

PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN “KING LEAR”

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King Lear is the climax of Shakespearean tragedy. It is also the best transition play between the tragedies and the last plays. In *King Lear* we have the work of a mature poet and dramatist, such that if we may find Shakespeare's settled opinion on our subject in any one play it is best to look for it, I think, in *King Lear*. Aristotle gave greater weight to tragedy than to history because tragedy deals with universals, history with particulars. Though a tragedy could be constructed on a single tragic event, the Elizabethan no less than the Greek playwright sought to penetrate to the universal world of guilt, passion and justice. In *King Lear* we witness the actions not of ancient Britons, but of humanity; we see not England, but the world. Both Greek and Elizabethan tragedy had religious origins; speculation on the ways of God to men was, therefore, an intrinsic part in them. The moralities were contemporary with the early Elizabethan drama so that the religious element in tragedy was not foreign. *King Lear* is in many ways a religious play,⁽¹⁾ more than *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's other equally religious play is *Measure for Measure*.

This leads us to the vital question whether *King Lear* is a Christian or a pagan play. The relevance of this question to our subject might at first seem thin, but it should be remembered that our subject is more than philosophical, it is primarily a religious or a theological one. An exclusive belief in free will implies atheism, and an entire belief in an all-embracing fate is, I think, very near paganism. To discuss whether *King Lear* is a pagan or a Christian play is not irrelevant to us. Such a discussion serves as an excellent introduction to *King Lear*, and is also the best preparation for our final decision on fate and free will.

Lear (Llyr, Ler) is a shadowy figure in the mythology of the ancient Britons. Nevertheless, there are several references to Greek mythology in Shakespeare's play. King Lear invokes the “mysteries of Hecate” (I, i. 112)⁽²⁾

1. In *King Lear* “References to religious or irreligious beliefs and feelings are more frequent than is usual in Shakespeare's tragedies, as frequent perhaps as in his final plays.” A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 222.

“We can distinguish three modes of religion stressed here by the poet. First, the constant references to the ‘gods’; second, the thoughts about ethical ‘justice’; and, third, the moral or spiritual development illustrated by the persons before us.” G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 186.

2. All subsequent references to Shakespeare's works are to George Lyman Kittredge's ed. of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*.

description of Cordelia beside her father by whom she was unjustly expelled, "Patience and sorrow strove Who should express her goodliest." (IV, iii, 18–19)

Shakespeare's patience in *King Lear* is Christian, not Stoic. There is a great difference between the two. Christian patience is motivated by charity and it takes its inspiration and strength from the example of *Christus patiens*. Stoic patience is a passive struggle with all that goes against Reason. In the Renaissance, much more in the Middle Ages, patience was not thought of as a negative virtue, a mood of empty passiveness, as it is thought of nowadays. Chaucer eulogized its theory in *The Persones Tale* and its practice in *The Tale of Melibeus* and in *The Clerkes Tale*.

The Renaissance produced several treatises on affliction and patience. There was Francis Bacon's essay *Of Adversity*, Roger Hutchinson's *The Second Sermon of Oppression, Affliction and Patience*, and Thomas Becon's *Catechism*. But the most exhaustive treatise was Myles Coverdale's *The Spiritual and Most Precious Pearl*, which was a translation from the German of Otho Wermullerus. The pearl is "the noble and precious virtue called patience". Shakespeare could easily have had access to this book, in which the seventeenth century Reformer quotes Aristotle, the Stoics, Cicero, and Seneca as heathen advocates of the value of patience. But then Coverdale distinguishes between heathen and Christian patience. His distinction is closely similar to that given by Hutchinson:

The heathen and philosophers profess a certain kind of sufferance, in that they regard not the grievous chances of this life ... but they lacked the patience that God esteemeth, and is commended to us in Christ's example.⁽¹⁴⁾

Coverdale further describes the behaviour of the ungodly under adversity:

The unfaithful do ascribe their prosperity and felicity to their own working, wisdom, and policy, and not to God: and their misfortune and adversity they ascribe to blind fortune, as though fortune had a certain power to work herself, without the working of God.⁽¹⁵⁾

In another place Coverdale's translation says that "like as prosperity shutteth and blindeth the eyes of men, even so doth trouble open them." Adversity makes man "more tame, patient, sober, loving, and friendly." It recalls Duke Senior's mellow contemplation –

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.

