After this, there are no key references to Fortune until Pompey enters the scene.⁴ And, in the light of the fate that befalls Pompey, his words are heavy with irony. As Raleigh pointed out, Fortune, or the great gods, does not necessarily assist the deeds of just men.⁵ Pompey's powers might be crescent, but, when he fails to seize the opportunity to slaughter Caesar, Lepidus and Antony when it is presented to him, he sacrifices his hopes of good political fortune. Menas is a caustic commentator upon this scrupulousness that will cost him his good Fortune:

For this,
I'll never follow thy pall'd fortunes more.
Who seeks and will not take, when once 'tis offer'd,
Shall never find it more.⁶

Shortly after this, we hear Caesar making his first important pronouncement upon the subject of Fortune, and we discover him in the apparel of a minister of the just gods, with a mission to avenge the injustices done to his sister:

¹I.ii.26. Could these perhaps be the wise men from the East?

²I.ii.27. Could this be an obscure reference to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist — whose ministry heralded the coming of Christ?

³I.ii.28-29.

⁴II.i.

⁵See II.i.1-2:

If the great gods be just, they shall assist
The deeds of justest men.

See also the discussion between Menecrates and Pompey that follows these lines; and compare the quotation from Raleigh on p.228.

⁶II.vii.81-84.

Cheer your heart;
 Be you not troubled with the time, which drives
 O'er your content these strong necessities,
 But let determin'd things to destiny
 Hold unbewail'd their way
 You are abus'd
 Beyond the mark of thought: and the high gods,
 To do you justice, makes his ministers
 Of us, and those that love you.¹

Gradually, however, the difference between Caesar's attitude and that of Antony becomes apparent. Caesar, for example, wisely refuses to take up Antony's challenge to single combat, because the risks it entails are not countered by the prospect of worthwhile gain. Antony, however, will do what is not to his advantage — such as fighting Caesar by sea — because he is challenged to do so and because it is a matter of honour that he should not shirk such a challenge. Canidius underlines the foolishness of such an approach to matters which affect one's destiny by pointing out that Caesar's approach is more politic:

These offers,
 Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off,
 And so should you.²

So, too, Enobarbus points out that to fight Caesar at sea lays his master open to chance and hazard; runs counter to all that is reasonable, wise and politic in regard to the opportunities that are offered, and in regard to Antony's knowledge of his strengths and weaknesses:

Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
 The absolute soldiership you have by land,
 Distract your army, which doth most consist
 Of war-mark'd footmen, leave unexecuted
 Your own renowned knowledge, quite forgo

¹ III.vi.81-89. Note Caesar's attitude towards the times, and his assumption that he is an instrument of destiny (see also pp.233-235).

² III.vii.32-34.

The way which promises assurance, and
Give up yourself merely to chance and hazard,
From firm security.¹

Antony's lack of discretion does indeed become a factor in his loss of good fortune, so that his chance "sinks most lamentably,"² is "wounded,"³ while Caesar becomes "Lord of his fortunes,"⁴ and the "circle of the Ptolemies" is "hazarded" to his "grace."⁵ Antony who could once make and mar fortunes⁶ lies at the mercy of chance, whereas Caesar's fortune continues in the ascendant.

We therefore find that Antony is gradually forced back to a Stoic attitude towards Fortune: braving her, recklessly daring her to the odds as he has dared Caesar, opposing his fate against that of Caesar.⁷ But long before this, we have seen him warned by the same soothsayer who hinted at the fall of Egypt that his demon is no match for that of Caesar:

Ant.	Say to me, Whose fortunes shall rise higher, Caesar's or mine?
Sooth.	Caesars. Therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side: Thy demon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is

¹ III.vii.41-48.

² III.x.26. It is interesting to note that the lines following this quotation are: ". . . Had our general / Been what he knew himself, it had gone well."

³ III.x.36. Notice the opposition here, Enobarbus will
yet follow
The wounded chance of Antony, though my reason
Sits in the wind against me.

⁴ III.xii.11.

⁵ III.xii.18-19.

⁶ See III.xi.65.

⁷ See III.xiii.169.

Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
 Where Caesar's is not. But near him, thy angel
 Becomes afraid; as being o'erpower'd, therefore
 Make space enough between you.

Ant. Speak this no more.

Sooth. To none but thee; no more but when to thee.
 If thou dost play with him at any game,
 Thou art sure to lose; and of that natural luck,
 He beats thee 'gainst the odds. Thy lustre thickens,
 When he shines by: I say again, thy spirit
 Is all afraid to govern thee near him;
 But he away, 'tis noble.¹

Here we are clearly shown the opposition between Antony's personal worth, which exceeds that of Caesar in courage and nobility, and Antony's luck, which is no match for that of Caesar.

As Antony's fortunate star begins to set, that of Caesar rises. At the same time, however, we notice a strange process at work in the references to Caesar's fortune. It is as though Shakespeare begins to hint at a providential force guiding the fortune's of Rome. It is as though, over the tragedy which works itself out in Antony and Cleopatra, there are indications of the fact that the world is being ordered for the birth of Christ. Earlier,² we saw Caesar speaking as though he were a minister of destiny, and we have already examined the general belief that it was ordained by God that Christ should be born in the time of "universal peace" brought about under the reign of Caesar.³ Let us now look at some of the other images in the tragedy which point to a ripening towards the time when the Bond of Grace will become operative.

¹ II.iii, 14-29. See also II.31-37. Compare the quotation from Plutarch on p.226.

² See p.231.

³ See pp.182 and 234.

see Proculeius advising Cleopatra to

Make your full reference freely to my lord,
Who is so full of grace, that it flows over
On all that need. Let me report to him
 Your sweet dependency, and you shall find
A conqueror that will pray in aid for kindness,
Where he for grace is kneel'd to.¹

Caesar as we know him bears little relation to such a plenitude of grace, to such a flowing over² of mercy and kindness. We are led to deduce that these are not so much Caesar's personal qualities as hints of the Divine Grace and Charity whose commencement are imminent.

We have thus far dealt only fragmentally with the position Antony occupies in the tragedy. Let us now concentrate upon his nature and his actions in an attempt to discover why he is caught up in the tragedy.

Antony's nature and his actions are the field for a continuous debate on the opposed values of Rome and Egypt. It is a debate between the operation of the Bonds of Law and the operation of the Bonds of Nature; between control and untrammelled freedom; precise measure and overflowing; expediency and honour; ambition and love; business and idleness; deductive reasoning and feeling; duty and inclination; statecraft and personal interest; good fortune and bad luck — all the paradoxes that run as leitmotifs through the tragedy. And, in the person of Antony, we discover that the Bonds of Nature and those of Law are in practice

¹V.ii.23-38. These are certainly not Caesar's characteristics as we have learnt to know them so far, nor are they the characteristics of the Caesar who hopes to win Cleopatra as an ornament for his triumph by means of a trick (which is revealed to her by Dolabella in V.ii.197-203). My underlining of key phrases and images above brings this out clearly.

²This image is particularly inapposite for the Caesar whom we have seen as the epitome of "measure." It is, however, the quality of the Divine Grace which comes through Christ in the time of Caesar.

usually contrary and, in Elizabethan eyes customarily, scarcely to be reconciled satisfactorily in man without the agency of the Bonds of Grace.

From the first, then, we see Antony torn between his habit and upbringing as a Roman and his natural attraction toward the style of life symbolised by Egypt. We see that, vacillating between the two extremes, he is true to neither of them: nor can he find a mean between them. And, in his striving to accommodate the demands of both sides, he betrays them both.¹

The Romans accuse him of levity and excess, of allowing his passions to rule his reason and his judgement and dissipate his soldier-ship.² This accusation is, in fact, the note on which the tragedy opens:

¹Plutarch *Moralia* (Loeb ed.), Vol.V, pp.119-121, contains a paragraph which throws up some fascinating tangents to the positions occupied by Antony, Cleopatra and Caesar in the tragedy:

"The adherents of Pythagoras include a variety of terms under these categories: under the good they set Unity, the Determinate, the Permanent, the Straight, the Odd, the Square, the Equal, the Right-handed, the Bright; under the bad they set Duality, the Indeterminate, the Moving, the Curved, the Even, the Oblong, the Unequal, the Left-handed, the Dark, on the supposition that these are the underlying principles of creation. For these, however, . . . Plato, in many passages, as though obscuring and veiling his opinion names the one of the opposing principles 'Identity' and the other 'Difference'; but in his *Laws*, when he had grown considerably older, he asserts . . . that the movement of the Universe is actuated not by one soul, but perhaps by several, and certainly by not less than two, and of these the one is beneficent, and the other is opposed to it and the artificer of things opposed. Between these he leaves a certain third nature, not inanimate nor irrational nor without the power to move of itself, as some thing, but with dependence on both those others, and desiring the better always and yearning after it and pursuing it, as the succeeding portion of the treatise will make clear, in the endeavour to reconcile the religious beliefs of the Egyptians with this philosophy."

²See, for example, III.vii.12-15:

He is already
Traduc'd for levity, and 'tis said in Rome
That Photinus, an eunuch, and your maids
Manage this war.

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
 O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
 That o'er the files and musters of the war
 Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
 The office and devotion of their view
 Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
 Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
 The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
 And is become the bellows and the fan
 To cool a gipsy's lust.¹

Here we clearly have the Roman ideals opposed to the Egyptian qualities that Antony is seen to pursue.

On the other hand, the Egyptians accuse him of sterile rigidity, or hardness and unfeelingness, when he acts in Roman fashion.² So, Cleopatra declares that,

He was dispos'd to mirth; but on the sudden
 A Roman thought hath struck him.³

Antony himself and those closest to him, however, gradually realise that Rome no longer offers him the complete fulfilment of his self in terms of the Bonds or norms that operate to control the Roman way of

¹I.i.1-10. It is interesting to note how often we are told what the Romans think, feel or say about Antony's behaviour. See, for example, I.iv.55-73 for Caesar's comparison of what Antony was and the privations he bore in contrast to his present behaviour; and III.xiii.3-12 for Enobarbus' condemnation of the fact that Antony allows his will to overcome his reason, and the inclination of his affection to nick his captainship (quoted on p.248).

Bamborough, pp.48-49, comments on Antony's will which has become perverted by passion, "knows it is pursuing evil, but cannot draw back." He also points out that Garzoni (The Hospitall of Incurable Fooles) includes "under the heading, 'Amorous Fooles', Mark Antony; 'who besotted with the love of Cleopatra Queene of Egypt, lost for her onely cause both his empire, life and honour.' "

²So, for example, Cleopatra says, "Your honour calls you hence, / Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly" (I.iii.97-98), and claims to see in his businesslike acceptance of Fulvia's death and its consequences a simile of his love for her.

³I.ii.79-80.

life. Thus it is that he admits that his marriage to Octavia is but for his peace, whereas his pleasure lies in the East with Cleopatra.¹ And, when Menas asks who would not have his wife of the holy, still and cold conversation of Octavia, Enobarbus (who knows his master well) replies, "Not he that is himself not so."²

When Antony cries,

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall,³

he is characterising his rejection of Roman values in favour of the Egyptian ones in terms that typify both: the ranged or ordered empire stands at the heart of things Roman, whereas the melting process is the essential characteristic of the Egyptian approach. So, too, we find him subverting the Roman approach to time in his declaration to Cleopatra that,

Now for the love of Love, and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh:
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now.⁴

This brings us to a question that has a direct bearing on

Antony's tragic dilemma: when is Antony truly Antony?

¹II.iii.37-39. Thomas B. Stroup, "The Structure of 'Antony and Cleopatra,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.XV, no.2 (1964), p.295, claims that "it is really out of Antony's character-struggle, his psychomania, that the tragedy develops." This claim could probably be wholly justified if it were amended to read: "it is in part out of" There are other Bonds and factors involved as well.

²See II.vi.119-122.

³I.i.33-34. See p.212.

⁴I.i.44-47. Compare this with Caesar's indictment of Antony's un-Roman lack of a sense of priorities: "But to confound such time, / That drums him from his sport" (I.iv.28-29). See also the discussion on pp.220-221.

Three points of view about this question find their expression in the course of the tragedy: there is the point of view of those who look at him from the Egyptian norms; there is the point of view of those who look at him from the standards of Rome; and there is Antony's own vision of himself.

The Romans, observing his behaviour in Alexandria maintain that:

Sometimes, when he is not Antony,
He comes too short of that great property,
Which still should go with Antony.¹

They see him as the "triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool,"² because he is neglecting his duties as a Roman captain for dalliance with a woman.

Antony himself worries that the Egyptian way of life is causing him to "lose"³ himself — unless he can break with Cleopatra and return to Rome and values Roman. So, too, when he is justifying his breaches of the Roman Bonds, he maintains that he did so "when poisoned hours had bound me up / From mine own knowledge"⁴ and, using terminology characteristic of Roman values, bids Octavia

¹I.i.57-59. It is interesting to note how often Antony, rather like Macbeth (who similarly experiences a dichotomy in his personality), is seen as an actor. So, for example, Cleopatra bids him, in I.iii.78-80:

Play one scene
Of excellent dissembling, and let it look
Like perfect honour.

²I.i.12-13.

³I.ii.114: "Or lose myself in dotage." Compare this with I.i.1, where Philo speaks of "this dotage of our general's."

⁴II.ii.90-91.

Read not my blemishes in the world's report:
I have not kept my square, but that to come
Shall all be done by the rule.¹

On the other hand, when Antony declares that he will oppose the fate of Caesar, that he and his sword will "earn our chronicle,"² Cleopatra declares, "That's my brave lord!"³ and when he calls for "one other gaudy night,"⁴ she replies:

It is my birth-day,
I had thought t' have held it poor. But since my lord
Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.⁵

It becomes apparent, then, that there are as many Antonys as there are viewpoints of him.⁶ At the core of his being, however, are certain qualities against which he cannot transgress without doing mortal violation to his self — among them are his honour and his reputation as a soldier and a brave man. When he transgresses against these by his conduct in battle, he experiences a sense of shame, guilt and mutiny within himself very similar to that experienced by Macbeth, who does

¹ II.iii.5-7.

² III.xiii.175.

³ III.xiii.177.

⁴ III.xiii.183.

⁵ III.xiii.185-187. My underlining.

⁶ Critics tend to see Antony only as a man besotted with love for Cleopatra. So, for example, Arthur Ruegg, Shakespeare: Eine Einführung in Seine Dramen (Berne: A.Francke Verlag, 1951), p.252, says: "Sooft er Zeit und Besinnung hat, missfällt er sich in der Rolle des Herkules bei Omphale und des Odysseus bei Circe." Levin L.Schücking, Shakespeare und der Tragödienstil Seiner Zeit (Berne: A.Francke Verlag, 1947), p.73, maintains that "so beherrscht Cleopatra den Antonius durch seine Sinnlichkeit. Aus dieser Willensunterjochung aber gibt es für ihn kein Erwachen." R.H.Case, in his Introduction to the text used for this thesis, deals admirably with some of the varied estimations of Antony's nature.

things that do not "become"¹ a man. Thus, for example, we find him saying:

Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon 't,
It is asham'd to bear me . . .
* * * * *
My very hairs do mutiny; for the white
Reprove the brown for rashness, and they them
For fear, and doting.²

As Iras phrases it, too, he "is unqualified with very shame."³

If one bears in mind the mediaeval chivalric tradition, one realises that Antony represents to a certain extent its essential qualities in action. He is often more like the mediaeval warrior knight going into battle for the cause of honour and the love of his lady, than a Roman soldier. Look, for example, at his farewell to Cleopatra:

I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war,
As thou affects.⁴

No true Roman soldier should allow a woman's wishes to affect the execution of his military duty to this extent!

¹See pp.299ff. Note how often in Antony and Cleopatra the words "become," "becomes," "becoming," "befits," or "suits" are used. See, for example, I.iv.21; II.ii.97; II.iv.5; and III.xi.34 ("Observe how Antony becomes his flaw").

²III.xi.1-15.

³III.xi.44.

⁴I.iii.69-71. It is interesting to note that C.S.Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Mediaeval Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp.12ff., deals with the tradition of courtly love and mentions four main marks of this tradition: Humility, Courtesy, Adultery and the Religion of Love. Antony's love for Cleopatra has as one of its aspects all the marks of this tradition. So, his love is clearly adulterous; so also he is the "courteous Antony" (see n.1 below); and so, too, we find Dolabella — similarly affected — speaking in V.ii.197-198, of "your command / (Which my love makes religion to obey)."

He is also the "courteous Antony, / Whom ne'er the word of
'No' woman heard speak,"¹ the bravely-caparisoned knight² bearing
his lady's kisses like favours into battle and challenging all-comers to
the single-handed odds. Indeed, the single combat of the tournament is
still his concept of the honourable way to meet an adversary, so that, as
his military power declines, he falls back upon this type of challenge as
a solution to the war between himself and Caesar, and cries out,

I dare him therefore
To lay his gay comparisons apart
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,
Ourselves alone.³

It is in the spirit of this chivalric tradition, too, that Antony calls Cleo-
patra the "armourer"⁴ of his heart, and boasts to Eros that, "My queen's
a squire / More tight at this than thou."⁵ And it is also in keeping with
this tradition that Antony fights his battles not on behalf of his contrac-
tual wife, but on behalf of his mistress.⁶

Thus it is that, if one understands the cult of the knight and

¹ II.ii.222-223.

² Note, for example, how often we have a picture of Antony and his armour or his military accoutrements — his "sword Philippan" (II.v.23), the "arm-gaunt steed" (I.v.48), or the "bruised pieces" (IV.xiv.42). See also the discussion and quotations on pp.257-258 — which show that his armour is not proof against feeling.

³ III.xiii.25-28. In this context, see also the following quotation from III.xiii.172-175 (my underlining):

Where hast thou been, my heart? Dost thou hear, lady?
If from the field I shall return once more
To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood,
I, and my sword, will earn our chronicle.

⁴ IV.iv.7.

⁵ IV.iv.14-15.

⁶ Compare note 4, on previous page.

his lady, a good deal that is puzzling in the Bonds that control the relationships of Antony and Cleopatra, and that is not simply explainable in terms of the Bonds of Law and Nature, becomes clearer. It also explains, for example, his almost callous treatment of Octavia, who is his lawful wedded wife.

At the same time, if one examines Shakespeare's treatment of the imagery dealing with Antony and his armour, another undertone of the imagery emerges.

When Antony is encased in his armour, he is supposedly invulnerable. Mars is, however, helpless when confronted by Venus; and Antony's armour is no proof against love.¹ It is interesting, then, to notice how often Antony is represented as the incarnation of Mars: just as Cleopatra is represented as the incarnation of Venus.² It is also interesting to notice how often Cleopatra dons Antony's armour or makes sport of it — as, for example, when she "put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan."³

As we watch Antony, we see him changing his outward casing from scene to scene. In one scene he will be all impregnable armour, the firm Roman; in the next he will be sensitive skin, alive and vulnerable to

¹So, for example, III.xi.65-68 makes this clear:
 You did know
 How much you were my conqueror, and that
 My sword, made weak by my affection, would
 Obey it on all cause.

See p.237 for a further discussion of Antony's weakened will.

²See, for example, II.ii.200 and II.v.117.

³II.v.22-23. Note also how frequently Antony himself, as well as other observers, refer to the effect Cleopatra has upon the manner in which Antony wears his armour.

feeling and emotion. And the "man of steel"¹ can bid her,

Chain mine arm'd neck, leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing.²

If one looks more closely at the question of Antony's soldier-ship, it becomes clear that this debate is carried further. We watch, as it were, a conflict between the old order of chivalry and the new world of Machiaevellian power politics — a thoroughly Renaissance question. In depicting the worlds of Rome and Egypt, Shakespeare appears to distil their essence yet, at the same time, see them with the eyes of his own time, and in terms of the conflicts in his own time between the earlier chivalric values and the new world of political expediency.

Pompey and Antony are ranged against Caesar in this clash of systems. To both the former, the maintenance and enlargement of their honour is an intrinsic personal need. Indeed, Antony asserts that, "If I lose mine honour, I lose myself,"³ and Pompey loses his chance to be "lord of all the world"⁴ because, as he points out, he cannot stoop to dishonourable profit-taking by allowing his unsuspecting guests to be slain with his knowledge and connivance:

Ah, this thou shouldst have done,
And not have spoke on't! In me 'tis villainy,
In thee, 't had been good service. Thou must know,
'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
Mine honour, it.⁵

¹ IV. iv. 33.

² IV. viii. 14-16.

³ III. iv. 22-23.

⁴ II. vii. 61.

⁵ II. vii. 73-77.

In contrast to Caesar, who does not use the word honour in regard to himself, Antony has very clear ideas of what the honourable course of action for a man and a soldier should be. For Antony, the honourable way is the soldier's way: wounds nobly borne in brave battle, where men meet each other to test their personal strengths and courage. Honour also means bearing with fortitude privations such as those he bore at Modena and Parma, where he was forced to eat strange foods and endure sufferings beyond the normal course. Honour means the maintenance of certain standards of behaviour and codes of conduct, as well as the preservation of that elusive attribute — reputation.¹

Caesar has no such concept of honour. His life is guided by the rules of expediency, reason, calculation, logic; by an estimating of the manner in which others will act or react, and an acting upon these reasoned deductions.² One cannot imagine Caesar going into battle when the odds appear against him, since calculation of the odds and the weighing up of his chances of success are such an intrinsic part of his nature.

¹ So, for example, Antony declares after the disastrous battle with Caesar, "I have offended reputation, / A most unnoble swerving" (III.xi.49-50). Note also how Antony uses the word "name" almost as a simile of "reputation." Thus, in I.ii.102-106, we hear him say,

Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue:
Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome;
Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults
With such full license, as both truth and malice
Have power to utter.

² Compare the popular concept of the Machiaevellian "type." Caesar may not share the villainy of an Edmund or an Iago, but in his attitudes and practices he appears to have a good deal in common with them. And no man who was honourable in the chivalric tradition would use the expedient of reassuring Cleopatra that he intended only good towards her in order to lure her into the trap which would ensure her presence at his triumphal march through Rome (see V.ii).

Caesar is the new Roman, tellingly epitomised in Burke's complaint that "the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded,"¹

Caesar is also the young boy whose power blossoms as that of Antony wanes or withers. Shakespeare depicts the power struggle between the two of them as being in part that between the forces representing the new values, led by Caesar, and the old order that Antony, whose "grey" is mingled with his "younger brown,"² represents. Even Caesar's soldiering skill is not the same recklessly courageous leadership that we see (or saw) in Antony: he is the planner who directs the course of battle from a safe distance. As Antony says,

He at Philippi kept
His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I
That the mad Brutus ended: he alone
Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had
In the brave squares of war.³

The strength and greatness of Caesar lies in his statecraft: and the size of his ambition is tailored to his knowledge of the possibilities. In contrast to Antony's, Caesar's speeches abound with references to the process of politics and to military procedure, to "written purposes before us sent,"⁴ to the assembling of councils, and to the justification

¹ Edmund Burke, Reflections on the French Revolution (Harvard Classics, Vol. XXIV; New York: P.F. Collier & Son Co., 1909), p. 224.

² IV.viii.20. Compare Edmund in King Lear III.iii.27: "The younger rises when the old doth fall."

³ III.xi.35-40.

⁴ II.vi.4.

of his actions.¹ Thus, as soon as he hears of Antony's death, he bids his party

Go with me to my tent, where you shall see
How hardly I was drawn into this war,
How calm and gentle I proceeded still
In all my writings. Go with me, and see
What I can show in this.²

As it is hoped the foregoing discussion on the various Bonds at work in the world of Antony, Cleopatra and Caesar has shown, the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra has many roots. It can in part be found in the nature of the times wherein they enact their roles according to their natures, and it can in part be traced to the effects of their actions and decisions. For Antony, the crux of the tragedy is reached at that moment when he decides to cast his lot permanently on the side of Egypt and Cleopatra against the forces of Rome under Caesar. And this tragic decision is magnified by his bungled military clashes against the forces of Caesar, so that when Cleopatra asks Enobarbus, "Is Antony, or we, in fault for this?"³ Enobarbus can reply:

¹ See, for example, I.iv.1-3:
You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know,
It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate
Our great competitor.

He points out to Lepidus that not only does Antony dally daily with Cleopatra, but, worse, "hardly gave audience, or / Vouchsaf'd to think he had partners" (I.iv.7-8).

See also, for example, "Assemble we immediate council" (I.iv.75); and "Let our best heads / Know" (IV.i.10-11).

² V.i.73-77.

³ III.xiii.2. Here we find, as in King Lear, one of a series of questions asked by the central characters in an attempt to discover how and why a tragic course of events has overtaken them, where the fault lies, and how this has affected their attitude towards themselves and their relationships with others. See pp.5ff. for a discussion of the tragic process.

Antony only, that would make his will
 Lord of his reason. What though you fled,
 From that great face of war, whose several ranges
 Frighted each other? why should he follow?
 The itch of his affection should not then
 Have nick'd his captainship, at such a point,
 When half to half the world oppos'd, he being
 The mered question.¹

It must also be noted, however, that Antony's process of loss is more protracted and more ramified than that of Cleopatra: the only thing of value to her that she loses is Antony, and her tragedy really only perhaps commences when she cradles his dying head in her arms. Antony on the other hand undergoes a slow and painful stripping of all that he holds dear.

The gradual stripping of Antony is, as in the other tragedies, an integral part of the tragic process, and it occurs both on the material or physical plane and on the mental or spiritual plane. And, concomitant with the loss of all those things dear to him, Antony experiences a discovery of or insight into what is of real worth. Let us, however, look first at what he loses, before turning to examine the nature of the truths he discovers.

