SHAKESPEARE'S PRESENTATION OF EVIL IN KING RICHARD THE THIRD, KING LEAR AND MACBETH

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by

Parsram Singh, B.A. (McMaster)

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September 1978

MASTER OF ARTS (1978) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Shakespeare's Presentation of Evil in *King Richard the Third*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*

AUTHOR: Parsram Singh, B.A. (McMaster)

SUPERVISOR: Professor B. A. W. Jackson

NUMBER OF PAGES: 169 + v

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I have examined the principal ways in which Shakespeare presents evil in King Richard the Third, King Lear and Macbeth. I have devoted considerable attention to the dramatization of Richard III, Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Macbeth in an attempt to establish what their motives for evil are, how their evil deeds are accomplished, why they are perpetually involved in evil, what good comes from their evil, and how they are eventually overthrown. Since these plays end with the triumphant reaffirmation of good, I have examined how good is presented in order to stress its intrinsic attributes which allow it to subdue evil.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Jackson for his help and advice throughout the writing and organizing of this thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude to the government and people of Canada for giving me the opportunity to study here.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The warfare between good and evil is one of the recurring themes in the literature of any age and of every land. Poets, dramatists and novelists often portray the forces of evil with greater intensity and vitality than they depict the forces of good partly because evil seems to have a greater appeal to the reader than good, and partly because it appears to be rather difficult to represent good as a force strong enough to counterbalance and counteract evil. There are many critics, including the eminent poet Blake, who believe that Milton's Satan is the most powerful character in Paradise Lost and that the good characters such as God and the Son are not very effectively represented. Marlowe's Faustus and Barabas are colossal figures towering over the remaining characters of their respective plays. However, in Shakespeare's major tragedies, such as Othello, King Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth, while evil exists as a considerably entrenched force, while evil characters like Iago and Macbeth dominate by the sheer strength of their villainy, good, nevertheless, is presented as a powerful force. We are profoundly touched

by the innocence of the virtuous Desdemona, and by the selfless sacrifice of Cordelia and Kent. The evil of Macbeth is undermined by his awareness of damnation and by the intensity of the poetry of the play. Despite the strength of evil in King Lear, we see that it is a self-destructive force. However, in King Richard the Third the villain-hero eclipses everyone else and the pious Henry Tudor appears to be a flat character, thrown in at the eleventh hour.

For my thesis I have decided to confine myself mainly to the tragedies because Shakespeare presents evil with greater intensity in the tragedies than in the comedies or in the romances. Because of the limits of my thesis I have discussed three tragedies but I have made references to others as the need arose. The three tragedies are King Richard the Third, King Lear and Macbeth.

I have selected King Richard the Third because it is one of Shakespeare's earliest examinations of evil. Although this play is the conclusion of the first tetralogy, it is thematically the culmination of Shakespeare's two tetralogies, devoted exclusively to English history from around 1399 to 1485. In these two tetralogies Shakespeare gives a providential view of history in which evil exists as the means by which God punishes England for the murder of the anointed King Richard II. I have included King Lear because it is regarded by many as Shakespeare's greatest

dramatic achievement. In Othello evil is personified in the arch-villain Iago and is directed mainly against the seasoned soldier, Othello. In King Lear the good characters are reduced to the most pitiable state while the wicked are distinguished by their hatred, egoism, cruelty, and their relentless drive for power. The suffering inflicted upon the aged Lear and Gloucester by their ungrateful children is much more shocking than the torture of jealousy the malignant Iago has devised for the warrior, Othello. In Macbeth, the third play I have chosen, Shakespeare presents a profound picture of evil and makes a thorough examination of the impact of evil on the conscience of the evil-doer. There are overlapping themes in Macbeth and Hamlet. For instance, Macbeth and Claudius are usurpers and they are finally defeated in their continuous attempts to strengthen their grip on their respective crowns. However, while the central interest in Hamlet lies in the clash between the mighty opposites, Hamlet and Claudius, in Macbeth our interest is focussed primarily on Macbeth as he journeys from one crime to another towards damnation.

In my thesis I have attempted an independent rather than a comparative study of each of the three plays I have selected. However, I have considered myself at liberty to draw on any part of Shakespeare's canon for a significant comparison. My approaches to these plays are

almost identical. I have examined Shakespeare's principal sources with the intention of showing what important adaptations he has made in presenting evil.

It is very likely that in his presentation of evil Shakespeare is indebted to other Elizabethan dramatists, notably Marlowe.[1] Marlowe's views, or rather his misconceptions, of Machiavelli are reflected in Shakespeare. Machiavelli's views in The Prince were grossly misunderstood by Elizabethans. They regarded this Italian political exponent as the advocate of everything evil in statecraft. In one of the Prologues to The Jew of Malta the character, Machiavel, says that he regards religion as a childish toy and believes that might first made kings. Barabas couches his absolute self-interest in Latin: Ego mihimet sum semper proximus,[2] (The Jew of Malta, I.i.187) and lavishly extols himself for his duplicity or "policy", as he calls it. Shakespeare's villains are characterized by their disregard for religion, by their egoism, and by their use of brute force and duplicity to gain their objectives.

The theme of damnation is forcibly presented in Marlowe and in Shakespeare. Some of Marlowe's heroes

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[1]According to E.K. Chambers (The Elizabethan Stage, III, 421-424), Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Parts 1 and 2 (c.1587), Doctor Faustus (c.1588), and The Jew of Malta (c.1589) were written before Shakespeare's Richard III (1592-1593?).

[2]A literal translation is: "I am always closest to myself".

strive for power through conquests, wealth or through necromancy. Faustus falls because of his sin of pride. Despite the fact that he has reached the frontiers of all knowledge, his awareness of his limitation as a man makes him melancholy. By aspiring to godhead *via* necromancy, he signs a bond with the devil and so loses his soul. His death and damnation are very dramatically presented in the penultimate scene of *Doctor Faustus*. Although it is difficult to determine whether or not Marlowe was attacking all forms of religion in his play, *The Jew of Malta*, many Elizabethans probably saw the Jew, Barabas, as a diabolical character, destined to damnation. It seems likely that they would see Shakespeare's villains in the same way.

Our attitude to Marlowe's heroes such as Tamburlaine, Faustus and Barabas and to Shakespeare's villains is likely to be ambivalent. Tamburlaine certainly possesses several admirable attributes but we are revolted by his excessive pride, ambition, cruelty and blasphemy. While we are horrified by Faustus' pact with the devil, we still find Faustus to be a Renaissance humanist scholar with an ardent zeal for knowledge. Though Barabas degenerates into a villain, we are captivated by his wit, resourcefulness and ingenuity. The farcical elements throughout *The Jew of Malta* tend to tone down considerably Barabas' atrocities. It seems very likely that Shakespeare's Aaron and Richard III owe very much to Marlowe's Barabas. In a

similar manner, we are not totally alienated from Shakespeare's evil characters. We are constantly intrigued by their verve, wit, cleverness and the limitless scope of their evil.

In my examination of King Richard the Third, King Lear and Macbeth, I have attempted to point out Shakespeare's chief methods of presenting evil, which I shall now sum up very briefly. While he lets his villains expound their motivation for evil in soliloquies before the audience, he makes it clear that the villains are never justified in embarking on an evil career. Richard III, Edmund and Macbeth, to name a few, deliberately choose evil as a means of acquiring power. However, Shakespeare elicits sympathy for their action; Richard is exacting vengeance on society to compensate for his physical deformity. Edmund reacts in a similar manner to the indelible stigma of his dishonourable birth. Though ambitious, Macbeth chooses evil reluctantly and is severely punished by his conscience.

In Shakespeare the legitimate king is a symbol of order, and his removal or murder engenders disorder. This is made abundantly clear in the plays I have chosen. For instance, when Lear divides his kingdom and resigns through folly he unwittingly creates the condition for evil to flourish. To give another example, after Macbeth's seizure of the Scottish throne the state is thrown into

chaos. Order is restored only when those who claim to be the legitimate heirs are restored to their thrones.

In Shakespeare's presentation of evil in the plays I have examined, a number of images recur. Cosmic disorders mirror social upheavals caused by man's heinous deeds. To Gloucester the eclipses of the sun and moon portend the disintegration of the family and the state. Images of vicious and venomous animals in Shakespeare's plays accentuate the unnaturalness, bestiality and Satanic nature of the wicked. The destructiveness of Goneril, Regan, Macbeth and Richard III is emphasized by images of disease.

Shakespeare also shows that evil is self-destructive and that the wicked are invariably punished by retributive forces. In King Lear Goneril poisons Regan before committing suicide; Edmund, Oswald and Cornwall are deservedly killed for their evil causes. Margaret in King Richard the Third and the Witches in Macbeth (i.e. after Macbeth's second interview with them) represent Nemesis. Margaret's curses and the witches' prophecies express a sense of inevitability. Richard III and Macbeth are severely punished for their crimes. Each man is isolated, sceptical of the loyalty of his troops; each is overcome by despair, and meets a bloody end. Macbeth's punishment is augmented by the slow death of his soul.

Moreover, from evil comes some good except, as we shall see,in Macbeth. The only good Shakespeare's Richard

III may be said to be doing is that as a scourge of God he is punishing those who perjured themselves. In King Lear, Lear and Gloucester, by enduring the evil of their ungrateful children, make a pilgrimage, as it were, from ignorance to self-knowledge. Severe affliction and want have purified them; they learn about charity, discover true love, repent their follies and renounce the world.

Albany seems to be summing up the attitude of the wicked to virtue when he bitterly reprimands Goneril thus: "Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile; / Filths savour but themselves..."[3] (King Lear, IV.ii.38-39) Virtue is deemed a weakness in Othello and King Lear. Though eulogizing the good for their virtues, the wicked still despise them because the good are very often gullible owing to their innocence and naivety. In Othello, Iago leads the honourable Moor and the honest Cassio by their noses and brings about the death of Desdemona. Macbeth is exceptional in that he highly esteems Duncan's sterling attributes; Richard III, however, sees virtues as signs of weakness. For example, when Anne accuses Richard of murdering Henry VI, who, she says, was "gentle, mild and virtuous", Richard's contemptuous reply is, "The better for the King of Heaven that hath him." (King Richard the Third, I.ii. 104,105) Also, because of their virtues Edgar is easily

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[3]This quotation and all others from Shakespeare are taken from the Pelican editions of his plays.

exploited by his half-brother, Edmund, and Albany is considered a fool by his wife.

In the perennial conflict between good and evil, good is always able to reassert itself but only after a heavy toll of lives. Evil is a negative, destructive force which breeds chaos, defaces nature and brings suffering on the good and bad alike. Good, on the contrary, is a positive force, epitomizing justice, mercy, love, altruism and order.

Finally, of the three plays I have discussed in my thesis, Macbeth is Shakespeare's most intense picture of evil. Although Richard III is thoroughly evil, the total impact of his crimes is undermined by his diabolical witticisms. His murders do not horrify us as much as they would if they were performed on-stage. Unquestionably the atmosphere in King Lear is one of profound despair and disillusionment in the face of uncontrollable evil. However, because of the diverse subject matter of this play, our interest cannot be directed upon a specific character, good or evil, but must be divided over a large number of important characters and events. The evil of Goneril, Edmund, and Regan, though forcibly presented, does not have the same impact as Macbeth's. We are shocked when we witness the gouging out of Gloucester's eyes. However, we are not horrified when we witness the violent deaths of Cornwall, Oswald and Edmund all of whom deserve death. On

the other hand, Macbeth, which is Shakespeare's shortest tragedy, is almost exclusively devoted to the temptation, bloody career and damnation of the hero. The elements of the supernatural, blood, darkness and fear contribute vastly to creating an atmosphere of evil, mystery and horror in the play. It is only in this one of the three plays I have selected that Shakespeare dramatizes upon the stage the murder of the innocent so as to emphasize the hideousness of Macbeth's crimes. No good comes from his evil. Macbeth who murders his king merely out of ambition, who degenerates into a butcher, who murders until his end, and who dies unrepentant, comes the closest to absolute evil.

CHAPTER II

KING RICHARD THE THIRD WITH REFERENCE TO THE SECOND AND THIRD PARTS OF KING HENRY THE SIXTH

Shakespeare's two tetralogies cover English history from around 1399 to 1485. The first tetralogy, consisting of King Henry the Sixth, Parts I, II, and III, and King Richard the Third, is devoted to the second half of this period, while the second tetralogy, consisting of King Richard the Second, King Henry the Fourth, Parts I and II, and King Henry the Fifth, to the first half of the period. It is not entirely clear why Shakespeare dealt with the second half of this period first. Tillyard conjectures that Shakespeare in his youth may have found it easier to write about chaos and evil; that after the Henry VI-Richard III cycle, he could confidently embark on the more difficult task of celebrating the courage and piety of Prince Hal.[4]

I find it rather difficult and confusing to discuss Shakespeare's presentation of evil in King Richard the Third

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[4]E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 155.

without reference to the rest of the first tetralogy and to the second tetralogy. This is because King Richard the Third is the conclusion of the two tetralogies. For instance, a knowledge of The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth helps one have a better understanding of King Richard the Third. When, in King Richard the Third, the imprisoned Clarence tells the Keeper about his (Clarence's) perjury in deserting Warwick and his part in stabbing Prince Edward, (I.iv. 43-74) Clarence is referring to incidents in the preceding play, The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth. Also in King Richard the Third men are punished for crimes which are presented in the preceding play. In the early part of this chapter, therefore, I shall trace the general pattern of events in the second tetralogy and in The Three Parts of King Henry the Sixth in order to place King Richard the Third in its proper perspective.

Shakespeare's principal aim in the two tetralogies is to propagate one aspect of the Tudor myth, which is ultimately derived from Polydore Vergil, that God's hand is present in human history. The removal and murder of Richard II, the anointed king and consequently God's deputy, arouse God's wrath and entail divine retribution. England must atone for Richard's deposition and death until God pities her and restores her to grace. As part of the divine plan, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, as God's emissary, unites the two hostile houses of York and

Lancaster, and restores England to stability and prosperity. Polydore Vergil regarded the Lancastrian, Henry IV, as a usurper, and to indicate that there was a specific pattern in English history from the deposition of Richard II to the beginning of the Tudor dynasty in 1485, Vergil made this comment in the twenty-fourth book of his Historia Anglicae when the Lancastrians were decisively beaten at the Battle of Tewkesbury by the Yorkists under Edward IV:

> Yet it may be peradventure that this came to pass by reason of the infortunacy of the house of Lancaster, which wise men thought even then was to be ascribed to the righteousness of God; because the sovereignty extorted forcibly by Henry IV, grandfather to King Henry VI, could not be long enjoyed of that family. And so the grandfather's offence redounded unto the grandson's.[5]

This aspect of the Tudor myth was emphasised by other Tudor historians such as Hall and Holinshed.

The other aspect of the Tudor myth which Henry VII was at pains to disseminate was his claim that because of his Welsh grandfather, Owen Tudor, who married Henry V's widow, he was directly descended from Cadwallader, the last of the British kings. In effect, the Tudor myth was essentially calculated to strengthen Henry VII's claim to the throne, which was questionable. There were other candidates with better claims than Henry Tudor under the law of primogeniture, such as Edward IV's five daughters;

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[5]Quoted by E.M.W. Tillyard in Shakespeare's History Plays (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 43-44.

Edward, Earl of Warwick, the son of George, Duke of Clarence; and John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, the son of Elizabeth, Edward IV's sister.

The two tetralogies are ultimately concerned not with individual heroes but with England, chastized by God. The evil with which God afflicts England between Richard's murder at Pomfret Castle and Richmond's victory at Bosworth Field manifests itself in various ways--in retributive civil wars, in rebellions, in political chaos, in the rise and fall of sovereigns, in England's loss of French territories and in the sway of men's passions over their reason. In King Richard the Second, Carlisle in his impassioned speech denouncing Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, prophesies the attendant evils when the legitimate sovereign is removed:

> My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
> Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king;
> And if you crown him, let me prophesy,
> The blood of English shall manure the ground
> And future ages groan for this foul act;
> Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
> And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
> Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
> Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
> Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
> The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
> (IV.i.134-144)

The two tetralogies illustrate Carlisle's prophecy and show that England is the main victim. If they are viewed in proper chronological sequence, King Richard the Third deals with the end of the period covered. It would

therefore be useful to keep in mind what the preceding plays reveal about England's suffering.

Since the murder of Richard II, England does not enjoy peace and stability for any considerable length of time. Henry IV spends most of his short reign in putting down rebellions. He is always conscious of his guilt in deposing Richard II, which he thus admits to Hal:

> God knows, my son,
> By what bypaths and indirect crooked ways
> I met this crown, and I myself know well
> How troublesome it sat upon my head.
> (2 Henry IV, IV.v.183-186)

The theme of guilt is repeated in King Henry the Fifth. The heroic Henry V, mindful of the inherited guilt, prays to God before the Battle of Agincourt:

> Not today, O Lord,
> O not today, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown.
> (Henry V, IV.i.285-287)

However, while God grants Henry V victory over the French, He still scourges the land; Henry's reign is brief and he is succeeded by his nine-month old son, Henry VI. A child-king certainly diminishes the likelihood of peace, and even more harrowing civil wars are now in the offing.

In the first tetralogy Shakespeare shows that England continues to atone for Richard's murder. In The First Part of King Henry the Sixth England loses most of her French possessions because of the division among the

nobility. In The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth England continues to suffer because of internal struggle for power. Gloucester, the Protector, faces united opposition from Queen Margaret, the Duke of Suffolk, the Duke of York, the Duke of Buckingham and Cardinal Beaufort. After his resignation as Protector, he is arrested on the trumped up charge of treason and hurriedly murdered in prison while awaiting trial. Next, the Duke of York, supported by the two Nevils, Warwick and Salisbury, aims at the crown. York argues that since he owes his descent to Lionel, Duke of Clarence, Edward III's third son, he is the legitimate successor to Richard II; Henry IV, the son of Edward III's fourth son, and his descendants are consequently usurpers.

The murder of Gloucester leads to chaos. After his successful expedition in Ireland, York intends to use his army to gain the crown. Before embarking on the Irish expedition, York has seduced John Cade, a Kentishman, to pretend to be John Mortimer and hence the rightful heir to the crown and to incite a rebellion against Henry VI. In Cade's rebellion we see political chaos permeating even the lower levels of society. Cade, almost an emblem for disorder, proposes reforms which will only perpetuate disorder. Literacy becomes a treasonable offence. A clerk is ordered to be executed because he is literate. Cade deems all scholars, lawyers, courtiers, and gentlemen

"false caterpillars" (2 Henry VI, IV.iv.37) because they are literate. "All the realm shall be in common", (2 Henry VI, IV.ii.62) says Cade. He orders all the records of the realm to be burnt, and proclaims that his "mouth shall be the parliament of England". (2 Henry VI, IV.vii. 12-13)

The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth is, in effect, "a study in anarchy--anarchy in the state, in the family, in the mind of the individual".[6] We are reminded that the Wars of the Roses originate from the controversy over the legitimacy of succession. Shakespeare catalogues the great men, princes and kings who rise and fall on the wheel of fortune. The Battle of Towton is a picture of anarchy. To enhance anarchy, Shakespeare cleverly juxtaposes the Battle of Towton with Henry VI's longing for order. As Henry stands on a molehill awaiting the outcome of the battle, he meditates upon the peaceful and ordered life of the shepherd:

> O God! methinks it were a happy life
> To be no better than a homely swain;
> To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
> To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
> Thereby to see the minutes how they run--
> How many makes the hour full complete,
> How many hours brings about the day,
> How many days will finish up the year,
> How many years a mortal man may live;
> When this is known, then to divide the times--

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[6]A.S. Cairncross, ed., The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth (London, 1964), Introduction, p. liii.

So many hours must I tend my flock,
So many hours must I take my rest,
So many hours must I contemplate,
So many hours must I sport myself;
So many days my ewes have been with young,
So many weeks ere the poor fools will ean,
So many months ere I shall shear the fleece.
So minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years,
Passed over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
(3 Henry VI, II.v.21-40)

Henry VI is deeply shaken out of this reverie when he witnesses a fight in which a son kills his father, and another in which a father kills his son. Shakespeare includes these two fights because they are representative of the horrors of the civil wars. The civil wars boil down to a domestic feud since the Yorkists and Lancastrians are all descendants of Edward III. Henry VI is oppressed with grief as he envisages the futility and horror of the conflict, the thousands that will be killed, and divisions within families that the conflict will cause.

When viewed in the proper historical perspective, King Richard the Third is the culmination of the two tetralogies. Shakespeare's Richard III has emerged from the internecine civil wars between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians as the most formidable villain whose evil is directed without partiality against friends, kinsmen, and foe. Richard strives for power relentlessly and with absolute singlemindedness of purpose. His infinite quest for security, like Macbeth's, proves to be futile, for he

succeeds only in alienating friends and isolating himself the more. In King Richard the Third, Shakespeare follows Hall, who is indebted to Polydore Vergil, in showing the conclusion of God's plan for England, which is the restoration of peace and prosperity by the overthrow of the arch-villain, Richard III, and by the union of the Lancastrians and the Yorkists, symbolized in the marriage between Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and Princess Eliabeth, daughter of Edward IV. Moreover, Shakespeare violates history by including Queen Margaret in King Richard the Third in order to use her for a decidedly moral purpose. In the first tetralogy Shakespeare never lets us forget that an evil-doer cannot escape the ineluctable forces of retribution. As we watch each of Margaret's curses come true, we are reminded that her victims suffer because of their own past misdeeds or those of their ancestors.

Rossiter comments thus on the structure of the play:

> What we are offered is a formally patterned sequence presenting two things: on the one hand, a rigid Tudor schema of retributive justice... and, on the other, a huge triumphant stage-personality, an early old masterpiece of the art of rhetorical stage-writing, a monstrous being incredible in any sober historical scheme of things--Richard himself.[7]

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[7]A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns (New York, 1961), p. 2.

I intend to explore this "schema of retributive justice" because it is an integral part in Shakespeare's presentation of evil in King Richard the Third. In this play Shakespeare shows that evil-doers are eventually intercepted by Nemesis.

Margaret of Anjou, as depicted by Shakespeare, has contributed immensely to the evils of civil discord and to the tragedy of her own house. England has to put up not only with the loss of Henry V's French conquests but also with Henry VI's humiliating marriage to a dowerless French woman soon to become Suffolk's mistress. This unpopular marriage precipitates the rivalry between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians for the crown. The Duke of York thus comments on the ignominious terms of peace between England and France:

> Anjou and Maine are given to the French,
> Paris is lost; the state of Normandy
> Stands on a tickle point now they are gone.
> Suffolk concluded on the articles,
> The peers agreed, and Henry was pleased
> To change two dukedoms for a duke's fair daughter.
> I cannot blame them all. What is't to them?
> 'Tis thine they give away, and not their own.
> (2 Henry VI,I.i.212-219)

York regards the Lancastrians as usurpers and is resolved to claim the crown at the ripe time.

