

# Cordelia's Silence, Edgar's Secrecy: Emblems of the Authorship Question in *King Lear*

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## Abstract

xplores the significance of the silence of Cordelia, and the profound secrecy and anonymity of Edgar, in *King Lear*, in terms of what they may tell us about the authorship.<sup>1</sup>

hy is Cordelia silent in *King Lear*? Why is Edgar so concealed, so anonymous, and so various in his identity? And – Freud's<sup>2</sup> question – why does Cordelia die? Since I wrote the chapter<sup>3</sup> from which this essay derives, James Shapiro<sup>4</sup> has published *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* on which I have commented at length.<sup>5</sup> My aim in the chapter was to strengthen the assumption that it is possible to make complex (not one-to-one, but potently dialectical) inferences from an author's writings, which have a strong relationship to the author's life, and then to deepen interpretation of *King Lear* on the basis of that.

Shapiro wavers between a principled, and a circumstantial, rejection of this kind of conception. At the end of the book he states the principled version (connections between life and work are misguided in principle):

We can believe that Shakespeare himself thought that poets could give to

“airy nothing” a “local habitation and a name.” Or we can conclude that this “airy nothing” turns out to be a disguised something that needs to be decoded, and that Shakespeare couldn’t imagine “the forms of things unknown” without having experienced them first hand. It’s a stark and consequential choice.<sup>6</sup>

The more hesitant circumstantial version (connections between life and work are misguided because we know so little, and interpretations are so clumsy) is found earlier:<sup>7</sup>

Even if Shakespeare occasionally drew in his poems and plays on personal experiences, and I don’t doubt that he did, I don’t see how anyone can know with any confidence if or when or where he does so. Surely he was too accomplished a writer to recycle them in the often clumsy and undigested way that critics in search of autobiographical traces – advocates and sceptics of his authorship alike – would have us believe.<sup>8</sup>

This assumption of Shapiro’s has very many precursors in the orthodox position (discussed in *The Muse as Therapist*).<sup>9</sup> But it is now held and propounded by him in a stronger form than ever before — an indication, I believe, of deep unease. That it is a “position of convenience,” ill-thought out, is suggested by the fact that, on the one hand, Shapiro<sup>10</sup> can flay Looney, for instance, in taking Ulysses’ speech on degree out of context:

Lifting these words out of context, and italicising the lines that highlight his hierarchical views, Looney ignores how wily Ulysses mouths these pieties to manipulate his superior, the buffoonish Agamemnon, who has ample reason to hear degree and “due of birth” defended so aggressively.<sup>11</sup>

But, at the same time, on the other hand, his crucial attribution of opinion to Shakespeare himself, the climax of his book, consists in attributing the skeptical-positivist Theseus’ views on imagination to Shakespeare the author, doubly out of context (because, without noticing it, he is violating his own rule in the very act of propounding it and “demonstrating” it):

One of the great pleasures of this speech is that Theseus is himself an “antique fable.” Along with lovers and lunatics, writers share a heightened capacity to imagine the “forms of things unknown.” But only writers can turn them “to shapes” and give “to airy nothing/a local habitation and a name.” It’s hard to imagine a better definition of the mystery of literary creation. Not long after delivering this speech, Theseus watches a play performed by Bottom and the other rude mechanicals and finds himself transformed by the experience. His reaction to their play ranks among the most wonderful speeches in Shakespeare: “the best in this kind are

but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.” His captive bride-to-be Hyppolyta is quick to remind him, as well as us: “It must be your imagination then, and not theirs” (5.1.210-12).<sup>12</sup>

The morass of historical and epistemological confusion in which Shapiro is mired is considerable and beyond exploration here (elaborated in *De-Imagining Imagination*).<sup>13</sup> We need not of course go to the opposite extreme and attribute a purely biographical significance to the content of works of art; that would be to miss the profound effects of form and frame. The greatest literary and dramatic creators, particularly in the Renaissance period, profoundly and symbolically transmute their sources and experience origins, but of course they have to have something to transmute. We may prefer the version of John Keats, who grasps both aspects so profoundly:

A man’s life of any worth is a continual allegory – and very few eyes can see the mystery of his life – a life like the scriptures, figurative – which such people can no more understand than they can the hebrew Bible. Lord Byron cuts a figure – but he is not figurative – Shakespeare led a life of Allegory – his works are the comments on it.<sup>14</sup>

In the Renaissance this outlook was readily expressed likewise in a myriad of different forms of anonymity and pseudonymous authorships and conventions, whose intricacies and many modes and categories have been explored in depth by Marcy L. North.<sup>15</sup> The role of Edgar as an emblem of anonymity and hiddenness is central to the present essay.

This essay explores the riches that come to us in understanding *King Lear*, if we adopt the wider dialectical assumption. William Farina has previously pursued this general strategy.<sup>16</sup> Of Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, a very great deal indeed is known, much of it highly ambiguous, mercurial, and demonic (in a Byronic way), but what is not in doubt is that he ran through virtually his entire fortune in his lifetime. He was, as Nina Green<sup>17</sup> has shown, financially and legally foredoomed by machinations of the Queen and the Earl of Leicester. He was additionally, certainly in his early life, very lavish, and acquired a reputation of improvident “unthrift.” By the 1590s he was no doubt popularly known by the nickname Nashe and Harvey attributed to him of “Pierce Penniless.”<sup>18</sup> In the process he had also marred his reputation in a multitude of ways, morally and prudentially, some, such as Alan Nelson,<sup>19</sup> would say, on several fronts. Financially, to take the obvious case, he certainly appeared to fulfill the requirements to be the original of *Timon of Athens*, who lavishes, and squanders, his entire fortune, in Shakespeare’s play.

Can we start from the other end, and infer *from the greatest plays themselves* that they are written from within an experience of the author’s own life as being a lavish, on the grand scale, a “spender,” not only financially, but psychologically, in

many ways? I set out to ascertain this by taking the greatest of the tragedies, *King Lear*, as a test.

I must first note that, so great is *King Lear*, that *any* actual man proposed as the author must still seem utterly inadequate to it. And to respond to the play means a kind of submission to it (a submission modelled *within* it, particularly in the roles of Cordelia and Edgar).

The first thing that hit me on rereading the very first lines of *King Lear* is that, between Lear and Gloucester (who are uncannily linked as ego and alter ego, as their “incognito encounter”<sup>20</sup> near Dover suggests), Edward de Vere’s entire family situation is duplicated, in terms of number, gender, and legitimacy status. I discovered later that William Farina<sup>21</sup> has already mapped this in very similar terms.

The family situation of Edward de Vere in the 1590s was: three surviving daughters from his first marriage to Anne Cecil, Lord Burghley’s daughter, Elizabeth, b. 1575, Bridget, b. late 1570s, Susan, b. 1587, and two surviving sons – one legitimate from his second marriage to Elizabeth Trentham (Henry, b. 1593) and one illegitimate (Edward, b. 1581), from his liaison with Anne Vavasour.