As we saw, Antony's love for Cleopatra causes him to betray his pure Roman self. It is a betrayal that has its origins before the commencement of the play; and its first direct consequence is that Antony loses the good opinion of Rome.²

It is also for Cleopatra that Antony embarks on a disastrous war against Caesar and, in his method of waging it, violates his "experience, manhood, honour"³ — the honour of which he had said, "If I lose

¹ III. xiii. 3-10.

² See discussion on pp. 237ff.

³ III. x. 23.

mine honour, / I lose myself."¹

It thus becomes apparent that, like Lear, Antony is to a certain extent the agent of his stripping. And, by the end of Act III, scene xi, we see him denuded both of his reputation as a soldier and of his honour. Nor is he unaware of this process of loss that is taking place at an escalating rate: and it is this awareness that causes him to lose his own self-esteem, so that he becomes "unqualified with very shame."²

As "authority melts"³ from him, as he loses the external manifestations of his greatness, the loyalty of his followers also wavers; or, at least, the loyalty of those who followed him for pragmatic reasons. His troops begin to desert him, and the kings who fought under his banner switch their allegiance to the more successful Caesar.⁴ Even Enobarbus leaves him because he has lost his powers as a compelling commander.⁵ And, at last, the God Hercules himself, whom Antony loved, abandons him to his fate on the eve of his last battle.⁶

As part of this stripping process, we also watch Antony lose completely that sense of identity or self-value that he had while he could still place himself in terms of standards such as honour, soldiership,

¹ III.iv.22-23. See also pp.244ff.

² III.xi.44. See also pp.240-241.

³ III.xiii.90.

⁴ See, for example, IV.vi.9-18. It is interesting to note, in the context of the position occupied in Christian history by Caesar and Herod, that Herod is persuaded to "leave his master Antony" and "incline himself to Caesar" (ll.14-15).

⁵ See, for example, his comments in III.xiii.41-46; 63-65; and 195-201.

⁶ IV.iii.15-16.

bravery, etc. He is lost in the world once he no longer feels these attributes applicable to him.¹ The "firm Roman,"² the "well-divided disposition,"³ the "heavenly mingle"⁴ is no longer "what he knew himself."⁵ And yet, like Lear, he harks back to what he was, cries out that "I am Antony yet."⁶ The process of loss and dissolution as a result of which Antony loses his sureness of himself reaches its climax in Act IV:

Ant. Eros, thou yet behold'st me?
 Eros Ay, noble lord.
 Ant. Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
 A vapour sometime, like a bear, or lion,
 A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
 A forked mountain, or blue promontory
 With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
 And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
 They are black vesper's pageants.
 Eros Ay, my lord.
 Ant. That which is now a horse, even with a thought
 The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
 As water is in water.
 Eros It does my lord.
 Ant. My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
 Even such a body: here I am Antony,
 Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.⁷

It is fascinating to note that this sense of the evanescent, this fluid, shifting loss of clarity in self, is the characteristic of Egypt that overtakes Antony. And it is interesting to compare it with the following

¹ See, for example, III.xi.3-4: "I am so lated in the world that I / Have lost my way for ever."

² I.v.43.

³ I.v.53.

⁴ I.v.59.

⁵ III.x.27.

⁶ III.xiii.93. Compare pp.144ff. (on King Lear) and the quotation on p.222, note 2.

⁷ IV.xiv.1-14.

speech by Lear when he arrives at the same point of his tragic development:

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

Like Lear, Antony can no longer define himself in terms of the old Bonds, and is forced to try and re-establish his identity in terms of a new set of values.

As in King Lear, this stripping process is also an intensely painful one. The mental anguish that it causes is reflected in the imagery as physical pain or disfiguration. Antony's chance is "wounded,"² and there are "scars"³ upon his honour, for — as Cleopatra points out —

The soul and body rive not more in parting
Than greatness going off.⁴

So it is, too, that Antony becomes the Herculean hero with the shirt of Nessus burning into him. Like Hercules, his ancestor, he cannot escape the exquisite agony that torments him, cannot pluck off the shirt,

¹King Lear I.iv.234-238. When her Antony dies, Cleopatra is similarly caught up in a process where she finds it necessary to question the reality of the estranged world around her. We hear her speak of the past as though it were a dream in which she "dreamt there was an Emperor Antony" (V.ii.76), and, when Dolabella doubts there could have been such a man as she has described, declares in V.ii.95-100:

You lie up to the hearing of the gods.
But if there be, or ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming: nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy, yet to imagine
An Antony were nature's piece, 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

²III.x.36.

³III.xiii.58.

⁴IV.xiii.5-6.

since it is etched into his flesh. Like an old lion dying,¹ he lashes out about him, wounding himself as well:

The shirt of Nessus is upon me, teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o' the moon,
And with those hands that grasp'd the heaviest club,
Subdue my worthiest self.² The witch shall die,
To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall
Under this plot.³

Only when Antony and Cleopatra have been brought face to face with the possibility of losing not only honour and power and glory, but also of losing each other, are they in a position to know with complete understanding the full meaning of the exchanges between them in the first scene of the tragedy:

Cleo. If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
Ant. There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.
Cleo. I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
Ant. Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.
.....
Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
Is to do thus: when such a mutual pair,
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.
Cleo. Excellent falsehood!
Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?⁴

¹III.xiii.94-95: "'Tis better playing with a lion's whelp, / Than with an old one dying." Is Caesar perhaps the lion's whelp?

²Compare this with his suicide — where Antony triumphs on himself. See discussion on pp.269-270.

³IV.xii.43-49. See also the reference to Hercules in I.iii.84; and compare Plutarch Lives (Penguin edition, p.177).

⁴I.i.14-41. See also pp.255ff. for a discussion of Antony's marriages and his loves.

These lines summarise the truths that hold in the latter part of the tragedy. There is, indeed, a remarkably cyclic pattern to the whole play,¹ so that the statements and prophecies of the early sections gain validity as the tragedy moves to its climaxes.² Let us, therefore, use these lines as a sounding board for a discussion of the later developments in the tragedy.

The love of Antony and Cleopatra began as one based on lust, on elementary desire. It was a relationship based on the unordered passions of human nature, not on formal Bonds of marriage according to the Law. And we have just heard Cleopatra mockingly question the extent and reliability of the love that can be offered to her when the giver is married to — and should therefore love — another woman.

But lust, unlike ambition (which is usually self-regarding and self-satisfying) depends on another for its gratification. And in this dependence lies the germ of a sacrificial quality. It means that Antony has "kiss'd away / Kingdoms, and provinces"³ because he could not refuse Cleopatra her wish to fight by his side, has (in Shakespeare's version) "forborne the getting of a lawful race"⁴ for the sake of the pleasure he found in her. At its highest, it means that without each other they find

¹It is worth noting, too, how often the wheel, the seasonal cycle and the revolution of the planets crop up as images in the course of the tragedy. As we saw earlier (pp.185-186) this ties up with the concept of states reaching an apogee and then declining.

²The fortune-telling scene of I.ii., for example, is closely linked with Cleopatra's death scene — as are the earlier references to her "celerity" in dying.

³III.x.7-8.

⁴III.xiii.107. It is interesting to note that Plutarch Lives (Penguin edition, pp.221 and 294) clearly states that Antony did in fact have children by Octavia and by Fulvia.

life untenable and are prepared to commit suicide to rejoin each other. Their motives might not be entirely unalloyed by other considerations, but their love for and need of each other remains the major reason why they commit self-murder.¹

Through this lust both Antony and Cleopatra can grow towards something which transcends the simply carnal and material. In the process of uniting with each other, and through their commitment to each other, both of them lose their self-centredness.² Even the outward signs of their love — the embraces,³ the holding of hands,⁴ the mingling of eyes⁵ —

¹ Antony's honour, for example, is a consideration; as is Cleopatra's horror of appearing in Caesar's triumph. M.R.Ridley, pp.xlv to xlix of the Introduction to the Arden text, considers the criticisms that Cleopatra is most unlovingly tardy in following Antony into death. If one accepts that the stripping or loss process is an integral part of the tragic movement, then the delay between Antony's death and that of Cleopatra becomes, in fact, a dramatic necessity. Until the moment that Cleopatra loses Antony, she has suffered little personal tragedy, lost nothing of real worth. Her tragic experience really only begins when Antony dies in her arms — see the discussion on pp.248ff.

² See Bamborough, p.25:

"Love, music and dancing were all closely associated in the Elizabethan mind. They were types of the harmonious reconciliation of opposites and the friendly co-operation of units which at the same time retained their own identity."

³ See, for example, the quotation on p.252: "The nobleness of life / Is to do thus . . . [Embracing.]"

⁴ So, in Antony's vision of heaven, "We'll hand in hand" (IV. xiv.51).

⁵ So, when Antony fears she has been dallying with Caesar's messenger, he cries out:

To flatter Caesar, would you mingle eyes

With one that ties his points? (III.xiii.156-157)

Note also how often they kiss, and how often a kiss restores the peace between them (e.g. III.xi.70-71: "Give me a kiss, / Even this repays me"). At the same time, however, as "eternity was in our lips, and eyes, / Bliss in our brows' bent" (I.iii.35-36), Antony can appear like a Gorgon (II.v.116) and Cleopatra has "the asp" in her lips (V.ii. 292).

point to a sharing. This loss of clarity in self for the sake of sharing with another is part of the lover's sacrifice and his gain.

Since it is, however, a love outside the Bonds of marriage, there is no law that binds Antony and Cleopatra together but their need of each other. As a result, their relationship tends to be unstable, subject to jealousy and suspicion, prey to chance and fortune. And this is its weakness: a weakness that is perhaps only finally overcome in death.

The instability of this love based on lust is magnified by the fact that Antony brings to his affair with Cleopatra the history of a marriage to Fulvia¹ that showed no great qualities of faithfulness in him; and it is compounded by his marriage to Octavia,² so that there is some justification in Cleopatra's cry:

What, says the married woman [Fulvia] you may go?
 Would she had never given you leave to come!
 Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here.
 I have no power upon you; hers you are.³

Cleopatra, for her part, brings to her affair with Antony a history of love without the Bonds of marriage, and the possibility that she may become similarly engaged with Caesar, so that Antony can heap upon her recriminations such as,

I found you a morsel, cold upon
 Dead Caesar's trencher: nay, you were a fragment

¹Note how often Fulvia is referred to as Antony's "wife." Cleopatra clearly outlines the tenuous nature of her position when, in I.iii. 27-31, she says to Antony:

Why should I think you can be mine and true
 (Though you in swearing shake the throned gods)
 Who have been false to Fulvia? Riotous madness,
 To be entangled with those mouth-made vows,
 Which break themselves in swearing!

²Note that his marriage to Octavia is ratified by formal Bonds.

³I.iii.20-23.

Of Gnaeus Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out.¹

Indeed, from the beginning, we are made to realise that (in the eyes of others at least) Antony can be seen simply as an adulterer,² and Cleopatra as a whore.³ And, as their world disintegrates about them, they themselves realise that, when viewed uncharitably, this is the reality of their position. This awareness is clearly revealed in Cleopatra's horror at the thought of being shown in Rome:

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' the posture of a whore.⁴

There is, however, another aspect to these Bonds of love in the tragedy. Those who love are strong, and vulnerable. The extent of their commitment to each other makes Antony and Cleopatra fearful for its permanency, yet utterly dependent on its continuance. Throughout the play we watch them swerve between trust and suspicion, between fidelity and betrayal. When Antony fears that Cleopatra has betrayed his love by packing cards⁵ with Caesar, he curses her for a witch.⁶ When he

¹ III.xiii.116-120.

² Note, for example, how often Caesar speaks of the "adulterous" Antony or his lust.

³ The Romans, for example, call her a "gipsy," a "strumpet," or a "trull." See also p.197.

⁴ V.ii.215-220.

⁵ See IV.xiv.19.

⁶ See, for example, IV.xii.10ff.

Courage can no longer alleviate his suffering, nor can weapons of war overcome it. Armour is only effective against external attacks: it cannot protect a man from himself, nor ward off the pain from within. The "seven-fold shield of Ajax" cannot protect Antony from the desolation of his loss; his armour is now useless. Antony is at this point stripped of all he held dear. Naked, like Lear, he is reduced to the "thing itself."¹ And, like Lear, he bids his body break its "frail case," for human nature should not be able to sustain such suffering intact.²

Both Antony and Cleopatra come to realise that, without each other, life is meaningless,

Now all labour
Mars what it does: yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength.³

And as the tragedy moves to its close, we are presented increasingly with these images of action or being that has lost its purpose, and will "rot itself with motion,"⁴ as does the leaderless crowd. All that enabled Antony and Cleopatra to distinguish themselves from the commonality of mankind disintegrates when they lose each other. The "crown o' the earth doth melt"⁵ when Antony dies in Cleopatra's arms, and

wither'd is the garland of the war.
The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls

¹ King Lear III.iv.109.

² Compare King Lear II.iv.199-200: "O sides! you are too tough; / Will you yet hold?" At the same time, Antony's cry is perhaps a final cry against the Roman habit of containing oneself, of barring the path to intense feeling.

³ IV.xiv.47-49.

⁴ I.iv.47.

⁵ IV.xv.63.

Are level now with men: the odds is gone,
 And there is nothing left remarkable
 Beneath the visiting moon.¹

It is interesting to note how often Cleopatra, for example, returns to remark upon this levelling process: without her Antony, she is

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
 By such poor passion as the maid that milks,
 And does the meanest chares.²

At the same time, however, as Antony and Cleopatra lose their power and their stature, that of Caesar grows until, at their deaths, he becomes master of the world. The control of the world by a power representing the Bonds of law and order does not, however, extend beyond the temporal and the external — and this is the key to Caesar's limitations. Octavius brings only political peace. He has no power over the mind and spirit, or over the affections of men. Samuel Daniel in his "Cleopatra" is explicit about these limits to Caesar's power: his Caesar is forced to recognise that

Kingdomes I see we winne, we conquer Climates,
 Yet cannot vanquish hearts, nor force obedience;
 Affections kept in close-concealed limits,
 Stand farre without the reach of sword or violence,
 Who forced to pay vs duty, pay not loue:
 Free is the heart, the temple of the minde,
 The sanctuary sacred from aboue,
 Where nature keeps the keies that loose and bind.
 No mortal hand force open can that door,
 So close shut vp, and lockt to all mankind:
 I see mens bodies onely ours, no more,
 The rest anothers right, that rules the minde.³

¹ IV. xv. 64-68.

² IV. xv. 73-75. Note also how Antony says of himself in IV. xii. 23-24: "This pine is bark'd, / That overtopp'd them all."

³ Daniel, "Cleopatra," p. 42, ll. 260-271.

Two key considerations emerge from this quotation that are of importance for Antony and Cleopatra as well: the first is the limit to Caesar's power; the second is his inability to elicit affectionate responses from other people.¹

Unlike Antony and Cleopatra, Caesar does not appear to awaken unselfish or sacrificial love in others. Those who follow him appear to do so because it is profitable to be on the winning side, not because they are tied to him by the Bonds of love or affection. They do not die for love of him as Enobarbus,² Eros, Iras and Charmian die for love of Antony and Cleopatra.³ Indeed, even Caesar's henchman, Dolabella, can be so moved by love of Cleopatra, that he will betray his master's plans to her.⁴

Yet, committed to this world, Caesar is dependent upon others as instruments in his greatness. And it is these same people who can foil the carefully-planned execution of his designs. Cleopatra, for example, is able to do this. Caesar needs her for his victory parade, as a sign of his greatness: for her "life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph."⁵ By committing suicide under the very eyes of those he has appointed to prevent it, she razes his hopes of a glorious triumph.

¹It is perhaps worth remembering Christ's answer to the Pharisees when they asked him whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar: "Give therefore to Cesar, the things which are Cesars, and give unto God, those things which are Gods" (Matthew 22 : 21 [1599 version]).

²See, for example, Enobarbus' dying words in IV.ix, where he sets forth his guilt and shame and anguish at having betrayed his master.

³Eros, for example, kills himself rather than be brought to bear the knife against his master, although he bids him do so.

⁴See V.ii.197-199:

Madam, as thereto sworn, by your command
(Which my love makes religion to obey),
I tell you this.

⁵V.i.65-66.

Moreover, not only can Cleopatra defeat Caesar's ends by taking her own life, she can also underline thereby his essential limitation. Caesar's kingdom or dominion is not eternal. The eternity of which we have just heard him speak is only of this life, and only over the body. Despite his power, he has no control over the human spirit or over the afterlife. He can imprison Cleopatra's body, but he cannot chain her spirit. As a result, he is reduced to a mere instrument of Fortune, which controls the lives of men as long as they inhabit a body. Once dead, they are beyond the reach of Fortune or of Caesar.¹ This is the key to Cleopatra's growing insight:

My desolation does begin to make
A better life: 'tis paltry to be Caesar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's.²

And it is in the context of this insight and of her decision to put herself beyond the reach of Caesar that the irony of her final message to him becomes apparent:

Pray you, tell him
I am his fortune's vassal, and I send him
The greatness he has got.³

¹So she hears her Antony mock from heaven the "luck of Caesar, which the gods give men / To excuse their after wrath" (V.ii.285-286). This brings us back to the quotation from Raleigh on p.228 in which we discovered that the politic time-server and the evildoer are often successful on earth — but this does not ensure them a blessed afterlife.

²V.ii.1-8.

³V.ii.28-30. Indeed, one of her last wishes is that the serpent could speak: "That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass, / Unpolicied" (V.ii.306-307).

Cleopatra now knows the real nature of Caesar's greatness, the finiteness of earthly power such as his. As we shall see in the pages that follow, she realises her power to transcend this mutable, limited world of the flesh by death. She will gladly yield Caesar recognition of his earthly greatness, for hers lies now not in kingdoms, crowns, or palaces; it lies beyond time and the vagaries of Fortune; it is the eternal liberty and greatness of the spirit. For the most part the movement of the latter part of this tragedy is toward the "new heaven, new earth" first referred to in Act I, scene i.

By his very nature, Caesar is bound to be committed to the things of this world. On the other hand, even when earlier Antony and Cleopatra seemed similarly committed, there was a distinction to be drawn between their commitment and that of Caesar. The earthly things they sought were to Antony and Cleopatra not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. Caesar seeks power for its own sake — for the most part, all his working is directed to this end. Antony and Cleopatra sought power to bring pleasure; sought wealth in order to distribute it bountifully to those they loved.

Gradually, however, both Antony and Cleopatra become disillusioned with the world of Nature: as they earlier rejected the limitations of the world of Law, measure and control. Once people start dying, and they realise that their earthly glory is dimming, they retreat from the world of "dungy earth" and the "kingdoms of clay."¹ In the dreamlike, almost unreal, closing scenes, they become aware of the naked realities of human life: that both the king and the beggar are born of dust and

¹I.i.35. See also pp.252ff.

and return to dust to be the food of worms . They realise that the universe is both great and limited . And they who have played like demi-gods , like Atlases of the earth ,¹ now find no further value or goal in this world . They become too large for , outgrow , the material universe .

This is the stuff of Cleopatra's vision of an Antony who was larger than life , whose

face was as the heavens , and therein stuck
A sun and moon , which kept their course , and lighted
The little O , the earth²;

whose

legs bestrid the ocean , his rear'd arm
Crested the world ; his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres , and that to friends :
But when he meant to quail , and shake the orb ,
He was as rattling thunder³ ;

whose delights

Were dolphin-like , they show'd his back above
The elements they lived in.⁴

This was their glory ; this last magnificent tragic blaze of a pagan universe before the dawning of a new age ; this final clash of two almost irreconcilable ways of looking at the world and the Bonds which operate in this world , neither of which is adequate for the needs of its protagonists without the reconciling force of the Bonds of Grace . This Grace does not operate in the tragedy . But , in their transcendence of the limitations of the finite fleshly world , we see Antony and Cleopatra moving towards

¹See I.v.23 .

²V.ii.79-81 .

³V.ii.82-86 .

⁴V.ii.89-90 . Note how these images tie up with the earlier discussion of the Bonds of Nature in Egypt : see pp.189ff .

a glimpse of the vaster greatness it offers. Caesar on the other hand remains a petty demagogue, the minister of Fortune and the Divine Providence.

It is also in this context that they, who have always been seen in terms of the light-makers, the light-bringers, who have been called the sun and moon of the world, leave the world dark by their leaving.¹ Without each other, too, the "torch is out,"² the "lamp is spent,"³ the "bright day is done," and they are "for the dark."⁴ They who could play with time as they pleased, turning night into day⁵ and filling every minute with pleasure,⁶ now find that time hangs heavy.

This darkness that falls upon the final scenes of the tragedy is of significance in the development and resolution of the tragedy. Those who know, will know that this darkness will only be dispelled by the birth of Christ, who will be the bringer of light into the darkness in which the heathen dwell.⁷ It is not spelled out in the play. But, when Antony falls, Shakespeare puts into the mouths of two guards words whose portent

¹ See the quotations on previous page. See also Cleopatra's words in IV.xv.9-11 when they bring the dying Antony to her:

O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in, darkling stand
The varying shore o' the world.

² IV.xiv.46.

³ IV.xv.85.

⁴ V.ii.192-193.

⁵ See I.iv.4-5.

⁶ See I.i.46-47.

⁷ See, for example, Luke 2 : 32 (1599 version) : "A light to be revealed to the Gentiles."

The cataloguing of these references, however, has little intrinsic merit. Their importance lies in their relevance to the development of the tragedy.

Thus, the possible echo of the 23rd Psalm in Antony's "Lie down and stray no farther" is only important because it underlines a certain approach towards life and the fear of death: when one places no further value on life, death is no longer to be feared, because it robs one of nothing that one holds dear. So, too, the parallels between Enobarbus and Judas or Peter¹ are only important if they help depict the generously forgiving nature of the Antony whom he has betrayed in his hour of need as they betrayed Christ. Cleopatra's Pieta-like attitude as she cradles the dying Antony in her arms does not equate her with the Virgin, but becomes a like symbol of grieving, which extends the resonances of her sorrow.²

There are, indeed, several such echoes in the tragedy. One of the most interesting is that between Cleopatra's words, "Now no more / The juice of Egypt's grape will moist this lip,"³ and Christ's words to his followers:

I say unto you, that I will not drinke henceforth of this fruit of the vine untill that day, when I shall drinke it new with you in my Fathers kingdome.⁴

¹ See his dying words in IV. ix. 20-22:
 Forgive me in thine own particular,
 But let the world rank me in register
 A master-leaver, and a fugitive.

² It is also interesting to note that both Antony and Cleopatra believe that they are dying into a richer and fuller life — which is an almost Christian concept, although their vision of heaven is definitely not an explicitly Christian one. See discussion on following page.

³ V. ii. 280-281.

⁴ Matthew 26 : 29 (1599 version).

Like Christ, Cleopatra is here renouncing all earthly sustenance in favour of eternal life. It is a renunciation which is in sharp contrast to the earlier delights of the senses she both savoured and offered.¹

Antony and Cleopatra do not, however, see the afterlife in terms of a Christian heaven: their visions of heaven are closer to a Graeco-Roman view of the afterworld, as Antony's description clearly shows:

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
Dido, and her Aeneas, shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.²

It is also only in their vision of heaven that they almost achieve that constancy which they could not achieve on earth. And, even here, we find Cleopatra — jealous woman-like — fretting that (by meeting Antony before she does) Iras may win from Antony that "kiss / Which is my heaven to have."³ At the same time, however, the only occasion on which Cleopatra calls Antony "husband"⁴ is the moment when, by her preparedness to follow him into death, she can prove the constancy of her love. Only through the ultimate sacrifice does she earn the right to call him by that title which was denied to her in life.

¹ See discussion on pp.201ff. Compare her threat in V.ii.49-52:
Sir, I will eat no meat, I'll not drink, sir, —
If idle talk will once be necessary, —
I'll not sleep neither. This mortal house I'll ruin,
Do Caesar what he can.

² IV.xiv.51-54. Even in heaven they see themselves as winning friends and followers. Compare this with the discussion on p.260 of Caesar's inability to do likewise.

³ V.ii.301-302.

⁴ V.ii.286.

That love, flawed as it may be, which Antony and Cleopatra bear toward each other is the main instrument in their movement towards the religious or spiritual. And it lies at the core of the tragedy.

Stripped of external and public things of value, Antony and Cleopatra come, as we have seen, to realise that earthly life is subject to flux, to change, and to decay. There is a limit to the glory and the greatness the individual can gain or retain. Like Lear or Hamlet, they then begin to move toward a spiritual world in which there are no boundaries, where man can be "bounded in a nutshell" and still count himself "king of infinite space."¹

The only thing of value left to Antony and Cleopatra, the only nobleness which their lives still retain, is their love for each other; and this is the regenerative and redeeming factor in their evolution. Only the things of the spirit can triumph over the vain and transitory. And those who, like them, seek and perhaps find a love of the spirit as well as of the flesh have one means of gaining a glimpse of another world in which destiny is overcome and liberty is law — for love is one way of finding immortality through another. Love can be one of the eternal values, and one of the means whereby a man can transcend that part of himself which is mortal, for love does not, ideally, change, decay, or grow old. So it is that, by their habit of giving themselves up to Nature, letting emotion sweep through their beings to the root and core of their existence, Antony and Cleopatra lay themselves open to a love that can become spiritual through its intensity.

¹ Hamlet II.ii.253-255.

When a tragic character has reached this state of knowledge or understanding through suffering, death is a welcome release. Gloucester's heart "burst smilingly,"¹ and Antony and Cleopatra welcome death, choose to run into it as "to a lover's bed,"² tell life it is not "worth leave-taking,"³ Through death they escape all tedious earthly trammels, the restrictions of the "mortal house,"⁴ and the mortality of man: the frightening process of aging and the admission that their strength and beauty and powers have waned.