In the exchange of insults between the contending factions before the Battle of Towton, Edward IV tries to heap the blame for the civil war on Margaret's head and vehemently condemns the Henry-Margaret marriage in these

words to Margaret:

> And had he matched according to his state,
> He might have kept that glory to this day;
> But when he took a beggar to his bed
> And graced thy poor sire with his bridal day,
> Even then that sunshine brewed a show'r for him
> That washed his father's fortunes forth of France
> And heaped sedition on his crown at home.
> For what had broached this tumult but thy pride?
> Hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept,
> And we, in pity of the gentle king,
> Had slipped our claim until another age.
> (3 Henry VI, II.ii.152-162)

Margaret is to some extent responsible for the civil wars. She among others has connived at the arrest and murder of the Protector, Gloucester, so as to end Henry VI's tutelage. After the Battle of Saint Albans a compromise is reached between the Duke of York and Henry VI; Henry VI shall remain king but upon his death, the crown shall be entailed to York and his heirs. Margaret refuses to acquiesce in this compromise, and prolongs the civil war by raising an army to destroy the house of York. (3 Henry VI, I.i.247-256) However, Margaret alone is not responsible for the continuation of the civil war. Edward and Richard persuade their father, the Duke of York, to violate his oath of allegiance to Henry VI (3 Henry VI, I.ii) and seize the crown.

Margaret violates the medieval idea of proper degree when she virtually supplants her husband, Henry VI, as ruler of the realm, takes to the field as generalissima to prevent her son's exclusion from the throne and subse-

quently to reinstate her deposed husband. She unveils her true mettle in the molehill scene where she crowns the captured York with a paper crown and gives him to wipe his tears a handkerchief steeped in the blood of his son Rutland. York deplores her unnatural, unmotherly and unchivalric conduct, and dubs her stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless, inhuman and inexorable; in short, says York,

> Thou art as opposite to every good
> As the Antipodes are unto us,
> Or as the south to the Septentrion.
> (3 Henry VI, I.iv.134-136)

Margaret, however, does not escape the scheme of retributive justice. For her complicity in Gloucester's murder, (2 Henry VI, III.i.233-234) for stabbing York after the Battle of Wakefield, and for taking the reins from Henry VI, she predetermines both the fate of her son at Tewkesbury and her own banishment to France.

This, however, is not the end of Margaret. In the dramatic presentation of Margaret, Shakespeare has no compunction about altering history or adapting his sources to suit his intentions. Hall records that Margaret, ransomed by her father, Reiner, who had to pawn his petty dukedoms before he could do so, "in her very extreme age she passed her dayes in Fraunce, more lyke a death then a

lyfe, languishyng and mornyng in continuall sorowe."[8] In King Richard the Third she returns from exile to take on the role of "avenging fury",[9] to spell the doom of her victims with her curses, and to see the Yorkists fight among themselves over their spoils. In this respect she is not a fully realized character but a sort of choric figure or a voice of doom.

As Nemesis incarnate Margaret's function in the play is to remind us of the past and to prophesy the future so that we may construe the fate of her victims as a visitation from God for their former sins. In I.iii of King Richard the Third, she delivers her curses in neat equations of retribution where the predicted doom of her victims is more or less balanced with their past crimes. For instance, she earmarks Queen Elizabeth and the heir apparent thus:

> Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,
> For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales,
> Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
> (I.iii.198-200)

Similarly, because Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings witnessed her son's death at Tewkesbury, she begs God, "That none of you may live his natural age, / But by some unlooked

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[8]Edward Hall, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1960), III, 206.

[9]E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 160.

accident cut off!" (I.iii.212-213) Shakespeare derives from Hall this dominant motif of retribution. After Hall records the murder of Edward, Prince of Wales, by Clarence, Gloucester, Dorset and Hastings, he moralizes thus: "The bitternesse of which murder, some of the actors, after in their latter dayes tasted and assayed by the very rod of Justice and punishment of God."[10]

Like Margaret, King Edward IV exemplifies the theme of divine retribution. By his perjury and lasciviousness he predetermines the tragic fate of his house. After the Battle of Saint Albans the Yorkists and the Lancastrians agree to end the civil war. The Duke of York swears allegiance to Henry VI and in return the crown is to revert to the Yorkists at Henry's death. The pragmatic Edward does not believe in the inviolability of an oath when a crown is within grasp and joins with Richard in prevailing upon their father to perjure himself. Edward enunciates his pragmatism in these words: "But for a kingdom any oath may be broken. / I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year." (3 Henry VI, I.ii.16-17)

On another occasion Edward proves to us how brittle an oath is in an anarchic world. On his return from Flanders with fresh troops of Hollanders he is denied

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[10] E. Hall, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1960), III, 206.

entry into his duchy of York. While his avowed intention is to wrest the crown from Henry VI, he lies to the Mayor of York by assuring him that he has come to claim only his rightful dukedom and not the crown: "Why, and I challenge nothing but my dukedom, / As being well content with that alone." (3 Henry VI, IV.vii.23-24) It is strange that Shakespeare does not mention the oath of allegiance Edward was required to take before he could enter York. By omitting the oath, Shakespeare does not emphasize the point that Edward perjures himself in order to regain the crown, a crime for which Edward's children will pay with their lives. Hall mentions the oath and in keeping with his didactic purpose draws an appropriate conclusion about the violations of oaths. He says that oath-breakers

> at one tyme or other be worthely scorged for their perjurie, in so much oftentymes that the blot of suche offence of the parentes is punished in the sequele & posteritie: of this thynge I may fortune to speke more in the lyfe of Rycharde the. iii. as the cause shall arise, where it may evidently appeare, that the progeny of kyng Edward scaped not untouched for the open perjurie.[11]

Hall is articulating his belief that the sins of the father are visited upon his children; with this rationale he explains the extermination of Edward's line.

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[11] Ibid., III, 197.

Edward's treachery is matched by his vindictiveness and inhumanity. The murder of Edward, Prince of Wales, the son of Henry VI, is both reprehensible and unchivalric. Hall makes it clear that Edward IV was responsible for Prince Edward's death. Prince Edward was captured at the Battle of Tewkesbury and brought before Edward IV. When the prince was asked why he presumptuously entered the realm, he replied that he wanted to recover his father's kingdom. Hall tells the rest of the story as follows:

> At which wordes kyng Edward sayd nothyng, but with his hand thrust hym from hym (or as some say, stroke him with his gauntlet) whom incontinent, they that stode about, whiche were George duke of Clarence, Rychard duke of Gloucester, Thomas Marques Dorset, and William lord Hastynges, sodaynly murthered, & pitiously manquelled. The bitternesse of which murder, some of the actors, after in their latter dayes tasted and assayed by the very rod of justice and punishment of God.[12]

In Shakespeare, however, Edward IV incriminates himself by stabbing Prince Edward. (3 Henry VI, V.v.38) Hall's moralizing is one of the central themes of King Richard the Third; George Duke of Clarence, Richard Duke of Gloucester, and William Lord Hastings all perish. While Edward IV dies in his sick bed, his two sons atone for their father's crimes with their lives.

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[12] Ibid., III, 206.

The cold-blooded murder of Prince Edward cannot be defended on the ground that it settles the score for the murder of young Rutland or for the communal stabbing of York. The revenge motif around Rutland's murder has already been played out. To avenge his father's death, Clifford kills the child Rutland and is himself killed at Towton. York, on the other hand, deservedly pays for his perjury to Henry VI.

Edward's sexual wantonness is one of the evils which bedevil England by promoting disunity and protracting the civil wars. In the molehill scene where the Duke of York is humiliated and killed, Margaret refers to Edward as "wanton Edward". (3 Henry VI, I.iv.78) Before Prince Edward is murdered at Tewkesbury, he describes Edward IV as "Lascivious Edward". (3 Henry VI, V.v.34) When wooing the widow Elizabeth, Edward confesses that he has bastards:

> Thou art a widow, and thou hast some children;
> And, by God's Mother, I, being but a bachelor,
> Have other some.
> (3 Henry VI, III.ii.102-104)

Hall records that Shore's wife was Edward IV's concubine.[13] The Yorkists' victory at Towton results in Edward's accession to the throne. John Nevil, Marquess of Montague,

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[13] Ibid., III, 264.

says that if Edward IV had married Bona, the French king's sister, he would have consolidated his position with an Anglo-French alliance:

> Yet, to have joined with France in such alliance
> Would more have strengthened this our commonwealth
> 'Gainst foreign storms than any home-bred marriage.
> (3 Henry VI, IV.i.36-38)

Warwick's diplomatic mission to negotiate this marriage alliance is thwarted by Edward's lust. Completely disregarding Warwick's mission, Edward precipitously and disastrously yokes himself with the widow Elizabeth. Clarence and Warwick are forthwith alienated--the former because Edward has matched "more for wanton lust than honour"; (3 Henry VI, III.iii.210) the latter because he has been treated with absolute contempt and ingratitude. Consequently, Warwick, the "setter up and puller down of kings", (3 Henry VI, III.iii.157) having set Edward on the throne on the conviction that Edward's claim is just, now resolves to pull him down to appease his passion for revenge. The upshot is the unexpected Warwick-Margaret reconciliation, the continuation of the civil war, and the chequered fortunes of kings as they rise and fall on the wheel of fortune.

This, however, is not the end of Edward's evil. Giving credence to the grotesque prophecy, which Richard undoubtedly has helped to spread, that the heirs of Edward IV will be murdered by one whose name begins with

the letter "G", (King Richard the Third, I.i.39-40) Edward IV suspects that his brother, George, Duke of Clarence, is the culprit and signs a warrant for Clarence's imprisonment and execution. Little does he realize that, by acquiescing in the dismemberment of his own family, he has initiated a course that will culminate in the murder of his two children. Hall unequivocally records that Edward is fully responsible for Clarence's death.[14] Shakespeare, however, ascribes Clarence's death ultimately to the machination of Richard in conformity with his intention of presenting Richard as a thoroughly evil king.

In King Richard the Third Edward makes a feeble attempt to reconcile all opposites so that he can find peace after death. The extravagance with which Buckingham and Richard profess their friendship rings hollow. From the profusion of hand-shaking and empty ceremonial kissing, one quickly intuits the superficiality of these reconciliations and anticipates the prompt recrudescence of animosity after the king's death. What is important, nonetheless, is Edward's penitence for signing Clarence's death warrant and his fear of divine retribution. After accepting the responsibility of his brother's death, he says: "O God! I fear thy justice will take hold / On me and you, and mine and yours, for this." (King Richard the

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[14] Ibid., III,249-250.

Third, II.i.132-133) Margaret is more explicit when she torments the lachrymose Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York with her theme of retribution:

> Thy Edward he is dead, that killed my Edward;
> Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward;
> Young York he is but boot, because both they
> Matched not the high perfection of my loss.
> (IV.iv.63-64)

What is of consuming interest in the study of the villain-hero Richard is his almost infinite energy for evil, his repulsiveness as well as his cleverness, his diabolical wit and his penchant for histrionics. Richard remains in effective control of his fortune until his increasing atrocities cause grave disaffection in his rank. As far as Richard is concerned, human beings are expendable commodities whose raison d'etre is to be subservient to his ambition. Ambition has transformed him from a pack-horse, as he calls himself, (Richard III, I.iii.121) into an absolute tyrant. Once he has decided to wade his way through slaughter to the English throne, Shakespeare presents us with a man who is denuded of even the last vestige of humanity, who will shrink from no enormity, whose evil is so impartial that all who stand in his way are indiscriminately mowed down. In a world where men are punished for their misdeeds, Richard in his escalation of evil, is unwittingly the scourge of God, though he himself is not exempted from being scourged by God.

Richard Crookback is a microcosm of the political evil of chaos. In his particular case, physical deformity mirrors spiritual deformity. In his celebrated soliloquy in The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth, he expatiates on his withered arm, the envious mountain on his back, the uneven length of his legs and his premature birth. (III. ii.124-195) In short he epitomizes anarchy when he compares himself to "a chaos, or an unlicked bear-whelp". (III.ii.161) Margaret dubs him the "foul misshapen stigmatic, / Marked out by the Destinies to be avoided". (II. ii.136-137)

Shakespeare derives his information about Richard's physical defects from Sir Thomas More's History of King Richard III, which is included in E. Hall's The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancastre and Yorke. More received much of his information from Bishop Morton of Ely, whose animosity for Richard was no secret.[15] More writes:

> Richard duke of Gloucester...was in witte and courage egall with the other Edward and George, but in beautee and liniamentes of nature far underneth bothe, for he was litle of stature, eivill featured of limnes, croke backed, the left shulder muche higher than the righte.[16]

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[15] G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1960), III, 224.

[16] Ibid., III, 253.

Shakespeare retains these physical defects of Richard, as reported by More, because they symbolize the absolute depravity of Richard as presented in the play. However, Thomas B. Costain in his book The Last Plantagenets comes to the defence of the historical Richard. Costain says that Richard was not a hunchback and did not have a withered arm, but that one shoulder was higher than the other.[17] He adds that the story of Richard's deformities was part of a concerted campaign, begun in the reign of Henry VII, to vilify this last Plantagenet.[18]

E. M. W. Tillyard offers this interesting and apt comment about Richard:

> Whereas the sins of other men had merely bred more sins, Richard's are so vast that they are absorptive, not contagious. He is the great ulcer of the body politic into which all its impurity is drained and against which all the members of the body politic are united. It is no longer a case of limb fighting limb but of the war of the whole organism against an ill which has now ceased to be organic.[19]

The images used to describe Richard are cosmic--"the troubler of the world's peace"; (Richard III, I.iii.220) animal--"Thou elfish-marked, abortive, rooting hog!" (I.iii. 227) and infernal--"the son of hell". (I.iii.229) Richard

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[17] T. B. Costain, The Last Plantagenets (New York, 1962), p. 362.

[18] Ibid., p. 363.

[19] E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 215.

is showered with other appropriate epithets such as "caco-demon", "fiend", "minister of hell", "foul devil", "villain", "beast", "hedgehog", and "carnal cur". He is associated with poison, for he is called "bottled spider", "adder", and "this poisonous bunch-backed toad". (I.iii.241,245)

Richard is considerably imbued with the spirit of his age. In the Wars of the Roses, Shakespeare shows that men were governed by their passions--by ambition, anger, animosity and revenge. Northumberland is perhaps speaking for the others as well when he says: "It is war's prize to take all vantages." (3 Henry VI, I.iv.59) Men take "vantages" in war and peace by means fair and foul. Richard will take this principle to the extreme when after his father's death he hopes to aspire to the crown with no regard for principle. Envisaging the arduous task entailed in this enterprise, he thus ruminates:

> And yet I know not how to get the crown,
> For many lives stand between me and home;
> And I--like one lost in a thorny wood,
> That rents the thorns and is rent with the thorns,
> Seeking a way, and straying from the way;
> Not knowing how to find the open air,
> But toiling desperately to find it out--
> Torment myself to catch the English crown;
> And from that torment I will free myself
> Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.
> (3 Henry VI, III.ii.172-181)

For advantages Richard says he can smile and murder while he smiles, emulate Ulysses in deception, change shapes like Proteus, and "set the murderous Machiavel to school". (3

Henry VI, III.ii.193) Like the Elizabethan Machiavel, his precept is, "I am myself alone". (3 Henry VI, V.vi.83)

The opening soliloquy in King Richard the Third is of crucial importance if one is to fathom the recess of Richard's mind in the hope of assigning motives for his villainy. The beginning of the soliloquy refers to the concluding speech of The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth, in which Edward IV, now reinstated, talks about the "stately triumphs, mirthful comic shows" (3 Henry VI, V. vii.43) of his court. After ironically singing of the fruits of peace, Richard now harps on the old theme of his deformity:

> But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks
> Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
> I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
> To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
> I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,...
> Why I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> Have no delight to pass away the time,
> Unless to see my shadow in the sun
> And descant on my own deformity.
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
> (Richard III, I.i.14-21;24-31)

In these lines it is important to bear in mind that Richard chooses to do evil of his own volition ("I am determined to prove a villain") and therefore he is responsible for his tragedy. Of course Richard tries to justify his villainy

as a compensation for his exclusion from love, but such a justification certainly does not extenuate his iniquity or absolve him from moral responsibility for his actions. In his essay, "Of deformity", Bacon writes that deformed persons are inclined to be evil: "For as Nature hath done ill by them; So doe they by Nature: Being for the most part, (as the Scripture saith) void of Naturall Affection; And so they haue their Reuenge of Nature."[20] Bacon is not saying that physically deformed persons are necessarily evil. As Elizabethans were no doubt aware, a physically deformed person, like anyone else, has the capacity to choose freely. Consequently, physical deformity is no excuse for moral degeneracy.

Richard III, like Macbeth, is a thoroughly evil king, presented as hero. He is the ultimate in monstrosity, produced by the One Hundred Years' War between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians. England's deliverance from this cancer, cankering the body politic, is at hand, for Richmond's assault is gathering strength and momentum. Shakespeare's Richard III, however, far from alienating our sympathy, appeals to us irresistibly, at least in the first half of the play, because of his exuberant energy for evil, his daemoniac intensity, his consummate acting, and his clowning. For about half of the play we find ourselves in

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[20] F. Bacon, Essays (Oxford, 1947), p. 179.

the uncomfortable position of applauding evil which would have horrified us in real life, because Richard displays great wit, cleverness and vitality.

The audience first sees Richard as actor in the first wooing scene, a performance later to be repeated with variation in the second wooing scene. The courtship of Anne Nevil is a bizarre spectacle. With the coffin containing the deceased Henry VI in the background, Richard woos Anne with such energy, guile, and strength of will that she is relentlessly coerced into submission to his will. In the dramatic monologue ending the scene, one forgets, at least temporarily, Richard's villainy as he expresses his outrage at Anne's conduct, exults over his triumph, and entertains the audience with his wit. Richard as the devil is paradoxically condemning Anne, on moral grounds, for capitulating to him in full awareness that he has slain her father Warwick, her father-in-law Henry VI, and her husband Edward Prince of Wales, who, says Richard, is "A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman, / Framed in the prodigality of nature". (Richard III, I.ii.242-243) In the same breath with which he verbalizes this outrage and declares he will murder Anne, Richard evokes laughter when he observes that his defmority is no blemish to his "good looks" and he decides to procure a looking glass and "entertain a score or two of tailors / To study fashions to adorn my body". (Richard III, I.ii.256-257)

Shakespeare presents Richard as a Machiavel and, as Rossiter mentions, "an artist in evil".[21] As a Machiavel, Richard does not shrink from employing duplicity or ruthlessness for the acquisition of power. Also, in his preoccupation with the artistry of his evil, Richard is an actor par excellence. For this reason, his role not only lends itself to good acting but demands the maximum capability of the skilled actor.

There are many instances where Richard the usurper-king and Richard the actor are inextricably interwoven. In I.ii Richard dramatically storms upon the stage, and preparatory to denouncing the queen and her relations for causing Clarence's imprisonment, which in reality he himself has engineered, he tries to vindicate his "honesty" and "plainness" with great volubility:

> Because I cannot flatter and look fair,
> Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive and cog,
> Duck with French nods and apish courtesy,
> I must be held a rancorous enemy.
> Cannot a plain man live and think no harm,
> But thus his simple truth must be abused
> With silken, sly, insinuating Jacks?
> (I.iii.47-53)

Furthermore, it is difficult not to admire Richard's virtuosity as an artist of evil when with great gusto he masquerades as a saint before his naive victims. We are swept away by Richard's sheer effrontery and bravado when

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[21] A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns (New York, 1961), p. 17.

he vents such utterances as "I am too childish-foolish for this world", (I.iii.141) or:

> I do not know that Englishman alive
> With whom my soul is any jot at odds
> More than the infant that is born to-night.
> (II.i.70-73)

However, the stage villain Richard is not satisfied with just playing the role of the devil, but is at pains to enlist the audience's support for his skilfully contrived acts of evil. To do this, he occasionally steps out of his role and ingratiatingly explains his machinations to the audience. In I.iii, to give an example, after revealing how he intends to confound and dispatch his opponents, he shares this secret in confidence with his audience:

> I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl.
> The secret mischiefs that I set abroach
> I lay unto the grevious charge of others...
> But then I sigh, and, with a piece of Scripture,
> Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:
> And thus I clothe my naked villainy
> With odd old ends stol'n forth of holy writ,
> And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.
> (I.iii.323-325;333-337)

After his expeditious execution of Lord Hastings for refusing to support Richard to the crown, Richard provides the audience with another piece of his stage show on the theme of dissimulation, naturally to cover up his villainy. He and Buckingham are harnessed in "rotten armour, marvellously ill-favoured", (III.v. stage direction) ready for their act before the Mayor of London. The outcome is a play

within a play, with Richard as director and roleplayer:

> Richard. Come, cousin, canst thou quake and
> change thy colour,
>
> Murder thy breath in middle of a word,
> And then again begin, and stop again,
> As if thou were distraught and mad with terror?
>
> Buckingham. Tut, I can counterfeit the deep
> tragedian,
> Speak and look back, and pry on every side,
> Tremble and start at wagging of a straw:
> Intending deep suspicion, ghastly looks
> Are at my service, like enforced smiles;
> And both are ready in their offices,
> At any time to grace my stratagems.
> (III.v.1-11)

In the scene where Richard must be persuaded to be king, we again see his flair for theatrics as he and Buckingham successfully stage an incredible piece of trickery. Far from being appalled by Richard's usurpation of the crown, we are rather intrigued by his mastery in dissimulation, which is presented almost as a comedy. The comedy here depends on dramatic irony--between what we know about the real Richard and what is being acted out on the stage before the Mayor of London, the aldermen and the citizens. The high point of this comic scene is reached when Richard enters, buttressed by two bishops.

Richard, therefore, is presented as a wit, a comedian and an artist, delighting in his evil craft. We are drawn to his evil because of the zest, resourcefulness and indefatigable energy with which he accomplishes his

evil objectives and we are in the uncomfortable position of accepting the devil as hero. In his essay, "Angel with Horns", Rossiter discusses this very appeal of value-reversals Richard elicits from us and makes this interesting remark:

> But he [Richard] is not only this demon incarnate, he is in effect God's agent in a pre-determined plan of divine retribution: 'the scourge of God' ....Thus in a real sense, Richard is a king who 'can do no wrong'; for in the pattern of the justice of divine retribution on the wicked, he functions as an avenging angel. Hence my paradoxical title, 'Angel with Horns'.[22]

I now come to Rossiter's argument in which he disagrees with what Tillyard sees as Shakespeare's main aim in King Richard the Third (and in the rest of the two tetralogies). Rossiter says:

> Richard's sense of humour, his function as clown, his comic irreverences and sarcastic or sardonic appropriations of things to...his occasions: all those act as underminers of our assumed naive and proper Tudor principles; and we are on his side much rather because he makes us (as the Second Murderer put it) 'take the devil in [our] mind', than for any 'historical-philosophical-Christian-retributional' sort of motive.[23]

Rossiter is not consistent here, for he has already agreed that Richard is "God's agent in a pre-determined plan of divine retribution". He later adds:

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[22] A. P. Rossiter, Angel with Horns (New York, 1961), p. 20.

