KING LEAR AND THE GODS:

SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY AND RENAISSANCE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

I

Although most recent interpretations of Shakespeare's King Lear have tended, in various ways, to identify it as a "Christian" play, the aim of this study is not to determine whether it contains Christian references. Rather, it is mainly to examine the validity of the currently widespread belief that Lear is an optimistically Christian drama, in which (1) the protagonist, among other characters, is, consequent to his sufferings, "regenerated," "redeemed," or "saved," often by analogy with the morality play tradition, or with Dante's Purgatorio through which he is assumed to have passed on the way to his Paradiso, and (2) corresponding to the meaningful suffering of the protagonist, there is, in addition, an intrinsic teleology suggested by the play, a cosmically derived plan, which somehow gives providential significance to the events of the tragedy.

Concerning the first point, instances are numerous, ranging from O. J. Campbell's morality-play interpretation, "The Salvation of Lear," to R. W. Chambers' attempt to improve on Bradley's "Redemption of Lear": "If there were no more . . . than a tale of redemption

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2R. W. Chambers, King Lear (Glasgow, 1940), pp. 48, 49.

through suffering, it would be as unbearable as the Purgatorio would be without the Paradiso. But King Lear is, like the Paradiso, a vast poem on the victory of true love. . . . Lear, consoled, ends by teaching patience to Gloucester and Cordelia." Still further, some critics envision not only Christian optimism, but Christ Himself: like G. Wilson Knight, who sees in each tragic hero "a miniature Christ," 4 J. Dover Wilson remarks, "It is impossible to contemplate the death of Lear without thinking of Calvary." 5 According to Bickersteth, Shakespeare "was unconsciously inspired by a story taken from Christian mythology," with Cordelia in the part of Christ. 6 As for Lear, there is no doubt that he has been improved, or regenerated: "The 'spire of meaning' in this play," says Lothian, "is the spiritual history or regeneration of King Lear." 7 To Danby, the important point is the learning of patience: "King Lear in fact can be regarded as a study in patience unrewarded although achieved." 8 "Lear," insists Bethell, "after being bound upon his fiery wheel in this life, attaining humility and patience . . . is

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5 J. Dover Wilson, Six Tragedies of Shakespeare (London, 1929), p. 46.
7 J. M. Lothian, King Lear (Toronto, 1949), p. 27.
fit for heaven." According to Tillyard, Lear is one of the tragedies in which the hero is regenerated through his sufferings; through him, "not only the destruction of an established way of life, but the birth of a new order" ensues. And Thaler adds, "... not only Lear but also Cordelia and Kent and Gloucester and Edgar gain spiritual insight through the discipline of suffering... the soul-searching and God-seeking which Lear proposes at the end."

"Mankind," says G. Wilson Knight, "are working out a sort of purgatory... the good are sweetened, purified by adversity." Theodore Spencer speaks of "... the purgation of King Lear... it is the discovery that... reality is good... that breaks his heart..." According to Haydn, "Lear and Gloucester move through purgation from self-indulgence to endurance and patience." In this "noblest spiritual utterance since La Divina Commedia," suggests Fripp, Lear achieves "Lowness, justice, tenderness," the "patience and happy death" which "Gloucester,


too, attains."  Adrien Bonjour finds Lear "redeemed." Brents Stirling apparently considers it a fact too obvious for discussion that Lear ends in Christian reconciliation. It is not, deduces Ribner, "a tragedy of damnation, but rather of salvation." Symptomatic of the stat present in Lear studies, Siegel's recent book carries such views even further:

Lear's final conviction that Cordelia is alive might be regarded as the mysterious insight believed to be granted a man on the point of death. In his reconciliation with Cordelia it was as if from purgatory he had heard the celestial music and seen the angelic radiance that he was at last about to attain, a vision of what he would experience after death. This miracle is the redemption of Lear for heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the Son of God had come down to earth. The analogy between Cordelia and Christ, who redeemed human nature from the curse brought on it by Adam and Eve, is made unmistakable, although not crudely explicit. Cordelia's ignominious death completes the analogy between her and Christ; the "brand of heaven" in releasing Cordelia's and Lear's souls from the prison of their bodies, enabled them to become reunited in eternal bliss.

While microcosmic suffering is, therefore, meaningful, and in

16 English Studies, XXXV (1954), 254.
the Dantean sense, ultimately "comic," the macrocosm, too, has a corollary orderliness. As a chapter of Heilman's book puts it, "The Gods are Just"; Divine Justice rules the earth. 20 "In the play itself," affirms M. D. H. Parker, "there is nothing wanton. There is justice, mercy, sacrifice, and redemption." 21 "The Christian view prevails in King Lear," agrees Myrick, "though the characters are pagans" 22; and Kirschbaum pronounces, "That it is laid in pre-Christian times need not at all mean that it is not Christian in content." 23 Indeed, agrees Heilman, in this play "pervaded by Christian influences . . . there is a realm of eternal law and justice . . ." 24 Natural law, in the traditional sense, presides over the tragedy. "Shakespeare," Hardin Craig asserts, "held very firmly to this belief in the ultimate punishment of the wicked, in other words, in eternal justice." He exemplifies it in all of his tragedies, and was certainly neither sceptical nor bewildered. . . . King Lear is based on the doctrine of eternal law . . . Lear's faith in a divine providence, at least while he has his reason, is complete." 25 King Lear presents the "moral world as inexorably just

20 R. B. Heilman, This Great Stage (Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1938).


23 Leo Kirschbaum, "Banquo and Edgar: Character or Function?" Essays in Criticism, VII (1957), 13.

24 Heilman, op. cit., pp. 277-278.

the play depicts an open way toward moral restoration and seems to promise redemption to all who will forsake evil," concludes A. W. Crawford, who finds the play in "perfect accord with the theistic view of Christianity."  