Oxford, when in early puberty, faced a legal challenge to his legitimacy, which, as a youthful poem on “Loss of Good Name” (Looney, 1921), indicates, highly sensitized him to such matters (c.f., *Othello*, 3. 3. ll.). His illegitimate son Edward, who went to University abroad in Leyden, Holland, and who was eventually knighted by King James I, established himself as a comrade in arms of Oxford’s cousins Francis and Horace/Horatio,<sup>22</sup> as one of the “fighting Veres,” who are celebrated in Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House,” quoted in turn in Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*.<sup>23</sup> Melville significantly names his Napoleonic era sea captain Edward Fairfax Vere, nicknamed “the starry Vere” in *Billy Budd* on the strength of the Marvell poem (Oxford’s emblem was the star). This all suggests that Edward was not denied and neglected by his father.<sup>24</sup>

Both in *King Lear*, and in the relevant Sonnets, shame, “burning shame,” is the central emotion from the start, the nature and roots of which the play explores. Gloucester’s opening remarks both indicate his own shame, and are themselves shaming, in their “nod and wink” masculine freemasonry; Edmund deals with his shame by a “brazing” (in Gloucester’s word) it out into, converting it into a deeper, and nihilistic, character:

His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge:

I have so often blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to it.<sup>25</sup>

(1.1. 8-10)

We cannot simplistically turn Shakespeare into a thoroughgoing developmental psychologist (though the grasp of such issues is profoundly there, in Cordelia and her sisters, for instance). Nevertheless, despite Edmund’s nearly complete and utter villainy (countermanded genuinely, but ineffectually, for a moment, when he is dying), which results directly in his father’s blinding, and his brother’s banishment and intended death, and much else of evil, there are many

tokens in the text which reveal that the author by no means has the same contempt and disgust towards him, which he clearly bears towards Iago, in *Othello*, whose villainy is comparable. His brother Edgar, despite Edmund's utter treachery to him and his father, treats him with fate-acknowledging forgiveness after their fight, when he is dying.

Shakespeare clearly also regards him as significantly embodying *one view* of nature (in contemporary terms perhaps that of Machiavelli) which is not simply false in the final analysis, though it is grossly incomplete. John Danby<sup>26</sup> identifies Shakespeare's three views of Nature, which oscillate and interchange wildly in the play, as cosmic order (Gloucester); raw power and force (Edmund); and healing reconciliation/restoration/transformation based in restored equilibrium (Cordelia).

All three leave little room for the positive dialectic with culture we find elsewhere, for instance, in *The Winter's Tale*. Here is Edmund:

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law  
My services are bound. Wherefore should I  
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit  
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,  
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines  
Lag of a brother? 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?

(1.2.1-9)

Now, there is virtually no direct exploration of monetary issues in *King Lear*; the word "debt" occurs once, and "usury" and "usurer" are as infrequent. If there is a presentation of lavishing/squandering it is *purely symbolic*, in the form of the direct and absolute — a deliberately unanalyzed abdication of the monarchy. The premise from which the play starts is far starker than that found in the possibly earlier *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters*,<sup>27</sup> and the other earlier sources in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Holinshed, *The Faerie Queene*, *Arcadia*, and the Irish/Welsh legend of Lir's daughters, turned into legendarily silent swans. Farina notes, intriguingly, that one of Sidney's own sources in *Arcadia* was probably a work of Heliodorus, translated in 1569 and dedicated to de Vere.<sup>28</sup> In a manner Shakespeare excises the monetary equation entirely from the *peripeteia* (dramatic reversal), so that the theme of squandering could be traced to its source in dereliction/abdication of duty, without distractions.

What *is* included in *King Lear* is an exploration, connected with the "nature" theme, of the most extreme kind, of the stripping off of garments, of coverings, falsifications, both real and symbolic, and reduction of "culture" to "nature" and "naked truth" in every sense. Yet it is also, by the same token, in an uncanny doubling, which is the heart of the paradox and the "equation" of the play, about the necessity of disguise. This theme provides a profound link with those of Dickens'

*Little Dorrit*,<sup>29</sup> deeply influenced by *King Lear*. In a very Freudian reversal of Freud, “civilization” itself is a squandering, in *King Lear*. How do the themes connect? Lear struggles to articulate this when Goneril and Regan are about to deny him his unruly followers:

**Regan.** What need one?

**Lear.** O, reason not the need: our basest beggars  
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:  
Allow not nature more than nature needs,  
Man’s life’s as 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 —  
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!  
(2. 2. 438-445)

*King Lear* has more interwoven themes than any other Shakespeare play. But the play plummets downwards from its first moments of Lear’s abdication, to the abyss of the ejection of Lear on to the heath in the storm, and the blinding of Gloucester, with a cataclysmic, symphonic, ferocity. *King Lear* combines the terrible concentration of drama and action of *Macbeth* and *Othello*, with the vastness carried within the sprawling spaciousness of *Hamlet*. It has a cosmic reach and interconnectedness which is unique in literature, despite, and because of — in a complex unity — the sheer *ineptitude*, though not merely ineptitude, as one may call it, of Lear and Gloucester. The musical dimension of *King Lear* is commensurate with a pre-communicable, pre-verbal, dimension, and goes with the general sense of cosmic “beyondness,” neither purely Christian, purely pagan, nor naturalistic, but utterly, enormously, *numinous*, in what Wilson Knight calls “the *Lear* universe.”<sup>30</sup>

*King Lear* points us towards a way of understanding the tragic ineptitude — one which, in Hegelian mode, positively incorporates the ineptitude right into the heart of the tragedy as such. Significantly, there is a very great deal of ineptitude, combined with burlesque grandiosity, in Oxford’s own life, which researchers such as A.L. Rowse or Alan Nelson are not reticent to emphasize. But it operates in favor of the case for his authorship, not the reverse. And the miserly characteristics of William Shakespeare of Stratford, which Shapiro<sup>31</sup> interestingly dilutes and normalizes by invoking the speculatively supposed business role of his wife, do not count against him because he is *bad*, as Ogburn,<sup>32</sup> for instance, is drawn constantly into implying, but simply because these characteristics *do not fit* the author of the plays.

We find ourselves asking about *King Lear*, what are *the roots and limits of morality in nature*? Is God dead? Are the gods dead? Do they torture us for their pleasure? Is there any basis in nature for our “natural” or human desire for providential justice? Why does someone as totally good-hearted as Cordelia die? Why is Cordelia (so uncannily, as Freud realized<sup>33</sup> — and this is Shakespeare’s addition)

silent? These Nietzschean questions, three centuries before their time, are at the heart of *King Lear*, nor is it likely that the play offers any final answers; multiple perspective, and “negative capability,”<sup>34</sup> reign.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries —the centuries of Leibniz’s optimistic *Theodicy*, and Voltaire’s and Dr. Johnson’s pessimistic responses to it (*Candide* and *Rasselas*), and the questioning provoked by the Lisbon earthquake of 1751— found it simply impossible to cope with the death of Cordelia following upon her reconciliation with her father (which, again, is a telescoping, and extreme intensification, of Shakespeare’s sources).

Even Dr. Johnson (hardly a natural optimist about the state of things in this life) wrote:

In the present case the publick has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia’s death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.<sup>35</sup>

That this is not an isolated reaction, confined to its own time, is indicated by a representative remark, from two centuries later, of F.R. Leavis’s from around 1958:

“King Lear,” certainly there the disturbing radical attitude to life. The desperate Shakespeare is definitely there. The last turn of the screw, really disturbing. Not prepared to talk glibly about it. No one is. Not prepared to say anything about it.<sup>36</sup>

Harold Bloom says simply: “Every attempt to mitigate the darkness of this work is an involuntary critical lie.”<sup>37</sup> It is difficult for us to imagine that the universe has not got a moral response to us. Even the Nietzschean position oscillates between cosmic neutralism, and a doctrine akin to Edmund’s, in which “Nature” is taken to support values such as power, strength and beauty. Darwinism exhibits the same oscillation in its history. It is hard not to interpret *King Lear* in the light of this. At some level we can take Shakespeare to be wrestling with such a view, even though it is constantly deconstructed, through the impingement of the presence of a stark absolute realism which is indifferent (or, alternatively, hostile) to man.

But this deconstructing is dialectical, not abstract; it interacts with other frameworks, significances, not a mere affirmation of indifference. If we start with this, then why does Cordelia die? And why the silence which triggers this vast catastrophic unfolding, an addition to the sources? In Shakespeare’s Cordelia, we have the most overwhelmingly moving, heart-rending portrayal of devoted filial love since Sophocles’ *Antigone*. She is matched by the poignancy of the character who is undoubtedly based upon her, Amy Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*,<sup>39</sup> which is Dickens’ symbolic commentary on *King Lear*, just as her father William Dorrit is based upon Lear in

some way, as Welsh plausibly argues.<sup>38</sup>

The scene (“You do me wrong to take me out of the grave....” *King Lear*, 4.5. 38 ff.) where Lear is restored to sane consciousness, surrendered to his extreme *contrition* towards Cordelia, but overcoming his shame through her total acceptance and love (his “do not laugh at me” is exceptionally poignant and telling, in relation to the expression of shame), in her presence, is beyond all description in its sublime simplicity and nobility.