In their deaths, too, they almost reconcile the warring factions within their natures. There is, indeed, a tragic irony in their manner of dying which is usually missed by critics. Although Antony dies as a Roman upon the sword, symbol of his Roman way of life, he dies for Cleopatra, who is Egypt. And at the end it is he who conquers himself:

That self hand
Which writ his honour in the acts it did,
Hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it,
Splitted the heart.⁵

By choosing what in the Roman view⁶ is the noble way out of a life that

¹King Lear V.ii.199.

²See IV.xiv.99-101.

³See V.ii.293-297:

If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts and is desir'd. Dost thou lie still?
If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
It is not worth leave-taking.

⁴V.ii.51.

⁵V.i.21-24.

⁶See, for example, the Stoics' choice of suicide as a noble way out of a life that has become burdensome or stained with dishonour.

has fallen into disgrace, he also restores his honour, which was tainted. He stresses this, the other motive for his suicide, when he maintains that

Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,
But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself.¹

Left behind, Cleopatra prepares to follow the only person who has mattered to her. It is interesting to note that she intends to reconcile herself with Antony in heaven by taking her life in the "high Roman fashion"² and relinquishing the Egyptian characteristics of mutability and inconstancy:

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.³

Her reference to the firmness of marble which she is taking on as her characteristic is that almost architectural Roman quality of steadfastness (which we saw in the earlier images of the "wide arch of the rang'd empire") in contrast to the fluidity of the Egyptian approach, which is symbolised by the effects of the "fleeting moon." At the same time, she soars triumphantly into death, leaving behind her the baser elements of earth and water⁴ which bind her nature to terrestrial life.

¹IV.xv.14-15. See also ll. 55-58:

And do not now basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman: a Roman, by a Roman
Valiantly vanquish'd.

Compare also Cleopatra's reply in ll.16-17: "So it should be, that none but Antony / Should conquer Antony, but woe 'tis so!"

²IV.xv.87.

³V.ii.237-240.

⁴V.ii.288-289: "I am fire, and air; my other elements / I give to baser life." See quotation from Ovid on p.194.

In her approach to death, Cleopatra begins to transcend the Bonds of Nature of which she had been the epitome. The strange scene with the clown underlines this obliquely. In its seeming nonsense lies a peculiarly logical statement on these Bonds of Nature. To understand it, we must return to the general statements made at the beginning of this chapter on the Christian view of the historic progression of man through the various Bonds. If we go back to the story of the Fall, we will remember that the serpent was the instrument whereby the perfect accord of human life with the Bonds of Nature was destroyed, the instrument whereby death and bondage came into the world. Cleopatra, who has so often been seen as the one who tempts and leads astray, the serpent incarnate, now uses the serpent to cause her death in order that she might have life eternal and absolute freedom —

What poor an instrument
May do a noble deed! he brings me liberty.¹

The serpent's biting is "immortal,"² and Cleopatra now has "immortal longings"³ in her. But, the serpent cannot eat her: she no longer cares to tempt, or is tempted, in terms of the things of this world.⁴

¹V.ii.235-236. Compare the Homily, "The Exhortation Against the Fear of Death" (Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to Be Read in Churches. . . [new edition; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1822]), p.93:

"Thus is this bodily death a door or entering unto life, and therefore not so much dreadful (if it be rightly considered) as it is comfortable; not a mischief, but a remedy for all mischief; no enemy, but a friend; not a cruel tyrant, but a gentle guide, leading us not to mortality, but to immortality, not to sorrow and pain, but to joy and pleasure, and that to endure for ever."

²V.ii.245-246.

³V.ii.280.

⁴Indeed, she is rather like a late mediaeval Magdalene figure; the harlot renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil.

At the same time, she who has been the life force now has the "aspic"¹ in her lips, and is become the death-bringer. Death, however, acquires a new meaning, for it is the means by which she and Antony escape the prison that the body has become; the key by which they enter the house of the immortals, where they will be at liberty to "play till doomsday."² The serpent is a "mortal wretch"³ whose deadly bite unlooses the "knot intricate of life,"⁴ the manifold Bonds, and frees her from the world that can no longer satisfy her needs or those of Antony.

¹V.ii.292.

²V.ii.231. Compare the quotation from the Homilies on the previous page.

³V.ii.302.

⁴V.ii.303.

MACBETH

Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond
Which keeps me pale! ¹

We have seen that human society rests upon the existence of Bonds, which delimit human action and response. Some of these Bonds are regarded as natural, some are to be found in the unwritten codes on which a society is based, some are imposed by law, and others are found revealed in a society's religion. Together, they help define the world in which a man lives — and, to understand any member of a particular society, it is necessary to understand the world in which he lives. Thus, the metaphysic against which Macbeth's condition is seen is one of the factors which differentiates his predicament from that of Lear, or Antony, or Cleopatra. At the same time, however, we must remember that Shakespeare's knowledge and awareness of his own metaphysic tends to colour his view of the world of Macbeth, so that it is necessary to take into account or understand both world pictures if one is to understand what happens in Macbeth.

Historically, the world of Macbeth is separated by approximately a thousand years from the earlier world of Antony and Cleopatra. From a Christian viewpoint, the most important change that has taken place is that Christ has been born, has suffered, died, and risen from the

¹ III. ii. 49-50.

dead. And, through His death and resurrection, the Bond of Grace has come into operation. In Macbeth, we are therefore faced with the actuality of Grace in operation in the world, and it is against this background of Christian thinking that we shall have to seek to understand the tragedy, for Macbeth's trespasses will be revealed not only as trespasses against the earlier Bonds of Nature, Law and Society, but also as trespasses against this Bond of Grace.

For a Christian, the chief purpose of life on this earth is to prepare man for the life hereafter. Life is but lent to man¹ in order that he might — through his own actions, and by the mercy of Christ's infinite Grace — attain immortality in heaven. Each man is free to spend his mortality as he pleases, but each thought, each word, each deed is entered against his name in the Divine record. On the great Judgement Day, he will be called to account. No man can escape this day of reckoning, for there is nowhere he can hide from it.² Should he have spent his life

¹Macbeth himself speaks of living the "lease of Nature" in IV.i.99. There is also an interesting reference in Purchas, Pilgrimes, Vol. I, chap.iii. p.15, to the subject of life as a lease or bond:

"In the first state all men had a naturall right in common over the creatures. But the Devill (the great Incloser) by sinne inclosed these Commons of Humanitie, and altered their tenure from Fee Simple, to meere Villenage: yet so (God in justice remembering mercie) that some ruines remaine since the fall."

²Compare Revelations 6 : 15-17 (1599 version):

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chiefe captaines, and the mightie men, and euery bondman, and euery free man, hid themselves in dennes and among the rockes of the mountaines,

And said to the mountaines and rockes, Fall on vs and hid vs from the presence of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lambe.

For the great day of his wrath is come, and who can stand?"

evilly or unwisely, he faces eternal damnation,¹ unless he sets forth a deep repentance and casts himself upon the Divine Mercy. Were it not for this Mercy, no man at all — let alone a sinner — would be considered worthy of eternal life with God.

Each man is free, within the limits of God's plan, to make his own choice in respect of his soul; each time he faces temptation, he makes this choice anew, and each time he must choose whether he will sell his soul to the things of this world and the forces of evil, or whether he will save his soul by looking steadfastly towards heaven and the things of the spirit rather than those of the flesh.²

When faced with this choice, Macbeth (as it is hoped to prove) elects earthly power and glory, no matter how it is come by and, against his conscience and his better judgement, breaks all those Bonds whose fulfilment could lead to the redemption of his soul and to eternal joy. He knows that he does this, for his is the predicament of the sinner who knows what it is that he has done, and knows what he must expect in retribution.³ However, we shall see that, although he can rationalise about his sense of guilt, he cannot vanquish his awareness of this guilt. The Christian conscience may not always be strong enough to prevent the sinning, but it is often strong enough to burden the sinner with an all-pervading awareness of the extent and implication of his sin.

¹ Compare Marlowe, Faustus V.iii : "O, no end is limited to damned souls!"

² Compare Hugh Latimer, Sermons by Hugh Latimer (ed. for the Parker Society; Cambridge: University Press, 1884), p.57 : "If ye will not die eternally, live not worldly."

³ Compare Spurgeon, p.381 : "Shakespeare's drama is concerned above all else with the development or deterioration of a soul."

The fate of his soul should deter Macbeth from committing a damning act. There are other Bonds, too: religious, social, legal and natural sanctions which mitigate against crimes such as his.¹ Both written and unwritten, these Bonds all legislate against murder because it strikes at the root of human existence.²

Murder is the causal nexus of the tragedy of Macbeth and his wife. It is this because it violates all the Bonds which operate in the world of the play.³

Thus, murder is the causal nexus of the tragedy of Macbeth and his wife because it violates the Bonds or laws of the religion of their time, as seen through Shakespearian eyes.⁴ Firstly, murder violates the Law

¹ Compare the following quotation from the Mirror for Magistrates, p.361, ll.36-37 (in the tragedy of Richard Plantaganet):
Both God, nature, dutie, allegiaunce al forgott,
This vile and haynous acte vnnaturally I conspyred.

² Kott, p.131, claims that Macbeth is neither a tragedy of ambition, nor of fear, but of murder:

"Man schrieb, Macbeth sei eine Tragödie der Ambitionen, und man schrieb, Macbeth sei eine Tragödie der Angst. Dem ist nicht so. In Macbeth gibt es nur ein einzige Thema, ein Monothema. Dieses Thema ist der Mord. Die Geschichte wird hier auf ihre einfachste Form reduziert, auf ein einziges Bild, auf eine einzige Einteilung: in die, die töten, und die die getötet werden.

Die Ambition ist hier als Vorsatz zum Mord und als Plan der Mordtat wirksam. Die Angst ist die Erinnerung an die Mordtaten die geschehen sind, und die Furcht vorder Notwendigkeit des neuen Verbrechens."

This, however, reduces Macbeth to the level of a Tragedy of Blood — which is only one aspect of the tragedy. The real significance of the murder appears to lie in its violation of the Bonds and in the implications of these violations for the players.

³ Compare G.Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare's Tragedies Including the Roman Plays (London: Methuen & Co., 1951), p.142: "Macbeth's crime is a blow against nature's unity and peace, a hideous desecration of all creative, family, and social duties, all union and concord."

⁴ Since then, the manner of interpreting the Bonds may have changed, but, because it is so antipathetic to continued, ordered human existence, murder remains a fundamental violation of the religious Bonds.

of Nature, which the Elizabethans believed was imprinted by God in man at the time of Creation. This Natural Law is an aspect of God's Eternal Law. Its nature and purpose can be discerned by human reason, which is one of the natural, distinguishing characteristics of man. In terms of this Natural Law, it is as unnatural for man to murder man as it is unnatural for kind to war upon kind. The reason for this is easy to discover: murder is abhorrent because it strikes at the core of ordered existence and runs counter to God's creative purpose, as well as to the structure of society or the continuation of a species:

By this natural Law, or law of humane Reason, did Cain perceive his own wickedness and offence, in the murder of Abel: for he not onely feared the displeasure of God, but the revenge of men; it being written in his reason, that whatsoever he performed towards others, the same by others might be done unto him again. And that this judgement of well and evil doing, was put into our natures by God, and his eternal Law, before the Law written, Moses in the person of God witnesseth.¹

Thus, due regard for the sacredness of human life is one of the Bonds laid upon man by the Law of Nature, and to disregard the sacredness of human life is to lay oneself open to similar abuses of this Bond by others.

In addition to this social aspect,² there is another aspect of the Natural Law that is violated when murder is committed. This is the personal aspect. The man who murders commits an act which prevents him from fulfilling the better part of him, which should be the purpose of

¹Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p. 215.

²We shall return to this point again. Knight, The Imperial Theme, p. 126, makes the following point: "Here we should observe the suggestion of harmony and order. Sons, kinsmen, thanes — all are bound close together. Scotland is a family, Duncan its head. A natural law binds all degrees in proper place and allegiance."

his life on earth.¹ He trespasses against Nature by violating the "wholeness" of his being, the unity of his body, mind, and spirit, and acts at a level which is lower even than that of animals — for even animals were thought to refrain by instinct from committing such acts, although they did not have the understanding to know why. Man, with his higher gifts such as reason and feeling, thus sinks lower than the animals when he turns his savagery upon his kind.²

Secondly, in Elizabethan eyes, murder violates the Unwritten Law of God, for

that murder and cruelty was also forbidden, both before the Law written, and before the Flood it self, it is manifest. God himself making it appear, that it was one of the greatest causes of the destruction of Mankind by the general Flood.³

Thirdly, murder violates the Written Law of God. The Commandments expressly state that "thou shalt not kill,"⁴ and Raleigh gives an explanation that will prove significant for Macbeth's predicament:

If Murther were not forbidden, and severely punished, the race of mankind would be extinguished; and whosoever would take the liberty to destroy others, giveth liberty to others to destroy himself.⁵

¹See, for example, Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, p.173:
"For there was never sin committed, wherein a less good was not preferred before a greater, and that wilfully; which cannot be done without the singular disgrace of Nature, and the utter disturbance of that divine order, whereby the pre-eminence of chiefest acceptation is by the best things worthily challenged."

²See pp.117ff. See also Ben Jonson, Timber: or Discoveries; Made Upon Men and Matters, ed. G.B.Harrison (Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos; Edinburgh: University Press, 1966), p.46: "But I say, he puts off man, and goes into a beast, that is cruell"; and Hooker, Vol. II, Bk V, p.19: "What more savage, wild and cruel, than man, if he sees himself able either by fraud to overreach, or by power to overbear, the laws whereunto he should be subject."

³Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, p.217.

⁴Exodus 20 : 13 (1599 version).

⁵Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap.iv, p.225.

Finally, and perhaps most important in the context of this play, there is the new religious Bond of Grace, which came through Christ and which instructs men to love and pity one another, to protect the weak and innocent, and to deal always according to the example of Divine Mercy. The Bond of Grace fulfils all the other Divine Laws. It fulfils, but does not cancel, the Eternal Law, the Law of Nature, and the Written and Unwritten Laws of God.¹ And the Bond of this Law of Grace instructs men to

owe nothing to any man, but to love one another: for hee that loveth another, hath fulfilled the Law.

For this, Thou shalt . . . not kill . . . and if there be any other commandement, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy selfe.²

Thus, murder violates the Law of Grace as well as the Law of Nature and the Written and Unwritten Laws of God.

However, in the context of this play, there are other Bonds, too, which are violated by murder. And the origin of the tragedy can be found in their violation as well. Raleigh defines the first of these other Bonds as the Written and Unwritten Laws of Nations. That is, common laws established by custom and use in individual societies or countries (such as Scotland), or statutory laws. They are regarded as being patterned on the laws we have just enumerated, if they are good, and as violating the laws enumerated, if they are bad or unjust.³ Thus, since

¹ See Matthew 5 : 17, and compare Raleigh, Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p. 219 : "Neither is there any of these three parts of the law of Moses, but it hath as yet in some respect the same power which it had before the coming of Christ. For the Moral liveth still, and is not abrogated or taken away; saving in the ability of justifying or condemning."

² Romans 13 : 8-9 (1599 version).

³ See earlier, pp. 20-21. Compare Hooker's definition of Human Law in Vol I, Bk I, p. 155, as "that which out of the law either of reason or of God men probably gathering to be expedient, they make it a law. All things therefore, which are as they ought to be are conformed unto this second law eternal."

"humane statute purg'd the gentle weal,"¹ murder is against the laws of the good society. Murder is not only a sin, it also becomes a crime.²

Moreover, in Macbeth's case, Duncan is also his king — God's representative on earth.³ As such, any attack on him is both sacrilegious and a crime against the state.⁴ It is also a violation of the oath of fealty taken by Macbeth at Duncan's coronation.⁵ Macbeth himself formulates the duties he should rather owe the king:

The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself. Your Highness' part
Is to receive our duties: and our duties
Are to your throne and state, children and servants;
Which do but what they should, by doing everything
Safe toward your love and honour.⁶

This is not all. Duncan also comes to him as a kinsman and guest, who trusts him and yields himself into his care:

¹ III. iv. 75.

² The S.O.E.D. defines sin as "a transgression of the divine law and an offence against God"; and crime as "an act punishable by law as being forbidden by statute or injurious to the public welfare."

³ See, for example, Fuller, Bk IV, chap. xxi, p. 335: "He [the king] holds his Crown immediately from the God of Heaven. The most high ruleth in the Kingdomes of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he will." The Homily, "Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion," spells this concept out even more clearly and warns subjects that, whether the king be good or evil, it is their bounden duty to respect and obey this divine representative, and that rebellion against the king is tantamount to rebellion against God's will (see pp. 506ff.).

⁴ The S.O.E.D. points out that sacrilege is, in ecclesiastical use, "extended to include any kind of outrage on consecrated persons or things, and the violation of any sacred obligation."

⁵ The Homily, "Against Swearing and Perjury," p. 71, points out that, "when subjects do swear to be true and faithful to their king and sovereign lord," this is a sacred and lawful oath.

⁶ I. iv. 22-27.

He's here in double trust:
 First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
 Strong both against the deed; then as his host,
 Who should against his murderer shut the door,
 Not bear the knife myself.¹

That is, Macbeth owes Duncan the due observance of the Bonds imposed by the fact that he is related to him² and that he is his host.³ To violate these Bonds by murder is to violate two of the most basic social Bonds imposed by the Written and Unwritten Laws, for, as we saw in King Lear, the Bonds which arise from the ties of blood are the elemental knots that should link people together in love and care for each other, and the Bonds of hospitality make a guest part of the family for the duration of his stay.

Finally, Duncan is a king who is not seen to have any of those qualities which could remotely justify his assassination.⁴ Instead, he

¹I, vii, 12-16.

²They are both grandsons of King Malcolm. Note how often Duncan calls Macbeth "cousin," or "kinsman" (e.g. I.ii.24; I.iv.14, 58).

³See how often Duncan calls Macbeth and his wife "host" and "hostess" or himself their "guest" (e.g. I.vi.10, 24-25, 29 and 31). Indeed, Duncan's last message is addressed to his "most kind hostess" (II.i.16).

⁴This is a delicate question. The history of the English throne being what it was, her kings were understandably sensitive to any suggestion that an unpopular king could legitimately be dethroned. Macbeth itself raises the problem: although a usurper, Macbeth is crowned at Scone (see II.iv.30-32) and presumably, therefore, becomes a lawful king whom Malcolm will overthrow. Shakespeare overcomes this problem to a certain extent by making the rebel forces act as "God's soldiers" (see V.ix.13, and discussion on p.365). The Homily on "Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," pp.104ff., propounds at considerable length the belief that no subject is justified in rebelling against his king. See, for example, p.108: "We have been taught . . . that all rulers are appointed of God, for a goodly order to be kept in the world: . . . and that all subjects are bound to obey them as God's ministers, yea, although they be evil, not only for fear, but also for conscience sake It is not lawful for inferiors and subjects, in any case, to resist and stand up against the superior powers."

is depicted, although sketchily, as the epitome of the virtuous man whose murder would be a damnable act —

Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off.¹

That is, Duncan has fulfilled his burden of the Bonds laid upon him as a man and as a king. He would qualify for Fuller's definition of the Good King, whom "we will describe . . . first as a good man . . . ; then as a good King."²

If these things are so, we are faced with our first major questions: Why then do Macbeth and his wife violate these Bonds? Why do they kill Duncan? What do they seek to gain thereby? And what effects do their actions have upon the course of the tragedy?

To answer these questions we shall have to take recourse once again to theology and consider, firstly, the Elizabethan view of the nature of temptation. This can briefly be set out as follows. Temptation is not an experience confined only to a few men. It is common to all men to be tempted; even Christ was tempted by the devil. Thus, to be tempted is not in itself a sin, but a test of man's faith and fortitude. Through temptation, man is placed in a position where he must make a choice of action. One course may lead to earthly riches, earthly power, earthly gain; the other course offers few earthly fruits — instead, it offers hope of heaven to him who resists temptation. Moreover, although man is often tempted, no man is tempted beyond his power to resist:

¹I.vii.16-20.

²Fuller, Bk IV, chap.xxi, p.335.

There hath no temptation taken you, but such as appertaineth to man: and God is faithful, which will not suffer you to be tempted above that you be able, but will even give the issue with the temptation, that ye may be able to beare it.¹

Temptation, therefore, is always a choice between alternative courses of thought or deed, not an insurmountable obstacle.

The witches in Macbeth are the agents of temptation, not the bearers of a fate.² A careful study of their words reveals a deliberate ambiguity, not an exhortation to evil. At no time do the witches tell Macbeth he will or must murder Duncan. They only hail him by the title he has and by the titles he shall have:

1st Witch. All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

2nd Witch. All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

3rd Witch. All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be King hereafter.³

They then disappear and leave him to choose to interpret their "prophecy" as he wishes. It is interesting to note that Hecate is traditionally the goddess of the crossroads, presiding over the dilemma of choice and decision.⁴ Macbeth chooses, as we shall see, to succumb to the

¹ I Corinthians 10 : 13 (1599 version). See also the Mirror for Magistrates, p.421, 1.76 : "God wyll suffer none of his to be tempted above their strength."

² Paul, pp.159-161, has some interesting comments to make on whether the witches are merely imaginary, whether they are Fates or Norns, or whether they are women practising the black arts. W.H.Auden, "Macbeth and Oedipus," Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism, ed. Laurence Lerner (Penguin, 1963), p.220, supports the present writer's view and maintains that, in contrast to Oedipus who is never faced with a choice of action, "Macbeth not only makes a series of wrong choices which he should not have made, but also, though the past exerts an increasing pressure on the present, at no point does it become necessity."

³ I.iii.48-50.

⁴ She is a triple goddess, mighty in heaven, on earth, and in the underworld; and her altar usually stood where three roads meet.

temptation implicit in the witches' greeting by seeking to make it come true.¹

The witches might have known that Macbeth would interpret their words in the way he does, but we are not told that this is so.

Bishop Hall has an interesting point to make in regard to the powers of witches and daemons:

They have not the name of Daemons for nothing: their natural knowledge was not forfeited by their fall For, as spirits, being not stripped of their original knowledge together with their glory, they cannot but know the natures and constitutions of the creatures; and, thereby, their tempers, dispositions, inclinations, conditions, faculties; and, therewith, their wants, their weakness, and obnoxiousness; and, thereupon, strongly conjecture at their very thoughts and intentions, and the likelihood of their repulses or prevallings: out of the knowledge of the causes of things, they can foresee such events, as have a dependance thereon.²

In contrast to Macbeth, Banquo does not immediately commit himself to the temptation to seek to make true the witches' prophecy.³ He is at this stage sceptical of their motives in prophesying as they do, and warns Macbeth of the dangers inherent in accepting their prophecy as

¹Paul, p.191, raises the following question: "Was Macbeth's fall caused solely by the devil or was it his own choice?" This question appears answered if one accepts this explanation of the nature of temptation. Macbeth chooses to succumb to a tempting choice implicit in the witches' prophecies. Bradley, p.288, maintains that not only was Macbeth free to "accept or resist the temptation, but the temptation was already within him."

²Hall, Vol. VI, Bk III, p.491.

³It must be noted, though, that Banquo does suffer the agonies of temptation. See, for example, II.i.7-9 (and the textual note to these lines):

Merciful Powers!

Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!

However, it is clear from the above that Banquo also casts himself upon the Divine for help in withstanding the temptation.

the whole truth because part of it is true:

But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of Darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequences.¹

Banquo is in fact warning Macbeth in terms of the Biblical admonition to "beleeve not every spirit, but trie the spirits whether they are of God: for many false Prophets are gone out into the world."² The Bible is full of instances where Satan has lied like the truth,³ and the man who counts on equivocations⁴ commits himself to a course of action which rests on a subversion of all normal truths. As we shall see, Macbeth accepts the witches' first salutation as true, because it is true: he is Thane of Glamis. He then discovers that there was truth in the second salutation, because it becomes true: he becomes Thane of Cawdor. Thus,

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.⁵

¹ I.iii.122-126.

² I John 4 : 1 (1599 version).

³ See, for example, Revelations 12 : 9; 13 : 14; and 20 : 3. See also King James I, Daemonologie, ed. G.B.Harrison (Elizabethan & Jacobean Quartos; Edinburgh: University Press, 1966), p.8, where he explains that the Devil lures men

"even by these three passionnes that are within our selues: Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended; or greedie appetite of geare As to the first of these, Curiosity, it is onelie the inticement of Magiciens, or Necromanciers: . . . or Witches, for that olde and craftie Serpent, being a spirite, hee easilie spyes out our affections, and so conformes himselfe thereto, to deceaue vs to our wracke."

⁴ Several critics have pointed out that there was considerable interest at the time in the nature and import of equivocation. See, for example, Paul's comments on the subject on pp.237-247.

⁵ I.iii.127-129. See also Banquo's words in II.i.20-21: "I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters: / To you they have show'd some truth."

He then makes the third salutation come true: he murders Duncan and becomes king. Thenceforth he assumes that the witches tell truth. However, the ironic question that hovers throughout the remainder of the play is whether the witches' third salutation might have come true even if he had not forced the action by murdering Duncan. Macbeth himself is aware of this other possibility from the start —

If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,
Without my stir.¹

If this is so, he will have stained his soul in vain.

The actual cause of his falling away from God and from the Bonds lies in the fact that, having been made aware of the possibility of greatness, he cannot wait for the greatness to come in its own time,² but o'erleaps the natural process and wrests for himself what might have been his in any case. He ceases to rely on God's providence and takes a "bond of Fate"³ instead. Macbeth does not determine first whether this "supernatural soliciting" comes from God or from the devil,⁴ but makes it his own cause. The progress of his damnation can be traced in the fact that, of his own accord, he later seeks out the witches.⁵

The following quotation from the Daemonologie of King James is

¹ I.iii.144-145.

² For an interesting light on this question of the due or appointed time, see Ecclesiastes 3.