Hudson agrees that such views are beyond dispute: "Need it be said that such ideas of human character could grow only where the light of Christianity shines? The Poet's conceptions of virtue and goodness, as worked out in this drama are thoroughly of the Christian type,—steeped, indeed, in the efficacy of the Christian Ideal," a declaration which may have caused the New Variorum editor to interpolate, "I cannot refrain from here recording my thorough admiration..." The most recent fully annotated text, that of Muir, concurs: "J. C. Maxwell is right when he says that King Lear is a Christian play about a pagan world. The first part of this assertion... seems to me certainly true." A study of "Heavenly Justice in the Tragedies of Shakespeare" by Carmen Rogers assures us that the heroes act "within the boundaries of a beneficent and divine order," whose "wheels of retribution move irrevocably, quickly, impartially, but compassionately."
G. J. Sisson speaks of "the essentially Christian spirit of the tragedies." Once again, Siegel will have none of even Bradley's modified optimism concerning a Shakespearean tragic moral order. In Bradley's picture of a moral order which admits the continual engendering of evil, and the destruction of good as well as evil, Siegel insists, four alterations must be made: "(1) Shakespearean tragedy conveys a sense of divine providence; (2) this divine providence visits a poetically appropriate retribution upon the guilty; (3) characters and action suggest analogies with the Bible story; (4) there are intimations of the heaven and hell of Christian religion." In short, Siegel's committed optimism revises Bradley "to make the order manifested in the course of the tragedy explicitly Christian; its laws the laws ordained by God . . . ." 32

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"though . . . barbaric in scenery, the play is in the deepest sense Christian"; H. J. G. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century (London, 1929), p. 122 n. 83; the following
Although this has been the weight of much recent commentary, in contrast to that of previous periods, critics are not lacking who refuse to acknowledge the "Christian-optimism" theory. In addition to those who pass over the matter in silence, or who, like Bradley, are ambiguous on the issue, several writers have directly entered the lists against the prevailing interpretation. With regard to the first aspect, that of the meaningful suffering of the protagonist in relation to the outcome, E. K. Chambers counters R. W. Chambers' "final victory of good" with his own vision of the final victory of evil.  

"We hardly," suggests Leech, "think of the dying Lear as going to his reward." George Orwell doubts any improvement at all in the protagonist through suffering. Schülling enters a vigorous antithetical position, denying even Lear's purification, which Bradley would grant. In surveying recent Lear criticism, Zandvoort comments on Bickersteth's identification above of Cordelia with Christ: "I would not be surprised if all


this was thought rather bewildering. Some it may remind of medieval methods of biblical exegesis (Bickersteth himself uses the term 'anagogic' for the spiritual meaning he discovers in the play). . . . We will not cavil at this interpretation . . . by pointing out that Christ rescued his chosen ones from Hell after his crucifixion, whereas, if Cordelia entered a kingdom already divided against itself, she did so before being hanged." Further, observes Zandvoort, in a comment which underlines an anomalous situation, "What is important for our purpose, and symptomatic of at least one trend of contemporary criticism, is that an interpretation like this comes from a man who . . . is a serious scholar, and not merely a religious enthusiast exploiting Shakespeare for his own purposes." Stoll had earlier incredulously remarked of the consoling and Hegelian reconciliation proposed by such critics for the end: "If that be the sentiment of Shakespeare, his play should be by our bed's head, with the prayer book"; such a conclusion, Stoll ironically called a "Stimme von Oben." The optimistic renderings of Shakespeare's play are diagnosed in John Peter's study of satire: the hopelessness of Greek tragedy, "a Christian dramatist is not likely on the face of it (and despite King Lear) to achieve. His audience are all too ready to substitute for the intangibles of calamity some simplified scale of rewards and punishments.

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to console themselves with an epilogic vision of Lear and Cordelia happily reunited in Heaven, while Edmund, Gonoril, and Regan are roasting in Hell, and this tendency is bound to detract from the tragic sense of death and disaster as absolute experiences... during which, rather than after which, man realises himself. Or, as Dr. Johnson put it, regarding Nahum Tate's version, "In the present case the publick has decided"; and Johnson's "publick," it may be suggested, shares a tradition with the critical theory to be examined in the present study.

With regard to the second, or macrocosmic, aspect of the optimistic theory, opponents would deny the alleged universal order and benevolence. Such divergent critics as Bradley and Empson concur on this point: Any theological interpretation of the world on Shakespeare's part is excluded from the great tragedies, says the first; "The attempts to fit Christian sentiments onto" Lear "seem to me to falsify the play," agrees the second. P. P. Wilson declares of that work: "No compensatory heaven is offered. Man has only himself and his own power and endurance to fall back on. These are very great, but when they fail only madness or death remains and death is, if not nescience, escape into the unknown." G. B. Harrison is one of the few to commit what

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39 John Peter, Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford, 1956), pp. 211-212.


the optimistic critics might term a "vulgar error": "The lesson, motive and motto of Lear is contained in Gloucester's words" on the flies.43 Like Arthur Sewell, D. G. James, in his Dream of Learning, sees no clear sign of Christian doctrine in the play, which depicts a world of savagery and evil.44 Finally, Fairchild contrasts Lear with the other tragedies, such as Hamlet and Othello, where Christian belief appears as an implied background; compare Hamlet's religious faith that includes belief in God, the soul, and personal immortality, while "Othello, pagan though he is, believes in man's 'eternal Soul,' in prayer, in Heaven and its powers, apparently also in the Devil. Macbeth has a degree of religious awe; what he would 'highly' that would be 'holily'; he believes in God, in prayer, and in some form of immortality." King Lear, says Fairchild, lacks such a background; yet "paradoxically, what we may call religious beliefs are mentioned more frequently in King Lear than in other tragedies; but they are the cries of natural man as he comes into conflict with forces aligned against him."45


45 A. H. R. Fairchild, Shakespeare and the Tragic Theme (Univ. of Missouri Studies, XIX, 1944), p. 49 ("King Lear is distinctly a pagan play"). T. S. Eliot (various essays, corroborated in conversation with the writer in 1951) seems to retain, along with Santayana, a nineteenth-century secular attitude towards Shakespeare; long the dominant view, Santayana's, like Taine's, Brandes', Leslie Stephen's, Else's, and Ruskin's, persists today in many quarters, as well as among the general public. Cf. Santayana's Interpretations of Poetry and Religion (New York, 1900), p. 25: "For Shakespeare, in the matter of
In view of numerous such religious interpretations as those exemplified above, this study proposes, in brief, to examine the relevance to King Lear of the popular modern theory of "Christian optimism."