[23] Ibid., p. 17.

> The orthodox Tudor myth made history God-controlled, divinely prescribed and dispensed, to move things towards a God-ordained perfection: Tudor England. Such was the frame that Shakespeare took. But the total effect of Shakespeare's "plot" has quite a different effect from Hall: a very different meaning.[24]

Rossiter's conclusion is that if Shakespeare had entirely accepted the Tudor myth, the frame and pattern of order, he would have written moral history; but that his way led him to write comic history.[25]

I do not agree with Rossiter that Shakespeare in his dramatic presentation of Richard is undermining "moral history" and hence the orthodox Tudor myth that God is guiding England from chaos to the peace and prosperity of Tudor England. In the first place, many of the attributes of Shakespeare's Richard III are taken from Hall, who was writing moral history. In Hall Richard III is an artist in his evil; he is a consummate actor, a classical Machiavel and a skilled dissimulator. Hall presents Richard as excessively ambitious, calculating, and indifferent to friend and foe. To give one example in Hall of Richard's histrionic ability, after the convenient execution of Hastings for the fictitious charge of treason, Richard and Buckingham appeared in rotten armour in the Tower before some hastily summoned Londoners. Richard explained to them

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[24] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[25] Ibid., p. 22.

that he and Buckingham were so clad out of desperation to save their lives from Hastings' conspiracy.[26] In Hall Richard's artistry and unbounded energy for evil do not seem to impair Hall's didactic purpose. Next, it does not require any uncanny perspicacity to realize that Richard is a thoroughly evil man who obstinately persists in evil to the very end. He may dress his iniquity with witticism; he may bewilder us with his diabolical ingenuity and remorseless verve; he may expose the mental limitations and moral shortcomings of his victims; he may accidentally be the agent of divine retribution; but we never forget that he is the epitome of evil, and that his murders are premeditated, cold-blooded, and above all, executed in the name of unscrupulous ambition.

Moreover, while we are lured by his artistry and histrionics into accepting Richard as hero in about the first half of the play, we are at the same time equally horrified by his revolting atrocities. As early as I.iii, Margaret reminds us that Richard is a regicide, having murdered her husband, Henry VI, in the Tower and her son, Edward, at Tewkesbury, and she invokes her curses upon him. It is difficult to imagine that Shakespeare is undercutting "moral history" when Richard's intrinsic evil is actualized

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[26] E. Hall, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1960), III, 267.

into carnage--into the expedient execution of Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings and Clarence, and into the imprisonment of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, all within the first half of the play. Hastings' lament, "O bloody Richard! Miserable England!" (III.iv.103) only strengthens one's horror and repugnance at Richard's barbarism.

The Richard that emerges from the dramatist's pen does not therefore undermine the Tudor frame of the play. As I have pointed out earlier, an audience is unquestionably intrigued by Richard's attractive qualities such as his cleverness, wit and artistry, but is simultaneously revolted by Richard's infinite capacity for evil. Furthermore, in Shakespeare evil inevitably leads to its own destruction, and this brings me to Margaret's curses upon Richard.

In a play which exploits the theme of divine retribution, Richard is not exempted. Margaret invokes upon him the curses of a troubled conscience, of suspecting friends for traitors, of taking traitors for his dearest friends, and of insomnia. These curses come into effect later in the play.

Prior to the visitation of the ghosts of his victims, Richard's soliloquies have been concerned only with external problems which impeded the materialization of his ambition. Immediately after the visitation Richard surprises us with an introspective monologue in which he tells us that he is being afflicted by his conscience. He

has never before been troubled by conscience in his evil career. Now we see Margaret's first curse upon Richard, "The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul!" (I.iii.221) fulfilled. The irony here is that while his forces outnumber Richmond's three to one ("Why, our battalia trebels that account", V.iii.11) Richard is vanquished before his defeat at Bosworth by an inner obstacle, his troubled conscience. He cannot flee from his conscience and is constrained to be frank with himself for once:

> I am a villain...
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> Perjury, perjury, in the highest degree,
> Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree,
> All several sins, all used in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty! guilty!'
> I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
> And if I die, no soul will pity me.
> And, wherefore should they, since that I myself
> Find in myself no pity to myself?
> (V.iii.192; 194-204)

For this brief moment Richard proves to be human after all. The nightmare being fresh upon his mind, he expresses doubt whether his friends will be loyal (V.iii.214) and acknowledges that

> shadows to-night
> Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
> Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
> Armed in proof and led by shallow Richmond.
> (V.iii.217-220)

Later, when the nightmare fades out of his mind, he is able

to reject conscience and reaffirm his unscrupulous principle that might makes right:

> Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
> Devised at first to keep the strong in awe:
> Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law!
> (V.iii.310-312)

Margaret's two other curses come to pass. Anne alludes to Richard's "timorous dreams" (IV.i.84) while Richard himself testifies to his insomnia. (IV.ii.72) When just before Bosworth he requests wine because he has neither "that alacrity of spirit / Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have", (V.iii.73-74) he is, writes Tillyard, "the genuine ancestor of the villain in a nineteenth-century drama calling for whisky when things look bad".[27] Moreover, Richard alienates his invaluable friends, Buckingham, the Bishop of Ely, and Lord Stanley who desert him for Richmond. In his oration to his soldiers Richmond reminds us about Margaret's curses when he says: "Richard except, those whom we fight against / Had rather have us win than him they follow." (V.iii.244-245) Finally, Nemesis intercepts Richard when he sinks to perdition at Bosworth Field.

Long before Richard's fall at Bosworth Field, Shakespeare keeps reminding us with hints that evil will be

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[27] E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 217.

defeated and that good will be reaffirmed. The earliest of these intimations occurs in The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth. (IV.vi) In one of the brief lulls of the civil wars Henry hails the young Richmond as "England's hope", (3 Henry VI, IV.vi.68-76) blesses the child, and from his face intuits the approaching end of anarchy and the restoration of order under the Tudors.

Moreover, there is a definite change in temper or mood in King Richard the Third. In The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth Shakespeare presents us with unbridled chaos, occasioned by ambition and civil strife. The realm of England is divested of chivalry. Men are not governed by reason but are impulsively spurred to action by their passions--by revenge, anger, and lust. The Duke of York dies defiantly and without remorse at Wakefield; so also die the Young Clifford at Towton, Warwick at Barnet, and Prince Edward at Tewkesbury. In King Richard the Third, however, men meet their end in penitence, acknowledging their sins. Clarence remembers his perjury to Warwick and his share in the hideous murder of Prince Edward. Edward IV accepts responsibility for his brother's execution, and on his death-bed fears God's justice. Similarly, Anne, Buckingham, and Hastings die in repentance. The war-weary Duchess of York, who has lost her husband York and her son Rutland in the internecine civil war, envisages the protraction of the "domestic broils" (II.iv.60) in the imprisonment

of the young Edward V and the Duke of York. Referring to the interminable nightmares of civil strife, she makes an urgent appeal for peace in these lines:

> the conquerors
> Make war upon themselves, brother to brother,
> Blood to blood, self against self. O preposterous
> And frantic outrage, end thy damned spleen.
> (II.iv.61-64)

As Tillyard remarks, "All this penitence cannot be fortuitous; and it is the prelude to forgiveness and regeneration."[28]

The lamentation-scene (IV.iv.1-135) and the ghost-scene (V.iii.119-177) have religious undertones and look forward to the end of bloodshed and to the inauguration of peace. The lamentation-scene is very impressive when three queenly figures bewail their losses and unite in heaping curses upon Richard. The speeches are ritualistic and incantatory on account of repetition, anaphora, and balance occasioned by antithesis. Even the action is ritualistic, as each of the three ladies utters four lines before sitting down. Elizabeth asks God how He can allow an atrocity such as the liquidation of her two sons to happen. (IV.iv.22-24) The Duchess of York enhances the intensity of her sorrow by using eight different images in just three lines to describe her state:

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[28] Ibid., p. 211.

> Dead life, blind sight, poor mortal-living ghost,
> Woe's scene, world's shame, grave's due by life usurped,
> Brief abstract and record of tedious days...
> (IV.iv.26-28)

Margaret's stylized speech--

> I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him;
> I had a Harry, till a Richard killed him:
> Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him;
> Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him--
> (IV.iv.40-43)

illustrates the impartial extent of Richard's evil. Richard is the "foul defacer of God's handiwork" (IV.iv.51) in the sense that he interferes with God's creation. Margaret also sees Richard as the anti-Christ when she calls him "That excellent grant tyrant of the earth". (IV.iv.52) While expressing satisfaction that her appetite for revenge has been glutted, she feels that Richard in his capacity as "hell's black intelligencer" (IV.iv.71) is used as a scourge to punish others before being punished himself. The recurrence of animal imagery--"hellhound", "carnal cur", "bottled spider", and "bunched-backed toad"--is another reminder of Richard's regression into bestiality. Margaret emphasizes the immeasurable depth of Richard's evil when she makes three worlds call for his death:

> Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray,
> To have him suddenly conveyed from hence.
> Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray,
> That I may live and say, 'The dog is dead.'
> (IV.iv. 75-78)

Margaret uses the elegiac formulas, "Then and now" and ubi sunt, to comment on the mutability of man's lot and to inform Elizabeth about the fulfilment of the prophecies and curses Margaret has previously pronounced upon her.

When Margaret, whose curses never let us forget the past, makes her final exit towards the end of Act IV, it is fitting that Richmond, the bringer of a happy future, should appear. In his very first speech he refers to Richard as the "usurping boar" (V.ii.7) and "foul swine", (V.ii.10) thus continuing the animal imagery with which Richard is associated. When he says that Richard is "in the centry of this isle", (V.ii.11) he means that Richard is the nerve-centre and fountain-head of evil and that the realm must be purged of this evil before a new era of peace can commence. Richmond's prayer on the night before the Battle of Bosworth makes it clear that he regards himself as God's minister:

> O Thou, whose captain I account myself,
> Look on my forces with a gracious eye;
> Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,
> That they may crush down with a heavy fall
> The usurping helmets of our adversaries;
> Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
> That we may praise thee in the victory.
> To thee I do commend my watchful soul
> Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes:
> Sleeping and waking. O, defend me still!
> (V.iii.109-118)

As I have mentioned earlier, the ghost-scene has a strong religious tone. The action and speech are symmetri-

cal, patterned and ritualistic. The procession of ghosts visiting the sleeping Richard and Richmond consists of Richard's eleven victims, appearing in the order in which they were killed. The ghosts, using the same formulas, curse Richard and remind us of his crimes, while they bless Richmond. Unlike Margaret, these ghosts do not come for revenge but to disturb Richard's conscience on Bosworth Field in the morning by confronting him with his guilt, and to undermine his courage. "Let me sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow" (V.iii.119) is used thrice, while "despair, and die", (V.iii.127) with one variation, is used nine times. The ghosts, however, give their unanimous support to Richmond, exhorting him to conquer Richard, "live and flourish" and "beget a happy race of kings".

In his oration to his troops, Richmond reaffirms that God is on his side: "God and our good cause fight upon our side". (V.iii.241) Although Richard is a usurper, it must be remembered that he is the anointed king and therefore God's deputy. This notwithstanding, Richmond justifies rebellion against a king who is essentially "A bloody tyrant and a homicide" (V.iii.247) and "One that hath ever been God's enemy". (V.iii.253) Since Richmond is God's "captain", he can always appeal to divine sanction for what is in effect a rebellion against the king. For what he is, Richard can appeal to no higher order for guidance and victory and is content to gratify his spleen by denigrating

his foe with a cascade of abuses.

In the whole of the first tetralogy Shakespeare presents a world in chaos, engendered by the struggle for power among the nobility and by the century-old war of attrition between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians, which culminated in Richard's absolute tyranny. Following the sixteenth century historians such as Polydore Vergil, Hall and Holinshed, Shakespeare presents the political chaos and social ills as God's punishment for the deposition and murder of Richard II in 1399. Amid the disorder, however, Shakespeare has occasionally presented brief glimpses of order and degree. For instance, Henry VI in a very stylized speech longs for the ordered life of the shepherd as he watches the Battle of Towton from a molehill. Shakespeare presents Richmond as the bringer of a new and healthy order. Richmond's final speeches, which are concerned with the notion of proper degree, symbolize the restoration of order. Observing due degree, Richmond praises God for the victory over "the bloody dog", (V.ii.2) Richard. Next, the dead are to be buried as befitting their ranks, and Richard's soldiers are to be pardoned. Then, in accordance with his promise, Richmond will join the White Rose with the Red by marrying Elizabeth of York. This marriage between "The true successors of each royal house" (V.v.30) will heal the nation's wounds, effect a reconciliation between the Lancastrians and the Yorkists, and usher in "smooth-faced peace, /

With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days". (V.v.33-34) Unlike Richard's hollow proclamation of peace at the beginning of the play, Richmond's promised peace is meant to be genuine as he is earnestly praying for peace. We recall that the ghosts of Richard's victims have unanimously blessed Richmond, and we are always reminded that Richmond is God's chosen instrument. Richmond's controlled and structured speeches such as his oration to his soldiers (V.iii.238-271) and his final prayer (V.v.20-41) anticipate the peace and stability he promises.

The penultimate scene of the play (V.iv) evokes, if not sympathy for Richard's cause, at least admiration for his heroism and defiance. There is something admirable in the way Richard champions his evil cause with an adamantine will and, like Macbeth, remains unrepentant and defiant up to the very end. Catesby assures us of Richard's prowess in the battlefield:

> The king enacts more wonders than a man,
> Daring an opposite to every danger:
> His horse is slain, and all on foot he fights,
> Seeking for Richmond in the throat of death.
> (V.iv.2-5)

That Richard tries to seek out Richmond in the battle and slays singlehanded six men dressed as Richmond testifies to Richard's courage. Though isolated and at the end of his tether, he will not save his life by ignominious flight, but he will heroically "stand the hazard of the die". (V.iv.10)

His celebrated last line, "A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" (V.iv.13) indicates that he has gambled everything and has lost.

It is significant that in his last speech, Richmond does not mention Richard. In fact, except for this report, "the bloody dog is dead", there is no other mention of Richard in the last scene. Richard utters no dying speech; none of the survivors of Bosworth delivers an obituary on him. All of this indicates that Shakespeare is endorsing that Richard is the acme of evil whose death is a purification for the realm and consequently ought not to solicit sympathy.

CHAPTER III

KING LEAR

In both Richard the Third and King Lear Shakespeare ascribes the prevailing evil to immediate causes. In the Henry the Sixth--Richard the Third cycle Shakespeare very emphatically drives home the point that England or Respublica must atone for the forcible removal and subsequent execution of the anointed King Richard II. In the resultant civil wars, which harrowed England for nearly a century, both the guilty and the innocent were punished. This was a dispensation of universal evil when men obeyed their passions rather than their reason, when fathers rose against sons and sons against fathers, and when Richard III, the reprobate usurper-king, was determined to hold the sceptre as long as he could murder anyone else with a better claim. In King Lear both Lear and Gloucester through their own follies inadvertently release the forces of evil which divide their respective houses and threaten to ruin the land. Because of his pride, susceptibility to flattery, foolhardiness and imperiousness, Lear has unjustly repudiated Cordelia, banished Kent and divided the kingdom between Goneril and Regan. Gloucester has committed

adultery and fathered an illegitimate son. He too in his blindness casts off his loyal, legitimate son, Edgar, in favour of his villainous bastard, Edmund. In the play both Lear and Gloucester have to learn the hard way. They both undergo a process of purification in which they suffer more than they deserve, but progress from ignorance to knowledge. The forces of evil which they unleash are designed to chastise them until they realize their errors and repent. In their excruciating tortures, both mental and physical, they learn charity and altruism, and discover the strength and reality of love in a disillusioned world.

Apart from the theme of filial ingratitude and the suffering it entails for Lear and Gloucester, Shakespeare is preoccupied with the question about the nature and source of evil. Much earlier the dramatist was intrigued with the idea of presenting all the diabolical attributes of the stage villain Richard III. Richard, a veritable monument of egoism, was presented as the classical Machiavel, the actor, the artist, the buffoon, and the divine agent of retribution.

One feels that in King Lear Shakespeare has created a world of intense despair and uncontrollable evil. The denizens of this world are mainly monsters of iniquity. At first evil proliferates while the forces of good are too powerless to resist it. One factor contributing to the atmosphere of gloom is the number of unanswerable ques-

tions raised as the whirligig of time brings in unspeakable torture and death. Are the presiding deities in the pagan world of King Lear benevolent or malevolent? In the perpetual conflict between good and evil why do the good suffer more than the evil? How can we account for the limitless scope of evil of a Goneril, a Regan, or an Edumund? Why must Cordelia die? Perhaps Shakespeare wants to say that these are some of the unfathomable mysteries of an imperfect world.

I wish to establish the religious background of The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir, which was written by an anonymous playwright, and which was Shakespeare's principal source for King Lear, and of King Lear because this will help one understand, to some extent, the actions of the good and evil characters in these two plays. The world of the old play, King Leir, is decidedly Christian. Leir abdicates because he is old and weary and wants to devote the rest of his life to the welfare of his soul. Delighted with Gonorill's and Ragan's lavish protestation of love, Leir thinks that they are "the kindest gyrles in Christendome".[29] Cordella in Scene 13 is penitent that she has been negligent in not going to the Temple of God to render thanks and rounds off her soliloquy with Christian forgiveness and piety:

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[29] Anon., The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 351.

> Yet God forgive both him, and you and me,
> Even as I doe in perfit charity.
> I will to Church, and pray unto my Saviour,
> That ere I dye, I may obtayne his favour.
> (King Leir, ll.1090-1093)

Moreover, providential intervention prevents the murder of Leir and Perillus. The thunder, interpreted as a sign of divine providence, warns Ragan's hired assassin not to swear and forces him to drop his dagger. In the Christian world of King Leir good triumphs over evil. Gonorill and Ragan are defeated and Leir is restored to the throne.

Since Shakespeare's King Lear takes place in a pre-Christian era, there is no direct reference to Christianity or to a monotheistic religion. The play is, however, interspersed with a few Christian concepts. Edgar and Cordelia, for instance, return good for evil. Cordelia's sacrifice is Christ-like; Edgar is as patient as Job; far from succumbing to despair, he even succeeds in helping Gloucester conquer despair. There is also a great deal of emphasis on the pagan virtue of stoicism, as we see Edgar, Kent and the Fool endure adversity with admirable stoicism. But there are innumerable references to the worship of nature, to astrology, to the gods of the Greek and Roman pantheon, and to a plurality of other gods with some Christian colouring. While Edmund dedicates himself to his goddess, Nature, (I.i.1) Gloucester believes that the division between parents and children and the threats of civil

war have been portended by the late celestial disturbances. (I.ii.101-120) When repudiating Cordelia, Lear swears by "The mysteries of Hecate and the night, / By all the operation of the orbs". (I.i.110-111) Also, there are a number of references to gods of retribution who are occasionally summoned to punish the wicked and defend the weak, the oppressed and the poor. For instance, Albany, learning about Cornwall's execution of blind justice upon Gloucester's eyes, construes Cornwall's death as a just recompense for his monstrosity:

> This shows you are above,
> You justicers, that these our nether crimes
> So speedily can venge.
> (IV.ii.79-81)

However, while characters interpret the deserving fate of criminals as a corroboration of their belief in a retributive deity, in their despair they question whether such a deity is malignant or benevolent. While Gloucester subscribes to the idea that the gods are concerned with the administration of justice, his loss of sight leads him to the belief, at least momentarily, that the gods are amused at the miseries of mortals: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport." (IV.i. 36-37)

Lear is not a corrupt king. He suffers from certain tragic flaws; he is proud, imperious, impetuous and

unable to control his temper. His human errors bring about catastrophic consequences by unleashing the forces of evil. In the play Lear is primarily a victim of these forces. In this chapter I intend to show how Lear undergoes a process of education and purification as he endures evil from the daughters who profess to love him, and how he fights evil singlehanded. He wants to eradicate ingratitude, cruelty, injustice and corruption from the world. Lear is ennobled by adversity as his greatness and humanity emerge in the midst of suffering. In the depths of his tribulations and in the moments of his temporary insanity, his defective vision is restored, he is purged of his egoism, and he learns altruism, charity, love and humility.

In the first scene of the play Lear dramatizes his fatal errors. First, making his entry in a magnificent procession with all the trappings of the court, he announces his decision to resign the crown and to transfer "All cares and business" (I.i.39) of kingship to "younger strengths" (I.i.40). It seems likely that an Elizabethan audience would deem as the height of folly the abdication of the legitimate and anointed king, who is essentially God's deputy. Secondly, Lear has divided his kingdom among his three daughters to prevent future strife, without realizing that a divided kingdom is more likely to generate strife than to diminish its likelihood. Thirdly, Lear has devised the love-test ostensibly to reward his daughters for their

love but really to be humoured by hearing a public declaration of love from them. This not too prudent test boomeranged by puncturing his pride. Revolted by the windy rhetoric of Goneril and Regan, and reluctant to promulgate her love, as it were, since she believes in deed rather than in words ("Since what I well intend / I'll do't before I speak"), (I.i.225-226) Cordelia refuses to vie with her sisters but declares that she will obey, love and honour her father as befits a daughter. (I.i.95-103) Fourthly, Lear cannot discriminate between flattery and love. He is very easily seduced by superficiality and cannot plumb the depths of Cordelia's genuine love when she says: "I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth". (I.i.91-92) Fifthly, Lear is prone to spasmodic bursts of uncontrollable wrath which blinds him to reason. Goaded by anger, he misinterprets Cordelia's laconic answer as pride and ingratitude, and Kent's headstrong and obstinate intervention on behalf of truth as disobedience. The upshot is a blatant miscarriage of justice: Lear repudiates Cordelia and banishes Kent.

Lear's tragedy stems from this initial injustice, engendered in large measure by his excessive pride and rashness. After his abdication, he keeps a retinue of a hundred knights and still hangs on to authority: "Only we shall retain the name, and th' addition to a king". (I.i.135-136) At the conclusion of Act I, Scene i, Goneril

and Regan have already started to conspire to strip Lear of his authority. Ascribing Cordelia's rejection and Kent's banishment to their father's "poor judgement", "the infirmity of his age", his "unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them", they feel that "if our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us".

A retired, imperious autocrat and his one hundred retainers are unlikely to contribute to Goneril's domestic harmony; yet one cannot estimate how far Lear is blameworthy when Goneril accuses him of causing anarchy in her home. Besides, one wonders whether Goneril is telling the truth when she says:

> By day and night he wrongs me. Every hour
> He flashes into one gross crime or other
> That sets all at odds. I'll not endure it.
> His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
> On every trifle.
> (I.iii.3-7)

That she addresses her grievances to a servant is a dim reflection of her character. That she instructs her servant to be remiss in his duty to Lear makes her scheme transparent; she is taking the initiative to bring matters to a head with Lear. Also, since Goneril and Regan have already conspired to humiliate Lear by denuding him of his authority, the elder sister will try any expedient to realize her objective.