In life Oxford’s youngest daughter was Susan Vere. She later married Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, one of the “incomparable paire of brethren” (William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and at that time Lord Chamberlain, with power to control what was and was not printed, a post he had fought for tenaciously, was the other).<sup>40</sup> To them the First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays was dedicated. They shared with Ben Jonson, and Heminge and Condell, the “cunning plan” of achieving the mysterious publication of this enigmatic, ambiguous, and extraordinary volume in 1623. In 1602 a law student at the Middle Temple, John Manningham, the gossip who kept a diary for a year,<sup>41</sup> and to whom we owe a fortunate knowledge of several vital things, recorded an epigram couplet of **La(dy) Susan Vere**:

Nothing’s your lott, that’s more then can be told  
For nothing is more precious then gold.

Compare this to the early dialogue between Lear and Cordelia:

**Lear.** Now, our joy,  
Although the last, not least; to whose young love  
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy  
Strive to be interest’d; what can you say to draw  
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

**Cor.** Nothing, my lord.

**Lear.** Nothing!

**Cor.** Nothing.

**Lear.** Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

**Cor.** Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty  
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

**Lear.** How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,  
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

**Cor.** Good my lord,

You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I  
Return those duties back as are right fit,  
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.  
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say  
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,  
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care and duty:  
 Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,  
 To love my father all.

**Lear.** But goes thy heart with this?

**Cor.** Ay, good my lord.

**Lear.** So young, and so untender?

**Cor.** So young, my lord, and true.

**Lear.** Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower.

(1.1. 82-108)

The pun on Vere/Ver (“verity,” “verily,” “verie,” “very”) as Truth is one Oxford had often made. Nathaniel Baxter, who had traveled to Italy with Oxford in the 1570’s, writes a fairly frank poem about him to Susan in 1606 (he died in 1604), whose first letters form the words:

VERA NIHIL VERIUS SUSANNA NIHIL CASTIUS,

that is,

Nothing truer than truth, nothing chaster than Susan.<sup>42</sup>

Alan Nelson<sup>43</sup> interprets Davies’ 1602 couplet as a mocking allusion to Oxford as a “deadbeat dad,” who had handed over the care of his daughters to Lord Burghley, when he had lost all his estates, and become virtually destitute. But, as Warren Hope<sup>44</sup> argues, this overlooks the connection of Cordelia’s dialogue with Lear in this passage, which brings home that the “nothing” which is more precious than gold, is *truth*. As the King of France says of her:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;  
 Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised!

(1.1.250-251)

In many ways familiar to contemporary thought, Cordelia *aletheia-ically* (from the Greek ἀληθεια, “truth”) enacts truth as “nothingness.” She was always mysteriously and poignantly for me the prototype of what I have latterly come to identify in my work under the rubric of *pre-communicability* (and which helped me immensely to value creative silence in my work, both with, and in, my clients). Yet Cordelia is murdered — and murdered following her most poignant moments of reconciliation and transfigured love with her father.

What does this symbolize? Does truth condemn her to death? The possibility is bypassed of such a miraculous ending as those of *The Tempest* or *A Winter’s Tale*, which show, by contrast, there is no inevitability about this, and therefore that it is intentional, that it is clearly deliberately passed over by Shakespeare.

In fact, four of the five children die: Edmund, bastard son of Gloucester, and

the three daughters of King Lear, all die, within minutes of one another; only Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, is left alive at the end — left to rule the kingdom. Here, as elsewhere, Edgar has a special role. So, let us pause from the situation of Cordelia, to consider the implication of Edgar's role in the play.

What marks Edgar is that *he is apparently without relationships*, except of loving service, by contrast with all four of the others (three of whom, further, are engaged in lustful and passionate advances between themselves, as reflected in Edmund's wry and witty remark at the death of Regan and Goneril):

I was contracted to them both: all three  
Now marry in an instant.

(5.3.203-204)

Edgar has no ordinary human position in the play, and his peculiar combination of melodramatic sentimentousness, with imposed roles, has been often noted, for instance, negatively, by Mason.<sup>45</sup> His position is one of *filling a role* — as the stooge his brother sets up at the start of the play; as Poor (mad) Tom; as Gloucester's "most poor man" guide after his suicide attempt; as the fake peasant who kills Oswald in protecting Gloucester; or as Edmund's mysterious challenger; in each case there is a role, although crucial at the time, which melodramatically denies him personhood. These are all additions to the role of Leonatus in the source material in Sidney's *Arcadia*. They are also roles into which the extremes of the suffering of others are poured, within the field conditions of the play.

He is, in a way, the most *depersonalized*, anonymized, individual in the whole drama. One cannot but see him as *celibate*, which none of Cordelia, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are. Bloom, who *does* recognise his central importance in the play, albeit on a naturalistic model which ultimately prevents him from grasping its significance, in this iconically "poetic drama," says:

There is something so profoundly disproportionate in Edgar's self-abnegation throughout the play that we have to presume in him a recalcitrance akin to Cordelia's, but far in excess of hers. Whether as bedlamite or as poor peasant, Edgar *refuses his own identity* [my italics] for more than practical purposes.<sup>46</sup>

Now, there exists an intriguing three-way link between Shakespeare, Edgar, and Oxford. In the Sonnets (for instance, Sonnet 37 includes almost the very same phrase: "so I, *made lame by fortune's dearest spite*") the bard portrays himself several times as lame; Oxford, in his letters several times<sup>47</sup> refers to his lameness or infirmity); in the Quarto version of *King Lear* of 1608, Edgar describes himself to Gloucester as

A most poor man, *made lame by fortune's blows*;  
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,

Am pregnant to good pity. Give me your hand,  
I'll lead you to some biding.<sup>48</sup>  
(20.213-216)

In the Folio of 1623 this becomes:

A most poor man, made *tame* to fortune's blows  
(4.4. 220)

What, then, do we make of the fact that, as Poor Tom, but as acting a part (and how does this literal-minded man manage that, considered naturalistically?), *Edgar takes on the lustful persona of both his father, and of Edmund (and Goneril and Regan)*? Notice how this is also linked with the squandering motif – c.f., below, “thy pen from lenders’ books”:

**Lear.** What hast thou been?

**Edgar.** A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair; wore gloves in my cap; served 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 waked to do it: wine loved I deeply, dice dearly: and in woman out-paramoured 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. Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind: Says suum, mun, ha, no, nonny. Dolphin my boy, my boy, sessa! let him trot by.

(3.4.78-94)

Where has the author got this all from? I found myself initially asking whether Oxford is putting *himself* into this also, that Edgar’s simulated madness is an expression of Oxford’s own real near-madness, but also, in his role-playing, what is closely allied to that near-madness, his huge self-concealment and psychological carrying of the predicament of his time. Lear’s mockery of Edgar’s (lack of) dress even possibly replicates all this in the context of *clothing*; in *Speculum Tuscanismi* Gabriel Harvey<sup>49</sup> mocks Oxford’s Italianate penchant for archaically elegant clothing; and here Lear comments to Edgar (ironically to us, but “seriously” for Lear):

You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred; only I do not like the fashion of your garments: you will say they are Persian attire: but let them be changed.