II

In order to determine the relevance of the "Christian optimist" theory to King Lear, a detailed investigation of the characters' religious "belief-speeches" will be presented. Among the central personages, such belief-utterances will be shown to fall into four main categories: pious, atheistic, superstitious, and an indeterminate piety-skepticism configuration. In addition to the evidence of the play itself, it will be seen, first, that Renaissance tendency was to

attribute such beliefs to pre-Christians and Heathens, who were either 
prisci theologi (foreshadowing Christianity), atheistic, superstitious, 
or pagans whose natural religion might easily decline into skepticism; 
and secondly, that such belief-categories were already present or implicit in a work acknowledged to be Shakespeare's source for his secondary plot, Sidney's *Arcadia*. Insofar as the play may be said to operate as a testing of these religious attitudes in the light of an ambiguous or unbenevolent Providence, it may be considered to be a manifestation of the Renaissance disintegration of trust in a Special Providence.

In the next chapter, evidence will be offered, as background, (1) to demonstrate the Renaissance breakdown of providential beliefs, in Italy, in France, and in England, and the substitution of such concepts as fortune, chance, and the supposed Epicurean disinterestedness of the gods. Consequently, Gloucester's "flies • • • sport" speech will be found no inordinately eccentric or isolated utterance, but, along with the more frequent image of man as the gods' tennis ball, a representative expression of despair at man's passivity in a newly discovered un providential universe. (2) Calvin and Montaigne are observed to fill the apparently un providential void with a new image of the Deity as a *Deus absconditus*, whose de-anthropomorphized visage and whose justice are hidden from the feeble reason of mankind; while in this process, the Baconian instauration of Second Causes, and the scientific circumvention of the First Cause, are furthered. In short, evidence exists to illustrate not only Renaissance disbelief in a clear
and Special Providence, but also the breakdown of the medieval analogi-
cal principle linking a perspicuously and appealably just God with man.

(3) While the direct connection between Montaigne and Lear has not
been fully established, it is reasonable to suppose that similar ideas
were in the air; in any event, Calvin, whose view of the Deus abscondi-
ditus was not unlike Montaigne’s, is believed to have been the major
religious influence in Shakespeare’s age. (4) If Shakespeare’s direct
manifestation of a Calvinist Deus absconditus seems unacceptable—and
no attempt is made to press Shakespeare’s connection with Calvinism
beyond that point—he could indirectly have derived a similar concep-
tion of the Deity from his source, the Arcadia, whose author was
influenced by Calvinism. In the Arcadia, not only are there continual
cries of despair in a mysteriously hostile universe, where the gods
seem wantonly opposed to human happiness, foreshadowing Lear, but the
major religious attitudes in Shakespeare’s tragedy are already present:
(a) the prisca theologia view in Pamela; (b) the atheistic position in
Cecropia; (c) the superstitious notion in Basilius; and (d) the inde-
terminate attitude of mankind caught in a universe ruled by ambiguous
or malignant Powers. In connection with the second (atheistic) and
fourth (ultimately skeptical) of these views, the existence of a sig-
nificant Renaissance climate of free-thought is sketched, along with the
Renaissance convention of the inward and the outward skeptic, a dual-
istic polarity which may be considered to embrace Edmund and the later
Lear. (5) In order more clearly to define Shakespeare’s intentions in
his work, the old King Lear, generally accepted as his source, is
examined for its religious attitudes. In his new drama, Shakespeare has eliminated the numerous direct Christian references of his source, removing both the underlying conviction of Divine Justice and Providence, and such traditional expressions of these as the voice of God in thunder; and in place of the anthropomorphic Deity, he has introduced presiding Powers whose voice in thunder seems ambiguously to express disinterest, menace, or hostility.

In the third chapter, evidence from King Lear itself is presented to demonstrate that the belief-utterances of the major characters coincide both with the expected tendencies of pagans, as well as with the religious attitudes available to Shakespeare in the Arcadia: (a) Cordelia and Edgar are seen to parallel the prisca theologia position of Pamela, helping to account for Shakespeare's Christian overtones in the depiction of those personages; (b) Edmund, Goneril, and Regan parallel the inward atheist, Cecropia; (c) Gloucester, reminiscent of Sidney's sustained antipathy to superstition, parallels Basilius not only in his superstition, but also in his adultery; and (d) Lear reflects a shifting reaction to the ambiguously-oriented cosmos which Sidney depicts. In Lear's case, the complexities of the piece, framed between belief and disbelief, are exemplified: he is shown to move from total dependence on his gods, through experience, to a total and vehement rejection of those gods.

While, in general, the religious attitudes in Lear reflect the Renaissance breakdown of a belief in a Special Providence, further intrinsic evidence is, in the fourth chapter, shown to exist. (1) In
his depiction of the minor characters, especially Albany, Shakespeare appears to take special pains to indicate the play's probing of optimistic faith in divine justice; and Albany's hierarchical status is ironically juxtaposed with the patent fallacy of his belief. (2) But even more clearly, an examination of the relationship between prayers and their results reveals the extent to which the play implicitly derides such optimism. (3) And still more clearly, and even more implicitly, a number of sequential ironies—juxtaposition of line and line, or line and action—displays the incontestable anti-Provvidential direction of Shakespeare's tragedy. (4) Finally, if the propositions of this study are correct, they may help to clarify one of the major puzzles of King Lear. Shakespeare's mature and apparently unique resort to a duplicated plot; it may be suggested that not two wastefully iterative plots, but four conflicting attitudes towards Providence operate in King Lear. Shakespeare thus continues a method of dramatic correlation of parallel and competing ideas, which he has already utilised, for instance, in Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, and Hamlet. In addition, both Lear and Gloucester are shown, through examination of Renaissance conventions, to have a relation of duality, as well as of iteration, and other complementary and contrasting functions of those characters are proposed.

If the above demonstration is acceptable, the two tenets of the optimistic Christian theory, that Lear is ultimately redeemed, and that a just and beneficent Providence prevails, will have been shown to be untenable.
In the latter half of the sixteenth century, two attitudes towards Divine Providence, even among Christian believers, seem to have gained ground: first, that Providence, if it existed, had little or no relation to the particular affairs of individual men; and, second, that it operated in ways inscrutable and hidden to human reason. (1) The first coincided with an Epicurean revival, which, along with Lucretius, and the renewed ancient atomist tradition, Lucian, and such currents as Averroism, prevailed among those increasingly susceptible to skepticism. (2) The second viewpoint was furthered, in addition to Montaignian and Baconian influences, by the Reformers; of these, Calvin, especially, dominating religious doctrine during a large part of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, presented an incomprehensible and unappealable God—a Deus absconditus (cf. Isaiah 45:15) whose seemingly arbitrary judgments of election and reprobation were already determined, beyond the reach of human reason or experience.