³ IV.i.84.

⁴ Compare Banquo, who prays for deliverance from the dreams that tempt him, and see the discussion and quotations on the previous page.

⁵ IV.i. See discussion on pp.339-340 for parallels between this action and that of Saul who sought out the witch of Endor.

of interest here, because it mirrors Macbeth's progress to damnation:

For divers men having attained to a great perfection in learning, & yet remaining overbare (alas) of the spirit of regeneration and frutes thereof: finding all naturall thinges common, aswell to the stupide pedants as vnto them, they assaie to vendicate vnto them a greater name, by not onlie knowing the course of things heavenlie, but likewise to clim to the knowledge of things to come thereby. Which, at the first face appearing lawfull vnto them, in respect the ground thereof seemeth to proceed of naturall causes onelie: they are so allured thereby, that finding their practize to prooue true in sundry things, they studie to know the cause thereof: and so mounting from degree to degree, vpon the slipperie and vncertaine scale of curiositie; they are at last entised, that where lawfull artes or sciences failes, to satisfie their restles mindes, even to seek to that black and vn-lawfull science of Magie. Where, finding at the first, that such diuers formes of circles & conjurations rightlie joyned thereunto, will raise such divers formes of spirites to resolute them of their doubts: and attributing the doing thereof, to the power inseparablie tyed, or inherent in the circles: and manie words of God, confusedlie wrapped in; they blindlie glorie of themselves, as if they had by their quicknes of ingine, made a conquest of Plutoes dominion, and were become Emperours over the Stygian habitacles. Where, in the meane time (miserable wretches) they are become in verie deede, bond-slaues to their mortall enemie: and their knowledge, for all that they presume thereof, is nothing increased, except in knowing evill, and the horrors of Hell for punishment thereof, as Adams was by the eating of the forbidden tree.¹

As our discussion of the tragedy progresses, it will become apparent that this is, indeed, what happens to Macbeth.

Ambition then is Macbeth's taint.² His is the "good and

¹King James I, Daemonologie, pp.10-11. Compare also, for example, I.iii.127-133:

[Aside] Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. — I thank you, gentlemen. —
[Aside.] This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good:—
If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth?

See also how Macbeth restlessly seeks to know ever more, how he conjures the witches to resolve him of his doubts, falls thrall to them, and realises he can only look forward to the punishment of Hell as a result.

²Fuller; Bk V, chap. iv, p.355, makes an interesting comment in his discussion of the Witch of Endor: "Mens minds are naturally ambitious to know things to come."

virtuous nature" that may "recoil in an imperial charge."¹ Ambition causes him to be "rapt withal" at the witches' words: so absorbed by the prospect of greatness that he is transported beyond himself,² blind to the better part of him.³

In their aspirations, there is something almost Faustian about Macbeth and his wife. Like Faust, they are not satisfied with that which they can obtain by natural means. Their ambition is a consuming force which causes them to "ravin up" their "own life's means"⁴ in the pursuit of its fulfilment. Like Faustus, too, they are prepared to sacrifice the future of their souls for present glory and power, admitting, yet not fully comprehending until too late, what such overweening ambition involves.

¹ IV.iii.19-20.

² The word "rapt" is used frequently in the early scenes. See, for example, I.iii.57 and 143; I.v.6; and I.v.56 ("transported").

³ See later discussion on pp.304-305. Hall, Vol. VII, p.112, defines ambition as follows: "Ambition is a proud covetousness; a dry thirst of honour; the longing disease of reason; an aspiring and gallant madness. The Ambitious climbs up high and perilous stairs, and never cares how to come down: the desire of rising hath swallowed up his fear of a fall."

⁴ II.iv.28-29. Lüthi, p.84, makes the following point:

"Der Titanendrang des Menschen über sich selber hinaus, wie er in Prometheus, Macbeth, Faust, Wallenstein in Erscheinung tritt, ist sich zweideutig: heilig und böse zugleich Der Mensch ist wesensmässig ein solcher, der über sich selbst hinauswachsen, das Bestehende, sich selber und die Welt, überwinden will, die Angleichung an Gott ist ein Christliches Ideal (Matthäus 5, vers 48). 'König werden' heisst es bei Macbeth wie bei seiner Frau. Aber in diesen Wachsenwollen, das eigentlich ein Sichentfernen von sich selbst bedeutet, steckt doch zugleich auch ein Verabsolutieren seiner selbst. Macbeth und Wallenstein werden sich zum Selbstzweck, alles andere wird Ding, Werkzeug, Mittel. Der unstillbare Drang nach oben ist legitim und lässt einen Macbeth, einen Faust, einen Wallenstein in einem volleren und höheren Sinne Mensch sein als trügere Gemüter es sind, aber diesselbe Intensität, die in dem Streben der Titanen lebendig ist, lässt sie nicht von sich loskommen, fesselt sie an sich selber, der Drang wird zur Gier, an die Stelle der Vergöttlichung tritt der Vergötzung, der Erzengel wird Satan."

It must be borne in mind, however, that ambition is not of itself sinful. It is the end toward which it is directed that can make of it an evil trait, and can lead to wicked deeds. Thus, ambition can lead to an enlargement of man; but it can also taint him and, therefore, be evil. What is important are the means employed and the purposes for which they are employed —

If divers men seek Fame or Honour, by divers wayes; so both bee honest, neither is to be blam'd: But they that seeke immortality, are not onely worthy of leave, but of praise.¹

In terms of the values of this play, ambition is an evil if it means living for one's own dark desires² instead of God's. It is an evil if it leads man to strive for the forbidden fruit in the hope that he might achieve a greatness, a power, a glory, a knowledge, that will set him above ordinary men, and yet deprive him of the eternal reward which is the lot of the virtuous Christian. In terms of these values, the ambitious man reaches out for the earthly crown, and loses the heavenly crown: for the kingdom of earth "leadeth to perdition, and is begun and established by ambition, covetousness, beastliness, craft, treason and tyrannie."³ Burton sets out the consequences of such ambitious deeds in a form which is very similar to the consequences brought about by Macbeth's actions: through ambition,

fair becomes foul, the Graces are turned to Harpies, friendly salutations to bitter imprecations, mutuall feastings to plotting villainies, minings and counterminings.⁴

¹Jonson (ed. Harrison), "Timber," p.11.

²See treatment of the imagery of "dark" and "night" on pp.306ff.

³Revelations 13 : 11, gloss (p) in 1588 version.

⁴Burton (Dent ed.), Vol.III, Pt III, Sec.1, Mem.1, Sub.2, p.21.

Macbeth also trespasses against the Law of Reason which God has implanted in him by allowing his passions and affections to overcome his will and his better judgement.¹ His will should lead him to the choice of the best good,² but the intemperance of his passion for greater power than that he wields or has been promised³ causes him to act contrary to the inclination of his will. It is through this intemperate ambition that Satan enters into him, for

that olde and craftie Serpent, being a spirite, hee easilie spyes our affections, and so conformes himselfe thereto, to deceave vs to our wracke.⁴

In the Elizabethan view, it is not wrong to be ambitious, but wrong to be over-ambitious, to trespass against moderation, against degree —

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows! . . .
.
Force should be right; or, rather, right and wrong —
Between whose endless jar justice resides —
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself.⁵

¹ See Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I, pp. 169-175, on the nature of Will and Appetite, and the relationship between them.

² See *ibid.*, p. 170: "To will is to bend our souls to the having or doing of that which they see to be good."

³ See, for example, Duncan's promises of greatness to Macbeth in I. iv. 28-32 and I. vi. 29-30.

⁴ King James I, p. 8.

⁵ *Troilus and Cressida* I. iii. 109-124. L. C. Knights, "'Macbeth' as a Dramatic Poem," *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. Laurence Lerner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 194, uses the quotation from *Troilus and Cressida* to point out that degree "represents society in harmony with nature, bound by love and friendship, and ordered by law and duty."

By yielding to his ambitious appetites Macbeth trespasses against the better part of his nature and negates the power of his will or reasoning mind to lead him upwards towards the attainment of a more divine likeness.¹ His fault is that his ambition exceeds the due measure proper in the good man — and throughout the play we see him revealing signs of such excess.²

It is by the sin of such wrongly-directed ambition that the angels fell,³ and, in Henry VIII, Shakespeare sets out clearly what the good man's course should rather be:

Fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels. How can man then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?
Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not;
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's, and truths; then if thou fall'st, . . .
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr!⁴

¹ See Hooker, Vol. I, Bk I.

² See, for example, Macbeth's words in II.iii.110-111: "Th' expedition of my violent love / Outrun the pauser, reason."

³ See, for example, Marlowe, Faustus I.iii:
Faust. Was not that Lucifer an angel once?
Meph. Yes, Faustus, and most dearly lov'd of God.
Faust. How comes it then that he is prince of devils?
Meph. O, by aspiring pride and insolence;
For which God threw him from the face of heaven.

⁴ Henry VIII III.ii.440-449. Bacon (ed. Watts and Collins), Essay XXXVI, p.109, however, is clear about the effects of frustrated ambition:

"Ambition is like choler; which is an humour that maketh men active, earnest, full of alacrity, and stirring, if it be not stopped; but if it be stopped, and cannot have his way, it becometh adust, and thereby malign and venomous. So ambitious men, if they find the way open for their rising, and still get forward, they are rather busy than dangerous; but if they be checked in their desires, they become secretly discontent, and look upon men and matters with an evil eye, and are best pleased when things go backward."

The words of the Chorus in "The Misfortunes of Arthur" set out even more explicitly the dangers of ambitiously trying to wrest kingly power for oneself:

Ye princely peers, extoll'd to seats of state,
Seek not the fair that soon will turn to foul:
 Oft is the fall of high and hovering fate,
 And rare the room which time doth not control.
 The safest seat is not on highest hill,
 Where winds and storms and thunders thump their ill:
 Far safer were to follow sound advice,
Than for such pride to pay so dear a price.

The mounting mind that climbs the haughty cliffs,
 And soaring seeks the tip of lofty type,
Intoxicates the brain with giddy drifts,
Then rolls and reels and falls at length plum-ripe.
 Lo, heaving high is of so small forecast,
 To totter first, and tumble down at last.
 Yet Pegasus still rears himself on high,
 And coltishly doth kick the clouds in sky.

Who saw the grief engraven in a crown,
 Or knew the bad and bane, whereto it's bound,
 Would never stick to throw and fling it down,
 Nor once vouchsafe to heave it from the ground,
Such is the sweet of ambitious power,
No sooner had, than turns oftsoons to sour,
Achiev'd with envy, exercis'd with hate,
Guarded with fear, supported with debate.

O restless race of high-aspiring head!
 O worthless rule both pitied and envied!
 How many millions to their loss you lead,
With love and lure of kingdoms' bliss untried!
So things untasted cause a quenchless thirst,
Which, were they known, would be refused first:
Yea, oft we see, yet seeing cannot shun
The fact we find as fondly dar'd as done.¹

It is interesting to note how many of the images here link up with the causes and effects of Macbeth's actions, and are mirrored in Macbeth itself.

¹Thomas Hughes, "The Misfortunes of Arthur," A Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed. Robert Dodsley, rearranged W. Carew Hazlitt (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), Vol. IV, Chorus, pp.296-297.

Although Macbeth is ambitious enough to consider the murder of Duncan, he is aware of the dangers of such ambition, and cannot be ambitious to the exclusion of consideration. He has

no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition,¹

yet he knows that ambition often "o'erleaps itself / And falls on th' other side."² Thus, Macbeth is not averse to the fruits of ambitious deeds, but loath to perpetrate them and afraid of their consequences. This is his dilemma: either he must be ambitious enough to murder Duncan and lose his soul, or, for his soul's sake, he must suppress his ambition and perhaps lose the crown. By nature he should and would prefer a course which did not implicate him in wrongful dealings, but his nature is at war with the size of his aspirations. Lady Macbeth sees through this type of desire and defines it as follows:

Yet I do fear thy nature;
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win; thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, "Thus thou must do," if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone.³

It is part of the tragedy that Lady Macbeth should deplore in her husband those very aspects of his ambition that belong to the better part of it; the characteristics that should ensure that he does not violate the laws laid upon him by the Bonds in order to attain his ends. At the same time, however, she does point out a basic ambivalence in Macbeth's

¹ I.vii.25-27.

² I.vii.27-28.

³ I.v.16-25.

attitude: the fact that he would gladly eat the fruits of evil, yet does not want to bear the responsibility of plucking them.

Lady Macbeth's own ambition is far less ambiguous. Once apprised of the possibility of a crown for her husband, she has no scruples about catching the "nearest way" to it by murdering Duncan. Deliberately, she will bend all her powers to this end,

pour mine spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.¹

Perhaps her failure to weigh the consequences, either temporal or eternal, springs from the fact that she concentrates so single-mindedly upon the means to the end that (unlike Macbeth) she fails to realise that the assassination might not be "the be-all and the end-all."² However, although she does not shed blood, she is the instigator of its shedding, an accomplice in the crime, and the stain upon her soul is as dark as that upon Macbeth's.

In some ways, indeed, Lady Macbeth is her husband's second tempter. She spurs him into action by attacking him through the tender

¹I.v.26-30.

²I.vii.5. Wayne Booth, "Shakespeare's Tragic Villain," Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism, ed. Laurence Lerner (Penguin, 1963), p.188, maintains that

"Macbeth knows what he is doing, yet he does not know. He knows the immorality of the act, but he has no conception of the effects of the act on himself or his surroundings Even though he has a kind of double premonition of the effects of the deed both on his own conscience and on Duncan's subjects . . . he does not really understand."

Such an assumption is perhaps more correctly applied to Lady Macbeth; as we shall see, Macbeth's conception of the consequences of his evil is far clearer.

spots in his character, re-fires his ambition, reviles him for cowardice, and mocks his manliness¹ :

Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thing own act and valour,
As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' th' adage?²

The disjunction touched on here between the "desire" and the "act" brings us to the next aspect of the operation of the Bonds in the tragedy. Why should Macbeth desire the crown, yet flinch from their contemplated method of attaining it?

The physical act of murdering a defenceless man³ is little reason why Macbeth should be afraid. What are worthy of fear in the context of this play, however, are the religious and social implications of violating the Bonds which forbid man to murder man, and should prevent Macbeth from murdering Duncan. Thus, it is necessary to differentiate between the different forms of fear and bravery if one is to understand Macbeth's attitude to the murder of Duncan — and his reactions after the murder.

¹W.A.Murray, "Why was Duncan's Blood Golden," Shakespeare Survey, no.19 (1966), p.39, points out that "critics have noticed before that Lady Macbeth re-enacts the Fall of Eve, as Macbeth does that of Adam."

²I.vii.35-45. Kott, p.134, points out that "den Vollzug des Mordes verlangt sie von ihm geradezu wie einen Liebesakt."

³The "unguarded Duncan" of I.vii.71.

We first see Macbeth as the protagonist of the brave soldierly virtues:

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),
 Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
 Which smok'd with bloody execution,
 Like Valour's minion, carv'd out his passage.¹

There are, however, two kinds of courage.² One is physical courage, this brave soldierly courage that Macbeth is praised for, the courage of the swordsman, or of the man who will face the "rugged Russian bear, / The arm'd rhinoceros, or th' Hyrcan tiger"³ without trembling. The other courage is far more difficult to define. Perhaps it could best be termed "moral" courage. This is the courage to do what is right in the eyes of God and man, and to strive after what is best in oneself — the courage to resist temptation.⁴ As a corollary, there are some things a man is a coward to fear, and there are some things of which he should rightly be

¹I.ii.16-19.

²We can here expand the earlier quotation from Knight, The Imperial Theme, p.126:

"Sons, kinsmen, thanes — all are bound close together. Scotland is a family, Duncan its head. A natural law binds all degrees in proper place and allegiance. Only in terms of this allegiance is courage an honourable ideal."

³III.iv.99-100. Frye, pp.151ff., makes an interesting distinction between the several types of fear. The first type should enable us to guard ourselves against sin; the second type is the fear arising from "acting in defiance of the moral law, of God and man"; the third type is the fear of not fearing, of having a conscience that is dead. The first two will be dealt with in the following pages, and we shall return to discuss the third fear, or lack of it, when we deal with the effects of his actions upon Macbeth.

⁴By distinguishing between the different types of courage, the present writer differs from Bradley, p.295, who claims that: "In reality his courage is frightful. He strides from crime to crime, though his soul never ceases to bar his advance with shapes of terror, or to clamour in his ears that he is murdering his peace and casting away his 'eternal jewel.'" His murder of Duncan shows a lack of the courage to resist temptation, and his later actions seem to spring more from the "valiant fury" of a man who has nothing left to lose but life, rather than from true courage.

afraid.¹

As long as he fulfils the Bonds laid upon him by God, a Christian can be brave in the knowledge that he need

feare . . . not them which kill the bodie, but are not able to kill the soule: but rather feare him which is able to destroy both soule and body in hell.²

This is the major distinction between the two types of fear, and is crucial to an understanding of what happens in Macbeth. Thus, Macbeth is no coward when the dangers are the physical ones of battle or wild beasts. However, he is justifiably afraid of the consequences of his sins — not only on earth, but in the afterlife. A murderer violates the Bonds laid upon him by God, and has real cause to be afraid of what the afterlife holds for him. This is the ironic difference between the murdered Duncan and the murderer, Macbeth. Duncan

is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further!³

Duncan has nothing more to fear. Though his body has been killed, his soul cannot be touched by Macbeth.⁴

There are several exchanges between Macbeth and his wife in which this distinction between these two types of fear and courage is debated. Let us examine two of them. The first occurs after the murder of

¹Campbell, p.208, has an interesting definition of "prudence" as a keeping of the mean between foolish hardness and fear.

²Matthew 10 : 28 (1599 version).

³III. ii. 22-26.

⁴We shall return to examine this point when we discuss the effects of the murder upon Macbeth and his wife.

Duncan:

Macbeth. I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

Lady M. Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping, and the dead,¹
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil.²

The second example of this type of debate occurs when the ghost of
Banquo appears:

Lady M. Are you a man?
Macbeth. Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the Devil.

Lady M. O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear:
This is the air-drawn dagger, which, you said,
Led you to Duncan. O! these flaws and starts
(Imposters to true fear), would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authoris'd by her grandam.³

To Lady Macbeth, her husband's fear is unreal because it is a
moral fear, not fear of a tangible, physical danger. To Macbeth, this is
the more real fear. It is interesting to note that this difference of attitude
is represented in the imagery through different interpretations of appear-
ance and reality. Lady Macbeth refers to the "painted devil" seen

¹ See discussion on pp.327ff. of sleep and death.

² II.ii.49-54. Compare Francis Bacon, ed. Arthur Johnston
(London: B.T.Batsford, 1965), p.113:

"Men feare Death, as Children feare to goe in the darke¹: And as
that Natural Feare in Children, is increased with Tales,² so is the
other.

¹Children. Lucretius in Books 1,3,6, of De Rerum Natura,
repeats 'Even as children tremble and fear everything in
blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things
that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder
at in the dark, and imagine will come to pass.'

²Tales. children are frightened by stories of ghosts, etc.;
men (according to Lucretius) by stories of punishment after
death."

³ III.iv.57-65.

through the "eye of childhood," the very "painting" of his fear, or a "woman's story at a winter's fire."¹ To her, Macbeth's is an unrealistic dread of shadows and illusions, because he is not threatened at the visible, palpable level. Macbeth, however, dare not "look," because the invisible dangers, since they threaten the life of his soul, are a more real threat — one that might "appal the Devil."

This is why Macbeth cannot face with equanimity the ghost of the man whose blood is on his hands. To him, the ghost is real, because his consciousness of his sin is real² — "The wicked flee when none pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."³ Macbeth's fear is the fear of punishment that springs from an awareness of guilt. Were they only natural dangers, he could face them as bravely as any man, but his unnatural act will call forth unnatural consequences against which he is powerless. The dagger and the ghost are terrible reminders of the horrors of hell.⁴

The question of bravery and cowardice has another aspect, too. And this aspect is concerned with the characteristics that "become" a man, which assume significance when we remember our earlier discussion of the Elizabethan view of the nature of man and the laws or Bonds that,

¹The images themselves draw a grimly ironic contrast between the devil of puppetry, picture-book and story (which is all childish innocence has to fear) and the dread ruler of the damned souls.

²It is interesting to compare Macbeth's reactions to the appearance of Banquo's ghost and to the apparitions raised to confuse him by Hecate (see p.336).

³Proverbs 28 : 1 (1599 version).

⁴As we shall see later when we discuss the effects of the murder, Macbeth is (as he himself admits) not so much "brave" as "bold," not so much courageous as foolhardy.

ideally, govern this nature.

Thus, Lady Macbeth taunts Macbeth with cowardice because he is loath to murder Duncan, and Macbeth replies that he

dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more, is none.¹

That is, the man who would do things unbecoming to himself as a member of humankind is not being brave or manly in the true sense of the word, because he is negating the characteristics that make him worthy of his kind. Lady Macbeth immediately counters his argument with one of her own:

What beast was't then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be so much more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man.²

In one sense, Lady Macbeth is correct: Macbeth is already guilty of a certain "beastliness" by virtue of the fact that he has contemplated such an enterprise. On the other hand, however, she fails to make Macbeth's distinction between physical and moral bravery and physical and moral cowardice. She will not admit that there are deeds that are not proper for a man to commit. Indeed, Lady Macbeth goes one step further, and maintains that she would abjure all womanliness within her if she were in Macbeth's position.³

What is it then that makes a man manly? What are the deeds that "become" a man? If we can find an answer to these questions in the

¹ I.vii.46-47.

² I.vii.47-51.

³ See pp.314-315 for a further discussion of this point.

Bonds of Nature, Law or Grace, we may perhaps better understand the nature of Macbeth's trespass against these Bonds.

In Antony and Cleopatra we saw the qualities Antony represents being opposed to the qualities embodied in Caesar, the new Roman, and we analysed this as being in part a debate between the old chivalric qualities and those of modern power-politics.¹ To a certain extent, a similar debate occurs in Macbeth. The old virtues of fortitude, courage, humility, nobility and honour, which Duncan seems to represent (and which Macbeth at first appeared to represent²), are challenged and violently defeated by the new forces of ambition, polity, power-seeking, unscrupulous dealing and tyranny. The

king-becoming graces,
As Justice, Verity, Tempr'ance, Stableness,
Bounty, Perserverance, Mercy, Lowliness,
Devotion, Patience, Courage, Fortitude,³

which symbolise the ideal freedom and self-fulfilment within the order of the Bonds are overthrown by overweening, by injustice, untruths, insecurity, avarice, intemperance, hardness of heart, pride, selfishness, impatience, terror, and — eventually — a type of despair. The catalogue of contravention of all that goes to make an ideal man is complete.

The qualities that fit a man are opposed to the ill-becoming qualities revealed by Macbeth, and the "king-becoming graces" show up the unbecoming nature of Macbeth's kingship. The clothing and tailoring

¹ See pp.244ff.

² See, for example, the descriptions of Macbeth's courage in I.ii. Note also how often he is spoken of as "noble Macbeth."

³ IV.iii.91-94. Elyot deals at great length with these "king-becoming graces" and their opposites.

images which run through the play underline these contrasts further. The "golden opinions" bought by Macbeth's nobility of action at the beginning of the play, which "would be worn now in their newest gloss, / Not cast aside so soon,"¹ are indeed cast aside by Macbeth when he casts aside his nobility of bearing and action by murdering Duncan. The "new honours come upon him" are never given a chance to "cleave" to their "mould" with the "aid of use,"² for these, too, he casts away. In their stead, he attempts to wrest for himself the golden crown and the royal robes that are not his by right. Macbeth does not, however, have the necessary moral stature to wear these robes, and his title hangs "loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief."³

And, in setting his sights upon the crown at all costs, Macbeth disregards the divine injunction:

Lay not up treasures for your selves upon the earth, where the mothe and canker corrupteth, and where theeves digge through and steale.

But lay up treasures for your selves in heaven, where neither the mothe nor canker corrupteth, and where theeves neither digge through nor steale.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.⁴

The trappings of royalty that he has stolen can be worn only on earth; on the great judgement day he will be naked before God, for the crown is only an earthly "ornament"⁵ — Macbeth's real "eternal jewel"⁶ should be his soul.

¹See I.vii.33-35.

²See I.iii.145-147.

³V.ii.21-22.

⁴Matthew 6 : 19-21 (1599 version).

⁵See I.vii.42.

⁶See III.i.67.

By contrast, Macbeth's opponents are naked in the face of his tyranny,¹ but their nakedness also has in it the strength of Christ, who was the naked, new-born babe.² Their nakedness is, moreover, a sign of their innocence, and their vulnerability to tender human feeling. Macbeth wears his clothes like an armour about him to blunt up his more tender sensibilities: he tries to "blanket"³ and "scarf up"⁴ all that is delicate and sensitive in the world about him, lest it should cry out at his violation of the Bonds. Similarly, he will seek to hide his "bare-fac'd power"⁵ and cruelty under a mask of feeling.⁶

If we delve deeper into this question of what suits or becomes a man, we come up against another problem that, once again, can only be answered by an understanding of certain Bonds or Laws. How else, for example, is one to understand the following lines spoken by Macbeth:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man,
That function is smother'd in surmise,
And nothing is, but what is not.⁷

¹ See, for example, the sequence of images in I.iii.126-127 ("And when we have our naked frailties hid, / That suffer in exposure"); and in II.iii.130 ("In the great hand of God I stand").

² Compare I.vii.21-22: "Pity, like a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast."

³ See Lady Macbeth's "blanket of the dark" in I.v.53.

⁴ See III.ii.47.

⁵ III.i.118.