(*As You Like It*, II, i, 12–14)

14. *Works of Hutchinson*, ed. for Parker Society, p. 320.

15. *Works of Coverdale*, ed. for Parker Society, p. 147.

Seneca's theoretical theodicy expressed in his *De Providentia* is a far cry from what he dramatized in his plays. The sub-title to the English translation of this treatise rendered by Thomas Lodge and included in the 1614 edition of Seneca's *Works* is relevantly, "Why good men are afflicted since there is a divine Providence." The doctrine sententious Seneca teaches in this long essay is that those things,

thou callest difficulties, adversities and abominable are first of all for the good of those to whom they happen and afterwards for other men's good, of whom the gods have more care than of everyone in particular.⁽¹⁶⁾

Another passage is even more relevant to *King Lear*:

There is nothing more unhappy than that man that hath never been touched with adversitie for he hath not had the means to know himself. . . . Let them [the good who suffer] say we have been thought worthy by God to be esteemed such in whom he might make trial how much human nature may suffer.⁽¹⁷⁾

In his prosperity Gloucester ascribed his success solely to his wisdom, but in adversity he became patient and loving. It is true that at one moment he attributes to the gods in their dealings with men the cruelty of wanton boys, but in the *Precious Pearl*, too, we read that occasionally the afflicted can "find it in his heart to curse and blaspheme God, as though he were a cruel, unmerciful, and unrighteous God." Even Job's lamentations might appear blasphemous to the untried man. But Gloucester becomes charitable. On two occasions does he give purses: the first before he parts with Poor Tom (IV, i, 65), the second — again to Edgar, now speaking like a peasant — before he hurls himself from the imaginary cliff (IV, vi, 28). On the first occasion he explains how "the superfluous and lust-dieted man" (IV, i, 68) should distribute his excess among the poor. This springing up of charity from adversity is the best evidence that Gloucester's patience is essentially Christian. In like manner, after his trial on the heath and in the wood, Edgar uses charity precisely with Edmund, the man who has caused him all the trouble. Cordelia's care of her ungrateful father is, like Griselda's, Christian patience and charity in practice.

Before the curtain is drawn Albany summarizes the tragedy, "Our present business Is general woe" (V, iii, 318 – 19), and Kent in like manner says that "All's cheerless, dark, and deadly" (V, iii, 290). But Edgar's "Let's exchange charity" (V, iii, 166) is more impressive than either, especially when we remember that it is said to Edmund. And charity wins Edmund to repentance. "This speech of yours hath mov'd me, And shall perchance do good" (V, iii, 299 – 300), Edmund says.

S.L. Bethel was probably the first to show in his *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* that Cordelia is conceived as a Christ-like

16. C. III, p. 503.

17. C. III – IV, pp. 503 – 4.

figure. This can be proved either from Cordelia's own words or from words applied to her by other characters. Cordelia's grief over her father is thus described:

There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
That clamour moisten'd.

(IV, iii, 31 – 3)

The reference is to the holy water used in churches, but the conjunction with "heavenly" is certainly suggestive. In the next scene we find the words of the child Jesus as narrated in St. Luke's Gospel (ii, 49) echoed in Cordelia's –

O dear father,
It is thy business that I go about.

(IV, iv, 23 – 4)

To her unconscious father she says:

wast thou fain, poor father,
To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn,
In short and musty straw?

(IV, vii, 38 – 40)

This is probably written with Higgins' line from *The Mirror for Magistrates*,

From dainty beds of down, to bed of straw full fain

in memory, but Shakespeare surely had in mind as well the story of the Prodigal Son, who according to the Geneva Version of the *Newe Testament* (1560) – the version used by Shakespeare –

wolde faine have filled his bellie with y^e huskes,
that the swine ate.

Here Lear becomes the prodigal son, Cordelia his waiting father. In the same scene as soon as Lear comes to consciousness he speaks to his daughter:

Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire,

(IV, vii, 46 – 7)

as if Lear is in Purgatory and Cordelia in Heaven.