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New orientations between man and the heavenly powers were, in several directions, formed during the Renaissance, disintegrating the relative medieval sense of security, "die innere gläubige Sicherheit des mittelalterlichen in Gott gebetteten Menschen, die Goethesche 'ewige Ruh des Herrn.'"² In his study of "The Rehabilitation of Epicurus . . . in the Early Renaissance," D. C. Allen has demonstrated the return to the Epicurean pleasure-doctrine, without considering the corollary Epicurean notion regarding Providence;³ the latter, perhaps, held at the same time, was, as Surtz has indicated, the inexorable conclusion from Epicurus' premises: "The happy life of pleasure which is the final end of man is impossible without the elimination of the most serious hindrance to human joy," i.e., fear of the heavens, and, to destroy that, "he does not annihilate the gods, but makes them absolutely indifferent to human concerns."⁴ To Epicurus, paradoxically, those people "smitten with 'religious' dread" are truly impious, while those exhibit true piety who hold that the divine is immortal and happy, believing that the gods, "being endowed with prudence, cannot enter into the category of bunglers" and "know neither toil nor fatigue." Despite the fact, then, that Epicurus was apparently religious and

believed in the gods, he viewed them as rois fainéants and held their perfect serenity to be inconsistent with their meddling in the human scene, "the turmoil of affairs, anxieties, and feelings and anger and benevolence"; and he concluded that "From their indestructibility it follows that they are strangers to all suffering; nothing can cause them any joy or inflict on them any suffering from outside."

In place of Providence, the blind and fickle Fortuna, with her human counterpoise, virtù, was re-emphasized in, for example, the historical scienza nuova of Machiavelli; for him, as for Napoleon, Providence was on the side of the strongest battalion. Drama, moreover, paralleled history, as Allen Gilbert observes: "it seems hardly too much to call the tragedy of the sixteenth century the tragedy of Fortune." And, discussing Fortune's operations in the plays of Cinthio, he finds it to conform both to the dramatic practice of Rucellai, Alamanni, Tasso, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher, as

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well as with the Renaissance view of life as "unstable, shifting, irrational, and unpredictable." 9 The latter, Machiavelli considered the reason for the widespread belief in Fortune during his time. 10 Even during the first half of the sixteenth century, a passive reaction to the vagaries of Providence appears in the Venetian humanist, Pietro Alcyonio; offering no explanations for man's sufferings, his resignation, like Poggio Bracciolini's, was that of one to the way of the world. The latter, in *The Misery of the Human Condition*, stressed the antagonism of nature to human life. 11 Another Italian humanist, Filippo Bervaldo, in his treatise on *Earthquakes*, saw no remedy against calamity, attributing man's unhappiness to the arbitrary and blind operations of Fortune. And about 1515, Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1476-1533), nephew of the more noted Giovanni, felt called upon to explain *The True Causes of the Calamities of our Times*, combatting the misleading fatalistic and astrological views current at the time. 12 Accepting, on the other hand, the pseudo-naturalistic astrological determinism of events, 13 the influential Pomponazzi (1462-1525), called the "last Scholastic and the first man of the Enlightenment," while

9 Gilbert, ibid., p. 41.
10 Gilbert, ibid., pp. 32-33.
viewing Providence as God's eternal law, removed the Deity from direct and immediate relation with the world; the universe acts through "the heavens" determining particular occurrences. Further, numerous Renaissance Italians, as a modern sociologist of that period asserts, had relinquished the idea of divine power, while humanist historians tended to eliminate belief in miracles; these, and the search for supernatural causation they abandoned, content to leave such problems of teleology to theologians. Finally, Roman Seneca, transmitting the idea of Fortune and the truth of existence as uncertain, bequeathed also to Renaissance drama a Stoic sense of fatalism which ran counter to the conception of Providence.

In Renaissance France, as in Italy, evidence for the disintegration of belief in Providence appears plentiful, both in skeptical writings, necessarily less patent because of the censorship, and in the pious attacks against proponents of skepticism. Indeed, as Busson observes, towards the middle of the sixteenth century, "Il semble . . .

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16 W. K. Ferguson, The Renaissance in Historical Thought (Boston, 1948), pp. 4, 81.

Charles Sainte-Marthe, In Psalmum Nonagesimum (1550) observes: "Ces Épicuriens impies se servent des raisons naturelles comme de machines de guerre pour jeter Dieu à bas de son trône, lui enlever la providence ..." Earlier in his career, Pontus de Tyard in his Livre des Vers Lyriques (1552) condemns Aristotle's attacks on providence: "Le grec trop audacieux/Duquel l'infâme pensée/Fut jusqu'au Ciel avancée/Pour y enfermer les Dieux," and in another place he disposes of the Epicureans "qui trop vivement pique du corporel, se sent en loy entièrement arrestez et ... ont osé loger en un si vil lieu la fin et le terme du soverain bien." Elsewhere, however, as in Mantice (ed. 1558), he questions Providence. In one of his Dialogues, Guy de Brus, has a speaker suggest that Fortune rather than reason rules Providence. Popular in the Renaissance, Lucian satirizes the absurdity of prayers; in Jupiter tragoedus, he ridicules those who give the name "order" to a blind tendency, and "providence" to the natural order. Although influenced by Lucian, Erasmus, on the one hand, denounces his providential view as blasphemy,  

21 Busson, Sources, pp. 415-416.  
While, on the other hand, Des Périers reveals the Lucianic attitude in his *Cymbalum Mundi* regarding the injustices of life. Bateman's *Golden Book* (1577) similarly mentions the Epicurean belief in the futility of prayers to Jupiter: "his want of ears declare him to be indifferent unto all, not harkening more to one, then to an other." In his preface (1563) to the second volume of *L'Instruction Chrétienne* (1564), observes Virat, "Ces déistes, ... ne se moquent de toute religion. ... et ... jugent comme les épicuriens et pareillement de la providence de Dieu envers les hommes, comme s'il ne se resloit point du gouvernement des choses humaines, ainsi qu'elles fussent gouvernées ou par fortune, ou par la prudence, ou par la folie des hommes, selon que les choses rencontrent." These doubters of Providence, "épicuriens et

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25 Bateman, t., [2].