⁶ See, for example, I.vii.82-83 (and Lady Macbeth's words in ll.78-70); III.i.124-125; and Malcolm's verdict in II.iii.136-137. It is also interesting to compare Macbeth's image of the actor in V.v.24-28 (see discussion on pp.355-363) and to contrast Duncan's words in I.iv.11-12.

⁷ I.iii.139-142.

If we assume the harmony and fit nature of good, and assume that that which is evil is disruptive and unfitting, then evil is also that which attacks the becoming singleness of man's body, mind and soul, so that he is no longer a "whole" man. That is, evil disrupts the Bonds within man himself, the Bonds which keep him whole — both pure and free from sin and unified in body, mind and spirit. By contemplating the murder of Duncan, Macbeth violates his proper function, so that his self is no longer becoming to him.¹ He trespasses against his own integrity.²

It may be useful to compare the speech quoted above with the following passage from Matthew:

The light of the body is the eye: if then thine eye³ be single, thy whole body shalbe light.

But if thine eye be wicked, then all thy body shalbe darke. Wherefore if the light⁴ that is in thee, be darkenesse, how great is that darkenesse?⁵

Here the word "single" has the same meaning as in the passage from Macbeth. Both passages deal with the usurpation of the normal coherent mode of being and knowing by the fragmenting, smothering effects of evil.

¹Note that earlier (see p.288) we spoke of Macbeth as being "rapt," and explained what that meant.

²See, for example, Raleigh's debate in Bk II, Pt I, chap. iv, p.224, on the degree of sin that the continent man (who bridles the evil desires he has) is guilty of, and that the incontinent man (who has good desires which are overcome by contrary passions) is guilty of.

³See gloss (g) in 1599 version: "The iudgement of the mind: that as the body is with the eyes, so our whole life may be ruled with right reason, that is to say, with the spirit of God wherewith we are lightened."

⁴See gloss (r) in 1588 version: "If the concupiscence and wicked affections overcome reason, we must not marvaile though men be blinded, and be like unto beastes."

⁵Matthew 6 : 22 -23 (1599 version). See also gloss (7) to this edition: "Men doe maliciously and wickedly put out even the little light of nature that is in them." For further comment on this text, see also the Homily, "Of Good Works," p.50.

As a result of this evil, Macbeth can no longer define existence in terms of the known Bonds or Laws, because they cease to operate: "function is smother'd in surmise," and the nature of things can only be assumed to be the antithesis of what it normally is — "nothing is, but what is not." Macbeth, when he commits murder, ceases to live in the light of goodness, and enters the darkness of evil, where all is equivocation and doubt.

And, in a sense, he dies when he thus forsakes the better part of his being, for, as St Augustine explains of Adam's sinning, "in this was the first death felt, that is the departure of the soul from God."¹

Having dealt with the working of evil in Macbeth, and having seen that evil runs counter to that unity of being that should be his, and all that accords with the better part of him, let us turn now to examine the working of evil in Nature, whose Bonds are transgressed.

Nature has a divinely ordained and divinely sustained order in which growth, development, change, time and fortune all play their part. However, Nature also contains within itself the germs of evil and disorder, and the forces that wither and decay or can bring about a withering and a decaying. As long as the Bonds are maintained, these potentially evil forces are contained and restricted to their appointed function. If and when the Bonds are broken, the seeds of evil are spilled out to cause disruption and destruction.²

¹St Augustine, Bk XIII, chap.xv, p.11.

²Rather like Pandora's box that, when opened by Epimetheus, spilled forth all the evils that afflict the world. Compare the comments of Curry in chap. ii ("Tumbling Nature's Germens"), pp.29-49.

According to the Laws of Nature, night and day are both aspects of the normal, natural solar cycle, and darkness and light are signs of this cycle. Night itself is not evil, nor is darkness evil, just as neither day nor light are in themselves good. God created both night and day, and both are natural necessary occurrences that function according to His plan for the world.

However, night and day can also become symbols of events that take place during their dominance. Thus, during the day, Nature is active and busy. The light enables men to see, and their deeds are seen. At night, life or consciousness is seemingly suspended; Nature "sleeps" in order to restore its strength for the day's activities. As a result, night is a dangerous time because the powers of good are at their weakest, and the powers which use the darkness for their own ends are able to attack most successfully. So, Macbeth can say:

Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles Night's black agents to their preys do rouse.¹

When man is in the dark, he cannot see or be seen. When he is asleep, he is defenceless, an easier prey for "wicked dreams"² and

¹ III. ii. 52 -53.

² See Rainer Lengeler, Tragischer Wirklichkeit als Grotteske Verfremdung bei Shakespear (Anglistische Studien; Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1964), p.185:

"Nur auf dem Hintergrund jener aus dem Mittelalter überkommenen Vorstellung, nach der der Mensch im Schlaf und Traum infolge der Ausschaltung seines Bewusstseins der Tätigkeit der Dämonen ausgeliefert ist, versteht sich auch der Topos von der grotesk-verfremdeten Welt als Traum, als 'phantasma, or a hideous dream' (Julius Caesar II. i. 65)."

Browne, in an essay entitled "On Dreams" (ed. Keynes, Vol. III, pp.230-233), points out that the "phantasmies of sleepe do commonly walk in the great road of naturall and animal dreames" (p.230), but adds that, "beside these innocent delusions there is a sinfull state of dreames; . . . & there may bee a night booke of our Iniquities" (p.233).

the visitations of evil spirits.¹ Macbeth himself formulates the dangers that lurk under cover of the dark:

Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep: Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd Murther,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost.²

Night is also, therefore, the time when murderers and tyrants are wont to go about their business; the time when the spirits of evil are abroad; and materials are best collected for the preparation of spells and charms — the "root of hemlock, digg'd i' th' dark,"³ and "slips of yew, / Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse."⁴

Thus, it is an easy transition from the concept of night as the time during which evil is most likely to take place, and the concept of light and day as the time when the forces of good are at their strongest, to the images of night and darkness as signs of evil⁵ opposed to the

¹ See, for example, Banquo's prayer in II.i.7-9 and the discussion of the imagery of sleep on pp.327ff. Compare Thomas Nashe, *Works*, ed. R.B.McKerrow, reprinted F.P.Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), Vol. I, p.386: "Hence it is, that sinne generally throughout the scripture is called the workes of darknesse; for neuer is the diuell so busie as then, and then he thinkes he may aswel vndiscovered walke abroad, as homicides and outlawes."

² II.i.49-56. It is interesting to note that, in the continuation of this quotation, it is Macbeth himself who hopes to steal with murderous intent through the dark.

³ IV.i.25.

⁴ IV.i.27-28.

⁵ Compare Rudolf Stamm, Shakespeare's Word-scenery: With Some Remarks on Stage-history and the Interpretation of His Plays (St Gallen: Handelshochschule, 1954), p.20: "But the darkness is not dead and neutral; it is alive with the symbols of evil."

the images of light and day as signs of good.¹ In the same way, too, black and white come to represent sin and innocence.²

This explains why, when contemplating evil, Macbeth and his wife make their appeals to Night:

Stars, hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires³;

Come, thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, "Hold, hold."⁴

Come, seeling Night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful Day,
And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,
Cancel and tear to pieces, that great bond
Which keeps me pale!⁵

Evil such as they contemplate, they dare not perpetrate when the "tender eye of pitiful Day" or the forces of good would bar their way. Once again, however, the ramifications of the imagery extend far beyond the single, simple aspect discussed here, for the echoes of the evil dramatised by

¹Rudolf Stamm, Zwischen Vision und Wirklichkeit: Zehn Essays über Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Eugene O'Neill und Christopher Fry (Berne: Francke Verlag, 1964), p.35, makes the point that: "Während der Mord an König Duncan vorbereitet wird und geschieht, gehen die äussere und die innere Nacht ineinander über, die eine steigt die Not und das Grauen der anderen." Compare also Duncan's words in I.iv.41-42: "Signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine / On all deservers."

²See, for example, the "secret, black, and midnight hags" of IV.i.48; "black Hecate" of III.ii.41; and "black Macbeth" of IV.iii.52. In contrast, the images of whiteness are to be found in the milk, the snow, and the lamb that represent the good.

³I.iv.50-51.

⁴I.v.50-54.

⁵III.ii.46-50. For further comment on this quotation, see pp.317-318.

Shakespeare in Macbeth range through the whole realm of human imagination and experience. The natural external night and darkness become symbols of the inner spiritual darkness that, in terms of the definition found in Matthew,¹ descends upon Macbeth and his wife.

Let us turn now and examine the witches, who are so much a part of this evil. The witches in Macbeth are the "secret, black, and midnight hags,"² the "instruments of Darkness,"³ the Devil's emissaries; and it is against these that man should wage a ceaseless battle:

For we wrestle not against flesh & blood,⁴ but against principalities, against powers, and against the wordly governours, the princes of the darknesse of this world, against spirituall wickednesse, which are in the high places.⁵

A gloss on this verse in the 1588 version deals with the relationship between this evil and the Bond of Grace:

The faithfull have not onely to strive against men and themselves, but against Satan the spirituall enemy, who is most dangerous: for he is over our heads, so that we cannot reach him, but he must be resisted by God's grace.⁶

Thus, man need not so much fear the power of the witches to do him harm in this life, as their power to seduce him to spiritual wickedness that will damn him in the life to come. Although they might be able to cause

¹ See earlier quotation from Matthew 6 : 22-23 on p.304.

² IV.i.48.

³ I.iii.124.

⁴ It is interesting to compare this with Macbeth's fear not of flesh and blood, but of spiritual dangers.

⁵ Ephesians 6 : 12 (1599 version). See Sir Thomas More, More's Utopia and A Dialogue of Comfort, intro. John Warrington (reprinted; London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1962) , p.233, for an elaboration on this text.

⁶ Ephesians 6 : 12, gloss (f) in the 1588 version.

man to "dwindle, peak and pine,"¹ they cannot touch his soul unless he yields it to them of his own choice. Although they can tempt and deceive, cast spells and charms, destiny itself lies, ultimately, in God's providential care and man's free will.²

The witches are part of the forces of potential evil in Nature, the "multiplying villainies of nature,"³ and the power of decay, rotting and withering.⁴ They are thus not so much not a part of Nature, as abnormal, deviant, and against all that is good and beneficial in Nature.⁵ They subvert all customary values and norms, blight all natural growth and development, unremittingly abjure all Bonds and laws, and distort all truths. They live upon the "blasted heath,"⁶ and appear in thunder,

¹I.iii.23. See also ll.24-25: "Though his bark cannot be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tost."

²Compare Bartholomaeus (Anglicus) *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, trans. by John Trevisa (Westminster, Wynkyn de Worde, [1495]), Bk II, rubric xix: "Also it is sayde there that they [evil spirits] haue no power nother vertue agaynst men, but it be graunted by dysposycon and suffraunce of god." See also King James, p.32: "It is to be noted nowe, that the olde and craftie enemye of ours, assailes none, . . . except he first find an entresse redde for him."

³I.ii.11.

⁴See also discussion on pp.338-339.

⁵This is, for example, the basis of the contrast between the "compunctious visitings of Nature" and "Nature's mischief" in Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in I.v. Compare John Cotta, *The Triall of Witchcraft* (1616) (The English Experience, no. 39; Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1968), p.34:

"Here may be againe objected, that the Diuell is able to worke aboue the power of Nature. . . . It is answered, though the diuel indeed, as a Spirit, may do, and doth many things aboue and beyond the course of some particular natures: yet doth hee not, nor is able to rule or commaund ouer generall Nature, or infringe or alter her inviolable decrees in the perpetuall and neuer-interrupted order of all generations; neither is he generally Master of vniuersall Nature, but Nature Master and Commaunder of him."

⁶See, for example, I.iii.77.

lightning and in rain,¹ which are traditionally symbols of a disruption or abnormality in the state of Nature. Their appearance, too, reveals their social exile: they are "wither'd" and "wild"² in their attire, "should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so,"³ and "look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth, / And yet are on 't."⁴ The owl, the raven, the crow, the toad and the cat (animals ominous or loathsome to ordinary people) are their pets and familiars,⁵ and they themselves can assume abnormal guises,⁶ or call up spirits to do their bidding.⁷ The witches in Macbeth also have powers of levitation and of invisibility not revealed by ordinary mortals:

Banquo. The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
 And these are of them. — Whither are they vanish'd?
Macbeth. Into the air; and what seem'd corporal,
 Melted as breath into the wind.⁸

Man falls victim to the witches because they know his weaknesses and prey upon them, because he is gullible and superstitious and readily believes that which he would fain have true — or fears to be true. These are Macbeth's failings.

¹See, for example, I.i.2.

²I.iii.40.

³I.iii.45-47.

⁴I.iii.41-42.

⁵See, for example, I.i.8-9 and IV.i.1ff.

⁶See, for example, I.iii.9: "Like a rat without a tail."

⁷See, for example, III.v.27ff., and the apparitions of IV.i.

⁸I.iii.79-81. See also the "sightless substances" in I.v.49. This quotation seems to underline the fact that the witches are a part of Nature, although abnormal.

At the same time, man can obtain a certain power over the witches by conjuration.¹ That is, he can call them up by abjuring all the normal Bonds of Nature, Law and Grace, and by reversing, for example, all normal relationships, attitudes and religious practices — not only in thought, but in word and deed as well.² Evil is always hovering, ready to enter to those who will violate good.³

It is worth noting, then, that Macbeth's very first words, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen,"⁴ almost mirror the witches' first incantation:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air,⁵

in which all normal states are reversed. Does Macbeth at this stage conjure the witches? We should hesitate to maintain such a standpoint: rather, perhaps, is he at this stage the object of their spells and their temptation. On his second meeting with them, however, he definitely does conjure them by abrogating his dependence on all the normal Laws of Nature:

I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:
Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the Churches; though the yesty waves

¹ See earlier quotation from King James I on p.287.

² See Nashe, Vol.I, p.358, for a reference to the manner of witches' working by using "halfe Scripture and halfe blasphemie."

³ See earlier quotation from King James I on p.310.

⁴ I.iii.38.

⁵ I.i.11-12. Bradley, p.283, cites this as an example of the "Sophoclean irony" that is a characteristic of the tragic form in Macbeth.

Confound and swallow navigation up¹;
 Though bladed corn be lodg'd, and trees blown down;
 Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
 Though palaces, and pyramids, do slope
 Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
 Of Nature's germens tumble all together,
 Even till destruction sicken, answer me
 To what I ask you.²

Thus, Macbeth sets out his preparedness to have the entire world run counter to its essential principles, which are visible in its order and purposeful function, to gain from the witches the answers to the nagging doubts and fears that haunt him. The terrible irony (as we shall see) is that, although Macbeth abrogates his dependence on all the normal Laws of Nature, calls forth every catastrophe and disruption in the order of the world, he does not expect Nature to breach the Bonds that keep her in her course.³

¹This is one of several references to the fact that the witches were thought to have control over wind and weather. See also, for example, I.iii.11-25.

²IV.i.50-61. The textual notes to these lines refer to Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, in which is set out the belief that the witches had control over storms, and an ability to "transfere corne in the blade from one place to another." The notes also make the following point:

"Curry shows, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns, pp.31ff., that Nature's germens are the rationes seminales, 'the material essences which correspond to the exemplars in God's mind.' He quotes Augustine, De Trinitate: 'But in truth, some hidden seeds of all things that are born corporeally and visibly, are concealed in the corporeal elements of this world. . . . For the Creator of these invisible seeds is the Creator of all things himself; since whatever comes forth to our sight by being born, receives the first beginnings of its course from hidden seeds, and takes the successive increments of its proper size and its distinctive forms from these as it were original rules.' "

³See pp.336-338 for a discussion of the fact that this is one of the reasons why he becomes a victim of the witches' final equivocation, why he does not expect Birnam forest to uplift its roots, nor someone not born of woman to defeat him.

A similar direct invocation of the witches or spirits of evil occurs in Lady Macbeth's appeal:

Come you Spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts,¹ unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on Nature's mischief!²

It is interesting to note that Lady Macbeth's conjuration is far more personal than that of Macbeth. Macbeth summons the witches by calling forth global catastrophe; Lady Macbeth summons the spirits of evil by repudiating her natural self, and all the qualities and instincts that are thought, in terms of the Bonds, to be natural and proper for a woman.³ She appeals to the spirits to "unsex" her. And here, too, the tragic irony will operate: Macbeth who has done things no man should do, and Lady Macbeth who has become unwomanly, become the bearers of a barren crown.

The imagery used by Lady Macbeth in her appeal to the witches is also echoed again in her later proclamation of steadfastness in the contemplation of evil:

¹Note again the reference to the fact that the witches "tend on mortal thoughts," hovering everywhere, waiting on "Nature's mischief," ready to gain entrance to those who will open themselves to evil.

²I.v.40-50.

³Schücking, p.143, points out that Lady Macbeth's invocation of the witches is very similar to that of Medea. See also Inga-Stina Ewbank, "The Fiend-like Queen: A Note on 'Macbeth' and Seneca's 'Medea'," *Shakespeare Survey*, No.19, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), pp.82-94.

I have given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
 And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
 As you have done to this.¹

A mother is normally seen as the life-giver and the life-sustainer, the ultimate source of love and pity, which are the outward signs of the operation of the Bond of Grace.² But, here, the imagery of the mother tenderly giving suck to her defenceless babe is horribly inverted to that of a witch-like creature,³ whose milk shall turn to gall, and who would dash out the brains of her own child — in complete violation of these Bonds of Nature and of Grace.

From these passages it also becomes clear that both Lady Macbeth and her husband realise that only moral violence, a screwing of their courage to the "sticking-place," can make their bodies, minds and spirits overcome their natural repugnance towards such a violation of the

¹ I.vii.54-59.

² Compare Lady Macbeth with, for example, Mary, the mother of Christ — who is the symbol of love and pity. By maintaining that she would violently dash out the brains of her own flesh and blood, Lady Macbeth is taking one step further than King Lear the violation of the Bonds which are thought to be intrinsic to the fact of consanguinity. At the same time, there is once again a parallel implicit here between Christ's redeeming blood which flowed freely for all men, and Lady Macbeth's blood hardened to all movement of love, pity or remorse in her body. Marlowe's Faustus, for example, contains such a parallel: when Faustus attempted to write in blood the deed which signed away his soul to the devil, the blood itself congealed.

³ Richard Flatter, Grundlagen und Gedanken zum Verständnis Klassischer Dramen; Shakespeare: "Macbeth" (Vienna: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1958), pp.61ff, discusses critics such as Kreissig, who have seen Lady Macbeth as "Überhexe" or "eine altnordische Furie." There does not appear enough evidence in the text to prove that Lady Macbeth was herself a witch, although she is definitely witch-like. It is interesting to note that she is never called a "witch" in the tragedy, only the "fiend-like" queen (V ix.35). See also Paul, pp.268-270.

self. Only the power of their wrongly-directed will and determination to do evil can steel them to the act. Lady Macbeth's blood must be made "thick," and its "access and passage to remorse" must be stopped up, so that "no compunctious visitings of Nature" can shake her determination to do evil by causing her healthier self to reject such diseased intent. And Macbeth must "bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat,"¹ and trespass against the natural aversion of his physical and spiritual being to deeds such as those he contemplates.

In fact, the evil they contemplate and perpetrate is depicted in terms of what is almost a physical disease; ill comes to mean the same as evil.² And the saving healthiness of the body shows its perturbation at such a contemplated violation of the Bonds:

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature.³

There is a madness in what they propose⁴ that is reflected by the body and the mind in starts and palpitations, the visions of the dagger and the ghost, and, later, in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking. It brings about a

¹ I.vii.80-81.

² It must be noted, however, that "ill" meaning "sick" in the modern sense was not an Elizabethan usage. As we shall later see, this evil contaminates all Scotland (e.g.V.iii.50-56) and only the forces of good that vanquish Macbeth can administer the medicine that will restore her to health and sanity (e.g.V.ii.27-29). Bamborough, pp.22-23, points out that "Shakespeare frequently speaks of the body politic in terms of the human body. He very often, for example, likens civil disturbance to bodily illness."

³ I.iii.135-137.

⁴ It is interesting to note that, after the appearance of the witches, Banquo asks:

Were such things here, as we do speak about,
Or have we eaten on the insane root,
That takes the reason prisoner? (I.iii.83-85)

dichotomy between hand and eye and sight and touch¹ which is indicative of the soul-sickness that attacks the Macbeths from within in the same way as the external disorders they cause threaten them from without. Eventually, Macbeth will no longer be able to rely on the information provided by his senses, for they, too, will deceive him.

Indeed, both Macbeth and his wife remain afraid that Nature herself will intervene to prevent such terrible deeds; afraid that her "compunctious visitings" or "pitiful day" will bar their way. This explains their appeals to the forces of evil or to Night — which we have seen becomes a symbol of evil — for assistance in cancelling all those Bonds which legislate against such transgressions:

Come, seeling Night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful Day,
And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,
Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond
Which keeps me pale!²

¹This is the key to the hallucinatory dagger he sees in II.i. 33-39 (my underlining):

Is this a dagger, which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:—
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling, as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.

.....
Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
Or else worth all the rest: I see thee still;
And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. — There's no such thing.
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes.

It is also interesting to compare this with the discussion in the chapter on Antony and Cleopatra (see p.207) on the eyes as being the most fallible of the sense organs .

²III.ii.46-50 (also quoted on p.308).

And each time they intend evil, they appeal anew to these forces without whose aid they could not plumb the depths of evil that they do. The "great bond" Macbeth wishes cancelled is much more than the "bond by which Banquo and Fleance hold their lives from Nature,"¹ It is the sum of all those Bonds we have discussed so far, all the statutes of man and God and Nature against which he has transgressed. It is also the "bond of fate"² he has entered into by the murder: a course upon which there is no going back,³ a violation of the Bonds of Nature, Law and Grace. And the fear that keeps him "pale," that will not give him rest or surcease from anxiety, is the knowledge that, for his transgressions against these Bonds, he will at some stage be required to repay both the capital and the interest —just as the Devil came at the appointed time to claim his dues from Faustus.⁴

¹See textual notes to III.ii.49.

²IV.i.84. See also the textual notes to this line.

³See John Donne, The Sermons of John Donne, ed. with introd. by George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), Vol. I, Sermon 2, p.181:

"Take heed lest these sins carry thee farther, then thou intendest: thou intendest but Pleasure, or Profit; but the sin will carry thee farther: Quæris quo? says that Father; Dost thou ask whither? Ad cor durum. To a senslesness, a remorselesness, a hardness of heart: nec pergas quærere, (says he) quid illud sit; Never ask what that hardness of heart is: for, if thou know it not, thou hast it."

⁴Curry, p.127, comments as follows upon this quotation: "He recognizes that the acts of conscience which torture him are really expressions of that outraged natural law, which inevitably reduces him as individual to the essentially human. This is the inescapable bond that keeps him pale, and this is the law of his own nature from whose exactions of devastating penalties he seeks release. . . . He conceives that quick escape from the accusations of conscience may possibly be effected by utter extirpation of the precepts of natural law deposited in his nature. And he imagines that the execution of more bloody deeds will serve his purpose."

This analysis of the world in which the Macbeths transgress brings us to the end of the study of the reasons why, given the Bonds that operate, they yet decide to murder Duncan. Our next consideration will be: what happens once they violate these Bonds? What must they expect once they have murdered Duncan?

The first point to be made is a reiteration of the fact that the murder of Duncan is the causal nexus of the tragedy. His death is not an end. It is the beginning of the tragedy of Macbeth and his wife. And the crux of the play is reached when Macbeth enters and says, "I have done the deed."¹

The murder of Duncan is the first irrevocable step that Macbeth takes on his way to the crown of Scotland. Once Duncan is dead, there is nothing he or his wife can do to undo their act. "What's done is done,"² and nothing on earth will wake Duncan from his sleep of death, although Macbeth would wish it otherwise.³ It is this finality that will haunt them, for, although Lady Macbeth maintains that "things without all remedy / Should be without regard,"⁴ yet the enormity of their trespass bars the way to such forgetfulness. Every day that Macbeth is King, and Lady Macbeth his Queen, is a reminder of the means they used to get there. Innocence once lost cannot be regained. Their only hope would lie in

¹ II.ii.14.

² III.ii.12. Lines spoken by Lady Macbeth. She returns to this thought in almost identical words during the sleepwalking scene (V.i.65): "What's done cannot be undone."

³ See II.ii.73: "Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would thou couldst!"

⁴ III.ii.11-12.

forgiveness by virtue of the Bond of Christ's Grace; and we shall see that they are unable to "remedy" their condition by this path.

At the same time, however, as Duncan's death is final, the consequences that arise from his death are (as we shall see) only in their infancy. Macbeth knew this, and yet did not expect it to be so. This is the terrible irony contained in his soliloquy prior to the murder:

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all.¹

And, as our examination of the effects of the murder upon the course of the tragedy progresses, we shall see Macbeth and his wife being faced at every turn with the practical and spiritual consequences of their deed.

At the moment when Macbeth murders Duncan, he sets himself apart from other men, both as a criminal and as a sinner. Like Cain, the first murderer, Macbeth (and Lady Macbeth, his accomplice) is henceforth doomed to be amongst men, and yet set apart from them, always alone, because he has stepped outside the community of those who keep the Bonds, so that God's curse upon Cain seems to become applicable to him: "A vagabonde and a runnagate shalt thou be in the earth And the Lord set a marke upon Kain."²

Both Macbeth and his wife know what they have done, and, because they know the extent of their trespasses against the Bonds of Nature, Law and Grace, they live in constant fear that others should know it too. Thus, the second effect that the murder has upon them is

¹I.vii.1-5.

²Excerpts from Genesis 4 : 12-15 (1599 version).

that it causes them to fear the imminent revelation of their crime, despite all their attempts to conceal it from men or from God.