Hence there are two opposing elements in *King Lear*. There is the pagan world of pre-Christian times with frequent references to the gods of Greek mythology, to "the gods" in general and to the wheel of Fortune. Fortune, however, is almost insignificant, and the gods are often referred to as just and kind. The word *patience* is echoed through the play.⁽¹⁸⁾ The other salient Christian virtue of charity is also mentioned, but, far more indicative,

18. cf. Edith Sitwell, *A Notebook on William Shakespeare*, p. 50.

it is shown in practice by Edgar, Kent, and Cordelia, who is delineated as a Christ-like figure. Moreover, in *King Lear* it is the good forces, not the evil, that win.

The logical conclusion then is that while Shakespeare threw the story in a primitive pagan epoch, the issues of the play are essentially Christian. In this almost all commentators agree. L.C. Knights says that in *King Lear*:

The positives that emerge from the play are indeed fundamentally Christian values.⁽¹⁹⁾

And J.C. Maxwell states that it is "a Christian play about a pagan world."⁽²⁰⁾ John F. Danby ended his long study of *King Lear* with the following words:

To me, certainly, the clairvoyance of *King Lear* is hardly distinguishable from religious insight. It is not only our profoundest tragedy; it is also our profoundest expression of an essentially Christian comment on man's world and his society, using the terms and benefitting by the formulations of the Christian tradition. . . . Its gifts are those of gentleness, compassion, and truth: patience and charity.⁽²¹⁾

One notable exception to this interpretation is D.G. James'. In his sound little book, *The Dream of Learning*, he constantly refers to Shakespeare as a non-Christian playwright, but there is one emphatic passage on *King Lear* on which, I think, many refuse to agree:

what seems certain is that it was Shakespeare's fully conscious decision not to give to the story any fraction of a Christian content. The play's action is terrible in all conscience; but there is no crumb of Christian comfort in it.⁽²²⁾

James seems to refuse to admit that Shakespeare was a very conscious artist and that the full meaning of his work, particularly in *King Lear*, can be gleaned only by adopting several methods of appreciation. For example, James never takes into consideration the possible meaning of the frequent uses of the words *grace* or *patience*. Nor does he ever question the possibility of biblical echoes in language or situation — a technique often met with in the writings of Elizabethan thinkers — in Shakespeare. Besides, if we accept James' view, I wonder what would be our answer to the fact that soon after *King Lear* Shakespeare turned to the later romances in which spiritual Christian values are definitely involved. As far as I may see, Shakespeare's

19. *Some Shakespearean Themes*, p. 91.

20. "The Technique of Invocation in *King Lear*", in *MLR*, Vol. XLV, 1950, p. 142.

21. *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear*, pp. 204 — 5.

22. pp. 92 — 3.

artistic development is never sudden or contradictory to previously held opinions.

Hence, I see no danger in insisting on what I said earlier that *King Lear* is essentially, though uncommittingly, a Christian play.⁽²³⁾ We should not expect, therefore, the world of this tragedy to be dominated by fatalism. Destiny or the *Wyrd* is not all-powerful as it is in some of the Old English elegies. Neither Fate nor Destiny is ever mentioned in *King Lear*. It is profitless to compare it with Hardy's gloomy novels. A very rewarding comparison, however, will be with the old *King Leir* and with *Gorboduc*, a play which bears close affinity with the Lear story.

"King Leir" and "Gorboduc"

That Shakespeare knew and used *King Leir* has never been questioned. He probably had it on his desk while he was writing his own version of the story. This is enough to make it claim our attention, but what makes me write a short survey of it is the indispensable light it throws on what we have been saying on the pagan and Christian elements in Shakespeare's play. *King Leir* was probably produced at Henslowe's *Rose* in 1594, but it was not printed before 1605 – just at the time that Shakespeare wrote his play – as *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*. And the title-page adds, "As it hath bene diuers and sundry times lately acted."⁽²⁴⁾

King Leir contains many references⁽²⁵⁾ to Greek mythology: to Apollo, Jove, Leander and others, in fact more than in Shakespeare's play. But, as far as I remember, there are no significant references to magic or astrology. Nor is there a single mention of "the gods". In *King Leir* the deity is constantly mentioned, but it is always a Christian God. In the peculiar scene where the mariners offer cloaks to Leir the first mariner thus salutes the old monarch, "God be with you, sir" (2034), which is echoed, I think, in Gloucester's last farewell to Edgar, "Grace go with you, sir!" (V, ii, 4) I counted more than forty explicit mentions of God in *King Leir*, and they all reveal a kind and watchful God. Perhaps the best description of the play from this aspect is Perillus'

The blessed God of heauen hath thought vpon vs,
(2185)

Whereas in *King Lear* there are no explicit biblical allusions, in the old play *Iehoua* (1649), *Elias* (2192), *Abraham* (2326), *Iuda* (2327), the Manna

23. Other critics who stressed the Christian elements in *King Lear* are: R.W. Chambers, *King Lear: A Lecture*; R.B. Heilman, *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear*, Baton Rouge, 1948; and Enid Welsford, *The Fool*, London, 1935.