26 Susson, *Sources*, p. 509.
atheistes, desquels le nombre est beaucoup plus grand que plusieurs ne pensent," depress him because many are learned men: "... l'horreur me redouble encore d'avantage, quand je considère que plusieurs de ceux ... qui sont mesme souventes fois estimes des plus savans, et des plus aigus et plus subtiles esprits, sont non seulement infectes de cest execrable atheisme, mais aussi en font profession et en tiennent escole, et empoisonnent plusieurs personnes de tel poison. Parquoy nous sommes venus en un temps, auquel il y a danger que nous n'ayons plus de peine à combattre avec tels monstres qu'avec les superstitieux et idolatres si Dieu n'y pourvoit, comme j'ay bonne esperance qu'il le fera."27 Virat feels a real danger to exist from the Epicurean scoffers et Providence: "Il nous devra pour le moins garder de tomber en l'erreur ... des Epicurdiens abbesstes qui nient la providence de Dieu," while the Stoics offer a similar peril in mingling God with nature: "et de tomber semblablement en l'erreur ... de ces pauvres philosophes nommes stocliens, qui lient et assujettissent Dieu à nature et aux causes qu'ils appellent secondes ..." Those philosophers who say "qu'il n'y a aucune providence en luy, c'est à dire qu'ils estiment Dieu, comme s'il estoit cisseux, et comme s'il avoit aucun soin de ses creatures pour les gouverner" believe God to be cruel and inhuman.28

Evidence of the prevalence of feeling against Providence appears in Calvin's Institutes: "I speak not of the Epicureans," he explains,

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27Busson, Sources, p. 510 and n.
28Ibid., pp. 471-472.
"(a pestilence the world hath always been filled with) who dream of an
depraved mind of man, fortune may not be said to rule: not that we
whirls about all things at random, for such folly ought to be far from
the breast of a Christian." 

they do trifle and talk fondly, who thrust in a bare permission," he adds later, "in place of the
providence of God, as though God sat in a watch-tower waiting for the
chances of fortune, and so his judgments should depend on the will of
men." Pierre du Val's De la Grandeur de Dieu (1555) reproves
"... Epicuriens et fols Empedoclistes/ Qui ne voulez aucun Dieu recevoir/ On lui ostez Providence et scavoir." Louis Leroy in the
preface to his translation of Phédon de Platon traitant de l'immortalité
de l'Ame (1553), attacks the atheism of those "qui nient la Providence divine ... pour avoir grand occasion de servir à leurs concupiscences désordonnées et voluptés illicites." The supposed Epicurean belief
in dieux fainéants is condemned by Jean de Neufville in De pulchritudine animi (1556): "la secte des épiciuriens ... de toutes les sectes la plus pernicieuse," which finds in Aristotle some support for

29 Institutes, tr. Norton, I, xvi.4.
30 Ibid., I, xvii.2.
31 Ibid., I, xviii.1.
32 Busson, Sources, p. 593.
its denial of providence. More scornful is the translator of Cicero's De la nature des dieux (1581), a work which he believes "n'avoir rien omis de ce qui appartiennent aux discours et raisons qu'ameinent de nostre age les mescreans, lucianistes, epicuriens, libertins, qui comme serpens rampent et pullulent de jour en jour." According to La Noue's work, translated as Politike and Militarie Discourses (1588), France is overrun with Epicureans. In his Apologie pour Herodote (1566), Henri Estienne devotes a chapter to defending God against the charge of injustice; besides the true atheists, he says, there is a whole group that, "nonobstant le remors de leur conscience, veulent contrefaire les atheistes." "Se faschent de ce qu'ils ne se peuvent oster de la fantasie qu'il y ait un Dieu et qu'ils ont des remors de conscience alencontre du reniement de la providence de Dieu."37

In his Trois vérités (1593), Charron distinguishes, among three types of atheists, the Epicureans who seem to have some Deity, but hold it to be careless of this world and of us. In Hotman's Trois divers traittez sur la Providence (1596) protests, against the protagonists

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34 Pp.169-170; cited by Busson, Sources, p.604. Jean de Neufville, in his preface, like Hervet and Postel, writes "pour la multitude grandissante chaque jour des epicuriens et des athees de ce siecle." Cited by Greenwood, op. cit., p. 84.

35 Busson, Sources, p.603.

36 Chapter 24; cited by Buckley, op. cit., p.100.

37 XIV.9; cited by Busson, Sources, pp.513-514.

38 I,3, pp.7,9,10; cited by Busson, Sources, pp.585-589.
ideas in *King Lear*, that man is not less provided by *Nature*, as Pliny suggests, than the animals; he agrees, rather, with Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* that Providence has given man all he requires.\(^{39}\) The extent of contemporary disbelief in watchful providence is suggested by G. Pacard's *Théologie naturelle* (1574, 1606, 1611): "Nous voyons cette perverse opinion avoir saisi le coeur de la plupart des hommes que Dieu est voirement créateur de toutes choses, mais qu'à present il ne se soucie aucunement de ce qui se fait ici-bas sur terre." Pacard distinguishes classes of infidels: the first hold with Averroes that if God governed this world "rien n'arriveroit par fortune et par cas"; the second agree with Epicurus that "si Dieu avoit soin des choses basses et particulières, cela diminueroit sa felicité"; others think that God would have the alternative of suppressing worldly evil or accepting responsibility for sin. Pacard opposes especially those who would replace God by "nature, fortune, or art," and suggests that the atheists confuse nature with God, that chance does not exist because the world is ordered, and as art proves man's intelligence, so the world demonstrates the wisdom of God.\(^{41}\) In his treatise of Providence, Book II, of *La Constance et Consolation des Calamités Publiques* (1594), the neo-Stoic Du Vair gives evidence of those contemporaries who regarded Providence as inactive or malicious: "la pluspart des hommes luy..." \(^{40}\)

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\(^{39}\) Ch. VII; cited by Busson, *Sources*, p. 506.