Lear is thunder-struck by Goneril's volte-face when she assaults him with this incisive speech which now invalidates her former hyperbolical professions of filial love:

> Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool
> But other of your insolent retinue
> Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth
> In rank and not-to-be endured riots. Sir,
> I had thought by making this well known unto you
> To have found a safe redress, but now grow fearful,
> By what yourself too late have spoke and done,
> That you protect this course, and put it on
> By your allowance.
> (I.iv.191-199)

In the old play Leir bears his daughters' ingratitude patiently, regarding it as deserved punishment for his unkindness to Cordella: "And for her sake, I thinke this heavy doom / Is falne on me, and not without desert". (King Leir, ll.915-916) In Shakespeare's play, however, Lear is appalled by Goneril's monstrosity and reacts with violent rage and curses.

Lear condemns the unnaturalness of his daughters' ingratitude in sexual curses. After Goneril has reproached him for his retinue, which she alleges to be riotous and debauched, Lear supplicates the aid of the goddess Nature to strike his daughter barren or to make her the mother of an ungrateful monster. (I.iv.265-280) He tells Regan:

> If thou shouldst not be glad [i.e. to see him],
> I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
> Sepulchring an adultress.
> (II.iv.125-127)

He presently asks the lightning and the fen-sucked fogs to taint Goneril's beauty and give her a monstrous exterior to harmonize with her inner bestiality. At this stage, of course, Lear is not justified in uttering such violent curses and abuses on Goneril.

In King Richard the Third and in King Lear Shakespeare uses animal images to describe the evil nature of villains. The devil-king Richard III is appropriately compared to the most savage beasts and venomous toads and vipers. Animals to which Shakespeare makes frequent references in King Lear include the pelican, the hedge sparrow, the cuckoo, the sea monster, the kite, the serpent, the wolf, the eel, the mongrel, the cur, the vulture, the owl, the lion, the bear, flies and mice. Lear, Gloucester and Albany liken Goneril and Regan to vicious animals to suggest their affiliation with beasts. To Lear, Goneril has a "wolfish visage". (I.iv.299) She is "like a vulture"; (II.iv.130) she struck Lear with her tongue which is "serpent-like". (II.iv.156) She is a "Detested kite"; (I.iv.253) her ingratitude is "Sharper than a serpent's tooth". (I.iv.279) Gloucester sends Lear to Dover because he does not want to see Regan's "cruel nails" (III.vii.56) pluck out Lear's eyes, nor Goneril's "Boorish fangs" (III. vii.58) stick in Lear's anointed flesh. Albany calls Goneril "This gilded serpent" (V.iii.84) and fears that men might become as predatory as "monsters of the deep". (IV.

ii.49-50) Albany describes Goneril and Regan as "Tigers, not daughters"; (IV.ii.40) Kent deems them "dog-hearted daughters"; (IV.iii.45) in the mock-trial Lear addresses them as "She-foxes"; (III.vi.22) to the Fool they are the cuckoo in the hedge-sparrow's nest. (I.iv.206) Edmund acknowledges that Goneril and Regan are like adders to each other in their rivalry for his love: "Each jealous of the other, as the stung / Are of the adder". (V.i.56-57) Oswald is appropriately dubbed a mongrel "the son and heir of a mongrel bitch". (II.ii.20) Bradley makes this very interesting comment about the animal imagery of the play:

> As we read, the souls of all the beasts in turn seem to us to have entered the bodies of these mortals; horrible in their venom, savagery, lust, deceitfulness, sloth, cruelty, filthiness; miserable in their feebleness, nakedness, defencelessness, blindness; and man, 'consider him well', is even what they are.[30]

Apart from illustrating the bestial nature of the wicked, the animal imagery is a reminder of the proximity of man's life to the animal's. When Regan strips Lear of his last knight, Lear passionately declares that "Man's life is cheap as beast's". (II.iv.262) Edgar, the man on the run because he has been proscribed, is reduced to the condition of the most wretched beast in the face of the

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[30] A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1963), pp. 218-219.

overwhelming onslaught of evil. To preserve himself he is persuaded

> To take the basest and most poorest shape
> That ever penury, in contempt of man,
> Brought near to beast.
> (II.iii.7-9)

As a Bedlam beggar he cannot sink lower in the social order and he now shares fellowship with the beasts. On the surface, as a Bedlam, Edgar's speeches appear nonsensical because they are designed to conceal his true identity, but when scrutinized, they contribute to the sense of wickedness and poverty in the world. When Edgar says that he "served the lust of my mistress' heart" (III.iv.82-83) and that he was formerly a "hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey", (III.iv.88-89) one is reminded of the diabolical quintet, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald. Shakespeare is perhaps recording his own awareness of the widespread poverty in the world when he lets Edgar utter this seemingly nonsensical speech:

> Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the todpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets, swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog, drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who is whipped from tithing to tithing, and stock-punished and imprisoned; who hath had three suits to his back, six shirts to his body.... (III.iv.121-128)

The method of commenting on the hideousness of man's evil by means of animal imagery also occurs in the old play, King Leir. The sycophant Scalliger cannot help stepping out of his role to condemn Gonorill as a "viperous woman, shame to all thy sexe". (King Leir, I.811) Perillus calls Gonorill a "monster"; (I.2881) Leir thus fulminates against Ragan for plotting parricide: "Out on thee, viper, scum, filthy parricide, / More odious to my sight then is a Toade". (ll.2584-2585)

One of the most striking features of King Lear is the polarization between absolute good and absolute evil, "almost as if Shakespeare like Empedocles, were regarding Love and Hate as the two ultimate forces of the universe".[31] On the one hand, Cordelia, Kent, Edgar and the Fool represent the forces of love and loyalty. On the other, are the quintet of monsters, namely, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald, who are inexorably dedicated to the cause of evil, as if evil were the very essence of their nature.

Filial ingratitude has become an idée fixe in Lear's mind as he marvels at its monstrosity and unnaturalness. It is an inscrutable mystery to him that his own daughters, Goneril and Regan, can be so devoid of humanity. The idea of the abnormality and absolute inhumanity of filial ingratitude surfaces several times in the play. While

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[31] Ibid., p. 215.

enduring the inclement storm on the heath, Lear denounces this evil thus:

> Filial ingratitude,
> Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
> For lifting food to't?
> (III.iv.14-16)

In his fixation with this evil, he is inclined to relate poverty to filial ingratitude. When he sees for the first time Edgar, disguised as a Bedlam beggar, almost as a reflex action, Lear asks: "Didst thou give all to thy daughters? Art thou come to this?" (III.iv.48-49) Presently he rationalizes Edgar's poverty out of bitterness of his own experience:

> Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature
> To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
> Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
> Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
> Judicious punishment--'twas this flesh begot
> Those pelican daughters.
> (III.iv.68-73)

Albany is eventually disillusioned with the professed virtues of his wife Goneril, for he now discovers to his utmost horror that her charming exterior conceals the devil beneath:

> Thou changed and self-covered thing, for shame
> Be monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
> To let these hands obey my blood,
> They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
> Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,
> A woman's shape doth shield thee.
> (IV.ii.62-67)

While Lear searches within his soul for the cause of anomalies such as Goneril and Regan, Kent looks up to the stars for an answer:

> The stars above us govern our conditions;
> Else one self-mate and make could not beget
> Such different issues.
> (IV.iii.33-35)

In this play, nonetheless, Shakespeare illustrates that out of evil comes good. The storm scenes represent the stages of Lear's purification in which he makes a pilgrimage from his original state of ignorance, anger, egoism and pride to knowledge, altruism, humility and love. Unable to stomach the infernal treatment from his two "unnatural hags", (II.iv.273) Lear abandons human society and chooses to seek sanctuary in the tempest-lashed heath and "To be a comrade with the wolf and the owl". (II.iv. 205) Suffused with hatred for mankind and hankering after revenge, he passionately apostrophizes the storm, appeals to the "cataracts and hurricanoes" (III.ii.2) to drown the world, and calls upon the thunder to annihilate the entire human race if this is the only way to eradicate the sin of ingratitude from the world:

> And thou, all-shaking thunder,
> Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world,
> Crack Nature's moulds, all germains spill at once,
> That makes ingrateful man.
> (III.ii.6-9)

While Lear has formerly invoked the goddess Nature (I.iv. 266) to punish Goneril, in the ecstasy of wrath he now reviles the gods who send the storm for aligning with his ungrateful daughters:

> But yet I call you servile ministers,
> That will with two pernicious daughters join
> Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head
> So old and white as this.
> (III.ii.21-24)

Later, in his obsession with man's iniquity, he sees the storm as sent by the gods as a means of coercing criminals to confess their evil:

> Tremble, thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes
> Unwhipped of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
> Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue
> That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
> That under covert and convenient seeming
> Has practised on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,
> Rive your concealing continents and cry
> These dreadful summoners grace.
> (III.ii.51-59)

Now he believes that he is a man "More sinned against than sinning". (III.ii.60)

Henceforth, Lear will turn his suffering to profit. He begins to learn through suffering some of the duties he neglected as king. Prior to his exposure to the storm, he has been a domineering, egoistic, irascible, impulsive and proud old monarch. Even though he does not feel the storm because his inner suffering is greater, Lear for the very first time looks outside of himself when he consents to

accept shelter in the hovel not for himself but for his fool: "Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee." (III.ii.72-73) After deprecating filial ingratitude, he then considers Kent's need before his own: "Prithee go in thyself; seek thine own ease". (III.iv.23) Battered by the storm and reduced to a minimal existence, the once arrogant king kneels in humility and prays compassionately for the poor, recalling his own indifference to suffering humanity and appealing to the wealthy to be charitable to the poor:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall you houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed 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.
> (III.iv.28-36)

So it is only when Lear experiences the state of direst want that he learns to be charitable.

Lear's interaction with Edgar, disguised as a Bedlam beggar, is an important stage in Lear's purgatory, for it confirms Lear's belief that civilization is only a veneer covering the beast within man. Having left society because of the hypocrisy of his daughters' love, Lear, who once held sway over a kingdom and fed his ego with the flattery of his court, now finds himself destitute on a

tempestuous heath with the last relics of his splendid court--a servant and a fool. To him the naked beggar in the primitive hovel symbolizes true, unsophisticated man:

> Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the silk 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. (III.iv.97-102)

Man's clothes, conventions and deceptive reason symbolize a corrupt society. It is when man is divested of his clothes and reason that he becomes "the thing itself", pure, simple man, "a thing of elemental, instinctive life".[32]

Lear's absorption with injustice and corruption leads him to hold the mock trial of Goneril and Regan. The trial scene reaches the height of pathos as a mad king arraigns his inhuman daughters before a fool, a servant and a beggar. The Bedlam beggar is the "robed man of justice", (III.iv.36) the fool is "his yoke fellow of equity", (III. vi.37) and Kent is "o' th' commission". (III.vi.38) In the midst of the "trial" Lear exclaims that the court is corrupt. What he discovers is that man's justice is not perfect. Still desiring to know the main-spring and ultimate source of his daughters' evil, he asks whether evil

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[32] G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London, 1962), p. 184.

is derived from nature: "Then let them anatomize Regan. See what breeds about her heart. Is there a cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III.vi.74-76)

Shakespeare is making a grave indictment against human justice. The "trial" of the two ungrateful daughters by a mad king, a fool, a beggar and a servant indicates that man's justice is a mockery. Immediately after this mock trial Shakespeare presents us with a travesty of justice. Gloucester is being tried by the corrupt justicer, Cornwall, who is blinded by his own mania for vengeance upon his victim. For this miscarriage of justice, Cornwall is slain by his own servant. We may also recall that the play begins with the mal-administration of justice when Lear is goaded on by wounded pride to pass judgement on Cordelia and Kent.

It is singularly appropriate that Lear should be punished with insanity since his errors are of the mind and will; he felt his judgement was flawless. Paradoxically Lear gains wisdom when he loses his sanity, for in his recurring moments of vision, he sees through the trappings of society--morality, clothes, justice and so on--to the inner reality of human nature. Civilization is only a means of hiding man's evil nature. "Man's morality, his realism, his justice--all are false and rotten to the core."[33]

When Lear reappears on-stage (IV.vi) he continues

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[33] Ibid., p. 192.

his declamation against man's evil nature and universal injustice. This time he is a judge passing sentence on adultery. A man, he says, should not be executed for adultery, implying that a man is as lecherous as the beast:

> Adultery?
> Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No.
> The wren goes to 't, and the small gilded fly
> Does lecher in my sight.
> Let copulation thrive.
> (IV.vi.109-113)

In addition, Lear remarks that Gloucester's bastard son was kinder, as he believes, to his father than Lear's daughters. From his defence of adultery Lear moves on to expose women's hypocrisy. The seemingly virtuous dame will listen with pleasure to the very mention of sexual indulgences. Women are animals down from their waists because they are pulled down by their passions:

> Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
> Though women all above.
> But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
> Beneath is all the fiend's.
> There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit; burning, scalding, stench, consumption.
> (IV.vi.123-128)

Lear finally denounces the hypocrisy and futility of universal justice. Absolute, incorruptible justice does not exist. He expresses his contempt for, and mockery of, man's justice thus:

> A man may see how this world goes with no eyes.
> Look with thine ears. See how yond justice
> rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine
> ear: change places and, handy-dandy, which
> is the justice, which is the thief?
> (IV.vi.148-152)

Those authorized to carry out justice are as corrupt as their victims. The beadle who whips the whore is himself consumed with lust for her. It is a mockery and an incongruity that a judge who practises usury, and is therefore the big cheat, should pass the death sentence on the little cheat. The sins of the poor are conspicuous; those of the wealthy and powerful are hidden. Justice, therefore, is impeded by class-distinction:

> Plate sin with gold.
> And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
> Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
> (IV.vi.162-164)

In utter despair Lear concludes that "None does offend", (IV.vi.165) for he recognizes that in a flawed world all alike are prone to sin and all need mercy.

Lear's suffering is incommensurate with his errors. In his mental purgatory he acknowledges and repents his unjust treatment of Cordelia. When they meet again, he thinks that Cordelia is looking down from heaven at him in purgatory where he is bound "Upon a wheel of fire". (IV.vii. 47) The once inflexible, proud monarch is now ready to kneel in humility before Cordelia. (IV.vi.188) After his protracted mental torment, he now rediscovers true love in

Cordelia, but his ecstasy is ephemeral as fate intervenes to sever them again. He apotheosizes Cordelia for the devotion and love she has shown in her attempt to reinstate him: "Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, / The gods themselves throw incense." (V.iii.20-21) In his speech, "Come let's away to prison," (V.ii.8-19) he renounces the world and wants to retire in bliss with Cordelia. Cordelia's death, however, is gratuitous and horrible, and an irony of fate. She is hanged by a common soldier in the midst of friends merely because of Edmund's inexplicable delay in countermanding his order for her execution.[34]

In his presentation of Gloucester, Shakespeare demonstrates, as with Lear, how an individual can be ennobled and regenerated by suffering in a world steeped in evil. Like Lear, Gloucester is not an evil man, though his character is tarnished by his original sin of lust and by his injustice to his legitimate son Edgar; both his lust and injustice earn him excessive retribution. He is too embarrassed to acknowledge Edmund as his bastard son but jocularly declares that Edmund is the offspring of his lust: "Yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged". (I.i.

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[34] I cannot find any clear reason in the text to explain why Edmund delays so long before attempting to save Lear and Cordelia. He countermands his order for their execution only when Albany asks him about the safety of Lear and Cordelia. By this time Cordelia has already been executed.

21-22) Gloucester must therefore bear the ultimate responsibility for Edmund's evil since he has created Edmund by committing adultery.

In furthering his evil intention, Edmund exploits Gloucester's simplicity, gullibility and superstition. By means of a forged letter Edmund lures Gloucester into believing that Edgar is scheming to oust Gloucester from his property on the ground that "sons at perfect age, and fathers declined, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage the revenue." (I.ii.71-73) Gloucester too readily accepts Edmund's calumny of Edgar without making any effort to demand a hearing from Edgar. He is simply prepared to rely on Edmund's initiative to find out Edgar's intention. Edmund accordingly manipulates his father into committing the injustice of disinheriting his loyal son. There is a recurrence of the motif of illegitimacy when Gloucester repudiates his legitimate son in these words: "I never got him." (II.i.78) and decides to make his villainous bastard his heir:

> and of my land,
> Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
> To make thee capable.
> (II.i.83-85)

Like Lear and Kent, Gloucester too is profoundly concerned about the universal prevalence of evil. Having recently witnessed Lear's abdication, his division of

the kingdom, the repudiation of Cordelia, Kent's banishment and the angry departure of the King of France, Gloucester is now informed of his son's alleged scheme to supplant him. Because he is superstitious, he thinks that the recent eclipse of the sun and moon have portended the evil now overshadowing the realm:

> These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction, there's son against father; the king falls from bias in nature, there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. (I.ii.101-112)

Edmund certainly finds this superstition conducive to implementing his evil scheme when he reports to Gloucester his unsuccessful attempts to apprehend Edgar:

> Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
> Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon
> To stand auspicious mistress.
> (II.i.38-40)

The fortunes of Gloucester illustrate that he like Lear is punished for his follies which permit evil to flourish. Gloucester is blinded for his inability to see when he had eyes. His extra-marital incursions, induced by lust, have produced Edmund, the embodiment of evil,

and ultimately brought about his blindness. Edgar makes the connection between Gloucester's lust and blindness in this magisterial pronouncement to the expiring Edmund:

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him his eyes.
> (V.iii.171-174)

Gloucester's simplicity of nature and credibility also add to his blindness. Misconstruing Edmund's deceptive appearance for reality, Gloucester has implicit faith in him. He blindly credits Edmund's slandering of Edgar, informs Edmund about the division between Albany and Cornwall, and makes him privy of his secret support for Lear. (III. iii.7-18) The consequence is well known. Edmund informs Cornwall about Gloucester's plan; Gloucester is blinded; Edmund displaces him as the new duke.

But out of Edmund's evil comes good. Like Lear, Gloucester undergoes excessive retribution through which he is cleansed and he eventually finds peace. When blind he becomes as philosophical as the mad Lear. In the paradoxical inversion of madness and wisdom of the play, Lear is sane when mad, while Gloucester sees when blind. Gloucester stumbled when he saw and now finds that his present affliction is an advantage, for when blind he sees his injustice to Edgar. (IV.i.18-24)

Moreover, in their adversity, Lear and Gloucester

learn to be altruistic and charitable. Lear remembers his indifference to the poor only when he experiences the storm as an outcast and a pauper. The blind Gloucester rejoices in his charity when he gives his purse to a Bedlam beggar. As happiness wells out from his heart because of his charitable deed, he prays that the wealthy should follow suit so that there may be an equitable distribution of wealth:

> Heavens, deal so still!
> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your pow'r quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough.
> (IV.i.66-71)

Edgar seems to have a special role to play in Gloucester's purgatory. When Gloucester is at the nadir of despair after he has been blinded, Edgar intervenes to guide him out of despair to peace, and to alleviate his father's isolation and misfortunes, he constantly exhorts him to endure his lot with stoic patience. In his unswerving resolve to fight the forces of evil, Edgar gains more confidence when he measures his misfortune against the mad king's and the blind Gloucester's.

Gloucester renounces the world through utter disillusionment and attempts to end his life, but Edgar impresses upon his father's mind the need to endure his purgatory and not to violate the divine ordinance by

committing suicide:

> Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
> Ripeness is all.
> (V.ii.9-11)

Gloucester's life exemplifies his philosophical utterance: "Our means secure us, and our mere defects / Prove our commodities". (IV.i.21-22) Physical torture, brought about by his defective judgement and by his lust, purifies and regenerates him. Some of the ennobling attributes of his nature emerge when he is at the bottom of fortune's wheel. He is at one with suffering humanity and learns to be charitable. He dies at a happy moment when he is reconciled to his son Edgar:

> his flawed heart--...
> 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
> Burst smilingly.
> (V.iii.197;199-200)

In King Lear Shakespeare presents us with a world in which there is conflict between the forces of good and evil. On the one hand, there are the forces of good--Cordelia, Kent, Edgar and the fool. Kent and the fool are exceptionally loyal to Lear. The injustice received from Lear does not diminish Kent's loyalty to Lear especially in Lear's moments of greatest need. Cordelia and Edgar do not lose their extraordinary love and piety for their fathers who repudiate them. On the other hand, are the

diabolical quintet--Edmund, Goneril, Regan, Albany and Oswald whose unlimited capacity for evil casts a dark shadow over the world until dispelled in the fifth act. The strength, ruthlessness, callousness and cruelty of the evil characters prompted Dr. Johnson to describe King Lear as a play in which "the wicked prosper and the virtuous miscarry".[35] Of course, this is not entirely true, for in King Lear the wicked are eventually vanquished, and good is reaffirmed. In their barbarity the wicked characters have in effect shed the last vestige of their humanity and have regressed into bestiality. The persistently recurring animal imagery of the play, with which I have already dealt, is designed to remind us how utterly abnormal and hideously unnatural are the wicked. A.C. Bradley remarks:

> In no other of his tragedies does humanity appear more pitiably infirm or more hopelessly bad. What is Iago's malignity against an envied stranger compared with the cruelty of the son of Gloucester and the daughters of Lear?[36]

At various stages in the play, Lear, Kent and Gloucester, as they marvel at the prevalence and magnitude of evil, keep on asking themselves whether the evil of a Goneril or

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[35] Samuel Johnson, An extract from the Preface and Notes of his edition, 1765, in Frank Kermode, ed., Shakespeare: King Lear: A Casebook (London, 1969), p. 29.

[36] A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, (London, 1963), p. 225.

whether civil discord is traceable to nature or astrology. In my treatment of Edmund, Goneril, Regan, Albany and Oswald, I will try to discuss their motivation for evil and the ways in which their evil is actualized. I shall begin with Edmund.