24. All subsequent references to *King Leir* are to the ed. of W.W. Greg and R. Warwick Bond.

25. cf. 186, 350, 352, 416, 522, 534–5, 1348–9, 1562, 2050, 2190.

of the Israelites (2202–3) are all mentioned. Moreover, the play is shot through with such references as "Christendome" (1225, 2378), *S. Denis* (622, 2548), "the King of heauen" (1604, 1745), "Paradise" (703), "Purgatory" (2580) and other similar notions. Shakespeare avoided all such allusions, and, instead, he steeped his play in nature. But the silent issues of *King Lear* seem to me to be far more spiritual – and sternly and convincingly so – than all the commonplace Christian allusions in *King Leir*.

We saw how Shakespeare insisted on Lear's patience. For this, too, he had precedence in his source. Perillus' description of Leir:

But he, the myrrour of mild patience,
Puts vp all wrongs, and neuer giues reply
(755–6)

evidently resembles Lear's words

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

(III, ii, 37–8)

At the end of the play Perillus again praises Leir's patience (2591–2). For Edgar's "Let's exchange chairty" Shakespeare might also have got the idea from Cordella's and Leir's "perfit charity" (1091, 1671) or from Ragan's "I swear, I am quite out of charity" (2377).

A more indicative term is *grace*. In the previous section I remarked how Shakespeare often introduces it in his play. It is used often and with a clearer Christian content in *Macbeth* and in the last plays.⁽²⁶⁾ It is surprising that generally the term *grace* is more explicitly Christian in meaning as used in *King Leir* than in its successor. In the earlier play there are at least seven uses of the word, all of which occur in the second half of the play. Perillus, Kent's prototype, tells the Messenger, who at times corresponds with Edmund, "now I see thou hast some sparke of grace" (1749). Leir fears that "weeds of rancour chokt the flower of grace" (2062) in Cordella, while Cordella herself wonders how her "shameless sister", Ragan, is "so deuoyd of grace" (2575). But the most telling and illustrative quotation on the question is given by Perillus:

No worldly gifts, but grace from God on hye,
Doth nourish vertue and true charity.

(1772–3)

Writing on *grace* one may draw attention to one of Cordella's genuinely religious utterances:

I will to Church, and pray vnto my Sauour,
That ere I dye, I may obtayne his fauour.

(1092–3)

26. cf. Derek Traversi's study on *King Lear* in *Scrutiny*, Vol. XIX, 1953, p. 130.

Here "fauour" is the substitute for *grace*, and in our previous section we noticed that in the first scene of *King Lear* Shakespeare three times made the word "grace" synonymous with *favour*.

Another profitable aspect of *King Lear* is the concept of Fortune it embodies. We may say from the start that Fortune is more concretely visualized in the older play than in Shakespeare's. Fortune bears great sway and seems to be genuinely believed in in *King Lear*, whereas in Shakespeare at this stage Fortune becomes a plaything of no real significance. At the opening of the play Lear states that "fortunes force shall ne're preuayle to cease" (68), and a little earlier his nobles had warned him that "nothing can reuoke the course of fate." (50) When Cordella is cast away by her rash father, she laments her lot:

How may I blame the fickle Queene of Chaunce,
That maketh me a patterne of her power?

(603 - 4)

And though she soon after makes herself "willingly imbrace the rod" of "the pleasure of my God" (610 - 11), she finally returns to the concept of Fortune:

And in this day of triumph to my sisters,
Doth Fortune triumph in my ouerthrow.

(656 - 7)

To her husband she denounces Fortune's trick -

Nor do not think, though fortune haue the power,
To spoyle mine honour, and debase my state,
That she hath any interest in my mind.