(3.6.36-40)

When Edgar has mortally wounded Edmund in their duel (which Edmund, in the same strange non-naturalistic way, accepts) he reveals himself to him exchanging forgiveness, in a way which conveys the same strange affinity between them, and then the comment, in somewhat Karmic fashion:

Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true;  
The wheel is come full circle: I am here.  
(5.3.164-165)

The Karmic or perhaps Zodiacal connection between them also points to this strange affinity, between darkness and light, perhaps – which also reminds me of the earlier incognito encounter (this is also an incognito encounter) between Lear and Gloucester on the heath.

And in becoming Poor Tom, also, Edgar takes on his “other” imaginatively, both sexually and psychically. Likewise, in becoming Edgar, the author takes on *his* other. Paradoxically Edgar, in his own persona, emerges as the most sane and stoical of individuals, albeit excessively sententiously virtuous. This element is strongest in the Quarto of 1608, and is somewhat pruned and streamlined in the Folio; the revisions move the play even further from a naturalistic conception. But Edgar is also the one, who, in the famous remark, “ripeness is all,” utters this play’s equivalent of Hamlet’s beautiful speech:

Not a whit, we defy augury; there’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come, if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.  
(5.2.165-170)

And, like Hamlet, *he feigns madness*. There is a clue in this, to which we shall return. The Fool, however wonderfully Joycean in his witticisms and linkages, remains very much his own person; but Edgar is, uniquely, thoroughly, *Other-determined* at every step in the play.

Symbolically, he seems like a kind of dream (or entry into the darkness, “the dark and vicious place”) of his father and brother, through whom they enact their mutual hatred, and their shared “hatred of women.” For we must now come to the oft noted central “hatred of women” which is at the heart of this play.

This connects with Freud’s profound interpretation of this play,<sup>50</sup> in conjunction with the theme of the three caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*, by relation to which he interprets *King Lear* as *also* representing a love-contest. As the pioneer of masked meanings and reversed interpretations, Freud of course is comfortable with the incessant reversals and disguises in Shakespeare — which lead him eventually to accept the Oxfordian thesis.<sup>51</sup> Along with the interpretation of Cordelia’s death as the expression of the indifference of nature, and as punishment (e.g., for Lear’s continued infantile self-absorption) there is now the Freudian interpretation of

Cordelia as death. He explores her meaning as the third of the Fates, the Parcae, Atropos the inexorable, Death - Truth as Death, Death as Truth, Woman as Death, Death as Woman, Woman as Entropy. Freud here is foreshadowing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,<sup>52</sup> and the relation of Truth, Death, and Nothingness is, as we have touched on, profoundly germane for De Vere as “Shakespeare.” Freud’s is an interpretation that does justice to our sense that a happy ending, such as Nahum Tate’s as discussed by Johnson,<sup>53</sup> is utterly impossible here.

Clearly, in the general overdetermination, this is not incompatible with other interpretations. Nor is it incompatible with a feminist view of Cordelia tacitly functioning as scapegoat-sacrifice for the “depravity” and “cruelty” of “woman” in general, and as innocent scapegoat-sacrifice for the irresistibility of sex, which in *King Lear* is very much, though not entirely, projected on to women.

Once again, this is very far from absent from the Sonnets, in particular and notoriously (though directed more against “sex” than “woman” as such – and note the link with “expense,” “expenditure,” “spending,” etc, an incessant theme in the Sonnets) Sonnet 129 (“shame” again!).

In *King Lear* it comes out in representative form during the period of Lear’s madness:

**Gloicester.** The trick of that voice I do well remember:

Is ‘t not the king?

**Lear.** Ay, every inch a king:

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

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.....

There’s hell, there’s darkness, there’s the sulphurous pit,

Burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie,

fie, fie! pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet,

good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination:

there’s money for thee.

(4.5.106-127)

In all of this “hatred of women,” there are a mass of themes which we need only note in passing, without succumbing to reductive temptations, which invoke both the psychoanalytic and other related dimensions: castration anxiety (which is also expressed in Gloucester’s blinding, if we follow Freud on such matters); “procreation envy” (as one might call it); fear of the “terrible mother” (Jung); birth anxiety; sexual guilt; etc.

At the root of such themes, arguably, is *sexual shame*, together with other forms of shame; shame is what, at this point, is keeping Lear away from Cordelia. It originally prevented Cordelia from speaking of her love for him — though that is profound *social* shame, not to contaminate her love with the public hypocrisy of her

sisters. This emerges clearly in him in the “wheel of fire” passage already quoted (is his Catherine- “wheel of fire,” like Schopenhauer’s “wheel of Ixion,” a sexual wheel?). If sexuality is shame, we thus get a strange and, as yet, enigmatic, inference: in a manner, only in relation to Edgar is the play free of shame. But Edgar also *takes on* the whole shame and abjectness of others.

Immediately following the passage quoted above, where Edgar as Poor Tom explains what he is to Lear, we have the following famous passage, relating to the “clothing” issue:

**Lear.** Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here’s three on ‘s are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! come unbutton here. [*Tearing off his clothes*]

(3.4.95-103)

And this “animal” theme connects with the whole clothes and nature and “society” issue, even into Lear’s final speech:

And my poor fool is hang’d! No, no, no life!  
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
 And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,  
 Never, never, never, never, never!  
 Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.  
 Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,  
 Look there, look there!

[*Dies*] (5.3.281-287)

We are, then, dealing with something like a Pauline-Augustinian conception of the Fall of Man, in which, in some way, it is connected with the whole theme of sexuality. In parallel with the reduction to nature and animality element, in short order, we might first say that the reason Cordelia has to die is the same as the reason why Christ has to die, (and perhaps also why Edgar has to live), the utterly innocent facing the utmost abyss of despair, abandonment, final judgment and retribution; all of Wilson Knight’s intuitions regarding the Christian dimension of the plays come into their own. Compare the passages from Matthew and *Lear*:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli,  
 Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou  
 forsaken me?

(Mt. 27:46)

**Lear.** Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:  
 Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so  
 That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever!  
 I know when one is dead, and when one lives;  
 She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;  
 If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,  
 Why, then she lives.

**Kent.** Is this the promised end

**Edgar.** Or image of that horror?

**Albany.** Fall, and cease!

(5.3. 232-239)

The intimate connection between Cordelia and Lear's Fool, which is expressed in this reminiscence at the point of Lear's death, is reflected in the Fool's profound "truth-telling," which is *altheiaic*.

Here also is a Pauline understanding (*First Letter to the Corinthians*), a *Kenotic* understanding,<sup>54</sup> of tragedy, which Shakespeare somehow combines with a capacity to evoke the tragic equal, if not superior, to that of the great Greeks:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the  
 wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the  
 mighty things,  
 And vile things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God  
 chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, That  
 no flesh should rejoice in his presence.

(1 Cor. 1.27-9)

That this Cordelian motif of "nothing" can be combined with an erotic  
 evisceration is illustrated by Donne in *A Nocturnall Upon St Lucies Eve* (where the  
 Pauline echo is equally clear):

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee  
 At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:  
 For I am every dead thing,  
 In whom love wrought new Alchimie.  
 For his art did expresse  
 A quintessence even from nothingnesse,  
 From dull privations, and leane emptinesse:  
 He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot  
 Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not.<sup>55</sup>

But Christ's way of life, too, in the Gospels is portrayed as celibate, annulling of  
 sexuality, as Paul was celibate, and there is the famous passage in Matthew:

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born of their mother's belly; and there be some eunuchs, which be gelded by men; and there be some eunuchs, which have gelded themselves for the kingdom of heaven. He that is able to receive this, let him receive it.

(Mt.19.12)

Can the epiphanies of Christian forgiveness encompass sexual affirmation as opposed to sexual denial? As in Mozart, they can. However, I think *Lear* (with much else of Shakespeare) falls within the group of those works, in which human sexuality is either repudiated (Wagner's *Parsifal*, Schopenhauer's philosophy), treated as a profound disturbance (Kierkegaard, Henry James, Thomas Mann, Beckett), or anatomized and belittled (Swift, Flaubert, Eliot, Proust):

**Vladimir.** Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries.<sup>56</sup>

But this happens, as with Wagner's *Parsifal*, in the context of what is otherwise a profound life-affirmation, for *King Lear*, though a work in many ways savage in the extreme, never loses its sense of meaning and of the cosmos, is never merely cynical. And Edgar, to whom we shall return in a moment, is central to the accomplishment of this — through Christian resonances in particular.

