Shakespeare's
King Lear

Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

An Edition with New Insights

By

S. Nagarajan

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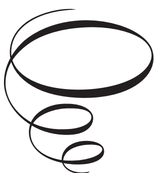

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface vii

Acknowledgements ix

Introduction

1. The Text and Dates of the Play 2

2. Sources, Influences and Values of the Play 5

3. Lear's Fool 48

The Play

Abbreviations 56

List of Characters 57

An Amalgamated Text of *King Lear* with Notes

Act I 59
Act II 145
Act III 199
Act IV 257
Act V 315

Language

4. Shakespeare's Words 352

5. Notes on Shakespeare's Versification 357

Some Problems of Interpretation

6. The First Two Scenes of the Play 362

7. Tragic Justice in *King Lear* 369

8. The Final Lines of *King Lear*: Are they spoken by Edgar
or by Albany? 382

9. Cordelia's Return to England Reconsidered.. 387

Staging

10. Glimpses of Lear on the Indian Stage.. 398

Bibliography 402

PREFACE

This is an edition of William Shakespeare's mightiest play, *King Lear*, that keeps in view both the reader who has access to well-stocked libraries, as well as students and teachers of English whose resources are limited such as in Indian colleges. To address these dual audiences, and especially the latter, I have made certain choices about details and emphases.

I have made it a "reading edition" in the sense that I have not written in detail about certain important aspects of the play such as the translations of the play into Indian languages or its adaptation or performance on the Indian stage. However, I have drawn the attention of the student to the importance of dramatising the play when it is presented in the classroom and I have tried to refer to how great actors have rendered the action of the play. (I hope these accounts of theatrical practice will induce second thoughts about the actability of the play provided the flexibility of Indian stage practice is fully utilized. I have depended on the stage-history of the play by Professor Marvin Rosenberg). Another topic which I have only briefly referred to, but have commented on in the Notes, is the style of the play. I have concentrated on annotating the play thoroughly writing "longer notes" in addition to "shorter notes" which are intended to help the immediate comprehension of the text; both types of notes are provided in the running annotation of the play. (In adding the longer notes, I have adopted a modified practice that Professor Harold Jenkins used in his Arden edition of *Hamlet*.) Indian teachers and students especially in the smaller towns lack ready access to books, scholarly journals, and audio-visual teaching aids which can be of tremendous help. In such places, even the Shorter Oxford Dictionary (let alone the original OED) is hard to access. I have naturally tried to take full advantage of previous editions, including those meant for non-European and non-American school students. Many features of the annotation in these school editions are old-fashioned but are worthy of renewed attention; for example, etymological and grammatical notes. Such notes need not be sacrificed to include literary interpretation.

The text of *King Lear* bristles with problems. But Indian academic interest in the textual problems of Shakespeare is at best mild or restricted. The text presented here is an eclectic one; as I explain later, I have conflated the Quarto text of the play with the text in the First Folio. I have,

by and large, followed the text presented by Alfred Harbage in the first American-Pelican edition and consulted the texts presented by Kenneth Muir in the second Arden edition and Reginald Foakes in the third Arden edition. This eclectic text of *King Lear* has followed the spelling conventions of its chosen model (Harbage). The rest of the textual matter—the Notes and introductory sections—follow British spelling.

I have given in my notes a generous but discreet selection of alternative readings. To compare these readings sharpens the literary sensibility of the student and helps her to make Shakespeare an internal acquisition. I have occasionally drawn upon Indian poetics and philosophy where it seemed to me profitable or interesting in the sense that a new reading was evoked thereby which did not conflict with the spirit of the play or good sense. With these connections, it is my hope that the non-Indian (as well as the Indian!) reader will benefit from viewing Shakespeare on a global stage, one that includes, but goes beyond, Anglophone cultures and Euro-American experiences. Such a widening of the understanding of the play is imperative to being educated in a globalizing world. Artistic thinking, when it is based on fundamental issues (for example, *Lear* as a tragedy) makes our thinking cross boundaries of time and space. Thus Aristotle is useful when we are considering Shakespearian tragedy. This remark does not give us license to dispense with tact, relevance or a flexible intelligence.

In considering the question which evoked much debate some decades ago—other attractions of criticism have come up since—the Christian cast of the play, I have drawn upon the understanding of Christianity in the writings of Simone Weil. Christianity is a many-splendoured religion. But perhaps its greatest splendour is that it is the religion of love and its religion tries to make sense of innocent or undeserved suffering in our life. Although she died unbaptised, Weil was fully aware of this attraction of Christianity as the religion of love and as an interpretation of human suffering.

I hope this edition will be found useful by the audiences for whom it is meant. I dedicate it to my children and the students who nurtured me in the University of Poona's Department of English from 1961 to 1977.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My most grateful thanks are due to the Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington D.C.) for the grant of a short-term fellowship that enabled me to revisit the Library after an interval of forty years and catch up with some of the recent writing on the play. (I must, however in all honesty, add that I failed to understand or appreciate a good deal of this recent criticism.) My gratitude to the Library is not only for the financial help that the fellowship provided but the learned company of scholars (including the staff) who gathered there while I was in residence there. When my tenure of the fellowship came to an end I went to live in Durham, North Carolina, with my daughter Leela Prasad, an associate professor in the Department of Religion at Duke University, and my son-in-law, Dr. Baba Prasad. I used the excellent facilities of the Duke University Library which were made available to me without any bureaucratic fuss. My older son, Gp. Capt. Shankar, an officer in the Indian Air Force and his wife Vijaya took time from their busy schedules to type the successive drafts of this edition. Leela made the riches of her folklore scholarship available to me and spent many hours working with me on the revisions of the manuscript. The task of proofing the manuscript was shared between her, Prasad, Shankar and Vijaya. My second son, Chandramouli, helped me to cope with the mysteries of the modern computer. His wife, Indira, made her own contribution to the courage and spirit that her husband brought into daily living. To all of them, I am grateful. My thanks also to Professors Melvin K. Peters and Mark Goodacre of Department of Religion, Duke University, for their comments which helped me make my remarks about the historical origins and development of *The Bible* more precise. The role of my wife, Srimathi, and her contribution to my life's fulfilment (such as it is) are best acknowledged in Shakespeare's words: *More is thy due than more than all can pay*.