\(^{41}\) Busson, *Sources*, pp. 578-579.
ferment malicieusement les yeux. . . . A la vérité peu s'en est-il trouvé, qui aient osé passer si avant en impiété que de la nier du tout . . . Bien y en a-t-il grand nombre, desquels j'ay souvent ouy, et toujours rejeté les opinions," Du Vair hastens to add, "qui avouans la puissance et sagesse divine en la première création du monde, luy en ont osté le gouvernement, après qu'il a esté creé; les uns l'attribuans a cest ordre, qu'ils appellent Nature, les autres â une nécessite fatale, les autres au hazard et à la fortune." Having made these pronouncements regarding current skepticism of Providence, Du Vair asserts that nature is not a power separate from God, as Vicomercato held, and that destiny is nothing but the foreknowledge of God.\(^1\)

The year 1596, Busson observes, is peculiarly rich in apologies,\(^2\) a fact, which suggests that the skepticism so plentiful since the middle of the century may have reached some sort of climax. At this time, in addition to Champagnac and Jean de Serres, appeared Hotman's *Trois divers traittez sur la Providence*, which remarks that men still believe in God but doubt Providence; against the Peripatetics, "ceux qui confessent une divine providence seulement en ce qui se fait au ciel, et non pas en ce qui se fait sur la terre," he establishes the reality of a particular providence; and, while he gives one chapter to the existence of God, he devotes nine chapters to His Providence,\(^3\) a ratio which may

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\(^1\) Busson, *Sources*, pp. 489-490.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 505-506.

\(^3\) Ibid.
indicate something of the Providence-questioning climate near the time of *King Lear*.

While, in England, unrestrained public expression of the Epicurean view of Providence had to wait until later in the seventeenth century, promulgation of such ideas, as in Italy and France, occurred during the England of Shakespeare's time. John Hooper's *Declaration of the Ten Commandments* (1588) complains of contemporary Epicurean disparagement of providential justice. Among such as think there is no God to reward virtue, nor to punish vice, as the Epicures say, I would to God the same blasphemy had corrupted none that bear the name of christianitie. In addition, Thomas Cooper's *Admonition to the people of England* (1589), attests that "the schoole of Epicure, and the Atheists, is mightily increased in these days." W. R., in *The English Ape* (1588) attacks the imitation of foreign ways, and especially, those that have "so stuffed England with their Epicurisme, and so replenished it with careless cogitations."

A work was published in 1590 of which the title remains: *Against the Impiety of*

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48 F. L. P. 118.  
49 F. L. P. 6.
Again, reflecting foreign influences, Thomas Bowes' preface to the 1594 edition of La Primaundayse's Second Part of the French Academie is afraid that those atheists in France against whom La Primaundaye had written have penetrated England: "And surely it is greatly to be feared that ... this poison of Atheisme hath praised [sic] narrow seas and is landed in the harts of no small number."  

La Primaundayse himself had written near the beginning of the Second Part, "There are many, yea moe at this day that doe openly shewe themselves to be Atheists and Epicures, then there are of those that are taken for good Christians."  

That scourge of God, Thomas Beard, in his Theatre of Gods Judgements (1597), in a chapter "Of Epicures, and Atheists," scolds "Epicures and cursed Atheists, that denie the providence of God ..."  

One of Beard's wicked targets is Christopher Marlowe, in whose writings lurks at least the suspicion of anti-providential views. Not only such expressions as "the malice of the angry skies" (II Tamb., II, iv, 11), and the equivocal treatment of Tamburlaine himself, as Jacquot has noticed, criticizing Battenhouse's judgment of Marlowe's play as a great moral spectacle, but Marlowe's dramatic attitude toward the Deity generally, as Kocher indicates,

50 Buckley, p. 99.  
51 1586 ed., Engl. tr., cited by Buckley, p. 98.  
52 Ch. XXIII; cited by Buckley, p. 90.
points to a deity in congruence with his life. With Marlowe, compare Spenser (Faerie Queene, II, c. 1, st. 36, 316-319), *. . . if that careless heavens . . . despise/ The dooms of just revenge, and take delight/ To see sad pageants of men's miseries/ As bound by them to live in lives despight . . . " and Douglas Bush's observation of Spenser's "painful struggle between his belief in a world evolving under divine providence and his vivid consciousness of a world of cruel strife and change."54

Having paid his tribute to "epicuriens . . . et autres tels aveugles,"55 Du Bartas, an influential figure in England, attacks in Sylvester's translation, the Epicureans who said that the world had been created by chance, and the Epicureans who deny a watchful Providence: "Fond Epicure, thou rather sleekest thyself/ When thou didst forge thee such a sleep-sick Elf."56 In Nosce Teipsum (1599), Sir John Davies defends God's justice and Providence; his namesake, John Davies of Hereford in Microcosmos (1603) refers to the "damed Epicurean-Libertines," while the latter's Mirum in Modum (1602), demonstrating God's providence against atheists and evidencing the skeptical climate:

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55 Commentaires, I, 940; cited by Busson, Sources, p. 607.

56 Du Bartas, 7th day of 1st week; cited by Buckley, pp. 103, 105.
"But with what words can I their blame bewray/ That maugre all that ever can be saide,/ To prove this God; will that All gainsay,/ And flat affirme, and speake as well apaide/ There is no God . . ." In 1603, Philemon Holland, some of whose work Shakespeare probably knew, in his translation of the Morals of Plutarch, complains of "These wretched daies, wherein Epicurisme beareth up the head as high as at any time ever before. . . . Epicureans (drunken & intoxicate with false supposals, seeing in the conduct of this worlds affaires, some that be honest and vertuous, distressed and depressed by divers devices and practices, whereas others againe, who be naught and vicious continue in repose, without any chastisement needs take from God the dispose and government of humane affairs, holding and maintaining this point: That all things roll and run at a venture, and that there is no other cause of good and evil accidents of this life, but either fortune or els the will of men." On the other hand, Plutarch, according to Holland, disposes of the Epicureans and their emphasis on chance, "shewing that it taketh away all distinction of good and evil." Plutarch, says Holland, "prooveth that prudence and wisdom over-ruleth this blind Fortune." Like La Primaudaye, supplying reasons "to stoppe the mouthes of all Epicures and Atheists . . .," Plutarch, says Holland, is useful "to stoppe the mouthes of those" oral dissenters, since print would probably

57 Buckley, pp. 113-114.
58 P. 538.
59 P. 229.
have been forbidden to the skeptic.⁶⁰ Again, "almost the only complaint in all men's mouths," observes Hooker in his Ecclesiastical Polity, "is, 'There is no justice.'"⁶¹ Such providential assertions of divine justice, suggests a recent critic, "represent a state of tension," their reiteration of the traditional belief all the stronger "because their hold on it is increasingly insecure."⁶² (Thus such statistics as those from the S.-T.C. are unreliable with respect to determining the amount of current disbelief, for works which were non-conformist in this way would not have passed the censor and therefore rarely saw print.)