(662 - 4)

She plans how to spend the time away from her father's realm: "Thus ile mock fortune, as she mocketh me" (704). It would take me very long were I to quote the other references⁽²⁷⁾ to Fortune found in the play. "Chaunce", too, is repeatedly mentioned.⁽²⁸⁾ But there is one further point which should be discussed. In almost a hundred lines the anonymous playwright makes Lear four times submit himself to the will of God. In his sufferings Lear prefers to relate himself to the salutary plans of God, rather than to a whimsical Fortune. "Let vs submit vs to the will of God," he says, and, "It is Gods will, and therefore must be so." (1656, 1658) Disputing with the Messenger the death of Perillus, Lear expresses conviction that Perillus' death will not come unless God is willing, "But that time shall not come, till God permit" (1679), and doubting whether his exiled daughter will receive him into her court, he says -

27. cf. 351, 537, 602, 928, 2064.

28. cf. 430, 550, 945, 1133.

If this third daughter play a kinder part,
It comes of God, and not of my desert.

(1788 – 9)

When he later realizes that his daughter more than received him, he modifies what he had said earlier into –

It comes of God and her, not my desert

(2288)

implying, it seems to me, that Cordella was kind with her father because she co-operated with God's grace.⁽²⁹⁾

This leads us to discuss what particularly links *King Lear* with its predecessor, that is, their quest for universal justice. Protracted suffering and ingratitude inevitably compel the sufferer to ponder on the validity of justice. In keeping with realism, Elizabethan and Greek playwrights sought to make their tragic heroes agonize on the justice or mercy, on the indifference or malignity of the superior beings on whom men's lives depend. Though *King Lear* is, as we have seen, primarily Christian in temper,⁽³⁰⁾ it does not lack this essentially tragic characteristic of brooding on universal injustices inflicted on men. Such a passage as the following must surely have left its impression on Shakespeare's vigilant mind:

Oh iust *Iehoua*, whose almighty power
Doth gouerne all things in this spacious world,
How canst thou suffer such outragious acts
To be committed without iust reuenge?

(1649 – 52)

Yet the author of *King Lear* did not possess the negative capability of Aeschylus or Shakespeare. Even the questions on justice always assume a Christian design ruling over the universe. Skalliger threatens Gonorill, "The heauens, no doubt, will punish thee for this" (812), and his wish is tragically fulfilled. Lear brings himself to realize that "This punishment my heauy sinnes deserue" (856), which he later seems to explain:

And for her [Cordella] sake, I thinke this heauy doome
Is falne on me, and not without desert.

(915 – 16)

At the same time he feels he has been unjustly treated, and he reconciles himself "vnto God, who my iniustice see" (1581), for he knows that "the iust heauens will hardly do the like", that is like the ungrateful behaviour of his "vnkind Girles" (2150 – 1). Cordella also suffers from the ungrateful behaviour of her father and sisters, but

29. Leo Tolstoy compared the morality and Christian doctrine of Shakespeare's play with the earlier version and stated that *King Lear* is undoubtedly preferable to Shakespeare's tragedy. cf. *Collected Works*, Oxford, 1937, Vol. 21, pp. 338 – 64.

30. cf. H.B. Charlton, *Shakespearian Tragedy*, p. 217.

vnto him which doth protect the iust,
In him will poore *Cordella* put her trust.

(331 – 2)

Similarly, at the end of the play, the Gallian King, Cordella's husband, comments with a choric significance –

But God protected him from all their spight,
And we are come in iustice of his right.

(2560 – 1)

Does not this faintly recall the peaceful choric quatrain with which *Samson Agonistes* ends?

The last four lines of *Gorboduc*, too, are on God's justice in his dealings with men. This first English tragedy in blank verse was first acted in 1561 and was printed in quarto four years later with the title, *The Tragedie of Gorboduc* and with the notice: "Where of three Actes were wrytten by Thomas Nortone, and the two laste by Thomas Sackuylle." Besides its intrinsic importance for its popularity and as a first tragedy, it is particularly worth examining for our study. Norton probably worked on *Gorboduc* while he was preparing his English translation of Calvin's *Institutio – The institution of christian religion* – which appeared in print in 1561, and hence the play, to some extent, claims our attention.