Let it be said at the very outset that like Richard III, Edmund has no justifiable reason for villainy. In fact, he himself says that of his own volition he chooses to be as he is, but more of this later. Of course, there are circumstances outside of his control which are likely to develop his potentials for evil, and for this reason one sympathizes with him to some extent. One such circumstance occurs at the very beginning of the play. In the presence of Edmund and Kent, Gloucester admits how embarrassing it is for him to acknowledge paternity of the bastard Edmund and speaks of Edmund's mother with considerable disrespect and flippancy. Coleridge very accurately describes Edmund's mortification at the damaging effect upon his mind of Gloucester's attitude:

> He [Edmund] hears his mother and the circumstances of his birth spoken of with a most degrading and licentious levity...this is the ever-trickling flow of wormwood and gall into the wounds of pride, the corrosive virus which inoculates pride with a venom not its own, with envy, hatred...pangs of shame personally undeserved and therefore felt as wrongs, and a blind ferment of vindictive workings towards the occasions and causes, especially towards a brother whose stainless birth and lawful honours were the constant remembrancers of <u>his</u> debasement

> and were ever in the way to prevent all chance
> of its being unknown or overlooked and
> forgotten.[37]

The other circumstance is that of his birth. Edmund's soliloquy in I.ii.1-22 is his manifesto for evil, but it is riddled with inconsistencies. He wants to be Gloucester's heir even though he cannot be for two obvious reasons. First, he is a bastard while his brother, Edgar, is legitimate. Secondly, even if he were Gloucester's legitimate offspring, the law of primogeniture, observed by the nobility, would forbid him to inherit Gloucester's estates since Edgar is the elder son.

To surmount these obstacles, Edmund advances a distorted argument to justify the unscrupulous means he will use to steal Edgar's patrimony. He argues that because of his illegitimate birth he stands outside the established social order and consequently owes allegiance not to any conventional, man-made laws of society, but to the laws of nature:

> 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 moonshines
> Lag of a brother?
> (I.ii.1-6)

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[37] S.T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed., T.M. Raysor (London, 1967), I,51.

Edmund is not acknowledging any divinity in Nature; he is rather advocating for himself a state of nature, which is not heaven-ordained, but one in which he can give free reins to his wanton passions. In other words, he erroneously thinks that he is free to flout the laws of the social order. By adhering to such a manifesto, he will be an anomaly in a society where order and stability are fostered by laws. Edmund should therefore abjure society and dwell with the beasts whose survival depends on sheer ruthlessness and strength. One of the ironies of the play is that whereas Lear rejects society when he recognizes his daughters' inhumanity, Edmund, who considers himself a basic animal by virtue of his bastard birth, nonetheless stays in society but as a predator. However, since he chooses to remain in society he ought to renounce his avowed principles, based on the primitive law of the jungle. In his drive for power he is consciously choosing evil. This may be his way of avenging himself on society for the stigma of his birth, for he is styled a bastard by the man-made laws of society.

To some extent one's sympathy is with Edmund when he argues that he ought not to be branded with baseness of birth inasmuch as he has had no part in predetermining the nature of his origin. Besides, Nature has not singled him out with any physical deformity to commemorate his dishonourable birth. In fact, he assures the audience that

he is a perfect specimen of his kind, boasting of youth, vigour and beauty of form:

> 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?
> (I.ii.6-9)

He wittily and gratifyingly points out that having been created in the secrecy of natural vigour and lust, he is endowed with

> More composition and fierce quality
> Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed
> Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops
> Got 'tween asleep and wake.
> (I.ii.12-15)

However, while one may commiserate with Richard III for his physical deformity and with Edmund for his bastardy, it behoves one to remember that neither physical deformity nor illegitimacy of birth is an excuse for villainy. Like Richard III, Edmund chooses to do evil out of his own free will and even tells us this. Also, like Cassius and Iago, Edmund is a pragmatist, believing in

the individual will.[38] He mocks Gloucester for his superstitious belief in astrology and states that a man ought to accept responsibility for his evil and not extenuate or condone it by making the heavens culpable for his own frailties. This statement inevitably leads Edmund to accept responsibility for his evil; he admits that he would be "rough and lecherous" irrespective of what stars were in the ascendant at his birth.

As agents of evil both Richard III and Edmund distinguish themselves by their monumental egoism. Both pursue their own ambitions with absolute singlemindedness of purpose. Richard makes no distinction between friend or foe; all alike are sacrificed so that he can become king and remain king for as long as brute force will allow. Richard best describes his egoism thus: "I am myself alone."

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[38] Iago strongly believes that a man has complete control over shaping his own destiny by the exercise of his free will. He tells Roderigo:

> 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are gardens, to which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender or herbs or distract it with many--either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry--why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. (Othello, I.iii.319-326)

Similarly Cassius tells Brutus that a man is the architect of his destiny:

> Men at some time are masters of their fates:
> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves... (Julius Caesar, I.ii.140-142)

(3 King Henry VI, V.vi.83) Edmund is essentially the same. As a son of "nature" he conveniently puts himself outside the pale of the law so as to have complete freedom in fraudently furthering his evil ambition. His egoism drives him at first to dispossess his brother and later to aim at the crown, using duplicity and ruthlessness to gain his objectives.

Often enough in Shakespeare evil characters have an irresistible appeal to the audience because of their lively wit and the artistry with which they execute their evil schemes. Richard III's witticisms are very entertaining; he has a flair for histrionics and he is a consummate Machiavel. Iago too is witty. For instance, while he waits with Desdemona, Emilia, and Cassio for Othello's arrival in Cyprus, he teasingly generalizes about women in these words:

> You are pictures out of doors,
> Bells in your parlours, wildcats in your kitchens,
> Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
> Players in your housewifery, and housewives in
> your beds.
> (Othello, II.i.109-112)

It is with amazing skill that Iago contrives his plots; he executes them with artistry and takes great pleasure watching his victims trapped and suffer.

Edmund too is witty and artistic. Although he is cruel and savage, the gaiety of his lighter side makes him

very appealing. He certainly elicits laughter when concluding the soliloquy about his bastard birth with this humorous note: "Now gods, stand up for bastards." (II.ii.23) In the forged letter which succeeds in leading Gloucester to believe that Edgar is the impatient heir, Edmund is privately having fun at Gloucester's expense when he writes: "I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny, who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffered." (I.ii.47-50) Again, Edmund is very ironic as he warns Edgar about a plot against him:

> Edgar: Some villain hath done me wrong.
> Edmund: That's my fear. I pray you have a continent forbearance till the speed of his rage goes slower; and, as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly bring you to hear my lord speak. Pray ye, go; there's my key. If you do stir abroad, go armed.
> Edgar: Armed, brother?
> Edmund: Brother, I advise you to the best. Go armed. I am no honest man if there be any good meaning toward you.
> (I.ii.159-168)

In presenting Edmund's villainy Shakespeare is to some extent indebted to Sir Philip Sidney.[39] In one of the episodes of his Arcadia Sidney narrates how the simple-minded King of Iberia is tricked by his second wife into believing that his virtuous son Plangus is plotting to

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[39] Sir Philip Sidney, (An extract from) The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 408-409.

overthrow him. At first the wicked queen would praise Plangus, her step-son, before the king so as to convince the king that she loves Plangus. Once she has gained the king's confidence, she begins to praise Plangus with the malicious intention of making the king suspicious of him. Having aroused the king's suspicion, she craftily strengthens it by professedly trying to defend Plangus from suspicion.

Edmund uses Sidney's wicked queen's technique to set Gloucester against Edgar in Act I, scene ii. The forged letter does antagonize Gloucester, and Edmund knows that any attempt to exonerate Edgar would only exasperate the father the more. This technique, however, is only one of the facets of duplicity, and Edmund, like Richard III, is adept at this game. Edmund is a Machiavel, an actor and an artist in evil.

Edmund, like Richard, is playing a role and gambling for high stakes. He at first assigns himself the role of a predator upon society, arguing, evidently for his own convenience, that as a son of "nature", he is absolved from the need to obey the laws of society. In his first meeting with Edgar, (I.ii.130-170) Edmund continues his role-playing, this time pretending to be worried by the ills portended by the recent eclipses. Edmund of course believes in free will and has already discredited astrology. He easily whisks Edgar off the

stage after making the latter believe that he has offended Gloucester. Again Edmund impresses one with his theatrical resourcefulness in engineering a mock duel with Edgar and in wounding himself so as to show a wound he has received in refusing to commit parricide at his brother's instigation. Edmund drops the mask after being fatally wounded by Edgar and accepts Edgar's pronouncement about divine justice with this theatrical reply: "Th' hast spoken right; 'tis true; / The wheel's come full circle; I am here." (V.iii.174-175)

Edmund is one of the few of Shakespeare's villains to repent. It is very difficult to account for the last minute repentance of one who has all along epitomized evil, ruthlessness and absolute self-interest. Perhaps he repents because he now realizes that the role-playing is over and he is not nearer to the enviable prize of the crown. He no longer regards himself as an outlaw and he concurs with Edgar about the divine justice involved in Gloucester's blindness and now in his own approaching death. After listening to Edgar's account of Gloucester's death, Edmund says that he meant to do some good:

> Some good I mean to do,
> Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send--
> Be brief in it--to th' castle, for my writ
> Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.
> (V.iii.244-247)

Not surprisingly, the only good Edmund tries to do is

botched up. Because of his inexplicable delay, the order for the execution of Lear and Cordelia is countermanded only after Cordelia has been hanged in jail.

It is extraordinary that Edmund is only once described in terms of animal imagery. This is when Edgar calls him "A toad-spotted traitor." (V.iii.139) Goneril and Regan, however, are always compared to vicious animals. Richard III is continuously being cascaded with animal images. Probably Shakespeare is sparing in using animal images in reference to Edmund because he has already made the point (I.ii.1-22) that Edmund is virtually an animal once he decides that his illegitimate birth gives him the right to flout the laws of society.

To the evil characters goodness is almost synonymous with stupidity. Edmund is contemptuous of his brother's nobility, for Edgar's "foolish honesty" (I.ii. 174) makes him vulnerable to Edmund's machinations. Edmund thus dismisses two men whose goodness and unsuspecting nature make them gulls:

> A credulous father, and a brother noble,
> Whose nature is so far from doing harms
> That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
> My practices ride easy.
> (I.ii.172-175)

Similarly, Goneril sees virtue as weakness and foolishness. In her lust and blind drive for power, she thinks that Albany is rendered impotent by his moral concerns. In IV.

ii.24-87 Goneril makes no secret about her implacable hatred for her husband's goodness. His reprimand about her inhuman treatment of her father is a "foolish" text; she calls Albany a "Milk-livered man," "a moral fool" and "a vain fool". In this play goodness is presented as pitiably weak most of the time. Lear, Gloucester, Edgar and Kent are reduced to fools and beggars; Cordelia becomes the fool of chance in her unnecessary death.

I have already discussed the animal images other characters use with reference to Goneril and Regan. In his puzzlement over his two elder daughters' limitless capacity for evil, Lear sees them as vicious animals and bastards. As Lear, Kent, Albany and Gloucester try to grapple with the question of evil, they create the impression that evil is an impenetrable and inscrutable mystery of the universe. In King Lear Shakespeare shows that while evil has such a vast potential for destruction it carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. By conquering evil, good will reassert itself, but in the struggle both the wicked and the innocent suffer.

On the surface, there is some plausibility in the motivation of Goneril and Regan. In the prose dialogues concluding Act I, scene i, Goneril, the more aggressive of the two sisters, says that Cordelia has been Lear's favourite daughter: "He always loved our sister most" (I. i.294-295) This is corroborated by Lear's folly in

banishing Kent and severing ties with Cordelia. Fearing Lear's unsound mind, therefore, Goneril concludes thus: "...if our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us." (I.i.302-304) Goneril offers a not unreasonable explanation for halving Lear's train, even though this is a violation of her tacit agreement that Lear should have a hundred knights. Lear's wrathful outbursts and curses confirm Goneril's assessment of the unbalanced state of his mind and indicate that Lear really cannot look after himself.

Unquestionably, Goneril and Regan envisage problems with Lear because of his irascible temperament and the deteriorating condition of his mind. However, their concerted effort to deprive Lear of any residue of authority is dictated not so much out of a sense of genuine grievance as out of premeditated villainy and a malignant will. It is made much clearer in the old play <u>King Leir</u> (II.171-178) that it is Gonorill's and Ragan's avowed intention to oust Cordella from her entrenched position in Leir's affection merely out of malicious revenge. In Shakespeare's play the sense that there is something overdone in the hyperbolical declaration of love by Goneril and Regan, the commentary of Cordelia's asides, and Kent's bold intervention on Cordelia's behalf all make one sceptical of the integrity of Lear's elder daughters. Moreover, Cordelia's

parting comment strengthens one's suspicion of the villainous propensity of Goneril and Regan. She tells them:

> I know you what you are;
> And, like a sister, am most loath to call
> Your faults as they are named. Love well our father.
> To your professed bosoms I commit him.
> (I.i.269-272)

There is no adequate motivation behind the evil of Goneril and Regan other than the prompting of their depraved, virulent minds. The shameless speed with which they proceed to reduce Lear to impotence and destitution is an act of sheer horror rather than a credit to their promptness in anticipating and forestalling future intramural bickering. Besides, Goneril's first clash with Lear has been premeditated. She exploits Lear's irascibility for her own ends. By setting her servant Oswald against Lear, she precipitates a conflict from which Lear is to emerge second best. When Lear bursts out with uncontrollable wrath and utter frustration into the storm, Regan and Cornwall make some irresponsible comments, symptomatic of their incorrigibility:

> Regan: O, sir, to wilful men
> The injuries that they themselves procure
> Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.
> He is attended with a desperate train,
> And what they may incense him to, being apt
> To have his ear abused, wisdom bids fear.
> Cornwall: Shut up your doors, my lord; 'tis a
> wild night.
> My Regan counsels well. Come out o' th' storm.
> (II.iv.297-304)

Goneril and Regan are exceptional characters in Shakespeare in that they are completely evil and therefore have no redeeming qualities. Their unnaturalness, outrageous wickedness, their kinship with vicious animals and their diabolical nature are stressed throughout the play. Though one will unhesitatingly condemn these two sisters, one is simultaneously filled with awe and wonder at their insatiable appetite for wickedness. Enid Welsford says: "The real horror [of Lear's tragedy] lies not in the fact that Goneril and Regan can cause the death of their father but that they can apparently destroy his human integrity."[40] Lear calls them both "unnatural hags". (II.iv.273) By her ingratitude, Goneril is a "marble hearted fiend", (I.iv. 250) says Lear. Having heard how Goneril and Regan treated their father, Albany describes these two daughters as "Most barbarous, most degenerate", IV.ii.43) deeming their action a "deformity" which "seems not in the fiend / So horrid as in woman". (IV.ii.60-61)

Shakespeare does differentiate between these two monsters of evil. Goneril is the more aggressive of the two; she is the one with initiative and leadership. While she is more forthright in evil, Regan is more cruel and sadistic. It is Goneril's idea that they should expeditiously proceed against Lear, and it is Goneril who sets

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[40] Enid Welsford, "The Fool in King Lear", in Frank Kermode, ed., Shakespeare: King Lear: A Casebook, (London, 1969), p. 142.

Oswald against Lear to hasten the crisis. She plots with Edmund to have her husband Albany murdered; she poisons Regan in the competition for Edmund; and she and Edmund sign the warrant for Cordelia's execution in prison. Goneril's last words in the play typify her fiendish defiance, for when confronted with the letter she wrote to Edmund concerning the plot to have Albany despatched, she replies: "Say if I do--the laws are mine, not thine. / Who can arraign me for 't?", (V.iii.159-160) thereby claiming sovereignty above the law. Her last damnable act is suicide.

Regan, on the other hand, is not less evil but more sadistic than Goneril. Regan is cold and callous and derives demonic satisfaction from torturing her victims. After listening to Lear's complain of Goneril's unkindness, she coldly exonerates Goneril:

> I cannot think my sister in the least
> Would fail her obligation. If, sir, perchance
> She have restrained the riots of your followers,
> 'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
> As clears her from all blame,
> (II.iv.136-140)

and counsels her father to submit and apologize to Goneril:

> You should be ruled, and led
> By some discretion that discerns your state
> Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
> That to our sister you do make return;
> Say you have wronged her.
> (II.iv.143-147)

Earlier Regan not only joins her husband in humiliating Kent but also displays her cruelty:

> Cornwall: Fetch forth the stocks. As I have
> life and honour,
> There shall he sit till noon.
> Regan: Till noon? Till night, my lord, and
> all night too.
> (II.ii.128-130)

Regan chills one with her morbid appetite for torture in the scene where Gloucester is blinded. She plucks his beard, insults him and adds to his torture. When one of his eyes is gouged out, she exlaims: "One side will mock another. Th' other too." (III.vii.71) When a servant draws his sword to prevent Cornwall from completely blinding Gloucester, Regan fatally stabs the servant in the back. To torment Gloucester mentally she disillusions him by unveiling Edmund's true nature:

> Out, treacherous villain;
> Thou call'st on him that hates thee. It was he
> That made the overture of thy treasons to us;
> Who is too good to pity thee,
> (III.vii.87-90)

and spurns him with her grotesque witticism: "Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell / His way to Dover." (III. vii.93-94)

Evil characters in <u>King Lear</u> are presented in their darkest, most sinister and monstrous forms. They are destructive and, except for Edmund's last minute repentance

and desire to make amends, devoid of human goodness. Oswald's fidelity to an evil mistress should not be misconstrued for goodness. Coleridge says of Oswald: "The Steward (as a contrast to Kent) [is] the only character of utter unredeemable baseness in Shakespeare."[41] Evil proliferates because nefarious characters pursue their goals with relentless savagery while the good characters appear to be weak because they are incapable of acting contrary to their nature. But evil does not prosper. All the wicked characters die, but not all the good. Goneril, Regan and Oswald die without any concern for a troubled conscience. There is an acknowledgement of divine justice in the deaths of the wicked. The complete egoism among the wicked inevitably leads to their own destruction. Their mutual lust for Edmund breeds antagonism between Goneril and Regan with the result that one poisons the other before her own suicide. Albany ascribes the deaths to the "judgement of the heavens". (V.iii.232) Edmund's willingness to make a ladder of anyone's back to cope with his growing megalomania settles his fate, and he implicitly agrees that his approaching death is a result of divine retribution. Oswald, the "post unsanctified / Of murderous lechers" (IV.vi.269-270) deserves an "untimely death" (IV.vi.246) in his villainous service. Cornwall, a

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[41] S.T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed., T.M. Raysor (London, 1967), I,55.

false justicer, listening to his blind passion for vengeance as he plucks out Gloucester's eyes, tastes his own rough justice when ignominiously killed by his own servant. Cornwall's deserved death reassures Albany in his belief in divine justice:

> This shows you are above,
> You justicers, that these our nether crimes
> So speedily can venge.
> (IV.ii.79-81)

Lastly, I wish to examine very briefly the role of the good characters in King Lear, namely, Edgar, Cordelia, Kent and the Fool. As Bradley nicely puts it, "And if here is 'very Night herself', she comes 'with stars in her raiment'".[42] The extraordinary loyalty, love and goodness of these four characters are as much to be marvelled at as the extreme evil of Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald. Perhaps, as Wilson Knight says, "...men here are good or bad in and by themselves. Goodness and cruelty flower naturally, spontaneously."[43] But the good characters have unwittingly contributed to the upsurge of evil. Cordelia's absolute honesty and unselfishness cause her to be inflexible and unobliging to Lear's whim for flattery. By obstinately refusing to flatter Lear or vie in a public love contest, as it were, she alienates Lear

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[42] A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1963), p. 253.

[43] G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London, 1962), p. 194.

and leaves him at the mercy of her two wicked sisters. Kent, "having more man than wit", (II.iv.41) is, strictly speaking, disobedient and is accordingly responsible for his banishment. His angry protest against flagrant injustice is commendable but it was indiscreet to come "between the dragon and his wrath". (I.i.122) Edgar's unsuspecting nature makes him vulnerable to Edmund's scheme: hence his implicit faith at first in a brother and his reluctance to meet Gloucester forthwith to demand an explanation all help to favour Edmund's evil. The Fool does not contribute to the prevalence of evil but it is not inappropriate to mention that Goneril regards him as a natural antagonist since he always perceives the truth and since he is outspoken in his criticism. No wonder when Goneril clashes head-on with Lear in I.iv.191-301 she shoots her first bolt upon the Fool: "Not only sir, this your all-licenced fool." (I.iv.191) Notwithstanding their accidental contribution towards the incipient evil, these characters wage, each in his own way, an incessant war against evil, and their imperishable love, loyalty and devotion are eventually triumphant. Their love and selflessness take on an added lustre as they strive in the lowest depths of adversity for the cause of right.

Edgar, disguised as a Bedlam beggar, adds a new dimension to the world of Lear. His dissimulated madness helps to bring about Lear's insanity. The appearance of

an ill-clothed beggar makes Lear and Gloucester realize the nearness of man's life to the beast's. Lear sheds his clothes in order to imitate unsophisticated man, an animal in reality; Gloucester is reminded that a man is a "worm". (IV.i.33) Edgar's preoccupation with his poverty, his possession by devils and the seven deadly sins are designed not just to conceal his identity but also to make one aware of poverty and the inexplicable evil rampant in the world.

In a world where the passions of the wicked run riot, Edgar remains untarnished because of his innate, unassailable virtues, his patience in adversity, his belief in returning good for evil, his reluctance to kill except in the cause of righteousness and justice, and his exhortations to his father against despair. Even though estranged from his father, proscribed and is

> bethought
> To take the basest and most poorest shape
> That ever penury, in contempt of man,
> Brought near to beast,
> (II.iii.6-9)

still he has the resourcefulness and buoyancy of spirit which keep him above despair. Moreover, Edgar is being elevated and purified by adversity. While himself overwhelmed by distress he can still commiserate with the insane king and his blind father. By constantly measuring his miseries against those of Lear and Gloucester, he

finds that his have become "light and portable". (III.vi.106) He welcomes the "unsubstantial air" (IV.i.7) because

> To be worst,
> The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
> Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.
> The lamentable change is from the best;
> The worst returns to laughter.
> (IV.i.2-6)

Edgar is able to triumph over despair because of his deep religious sense. He extends charity and love to Gloucester who has previously been unjust to him. Gloucester is told that he has been tempted to leap from the dizzy cliff by a fiend but has been miraculously preserved by the gods. He counsels his father not to surrender to despair by committing suicide but to await the appointed hour, the hour of "ripeness". (V.ii.11) Edgar's trumpet symbolically summons Edmund to judgement. Edmund is above all false to the gods, says Edgar. At the overthrow of the forces of evil, Edgar, like Richmond in King Richard the Third, emerges as the man of destiny. Richmond promises to heal the nation's wounds, inflicted by the century-old civil wars, and to bring unity, peace and prosperity. Edgar is invited to "Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain." (V.iii.321) It is true that a civil war between Albany and Cornwall has been averted; nevertheless Britain has had to deal with a foreign invasion and now depends on Edgar and Albany to inaugurate a new, and better order, based on justice and love.

In King Lear one witnesses "the crowning and the apotheosis of the Fool".[44] Shakespeare does not include the Fool merely to provide comic relief; the Fool makes one laugh rather uncomfortably, for he intensifies rather than alleviates the tragedy. Though he appears somewhat tainted in his wits, he is nevertheless an inspired fool who with his intuitive perception of the truth constantly anatomizes Lear's folly. In this respect, he figures almost as a chorus while at the same time he throws salt in Lear's wounds by means of his incisive comments.