It was my students at the University of Poona who kept my hope and courage alive when I was going through some very rough times in my career. How pure and innocent students are! It was their trust and faith in me and their love for me that kept me afloat when I was battling for survival as a teacher.

S. Nagarajan

INTRODUCTION

1. The Text and Dates of the Play

No manuscript of Shakespeare's *King Lear* seems to have survived, and in order to edit the play, we have to rely on three early texts: a Quarto of 1608, another Quarto published in 1619 (but wrongly dated 1608 on the title-page) and the text presented in the First Folio of Shakespeare's works published in 1623, seven years after his death. ("Quarto" and "Folio" refer to the size of the book. If a large sheet of paper, for example 15" in length and 10" in width, is folded in the middle lengthwise, we get 2 leaves or 4 Folio pages. If the sheet is folded again yielding 4 leaves or 8 pages we get a Quarto. Many of the plays of Shakespeare were published in Quarto before all (almost all) the plays were collected and published in the First Folio. (Facsimiles of the original Shakespeare Quartos and of First Folio are available.) There are important differences among the texts of our play as presented in the two Quartos and the First Folio. (The 1619 Quarto is virtually a reprint of the First Quarto.) Ann. R. Meyer notes that the First Quarto is:

> a poorly printed text with sporadic punctuation, incorrect lineation, limited stage directions, and several unintelligible readings…Folio *Lear* contains…ample stage directions and divides the play into acts and scenes. Although Folio frequently reproduces obvious errors from Quarto, editors have typically based their editions on Folio, turning to Quarto for assistance in correcting erroneous readings in Folio and including passages, thought to be authorial, that appear only in Quarto. There are approximately 300 lines or half lines that occur only in Quarto and approximately 180 lines that appear exclusively in Folio. In addition, there are roughly 850 variations between the texts in wording, punctuation, lineation and spelling. Several speeches are differently assigned between Quarto and Folio, the most famous of which affects the final speech: Albany closes the play in Quarto, while Edgar speaks the last lines in Folio (1994: fn. 1, 128-29).

In the opinion of some scholars (Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, Michael Warren), Quarto and Folio are not defective versions of a lost text, but two separate stages in the creation of *King Lear*. Quarto *Lear* and Folio *Lear* are two different plays with differing versions, characterizations, and moods. These scholars argue that Quarto and Folio Lear should be separately edited and presented. They should not be amalgamated or

conflated to make a single text. If we do so, we get a hybrid play which Shakespeare did not write as such. According to these scholars, thus, a conflated text obscures Shakespeare's art and gives us a play which was not seen on the stage during his time.

However, other scholars (Kenneth Muir, David Bevington and Sir Frank Kermode, for example) agree that there are differences between the Quarto and the Folio text but contend that their interpretative divergence can be easily overstated. In their editions (the second Arden edition of Kenneth Muir, the Bantam edition of David Bevington, and the Riverside Shakespeare edition of Sir Frank Kermode), they conflate the two texts, giving the student all that they consider authentically Shakespearean. They believe that conflation does not adversely affect the internal integrity of the play. The Oxford edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor prints the Quarto *Lear* and the Folio *Lear* separately. So does the new Pelican edition of Stephen Orgel. The New Cambridge edition of Jay Halio follows the Folio text, but makes the uniquely Quarto passages available in an appendix. Halio has published (through Cambridge) a separate edition of the First Quarto text. R. A. Foakes offers in his third Arden edition what is essentially a conflated text, but he marks with a small-print superscript "Q" or "F" words or passages found only in the Quarto or Folio respectively. In the Norton edition of Shakespeare (under the general editorship of Stephen Greenblatt) which is based on the Oxford text, three texts are offered: Quarto, Folio and a conflated text edited by Professor Barbara Lewalski of Harvard University.

There are many unresolved questions about the text of *King Lear* such as the nature of the copy text for the Quarto and the Folio and the relationship between the Quarto and the Folio, but the immediate question before us is whether to conflate or not to conflate. The present edition offers a conflated text largely on the lines of Alfred Harbage's first American Pelican edition, and Kenneth Muir's second Arden edition. The present editor is unable to accept the two-text hypothesis fully; this hypothesis "maintains that the Quarto and Folio texts do not derive from a single, lost exemplar of the play; instead, they represent two related but significantly distinct versions - an original one, most likely printed from Shakespeare's rough drafts, and a revised version adapted for presentation in the theatre" (Jay Halio, 1991: 1). This editor is inclined to agree with R.A. Foakes that "the play in both versions has the same basic pattern" (Foakes 1997: 149). Foakes declares that "the central question" for an editor of *King Lear* (his responsibility and the measure of his success, we

may add) is “how best to make available to readers the play of King Lear” (1992: l 19).

It must be conceded that the considerations that have weighed in making this choice of a text are more pragmatic than bibliographical. In India at least, where there is not much active interest in the textual study of Shakespeare especially at the undergraduate level, the teaching tradition of a conflated *King Lear* is firmly entrenched. (The readership for this edition includes senior Indian undergraduates and teachers in undergraduate colleges also—for whom a conflated text would offer a more immersive experience of the play). Other editions are readily available that offer full and accessible information on the textual problem. Folio and Quarto texts of Lear are also easily available. It is with this intent of making the play and its environments widely “available” both to international students and scholars and that this edition is presented.