Eubulus, the faithful follower of the King and the anticipator of Kent, thus ends his long, monotonous speech, fortunately the last of the Play:

Of justice, yet must God in fine restore
This noble crown unto the lawful heir:
For right will always live, and rise at length,
But wrong can never take deep root to last.

(V, ii, 438 – 41)

These four lines are specially interesting for us. First, they are representative of the author's constant preoccupation with universal justice. This strain closely links *Gorboduc* with the *Lear* plays. Secondly, these four lines contain the second and last reference to God, for, like *King Lear*, the godhead is always referred to in the plural. The other mention of *God*, associated with *grace*, occurs earlier in the same scene, where the same character, Eubulus, describes how a group of furious rebels "careless of country, and lawless of God" (209),

could not be withdrawn
By love, by law, by grace, ne yet by fear.

(205 – 6)

What makes one almost certain of Shakespeare's interest in *Gorboduc* in his writing *King Lear* is that either play shows the ruin of an early English dynasty caused by a wrong decision of the king. And their wrong decision is identical: both *Gorboduc* and *Lear* prematurely relinquish their power,

authority and realm to their unprepared children. Another similarity is that in both plays there are trials of evil children by their fathers. Though the trial in *King Lear* is weird and phantasmagorical, unlike the real one in *Gorboduc*, it is possible that Shakespeare used *Gorboduc*, since there is no trial in *King Lear*.

More relevant to our discussion is the keen interest the authors of *Gorboduc* show in destiny and fate. This is not to be wondered at since one of the authors was then translating Calvin's most important treatise. Old Gorboduc deems it unbelievable that his own sons should cause him all this heart-rending grief:

What cruel destiny,
What froward fate hath sorted us this chance,
That even in those, where we should comfort find,
Where our delight now in our aged days
Should rest and be, even there our only grief
And deepest sorrows to abridge our life,
Most pining cares and deadly thoughts do grow.
(IV, ii, 223 – 9)

To this question, equally applicable to Lear on his recovery, the king's counsellor answers in the vein of the *sic transit gloria mundi* related to the *De Casibus* theme:

the price of mortal joys;
How short they be, how fading here in earth,
How full of change, how brittle our estate,
Of nothing sure, save only of the death,
To whom both man and all the world doth owe
Their end at last.
(IV, ii, 231 – 6)

But the interest the joint authors of *Gorboduc* had in destiny was neither exaggerated nor depressing. In the same scene someone implies that the predetermined plans of Destiny are helped to come about by the free consent of men:

But most hard cruel heart that could consent
To lend the hateful destinies that hand,
By which, alas, so heinous crime was wrought.
(IV, ii, 311 – 13)

Revenge, retribution and justice are continually met with in the first English tragedy. From its dawn English tragedy insisted on the interest which God, or in pagan terms, the gods took in the affairs of men. In his affliction the tragic hero found relief in the thought that God would execute his justice on the wrong-doer: "O heavens, send down the flames of your revenge!", cries Gorboduc, "Destroy, I say, with flash of wreakful

fire The traitor son . . ." (III, i, 166 – 8), and later the same denunciation is heard again, this time tinged with a pagan deity –

Even Jove with justice, must with lightening flames
From heaven send down some strange revenge on thee.
(IV, ii, 327 – 8)

The attitude of "O cruel fates, O mindful wrath of gods" (III, i, 1) remained one of the most typical characteristics of the soul of Elizabethan tragedy. Often the fates or gods were attributed with the entire control of human beings, even to the point of denying man's free will. The Elizabethan tragedy most steeped in this man-gods relation is, I think, *King Lear*. It was, therefore, requisite to examine its pagan and Christian layers, for, it seems to me, the right approach to fate and free will in this extraordinary tragedy should begin in the setting. Whether it is a pagan or Christian setting inevitably contributes to decide which way the play inclines, whether to free will or to destiny.

A short survey of the old Lear play reinforced by a cursory comparison with *Gorboduc* helped to show us what Shakespeare found and what he introduced in the setting of the Lear story. More will soon be discovered, but for the present it is enough to keep in mind that Shakespeare's story had gained artistically by its superstitious pagan setting, where the contradictory forces of passion are left unrestrained. The issues of *King Lear* seem to me as to almost all critics, to be in line with the Christian teaching of charity and patience.

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