In the world in which they live, however, there is no possibility of hiding their deed of darkness from the omniscient eyes of the Divine, for

His eyes are vpon the wayes of man, and hee seeth all his goings.

There is no darkenesse, nor shadowe of death, that the workers of iniquitie might be hid therein.¹

Psalm 139 outlines even more clearly the all-seeing, all-knowing, ever-present, inescapable God who is in the wings throughout the tragedy of Macbeth:

Whither shall I goe from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I lie downe in hell, thou art there.

.....
If I say, Yet the darkenesse shall hide me; even the night shall be light about me.

Yea, the darkenesse hideth not from thee: but the night shineth as the day: the darkenesse and the light are both alike.²

Even if this God does not immediately exact retribution upon Macbeth for his sins, Macbeth must live in fear of the Lord who will come, who "will lighten things that are hid in darkenesse, and make the counsels of the hearts manifest."³ Thus, neither Macbeth nor his wife can hope to hide

¹Job 34 : 21-22 (1599 version).

²Psalm 139 : 7-12 (1599 version).

³I Corinthians 4 : 5 (1599 version). We shall return to I Corinthians 4 : 3-5 when we deal with human judgement and Divine judgement (see pp.345ff.). It is interesting to note that the imagery here is also concerned with light and darkness as symbols of good and evil, revelation and concealment, deceit and truth. And, as we shall see, the only means by which Macbeth could escape these fears that haunt him would be by casting himself upon the Divine Mercy

their deeds from the eyes of God; whether they trespass by night or by day, in the open or secretly. "Heaven knows what she has known"¹ — as the Waiting-gentlewoman says.

Almost as important for an understanding of their state of mind after the murder, is the fact that (in addition to their inability to hide their crime from the eyes of God) they cannot either hide their knowledge of their crimes from themselves. The human reason implanted in them by God through the Law of Nature makes it impossible for them to escape this knowledge of themselves. This explains why Macbeth and his wife dwell so often upon their horror of thinking upon their deeds — let alone looking upon them.² To look upon their deeds, really to face what they have done, would mean having to acknowledge what they have become.³ In some ways, then, it little matters who else can call them to "account"⁴:

¹V.i.47.

²See, for example, Macbeth's words in II.ii.50-51:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

³And, to face what they have done could lead to madness. See Lady Macbeth's words in II.ii.32-33: "These deeds must not be thought / After these ways: so, it will make us mad," and Macbeth's words in II.ii.72: "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself." The textual notes to the latter quotation contain references to remarks by Wilson and Ellis-Fermor which throw further light on this point.

⁴V.i.36-38: "What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?" Coming as late in the tragedy as this quotation does, it proves that, maugre all their claims to the contrary, this consideration does gnaw at the peace of Macbeth and his wife. One of the key dramatic functions of the sleepwalking scene is to demonstrate that all the problems and fears dismissed so lightly by Lady Macbeth before the murder of Duncan remain real and ever-present throughout the tragedy. The accusations of their own consciences are more damaging to Macbeth and his wife than any other voices which speak against them. The latter can, if necessary, be silenced by brute power; nothing can still the voices of the former.

they are their own strictest judges.¹

Macbeth and his wife do also, however, fear the judgement of men upon their trespasses, and they live in constant fear that their horrid deeds will be told, will be visible. This fear of being seen and being heard springs partly from their fear of being cast out of society if the nature of their violation of the Bonds should become known. And, although they have broken the Bonds, they still would wish others to observe them, for to be king is nothing unless one is accorded the Bonds due to a king. To be king is nothing unless one has subjects.²

Macbeth, therefore, lives in constant fear that Duncan's virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind³;

that the earth itself will cry out in horror at the deed and make his horrid crime known to all; that the blood itself will cry out as Abel's did:

The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me [God] from the ground, and now art thou cursed from the earth which hath opened up to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand⁴;

or that Nature herself will find a voice to cry out at the violation of her

¹We shall deal with this point again when we discuss their inability to cast themselves upon Christ's Grace.

²Compare King Lear's position. Macbeth's rule degenerates to the point where "those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love" (V.ii.19-20).

³I.vii.19-25.

⁴Genesis 4 : 10-11 (1599 version).

Laws — that "the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beame of the timber shall answere it,"¹ or that a "bird of the air shall carry the voice."² This is the meaning underlying Macbeth's words:

Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak³;
 Augures, and understood relations, have
 By magot-pies, and choughs, and rooks, brought forth
 The secret'st man of blood.⁴

Macbeth therefore lives in fear that his violation of the Bonds shall stand like the naked truth for all to see, and that it shall be told for all to hear — in Heaven and on earth.

In fact, his fear that Nature will revolt against his violation of the Bonds is not groundless. As the tragedy develops, Shakespeare shows us ever-increasing examples of a "perturbation in nature."⁵ The audience becomes a witness to the fact that "unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles."⁶ Nature shows signs of her violation:

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
 Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
 Lamentings heard i' th' air; strange screams of death,
 And, prophesying with accents terrible

¹Habakkuk 2 : 11 (1599 version),

²Ecclesiastes 10 : 20 (1599 version).

³It is interesting to compare this with the fact that Birnam wood later appears to "walk." No wonder the sight of those moving branches fills Macbeth with such horror.

⁴III.iv.122-125. See also the fear expressed before the murder of Duncan (II.i.56-59):

Thou sure and firm-set earth,
 Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
 The very stones prate of my where-about
 And take the present horror from the time.

⁵V.i.9.

⁶V.i.68-69.

This revolt occurs in the body itself as well. The signs of the perturbation in Nature can be read in the physical toll taken of Macbeth and his wife:

Who then shall blame
His pester'd senses to recoil and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself, for being there?¹

It is an illness or disorder, however, that needs rather the "divine than the physician,"² for it is the physical sign of a spiritual distress. Only repentance and forgiveness through the Grace of Christ could cure Lady Macbeth, could

minister to a mind diseas'd
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart.³

The body becomes at war with itself, because the actions of the Macbeths are at odds with the nature implanted in them. The symbolic revolt becomes clearer when one compares Macbeth's cry, "What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes,"⁴ with the following passage:

Wherefore if thy right eye cause thee to offend, plucke it out and cast it from thee: for better it is for thee, that one of thy members perish, then that thy whole body should be cast into hell.⁵

¹V.ii.22-24.

²V.i.71.

³V.iii.40-45.

⁴II.ii.58.

⁵Matthew 5 : 29 (1599 version). See also the treatment of "hand" in Matthew 5 : 30:

"Also if thy right hand make thee to offend, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for better it is for thee, that one of thy members perish, then that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

This physical disturbance is one of the results of Macbeth's trespass that frightens him most, because it cannot be controlled by rationalisation. Macbeth "murders" sleep.¹ The consciousness is in abeyance during sleep, but not the conscience. And the conscience continues to take physical toll of Macbeth and his wife throughout all their restless nights.² As soon as reason is suspended, man can no longer rationalise his actions and drive away fear and the sense of guilt. Lady Macbeth cannot deceive her subconscious mind into accepting that her deed has not been terrible. The signs of the perturbation in her nature reveal themselves in the fact that she walks in her sleep.

As we mentioned earlier, man cannot escape his knowledge of himself. Although he might defy or deceive others, Nature will take its toll of him, and "infected minds / To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets."³ The knowledge of themselves that Macbeth and his wife bear is too terrible to be forgotten or ignored. This is why it comes upon them when they relax their guard, as in sleep. Fuller's description of the Tyrant therefore has a direct bearing on the development of the tragedy in

¹ See II.ii.34-42.

² Compare Nashe, Vol.I, pp.367-368:

"Ah woe be to the solitarie man that hath his sinnes continually about him, that hath no withdrawing place from the diuell and his temptations.

Much I wonder how treason and murder dispense with the darknes of the night, how they can shriue themselues to it, and not raue and die. Me thinkes they shuld imagine that hell imbraceth them round, when she ouer spreads them with her blacke pitchie mantle."

³ V.i.69-70. See also II.ii.68-69: "Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles." Note how both these quotations link the imagery of disease with the presence of evil.

Macbeth:

He is glad to patch up a bad nights sleep, out of pieces of slumber. They seldome sleep soundly, who have bloud for their bolster. His phansie presents him with strange masques, wherein onely Fiends and Furies are actours. The fright awakes him, and he is no sooner glad that it was a dream, but fears it is propheticall.¹

Sleeplessness is also the curse the witches have power to inflict; they curse the Master of the Tiger in this way:

Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse lid;
He shall live a man forbid,
Weary sev'n-nights nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine.²

It is the curse that is inflicted on Macbeth and his wife. For their violation of the Bonds, neither can look forward to this welcome and necessary relief from the day's toil that is the right of the innocent man. By

¹ Fuller, Bk V, chap.xvii, p.447. Compare Nashe, Vol.I, p.358: "Dreames to none are so fearfull, as to those whose accusing priuate guilt expects mischiege euerie hower for their merit. Wonderfull superstitious are such persons in obseruing euerie accident that befalls them; and that their superstition is as good as an hundred furies to torment them. Neuer in this world shall he enioy one quiet day, that once hath giuen himselfe ouer to be her slaue. His eares cannot glowe, his nose itch, or his eyes smart, but his destinie stand vpon her triall, and till she bee acquitted or condemned, he is miserable.

A cricket or a rauen keep him fortie times in more awe than God or the Diuell."

See also Browne (ed. Keynes), Vol. III, p.232:

"However dreames may bee fallacious concerning outward events, yet may they bee truly significant at home, & whereby wee may more sensibly understand ourselves. Men act in sleepe with some conformity unto their awaked senses, & consolations or discouragements may bee drawne from dreames, which intimately tell us ourselves."

It is also interesting to note the following excerpt from Burton (Blake ed.), Pt III, Sec.4, Mem.2, Sub.3, pp.718-719:

"Kennetus, king of Scotland, when he had murdered his nephewe Malcolme, King Duffes son, prince of Cumberland, and with counterfeit tears and protestations, dissembled the matter a long time, at last his conscience accused him, his unquiet soule could not rest day or night; he was terrified with fearful dreams, visions, and so miserably tormented all his life."

their violation of Nature, they exclude themselves from the enjoyment of sleep, the "season of all natures,"¹ the

innocent Sleep;
Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.²

Here, we see sleep linked with the necessary spiritual nourishment of the mind and the senses, just as food is necessary for the physical nourishment of the body. Man cannot do without this sleep that is "a rest or binding of the outward senses, and of the common sense, for the preservation of body and soul."³

At the same time as sleep is presented as a necessary natural occurrence, however, it also gains a more frightening aspect, and this dual nature is to be found in many of the passages in Macbeth that deal with sleep. The following quotation from Donne's "Devotions" deals with both aspects:

"Naturall men have conceived a twofold use of sleepe; That it is a refreshing of the body in this life; That it is a preparing of the soule for the next; That it is a feast, and it is the grace at that feast; That it is our recreation, and cheeres us, and it is our Catechisme, and instructs us: we lie downe in hope, that wee shall rise the stronger; and we lie downe in a knowledge, that wee may rise no more.⁴

¹ III iv.140.

² II ii.35-39.

³ Burton (Blake ed.) Pt I, Sec.1, Mem.2, Sub.7, p.102.

⁴ Donne, "Devotions," p.86. The linking of the imagery of sleep with that of food or feasting is another example of the spilling over of images into each other that is characteristic of Shakespeare's treatment of his themes. As we saw in the quotation on the previous page, the common theme that links the two is that of sustenance, both physical and spiritual.

Macbeth murders sleep. As a result, neither he nor his wife can lie down in hope that they will rise the stronger, for they cannot escape "the affliction of these terrible dreams, / That shake us nightly."¹ Yet, they continue to lie down in the knowledge that they may "rise no more." They are therefore afraid of sleep,² for it pictures forth the sleep of death from which the virtuous shall awake and rise to greater joy, but the wicked shall awake to be damned to eternal suffering.³

This question of the death that may come at any time links up with another question: that of certainty and uncertainty. Death is one of the few sure aspects of the future — man knows that he must die, although he cannot always know the manner or the time of his dying. The only eternal life man can hope for is eternal life after death; earthly life he lives only for the span allotted him by God. And, when he dies at the end of his earthly life, the time will come when all the secrets of his heart will be known to God. Thus, Macbeth's only sure knowledge of the future is his knowledge that he cannot escape death or the reckoning that will come. Instead, however, of basing his actions upon this knowledge and, therefore, avoiding those deeds that could lead to his eternal death, Macbeth bases his actions upon surmise, upon speculation, upon the

¹ III.ii.18-19.

² Perhaps this explains why Lady Macbeth has light always by her.

³ We shall return to this point on pp.347-348 and pp.355-358. See also Donne, "Devotions," p.11: "Every nights bed is a Type of the grave." Compare Latimer, Sermon XXIX, p.548:

"So that when we believe in Christ, death shall not hurt us, for he hath lost his strength and power; insomuch that it is no more a death but rather a sleep, to all them that be faithful and fear God; from which sleep they shall rise to everlasting life. Also the wicked truly shall rise, but they shall rise to their damnation; so that it were better for them never to rise."

witches' prophecies, and an attempt to "look into the seeds of time."¹

He attempts to bend the time to his own purpose (egged on by Lady Macbeth)² and forgets that only God knows what will be.

In contrast to Macbeth, the Restorers only count on what is known to be certain — because it has happened — and wait for the time to resolve itself:

The time approaches,
That will with due decision make us know
What we shall say we have, and what we owe.
Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate,
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate.³

Had Macbeth acted similarly, he would not have fallen prey to the witches' equivocations about the future, and would not therefore need fear, as he now does, the death that could overtake him in sleep.

As the tragedy moves onward, we see Macbeth and his wife being progressively stripped, like Lear,⁴ of all the simple, necessary things that make up normal human existence. By violating the Bonds of Nature, Law and Grace which ordered the world in which they live, they forfeit their right to enjoy the sacraments partaken of by those who still remain within the community. They can no longer eat in peace, or sleep

¹I.iii.58. Spoken by Banquo to the witches.

²See, for example, I.vii.51-54:

Nor time, nor place,
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you.

As mentioned earlier, Lady Macbeth's error lies in not correctly anticipating or envisaging the future into which their deeds will precipitate them.

³V.iv.16-20.

⁴See pp.131ff.

in peace, or walk and talk freely with men. They also lose the right to enjoy the reciprocal aspects of the Bonds which they formerly enjoyed from others. Those who have violated the Bonds can no longer expect friendship, or love, or the honour previously accorded them;

And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.¹

By his deserts, Macbeth had "bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people,"² but, by his actions, these have been cast aside. Now, both he and his wife are sensitive enough to be keenly aware of their loss, keenly aware that

nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.³

And they are aware, too, that the golden crown they snatched at has less real value than those golden opinions of their fellow men, and peace of mind lost outweighs the "doubtful joy" gained.

¹V.iii.24-28.

²I.vii.32-33.

³III.ii.4-7. It is interesting to note the imagery of commerce that links the golden opinions "bought" with the fact that now "all's spent." It forms part of a chain of imagery that runs right through the play and deals, among other things, with the "lease of Nature" that is man's life on earth, and the souls that the Macbeths have "sold" to the devil. It culminates in the calling to "accout" of Judgement Day, when all their dealings shall be set out in the great book of records for all to see. Compare the following extract from the Homily, "Of Good Works," p.258:

"The life which we live in this world, . . . is of the free benefit of God lent us, yet not to use it at our pleasure, after our own fleshly will, but to trade over the same in those works which are beseeching them that are become new creatures in Christ."

Since Macbeth and his wife have lost the love and obedience that would have been their due had they gained the crown by honest means, they can now only use the power they wield to force obedience; those Macbeth commands "move only in command, / Nothing in love."¹

At the same time, Macbeth and his wife lose the peace and inner security that come from an easy conscience, for the evil-doer

is haunted with the terrors of his own conscience. If any two do but whisper together . . . he conceives their discourse concludes against him.²

As a result, they are forced to seek an external security.³ The kingship that they have founded on blood can only be retained by further bloodshed, so that, like ripples in a bloody pool, the repercussions of their initial act involve them in further murders as the number of persons who pose a threat to them increases. "Mischief is sometimes safe, but ne'er secure"⁴; no-one can trust them, and they can trust no-one.⁵

By murdering Duncan, Macbeth lays himself open to threats from Malcolm and Donalbain — who escape beyond his reach and thereby ensure that he can never feel secure. His course henceforth becomes like that of the men depicted in the following quotation from Daniel:

¹V.iii.19-20. Compare also Lady Macbeth's words in V.i.36-38: "What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to accompt?"

²Fuller, Bk V, chap.xvii, p.447.

³*Ibid.*, chap.xv, p.442: "A king though killed is not killed, so long as he hath sonne or subject surviving." This is, perhaps, the lesson for Macbeth.

⁴"The Misfortunes of Arthur" (ed. Dodsley, Vol IV), I.iv, p.276.

⁵For further examples of this, see *ibid.*, pp.276-278.

Yet mighty men with wary iealous hand,
 Striue to cut off all obstacles of feare;
 All whatsoeuer seemes but to withstand
 Their least conceit of quiet, held so deare;
 And so intrench themselues with blood, with crimes,
 With all iniustice as their feares dispose:
 Yet for all this we see, how oftentimes
 The meanes they worke to keepe, are meanes to lose.¹

Thus, Macbeth is precipitated from crime to crime in a frantic seeking after security of tenure, for "to be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus."² In the process he must kill the two grooms, to provide himself with "murderers" who cannot tell the truth. He must then kill Banquo and his son, Fleance, because Banquo knows of the witches' prophecy, because in his "royalty of nature / Reigns that which would be fear'd,"³ and because the withces have prophesied that Macbeth's crown will pass to Banquo's heirs. But Banquo's heir escapes to remain an unassailable threat to his security. He then fears "treachery" from Macduff who has spoken openly against him, refuses to attend him,⁴ and against whom the witches have warned him. But Macduff, too, escapes his sword and threatens his security. Eventually, all Scotland cries out against him,⁵ for all Scotland

¹Daniel, "Cleopatra," p.52, ll. 568-575.

²III.i.47.

³III.i.49-50. Note the words used to describe Banquo's nature; Macbeth reigns, but he lacks this royalty of nature.

⁴Since he cannot reach Macduff, Macbeth avenges himself by murdering his defenceless, innocent wife and children.

⁵See Kott, p.129:

"Er tötet den rechtmässigen Herrscher. Er muss die Zeugen des Verbrechens töten, und die, die ihn verdächtigen. Er muss die Söhne und die Freunde derer töten, die er zuvor hatte töten müssen. Dann muss er alle töten, denn alle sind gegen ihn:

. . . skirr the country round;

Hang those that talk of fear; Give me mine armour!
 Schliesslich wird er selbst getötet."

has suffered in his attempts to make his throne secure by force, if not by love.¹

Macbeth is therefore stripped both of security and freedom by his murder of Duncan, of the grooms, of Banquo, of Macduff's wife and children, and of all those others who stand in his way; and it is heightened by the fact that Malcolm and Donalbain, Fleance and Macduff escape his toils. Those he has killed and those who have escaped haunt him: they rise as ghosts from the past and visions of the future; they constrict his freedom of thought and action; leave him no freedom from fear. The following lines, spoken when he hears that Fleance has escaped, vividly depict his situation:

I had else been perfect;
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casing air;
But now, I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.²

The deeper he wades in blood, the less choice of action he has if he wishes to retain the throne of Scotland.³

¹See IV.iii.4-8 and 164-173.

²III.iv.20-24; see also III.i.106-107 for his attitude to Banquo:
Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
Which in his death were perfect.

The tragic irony is that Macbeth can never be "perfect" by this means.

Two set of images culled from Biblical sources would seem to show the inversion of values that occurs here. The first is the parable of the wise man who built his house upon rock, and the foolish man who built his upon sand. The second is that of the way to goodness, which is "strait" and narrow, and the path to evil that is broad and wide.

³See Kott, p.140, on Macbeth's search for the murder to end all murders:

"Macbeth sehnt sich nach der allerletzten, endgültigen Mordtat, nach dem Mord, der dem Morden ein Ende setzen würde. Jetzt weiss er dass es einem solchen Mord nicht gibt. Das ist die dritten und letzte Erfahrung Macbeths. Die toten kehren wieder."

This frantic quest to "make assurance double sure"¹ is finally the cause of Macbeth's downfall, for it causes him to clutch at the illusions raised to confuse him by Hecate, who

Shall raise such artificial sprites,
As, by the strength of their illusion,
Shall draw him on in his confusion.
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear;
And you all know, security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy.²

Thus it is that, despite the signs of a furious disorder in Nature, and the fact that his own conjurations³ have called forth the reversal of all the order of Nature, Macbeth does not really believe that Nature will breach her Bonds. This is what makes him fall prey to the final equivocation of the witches. This is why he feels sure in the belief that Birnam forest will not come to Dunsinane, for

that will never be:
Who can impress the forest; bid the tree
Unfix his earth-bound root?⁴

and that he need not fear Macduff when "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth,"⁵ since there is no man alive who is not born of woman. He clings to these promises as a charm, a talisman that will allow him to "live the lease of Nature, pay his breath / To time, and mortal custom."⁶

¹ IV.i.83.

² III.v.27-33. See Lüthi, p.87, for another interpretation of the nature of security: "Sicherheit ist des Menschen Erbfeind, denn der Mensch ist seinem Wesen nach ein Unsicherer, und wenn er sich einbildet sicher zu sein, verfällt er einer letzter Selbsttäuschung."

³ See IV.i.50-61 (quoted on pp.312-313).

⁴ IV.i.94-96.

⁵ IV.i.80-81.

⁶ IV i.99-100.

Macbeth, who has violated every Bond and Law in the world in which he lives, still hopes to die the natural death that accompanies old age in a normal world. Because he needs to believe the witches, he does not seek to discover whether or not there could be a natural explanation for such seemingly unnatural events.¹

The final stripping that occurs is, therefore, one that brings him to the "desolation of reality,"² the knowledge that his entire course has been based upon equivocations. Macbeth, who has so often sought to deceive others by seeming what he was not,³ has himself been deceived into acting upon double truths.

The process occurs in several stages. Firstly, Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane, quite naturally, borne as branches by the soldiers of the opposing force. Macbeth's disillusionment commences as he begins

To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend,
That lies like truth: "Fear not, till Birnam wood
Do come to Dunsinane"; — and now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane.⁴

Still he clings to the hope that "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth," and this hope is strengthened by the fact that he manages to slay young Siward — only to be dashed when Macduff reveals that he was not born, but from his "mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd."⁵ Too late, the

¹ Just as, earlier, he did not question the nature of the witches' prophecy, but interpreted it to his own design.

² Yeats, "Meru."

³ See, for example, I.v.62-65; I.vii.82-83; and III.ii.31-35.

⁴ V.v.43-46.

⁵ V.viii.15-16.

realisation dawns that the "juggling fiends" are no more to be believed,

That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.¹

Macbeth is entirely alone now, stripped even of the truths in which he had faith.

As the tragedy gathers momentum we see Macbeth and his wife being linked with some of the great Bond-breakers of history and of the Bible. At times the parallels are overt and explicit, at other times it is only the type we recognise. In the pages that follow, no attempt will be made to prove that one can equate Macbeth with Pilate or with Judas; all that is hoped is that, by looking at these other figures, we shall better be able to understand the development of the tragedy and the resonances of the imagery.²

As mentioned earlier, Macbeth becomes like Cain, the first murderer, a man marked and set apart from other men. God, however, also cursed Cain in another way: "When thou tillest the soil it shall not henceforth yield unto you her strength."³ In the same way, things wither under Macbeth's hands for his sin against Nature and the Law of God. Nothing

¹V.viii.19-23.

²These parallels would probably have been recognised by the playgoers of Shakespeare's time — accustomed as they were to the sermons and homilies of their day and to the Miracle and Morality plays that were still being performed. They are seldom so obtuse or so complex that it would require any large degree of scholarship to understand them. Indeed, they are usually standard references to a limited number of figures, symbols and concepts. Frequently, too, the use of the name of such a character, or reference to his type, is a dramatic shorthand for the qualities or actions he is usually assumed to represent. Thus, Cain stands for murderer, etc., or vice versa.

³Genesis 4 : 12 (1599 version).

worthwhile blossoms or flourishes under his care, for evil such as his stultifies beneficent natural growth and encourages only weeds instead — and a barren crown.¹ Eventually his life itself falls into the "sere, the yellow leaf,"² like that of the evildoer who shall "be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."³

For his trespasses against the Law of God which states that,

Let none be found among you that . . . useth witchcraft, or a regarder of times, or a marker of the flying of foules, or a sorcerer.

Or a charmer, or that consulteth with spirits, or a soothsayer, or that asketh counsell at ye dead.

For all that do such things are abomination unto the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth cast them out before thee,⁴

Macbeth will become like Saul, who sought out the witch of Endor against the will of God. And, like Saul, he will be shown a vision of his power passed from the hands of his family, despite all he might seek to do to

¹ See, for example, III.i.60-61 (my underlining):

Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,

And put a barren sceptre in my gripe.

The forces of right ranged against Macbeth will pour in as much of themselves as is needed to "dew the sovereign flower, and drown the weeds" (V.ii.30).

² V.iii.23.

³ Psalm 37 : 2 (1599 version). On the subject of Cain, see Samuel Purchas, Microcosmus or the Historie of Man (1619) (The English Experience, no.146; Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1969), p.224:

"Looke vpon Kain, the first-borne of Men, cursed and branded by God, and in his many remoouings, neuer able to shake off an accusing Conscience: wretched Man, alwayes bleeding his Brothers blood, not daring to looke vp to Heauen, fearing to looke downe to Hell: Accursed from the Earth, a Runnagate in the World: his Bodie marked with a Brand, no lesse of Ignominie then safetie; his Soule become a Stage for Anguish, Horror, Desperation, and other the Furies of Hell."