Thomas Fitzherbert's A Treatise (1606) refers to atheists "doubting of Providence," while in his Second Part of a Treatise Concerning Policy and Religion (1610), he affirms: "I take Atheists, not only for those, who deny that there is a God, but also for such, as deny the particular providence of God in the affairs of men."⁶³ Bacon, sympathetically treating the school of Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus, defends the last: "But certainly he is traduced; for his words are noble and divine . . . ," the army of small portions or "seeds" from which the world appeared necessitating a God.⁶⁴ In 1597, Bacon gives evidence of the spread of Atheism: "There is no heresy which strives with more

⁶⁰¹594 ed., p.593.
⁶¹III, 620.
⁶³Fitzherbert, 1606, pp.221-222; 1610, pp.69-70.
⁶⁴Works, XII, 132-133.
zeal to spread and sow and multiply itself, than Atheism. Nor shall you see those who are fallen into this phrenzy to breathe and importunately inculcate anything else almost than speech tending to Atheism; as in Lucretius the Epicurean . . . **65** But in his study of Henry VII, typically Janus-faced, Bacon is scornful of Providence as an element of historical causality. **66** Abraham Willet's *Thesaurus Ecclesiae* in 1604 (pp. 24-25) attacks "many carnall men, that cannot look into Gods providence," like the Epicures seeing all to be but chance. In a translation dedicated to James, 1605, Pierre Le Loyer's *A Treatise of Specters* (fol. 21r-32v) assails various points of the Epicurean religious position.

Tourneur's villain, the atheist D'Amville, who, in the *Atheist's Tragedy* (1607), probably reflected some contemporary opinion, disdains God's presence in events (I, ii): "I am of the confident belief that even the time, place, manner of our death/ Do follow Fate with that necessity that makes us sure to die./ And in a thing ordained so certainly unalterable,/ What can the use of Providence prevail?" In Webster's world, as a recent study summarizes, "there is no justice, no law, either of God or man to mete out punishment for evil and reward for good." **67** In the *Duchess of Malfi*, for instance, capricious Fortune rules, and in the *White Devil*, the workings of providence seem lost:

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**65** Forms (London, 1859), VII, 251.


"While we looke to heaven, we confound/ Knowledge with knowledge. O I am in a mist" (V.vi.259-260). Chapman's Bussy d'Ambois operates in a world where "Fortune, not reason, rules the state of things," where all men are "the spawn of Fortune" (I.ii.103), a world, in effect, where "the frantic puffs of blind-born chance . . . pipes through empty men and makes them dance" (V.ii.47-48). Fortune is "a kind of idolatry, or god of fools," suggests Sir Walter Ralegh, who, with possible first-hand experience of those whose opinions remained virtually unprintable, at the start of History of the World (1614), reports: "Yet many of those that have seemed to excel in worldly wisdom have gone about to disjoin this coherence between creation and providence, the Epicure denying both creation and providence . . .." "Divine Providence," he adds, "is just and majestical, not (as Herodotus falsely terms it, like an atheist) envious and malicious." Like Ralegh, Donne had some personal knowledge, in his early years, of the naturalist traditions; and in his sermons, he reproves atheists who presume that "naturall accidents, causall occurrencies, emergent contingencies" are matters which "would fall out though there were no God."  

69 Strathmann, Sir Walter Ralegh, p. 114.  
70 History of the World, II.v.3, p. 299; II.xii.3, p. 413; II.xii.5, p. 427; V.xiii.12, p. 485.  
71 Works, I.120; XXX Sermons, I.415, p. 465.
Further evidence of Elizabethan disbelief in a just Providence has been cited in connection with "The Problem of Justice in Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander'" (NQ, n.s. IV, 1957, 163-164). Remarkng that when Hero and Leander die in the Hellespont, the gods' divine justice is called into question, P. W. Miller cites John Carpenter's An Argument against Contentation (1597), pp. 232-234, clearly to show "that the concept of an unjust God was dangerously prevalent in England at the time of composition of these poems":

Herehence is also discried, that daungerous sin which hurteth mans soule with a desperate wound; vs. A deepe distrust of the Divine Providence, by faith in the which, men have a chief comfort in this life, and without the which, they run into a labyrinth of errors. Diagoras, the Atheist hath within his Schoole manie shrewd Schollers . . . yea, though the Lord testifieth in his word plainly, and we do see it evidently, that the almighty God worketh a work in our days: yet say they, Magister dixit; Our maister hath said, and we will beleev him. Now upon this suggestion Adam desireth a more pleasant place than Paradice to live in; Lot deviseth a safer tounne then Zoar to dwell in . . . and the Protestant is nothing scrupulous to pertake with the Peripatike [sic], the Stoicke, the Epicure, the theefe, the murtherer, the perjurer, the bragging Thraso: yea, and . . . a thousand of them which go under this title [Protestant], shame not to halt between God and Baal, between Moses and Corah, between Christ and Belial; . . .

But if they be induced to graunt the beeing of GOD, yet imagine they, that God is either of no regarde or desire, or habilitie, to rewarde vertues with honours, or to defend the oppressed from theyr foes in this life, or to give victorie in battaile, or to punish horrible sinnes with horrible plagues . . .