The pathos of Lear's tragedy is heightened by the very subtle interplay between King and Fool. The Fool, though wise, is considered foolish and functions as the embodiment of Lear's conscience, pointing out what Lear is too proud to admit. Lear's tragedy is consummated when he is stripped of his kingdom, of his self-respect, of the wherewithal for a minimal existence, and of his mental integrity. He is degraded to the condition of the lowest menial, isolated on a tempest-lashed heath, and accompanied by a fool, a servant and a Bedlam beggar.

After the "trial" scene the Fool disappears from the play with his last despairing jest that he will go to bed at noon. Although Shakespeare rather perfunctorily drops the Fool from the play without giving precise information about his fate, the Fool is no longer needed after Lear becomes the inspired fool upon acquiring "Reason in

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[44] Enid Welsford, "The Fool in King Lear", in Frank Kermode, ed., Shakespeare: King Lear: A Casebook (London, 1969), p. 149.

madness" (IV.vi.172) In the scene when the mad king and the blind Duke of Gloucester, led by a seemingly mad Bedlam beggar, meet, Lear adequately demonstrates he is now the fool and wise man rolled in one. In moments of inspiration he wrestles with the theme of universal injustice; at other times he relapses into insanity. Miss Welsford argues that the Fool's disappearance is a matter of poetic necessity, for the king, having lost everything, including

> his wits, has now himself become the Fool. He has touched bottom, he is an outcast from society, he has no longer any private axe to grind, so he now sees and speaks the truth.[45]

Kent, like Cordelia and Edgar, is the complete antithesis of Goneril, Regan and Edmund. Kent commends himself to our affection and admiration because of his resplendent virtues of loyalty, love and fellow-feeling, attributes of which the evil characters are completely devoid. The evil characters neither seek sympathy from their fellows nor show it; instead they distinguish themselves by their bankruptcy of humane feelings, by their lust and by their selfishness, and they dedicate all their sub-human energy and resources towards their monomaniac pursuit of power. By contrast Kent enshrines duty, love and concern for others to such an extent that

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[45] Ibid., p. 144.

though banished, he "followed his enemy king and did him service / Improper for a slave." (V.iii.221-222) Coleridge says, "Kent [is] the nearest to perfect goodness of all Shakespeare's characters."[46]

While the wicked characters never swerve from their course of complete self-interest, Kent is always motivated by love and fellow-feeling for his master. It is for Lear's benefit that he intervenes to defend Cordelia. Kent trips Oswald, who is disrespectful to the king, mainly to preserve Lear's dignity since it would be indecorous for a king to strike an insolent servant. Moreover, Kent follows Lear doggedly through the heath, always attentive to his needs, and escorts him to Dover out of pure love and duty. Even though he fails to gain recognition from his master, he is prepared to offer service to Lear even beyond the grave. That Kent does not act from self-interest is evident from his refusal to accept remuneration or to share in the rule of the realm.

In the old play, the King of France describes Cordella as "Myrrour of Vertue, Phoenix of our age!" (King Leir, l.1275) Subsequently, Perillus assures Leir that one is virtuous and charitable because of divine grace: "No worldly gifts, but grace from God on hye, / Doth nourish vertue and true charity." (King Leir, ll.1772-1773)

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[46] S.T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed., T.M. Raysor (London, 1967), I,54.

Perillus adds that Leir's unjust treatment of Cordella "makes not her love to be any lesse, / If she do love you as a child should do". (ll.1780-1781) Perillus later concludes that "the perfect good indeed, / Can never be corrupted by the bad." (ll.2065-2066) Perillus' idea about virtue, charity and perfect goodness is applicable to the good characters, and particularly to Cordelia, in Shakespeare's King Lear. Goneril, Regan and Edmund violate the closest and most fundamental family ties, the ties between children and parents. Cordelia, who epitomizes "the perfect good" by virtue of her inextinguishable love, charity, mercy and forgiveness, remains resplendent in her virtues in a world so saturated in evil.

Cordelia's transcendent love and charity force Lear to be humble and help him find love in a strife-torn world. Whereas Goneril and Regan remember only Lear's faults of rashness, capriciousness, and "unruly waywardness" (I.i.297) Cordelia always remembers that Lear is her father:

> 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.
> (I.i.96-98)

The bond between children and parents is sacred, and it will therefore be impious and inhuman to rupture it. Cordelia consequently does not remonstrate with her father against any injustice but she will always be kind and

loving to him. In the reconciliation scene when Lear says:

> If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
> I know you do not love me; for your sisters
> Have (as I do remember) done me wrong.
> You have some cause, they have not,
> (IV.vii.72-75)

Cordelia's reply is: "No cause, no cause." (IV.vii.75) It does not behove a child to engage in bitter recrimination with its parents over ancient wrongs. Cordelia, the fountainhead of love and charity, is ready to show mercy. Lear himself discovers in the scene with the blind Gloucester that since absolute justice is non-existent because no man is perfect, justice must be tempered with mercy. Lear says, "None does offend", (IV.vi.165) implying that everyone offends and everyone alike needs mercy.

Lear emerges from his purgatory a disillusioned man. He tells Gloucester:

> When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words. They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie--I am not ague-proof. (IV.vi.100-104)

Lear has undergone a thorough change in which he realizes that as king he has been beleaguered by sycophants and that absolute justice is a stranger to this world. The only reality for him is the reality of true love. He has been deceived by Goneril and Regan but when he finds love

tested and triumphant in Cordelia, he renounces the world and makes this vehement declaration; "He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven / And fire us hence like foxes." (V.iii.22-23)

Ironically, the imprisonment of Lear and Cordelia is only a transitory calm in Lear's unremitting miseries. Almost immediately Cordelia is hanged in prison. Wilson Knight describes her death as "the last hideous joke of destiny".[47] Goneril and Regan are already dead; Edmund is fatally wounded and has countermanded his orders for the execution of Lear and Cordelia. Yet she is hanged unnecessarily in consequence of her "most small fault", (I.iv. 257) and one inevitably asks why she has to die amidst her friends and why the good have to suffer more than the wicked. Shakespeare has already shown that there is no absolute justice in the world of King Lear and that the gods do not intervene in human life to redress wrongs, alleviate suffering and punish the wicked. Man has to solve his own problems. In Cordelia's death, one may still find consolation. In the struggle between the good and the evil, both the good and the evil suffer; but whereas all the evil characters die, not all the good ones die. Cordelia's death, however viewed, is tragic and undeserved but it is also a triumph of her goodness. There

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[47] G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London, 1962), p. 174.

is a glorious beauty in her death in that it is not brought about for personal aggrandizement; it is a Christ-like sacrifice, prompted purely out of love and fellow-feeling.

In King Lear we see that Lear's miscarriage of justice in remunerating the wicked--Goneril and Regan--and in punishing the innocent--Cordelia and Kent--has resulted in disaster. Lear's folly and Gloucester's lust have resulted in the primacy of evil. Both Lear and Gloucester undergo a kind of purgatory by acutely suffering the evil which resulted from their own actions. Both men are ennobled and purified by suffering and come to a fuller knowledge and better understanding of themselves and their world. Lear thoroughly wrestles with the question of justice and realizes that there is no absolute justice in the world. Moreover, he and Gloucester learn patience in adversity, humility, altruism and love, and they both renounce the world.

Shakespeare has also shown that love and goodness have triumphed over evil. Cordelia, Kent, Edgar and the Fool are the patterns of love and goodness and they never lose heart in adversity. Cordelia in a Christ-like fashion sacrifices herself in a gesture of love and fellow-feeling. Edgar, though at the bottom of fortune's wheel in the course of the play, is buoyed up by his patience and stoicism and never yields to despair. Always returning good for

evil, he leads his father through the latter's purgatorial destiny, helps him conquer despair and comforts him with love. Gloucester dies in ecstasy when reconciled to Edgar: "...his flawed heart...Burst smilingly" (V.iii.197,200) between joy and grief. The Fool also endears himself as he sticks with Lear through the storm and heroically "labours to outjest / His [Lear's] heart-struck injuries". (III. i.16-17)

While the good characters are redeemed and regenerated through suffering, the wicked are more and more corrupted by success. The reconciliation of the good characters is contrasted with the jealousy and complete egoism of the wicked. The wicked are inflexibly bent on destruction to satisfy their lust for power. Goneril and Regan who once united against their father are later torn apart by jealousy as they compete for Edmund. Edmund's evil is illimitable; he has sacrificed his father, alienated his brother and is determined to have Lear and Cordelia murdered so that he may become the supreme ruler of the state. In King Lear Shakespeare presents evil in its coldest and most horrible form. In their relentless career the wicked characters do not suffer from a troubled conscience as does Macbeth, and it is contrary to their nature to show or demand sympathy. However, while Shakespeare recognizes that evil has tremendous potentials for destruction, he also demonstrates that evil by its self-

destructive nature carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

CHAPTER IV

MACBETH

As a play about evil Macbeth overshadows Richard the Third and King Lear. The character Macbeth comes closer to absolute evil than any other evil character in Shakespeare. Though Richard III, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Iago are extremely wicked and beyond redemption, their initial motives, which do not justify their evil, at least evoke sympathy from us. Richard III feels ostracized from society because of his physical deformity, and to compensate for his exclusion from love he chooses evil. Goneril and Regan have smarted with jealousy and discontent that Cordelia has been Lear's favourite daughter. Iago is aggrieved that though better qualified than Cassio, Othello should choose the latter as his lieutenant. Macbeth has absolutely no reason for assassinating his King but personal ambition.

We cannot help comparing Macbeth with the Biblical Adam or the fictional Kurtz. Adam, pressured by his wife's promptings, yields to temptation and forfeits eternal bliss. The celebrated Kurtz, who has imbibed so much of Europe's culture, education and enlightenment, comes to the dark

continent of Africa with excessive missionary zeal and grandiose ideas to ameliorate the lot of the natives. Tempted by greed shortly afterwards, he completely abandons all the values of a European civilization and degenerates into an abominable butcher. Macbeth is tempted, first by the demonic powers represented by the witches, and then by his wife. This distinguished general succumbs to temptation and is soon transformed into an absolute, blood-thirsty tyrant. However, despite his unrestrained barbarity we sympathize with him. We are able to identify with him because we see him as representing the potential evil in us. Perhaps Shakespeare is making the interesting point, as Conrad later does with Kurtz, that not many of us would have emerged unscathed had we been in Macbeth's shoes.

Moreover, in the presentation of evil in Macbeth Shakespeare is doing a number of new things. First, no good comes out of evil in Macbeth. In a general way, the evil in Richard the Third is not purposeless. The endurance of Richard's evil is one of the means by which England expiates her past sins. At least this is the overall impression one has from reading the first tetralogy. In the next play King Lear both Lear and Gloucester are redeemed and regenerated by the prevailing evil. Secondly, in Macbeth, Shakespeare for the first time makes a thorough examination of the effect of guilt upon the

individual.[48] In Othello and King Lear Shakespeare began the investigation into the mystery of evil but did not go far enough. The dramatist did not significantly analyze the motivation for evil of Iago, Goneril, Regan and Edmund. These characters are icy agents of destruction and completely lacking in fellow-feeling. Conversely, the good characters are good for no clear reasons. We are tempted to conclude that in the world of Othello and King Lear men are good or bad in and by themselves. In Macbeth, however, Shakespeare delves deep into Macbeth's mind so as to portray the hero's troubled conscience. He is constantly and acutely aware of every evil he perpetrates and he is unceasingly tormented by his sense of guilt and self-destruction. In seeking security to consolidate his position he is as thwarted and frustrated as the famished Tantalus, whose grasp the spectral banquet always eludes. However, before examining the nature, scope and effects of the evil dramatized in Macbeth, I wish to comment on the atmosphere of the play.

Macbeth, which immediately followed King Lear, is another of Shakespeare's intense visions of evil. The evil of the Macbeths is dramatized amidst an atmosphere of horror, mystery and fear. Some of the potent elements which contribute to the atmosphere of the play are those of the supernatural, darkness, blood, storm and fear.

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[48]I accept Kenneth Muir's arguments in the Introduction to his Arden edition of Macbeth (pp. xiii-xxii) that the most likely date of the composition of Macbeth is the spring and summer of 1606.

The atmosphere of evil, uncanniness, mystery and fear is instantaneously conjured up as soon as the curtain rises. The three grotesque hags, the diabolical trinity, appearing on a desolate heath where the din of the battle being fought in the background is audible, would have a firm hold on the imagination of an Elizabethan audience. Indeed, many Elizabethans, like superstitious people the world over today, believed in witches. Even though these three hideous forms call themselves "The weird sisters" (I.iii.32), they have all the characteristics of witches of popular superstition. Their withered and wild attires, their aged and forbidding physical features and their devilish incantations mark them out as witches of vulgar superstition. The educated members of the Elizabethan audience would probably associate the weird sisters at first with the three Greek goddesses of destiny (the three fates) and later with the three avenging furies (the Erinyes).

Moreover, these three witches convey the impression that they are in league with the diabolical powers. In the sinister, ill-omened first scene the witches project the concept of topsy-turvydom into the world of Macbeth. In the three scenes in which they appear the central theme of disorder is underlined by the cosmic disorder symbolized by the accompanying thunder storms. Their precept, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i.10), unconsciously repeated

by Macbeth ("So foul and fair a day I have never seen", I.iii.38) at once foreshadows the central theme of the play, which is the reversal of values and the collapse of order.

In Holinshed's The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland Shakespeare's main source for Macbeth, the three women who greeted Macbeth and Banquo are "either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destinie, or else some nymphs or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromanticall science, bicause everie thing came to passe as they had spoken".[49] In Macbeth they are not merely "weird sisters" but "imperfect speakers" (I.iii.70) and "The instruments of darkness" (I.iii.124) whose half truths are designed to bring about man's ruin. They are associated with sinister, hideous and repulsive creatures. In the cauldron scene, preparatory to harnessing the demonic forces, they concoct a "hell-broth" (IV.i.19) of the most loathsome ingredients, including the finger of a child strangled at birth, the blood of a sow that has eaten her nine farrow and the "grease that's sweaten / From the murderer's gibbet" (IV.i.65-66). It is quite obvious that these "midnight hags" (IV.i.48) can give no wholesome advice to Macbeth.

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[49]R. Holinshed, (An extract from) The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 495.

In fact these malignant creatures traffic in equivocations with Macbeth. Their prophecies are as ambiguous as those uttered by the Delphic oracles. While they predict that Macbeth will be King they utter a series of cryptic and enigmatic statements about Banquo:

> Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.
> Not so happy, yet much happier.
> Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.
> (I.iii.65-67)

Later, the weird sisters give Macbeth false security with their ambiguous prophecies. Macbeth is to beware of Macduff and yet cannot be harmed by a man born of a woman. Also Macbeth will remain undefeated unless Birnam Wood arrives at Dunsinane Hill. As events show, Macbeth becomes the victim of the witches' equivocations. By choosing evil, he is destroyed by evil. The witches who have previously tempted him to a course of evil have now taken on an additional dimension as the agents of Nemesis to precipitate his overthrow.

In addition to the supernatural, darkness contributes immensely to the atmosphere of horror, mystery, evil and fear in Macbeth. Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the hired assassins and the witches are all products of darkness, for they commit their dastardly deeds or fiendish rites under cover of darkness. Almost all the actions of the play occur in the dark. There seems to be a duel between light and darkness, and light wins only after the overthrow of

Macbeth, at which time we get the impression that the sun shines freely for the first time.

The three witches who "trade and traffic with Macbeth / In riddles and affairs of death" (III.v.4-5) owe allegiance to Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, a nocturnal art. They appropriately meet in an atmosphere of darkness, caused by the foreboding and foul storm of thunder and lightning. They are significantly called "instruments of darkness" (I.iii.124) and "secret, black, and midnight hags" (IV.i.48). Hecate describes the cave into which Macbeth goes to meet them later in the play as "the pit of Acheron" (III.v.15) so as to emphasize the impenetrable darkness of this locale. The narrow truth of their prophecies is shrouded as if in the darkness of ambiguity.

Darkness seems to be the habitat of the Macbeths because of their infernal desires. Lady Macbeth apostrophizes darkness bidding it conceal her ill-intention from mortal or from God:

> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
> To cry 'Hold, hold!' (I.v.48-52)

These lines which constitute the climactic moment of her dedication to evil unmistakably chill us with her abject cruelty. Macbeth fears the light for an obvious reason:

"Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires" (I.iv.50-51), and sees the night, as he thinks, as a reliable agent to extricate him from dangers and grant him security:

> Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale. (III.ii.46-50)

Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle at Inverness in the evening and is murdered in the night. On the fatal night, Banquo, observing the "husbandry in heaven" (I.vii.4) puts out his torch, an act foreshadowing the extinction of Duncan's light of life. As Macbeth projects himself into the wolf, moving like a ghost towards its victim, he thinks of the evil associated with darkness, of wicked dreams visiting those asleep, of witches performing their rites to Hecate, and of Tarquin who ravished his hostess, the virtuous Lucretia, in the dead of night. The upheavals in society are mirrored by cosmic disorder. After Duncan's murder darkness envelops the world when it should be day:

> By th' clock 'tis day,
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
> Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb
> When living light should kiss it? (II.iv.6-10)

By associating dark, hideous and sinister deeds with the night, Macbeth adds to the atmosphere of fear in

the play. Night approaching, lights thicken to repel the dark, the crow flies to the "rooky wood", and "Good things of day begin to droop and drowse, / While night's black agents to their preys do rouse." (III.ii.51,52-53) Macbeth's speech is capped with the stage direction of the next scene (III,iii), "Enter three Murderers", and we straightway see some of "night's black agents" at work. One senses the fear of the dark as the first Murderer states a commonplace:

> The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day.
> Now spurs the lated traveller apace
> To gain the timely inn, (III.iii.5-7)

for one knows that Banquo's life will be blotted out under cover of darkness. It is in the night that Macbeth catches sight of the glint of a spectral dagger as he is about to murder Duncan, and it is in the night that he is tormented by Banquo's phantom. Lady Macbeth too becomes afraid of the dark and "She has light by her continually". (V.i.20-21) She may repress her humanity and guilt, but when nature takes its course, as in her sleepwalking, her guilt surfaces. Unable to obliterate the spots of blood on her hands, which damn her, she imagines hell to be murky.

The continuous references to blood help to create the atmosphere of horror and are constant reminders that a usurper invariably relies on violence to secure his ill-gotten crown. These references also reflect the idea that

medieval Scottish history was characterized by interminable warfare, rebellions, treachery, conspiracies and murders. No sooner do the witches vacate the stage than a "bloody man" (I.ii.1) narrates how Macbeth unseamed Macdonwald "from the nave to th' chops" (I.ii.22) and mounted his head upon the battlements; how Macbeth and Banquo, bespattered with blood, seemed to "memorize another Golgotha" (I.ii.40). As the play unfolds we move from Macdonwald's decapitation, through the cauldron-scene of the armed head and bloody child, to Macbeth's decapitation.

The blood-references in the play are many. Lady Macbeth wants the infernal spirits to thicken her blood so that she can be immune to pity. Macbeth is conscience-stricken as he sees the blood-stained dagger in the air. Duncan's "silver skin [is] laced with his golden blood" (II.iii.108), and his grooms are smeared with blood. As we see later, the Macbeths are forever doomed for their part in shedding Duncan's blood; Neptune's oceans cannot cleanse Macbeth's hands; his hands

> will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red; (II.ii.60-62)

and "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this [Lady Macbeth's] little hand" (V.i.46-47). Night has a "bloody and invisible hand" (III.ii.48) because murders committed at night may remain undetected. The blood on

the murderer's face is Banquo's, and Banquo's phantom with twenty murderous wounds on its head attends the banquet.

Macbeth is imagined to rule with a bloody sceptre ("an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptred", IV.iii.104) a country bleeding and sinking under the yoke of tyranny, a country which "cannot / Be called our mother but our grave". (IV.iii.166) He is so deeply committed to bloodshed that he has reached the point of no return. (II.iv.136-140) Bloodshed, however, does not give Macbeth the security he seeks. In the show of kings the "blood-boltered" (IV.i.123) Banquo smiles as if contemptuously at Macbeth's powerlessness to prevent Banquo's descendants from becoming kings. The drawing and quartering of Macduff's innocent wife and children becomes the "whetstone" (IV.iii.228) of Macduff's sword.

Furthermore, the animal images are ingeniously interwoven with the general scheme of evil in the play. The animals mentioned are vicious, sinister and ill-omened. As far as Lady Macbeth is concerned, the croaking raven and the shrieking owl are harbingers of Duncan's death. The temple-haunting martlet which has its "pendent bed and procreant cradle" (I.vi.8) outside Macbeth's castle heightens the contrast between the innocence and peacefulness within this bird's nest and the conspiracy and treachery lurking inside the castle. Also, after Banquo has expatiated on the martlet's fertility, it is ironic that Lady Macbeth

should enter, for she is sterile, and in the previous scene she has relinquished her true nature of woman and has plotted murder. Later, when Macduff goes to wake Duncan, already murdered, Lennox relates that during that tempestuous night "The obscure bird / Clamoured the lifelong night." (II.iii.55-56) The murdered Duncan is metamorphosed into "a new Gorgon" (II.iii.68) that will destroy the sight of the beholder. The evil in man's society has even infected the animal world so that a "mousing owl" (II.iii.13) has killed a falcon, and Duncan's horses have become uncontrollable and cannibalistic. In Macbeth's catalogue of dogs, the Murderers should be classified as bloodhounds since they are his underlings hired to murder the innocent. Macduff's son is the fledgling soon to be gobbled up by the owl. That the weird sisters are in communion with dark, sinister and demonic forces is evident from their association with abominable creatures and from the hellish brew of nauseating creatures, to which Wilson Knight refers as a "holocaust of filth".[50]

Moreover, because Macbeth has strangled his conscience and his mind is now diseased, he expresses his fears and prick of conscience with reference to hideous animals. As he stalks to the room of his slumbering guest, he visualizes the wolf, treacherously gaining upon its

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[50] G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London, 1962), p. 145.

victim under cover of darkness:

> the wolf,
> Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
> With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
> Moves like a ghost. (II.i.53-56)

When his mind is totally absorbed with murdering Banquo, he has a nightmarish vision of night as an amorphous being with hands "bloody" and "invisible". (III.ii.48) The creatures of the dark--the crows, the rooks, the bat, the beetle, and the rest of "night's black agents" (III.ii.53) are all ominous. Previously advised to "look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under 't", (I.v.63-64) Macbeth now discovers that his mind is "full of scorpions". (III.ii.36) By killing Duncan and sparing Banquo, he has "scorched the snake, not killed it"; (III.ii.13) when Banquo falls but Fleance escapes, Macbeth thus dismisses any immediate threat from the son:

> There the grown serpent lies; the worm that's fled
> Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
> No teeth for th' present. (III.iv.29-31)

Under the excruciating agony of a troubled conscience and a deranged mind, Macbeth would rather encounter hideously savage creatures such as "the rugged Russian bear, / The armed rhinocerous or th' Hyrcan tiger" (III.iv.100-101) than confront a disembodied shade. Eventually, Macbeth, who has in the beginning been compared to regal animals such as the eagle and the lion, now deservedly earns from

Macduff the appellation of "hellhound". (V.viii.3)

In order to present Macbeth as an absolutely evil person, Shakespeare considerably altered his source materials. In Holinshed, first of all, Duncan was a young, incompetent king whose weakness invited revolts from disgruntled chieftains. Holinshed wrote:

> The beginning of Duncans reigne was verie quiet and peaceable, without anie notable trouble; but after it was perceived how negligent he was in punishing offendors, manie misruled persons tooke occasion thereof to trouble the peace and quiet state of the common-wealth, by seditious commotions....[51]

Secondly, Macbeth had some claim to the throne according to the custom of alternate succession, which was a complicated system, practised in Scotland. This meant that the crown alternated between two different branches of a family.[52] For instance, when a king died, the crown did not necessarily go to his son but to a member of the family of the previous king. Duncan and Macbeth were first cousins and they were both the grandsons of Malcolm II. By the custom of alternate succession, therefore, Macbeth was Duncan's heir and not Malcolm, Duncan's son.