2. SOURCES, INFLUENCES, AND VALUES OF THE PLAY[1]

H. H. Furness, the editor of the Variorum *King Lear* (1880) declared that the search for Shakespeare's sources was "the most profitless department of Shakespearian study" (1963 [1880]: 383). More balanced and less extreme are the remarks of R.A. Sayce in his book, *Essays of Montaigne*:

> History helps us to understand but also misunderstand. Montaigne's originality (like that of a scientist) often springs not from the modification of what he has read in books but a fresh and direct look at the world, the sort of look which is possible at any time . . . History tends to suggest that nothing is original, the work of the source-hunters has decomposed even the most powerfully original thinkers (a Rousseau or a Marx, for instance) to the point where every major conception (and most of the minor ones) is seen as a borrowing from some precursor or at least an unconscious echo. All this in a way is true . . . Nonetheless, new combinations of familiar or peripheral concepts produce essentially new totalities: originality is not entirely an illusion. Moreover, a work of literature or a work of art, does not exist just at one point of time, that of its creation. It continues to exist, and we study or read it. And in existing it changes its meaning . . . we see that a work has a post-history as well as a pre-history . . . a great original creator cannot be tied to a limited period (1972: 4-5).

Provided these alerts are taken into account, the study of Shakespeare's sources can be valuable. It can enhance our appreciation of his imagination which ordered and harmonized the wide variety of his sensuous and intellectual experience. As Kenneth Muir says, Shakespeare created his play from the most heterogeneous materials, amplifying and complicating his original fable by using incidents, ideas, phrases and even words from a variety of books. "He found his material for his purposes in the most

[1] "Source" and "influence" are used here in the traditional sense; "*source*" to refer to a book open on the desk or in the mind of the author, appearing as a direct, verbal and visible presence in the text; "*influence*" to refer to a cause less direct than a source and secondary in significance. Miola (1988) discusses the significance of these and other related terms in contemporary use.

unlikely places" (1977: 206). And he gave, through statement and suggestion, new meanings and new possibilities of meaning to what he took. Here, a brief and selective account of Shakespeare's sources, of the changes he made, and of the major influences on his writing of the play is provided to illustrate what Professor Muir and Professor Sayce have said so well. Generous and relevant extracts from sources of *King Lear* have been assembled with a judicious and comprehensive critical introduction in Volume 7 of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1973: 269 - 414). Bullough reprints in full what most scholars consider the principal dramatic source of the play, an anonymous play known as *True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters; Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*, published in 1605. The standard monograph on Shakespeare's sources for the Lear story is Wilfrid Perrett's *The Story of King Lear from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Shakespeare's Sources* (1904). The question (including for example, the source for the Gloucester plot) has also been discussed by Kenneth Muir in the first volume of his *Shakespeare's Sources*. Discussions of the sources will also be found in all editions of the play; for example, R.A. Foakes's third Arden edition, J.L. Halio's New Cambridge edition and Stanley Wells's World's Classics edition. The old play of *Leir* has been critically edited by Donald M. Michie (1991) with an introduction that discusses among other things its relationship with Shakespeare's play.

Sources

Folktale Origins

Shakespeare's play has its origins in a folktale which is well known in several traditions, both Eastern and Western. A folktale from India has been retold by Charles Swynnerton in *Indian Nights' Entertainment or Folk-Tales from the Upper Indus* (originally published in 1892; reprinted in 1997 in New York by the Arno Press; pp. 78-79). The story, titled "The King and His Daughters," goes as follows: Once upon a time there was a king who had several daughters. He asked the first one: "How do you love me?" She answered "Like sugar." The second one said: "As honey." The third one said "Like sherbet." The fourth one said: "Like salt." The King was dissatisfied with the fourth daughter's answer, but she would not change it. He drove her out into a forest. She was found there by a prince who fell in love with her and married her. Some years after, her father, the king, who did not know what had become of her, chanced upon her in the forest. She invited him to a meal. When he sat down to eat, the princess

veiled herself and served him sweet dish after sweet dish which he either passed over altogether or merely tasted. He was very hungry and was longing for something which he could eat with relish. At last the princess set before him a dish of common spinach, seasoned with salt, such as farmers eat. The king ate it with relish. Then the princess threw off her veil and said to him: "O my father, I love you as salt. My love may be homely, but it is true, genuine and lasting, and I entreat your forgiveness." The king realized his mistake: You cannot do without salt; a series of sweet dishes can be tiresome.[2] The moral of the tale is reflected in the biblical (Mathew, 5-13) expression, "the salt of the earth," meaning "a person of great excellence, virtue, or worth," or "those whose qualities are a model for the rest."

Historical Accounts

The story of King Lear appears in the written form for the first time in a legendary history of the kings of Britain beginning with Brut, the founder of the British race and a great-grandson of the mythical Trojan hero, Aeneas. The history comes down to the time of King Arthur (of Round Table fame) and was written in Latin by a monk called Geoffrey, of Monmouth in 1135. The *Historia Regum Britanniae* was a popular work. It was frequently translated and was easily available in manuscript. According to Perrett, over 170 manuscript copies exist. (It was first printed in Paris in 1508.) It is very likely that Shakespeare (whose Latin was small only in comparison with a classicist's) was acquainted with Geoffrey's Latin history. Perrett regards Geoffrey's work as an "undoubted source" while Bullough classifies it as a "probable source." Perrett thinks that it was in Geoffrey that Shakespeare found the motive for the love-test and the mode of linking the answers of the daughters with the division of the kingdom. Shakespeare found in Geoffrey "the best account to follow on matters of information," and he drew from it sufficient material to justify our looking upon it as his chief source of information (Perrett 1904: 286). Whereas in the folktale it is not explained why the king posed the love test to his daughters, it is in Geoffrey that we find the first mention of the love-test in relation to the division of the kingdom. Leir, who came to the throne of Britain after the death of his father, ruled nobly for sixty years. "When he [became] old, he had thoughts of dividing his kingdom among

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[2] There is a similar folktale in Himachal Pradesh [India] which Kirin Narayan narrates in her *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales (in collaboration with Urmila Devi Sood)* (1997). See Chapter 19, "Love Like Salt." Pp. 189-190. Also footnotes on pp. 248-249.