What is going on?

It seems to me, reflecting upon the play in the light of the hypothesis of the autobiographical elements, however transformed they are in it, that this play, like *Measure for Measure*, is one of those plays in which the author splits himself. Here we find dramatizations of aspects of himself of which he is profoundly ashamed, and about which he feels profound contrition, but also non-naturalistically conceived *deus ex machina* Ideal self (or "I"-Ideal), which is in some way exempted from, or lifted above, the ordinary course of procreative mortality, and through which he is enabled to "redeem" the base self or selves:

**Angelo.** O my dread lord,  
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness,  
To think I can be undiscernible,  
When I perceive your grace, like power divine,  
Hath look'd upon my passes.

(*Measure for Measure*, 5.1.563-567)

And the figures which embody *that* position, like Edgar, *do* have the "indeterminate" "No-Self" status which Emerson and Bloom attribute to William Shakespeare of Stratford ("As to the poetical Character itself.... it is not itself — it has no self — it is every thing and nothing - It has no character"<sup>57</sup>). But it also belonged

in another way to Oxford — the humiliated abyss of his ultimate non-personality, his un-personing, as creator of literature. It was this which made the Stratford man so paradoxically fascinating to me as the ultimate *mystery non-person* whose creativity came from the beyond, in my youth. This is perhaps the element of truth which is - most ironically! - transposed into the Stratfordian orthodoxy, reaching its current apotheosis in Shapiro's *Contested Will*.<sup>58</sup>

Lear's three children are, all three of them, utterly real and convincing characters. Of Gloucester's children, Edmund, while there is a "morality play villain" touch about him, is nevertheless consistently presented, has enormous charm, a human touch of vanity, need for love, and a quixotically chivalric style, which comes out both in relation to Goneril, and at the end, and enables him humanly to respond "despite of mine own nature," and which also makes him respond, as he had no need to, to Edgar's anonymous challenge.

Neither brother is entirely naturalistically convincing (it may be relevant that Oxford, unlike William Shakespeare of Stratford, had no brothers). But Edgar's character is on the face of it a *thoroughgoing non-naturalistic* anomaly, which has to be accounted for (for instance, Bloom talks about his self-humiliation, for which he gives no adequate reason). As already indicated, he has no overt character of his own (he is on the run from the very start of the play) *but only a series of functions*, dictated (with a trickster element) by the needs of others (even his Tom a' Bedlam disguise mirrors or emerges from a remark of his brother's):

And pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy: my cue is  
villanous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam. O, these eclipses do  
portend these divisions! fa, sol, la, mi). (1.2.131-135)

At the end he emerges as a true challenger, only appearing on the third sound of the trumpet, like a Knight of the Holy Grail. In between he acts like a psychopomp (an underworld guide, like Dante's Virgil in the *Inferno*) leading Lear into the madness he, Lear, seeks, partly as relief, unlike Gloucester, for whom madness is not available, from *his* "huge sorrows":

**Gloucester.** The king is mad: how stiff is my vile sense,  
That I stand up, and have ingenious feeling  
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distract:  
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs,  
And woes by wrong imaginations lose  
The knowledge of themselves.

(4.6.279-283)

But the madness is also the license to release Lear to utter the wisdom which has not been available to him in his "sanity," and while he still seeks to retain the needs which vanity and esteem, as the antithesis to shame, appear to require. (See, e.g., "O reason not the need...") And Edgar acts as the psychopomp who, conversely,

leads Gloucester back to life affirmation. He is in many ways the play's "touchstone" (see commentary below).

The world which opens up for Lear is a world in which the antithesis to royalty, royalty which Lear has forfeited, but which, in forfeiting, opens to him a reality of which he had had no comprehension before, the world of poverty, of the recognition of "wretches" (the key word Gerard Manley Hopkins<sup>59</sup> picked up from these passages, in his Lear-linked poem *No Worst There is None*):

**Lear.** Prithce, 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.

**Edgar.** [Within] Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom!

*[The Fool runs out from the hovel]* (3.4.23-38)

Now, Edgar's Grail-quest-like "entering into his opposite" is prefigured in an allusion which invokes something equivalent:

**Edgar.** Child Rowland to the dark tower came,

His word was still,--Fie, foh, and fum,

I smell the blood of a British man.

(3.4.170-172)

The *Britannia Kids Encyclopaedia* notes:

Childe Roland (sometimes spelled Rowland) is a character in an old Scottish ballad. A son of the legendary King Arthur, he is the youngest brother of Burd Ellen, who has been carried off by the fairies to the castle of the king of Elfland. Guided by the enchanter Merlin, Childe Roland undertakes a quest to Elfland and rescues her. Shakespeare alludes to the ballad.<sup>60</sup>

Edward de Vere's ancestor, who, Gardner notes,<sup>61</sup> came over with the Conqueror, was Alberic de Vere – Albry, Aubrey, Auberon, Oberon (the fairy king in *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, Albe Righ = the Elf King); arguably Cordelia is related to Persephone, visitant to Hades, a connection which is explicit in Perdita in *A Winter's Tale*.

Edgar, like Parsifal in Wagner's final opera, is making a journey into his non-respectable "other," his "alter," his "dark tower," his opposite, sexuality, madness, poverty, nakedness, degradation, victimisation, illegitimacy, sacrifice ("No worst, there is none..," in GM Hopkins' epitomisation); and then he describes "himself," his previous self, to Gloucester, after he has engineered Gloucester's faked suicide by throwing himself over the cliff which did not exist:

**Edgar.** As I stood here below, methought his eyes  
 Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,  
 Horns whelk'd and waved like the enridged sea:  
 It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father,  
 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours  
 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.  
 (4.5.69-74)

This is a fine evocation (which Wilson Knight<sup>62</sup> thinks simply "a fantastic picture of a ridiculously grotesque devil") precisely of the Elf King, - or the Celtic Horned god Cernunnos,<sup>63</sup> the Hobby Horse (mentioned in *Hamlet*), Oberon and Puck (with the phallicisation of Bottom), or the phallic Green Knight of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This is the kind of territory we are in here.

Similarly, the names of the fiends which torment poor Tom, through which he is able to simulate hallucinatory behaviors with graphic fidelity, are derived ostensibly from a book by Samuel Harsnett, about exorcisms performed by Roman Catholic priests, published in 1603. But Bowen<sup>64</sup> shows that this in turn relates back to an earlier book of "Miracles," from around 1585-6, and this, however contemporary its form, was the title given to the Medieval Mystery Cycle Plays, as Chambers argues.<sup>65</sup> So this derivation not only enables us to place *King Lear* earlier than the standard dating of 1605/6, but also takes us right back to the world of the Mediaeval Drama and the origins of drama, as one would expect from the author whose childhood memories included Hamlet's of "Yorick" (*Hamlet*, 5.1. 179 ff.).

So, taking all this together with his Parsifal-like challenge, clad in armor, to Edmund at the end, it is possible to plausibly confirm that Edgar is *one of those disguised presences of the author in the play* as magician or psychopomp, familiar in Shakespeare, which we find as Prospero in *The Tempest*, the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, and also there is an element of this in Touchstone the Clown in *As You Like It* (where Touchstone's affinity and connection with the Hamlet-esque figure of Jacques is significant).