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[51] R. Holinshed, (An extract from) The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 488.

[52] Ibid., p. 432 (Bullough's introduction to Shakespeare's Sources for Macbeth).

Although Kennth II, a previous king, had introduced the law of primogeniture, which meant that a king was to be succeeded by his next of kin, the new law was not acceptable to all. Thirdly, there was no deep regret in Scotland over the murder of Duncan by Macbeth, for Macbeth proved to be a more capable ruler who promulgated salutary laws, instituted beneficial social reforms, effectively administered justice, and contributed immensely towards maintaining peace and prosperity. As G. Bullough noted in his introduction to the sources for Macbeth, Macbeth was "generous to the Church and especially to the holy hermits of Lochleven, and in 1050 he went on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he scattered largesse 'like seed'."[53] Macbeth was a good king who ruled for seventeen years (1040-1057) but was represented as a villain by Malcolm's descendants and their court chroniclers. Holinshed recorded that Macbeth ruled well for the first ten years of his reign, during which time he

> was accounted the sure defense and buckler of innocent people; and hereto he also applied his whole indevor, to cause young men to exercise themselves in vertuous maners, and men of the church to attend their divine service according to their vocations... He made manie holesome laws and statutes for the publike weale of his subjects.[54]

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[53]Ibid., VII, 432.

[54]Ibid., VII, 497-498.

According to Holinshed, this ten-year good rule was merely a sham to woo popular favour and afterwards Macbeth unveiled his true nature:

> But this was but a counterfet zeale of equitie shewed by him, partlie against his naturall inclination to purchase thereby the favour of the people. Shortlie after, he began to shewe what he was, in stead of equitie practising crueltie.[55]

To intensify Macbeth's evil Shakespeare made some necessary changes with his source material. In the play there is no mention that Duncan is an incompetent king and military leader who has suffered several reverses in the field. In fact Duncan is represented as old, venerable and meek. Also, Shakespeare does not state that Macbeth has any claim to the throne. As nothing is said about succession, it is taken for granted that succession to the throne is by primogeniture. Therefore, it is not to be assumed that Duncan is acting unconstitutionally in investing his son Malcolm with the title of Prince of Cumberland and proclaiming him heir. Macbeth has served the King diligently in crushing Macdonwald's insurrection and is amply rewarded with the new title of Thane of Cawdor. Yet shortly afterwards, Macbeth murders his King, and we inevitably ask whether he is justified in doing so.

In the play Shakespeare presents a man who is

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[55] Ibid., VII, 498.

reluctant to commit evil and hence with some potential for good, who is sorely tempted by the forces of evil, and who, by succumbing to them, is gradually disintegrated by the prick of conscience . To emphasize Macbeth's evil, Shakespeare telescopes the seventeen-year rule of the historical Macbeth into a few weeks, omits the good years of his reign and his salutary laws, and exaggerates his crimes. Macbeth is soon convinced of the futility of his crime, and in his vain pursuit of security he degenerates into an absolute tyrant. In the process, however, he never completely forfeits his humanity, for his ineradicable guilt torments him incessantly. By the adaptation of his source material, Shakespeare makes it crystal clear that Macbeth has no justification for murdering Duncan. While his historical prototype committed the murder partly for altruistic reasons, that is, for the greater good of society, Shakespeare's Macbeth does it for a personal reason--ignoble ambition:

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition. (I.vii.25-27)

The Elizabethans regarded ambition not as something praise-worthy but as a disruptive force; an ambitious person was aspiring to a place to which he was not entitled. Marlowe's Faustus, a scholar, damned himself by aspiring to godhead. Satan fell because of his ambition to overthrow the

established order and usurp God's throne. The Elizabethans would see the connection between the collapse of order in Scotland and Macbeth's seizure of the throne because of his "Vaulting ambition". (I.vii.27)

In the first act Shakespeare presents Macbeth as ambitious but disinclined to employing unscrupulous means to realize his ambition. As the play begins Macbeth is a successful general who has just put down a rebellion and repelled a foreign invasion. It was his personal courage and prowess in the fight with Macdonwald that saved the day. Macbeth stands high in Duncan's and Macduff's esteem. Lady Macbeth very accurately describes her husband's moral dilemma thus:

> Yet do I fear thy nature.
> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ldst have, Great Glamis,
> That which cries 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do
> Than wishest should be undone.
> (I.v.14-23)

The last four lines imply that Macbeth wants Duncan murdered so that he can seize the crown, though he himself does not want to commit the murder. Later, Lady Macbeth's reprimand, "What beast was't then / That made you break this enterprise to me?" (I.vii.47-48) raises a problem. Did Macbeth discuss with his wife the "enterprise" about murdering Duncan before the action of the play or

in an intervening scene between I, v and I, vi, which Shakespeare later omitted? Macbeth does not broach the enterprise in the letter to his wife, and it is very unlikely that amidst the flurry of activities since the arrival of himself and his guests, he would have time to discuss the murder. That Shakespeare meant to date Macbeth's intention of murdering the king before the action of the play is more probable. If this is the case, then Macbeth has hitherto successfully resisted the temptation to do evil and has therefore contained his ambition. However, since he has been nursing unscrupulous ambition in his mind, and since he is now tempted by the witches, by his wife and by fate, he finally gives way to the forces of evil and disorder.

Macbeth's behaviour in the first act strengthens the theory that he has contemplated murder before the play begins. His very first utterance, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," (I.iii.38) which echoes the witches' precept of disorder, "Fair is foul and foul is fair," reveals his subconscious affinity with the evil and disruptive forces. His reaction to the witches' prophecy that he would be king prompted Bradley to write as follows:

> But when Macbeth heard them he was not an innocent man. Precisely how far his mind was guilty may be a question; but no innocent man would have started, as he did, with a start of fear at the mere prophecy of a crown, or have conceived thereupon immediately the thought of murder. Either this thought was not new to him, or he had cherished at least some vaguer dishonourable dream, the instantaneous recurrence of which, at the moment of his hearing the prophecy revealed to him an inward and terrifying guilt.[56]

The fulfilment of one of the witches' prophecies when Macbeth is made Thane of Cawdor spurs Macbeth on to dwell on the temptation of murdering the King. (I.iii. 130-142) Macbeth's fertile imagination vividly conjures up a picture of anarchy and nightmare. The thought of murder causes his hair to stand on end and his heart to knock at his ribs; his "Present fears" (I.iii.137) are overshadowed by "horrible imaginings". (I.iii.138) Also the thought of murder causes his "single state of man" to suffer what Brutus would call "The nature of an insurrection". (Julius Caesar, II.i.69) Macbeth says:

> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise and nothing is
> But what is not. (I.iii.139-142)

This anarchy within Macbeth's mind is a microcosm of the anarchy that will result in the state if the legitimate

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[56]A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1963), p. 288.

King, the symbol of order in the society, is removed by force.

Moreover, Shakespeare shows that the element of fate or chance has collaborated with Macbeth to further his evil ambition. However, chance alone would not have caused him to murder Duncan; Lady Macbeth becomes the decisive factor. Macbeth dismisses any intention of murdering Duncan and leaves his future entirely upon chance: "If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me / Without my stir." (I.iii.143-144) Perhaps he feels that the aged King may soon die and that he would succeed. However, his hope is shattered when Malcolm is proclaimed the Prince of Cumberland and heir, and he entertains in his mind the possibility of committing murder:

> The Prince of Cumberland - that is a step
> On which I must fall down or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
> (I.iv.48-53)

Moreover, chance has brought Duncan to Macbeth's castle and has given the Macbeths the opportunity they desire. Without Lady Macbeth, however, the murder would not have been committed. When Macbeth's impious zeal flags, his wife incites him to the act by aiming the barb of her assaults upon his manhood and by supplying the practical

details for the accomplishment of the deed. The prudent flight of Malcolm and Donaldbane temporarily incriminates them, and the Macbeths consequently enjoy immunity.

All along Shakespeare makes it abundantly clear that Macbeth is completely free to make his own decision. The presentation of Banquo illustrates that Macbeth is under no external compulsion either from the witches or from his wife to murder Duncan. Both Macbeth and Banquo are tempted, and it is significant that the latter does not yield to temptation. In Holinshed Banquo was an accessory to the murder, for Macbeth was able to slay the King with the help of Banquo and other trustworthy friends. Holinshed intimated that Banquo might serve Macbeth "of the same cup as he [Macbeth] ministered to his predecessor".[57] To prevent this and also to prevent the fulfilment of another of the prophecies that Banquo's descendants would be kings, Macbeth decided to eliminate Banquo and his son Fleance. Shakespeare has changed Holinshed's image of the "cup" to the image of the "poisoned chalice" (I.vii.11) when he makes Macbeth express fear of retributive justice. Shakespeare's Macbeth fears that by murdering he will really be teaching others to murder him in return and adds this comment on the impartiality of justice:

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[57]G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 498.

> This even-handed justice
> Commends th' ingredience of our poisoned chalice
> To our lips. (I.vii.10-12)

Shakespeare, however, makes Banquo a noble and honest man for a specific dramatic purpose, which is to show that Macbeth is free to exercise his will. It would therefore not be correct to say that by refusing to make Banquo Macbeth's accomplice Shakespeare is merely paying James I a compliment inasmuch as Banquo was invented to be the founder of the Stuart dynasty. Banquo warns Macbeth not to trust the witches:

> And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence. (I.iii.123-126)

In seeking to augment his honour, Banquo will not jeopardize his allegiance to Duncan but will keep his "bosom franchised and allegiance clear". (III.i.28) There is evidence, nonetheless, that Banquo is contaminated by his association with Macbeth, for after Duncan's death Banquo's conduct is certainly not commendable. He alone knows what the witches have communicated to Macbeth and though he suspects that Macbeth has murdered Duncan ("and I fear / Thou play'dst most foully for' t", III.i.2-3) he does not denounce Macbeth.

At this stage I wish to point out very briefly the similarities and differences between Macbeth and Richard III.

Both are villains presented as heroes; they both deliberately choose evil; they are both regicides and usurpers; they are both defeated in battle by those who claim to be the legitimate kings; they are both called "hellhound". On the other hand, the differences between them are considerable. First, Richard is an absolute egoist and will put his trust in no one:

> I have no brother, I am like no brother;
> And this word "love", which greybeards call divine,
> Be resident in men like one another,
> And not in me. I am myself alone. (King Henry the Sixth, Part III, V.vi.80-83)

Macbeth too is an egoist but he and his wife work as a team at least until Macbeth's second interview with the witches. Secondly, while Macbeth and Richard are totally committed to evil, Macbeth is initially presented as a man with some potential for good who has reluctantly chosen evil for which he is wracked by his conscience. Henry VI says that the ominous signs coincident with Richard III's birth, mark him out as an incorrigible agent of the devil:

> The owl shrieked at thy birth, an evil sign;
> The night crow cried, aboding luckless time;
> Dogs howled and hideous tempest shook down trees;
> The raven rooked her on the chimney's top,
> And chattering pies in dismal discords sung.
> Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain,
> And yet brought forth less than a mother's hope,
> To wit, an indigested and deformed lump,

> Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree.
> Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,
> To signify thou cam'st to bite the world.
> (King Henry the Sixth, Part III, V.vi.44-54)

Richard's deformity becomes a physical symbol of his depravity and diabolical nature. He is a skilled dissimulator and he relishes the plots he constructs and like Iago gloats over his success in capturing and destroying his victims. Not remorse but perverted humour accompanies Richard's success. Although successful in crimes, Macbeth, on the contrary, never forgets that he is doing evil, and his bitter remorse makes him feel irreversibly trapped in a vicious cycle. Because of this he does not alienate our sympathy as we watch his evil career at first with awe, then with pity as he falls. When Richard sinks at Bosworth we are relieved that the world is rid of such a disease.

Shakespeare emphasizes Macbeth's reluctance to commit himself to a path of evil and destruction by presenting the hero as wrestling with his conscience, and Macbeth's latent goodness might have prevailed had his wife not thrown in her weight in favour of murder. What makes Macbeth shrink from murder is his awareness of its unnaturalness, evil consequences and of his inevitable damnation. He fully realizes that even if he successfully accomplishes the horrible deed he would "jump the life to come"; (I.vi.7) and that by obtaining the crown by murder, he would be setting a dangerous precedent that

might recoil upon himself. The deed would be unnatural for he would be violating the law of nature by murdering his kinsman, the law of hospitality by murdering his host, and the feudal code of honour which should bind him as a feudal lord to lifelong obedience to his king, his feudal over-lord. Macbeth is imaginative enough to realize the universal horror that Duncan's murder would cause:

> Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
> The deep damnation of his taking off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
> That tears shall drown the wind. (I.vii.16-25)

Besides giving the idea of remoteness and the distant past, Macbeth's castle mirrors the breakdown of the social and cosmic order. We move from the desolate, witch-infested heath, from the confusion of the battle field, to the castle which is the breeding ground of murder and treachery. The banquet which the Macbeths give in honour of their king and guest, Duncan, is a symbol of social order. The notion of conviviality and fellowship implies a peaceful and unified society. It is unnatural, therefore, for the Macbeths to leave their guest and plot his murder. The second banquet is disrupted by the host himself who sees the phantom of the murdered Banquo. This

symbolizes that society is in a chaotic state now that the murderer Macbeth has usurped the throne. Lady Macbeth's reprimand, "You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admired disorder" (III.iv.109-110) is also applicable to the overthrow of order in the state occasioned by Macbeth's evil.

In the scene in which Duncan is murdered Shakespeare insists that disorder is concomitant with evil and presents the disintegration of the various levels of the Elizabethan world, beginning with the mind of the protagonist. It was an Elizabethan commonplace that man is a microcosm of the universe, and we now see Macbeth's mind convulsed, contorted and disintegrated by fear, not of drawing Duncan's blood, but of the total hideousness of the revolting act. That Macbeth's mind is in disorder is evidenced from his hallucination; he vainly grasps an insubstantial dagger in the air with its blade covered with "gouts of blood". (II.i.46) When he hears a voice calling him by his triple name, saying:

> Sleep no more!...
> Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor
> Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more,
> (II.ii.40-42)

it appears as if Macbeth's mind is reduced to three fragments, each condemned to insomnia. In Shakespeare sleep is a symbol of harmony and sound health. Since "Macbeth

shall sleep no more", his mind is now diseased and shattered. One may recall that Lear's insanity is partly due to his lack of sleep; the first time he sleeps since his exposure to the storm is when he arrives at Cordelia's camp at Dover. Sleep restores his sanity. Now that Duncan's murder has become history, Macbeth is acutely aware that his damnation is guaranteed and his guilt is ineffaceable:

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red. (II.ii.59-62)

The assassination of Duncan, which violates the order of society, is expressed both by images of unnaturalness and of natural and cosmic disorder. Macbeth is not altogether dissimulating when he says that Duncan's "gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature / For ruin's wasteful entrance". (II.iii.109-110) Macduff reinforces the horror of the deed as follows:

> Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
> The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
> The life o' th' building! (II.iii.62-64)

Lennox describes the cosmic disorder on the night of Duncan's murder; (II.iii.50-57) the choric scene of Ross and the Old Man again stresses unnaturalness and anarchy. The day after the murder "darkness does the face of the

earth entomb / When living light should kiss it", (II.iv. 9-10) an owl has killed a falcon, and Duncan's horses are cannibalistic.

After Macbeth's initial crime, committed in the name of ambition, Shakespeare shows how the hero degenerates into monstrosity. Macbeth is not repentant though overwhelmed with guilt, and his growing insecurity results from fear and from guilt. Though doomed to insomnia by his consciousness of guilt, his ambition and love for power are too strong to force him to resign and they strengthen his will to live. In proportion as his sense of insecurity increases, the chaos in his mind and in society increases. Like Claudius he plots one crime after another in his futile quest for security. He now sees Banquo as a dangerous potential enemy with a "royalty of nature", a "dauntless temper" but "a wisdom to guide his valour / To act in safety". (III.i.50;52-54) In short, says Macbeth:

> There is none but he
> Whose being I do fear, and under him
> My genius is rebuked. (III.i.54-56)

As Macbeth is deprived of sleep and racked by fear, his mind is fragmented. Total global destruction is preferable to his present state of trepidation and mental disarray; and naturally he envies Duncan who now sleeps peacefully:

> But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly. (III.ii.16-19)

Commenting on the correlation between Macbeth's evil and the consequent overthrow of order, Bullough says:

> One crime must be followed by another. Macbeth regards himself as already damned; henceforth he rushes on to his doom like a machine out of control; unlike a machine he knows what he is doing, and cannot will anything but death to others.[58]

Macbeth's career after murdering Banquo is nothing less than a descent into hell. He is now a hardened sinner and a seasoned murderer, no longer capable of experiencing "the pricke of conscience";[59] he is now indifferent to moral questions. Security still eludes him; now the Macduffs constitute a threat to his sleep and must be exterminated. He has waded so far in blood that to turn back would be as difficult as to go on; in short Macbeth is irretrievably committed to evil and this means he is considerably inhibited in exercising his free will:

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[58] G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 463.

[59] Ibid., p. 498.

> I am in blood
> Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er, (III.iv. 136-138)

and he deceives himself that he and Lady Macbeth "are yet but young in deed". (III.iv.144)

Confusion is intensified as Macbeth escalates his promiscuous butchery. This "wayward son" of the demonic forces, "spiteful and wrathful" (III.v.11,12) conjures up a picture of absolute topsy-turvydom as he orders the witches in his "I conjure you" speech (IV.i.50-60) to unfold his destiny. As Bradley rightly says, "The whole flood of evil in his nature is now let loose."[60] His actions are now completely dictated by his passions. Macduff's innocent wife and children are put to the sword. While Lady Macbeth suffers from a mental breakdown, Macbeth is erratic, ejaculating at friend and foe alike. The whole of Scotland is in a state of anarchy as the country bleeds and "sinks beneath the yoke". (IV.iii.39) As Miss Spurgeon has pointed out, the images of reverberation in Macbeth convey the idea that Macbeth's evil is felt in the entire state.[61] For instance, in Macduff's speech:

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[60] A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1963), p. 305.

[61] C. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us (Cambridge, 1966), p. 329.

> Each new morn
> New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
> Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
> As if it felt with Scotland and yelled out
> Like syllable of dolour,
> (IV.iii.4-8)

the sound of lamentations seems to be traversing over wide spaces. The devilish epithets in reference to Macbeth abound in the latter part of the play; he is described as "this fiend of Scotland", (IV.iii.233) "an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptred", (IV.iii.104) "Devilish Macbeth", (IV.iii. 117) "abhorred tyrant", (V.vii.10) "hell-hound" (V.vii.3) and "butcher". (V.vii.69)

Shakespeare presents evil not only as an inversion of order but also as a disease corrupting those who practise it, and infesting the body politic. The doctor offers this comment about Lady Macbeth's infected mind: "More needs she the divine than the physician." (V.i.69) Macbeth is probably thinking more about his own diseased mind when he asks the doctor this question, which, as Alfred Harbage rightly observes, seems to express the agony of all mankind:[62]

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?
> (V.iii.40-45)

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[62] William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. A. Harbage (Baltimore, 1974), p. 20 (Introduction).

The doctor's ingenious reply is: "Therein the patient / Must minister to himself." (V.iii.45-46) Macbeth is really longing for the removal of his oppressive guilt from his conscience so that he can find peace of mind and sleep. When he rejects curative physic, he is symbolically rejecting spiritual medication, for in effect he is in the last throes of a spiritual suicide. Macbeth, who is the disease from which his country suffers, ironically thinks that his country is sick and not he. He therefore asks the doctor to "find her disease, / And purge it to a sound and pristine health". (V.iii.51-52) This is to be Malcolm's work. The cry of the women which accompanies Lady Macbeth's suicide, cannot touch Macbeth, as it once could before his conscience was eroded, for now he is a seasoned sinner:

> I have supped full with horrors.
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once start me.
> (V.v.13-15)

In reality he is spiritually dead before his decapitation. The report of Lady Macbeth's death forces him to acknowledge the spiritual emptiness and meaninglessness of a life devoted to evil; his life is a tale "Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing". (V.v.27-28) His cause is a "distempered" (V.ii.15) one; he himself is a cancerous member of the state which must be amputated if the health of the state is to be restored. Under him the

state is groaning and bleeding. Malcolm, the lawful heir, is consequently "the med'cine of the sickly weal" and his "country's purge". (V.ii.27,28)

Finally, Shakespeare shows how the disorder and unnaturalness, occasioned by the devil's maxim, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair", recoil upon Macbeth. Trust in the devil gives Macbeth false security and leads to his overthrow. Macbeth sets in motion the forces of retribution by his first murder and he is finally intercepted by them. The murders of Duncan, Banquo and Macduff's wife and children do not strengthen Macbeth's grip on the crown but leave Malcolm, Fleance and Macduff to torment him. If the "juggling fiends" (V.viii.19) are his tempters in the beginning, they become the avenging furies or Nemesis in the end. With their equivocation they deliberately deceive Macbeth in his second interview by laying down impossible conditions for his defeat. Subsequently, we see how Macbeth himself becomes a victim to unnatural forces. In a way, Birnam Wood does come to Dunsinane Hill, and Macduff is not born of a woman.