[his three daughters, Gonorill, Regan, and Cordeilla], and of bestowing them on such husbands as were fit to be advanced to the rulership of the realm. But to make tryal [trial] who was the worthiest of the best part of the kingdom, he went to each of them to ask which of them loved him most" (Bullough 1973: 311). Gonorill and Regan made flattering and insincere professions of their love which, however, pleased the father. The third daughter, Cordeilla whom he loved most replied that she loved him as much as duty required of her. To say anything more (she declared) would be flattery. However, if her father insisted, she would say, "Look how much you have, so much is your value, and so much I love you." The father became very angry. He disinherited her, and declared that he would find some foreigner to marry her without any dowry. He resolved to divide half the kingdom between the two flattering sisters and he married them to the Dukes of Cornwall and Albania. The other half was to come to them in equal share after his death. King Aganippus of Gaul offered to marry Cordeilla even without a dowry because he had enough money and territory of his own. He wanted to marry her for her beauty of which he had heard much, and he wanted to have heirs by her. He also appreciated the beauty of her character. The match was thus concluded.

If we compare the two accounts, Geoffrey and Shakespeare, the following differences become apparent. In Geoffrey the marriages and the division of the kingdom are arranged "after consultation with the nobility." In Shakespeare the portion of the kingdom of the elder sister given as dowry is announced before Cordelia fails the love-test and is disinherited. The division of the kingdom is known to Gloucester and Kent who may or may not have been consulted beforehand. However, they refer to it as fair and impartial. Lear wants to bestow the remaining part of the kingdom, the best portion, on Cordelia, her love appearing greater than that of her sisters, a fact which provides the justification for doing so. He intends to spend the rest of his life with her. That is, the entire kingdom is divided right away among the daughters; no half portion is kept back by Lear for himself. Geoffrey's Cordelia (to make the names uniform) refers at first to her duty to love Lear, and declares that her father's value is the value of what he possesses. Her meaning is clearer in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's Cordelia refers to her "bond." The bond that obtains between parents and children is a bond of nature; an illustration of natural law. (Natural law, according to Shakespeare's elder contemporary, Richard Hooker, derives from God's eternal law.) To go against it is to go against God. Cordelia's sisters are morally inferior, and her father, at this point of the action, is no better. But he learns to see better.

To proceed with the story of Lear in Geoffrey: "A long time after this"

when Leir had become infirm with age his two sons-in-law rise against him and deprive him of the half kingdom that he had kept back for himself. They make an agreement with him, that he should have sixty followers and he and the followers should be maintained at the cost of the sons-in-law. As if it was not humiliation enough to be reduced to an allowance in the kingdom which he had ruled as king, after two years, Gonorill reduces the number of his followers to thirty and dismisses the rest. Leir leaves her and goes to Regan. But although everything is all right to begin with, before the year is out, Regan asks him to discharge all but five of his attendants. Geoffrey's Leir returns to Gonorill hoping that the misery of his condition would move some pity in her. But she will not have him unless he reduces his followers to one, she tells him bluntly how his desire of pomp does not become his age and circumstances. Leir has no option, and he agrees. But he begins to brood over his former grandeur and his present plight and he thinks of his last daughter, now living beyond the seas in Gallia. He has some doubts, however, whether she would receive him kindly since he has treated her so vilely. However, he sets sail to Gallia. On his voyage he reflects on his miserable condition. The truth of what Cordelia had told him comes to mind: When he had material possessions to give away, he was valued, and when he had none to give, his so-called friends and followers fell away from him. "When my gifts ceased, my friends vanished" (Bullough 1973: 314). He reaches the city where his daughter is living and sends word to her of his condition and of his arrival. He seeks her help. She is taken aback at the turn of events and weeps bitterly and asks the messenger how many followers her father has with him. He had but one, his former armour-bearer. Then Cordelia gives sufficient money to the messenger and asks him to shift her father to another city and provide him with all befitting comforts including forty well-equipped followers and inform King Aganippus formally of his arrival in the kingdom. (She wants to save her father's "face.") Leir is very honourably received by Aganippus who places all his forces at Leir's disposal so that he may invade Britain, fight his ungrateful sons-in-law and daughters and recover his kingdom. Leir fights and defeats his sons-in law, recovers his kingdom and becomes king again. He rules for three years. After his death Cordelia becomes the ruler for five years. The sons of her sisters rise against her. They cannot tolerate the idea that the country should be ruled by a woman. They rebel against her, defeat her and imprison her. Cordelia is overwhelmed with grief at the loss of her kingdom and she commits suicide. Her nephews, who are young men "of great spirit," (Geoffrey) fall out and fight. Gonorill's son is killed by Regan's son who thus obtains the entire kingdom. He rules for three and

thirty years. Thus ends the story of Leir and Cordelia in Geoffrey.

If we continue the comparison with Shakespeare's play, we see more difference than resemblance arising from hints that have been worked out differently. Geoffrey's Leir is harshly treated by both Gonorill and Regan and deprived of all but one of his followers. Shakespeare's Regan asks: "What need one?" (2.4.263) The "reservation" of a hundred followers is a condition set by Shakespeare's Lear when he divides the kingdom between Goneril and Regan. Both the sisters rival each other in maltreating the aged king and their father. Shakespeare's Cordelia refers to a bond which is the foundation of her filial love. Whereas Geoffrey's Cordelia intimates that the love professed by her sisters is all cupboard love, Shakespeare's Cordelia is more moral and positive in her reply. She derives her love from traditional natural law. She is more explicit (in "asides") than Geoffrey's Cordelia in doubting the hypocritical professions of her sisters. Shakespeare also draws on the tradition of early English drama in which the hero (who represents Mankind) is asked to choose between frank but truthful advice and attractive falsehood. He chooses wrongly, suffers, repents and comes back to the right path. (In Shakespeare it is an utterly reformed Lear who "comes back," a Lear who has made the tremendous discovery of the true nature of love and its central place in life.) By drawing on and adapting this early tradition of dramatic writing (not altogether moribund in his day) Shakespeare is clarifying and universalizing his story without losing touch with the particulars. Among other things, the "asides" of Cordelia commenting on her sisters, the protests of Kent, Lear's explosive temper, the commendation of the King of France of Cordelia's beauty of character ("She is herself a dowry."), and the conversation of the two elder sisters when they are by themselves help to individualize the action and the characters in Shakespeare's play. Perhaps the best example of the transmuting powers of Shakespeare's imagination is seen in the great re-union scene between father and daughter. In Geoffrey, the thirteenth chapter says: "As soon as he was provided with his royal apparel, ornaments and retinue, he sent word to Aganippus and his daughter (Cordelia) that he was driven out of his kingdom by his sons-in-law and had come to them for assistance to recover his dominions. Upon which they being attended with their chief ministers of state and the nobility of the kingdom, went out to meet him, and received him honourably, and submitted to his management the whole power of Gaul, till such time as he should be restored to his former dignity" (Bullough 1973: 315). Shakespeare concentrates his reunion scene on father and daughter, on the human aspect of the restored relationship and the significance of the bond that Cordelia refers to.