Edgar is, however, *unique in the scale* of his purgatorial descent into the darkness, which in psychotherapeutic terms has Jungian alchemical connotations, and which for me has been the central nucleus or eye of the vortex of this journey of

discovery. But the appearances of such figures in Shakespeare always signifies *attempt at an exorcism of wrongs*, and cleansings of the body politic, along the lines of Jacques' own comment in *As You Like It*:

Invest me in my motley; give me leave  
 To speak my mind, and I will through and through  
 Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,  
 If they will patiently receive my medicine.  
 (2.7.58-61)

On which the Duke Senior comments significantly:

Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin:  
 For thou thyself hast been a libertine,  
 As sensual as the brutish sting itself;  
 And all the embossed sores and headed evils,  
 That thou with licence of free foot hast caught,  
 Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.  
 (2.5.64-69)

When Shakespeare is in this mode, it is a fair preliminary inference that, among others, it is always also *himself* he is condemning. And so, in this aspect, when Cordelia dies, the ultimate judgment on Lear's dereliction is enacted.

Touchstone, with whom as Fool in his Motley Jacques is identifying, just as Edgar is associated with the Fool in the Storm scenes in *King Lear*, is the significant utterer of one of those moments in the plays and sonnets where an absolute identity claim, an absolute authority claim, is implied. They invoke either "the thing itself," or the "I AM THAT I AM" of Moses' vision of Jahweh in Exodus (3.14). In the case of Touchstone it is noteworthy the moment comes in rebuking, contemptuously, the country character, significantly called "William," but also implying that the water of identity has been poured into the wrong receptacle (though this is swiftly sidestepped again as soon as it has appeared):

**Touch.** You do love this maid?

**Will.** I do, sir.

**Touch.** Give me your hand. Art thou learned?

**Will.** No, sir.

**Touch.** Then learn this of me: to have, is to have; for it is a figure in rhetoric that drink, being poured out of a cup into a glass, by filling the one doth empty the other; for all your writers do consent that ipse is he: now, you are not ipse, for I am he.

**Will.** Which he, sir?

**Touch.** He, sir, that must marry this woman.

(5.1.35-45)

We see the affinity with Lear's evocation of Edgar *as animal*: "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" (3.5.101-103, my italics).

And the paradox of this, in Edgar's case, is that this is *also* a disguise – the absolute reversal paradox of the concept of Nature.

A letter of Oxford's to Burghley (I draw from Barrell here<sup>66</sup> as well as de Vere<sup>67</sup>) challenging his spying on him (this is in parallel, of course, with *Hamlet*), which also mirrors Lear's famous "I know not what they shall be but they shall be The terrors of the earth" threat to Goneril and Regan, 4.2, at the end of the "reason not the need" speech already quoted, contains an analogue comment:

My Lord, this other day your man Stainer told me that you sent for Amys, my man and, if he were absent, that Lyly should come unto you. I sent Amys, for he was in the way. And I think very strange that your Lordship should enter into that course toward me whereby I must learn that I knew not before, both of your opinion and goodwill towards me. But I pray, my Lord, leave that course, for I mean not to be your ward nor your child. I serve her Majesty, *and I am that I am* [my italics], and by alliance near to your Lordship, but free, and scorn to be offered that injury to think I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants, or not able to govern myself. If your Lordship take and follow this course, you deceive yourself and make me take another course that yet I have not thought of. Wherefore these shall be to desire your Lordship, if that I may make account of your friendship, that you will leave that course, as hurtful to us both.<sup>68</sup>

This, again, is paralleled in Sonnet 121, which we can almost feel being dashed off to relieve his feeling:

'tis better to be vile than vile esteem'd,

.....

No, *I am that I am* [my italics], and they that level

At my abuses reckon up their own.

(*Sonnet 121*)

Which in turn reminds us of (significantly, in its arrogance, just before the "no worst" moment when Edgar's hubris is deflated, when he encounters his father, blinded):

**Edgar.** Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd,  
Than still contemn'd and flatter'd.

(4.1. 1 ff.)

As we have noted, Edgar duplicates Hamlet in *mimicking madness*. Hamlet, in a catastrophic kind of way, and unable to master his relation to the whole situation until the very end of the play, nevertheless, in a Prospero-like fashion, *stage manages* the whole denouement of the process of the play, as the authentic representative of the author, and as heaven's "scourge and minister." Similarly, Edgar facilitates Lear's descent into madness (truth-in-madness) which enables him to return, though partly in a second childhood way, to Cordelia. Lear only returns to "truth" in the loss of her. Lear is unable, while she is living, to see her as a person in her own right, as opposed to a derivative of himself, even in the "court news" (5.3) exchange when they are led off to prison, and maybe this is his ultimate egotism, which can only be surpassed towards the other, by her loss through death. Edgar equally facilitates, in a psychopomp way, which, in the characteristic style of behaviour of psychopomps, seems ruthless and inhumane (as noted by Mason),<sup>69</sup> Gloucester's return to truth, and his refusal of both madness and suicide.

Both Lear and Gloucester incur, in a non-moral unfolding, the consequences of their derelictions, and egotisms, and it is Edgar who, in a way, ruthlessly stage-manages and orchestrates that unfolding, and likewise the subsidiary one of the melodrama of Edmund, Goneril, and Regan. Edgar, like Prospero, and the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, is left, alone, to rule the kingdom at Lear's death, when Kent declines the task. Accordingly, it seems to me that we must reconsider the famous moment, which we have already touched upon, of Lear's realization of the nature of man:

Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! come unbutton here. [*Tearing off his clothes*] (3.4.95-103)

If we are to consider only the author in his projection of himself into the play, then *this becomes the most extreme of all the self-identity formulations in the plays and poems*. It is one in which, representing both tenacious and unconquerable social order, and its sheer annulment, the twin poles of the play, in shame, and destitution, and (disguising) reduction to animality, shame-less nothingness, paradoxically absolutely deprived of role, "unaccommodated," he is penitentially (or nihilistically, or both) *reduced entirely to his animal and elemental cosmic being solely*: "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare, forked animal as thou art" (3.4.101).

This, as we have seen, is poignantly echoed in Lear's final speech. In the loss of Cordelia he himself has become Other, "wretch," and "unaccommodated man."

Edgar's Grail Journey in search of identity, and of his "sister" (Burd Ellen,

who, perhaps like Cordelia, “ran the reverse way round the church”) to the abode of the Elf-King has led him to this. And Lear attributes it to his “daughters”:

Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued nature  
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.  
(3.4.66-67)

It seems to me that, symbolically, Lear and Gloucester are *conducted by Edgar into the loss of everything*, as they approach death. Edgar is the emblem and instrument (“scourge and minister”) of their reluctant renunciation. In a way, in terms of Freud’s<sup>70</sup> model, therefore, *Edgar also* is Death. The final loss is the sacrificial death of Cordelia, which Edgar inadvertently, by delay, at least in the Quarto, brings about, symbolizing, in an overdetermined way, the many things touched on in this analysis.

By enacting *the loss of everything*, the author symbolically, Lear-like, commands something which was in reality beyond his control, but in the expiatory total reduction to “the thing itself,” which is enacted in the trajectory of the play, he surrenders it again – except in the form of the act of renunciation which he enacts through the disguise-based “null character” Edgar. Freud makes similar comment about the reversal of the reversal, in which Lear carries Death – as Cordelia/Atropos – dead in his arms, as Freud<sup>71</sup> compellingly asserts.

This is what I meant by Oxford as the author in a manner neutralizing himself penitentially, more than in any other play, in Edgar, who nevertheless, parallel to Prospero, takes over the Kingdom at the end, and, *in a disguised way*, is more potent than anyone else in the play. This may be the emblem of the authorship predicament.

In Edgar, Shakespeare has *dramatized disguising itself*, in an uncanny double take, in which case *King Lear* is also dramatizing the agony and shame of the authorial concealment as such – which is so often expressed in the *Sonnets*, e.g., 72 (“*My name be buried where my body is*”). I cannot see this as anything less (though it is also more) than comprehensive penitence and alchemical descent; and therefore I cannot conceive of the author as doing anything other than (though of course also *more than*) enact his comprehensive losses, and abdications, for which he feels responsible to an abyssal extent, in this profound symbolic expiation.