⁴ Deuteronomy 18 : 10-12 (1599 version). It is interesting to note that, when Macbeth approaches the witches of his own accord, the only question he does in fact ask is, "Shall Banquo's issue ever / Reign in this kingdom?"

retain it¹ :

So Saul died for his transgression that hee committed against the Lord, euen against the word of the Lord which he kept not, and in that he sought and asked counsell of a familiar spirit.²

Like Pilate, who trespassed against the gracious person of Christ, Macbeth and his wife will attempt in vain to wash the stains of their sin from their hands. Pilate, when he saw that

he availed nothing, but that more tumult was made, hee tooke water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this iust man: looke you to it.³

Pilate, however, was not freed from the responsibility of his part in Jesus' death merely because he washed his hands of the actual killing. Therefore, how much more guilty must Macbeth and his wife be, who not only did not prevent the murder of Duncan, but bore the knife themselves? The course of events will prove that, although they will be able to wash the physical signs of the blood from their hands, Lady Macbeth and her husband will not be able to wash the stain of the blood from their consciences, nor hide the stains from the sight of God or man.

The imagery of the blood-stained hands runs as a theme through Macbeth,⁴ and consists of several strands woven into the pattern of the tragedy. The first strand is perhaps most closely linked with the Pilate story, and deals with the attempt to wash away the blood of Duncan.

¹ See I Samuel 28, and compare IV.i.110-130.

² I Chronicles 10 : 13 (1599 version).

³ Matthew 27 : 24 (1599 version). Compare Richard III II.i. 270-271: "How fain, like Pilate, would I wash my hands / Of this most grievous murder."

⁴ There is a striking contrast between the violent hands the Macbeths lay on Duncan, and the healing laying-on of hands practised by the English King (see IV.iii.141 ff.).

It is interesting to note that, at first, it is Lady Macbeth who maintains that " a little water clears us of this deed: / How easy it is then! "¹ Despite her earlier asseverations, however, Lady Macbeth is haunted by the blood upon her hands. Indeed, it is one of her main preoccupations during the sleepwalking scene²: proof that the stain upon her conscience cannot be washed away as easily as she had thought.

From the start, Macbeth is keenly aware that there is a vast difference between the mere washing away of the blood upon his hands and the deeper effects created by the bloodying of his hands:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,³
Making the green one red.⁴

¹II.ii.66-67. See also II.ii.45-46: "Go, get some water, / And wash this filthy witness from your hand." Perhaps Lady Macbeth's early belief that it would be easy to cleanse themselves of the blood substantiates the present writer's claim that she does not look as deeply into the implications of their trespass against the Bonds.

²See, for example:

- V.i.27-29: "It is an accustom'd action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour."
 V.i.30: "Yet here's a spot."
 V.i.34: "Out, damned spot! out, I say."
 V.i.38-39: "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"
 V.i.42: "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"
 V.i.48-49: "Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

³It is interesting to note that the first plague in Egypt caused the waters to turn to blood (Exodus 7 : 17-21), and that one of the plagues of the Book of Revelations turned a third of the sea to blood (Rev. 8 : 8ff.).

⁴II.ii.59-62. The textual notes cite Cunliffe on Seneca's Phaedra as a possible source for this image, and refer to other critics' theories on the subject.

Despite her earlier claims to the contrary, Lady Macbeth similarly realises the impossibility of simply washing away that blood: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (V.i.48-49).

Not only will his sin be ineradicable, but its effects will also be multiple, will lead to a sea of blood. Even at this stage, therefore, we see Macbeth regarding his violation of the Bonds by murder as something which taints all he touches¹ — a violation that cannot be confined to a single event, though he would wish it so.

There are, moreover, two further aspects of the imagery of blood that link up with the Bonds. One aspect is the cleanness of a man's hands as the sign of his innocence; the other is the redemptive washing of man in the blood of Christ. Three quotations from sources outside the tragedy help to illumine this further:

The Lord rewarded mee according to my righteousnesse: according to the purenesse of mine hands hath he recompensed me.²

There is no puritie, nor cleannes, but by the blood of Christ onely, which purgeth our sinnes, and so maketh vs white.³

Though your sinnes were as crimson, they shall be made white as snow: though they were red like scarlet, they shalbe as wool.⁴

Red and white,⁵ sin and righteousness, damnation and redemption are vividly opposed: the blood shed by Macbeth and his wife on one hand, and Christ's blood shed for the redemption of man on the other. Christ's blood was shed to reconcile the Bonds of Nature and of Law by Grace,

¹ Compare the Mirror for Magistrates, p.364, ll.120-121:
But what thing may suffise the bloody man,
The more he bathes in bloud, the bloudier he is alway.

² 2 Samuel 22 : 21 (1599 version).

³ Revelations 7 : 14, gloss (n) in 1588 version.

⁴ Isiah 1 : 18 (1599 version).

⁵ See, for example, Lady Macbeth's words in II.ii.63-64:
My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white.

and thereby give sinful man new hope of life after death; the blood of his own kin¹ was shed by Macbeth for his own earthly gain, a "breach in nature"² and in the Law, for "ruin's wasteful entrance."³

Thus we see that the imagery of blood and bloodied hands ranges from parallels with Pilate's attempts to wash his hands of the blood of Christ to Christ's blood shed for man.⁴

A similar movement occurs in Shakespeare's treatment of the imagery of food and feasting; from possible parallels with the actions of Judas at the Last Supper⁵ to possible parallels with the body and blood of Christ as the food of life.⁶ Macbeth becomes the type of Judas: a man who can contemplate the death of his Lord, while he is attending a feast in his honour.

Breaking bread together is one of the outward and visible signs of the communion of those who observe the same Bonds. A meal, or a

¹ Blood is a symbol of kinship, and Duncan is Macbeth's cousin.

² II.iii.113.

³ II.iii.114.

⁴ As the present writer has repeatedly stressed, however, such parallels should not be laboured. The echoes are there, but they are perhaps fainter than many critics would wish them.

⁵ Compare, for example, Christ's words to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13 : 27), with Macbeth's words, "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly" (I.vii. 1-2), and with Lady Macbeth's words, "He has almost supp'd. Why have you left the chamber?" (I.vii.29).

⁶ The references to the "chalice" (I.vii.11), the "vessel" (III.i.66), and the "wine of life" (II.iii.95) can perhaps be seen as references to the Eucharist. In Macbeth's case, the chalice is "poison'd" and there are "rancours" in the vessel of his peace. Instead of partaking of the life of Christ, he has "supp'd full with horrors" (V.v.13). See also the comments of Horst Oppel, Shakespeare: Studien zum Werk und zur Welt des Dichters (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1963), pp.152ff., for further references and parallels.

banquet, is traditionally seen as the symbol of plenty, trust, hospitality, harmony and concord. Food is also one of man's basic physical needs: without food and drink he will die. The Eucharist is the outward and visible sign of God's plentiful Grace through Christ; it is the sign of man's faith in God's promises; the sign of the peace of God; the sign of the new dispensation that comes through Christ. Without this spiritual food, man cannot live with God in the life to come.

Judas violated this life-giving celebration by murderously planning to betray Christ, the epitome of Grace. Macbeth does the same at the banquet attended by the "gracious" Duncan. Having murdered Duncan, he then compounds the travesty of the symbolic meaning of the banquet by holding a second supper at the time when he has arranged for Banquo to be murdered. Small wonder then that his conscience calls forth the ghost of Banquo to haunt him with the grossness of his transgression. Henceforth, too, he will be excluded from the community of those who can partake of the life-giving sacraments.¹ He will no longer be able to eat in peace.²

¹ Compare *ibid.*, p.154: "Der lebendige Gegenwart des Toten trennt den Gastgeber von der festlichen Tafel — diesen Symbol des Friedens, der Gemeinschaft, der Geborgenheit —, die ihm nicht nur jetzt, sondern von nun an für alle Zeit verwehrt bleiben muss." Oppel also points out a similarity between the ghost of Banquo that appears at Macbeth's banquet and the ghost that appears in V.i. of The Knight of the Burning Pestle.

² It is interesting to note that the forces of the restoration hope that their victory will again "give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights, / Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives" (III.vi.34-35). The Homily, "Concerning the Sacrament," p.418, makes a point that is relevant: "Last of all, as there is here the mystery of peace, and the sacrament of Christian society, whereby we understand what sincere love ought to be betwixt the true communicants; so here be the tokens of pureness and innocency of life, whereby we may perceive that we ought to purge our own soul from all uncleanness, iniquity and wickedness, lest, when we receive the mystical bread, . . . we eat it in an unclean place, that is, in a soul defiled and polluted with sin."

Macbeth also ranges himself on the side of the tyrants¹ against the mercy of Christ.² Like Tarquin, he moves with "ravishing strides"³ through Scotland, leaving death and destruction in his wake. Like Herod, he becomes a slayer of the innocents—the defenceless Lady Macduff and her children.⁴ Thus, as the tragedy gathers momentum, we see Macbeth compared increasingly with the type of Antichrist—the herald of the days of Judgement. A quotation from Rowley casts further light on the nature and methods of Antichrist:

Turning to another of the persistent ideas of the apocalyptists, we observe that they looked for the end of the world to be preceded by a time of unprecedented suffering, and by the domination of evil. For the righteous they predicted bitter persecution, and for the world at large widespread disasters, and all the suffering that human tyranny can bring. Even Nature herself would be disturbed, and would bring fresh ills upon men by her unwonted behaviour. Often we have found, in some form or other, the conception of a great monster of evil as the leader or oppressor of the world in this evil age, and the idea that the world is to be handed over to his misrule for the time being. . . . Sometimes it is a human figure, . . . sometimes an incarnate demon. But it is always the embodiment of all that opposes the will of God. . . . In the human sphere, whether regarded as a mere man or as the incarnation of this demonic spirit, we have the figure of a powerful king or ruler, subduing man beneath his evil sway, filled with the sense of his own importance, setting himself up to be equal with God, claiming divine honours, and trampling on the saints.⁵

¹Macbeth is increasingly referred to as a tyrant. See, for example, III.vi.22 and 25; IV.iii.12,32,36,45 and 104; V.ii.11; V.iv.8; V.vi.7; V.vii.10,14 and 25; and V.ix.33.

²Malcolm and Donalbain flee Scotland because "there's no mercy left" (II.iii.146).

³II.i.55.

⁴See the references to Lady Macduff and her children as "murder'd deer" (IV.iii.206) or as "pretty chickens, and their dam" (IV.iii.218), both symbolic of defencelessness or innocence.

⁵H.H.Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic; A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation (2nd ed.; London: Lutterworth, 1950), pp.155-156.

This resemblance between Macbeth and those who set themselves up against Christ and "crucify" his people is first hinted at in the reference to Golgotha in Act 1, scene ii¹; it can also be seen perhaps in the image of Macbeth who will put on the guise of the "innocent flower," but be the "serpent under 't."² As we have also seen, Scotland does suffer under the domination of Macbeth's evil, and the righteous are persecuted.³ As disaster overtakes disaster, Nature herself shows signs of the violations that break her order⁴ as Macbeth and his wife

Pour the sweet milk of concord into Hell,
Uproar the universal peace, confound
All unity on earth.⁵

Macbeth's deeds sweep the countryside like the plagues of Revelations, leaving death and dearth and destruction in their wake, unleashing blight and chaos, overthrowing all that is normal, ordered, legal and healthy, until men can say of him:

Not in the legions
Of horrid Hell can come a devil more damn'd
In evils, to top Macbeth.⁶

¹I.ii.40-41: "Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha."

²I.v.64-65.

³See, for example, IV.iii.4-8 and 39-41. See also Lady Macduff's words in IV.ii.39-41.

⁴See earlier discussion (pp.324ff.) of the signs of a disturbance in nature which reflect Macbeth's unnatural deeds.

⁵IV.iii.98-100. Lines spoken by Malcolm. It is interesting to note that the words "universal peace" in Antony and Cleopatra pre-figured the birth of Christ, against whom Macbeth now trespasses.

⁶IV.iii.55-57. By the end of the tragedy, the words "devilish," "hell-kite," "fiend," and "hell hound" are being used with increasing frequency to describe Macbeth.

At the same time, however, as Macbeth can perhaps be seen as the type of Antichrist, he must also be seen as the sinner who fears the day of the Last Judgement. The plagues and terrors that strike Macbeth and his wife, as well as Scotland, seem to owe a good deal to the apocalyptic plagues and terrors of the Book of Revelations which herald the dawning of that dread day.

One of the most vivid images of the beginning of Judgement upon earth is to be found before the murder of Duncan. Macbeth sets out his fear that the murder of Duncan will give rise to events akin to those of the last days of the world, that Duncan's virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,¹
Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd²
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,³
That tears shall drown the wind.⁴

These are very like the angels of Doomsday; the day on which Christ shall come to destroy the wicked and deliver the faithful; the day on which the dead shall rise again,⁵ and the sleepers shall awake.⁶

¹ See Christ, who is pity, the naked new-born babe, becoming the "wrath of the Lamb" on the day of judgement (Revelations 6 : 16).

² Compare the horses of Revelations 6 : 2-8 and 19 : 11.

³ That is, his trespasses will be revealed for all to see.

⁴ I.vii.19-25. See Revelations 7 : 17 (1599 version): "And God shall wipe away all teares from their eyes."

⁵ This brings out the irony in Macbeth's later exclamation: "Rebellious dead, rise never, till the wood / Of Birnam rise" (IV.i.97-98).

⁶ See I Corinthians 15 : 51-52:

"Wee shall not all sleepe, but we shall all be changed.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall blowe, and the dead shall be raised up incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Macduff takes the parallel further in his horror at the sight of the murdered Duncan, as he calls on Banquo, Donalbain and Malcolm to awake,

Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,¹
 And look on death itself! — up, up, and see
 The great doom's image! — Malcolm! Banquo!
 As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,
 To countenance this horror!²

This image is echoed immediately after by Lady Macbeth, who asks,

What's the business,
 That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
 The sleepers of the house?³

The omens of the Book of Revelations also shake Scotland at the time of the murder. The sun is eclipsed,⁴ and, like the voices, thunderings, lightnings and earthquakes that herald the beginning of Doom,⁵ there are

Lamentings heard i' th' air; strange screams of death,
 And prophesying with accents terrible
 Of dire combustion,⁶ and confus'd events,
 New hatch'd to th' woeful time,⁷ the obscure bird
 Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
 Was feverous, and did shake.⁸

¹For an explanation of this simile, see discussion on pp.329-330.

²II.iii.77-81. Compare Revelations 20 : 12ff.

³II.iii.81-83.

⁴See, for example, II.iv.5-10. Compare Revelations 8 : 12.

⁵See Revelations 8 : 5 and 16 : 18.

⁶See Revelations 8 : 7.

⁷See Revelations 8 : 13.

⁸II.iii.57-62. See also the discussion on pp.324ff. on the disorder in Nature that is a sign of her violation.

Macbeth himself is tormented with the affliction visited upon the sinner who will not repent of his murders: his mind is "full of scorpions."¹ This is the torment inflicted by the locusts of the Book of Revelations² on those who have not the seal of God on their forehead,³ but the mark of Cain.⁴

So, too, Macbeth's fair castle becomes a parable of Hell, and his porter the keeper of Hell gate.⁵ The knocking at the door on the morning after the murder of Duncan assumes a twofold significance. The first meaning ties up with the imagery of Grace, hospitality, and the sacrament of the banquet. Its source is perhaps to be found in the following quotation from the Book of Revelations:

Behold, I stand at the doore, and knocke, if any man heare my voyce, and open the doore, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him, and he with me.⁶

That is, the man who opens his heart to Christ is assured of the gift of Grace, the inheritance conferred at the last supper. Macbeth has ignored this knocking by hardening his heart to murder.

¹ III.ii.36.

² See Revelations 9 : 3-5 and 21.

³ See Revelations 7.

⁴ Genesis 4 : 15. See also Revelations 14 : 9 (1599 version) which deals with those who have the "mark of the beast."

⁵ See, for example, Paul, p.243:

"Macbeth's castle of Inverness has by the murder just become very Hell, and the drunken porter stumbling to the gate is indeed the devil-porter of hell-gate."

The porter's comments in II.iii.1-42 deal with the whole range of human sin and damnation.

⁶ Revelations 3 : 20 (1599 version). This also ties up with the banqueting imagery discussed earlier, and contrasts Macbeth's life-destroying banquets with Christ's life-giving Eucharist.

The second occasion on which Christ knocks at the door is at the harrowing of Hell¹:

Then shall come Jesus, and a clamour shall be made, or a loud sound of things striking together, and let Jesus say: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doers: and the King of glory shall come in."²

Macbeth lives in mortal fear of this knocking, for Jesus has in his hands the "keys of hell and of death"³ as well as the keys of life, and no man can escape his call.

It is this background against which Macbeth's actions can be placed that makes it impossible for him to believe with any degree of certainty that he could "jump the life to come."⁴ Neither he nor Lady Macbeth can really convince themselves that it is only a "painted devil"⁵ that they fear.

Moreover, God has set a limit to Antichrist's reign. Thus, the tragedy develops to the point where, the powers of evil under Macbeth having held their sway for the appointed time, Macbeth

Is ripe for shaking, and the Powers above
Put on their instruments.⁶

Malcolm here seems to be echoing the Biblical words used when the angels of God come to bring his final wrath to those sinners who will not repent:

¹ See the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus 28ff.

² "The Harrowing of Hell," Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays, sc. i, p. 163.

³ Revelations 1 : 16 (1599 version).

⁴ I.vii.7.

⁵ II.ii.54. See earlier discussion on pp. 298-299.

⁶ IV.iii.237-239.

And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat in the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.¹

In terms of this imagery, Malcolm, the rightful king, becomes the agent of Christ's wrath; and Macbeth will be cut down in the full flower of his evil. Malcolm will also be the saviour of those innocents who have suffered under Macbeth; the man whose healing touch will, like that of the King of England, bring relief to those who suffer from the "Evil."²

It is perhaps worth noting that, to the original version of Holinshed, Shakespeare has added certain new words and phrases that seem to substantiate the hypothesis that the closing scenes of Macbeth parallel the struggle between the forces of Christ and Antichrist, for almost all these additions contain words that have a particular meaning in the Christian scheme. The following lines, for example, do not appear in Holinshed:

This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues,
Was once thought honest.³

To offer up a weak, poor, innocent lamb,
T'appease an angry god.⁴

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell:
Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace,
Yet Grace must still look so.⁵

¹ Revelations 14 : 15 (1599 version). See also verses 16-20.

² IV.iii.140-159. The English King is the exact antithesis of Macbeth. His hands heal, Macbeth's bring death; he cures the "evil," Macbeth spreads evil; he prays to heaven, Macbeth is unable to pray; he leaves a "healing benediction" to "succeeding royalty," Macbeth leaves no heirs or blessed gifts; he is as full of grace as Macbeth is damned; and the "blessings" that hang about his throne are absent from the reign of Macbeth.

³ IV.iii.12-13.

⁴ IV.iii.16-17.

⁵ IV.iii.22-24.

Black Macbeth

Will seem as pure as snow; and the poor State
Esteem him as a lamb, being compar'd
With my confineless harms.¹

Not in the legions

Of horrid Hell can come a devil more damn'd
In evils, to top Macbeth.²

Pour the sweet milk of concord into Hell,
Uproar the universal peace, confound
All unity on earth.³

The qualities of Divine Grace are here opposed to those of the devil (or Antichrist), the lamb is contrasted with black sin, angels with the legions of hell, black with the pure snow, and the universal peace with the universal uproar that accompanies Antichrist. At the same time it must be noted that it is to himself that Malcolm attributes the blacker evil. Since Malcolm is innocent of such evil, Macbeth's real evil appears more damnable.

Even if they could escape the judgement of God, both Macbeth and his wife have (as we saw earlier) cause to fear the judgement they face on earth:

We still have judgement here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor; this even-handed Justice
Commends th' ingredience of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips.⁴

By violating the Bonds which forbid bloodshed, they are themselves proscribed from the protection offered by the Bonds, and live in daily fear

¹ IV.iii.52-55.

² IV iii.55-57.

³ IV.iii.98-100.

⁴ I.vii.8-12. See also p.343, note 6.

that "it will have blood, they say: blood will have blood,"¹ for the Bible warns that "who so sheddeth mans blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God hath he made man."² The man who trespasses against the sanctity of human life unleashes a general disrespect for the sanctity of his own life, and causes his violation to rebound on him.³ Macbeth, the law-breaker, cannot hope at the same time to act as keeper and upholder of the laws, the fount of justice and mercy. Therefore, law and order, and their corollaries, justice and mercy, cease to operate in Scotland. Eventually, murder will exact its blood dues, and Macbeth will be slain.

Moreover, Macbeth cannot forget that in so much as he has done evil to the least of men, he has done it to Christ. So stern is his self-condemnation, that he cannot even have faith in the infinite Divine Mercy and Grace. This is why he cannot pray:

One cried, "God bless us!" and, "Amen," the other,
 As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
 List'ning their fear, I could not say, "Amen,"
 When they did say, "God bless us."

 But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
 I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
 Stuck in my throat.⁴

This is the same despair of Christ's Grace that assailed Faust.⁵ It is

¹ III.iv.121.

² Genesis 9 : 6 (1599 version).

³ See "The Misfortunes of Arthur" (ed. Dodsley, Vol.IV), I.iv.p.278:
 Who sows in sin, in sin shall reap his pain:
 The doom is sworn: death guerdons death again.

⁴ II.ii.26-32.

⁵ Faustus V.ii : "The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus."

also the same state as that revealed by King Claudius in Hamlet:

Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent.¹

Indeed, the entire soliloquy in Hamlet that deals with the relationship between prayer and forgiveness, repentance and mercy, and between sin and the state of grace has implications that are relevant to Macbeth:

What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"!
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder —
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above:
There is no shuffling; there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one can not repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art more engag'd! Help, angels. Make assay:
Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart, with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.
All may be well.²

If one reads the above quotation in conjunction with that beautiful, terrifying speech of Macbeth's —

¹ Hamlet III.iii.38-40. ² Ibid., III.iii.43-72.

She should have died hereafter:
 There would have been a time for such a word. —
 To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing¹ —

the clash in the tragedy between the two versions of the fate of sinners becomes apparent. Here, Macbeth outlines his vision of his fate in words that echo the Old Testament version:

Yea, the light of the wicked shall be quenched, and the spark of his fire shall not shine.
 The light shall be darke in his dwelling, and his candle shall be put out with him.²

This is Macbeth's expectation: that his life shall end or be snuffed out like a candle, because he is a sinner and there is no hope of eternal life for him in the light of the Lord.³ And this would be his fate if he were to be judged under the old Law.⁴ But, cast as a mantle over the whole play, referred to only obliquely, but present because of the time in which

¹V.v.17-28.

²Job 18 : 5-6 (1599 version). See also Job 21 : 17; "How oft shall the candle of the wicked be put out"; Proverbs 13 : 9; "The light of the righteous reioyceth: but the candle of the wicked shalbe put out"; and Proverbs 24 : 20.

³The following texts, among others, refer to the fact that man will not need his own feeble light of the spirit in heaven, for the eternal light of the Lord will shine everywhere for ever and ever (unlike Macbeth's brief candle which shall be extinguished when he dies): Revelations 21 : 23 and Revelations 22 : 5.

⁴See, for example, Romans 3 : 20 (1599 version): "Therefore by the workes of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the Law commeth the knowledge of sinne."

Macbeth lives, is the hope of the new dispensation: the hope of Grace which God gave to man as a free gift by Christ. This Grace does not come as a reward for man's works,¹ but as relief of his need for something more worthy than himself that can redeem him — if he is prepared to be contrite, to confess his sins, and make what satisfaction he can to those against whom he has sinned.² Grace comes through Christ's blood that was shed for man, and the only condition laid upon him to receive it is that he should want it, should seek it, should ask for it, so that it can be given.³ But Macbeth, like Faustus,⁴ knowing the full extent of his sins, condemns himself according to the old Law, and therefore dies

¹ See Romans 11 : 6 (1599 version):

"And if it be of grace, it is no more of workes: or els were grace no more grace: but if it be of workes, it is no more grace: or els were worke no more worke";

and Romans 5 : 15 (1599 version):

"But yet the gift is not so as is the offence: for if through the offence of that one, many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Iesus Christ, hath abounded unto many";

as well as Romans 6 : 23 (1599 version):

"For the wages of sinne is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Iesus Christ our Lord."

² "The Woman Taken in Adultery," Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays, clearly sets out the difference between judgement under the old Law and under the new Law of Christ. See also Taylor, p.32:

"First, therefore, repentance implies a deep sorrow, as the beginning and introduction of this duty; not a superficial sigh or tear, not a calling ourselves sinners and miserable persons: that is far from the 'godly sorrow that worketh repentance.' "

See also Marlowe, Faustus II.i. : "Contrition, prayer, repentance . . . they are the means to bring thee unto heaven."

³ See Luke 11 : 9 (1599 version): "And I say unto you, Aske, and it shall be given you: seeke, and ye shall find: knocke, and it shall be opened unto you."

⁴ See also Marlowe, Faustus V.ii. : "The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus" (quoted on p.353).

according to the old Law. And this, perhaps more than all his other sufferings, is his tragedy. In the time left to him, he does not make time for this repentance, which would involve throwing himself upon Christ's mercy, as Claudius seeks (but is unable) to do. This is his ultimate sin, and it overshadows all his other sins, for it is a sin against the spirit:

For in the Law of Moses, sin bound them to nothing but temporal evils, but they were sore, and heavy, and many; but these only there were threatened: in the Gospel, Christ added the menaces of evils spiritual and eternal.¹

Macbeth's final offence is a despair of Christ's infinite mercy; for

as the hope of salvation is a good disposition towards it; so is despair a certain consignment to eternal ruin. A man may be damned for despairing to be saved.²

This perhaps explains why Macbeth's death is so different from that of the other Thane of Cawdor, who

very frankly he confess'd his treasons,
Implor'd your Highness' pardon, and set forth
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it: he died
As one that had been studied in his death,
To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd,
As 'twere a careless trifle.³

The Thane of Cawdor can afford to throw away his life in this manner because, as a result of his confession, contrition and repentance, he might have hope of life hereafter. This life is all Macbeth has left, since he has despaired of the life hereafter through Grace. Therefore, "bear-like," he must "fight the course,"⁴ for he has already thrown away the "dearest

¹Taylor, p.53.