Shakespeare realizes for the better the sanctity and strength of natural law and its human warmth. In Geoffrey, Leir is left with a single follower (his armour-bearer). In Shakespeare, the follower (leaving aside the Fool) is the disguised Kent, who says he has followed Lear as his master and prayed for him, being duty bound to him as one is to his patron in the feudal way of life. Again the hint in the feudal or knightly "armour-bearer" is taken up and utterly transformed into a full-blown human relationship which climaxes in Kent's final line: "I have a journey, Sir, shortly to go, / My master calls me; I must not say no." Geoffrey's Leir recovers his kingdom and rules over it for three years. There is no hint that what he has gone through has changed him. The experience of the wilderness, the ingratitude of the daughters, his mental break-down and his reunion with Cordelia make Shakespeare's Lear indifferent to kingdom, power and status. A cage is enough to live in provided Cordelia is with him. Love is all that matters. Shakespeare's distinction consists in perceiving the possibilities of his material and realizing them in his chosen form. Lear's Cordelia, we may say, couldn't care less. Fortune, she knows, is false, and Cordelia can out-frown false Fortune's frown. When she weeps her tears are well described (in the Quarto text) as "holy water" from "heavenly eyes." She may share her name in Geoffrey's character (in a sense), but the two are conceived utterly differently.

Perrett (1804) identifies five other sources of Shakespeare's play (as far as the Lear story is concerned) besides Geoffrey. First among them perhaps is *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* of Raphael Holinshed. (The work was planned by Holinshed who also wrote the part dealing with English history. The Scottish and Irish parts were written by others.) The *Chronicles* are reputedly the first authoritative and continuous account in vernacular of the whole of English history. It first appeared in 1577 when it contained some pages that gave offence to the then queen (Elizabeth I) and were consequently removed from the second enlarged edition of 1587. It was this second edition that was probably consulted by Shakespeare for the Lear story which occurs in the second book of the history of England.) In Holinshed's account, Leir loves Cordelia best among his three daughters. When he grows old he "thought to understand the affections of his daughters towards him, and prefer her whom he best loved to the succession over the kingdom."[3] He poses the love question to Goneril. She declares that she loves him more than her own life which by right and reason should be most dear to her. Leir is pleased. He next asks

[3] Holinshed as quoted in Charles Knight, ed. *The Pictorial Edition of The Works of Shakspere: Tragedies, Volume 1*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1867, p. 395.

Regan. She answers that she loves him more than tongue can express and far above all other creatures of the world. Holinshed's Goneril and Regan thus give more or less the same answers as Shakespeare's corresponding characters and Shakespeare's Cordelia comments on their hypocrisy in her "asides." She thus attracts our attention as the true daughter who will speak from her heart. But she will find it hard to express herself in speech. Silence is her medium. When her turn to speak comes, Holinshed's Cordelia says: "Knowing the great love and fatherly zeal you have always borne towards me (for the which, that I may not answer you otherwise than I think, and as my conscience leadeth me), I protest to you, that I have always loved you, and shall continually while I live, love you as my natural father; and if you would more understand of the love that I bear you, ascertain yourself, that so much as you have, so much you are worth, and so much I love you, and no more." (Knight 1867: 395). In referring to the 'bond" that unites them, Shakespeare's Cordelia clarifies the basis of the relationship with her father; Holinshed's reference to "natural father" leaves that hint undeveloped. Whereas Geoffrey's Cordelia and Holinshed's Cordelia intimate that the elder sisters' love is based on the father's possessions, Shakespeare's Cordelia refers to the incompatibility between the total love of the father that her sisters profess so vociferously and the no less mandatory obligation to love the husband on which they are revealingly silent. Love of the father, love for the husband, all love in fact is derived from God's law. (This is relevant when we are discussing the Christianity of the play). No wonder that France refers to Shakespeare's Cordelia as "herself a dowry." But her father does not understand her—at least, at this stage. It is a rare and difficult lesson to learn (as Keats said in his sonnet on the play.) When Lear learns his lesson, toward the end, he stands "redeemed." (A. C. Bradley, the great Shakespearian critic, said that Shakespeare's play could well be called "The Redemption of King Lear.") Shakespeare's Cordelia exposes Goneril and Regan as superficial, hypocritical, insincere and false, and the exposure is thorough. In the rest of the story Holinshed follows Geoffrey closely with one exception. Holinshed's Cordelia goes with her father to Britain to recover the kingdom from the two cruel sisters and their husbands on the understanding that the land should come to her after her father's death "notwithstanding any former grant made to her sisters or to their husbands in any manner of wise" (Bullough 1973: 319) In Holinshed's version, Cordelia commits suicide out of despair.