As the forces of good are ready for the final conflict in order to end the anarchy in the state and to restore order, Shakespeare emphasizes the impotence of Macbeth's evil. Angus makes this significant comment:

> Now does he feel his title
> Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
> Upon a dwarfish thief.
> (V.ii.20-22)

In his Arden edition of the play, Kenneth Muir quotes Traversi's revealing comment of these lines, which is, "Before the advancing powers of healing good, evil has shrunk to insignificance."[63] Macbeth's atrocities, like Richard III's, have led to mass desertion, and Malcolm's comment:

> Both more and less have given him the revolt,
> And none serve with him but constrained things
> Whose hearts are absent too,
> (V.iv.12-14)

is reminiscent of Richmond's before the Battle of Bosworth Field: "Richard except, those whom we fight against / Had rather have us win than him they follow." (Richard the Third, V.iii.244-245)

Unlike Richard III, however, Macbeth retains our sympathy to the very end because he never completely extinguishes his humanity. We see him tempted and struggling gallantly with his conscience before he damns himself. We want to believe that if he had not been pushed by his wife, he would not have pursued his illegitimate ambition. However, Macbeth implicitly accepts full respon-

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[63] William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir (London, 1976), p. 143 (footnote).

sibility for his choice of evil, for he never tries to exculpate himself by fixing the blame on the witches or on his wife. He criticizes "these juggling fiends" (V. vii.19) for trafficking in ambiguities with him, but never for seducing him. Later as Macbeth degenerates into an indiscriminate butcher, no longer preoccupied with the niceties of a conscience, we are revolted by the magnitude of his crimes but not completely alienated from him. He does not wallow in self-pity, for he is always aware, and poignantly too, that he has perverted so much energy in an uncompromisingly evil cause. In the end, even though he is totally isolated, with nothing on which to rely but the witches' prophecies, he heroically decides against suicide. The Roman way to die with honour on the brink of defeat and disgrace is by suicide. Instead of playing the "Roman fool" (V.vii.1) like Brutus after Philippi and Mark Antony after Actium, Macbeth will use his sword against the enemy. Unlike Richard III, Iago, Goneril and Regan, Macbeth has the humanity to realize that his life has been sterile because he has misdirected his nobility to evil, and that the reward of his old age is not "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" (V.iii.25) but "Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath, / Which the poor heart would fair deny, and dare not". (V.iii.27-28) Now a hardened sinner and in utter spiritual despair, he is convinced of the total negation and meaninglessness of his

own life and he deludes himself into believing that life in general is meaningless. He says that life is bleak, monotonous, and transitory, and concludes with this pessimistic note:

> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.
> (V.v.24-28)

The poetry of this speech is so powerful that we find it difficult to resist Macbeth's persuasion about the futility of life. It behoves us to remember, nevertheless, that Macbeth's choice of evil deprives his life of those values which would make it meaningful. Also there is something admirable and heroic in the way he defiantly fights to the very last ditch, and in this respect he shares kinship with Richard III. At Bosworth when the tide turns against him, Richard is fatalistic and defiant; he refuses to save himself by flight and decides to "stand the hazard of the die". (Richard the Third, V.iv.10) When Macbeth comes face to face with Macduff, his humanity is not dead. His conscience is activated as he recalls that his soul is too much charged with the blood of Macduff's wife and children, and he has deliberately avoided Macduff in order to spare him. Like a bear tied to a stake, Macbeth will fight to the very end and will

not yield "To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet / And be baited with the rabble's curse". (V.viii.29-30) Here we may recall that Cleopatra commits suicide rather than endure the mortification of being exhibited in Octavius' triumph and see "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' th' posture of a whore". (Antony and Cleopatra, V.ii.220-221)

Shakespeare is very original and innovative in the way he presents the evil of Lady Macbeth. His Lady Macbeth is based on Donwald's wife and Lady Macbeth, two characters in Holinshed's The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland, but there is not much that he could have drawn from this source. In Holinshed, Donwald's wife instigated her husband to murder King Duff merely out of malice. Her task was simplified because Donwald had already had a grudge against the king. King Duff had refused to grant a pardon to Donwald's kinsmen, who had revolted against him, even though they were fraudently persuaded to revolt. As Holinshed records:

> ...she [Donwald's wife] as one that bare no lesse malice in hir heart towards the king, for the like cause on hir behalfe, than hir husband did for his friends, counselled him...to make him [the king] awaie, and shewed him the meanes whereby he might soonest accomplish it.[64]

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[64] R. Holinshed, The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 481.

In the end Donwald, his wife, and four others who participated in King Duff's murder were apprehended, tried and executed. Holinshed's Lady Macbeth, encouraged by the weird sisters' prophecies, sorely tempted her husband to murder Duncan "as she that was verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene".[65] This aspect of Lady Macbeth's character is not explicit in Shakespeare. Holinshed goes on to chronicle Macbeth's life without saying anything more about Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare's presentation of her is a tribute to his ingenuity and inventiveness. Though she bears her husband company along "the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire", (II.iii.17-18) she cannot completely shake off her humanity as Goneril and Regan succeed in doing.

In presenting the evil of Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare does not deviate from the predominant theme of the play that the overthrow of the proper order is allied to the individual's evil. As I have already shown, the anarchy in Macbeth's mind and in the state originates from the protagonist's evil. Lady Macbeth contributes a great deal to the inversion of the natural order. In the very first act the order in Macbeth's house is reversed when she usurps Macbeth's place as head of the house and has decisive control over him. After Macbeth has been schooled

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[65] Ibid., VII,496.

by her into committing the first murder, he no longer needs her to murder Banquo and Macduff's wife and children, and launch his bloody tyranny over Scotland. In the first act, however, Macbeth is relegated to the position of a henpecked husband as she leads him by the nose to commit murder. When Macbeth feels the full impact of horror and shrinks from the deed, Lady Macbeth reprimands him with her blustering rhetoric and exasperates her soldier-husband with a charge of cowardice:

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire?
> (I.vii.39-41)

She even questions his masculinity in order to galvanize him into action: "When you durst do it, then you were a man," (I.vii.49) and when he articulates doubt of success she outlines the strategy to be adhered to so as to divert suspicion from themselves.

In keeping with the dominant motif of unnaturalness, Shakespeare depicts Lady Macbeth as the embodiment of evil and unnatural motherhood. In her speech in I.v. 36-52 she deliberately and categorically chooses evil as she summons the "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts" to extirpate her innate goodness, "unsex" her, prime her with the "direst cruelty", thicken her blood, transmute her milk into gall and to

> Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose nor keep pace between
> Th' effect and it.

After this grotesque dedication to evil, her invocation of the night chills us with her cruelty and inhumanity. Shakespeare may have had Seneca's Medea in mind. Lady Macbeth's invocation recalls Medea's as the latter summons all the evil powers of darkness to aid her in her revenge.[66] In repudiating her motherhood, Lady Macbeth again invites comparison with her classical forbear, Medea, who slew her two children. Lady Macbeth horrifies us when she strips herself of motherly affection, pity, tenderness, compassion and remorse as she declares her willingness to destroy her child if she had promised to do so:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
> And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this.
> (I.vii.54-59)

The horror of this speech is increased when one realizes that the Scottish women believed in suckling their children so that they should be "kindlie fostered" and "they [the mothers] feared least they [their children] should degenerat and grow out of kind, except they gave

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[66] Ibid., pp. 521-522.

them sucke themselves."[67]

A very interesting comment Shakespeare has implicitly made on the question of evil in Macbeth is that however evil one is, one does not completely obliterate one's humanity. This is as true of Lady Macbeth as of Macbeth. Even though she is presented as unwomanly and diabolical, the latent sparks of her humanity occasionally illuminate before us. Although she has committed herself to perpetual evil, she is not as cold and inhuman as Goneril and Regan. As a couple Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are dedicated to each other. In a perverted way Lady Macbeth is an ideal wife, co-operating with her husband so that he may fulfill his ignoble ambition; Macbeth is going to despatch Duncan partly for her. In the banquet scene (III,iv) Lady Macbeth plays the good hostess, protects her husband as he is tormented by hallucinations, and dismisses the guests in time to prevent them from hearing Macbeth's exclamation, "blood will have blood". (III.iv.122)

Moreover, Shakespeare gives us substantial evidence that Lady Macbeth is consciously acting against her better nature. She is, in other words, deliberately suppressing her real nature by projecting an inflated and untrue image of herself. While she has kindled her husband's desire

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[67] Ibid., p. 506.

to commit murder by means of her bristling speeches, and has braced herself up with wine, she betrays her womanly nature when the shrieking owl scares her, (II.ii.2-3) and her true nature that on her own she could not have committed the murder: "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't." (II.ii.12-13) Totally unprepared for the additional murders, she faints when she learns that Macbeth has killed Duncan's two chamberlains.[68]

In her conscious moments, Lady Macbeth feels no remorse and is not bothered by matters of conscience partly because she is deliberately applying the brake upon her conscience and because of her unimaginative and almost naive nature. She is deceiving herself when she says: "A little water clears us of this deed" (II.ii.66) or "What's done is done." (III.ii.12) Conscience makes Macbeth afraid of what he has done and he is therefore unwilling to return to lay the daggers near the grooms. (II.ii.49-51) Her unimaginative nature causes Lady Macbeth to rationalize her husband's fear as follows:

> The sleeping and the dead
> Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil.
> (II.ii.52-54)

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[68] Whether or not Lady Macbeth's fainting is real will remain a debatable point since Shakespeare has given no stage direction here. It is arguable that her fainting is merely a strategic device to divert attention from Macbeth now under pressure to explain why he has slain Duncan's grooms. I feel that Bradley (in his Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1963, pp. 417-419) has given a very strong argument to prove that Lady Macbeth's fainting is real.

Her womanly nature prevails in her somnambulism in which she is propelled by guilt to re-enact her crime infinitely. In her unconscious self she realizes that the ineradicable spots on her hand have damned her and that "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." (V.i. 48-49) Shakespeare humanizes her when he shows that guilt has driven her to insanity and then to suicide. Goneril commits suicide not because she is overwhelmed by guilt but because her evil schemes have been thwarted and shattered.

Many of the other characters are involved in one way or another in the evil permeating the world of Macbeth. Macbeth's evil is prefixed with Macdonwald's rebellion and Cawdor's treachery. After the murder of Duncan we meet the Porter whom we immediately recognize as a symbol of disorder and corruption. That he is drunk at his post signifies that he has given up reason and has become a beast. Although his speech is amusing, the humour is grim. The audience is apprehensively awaiting the discovery of the murder just committed and cannot help feeling that the Porter of Macbeth's castle is in a true sense the porter of hell-gate. He makes the castle an emblem of hell, goes through the catalogue of wrong-doers and then admits them as if to hell. His swearing in the name of Beelzebub, a prince of darkness, reminds the audience that the Macbeths are creatures of darkness and are themselves on "the prim-

rose way to th' everlasting bonfire". (II.ii.17-18) The knock at the Porter's gate is a knock of doom for them. Macbeth's evil has also infected the murderers, Banquo, and to a lesser extent Macduff. Macbeth employs the murderers to rid him of dangerous potential rivals and to gratify his blood-thirstiness. As I have stated earlier, although Banquo has every reason to believe that Macbeth is responsible for Duncan's murder, he still compromises his honour by not denouncing him, probably because Banquo too hopes to benefit from the witches' prophecies. Macduff has in effect deserted his family, leaving them at the mercy of a tyrant and realizes that he is partly to blame for their murder.

> Sinful Macduff,
> They were all struck for thee! Naught that I am,
> Not for their own demerits but for mine
> Fell slaughter on their souls.
> (IV.iii.224-227)

Although the play is overshadowed by the evil of the Macbeths, yet good is presented with great intensity. Since the good characters, Malcolm, Macduff, Lady Macduff, and her son, the Messenger who warns Lady Macduff to flee, and to some extent Banquo, are not strong enough to counterbalance the preponderant evil of the Macbeths, Shakespeare strengthens the forces of good through the intensity of his poetry, especially by means of imagery, by the contrast between light and darkness, good and evil, and by

the implicit condemnation of evil itself; that is, Macbeth stands condemned by himself.

The recurring images of Macbeth's ill-fitting garments, noted by C. Spurgeon,[69] and of diseases are designed to make Macbeth's evil stand out prominently. Macbeth's reply to Ross who announces the general's new title, "The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me / In borrowed robes?" (I.iii.108-109) is very revealing, for after Macbeth has usurped the throne, he is dressed in "borrowed robes". When Macbeth's fall seems imminent, Caithness remarks that the "belt of rule" is not long enough to buckle Macbeth's disease-swollen garments. (V. ii.15-16) Angus, taking up the image of the ill-fitting garments, comments that Macbeth is like a dwarfish thief, rendered impotent by his oversized robe:

> Now does he feel his title
> Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
> Upon a dwarfish thief.
> (V.ii.20-22)

Macbeth is also conceived of as the disease impairing the health of the state. The images of unnaturalness in Lady Macbeth's "unsex me" speech, (I.v.39-52) such as the thickening of her blood, the stoppage of her remorse and the conversion of her milk into gall make her the embodi-

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[69] C.F.E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us (Cambridge, 1966), p. 324-326.

ment of evil. These images, conjunct with Macbeth's realization of the sterility of a life devoted to evil and of his irreversible damnation, underline the horror of evil.

Virtue and grace are heightened by contrast between light and darkness and good and evil. In Macbeth light is associated with good, darkness with evil. Other general contrasts help to emphasize the good. The pleasant air and the "temple-haunting martlet" (I.vi.4) outside Macbeth's castle underscore the evil within. Duncan's virtues are sharply contrasted with Macbeth's evil. Macbeth recoils from his evil intention as he reflects that Duncan's virtues "Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against / The deep damnation of his taking off". (I.vii.19-20) Moreover, he knows that pity for a murdered Duncan shall cause universal indignation. (I.vii.21-25) Duncan's virtues are enhanced by the intensity of the poetry. Macduff describes the murder of the saintly Duncan as a sacrilege:

> Confusion now hath made his masterpiece:
> Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
> The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
> The life o' th' building!
> (II.iii.62-65)

The continuation of the religious imagery increases the sense of horror at the outrage done to such a virtuous king. The ringing of the alarm bell and Macduff's frantic

attempt to wake the sleepers introduce the idea that the sleepers are now resurrecting as if to Doomsday now at hand. With Duncan's death, "Renown and grace is dead," (II.iii.90) says the murderer, Macbeth. The innumerable antitheses, of which the Porter's comment on lechery is a good example, is one of the characteristic features of the style of the play, and this has led Kenneth Muir to make this very significant comment about the play:

> We may link this trick of style with the 'wrestling of destruction with creation' which Mr. Wilson Knight has found in the play, and with the opposition he has pointed out between night and day, life and death, grace and evil.[70]

Macbeth has reached the pinnacle of his evil career after his senseless butchering of Macduff's innocent wife and children. In the very next scene Malcolm and Macduff are preparing an army to depose him and re-establish peace and legitimacy. In presenting the virtues of Macduff, Shakespeare makes some necessary alterations in his sources. In Holinshed Macduff left Scotland to join Malcolm in England after his wife and children had been murdered at Macbeth's instigation. Macduff's intention was "to revenge the slaughter so cruellie executed on his wife, his chil-

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[70] William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. K. Muir (London, 1976), p. xxviii (Introduction).

dren, and other friends".[71] In the play Macduff severs relations with Macbeth after the murder of Duncan and withdraws to Fife rather than attend the coronation. Moreover, in the play Macduff is ignorant of his domestic tragedy when he encourages Malcolm to reclaim his royal birthright by overthrowing a usurper. Macduff is thus presented as patriotic and altruistic, for he does not urge Malcolm on for any personal desire of revenge. We are impressed by his virtue when, not knowing that Malcolm has really been testing him, he bursts out with this cry of despair: "These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself / Hath banished me from Scotland." (IV.iii.112-113)

The evil emanating from Macbeth slightly touches but does not defile Malcolm, the one destined to cure Scotland's ills. He is at first sceptical of Macduff's honourable intention and in testing Macduff he heaps upon himself the vices of infinite voluptuousness and insatiable avarice and claims to abound "In the division of every several crime". (IV.iii.96) The catalogue of his imaginary vices culminates with this grotesque picture of anarchy:

> Nay, had I pow'r, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth. (IV.iii.97-100)

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[71] R. Holinshed, (An extract from) The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland, in G. Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London, 1973), VII, 501.

Here Malcolm is only reflecting the disorder of the realm caused by Macbeth's evil. More than testing Macduff, Malcolm, by accusing himself of every vice, is acknowledging the fact that a ruler who does not practise restraint is prone to all these vices. By pretending to deny himself the graces befitting a king,

> As justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness,
> Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
> Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,
> (IV.iii.92-94)

he is reciting the essential attributes of the ideal king. This is also a commentary about Macbeth's unsuitability as king. Macbeth is certainly bankrupt of these assets, being

> bloody,
> Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
> Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
> That has a name.
> (IV.iii.57-60)

Convinced about Macduff's rectitude, Malcolm abjures the vices he has hurled upon himself and declares his true nature thus:

> I am yet
> Unknown to woman, never was forsworn,
> Scarcely have coveted that was mine own,
> At no time broke my faith, would not betray
> The devil to his fellow, and delight
> No less in truth than life. My first false speaking
> Was upon myself. What I am truly,
> Is thine and my poor country's to command.
> (IV.iii.125-132)

Shakespeare also stresses Malcolm's virtuous nature in a number of ways to contrast him with the "Devilish Macbeth". (IV.iii.117) In urging Malcolm to claim his inalienable birthright, the throne of Scotland, by ending Macbeth's tyranny, Macduff reminds the prince that his father Duncan has been "a most sainted king" (IV.iii.109) and his (Malcolm's) mother has spent most of her life upon her knees in anticipation of the life to come. Like Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond in King Richard the Third, Malcolm believes that he and his supporters are God's instruments; Macbeth, he says, "Is ripe for shaking, and the pow'rs above / Put on their instruments". (IV.iii.238-239) Since Scotland is sick and Macbeth is the disease, Malcolm, the restorer of his country's health, is appropriately called "the med'cine of the sickly weal" and "our country's purge". (V.ii.27,28) He is also the "sovereign flower" while Macbeth and his evil retinue are the "weeds" that must be drowned. (V.ii.30)

Malcolm's speech about scrofula or the king's evil (IV.iii.146-159) is integral to the play. The pious King Edward the Confessor was reputed to have the divine power of healing those afflicted with scrofula. Holinshed relates the king's miraculous healing power as follows:

> As hath been thought he was inspired with the gift of prophesie, and also to have had the gift of healing infirmities and diseases. He used to helpe those that were vexed with the disease, commonlie called the kings evill, and left that vertue as it were a portion of inheritance unto his successors the kings of this realme.[72]

That James I believed that one of the attributes of the anointed king was this power of healing is not the main reason why Shakespeare includes Edward's therapeutic powers in the play. Shakespeare is primarily contrasting Edward's power of curing his subject's disease with Macbeth's evil which causes diseases in the realm. Moreover, Kenneth Muir makes this interesting footnote comment in his Arden edition: "The good supernatural described here [IV.iii.146-159] is a contrast to the evil supernatural of the Weird Sisters."[73] By associating with "England's holy king, health-giver and God-elect who, unlike Macbeth, has power over 'the evil',...Malcolm borrows 'grace' to combat the nightmare evil of his land".[74]

Malcolm is a more developed character than Richmond. Richmond seems to be thrown in almost gratuitously in the last act of Richard the Third. After Duncan's assassination, Malcolm flees to England to be outside the

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[72] Ibid., VII, 508.

[73] William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. K. Muir (London, 1976), p. 130 (footnote).

[74] G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London, 1962), p. 148.

reach of Macbeth. At the court of the devout King Edward the Confessor, Malcolm is spiritually moulded for his prospective role as king. When he reappears in IV.iii. he shows caution and wisdom in his interview with Macduff, and we know that he is matured enough to assume the responsibilities of kingship. In the cauldron scene the apparition of the crowned child, holding a tree symbolizes Malcolm the bringer of health and a new order. In his final speech with which the play concludes Malcolm the new king will "by the grace of Grace" (V.viii.72) purge the state of its "deadly grief" (IV.iii.215) and plant a new and healthy order.

In Macbeth, as in Richard the Third, King Lear and in many of his other plays, Shakespeare persistently shows the ultimate futility of evil. Evil is the absence of good, the denial of everything that makes life meaningful, and inevitably leads to the destruction of those practising it. Macbeth, a distinguished general with vast potential for good, succumbs to ignoble ambition. He murders his king, puts the blame on two innocent chamberlains whom he expeditiously despatches, and seizes the throne. Henceforth this usurper cannot enjoy a moment of peace, security and sleep. Once committed to evil, he is condemned to infinite evil, and in the process he is disintegrated and he ruins the country.

Macbeth's evil has made his life meaningless. Evil

breeds chaos in the minds of the Macbeths and in society. Macbeth's hallucinations are symptomatic of his disordered mind and his troubled conscience. His conduct is irrational; he is in close communion with dark, supernatural forces. The unholy quest for security is an exercise in futility. His mental disarray is characterized by expressions such as "But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer," (III.ii.16) by his conjuration of the witches, which is a vivid picture of absolute chaos, and by the unleashing of his passions as he fulminates on friend and foe alike and as he instigates senseless carnage in his desperation to apprehend elusive security. Evil has violated the mental integrity of Lady Macbeth. Her mental perturbation, somnambulism, fixation with guilt in her unconscious moments, and suicide result from her deliberate choice of evil. Macbeth is denied the basic natural goods of life, namely, sleep, food and security, as well as the benefits of old age, such "As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends". (V.iii.25) Previously, Macbeth has been overwhelmed by the sense of unreality when he contemplated murder:

> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise and nothing is
> But what is not.
> (I.iii.139-142)

Finally, there is one significant difference

between Macbeth, on the one hand, and Richard III, Goneril, Regan and Edmund, on the other. Richard III, Goneril, Regan and Edmund are very energetic in their perpetration of evil; they are essentially cold, calculating, callous, and not in the least concerned with consciences because they have expressed no internal moral conflict. They are superhuman monsters of iniquity. Before Bosworth Field, however, a nightmarish dream forces Richard III to talk about conscience for a brief moment but he soon forgets about conscience and dies defiantly. Only when Edmund is fatally wounded does he think of doing some good. In Macbeth, Shakespeare shows that however diabolical the Macbeths are, they never completely destroy their humanity. Neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth is repentant but they still win our sympathy and retain some residue of humanity. Macbeth is reluctantly initiated into evil; he murders the king only after he has been tempted by the witches and by chance which has brought Duncan to Macbeth's home; and above all he has been bullied by his wife. His conscience is always with him and he is bitterly aware of his inescapable damnation. Although Lady Macbeth wishes to dehumanize herself, repudiate her womanliness and be filled "from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty" (I.v.40-41), she lacks the courage to kill the king and is afraid of the screeching owl. We are soon aware that the redoubtable and bristling personality she projects is a synthetic one

after all. Her effort to act out her role and smother her conscience fails her. Her guilt is working from within and leads to her insanity, sleep-walking and suicide.

Shakespeare repeatedly makes the point that evil is ultimately destructive, destroying both the evil-doer and society. However, evil in itself is limited for it lacks the ability to regenerate itself. The forces of good always triumph but at a great price and invariably promise to heal the nation's wounds, restore legitimate rule, compensate the dispossessed, reward friends, punish enemies and plant a new order based on morality and justice.

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