This significantly matches the life of Oxford in a literal way (for he must have come near to this pass in the 1590s, as Anderson and Stritmatter argue),<sup>72</sup> in the way much of *Hamlet* does, but it is also profoundly *symbolically* congruent with what we know of it (in much the same way as, for instance, Wotan’s relation to Fricka in *The Ring* is congruent with Wagner’s own relation to Minna). And indeed the symbolic aspect of it is expressed monumentally in the *disguise* motif which Edgar embodies – as the iconic enactment of the author who, if the hypothesis is true, is the greatest disguised genius in history.

I cannot see that there is anything remotely comparable in what we know of the life of William Shakespeare of Stratford, nothing which could *come*

to life specifically, as congruent, in the way Oxford's life does, or that of Dickens' own father's time in *Little Dorrit's* Marshalsea Prison;<sup>73</sup> the only serious possible exception to this argument, it seems to me, is the Catholic Recusant dimension of the Shakespeares of Stratford. But this creates a mass of puzzles of its own in relation to the Authorship.

In so doing, Oxford/Shakespeare creates one of the greatest of all dramas — in which *his own* admission that “he hath ever but slenderly known himself” — is obliquely conducted into the profoundest self-knowledge through the impersonal “imaginary” cypher, Edgar.

Edgar never meets Cordelia alive during the play. But Nahum Tate's modification in which Cordelia lives and marries Edgar — paradoxically, the two “death” figures of the play — nevertheless does, therefore, symbolically and mysteriously correspond to something fitting, which is enacted in *Little Dorrit*.<sup>74</sup> An extended comparison of the two works, with consideration of the profound relation of marriage and death, would take this analysis further.<sup>75</sup> But here I must just note this. Having myself here made this Keatsian journey of descent into the darkness, the old oak forest evoked in Keats' Sonnet on reading *King Lear*,<sup>76</sup> once again, and having been privileged to discern the extraordinary role of Edgar, which I never saw previously, I find myself asking, with Ogburn:<sup>77</sup> what must have been the depths of the personal descent of the author of a work of such darkness, a work yet imbued, nevertheless, with the sustained and starkest determination to realize “the true” (veritas)? The Oxfordian hypothesis alone gives us an author into whom our fullest intuitions about the allegorical communication of the plays can expand. This does not in itself make it true, of course, but if the requirement of congruence, however denied by Shapiro<sup>78</sup> and his orthodox colleagues is part of truth, it establishes some preliminary conditions for inquiry.

Thus our spiritual detective journey into the creative psyche of the authorship points to the character of Oxford as profoundly compatible with the authorship, and William Shakespeare of Stratford (with the mentioned reservation) not at all. And thus this quasi-psychotherapeutic, quasi-literary, methodology, can contribute, in a modest way, to the return of this historically repressed heritage, and so to the longer-term righting of a deep and centuries-long-sustained historical wrong.

“Inside” and “outside” the text, criticism, and creation, are relative concepts. The enactment and journey we have been drawn into, in exploring this whole issue, is one which straddles life and work, and in which a creative totality is at work which transcends both separately.



☾ **Endnotes** ☽

- <sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations in what follows are from the Geneva Bible of 1560/1599 (Geneva Bible, 1560/99/2007), which would have been the Bible Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford would have known, and, indeed, of which he possessed a copy, explored in Stritmatter, R (2001) *Doctoral Dissertation on Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible* University of Massachusetts PhD dissertation All Shakespeare references are to the Oxford Shakespeare, 2005; if not identified further, they are to *King Lear*. Grateful acknowledgements are due to Karnac Publishers, London, and United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy, publishers of *The Muse as Therapist: a New Poetic Paradigm for Psychotherapy*, of which this is a modified version of chapter four.
- <sup>2</sup> Freud, S. (1913/1957) *The Theme of the three Caskets*, 1913, in *Collected Papers Vol IV*, London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 244-256.
- <sup>3</sup> Wilkinson, Heward. *The Muse as Therapist: A New Poetic Paradigm for Psychotherapy*, London: Karnac-UKCP, 2009.
- <sup>4</sup> Shapiro, James. *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare*, London: Faber and Faber, 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> Wilkinson, H (2010) *De-Imagining Imagination: An Essay on Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* by James Shapiro, online at: <<http://hewardwilkinson.wordpress.com/2010/04/04/de-imagining-imagination-an-essay-on-%E2%80%98contested-will-who-wrote-shakespeare%E2%80%99-by-james-shapiro/>>.
- <sup>6</sup> Shapiro, 316.
- <sup>7</sup> Shapiro, 305.
- <sup>8</sup> Shapiro, 305.
- <sup>9</sup> Wilkinson, *Muse*, 86ff.
- <sup>10</sup> Shapiro, 198-9.
- <sup>11</sup> Shapiro, 199.
- <sup>12</sup> Shapiro, 315-6.
- <sup>13</sup> Wilkinson, *De-Imagining Imagination*.
- <sup>14</sup> Keats *Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 Feb- 6 May, 1819*, Keats Letters, Ed. MB Forman, Oxford University Press, 1947, 305.
- <sup>15</sup> North, Marcy L. *The anonymous Renaissance: cultures of discretion in Tudor/Stuart England*, Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 2003.
- <sup>16</sup> Farina, William. *De Vere as Shakespeare: An Oxfordian Reading of the Canon*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2006.
- <sup>17</sup> Green, Nina The Fall of the House of Oxford, *Brief Chronicles* Vol. I (2009), 49-122 online at: <<http://www.briefchronicles.com/ojs/index.php/bc/article/view/7>>.
- <sup>18</sup> Anderson Mark K. and Roger Stritmatter, *The Potent Testimony of Gabriel Harvey: Master*

“Pierce Penniless” and his ‘sweetest Venus in print... armed with the complete harness of the bravest Minerva,” *Shakespeare Matters* 1:2 (Winter 2002), 26-29, online at: [http://www.shakespearefellowship.org/Newsletter/Paradigm\\_Shift\\_Winter\\_2002.pdf](http://www.shakespearefellowship.org/Newsletter/Paradigm_Shift_Winter_2002.pdf).

- <sup>19</sup> Nelson, Alan. (*Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2003.
- <sup>20</sup> The “incognito encounter” is my label for a phenomenon found at peak moments of the greatest literature: the reunion of Joseph and his brethren in the book of *Genesis*, the encounter between Jesus and his disciples on the Road to Emmaus, in *Luke’s Gospel*, Wotan’s encounter with Siegfried in *Siegfried* in *The Nibelung’s Ring*, the encounter of Oedipus and Laius on the crossroads outside Thebes, Pip and Magwitch on Magwitch’s return in Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, Nostromo with Dr Monygham in Conrad’s *Nostromo*, and so on. It always indicates an hidden relationship – either familial, or by conjoint participation in some fundamental enterprise.
- <sup>21</sup> Farina, 203.
- <sup>22</sup> Bowen, G. *Sir Edward de Vere and His Mother Anne Vavasour*, first published in *Shakespearean Authorship Review* (1966), online in *Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook* at: <http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/library/bowen/17vavasor.htm>
- <sup>23</sup> Melville, H. *Billy Budd and Other Stories*, London: Penguin, 1986.
- <sup>24</sup> Barrell, C.W. ‘Shake-speare’s” *Own Secret Drama: Discovery of Hidden Facts in the Private Life of Edward de Vere, Proves Him Author of the Bard’s Sonnets*, First published in Shakespeare Fellowship Newsletter (American), 1941-2. Available online at the Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook: <http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/library/barrell/05Sonnets1.htm>.
- <sup>25</sup> Shakespeare, W *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, King Lear*, First Folio version unless otherwise indicated, Ed. S Wells, G Taylor, J Jowett, and W Montgomery, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- <sup>26</sup> Danby, J. *Shakespeare’s Doctrine of Nature: “King Lear,”* London: Faber and Faber, 1949, 125ff.
- <sup>27</sup> Anonymous *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters*, London, 1605. Available online at *Elizabethan Authors* <http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/king-leir-1605-1-16.htm>.
- <sup>28</sup> Farina, 202.
- <sup>29</sup> Dickens, C.(1857/2003) *Little Dorrit*, London: Penguin. The connection I touch on here is, for lack of space, not taken far enough in detail to enable me relevantly to give page numbers. It is taken further in in *The Muse as Therapist*, chapter IV., 151-158
- <sup>30</sup> Wilson Knight, G. *The Wheel of Fire*, London: Methuen, 1930, 1960: 177ff.
- <sup>31</sup> Shapiro, 75, 307.
- <sup>32</sup> Ogburn, C *The Mystery of William Shakespeare*, London: Cardinal Books, 1988., e.g., 24ff.
- <sup>33</sup> Freud, *Three Caskets*, 247.
- <sup>34</sup> Keats, John. Sunday 21 Dec.,1817 letter (32) To G. and T. Keats. In M.B. Forman (1947 Ed.), *The letters of John Keats* (72). London: Oxford University Press, 72.
- <sup>35</sup> Johnson, S. *Preface to Shakespeare*, in *Johnson on Shakespeare*, Ed. W Raleigh, London: Oxford University Press, 1765/1958, 161-162.
- <sup>36</sup> Leavis, F.R. *Essays and Documents*, Eds. MacKillop, I.D., Storer, R, Sheffield: Continuum