The Faerie Queen and *A Mirror for Magistrates*

The next source identified by Perrett (1804) is Edmund Spenser's poem, *The Faerie Queen* (first three books in 1590; second three in 1596). The story of Lear and his three daughters occurs in Book II, Canto X, stanzas 27 to 33. Spenser's Cordelia says that she loves her father "as behooved." The "simple answer, wanting (i.e., lacking) colours fair/ To paint it forth" displeases Lear who disinherits her forthwith, and divides the entire kingdom between Goneril and Regan. He marries Goneril to the king of Scots and Regan to the king of Cambria. Cordelia is sent without a dowry to Aganip of Celtica. Lear leads a private life with Goneril. In course of time Goneril begins to ill-treat him. When the oil is spent, writes Spenser, the light goes out and the wick is thrown away. Goneril begins to despise her father's "drooping day" and grows weary of his stay. Lear shifts to Regan where the story repeats itself. He goes to Cordelia who receives him with love and respect. He is restored to his kingdom, rules for some years and dies of old age. He is succeeded by Cordelia who rules nobly. But her sister's sons rise against her and overcome her in battle. They put her in prison where, weary of her wretched life, she hangs herself in despair (in Holinshed she stabs herself). Despair is a deadly, unforgivable sin for it implies that one's sins are greater than God's mercy which is infinite and which the sinner rejects in committing suicide. The brothers fall out and fight and one of them kills the other. In Shakespeare's play, Edmund sends a Captain to hang Cordelia. Shakespeare's Cordelia cannot be accused of despair.

Shakespeare may have consulted the popular work *A Mirror for Magistrates* in which various famous men and women of English history and legend narrate how they fell from prosperity into misfortune. The work, planned during the reign of Henry VIII by George Ferrers and William Baldwin of Oxford, went through several enlarged editions beginning with an edition in 1559 (after an edition of 1555 which was suppressed). John Higgins, the compiler of the enlarged editions of 1574 to 1587, added the story of Cordelia (here called Cordila) in which the ghost of Cordelia narrates her pathetic story as a warning against the temptation of Despair. (In this narrative too, she has stabbed herself to death.) In Shakespeare, it is Gloucester who is tempted by despair. He is saved from suicide by his good son, Edgar. It is not death but despair that Shakespeare seems keen on avoiding as the end of his Cordelia, to judge from his resolute deviation from many previous versions of the story. It is one's state of mind at the time of death that matters, not death itself. Cordelia says that her aim in narrating her story is that others should find more aid and comfort in distress and "keep measure." Shakespeare's

Cordelia can "keep measure" in her life because she adheres to natural law. Such adherence makes her immune to the inner turmoil wrought by what Spenser called mutability which was a constant fact of life in Shakespeare's times. All had to cope with it especially the high and mighty on whom hundreds of followers depended. (When Lear's fortunes decline, his knights and squires melt away.) The Fool survives for reasons connected with the tradition of "folly" that he represents. (There is a powerful description in *A Mirror*, partly printed by Bullough, of the changed condition of Cordelia when she is defeated in battle and thrown into prison by her nephews.)

The Principal Source: *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters*

Most scholars who have considered the sources of Shakespeare's play and editors of the play are of the view that Shakespeare's principal source was an old anonymous play entitled *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters*. There is no agreement on how he came to know the play (see Knowles 2002). In the Register of the Stationers' Company (which controlled the London book trade including the licensing for publication and sale of books and other printed matter) the following entry appears for November 26, 1607: "Entered …a book called, *Master William Shakespeare his history of King Lear as it was played before the king's majesty at Whitehall upon Saint Stephen's night* [December 26] at Christmas last by his majesty' servants playing usually at the Globe [i.e., the public theatre owned by Shakespeare's acting company] on the Bankside [west of London Bridge on the South Bank of the river Thames where many theatres were situated]." By December 26, 1606 therefore, Shakespeare's play had been written. Shakespeare seems to have borrowed many of the names of the devils that Edgar as mad Tom mentions from Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, a unique source for the names. Harsnett's book was recorded in the Stationers' register on March 16, 1603. Shakespeare's play must have been written after March 16, 1603. The old play of *King Leir* was published in 1605 "as it [had] been divers and sundry times lately acted." A Lear play was enacted twice in 1594, and a chronicle history of Leir, king of England, and his three daughters was registered in the Stationers' Register for May 14, 1594. No publication followed, and the play was re-registered on May 8, 1605 as a "tragical history." On the title page it is described as a "chronicle history." According to Professor Knowles there are enough ("nearly a hundred") significant details of likeness between the old play and Shakespeare's play which suggest that Shakespeare had "close

familiarity" with the old play "as it exists in the 1605 edition" (2002: 35). He did not attempt to write on the Lear story before 1605. These facts suggest that Shakespeare's play was mainly written in the summer of 1605 and performed first on December 26, 1606 at court. The consensus of opinion is that the old play was written between 1605 and 1606.

Muir, Bullough, Michie and several other scholars and editors have also pointed out in detail verbal parallels and echoes between the two plays, and it is not necessary to repeat them. Only the broad differences between the two plays will be noted here.

The character of the chronicle Leir is very different from that of Shakespeare's Lear. Leir is old, he feels old and conducts himself like an old man whereas Shakespeare's Lear though old (more than eighty) still enjoys hard riding and hunting, and Goneril's' castle hall rings with his voice calling for dinner. He is every inch a king, his style of speech is that of a king, even when he says he is old and foolish. (Speak that I may see thee, said Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's great contemporary.) The disguised Kent, a great *sirdar* of the realm, says he wants to serve Lear because he sees in Lear's countenance that which he would fain call "master": Authority. It would never occur to Lear that he should explain himself to others or that they would have the temerity to raise any objections to his plans and decisions. Leir uses the love-test to trick Cordelia into marrying the king whom he has chosen for her, overriding her preference in the matter. Leir has two counsellors, one good (Perillus) and another, false and deceitful. Lear has Kent and Gloucester although Lear does not strike one as the sort of King who will defer to the advice of counsellors. Leir wants to dedicate himself to the religious life giving up the burden of rulership. He wishes to marry his daughters to neighbouring kings and divide the kingdom between his daughters Goneril and Regan who have been sought in marriage by kings whom, as it happens, both they and their father fancy. His third daughter Cordelia is however proving difficult. She insists that she will marry only the man whom she may fall in love with. It is here that the love-test fits in. Leir will ask the daughters how much they love him, and when Cordelia says she loves him, he will ask her to prove her love by marrying the man whom he has chosen for her. Shakespeare's Lear divides the kingdom equally among his three daughters. With Goneril and Regan married (and out of the way, as it were), he intends to marry Cordelia to either Burgundy or France and give the richest part of the kingdom as her dowry. He wants to spend the evening of his life with Cordelia. The love-test is intended to justify the bestowal of the most opulent part of the kingdom on the youngest daughter; it is not a ruse to trick her into marrying the king whom he has chosen for her. (When his plan goes awry