²Ibid., p.72.

³I.iv.5-11.

⁴V.vii.2.

thing he ow'd" — his soul. Suicide would only hasten the day of reckoning, so there is no escape that way either.¹ Nor is his death "becoming" like that of the other Thane, for the revelation through Macduff of the duplicity of the fiend has "cow'd" his "better part of man,"² and he must "despair" his "charm."³

It is because he has despaired of mercy that Macbeth adopts the position he does in this speech from Act V, scene v.

Let us look, for example, at his attitude towards time. As pointed out earlier, time is part of the normal, natural cycle. Day and night mark the passing of natural time, and the clock and the bell are man's measures of the passing of time. Both these images run through the play.⁴ However, passing time also reminds man that his own cycle from birth to death is inexorably moving to its close.⁵ For a Christian, the time lent to him on earth is a time during which he should strive

¹ See V.viii.1-2:

Why should I play the Roman fool, and die
On mine own sword?

Compare this with Antony's attitude: part of the difference in their approach lies in the fact that words such as "honour" and "nobility" still have meaning for Antony.

² V.viii.18.

³ V.viii.13.

⁴ It is interesting to note how often the clock, the cock and the bell mark the passing of time — or the death "knell."

⁵ Compare the quotation under discussion and V.iii.22-26 with Montaigne, Bk II, chap.xii, pp.309-310:

"The flower of age dieth, fadeth and fleeteth, when age comes upon us, and youth endeth in the flower of a full growne mans age: childhood in youth and the first age dieth in infancie: and yesterday endeth in this day, and to day shall die in to morrow [sic], And nothing remaineth or ever continueth in one state."

towards God, should repent of his sins and seek to make restitution, so that he can enjoy life hereafter.¹ Macbeth gave neither Duncan nor Banquo this time for repentance or restitution.² He himself, however, has the time, but fails to use it, for he is so involved in each day's futile attempt to keep his crime secret and retain his power, that he is unable to stop or repent.

Time thus develops a threefold meaning.³ Time past is irretrievable, unalterable; all their "yesterdays" are beyond recall. Duncan

¹See, for example, *Batman*, Bk I, p.2:

"And whereas that by humane fragilitie or frailtie, thou trespasseth against the commaundement of almightie God, yet see that thou dispaire not: for the good Lord of his aboundaunt grace, hath giuen a law for trespassors in this present lyfe, that is to say, Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction."

It is also interesting to compare the following excerpt from Burton (ed. Blake), Pt III, Sec.4, Mem.2, Sub.4, pp.720-721, on the state of mind of the man who is suffering from despair with the state of mind revealed by Macbeth:

"Imagine what thou canst, feare, sorrow, furies, grieffe, pain, terror, anger, dismal, ghastly, tedious, irksome, &c. it is not sufficient, it comes far short; no tongue can tell, no heart conceive it. 'Tis an epitome of hell, an extract, a quintessence, a compound, a mixture of all ferall maladies, tyrannical tortures, plagues and perplexities. There is no sickness almost but physick provideth a remedy for it; . . . but what physick, chirurgery, what wealth, favour, authority can relieve, bear out, asswage, or expel a troubled conscience? . . . Many of them in their extremity, thinke they hear and see visions, out-crys, confer with diuels, that they are tormented, possessed, and in hell fire, already damned, quite forsaken of God, they have no sense or feeling of mercy, or grace, hope of salvation: their sentence of condemnation is already past, and not to be revoked, the diuel will certainly have them."

²See II.i.62-64 and III.i.140-141. Compare *Hamlet* I.v.76-79 (where the Ghost speaks of being slain without time for repentance) and III.iii.73-95 (where Hamlet decides against slaying his uncle while he is praying for repentance).

³Critics such as Lengeler, Lüthi, Mahood, Spurgeon and Clemen have commented further upon aspects of time not dealt with here: such as time ripening, or causing to ripen, time bearing seeds, pregnant time, time as judge, time as discoverer, etc. Their findings have not been reflected here, as they are not cogent to this aspect of our discussion.

is dead, and nothing can bring him to life again. The deeds done by Macbeth and his wife cannot be erased, reversed, or forgotten — despite all their attempts to do so. "What's done is done."¹ As a result, the entire present is taken up with "beguiling the time,"² covering their tracks, and being swept along on the stream of results occasioned by their deeds. In a vain attempt to obliterate the past and stave off the future, they are forced to live from "day to day," hoping always that "to-morrow" they will be able to find security, and, in that security, find time to repent. This is why Lady Macbeth "should have died hereafter" when, firmly entrenched in powerful victory, they might have had time. Yet, "hereafter" is a terrible word, for it is in the hereafter that Lady Macbeth will die, when the last syllable of temporal time is recorded, and the judgement day dawns that will determine who will live or die for time eternal.³ Thus, as in the closing scenes of Faustus, there seems to be too little time for repentance, yet, if there is no repentance, time will stretch for all eternity in hell.⁴

¹ III.ii.12.

² I.v.62 : "To beguile the time . . ."

³ It is interesting to note that the line of Banquo's heirs stretches out to the "crack of doom" (IV.i.117).

⁴ Marlowe's Faustus faces a similar race against time before being plunged into eternal damnation. See, for example, the terrifying lines of V.iii:

Ah Faustus,
 Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
 And then must thou be damned perpetually.
 Stand still, you ever moving spheres of heaven,
 That time may cease and midnight never come;
 Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
 Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
 A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul.

Thus, Macbeth's Hell is twofold. It is the present Hell brought about by his misuse of the time allotted to him, which now deprives him of the satisfaction, peace, recognition, honour, joy and hope that would be the reward of a happily spent time, and yields instead guilt, sleeplessness and recognition only under duress. It is a Hell filled with fearful expectation of imminent retribution. There is, however, also the Hell that awaits Macbeth and his wife in the eternal death that Graceless persons face hereafter.¹

The man who has spent his soul and cancelled the great Bonds which might have ensured him eternal life, as Macbeth has, now finds no meaning or value in the life for which he was prepared to barter his "eternal jewel." He cannot even hope that he might be doing it for his heirs, for the "seed of the wicked shall be cut off."² The witches have already

¹ See, for example, Ecclesiastes 8 : 6-14 (1599 version):

"For to every purpose there is a time and iudgement, because the miserie of man is great vpon him.

For he knoweth not that which shalbe, for who can tell him when it shall be ?

Man is not Lord over the spirit to retaine the spirit: neither hath hee power in the day of death, nor deliverance in the battell, neither shall wickednesse deliver the possessors thereof.

.....
Because sentence against an evill worke is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to doe evill.

Though a sinner doe evill an hundreth times, and God prolongeth his dayes, yet I know that it shall be well with them that feare the Lord, and doe reverence before him.

But it shall not be well to the wicked, neither shall he prolong his dayes: he shall be like a shadow, because he feareth not before God.

There is a vanitie, which is done vpon earth, that there be righteous men to whom it commeth according to ye worke of the wicked: and there be wicked men to whom it commeth according to the worke of the iust: I thought also that this is vanitie."

² Psalm 37 : 8 (1599 version).

shown Macbeth that it is for Banquo's issue that he has

fil'd my mind;
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murther'd;
 Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
 Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common Enemy of man,
 To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!¹

Macbeth thus comes to know the futility of committing sin for the sake of worldly gain:

For what shal it profite a man though he should wine the whole world, if he lose his owne soule? or what shall a man give for recompense of his soule?²

This is the knowledge he expresses when they come to tell him that Lady Macbeth is dead.³ The man who dwells in evil and has despaired of Christ's mercy lives like a shadow, for there is no substance in his life that will live on, nothing permanent in the temporal values for which he has sold his soul.⁴ Like the candle, his life will gutter out, or be snuffed out — unlike those who will dwell in the light of Christ.⁵ This is the

¹ III.i.64-69.

² Matthew 16 : 26 (1599 version).

³ He expressed the same thought in his hypocritical distress at the death of Duncan in II.iii.91-96:

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
 I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
 There's nothing serious in mortality;
 All is but toys: renown, and grace, is dead;
 The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
 Is left this vault to brag of.

Had Macbeth died before he could murder Duncan, he could have hoped to live a "blessed time" in heaven; instead, the "wine of life" (the power of Grace to redeem to eternal life) will not be enjoyed by Macbeth. Therefore, life loses its meaning and value, "all is but toys."

⁴ See Ecclesiastes 8 : 13 for the likening of the life of the evil man to that of a shadow. See also, for example, Job 8 : 9; 14 : 2 and 17 : 7; Psalm 102 : 11; Psalm 144 : 4; and Ecclesiastes 6 : 12 for references to temporal life as a shadow.

⁵ See references cited on p.355.

basis of the ironic distinction between Macbeth and the fools. The fools slain by Macbeth, being innocent of his crimes, pass on with the hope of a blessed afterlife. They need not fear the dust to which their bodies will return, for the spiritual part of them will be regenerated. Macbeth, who has "lit" their way to death, has no hope but the darkness of Hell and the death of body and soul.¹

Christian man lives his brief life in the hope of immortality. Take away from him this expectation of an afterlife, and you take away all that gives life meaning and substance. He becomes then not the doer of deeds that will enable him to live on, but a player acting out the illusion of life, which ends when the play ends. Life becomes merely a tale that has been told² and, therefore, "full of sound and fury signifying nothing." This is the desolation of reality at which Macbeth arrives.

Thus it is that those Bonds which we dealt with at the beginning of the play are the Bonds that have ceased to operate with regard to Macbeth and his wife at the end of the tragedy.

The Law of Nature has been violated, and Nature herself then appears to violate herself: kind turns against kind, green things wither

¹Two Biblical references perhaps cast light upon this assertion. The first is Ecclesiastes 12: 7 (1599 version): "And dust returne to earth as it was, and the spirit returne to God that gave it." The second is I Corinthians 3 : 18-19 (1599 version):

"Let no man deceive himselfe: If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him be a foole, that he may be wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishnesse with God: for it is written, He catcheth the wise in their owne craftinesse."

²See, for example, Psalm 90 : 9 (1599 version): "For all our dayes are past in thine anger: we have spent our yeeres as a thought." (The modern version has ". . . as a tale that is told.") This contrasts sharply with Hebrews 13 : 8 (1599 version), where Jesus, "yesterday, and to day, the same also is for ever."

and die, and Macbeth's nature itself undergoes a tragic change. He is neither able to partake of the sacraments of Nature — sleep and peaceful meals or a revered old age — nor is he able to maintain or fulfil his own best nature. Accustomed sin breeds in him a new nature, so that he is dead to his old good self.¹ Ironically, this can be contrasted with the image of Christ's Grace, which causes man to be a "new man."² As a result of the sins he compounds, Macbeth becomes hardened to sin, numb to horrors:

I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.³

¹See, for example, the Mirror for Magistrates, p.158, ll. 111-112:

Sinnes ofte assayed are thought to be no sinne,
So sinne doth soyle, the soul it sinketh in.

See also Marlowe, Faustus V.i. :

Yet, yet, thou hast an amiable soul,
If sin by custom grow not into nature.

Latimer, Sermon XXIX, p.549, also comments on the danger of becoming a "customable sinner."

²See, for example, Ephesians 4 : 22 -24 (1599 version):
"That is, that yee cast off, . . . that old man, which is corrupt through the deceivable lusts,
And be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
And put on the new man, which after God is created unto righteousness and true holiness."

³V.v.13-15. Compare Dolora G. Cunningham, "Macbeth: The Tragedy of the Hardened Heart," Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. XIV, no.1 (1963), p.41 (quoting from a 1580 source): "For long custome of sinnes taketh away all sense and feeling of sinne, and maketh as it were another nature in us." This hardening to sin also brings about a numbing of the conscience, a disregard of fear. Frye, p.152, points out that

"there is a more frightful state than that of guilt-inspired fear, as Hooker reminds his congregation in one of his sermons: 'we are to stand in fear of nothing more than the extremity of not fearing.' At that point, a man's conscience no longer makes a coward of him, because his conscience is dead, and it is to this point that the conscience-haunted Macbeth rushes so that he

may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder."

The Bonds of Law , both Divine and Human , have also ceased to operate; nothing is sacred any longer . The Commandments have been broken . The table , the bed and the crown have been abused . Kinship counts for nothing , neither does innocence . Law and order , and their corollaries , justice and mercy , are absent . The spirit of Antichrist reigns through Macbeth .

The Restorers , who come as "God's soldiers , " will have to "free" the time . Malcolm will come as the healer who will cure Scotland of the evils with which she is diseased , the liberator who will free those who have suffered under the devilish tyrant , the man who will " in measure , time , and place , "¹ do all that needs to be done : not by his own power alone , but "by the grace of Grace ."²

There is a revelation , and it springs from Macbeth's fearlessness to articulate and define the misery that his life has become , from Lady Macbeth's realisation that "nought's had , all's spent . " The knowledge and the insight that they gain springs from an experience of both good and evil : and it must be remembered that the tree from which Adam and Eve , the first sinners , plucked the forbidden fruit was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil . Macbeth knows the good he has forsaken and he knows the evil he has tasted . He does not shirk the expression of the nature of the evil of which he is guilty , nor does he hesitate to

¹V.ix.39 .

²V.ix.38 .

³See Genesis 2 : 9 (1599 version) :

"For out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree pleasant to the sight , and good for meete; the tree of life also in the mids of the garden , and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ."

See also Genesis 2 : 12 .

formulate the effect it has had upon him, or the consequences he still awaits. Neither he nor his wife blunders into evil, nor is it forced upon them; their predicament is the result of their own choosing, although its effects might have exceeded their expectations. It is the predicament of human weakness and folly in the face of temptation. And Grace is the only means by which man can be redeemed from the evil in which he mires himself. By tasting of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, but being unable to cast themselves upon this Grace, Macbeth and his wife forfeit the right to eat of the fruit of the tree of life.¹ And this is the abyss of the tragedy.

The "great bond" that should have kept him pale has been cancelled and torn to pieces, not by the external agency to which he appealed, but by his own deliberate actions (and with the complicity of his wife). And Macbeth never ceases to be aware that both the capital and the interest will become payable to society and to God on the due date. We may not approve, but we are obliged to admire, the manner in which — having despaired both of life on earth and life everlasting — he meets his reckoning head-on at the end.

¹See Revelations 22 : 2 (1599 version):

"Blessed are they, that doe his Commandements, that their right may be in the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the Citie."

Compare Hooker, Vol.II, Bk V, p.492:

"The natural powers and faculties therefore of man's mind are through our native corruption so weakened and of themselves so averse from God, that without the influence of his special grace they bring forth nothing in his sight acceptable, no not the blossoms or least buds that tend to the fruit of eternal life."

EPILOGUE

By starting from the point of view of the world inhabited by the characters in the three tragedies discussed, rather than from that of the characters themselves, the writer of this thesis hopes to have demonstrated that Shakespeare is as conscious of his portraiture of society as of individuals. Indeed, the two are largely inseparable. One cannot justifiably examine a character in isolation from the world or universe he inhabits, nor pass judgement upon his actions unless one knows the system of values against which these actions must be judged.

It is a truism to say that Shakespeare created no amoral universe, but it is necessary to go further than this, and further than an approach which deals merely with the use of "Nature" imagery in the tragedies, or Shakespeare's supposed use of Christian doctrine, or his philosophical patterns, or a general acceptance of the Elizabethan world picture as a definitive statement of his dramatic content and intention, or a classification of his characteristic images in certain tragedies.

One can claim that Shakespeare had certain general moral and political or philosophical preoccupations which can be identified in all his works, but this does not satisfactorily explain why there is yet a vast difference between the world in which King Lear unfolds and those in which Antony and Cleopatra or Macbeth take place. If we turn to examine the plays themselves, it becomes apparent that each tragedy is enacted within a specific moral and metaphysical universe which differentiates it from all others. And the chief means by which this differentiation is

achieved is by an alteration in the quality or nature of the key Bonds that operate in the worlds of the tragedies. It is as though Shakespeare sees man as a creature of Bonds, no matter what his culture or civilisation. But, at the same time, he clearly accepts that at different times in man's history, or in different countries and cultures, the nature and functioning of the Bonds will differ. Thus, the world of Antony and Cleopatra cannot be superimposed upon that of King Lear or Macbeth without seriously misunderstanding the imaginative bases upon which they rest.

In this context, imagery has two key functions: to give meaning and form to the action and interaction of particular characters, and to delineate the universe in which this action has its effects; and it is at the same time the nature of the universe depicted that gives the actions and the props their symbolical value.

Moreover, as stated at the commencement of this investigation, there are two major considerations underlying such an approach to the tragedies. The first is this concept of the Bonds as determinants of the meaning attached to action and interaction in a particular world or universe; the second is the importance of the concepts of Nature, Law, and Grace as a cohesive body of principles underpinning the picture of the world in which the Bonds are seen operating or failing to operate.

Dr Johnson¹ accused Shakespeare of failing to portray a consistent moral universe, but, unless he expected Shakespeare to be both teacher and preacher as well as dramatist, this accusation is surely refuted by such an approach to his tragedies. As long as one accepts that

¹Dr Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. with an introduction by W.K.Wimsatt (Penguin Shakespeare Library; Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1969), "Preface," p.66.

what is moral for Rome in 40 B.C. is not the same as what is moral for Scotland in the time of Macbeth, and accepts that the Elizabethans were keenly aware of this and allowed for it in their world picture — while at the same time maintaining that there were universally moral and immoral actions and attitudes — there is no moral inconsistency in Shakespeare's treatment of his subjects.

At the same time, however, we dare not forget in our preoccupation with the questions of the Bonds and the principles of Nature, Law, and Grace, which define them in the Elizabethan period, the reality of the dramatist's insights and his creative imagination. There is an archetypal relevance in his study of man and his world, and his propensity to bring down tragedy upon himself and upon innocents in this world, that remains valid even if we know nothing about these concepts. They cannot be substituted for the play itself — at most they can help us better understand the work. Nor, as has been stressed, is it possible to claim that Shakespeare consciously made use of these concepts in the process of his writing; they simply formed part of the fabric of his time, just as twentieth century philosophy, psychology, social science and technology have affected our picture of man and his society — although few of us may ever have read an authoritative text on any of these subjects.

APPENDIX A

The pitfalls of relying on word-counting to demonstrate that a particular set of words or images appears with greater frequency in one play than in another is clearly brought out by the table on page 372.

Richard III emerges here as the play in which more references to the family appear than any other Shakespearean play: largely because the characters call each other by familial epithets rather than by name.

Even the more sophisticated process of image-counting is liable to the same bias. An image may appear with monotonous regularity, perhaps because it is the characteristic signature of a particular person, and yet not be of major importance in the work.

This is why, on the first page of the chapter on King Lear, the word "central" has been stressed when referring to the preponderance of family-linked images in the tragedy.¹ It is a distinction that is almost impossible to measure on quantitative scales, yet it appears to be the only valid criterion for determining the pre-occupation of a particular play in relation to others.

Perhaps only Hamlet approaches King Lear in its degree of concern with the question of the family Bonds — and they tend to be subordinated in Hamlet to considerations such as the working of the human mind,

¹Nor may we forget that these "images" can be embodied in the action as well as in the spoken word.

conscience, revenge, life, death, and the afterlife. Romeo and Juliet, for example, is more concerned with inter-family strife and with the question of love. Othello, although it provides us with a clear definition of the Bonds between a child and its parent,¹ is not centrally concerned with the subject. Antony and Cleopatra hardly touches on the family Bonds, and Julius Caesar even less. So, too, although it contains a large number of references to the family, is Titus Andronicus more concerned with the question of revenge. It is only by such a process of examination and elimination that it is possible to justify a claim that King Lear contains more central references to the family in almost all its aspects than any other Shakespearian tragedy.

¹See I.iii.178-189.

	Father	Mother	Wife	Husband	Child(ren)	Daughter	Son	Brother	Sister	Bastard(y) (izing)
Tempest	24	X	X	X	X	17	21	14	X	X
M. Wives	17	X	40	39	X	15	X	X	X	X
Measure	18	X	14	12	14	X	X	61	X	X
M. Ado	16	X	X	19	12	31	X	24	X	X
C. of Errors	X	X	33	30	X	X	X	X	21	X
M. of Venice	29	X	20	17	X	21	X	X	X	X
As You Like It	36	X	X	X	X	15	10	39	10	X
T. of Shrew	61	X	30	18	X	32	25	X	15	X
All's Well	23	24	29	13	X	15	30	X	X	X
W. Tale	55	12	22	X	17	35	35	12	X	X
K. John	29	32	X	X	21	X	34	13	X	X
Richard II	17	X	X	X	X	X	33	X	X	X
2 Hen. IV	43	X	X	X	X	X	31	18	X	X
1 Hen. VI	33	14	X	X	X	11	14	X	X	X
2 Hen. VI	20	X	14	X	X	X	21	X	X	X
3 Hen. VI	76	X	X	X	X	X	51	50	X	X
Richard III	29	47	26	17	30	25	46	43	X	X
Troilus & Cres.	15	36	X	X	X	X	14	10	X	X
Coriolanus	X	X	21	X	X	X	27	X	X	X
Titus Andronicus	39	25	X	X	26	X	68	34	X	X
Romeo & Juliet	25	13	18	12	16	17	15	X	X	X
Julius Caesar	X	X	X	X	X	X	10	X	X	X
Macbeth	13	X	13	X	X	X	11	X	X	X
Hamlet	62	34	X	X	X	16	21	16	X	X
King Lear	71	(7)	(6)	12	24	56	23	21	42	(9)
Othello	19	X	31	19	X	14	X	X	X	X
Ant. & Cleo.	X	X	13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cymbeline	36	21	X	X	X	17	41	18	X	X
Pericles	22	10	12	X	15	41	X	X	X	X

Based on John Bartlett, A Complete Concordance of the Dramatic Works and Poems of Shakespeare (London: Macmillan & Co., 1927).

Fewer than 10 references are indicated by an X.

APPENDIX B

The question of what can be called the "Reconcilers" in Shakespearean tragedy has given the writer much pause for thought. Such figures appear in almost all Shakespeare's tragedies, but their nature and function is difficult to define with any great degree of precision. They are often women, usually not making a major contribution to the tragedy, but difficult to dismiss lightly. Seldom as articulate as a Goneril, a Lady Macbeth, or a Cleopatra,¹ or as dramatically colourful, their few words and actions yet carry considerable weight in the overall scheme of the tragedy.

We find them in characters such as Cordelia, Octavia, Virgilia, Ophelia, and perhaps even in a Lady Macduff. As mentioned in the closing pages of the chapter on King Lear, they represent the silent powers for the good and the innocent, yet they are not usually strong enough to right the wrongs of the society in which they live, and suffer through no fault of their own. They are often shown as the character who says little: Virgilia is the "gracious silence"² of Coriolanus; Cordelia must "love and be silent"³ in King Lear; Octavia is of a "holy, cold and still

¹Portia is, perhaps, one of the few exceptions.

²Coriolanus II.i.194.

³King Lear I.i.61.

conversation," one whose "tongue will not obey her heart, nor can /
Her heart inform her tongue." ¹

At the same time, these "Reconcilers" tend to see through the appearance of the world in which they live to the reality beneath it. Cordelia loses her father for seeing through his vanity — and for telling him in terms unsoftened by flattery what she believes. Their predicament is often that of Lady Macduff:

I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm
Is often laudable; to do good, sometime
Accounted dangerous folly; why then, alas!
Do I put up that womanly defence,
To say I have done no harm?²

Although they often reconcile within themselves the contradictory pulls of human nature, and the conflict between reason and emotion, they can be torn by the conflicting demands of the society in which they live. Perhaps the clearest exposition of their position in this regard is brought out in Octavia's cry to Antony:

Oh my good lord,
Believe not all, or if you must believe,
Stomach not all. A more unhappy lady,
If this division chance, ne'er stood between,
Praying for both parts:
The good gods will mock me presently,
When I shall pray, "O, bless my lord, and husband!"
Undo that prayer, by crying out as loud,
"O, bless my brother!" Husband win, win brother,
Prays, and destroys the prayer, no midway
'Twixt these extremes at all.
.....
The Jove of power make me most weak, most weak,
Your reconciler! ³

¹ Antony and Cleopatra II.vi.119 and III.ii.47-48.

² Macbeth IV.ii.73-78.

³ Antony and Cleopatra III.vi.10-30.

Often, too, they come to represent the ideal Christian qualities of mercy, pity, peace, love, forgiveness, faith and charity¹ — and an almost virginal purity. This perhaps also explains why critics have so frequently seen them as the type of Christ or the Virgin, who are the ultimate Reconcilers and Intercessors. In this they are often paralleled, and sometimes contrasted, with the Restorers: those who reinstate the battered order, restore the rightful heir, see justice done, and bring back into operation the values of family, society or kingdom, which have been so violated or rejected by the tragic protagonists. They bury the dead, succour the injured, reward the innocent, and punish the wicked. Albany and Macduff are very similar to the Reconcilers, Caesar perhaps exemplifies the group with which they are contrasted — Caesar's triumph in Antony and Cleopatra tends to be the victory of might more than that of good.

¹See, for example, Portia's speech on mercy and charity in IV.i.184ff. of The Merchant of Venice.

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