International Publishing Group, 1995, 82.

- <sup>37</sup> Bloom, H. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, London: Fourth Estate, 1999, 485.
- <sup>38</sup> Welsh, A. "A King Lear of the Debtors Prison: Dickens and Shakespeare on Mortal Shame," *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences Issue*, 70:4 (Winter 2003), 1231 – 1258.
- <sup>39</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*
- <sup>40</sup> Bowen, G. (1961) *The Incomparable Pair and 'the Works of William Shakespeare,'* first published in *Shakespearean Authorship Review (English)* online in *Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook* at: <<http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/library/bowen/12pair.htm>>
- <sup>41</sup> Manningham, J. (1976) *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple 1602-1603* Edited by R. B. Sorlien, Hanover (NH): University Press of New England.
- <sup>42</sup> "Oxford the Deadbeat Dad," on Alan Nelson's website: <<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/oxdad.html>>
- <sup>43</sup> Nelson, "Deadbeat Dad."
- <sup>44</sup> Hope, Warren. "Lear's Cordelia, Oxford's Susan, and Manningham's Diary," *The Elizabethan Review*, Autumn 1997 (5:2), 123-126.
- <sup>45</sup> Mason, HA., "King Lear: Radical Incoherence," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 1967, II (3): 212-235
- <sup>46</sup> Bloom, 480.
- <sup>47</sup> Nina Green's Oxford Authorship Site, *Oxford's Letters*, online at: <http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/oxfordletters.html>.
- <sup>48</sup> Shakespeare, W. *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, The History of King Lear*, Quarto Version of 1608, Ed. S Wells, G Taylor, J Jowett, and W Montgomery, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 213.
- <sup>49</sup> Harvey, G. *Speculum Tuscanismi* available at Harvey (1580) on Elizabethan Authors website, at: <<http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/harvey101.htm>>
- <sup>50</sup> Freud, *Three Caskets*, 244ff.
- <sup>51</sup> Freud, S. (1930). The Goethe Prize. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, 205-214.
- <sup>52</sup> Freud, S, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis (1961), e.g., 32ff.
- <sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Preface*, 161-162.
- <sup>54</sup> Wikipedia: **Kenosis** is a Greek word for emptiness, which is used as a theological term. The ancient Greek word *kénōsis* means an "emptying," from κενος "empty." The word is mainly used, however, in a Christian theological context, for example Philippians 2:7, "Jesus made himself nothing (*ekénōse*) ..." (NIV) or "...he emptied himself..." (NRSV), using the verb form *kenōō* 'to empty'
- <sup>55</sup> Donne, J. (1941) *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, London: Nonesuch Press, New York: Random House, 32.
- <sup>56</sup> Beckett, S. *Waiting for Godot*, London: Faber and Faber, 1953/1959., 91
- <sup>57</sup> Keats, J. Tuesday 27th October, 1818, Letter to Richard Woodhouse, (1947 Ed.), *The Letters of John Keats* (227-8). London: Oxford University Press, 227.
- <sup>58</sup> Shapiro, e.g., 314-316.

- <sup>59</sup> Hopkins, GM. "No Worst There is None," in *Collected Poems*, Ed. Gardner, London: Oxford University Press, 1948, 106-107.
- <sup>60</sup> *Kids Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Childe Rowland," online at: <<http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-9319519/Childe-Roland>>.
- <sup>61</sup> Gardner, Sir L. (1999) "In The Realm of the Ring Lords," *Nexus Magazine*, 6:6 (October-November 1999) <<http://www.nexusmagazine.com/articles/ringlords2.html>>.
- <sup>62</sup> Wilson Knight, *Wheel of Fire*, 172.
- <sup>63</sup> Mystica Encyclopaedia, (no date) *Entry on Horned Celtic god Cernunnous*, online at: <<http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/c/cernunnous.html>>.
- <sup>64</sup> *Hackney, Harsnett, and the Devils in Lear*, first published in *Shakespearean Authorship Review (English)* (1965) online in *Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook* at: <<http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/library/bowen/16hackney.htm>>.
- <sup>65</sup> Chambers, EK *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages*, London: Oxford University Press, 1945.
- <sup>66</sup> Barrell, CW (1941-2) 'shake-speare's' *Own Secret Drama: Discovery of Hidden Facts in the Private Life of Edward de Vere, Proves Him Author of the Bard's Sonnets*, First published in *Shakespeare Fellowship Newsletter (American)*, 1941-2, Online in *Shakespeare Authorship Sourcebook*: <<http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook/library/barrell/05Sonnets1.htm>>.
- <sup>67</sup> De Vere, E. (30th October, 1584) *Letter from Oxford to Lord Burghley*, online at: Oxford Authorship Site: <<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/oxfordsletters1-44.html#15>>.
- <sup>68</sup> De Vere, E. (30th October, 1584) *Letter from Oxford to Lord Burghley*, online at: Oxford Authorship Site: <<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/oxfordsletters1-44.html#15>>.
- <sup>69</sup> Mason, HA. (1967) "King Lear: Radical Incoherence," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 1967, II (3): 212-235.
- <sup>70</sup> Freud, *Three Caskets*, 255-256.
- <sup>71</sup> Freud, *Three Caskets*, 255-256.
- <sup>72</sup> Anderson Mark K. and Roger Stritmatter, The Potent Testimony of Gabriel Harvey: Master "Pierce Penniless" and his 'sweetest Venus in print... armed with the complete harness of the bravest Minerva," *Shakespeare Matters* 1:2 (Winter 2002), 26-29, online at: <[http://www.shakespearefellowship.org/Newsletter/Paradigm\\_Shift\\_Winter\\_2002.pdf](http://www.shakespearefellowship.org/Newsletter/Paradigm_Shift_Winter_2002.pdf)> , 26.
- <sup>73</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*.
- <sup>74</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*.
- <sup>75</sup> This relationship between *King Lear* and *Little Dorrit*, of Edgar and Cordelia in relation to Clennam and Amy Dorrit, I pursue in a beginning kind of way in *The Muse as Therapist*, chapter IV., 151-158.
- <sup>76</sup> Keats, J., "On Sitting Down To Read King Lear Once Again," in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, London: Frederick Warne and Co (1818/1902), 337.
- <sup>77</sup> Ogburn, e.g., 136-138.
- <sup>78</sup> Shapiro, 314-316.