he makes an arrangement with Goneril and Regan to live with them by turns, attended by a hundred followers.) Leir in the old play does not say that Cordelia is his favourite daughter, and that he loves her most and wishes to spend his retirement with her. He is thinking solely of how to protect the kingdom from foreign invasions. Lear wants to give up the kingdom so that he may crawl toward death unburdened by the cares of kingship. He wants to announce the division of the kingdom so that future strife may be "prevented ." The preference for Cordelia is more pronounced in Shakespeare's play than in the old play. The emphasis on devoting himself to a religious life is more prominent in the old play than in Shakespeare's. At the end of the old play Leir resumes the rulership, and the religious aim of his retirement is quietly shelved. The contrast with Shakespeare's play in this respect is striking. Shakespeare's Lear indeed comes into Cordelia's care and goes to his death unburdened with the heavy cares of kingship. When father and daughter are reconciled in Shakespeare's play the emphasis is on the human aspect of the reconciliation. In the Chronicle play, Leir appears as a devout Christian; but the gods of Shakespeare's *Lear* are all pagan. The old play aims at a Christian atmosphere and contains many specifically Christian references. Shakespeare excises the references, but leaves the question of the Christianity of his play open to interpretation. W. R. Elton's *King Lear and the Gods* (1966) attempts to answer the question in historical terms. There are other important differences between the two heroes. Shakespeare's hero has a more intense sensibility. (It is quickened and intensified by the Fool.) The unexpected—not entirely, some say—ingratitude of his elder daughters disrupts his royal personality and shakes his faith in the very order of nature. The ingratitude appears to him not as a domestic misfortune, but a disturbance in the order of nature proclaimed by a storm. The dreadful curses that he calls down on his daughters are a sign of this sense of cosmic upheaval. His intense sensibility goes with an uncontrollable temper. Such a sensibility and such a temper inevitably run the risk of madness. Lear's mental breakdown is Shakespeare's addition to the story of Lear.

During this phase of madness, Lear gains valuable social and political insights. They are not new in themselves or in the literature of Shakespeare's times, but they illustrate Keats's observation that axioms in philosophy do not become axioms until they are proved upon our pulses. The truths that we live by are more a matter of discovery and realisation than of new invention. The poetry which conveys Lear's truths makes the truths fresh and surprising. None of the pre-Shakespearian Lears has the expanding intellectual and emotional horizon of Shakespeare's Lear.

Shakespeare prepares us for the madness of Lear in such a way that when it finally comes, we are not surprised. It releases the dramatist from the obligation to relate the content of the mad speeches to the immediate context. It releases the dramatist, for example, to relate Lear's social criticism to the personal experience in the play. The madness extends the intellectual and emotional horizons of the play. The King stands for the kingdom and his experience as King ought to be mindful of the collective experience of the people. The realization of this truth is triggered by Lear's personal experience. The knowledge humbles him, but he does not cease to be king. It is both king and father to whom Cordelia is reunited. Her mode of address to him serves to keep us in mind of his dual status in the great reunion scene.

Shakespeare's Lear is not mad to begin with—except in the sense that anger is temporary madness. (Thus when a man is angry we say that he has lost himself.) Lear has been an autocratic ruler for long, accustomed to instant obedience and to have his own way. His carefully thought-out plan for his old age and the state becomes suddenly a non-starter when his youngest daughter whom he loves fiercely refuses to fulfil his verbal expectations. It is true that he misunderstands her and will not listen to Kent, but his anger is a measure of his sudden disappointment. He has stepped out into empty space, imagining land. But he is not mad—not yet. He is irascible and has, as Regan says, ever but slenderly known himself, but to treat the play as the story of a mad man is to ignore its significance and its power to move. Lear has presided over a vast kingdom, not a lunatic asylum, for decades. He is every inch a king, and has commanded the voluntary loyalties of good clear- eyed men like Kent.

He slides into madness. Madness is perhaps always voluntary, an escape from an oppressive reality and represents a metaphysical failure. (Can we imagine Cordelia ever becoming mad?) But what makes his condition intolerable is the recognition that he has brought it upon himself; "beat at this gate that let thy folly in and thy dear judgement out." He perceives he is losing, but he feels unable to clench the loosening fingers.

Influences

Renaissance Resonances: From the Milieu of Medicine and Montaigne to Sidney's *Arcadia*

(a) Medical Views

It is in the context of "madness" that Lear refers to the onset of "hysterica passio," or the pain of the womb. David Hoeniger, author of

*Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissanc*e has described it "as an illness marked by fearful and painful (*passio*) sensations rising from the lower abdomen to the heart and the throat" (1992: 320). Many people regarded it in Shakespeare's time as a devilish possession. Edward Jordan, a physician contemporary with Shakespeare gave the name of "smother" to the illness. He wrote a treatise on it entitled *A Brief Discourse of the Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603) or "smother" (The patient felt smothered). Jordan sought to refute the theory of devilish possession. The illness was initially regarded as peculiar to women. (*Hystera* in Greek means "womb" or "uterus." Hence also the name "smother.") Later in the seventeenth century some physicians argued that the origin of hysteria was in the brain and not the uterus (and hence the condition was not exclusive to women), but their views did not prevail immediately. The ancient Egyptians believed that the uterus was "an animal that [desired] children. If [it was] not satisfied in its longing, it [became] aroused and [began] moving about, affecting the organs, and pressing against the diaphragm, thereby causing pain and disease" (Honeiger 1992: 321). The symptoms changed depending on whether the womb pressed upon the liver, the heart or some other area of the body, or even climbed towards the head. Galen (129-216 CE) (who along with Hippocrates (460-357 BCE) is regarded as one of the founders of Western medicine) rejected the notion of the wandering uterus in the female body and "…saw the cause of the illness as poisoned blood in the uterus produced by excess of black bile [one of the four 'humours' composing the body]. He developed the view that hysteria was found especially in widows and other women whose accustomed sexual intercourse or menses were suddenly interrupted…unhealthy vapors rise from the uterus, causing toxic effects on the higher organs, the blood vessels, and the pneumata or spirits. [Galen held that the fundamental principle of life were "spirits" of which there were three different forms performing three different forms of action.] The swelling of the organs impedes breathing, and in acute cases the vapors rise to the head, causing dizziness and disturbing the brain" (Hoeniger 1992: 321). The cure for hysteria was regular sexual intercourse which kept the female reproductive organs moist. If the woman did not wish to adopt this remedy she could in the words of Robert Burton (author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621-1651) "fortify [herself] by God's words" and engage in constant prayer. Both measures—the spiritual and the physical—were prescribed for their cooling, calming effects on the restive, inflamed womb" (Dixon 1995:174). (Lear's curses on Goneril in I.4 become significant when they are read in this context; for example the imprecation that his daughter's "organs of increase" should dry up.)

Lear's reference to his "hysterica passio" seems a misreference on the part of Shakespeare since in his days the illness was regarded as peculiar to women. But the reference may have a different significance. Great poets who are regarded as prophets have a way of anticipating the findings of later thinkers as, for example, Shakespeare's anticipation of the unconscious and how it manifests itself in the choice of the imagery used by a character. It is possible that Lear had submerged sexual feelings towards his daughters and felt in his disjointed mad speeches that it was sex that tipped the balance of his judgement. This line of thinking about the play was pursued as far as it could be pushed—perhaps even a little beyond—by Alan Dundes (1976). Goneril and Regan can deceive Lear because they are prepared to flatter him by asserting that they love him wholly and exclusively. Cordelia seeks to expose their immoral hyperbole ("Why have my sisters husbands if they say/ They love you all?") She fails at first, but ultimately she impresses her father that the love of a daughter for her father is derived from God's law, and true love is modelled after God's love for His creature. The social disposition should be based on God's love for human beings. In reply to her father's admission that she has some "cause" she says spontaneously, "No cause, no cause."(The word may have a specialized legal sense.) A simpler explanation is offered by Hoeniger for Lear's self- reference to "hysterica passio."

It has been shown that one of Shakespeare's sources for his play was a book by Samuel Harsnett (or, Harsnet, 1561-1631) called *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603). Harsnett, a bishop, later an archbishop, of the English church, tried to expose what he felt were bogus cases of devilish exorcism practised by Jesuit priests on simple, uneducated folk in order to win them over to Catholicism. Shakespeare seems to have read Harsnett's book with some care. Its influence can be seen not only in *King Lear* but in the *The Tempest* and *Pericles* also. Harsnett uses the term "hysterica passio" and thinks that men are also subject to the affliction (Hoeniger 1992: 322-323). The Harsnett explanation does not of course rule out the psychoanalytic explanation.

The doctor in Shakespeare's play (Quarto text) orders music to be played as Lear wakes up in the reunion scene. Music was included by many physicians as part of the process of healing mental illness which included medicines and prayers. (Mental illness caused by devilish "possession" called for divine intervention invoked through prayer.) Music therapy was part of the Galenic tradition and is recommended to this day. Laurinda Dixon, in her book *Perilous Chastity*, writes: "The concept originated with Plato who perceived the body as held together and 'tuned' by the four humors, much like a stringed instrument, and praised music as

a means of bringing the body and soul into mutual harmony" (There is a footnote reference in Dixon's book to Plato's *Timaeus*, 27-28) (1995: 175). Many medieval doctors stressed the therapeutic potential of music in alleviating the effects of humoural imbalance, a belief encouraged by the example of David in the Bible who followed the therapy to heal Saul of his mental illness. (Readers may recall Robert Browning's poem, "Saul.") Marsilio Ficino, the Italian neo-platonic philosopher (1433-99) who had an important influence on many English writers including Sidney and Milton, viewed music as the connecting medium between body and soul, the intercessor between the earth and celestial realms. He praised its effectiveness in curing cases of melancholy and even plague. Ficino declared that if the harmonies of the positive planets (such as the Sun, Jupiter, Venus and Mercury distinguished from the negative planets such as Saturn) were heard frequently, the soul would assume the character of the music, having by natural sympathy attracted the appropriate planetary spirit. The positive effect of music was not merely emotional but also physical. Thomas Wright declared in his book *The Passions of the Mind in General* (1604) that musical sounds, woven together according to Plato's rules of "…mathematical harmony and the structure of the macrocosm, caused 'mirth', 'joy', and delight which abate, expel and quite destroy contrary affections…rectify the blood and spirits…digest melancholy… and bring the body into good temper."[4] Wright also believed that "all passions rose from music" and that music was "a secret passage to the mind that made possible God's intervention in disease." This theory was echoed in the treatises of Timothie Bright (*A Treatise of Melancholy*, 1586) and Robert Burton (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621-1651). They especially praised music for its ability to manipulate the mind. The mind, Burton believed, was "harmonically composed" and therefore was capable of being "roused up at the tunes of music." Further, Burton was convinced that music could drive away the devil himself [and that] "corporeal tunes pacified our incorporeal soul." Seventeenth-century iatrochemists (who believed that medicine and physiology were to be understood in terms of chemistry) claimed that the "vibrations of air caused by music were effective in softening and breaking down atrabilious materials such as stale menstrual blood and impacted black bile. Likewise, the followers of Descartes' mechanistic theory also perceived music as affecting the arteries and vital organs of the body in a very direct way" (Dixon 1995: 177). Music was effective even when the patient was unconscious.

[4] My summation here draws on Dixon's cogent study (1995) of these prominent seventeenth century perspectives of health and healing