In the light of further discussion of Lear, Carpenter's attack on con-
temporary Protestant recourse to Stoic and Epicurean ideas of Provi-
dence is noteworthy.
Another preacher, Lancelot Andrewes, attacks those disbelievers in Providence who effect a "curtain" between God and man, holding to a Providence of "general things, not of particulars; others, admitting a Providence of both general and particular things, think it is idle and not rewarding"; and still others, subscribe to both a general and a particular Providence "which rewardeth good to the good and evil to the evil; and this is the truth which we hold," Andrewes expressing clearly the relationship between Providence and justice which Lear questions. Attempting to moderate between the old and the new, Sir Thomas Browne in his Urn Burial defends Epicurus as "the virtuous heathen, who lived better than he spake"; in his Religio Medici, he says that Epicurus' doctrine "that denied the Providence of God, was no Atheism, but a magnificent and high strained conceit of his Majesty, which he deemed too sublime to mind the trivial Actions of these inferior creatures." The atomist Nicholas Hill's Philosophia Epicureana, Democritiana, Theophrastica was an English reprint in 1619 of a work published in Paris in 1601. Finally, against such as Hobbes, who removed the Deity to a far-distant first cause, Milton—later acknowledging, "Many there be that complain of divine Providence . . ."—expresses the conscious horror of an amoral and un providential universe:

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72 A Pattern of Catechistic Doctrine, p. 32; cited by Baker, Wars, p. 23.
74 Mayo, Epicurus, p. 20.
"if this fail, The pillar'd firmament is rott'ness/ And earth's base
built on stubble." 75 The seventeenth-century controversy over provi-
dence appears to have been resolved in favor of the new ideas in the
definition of Spinoza where it becomes "nothing else than the striving
we find in the whole of Nature and in individual things to maintain and
preserve their own existence," 76 and in Descartes where it is "fatality
or immutable necessity." 77

The important work by the so-called "Huguenot pope," 78 Du
Flessis-Mornay, De la Verité de la Religion Chrétienne (1578), trans-
lated by Sidney and Golding as A Worrks Concerning the Trewnese of the
Christian Religion . . . Against Atheists, Epiciures . . . and other
Infidels (1587), makes a particular point of attacking the Epicurean
view of Providence, Chapter II dealing with the doctrine "That God by
his Providence Governeth the World," and Chapter XIII, on fortune and
destiny. Both Mornay and Sidney in his translation as well as in his
Arcadia, seem to have contemporary opponents of the idea of Providence
in mind. God, Mornay holds, reveals his Providence in the beauty and
utility of the elements of his world, and his special Providence, Mornay
replies to those who reject God's particular concerns here-below, is

75 Aretapagitica (1644), Prose Works (London, 1890), II, 74.
Corpus, 11, 597-599.

76 Spinoza, Short Treatise, Ch. V.

77 Descartes, The Passions of the Soul, II. exiv; cf. Baker,
Wes, p. 27.

as admirable in a fly as in the universe. It is interesting that the fly, or similar insect, should, in discussions of Providence, reappear: (1) providentially, in Sidney's *Arcadia* (Pamela to the atheist Cecropia): "if [God is] infinite, then must nothing, no not the estate of flies (which you with so unsavorie skorne did jest at) be knowne unto him" (Feuillerat ed., I.410); this is in reply to her atheist aunt's scornful "for els to thinke that those powers (if there be any such) above, are moved either by the eloquence of our prayers, or in a chafe by the folly of our actions; caries as much reason as if flies should thinke, that men take great care which of them hums sweetest, and which of them flies nimblest" (I.406-407); (2) against Special Providence, in Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Albert Thibaudet, Paris, 1950, p. 591 ("Comme si ce luy estoit plus et moins de remuer un empire ou la feuille d'un arbre, et si sa providence, s'exerçoit autrement, inclinant l'évenement d'une bataille, que le sault d'une puce! La main de son gouvernement se preste à toutes choses de pareille teneur, mesme force et mesme ordre; nostre interest n'y apporte rien; nos mouvements et nos mesures ne le touchent pas."79 Italics mine); Montaigne's flea-reference appears related to the conventional allusions in Sidney, Lear, and Cymbeline; (3) against Providence in both pre-Christian British plays (italics mine: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the

79"The term Fortune, so often employed by Montaigne, and in passages where he might have used that of Providence," points out W. C. Hazlitt (ed., Essays, tr. Charles Cotton, New York, n.d., p. 226 n.), "was censured by the doctors who examined his Essays, when he was at Rome in 1581. (See his Travels, ii.35 and 76.)"
Gods/ They kill us for their sport," Lear, IV.1.35-36; "No more thou thunder-master show/ Thy spite on human flies," Cymbeline, V.v.30-31).

In addition to the "flies . . . sport" image, a similar one, that of a tennis ball tossed by the gods, develops into a Renaissance, especially Jacobean, commonplace, as disillusion permeates the Elizabethan world picture. The apparently unnoted source of this figure may be the opening book of Calvin's Institutions of the Christian Religion, which, read for half a century in such versions as that of the dramatist Thomas Norton, contained some main tenets of the Renaissance English religious world-view: "And this is also to be added, that altho' either the paternal favour and benefice of God, or oftentimes the severity of his judgment do brightly appear in the whole course of his providence: yet sometimes the causes of those things that happen are secret, so that this thought insinuates itself into our minds, that the affairs of mankind are turned and whirled about by the blind direction of fortune, or so that the flesh excites us to murmur, as if God did to make himself pastime, toss them like tennis balls." (2) Sidney, a Calvinist by education and intimate friendships, expresses the same apparent attitude of the gods towards man in the Arcadia: "In such a shadow, or rather pit of darkness, the wormish mankind lives, that neither they know how to foresee, nor what to fear, and are but like tennis balls, tossed by the racket of the higher powers," declares the narrator; "whether the heavens at that time

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lifted to play with ignorant mankind"; "Balles to the starres, and
thralles to Fortunes raigne," means Flangus (I, 227); Zalmans declares,
"... whom ye onely have brought to this game of Fortune ..."
(I, 259); the king Basilius, "to do what he listed, and to list what­
soever pleased his fansie, he quickly made his kingdom a Teniscourt,
where his subjects should be the balles ... licenciously abusing
them" (I, 330), a microcosmic model of the heavenly sport; "The For­
tune (as if she had made chances now of the one side of that bloody
Teniscourt) went of the other side of the line" (I, 350). "And why,"
asks Pamela, "shal we any longer flatter adversity? Why should we
delight to make our selves any longer balls to injurious Fortune ..."
(I, 508). (3) Montaigne, taking another view from that expressed
above, observes, "The Gods play at hand-ball with us, and tosse us up
and downe on All hands ... The gods perdie doe reckon and racket us
men as their tennis-balles" (cited, for the sake of the parallel, from
Florio's trans., III, 203). (4) The tennis balls mockingly sent to
Henry V (I.ii.258), with which that angry monarch pledges "by God's
grace" to "play a set/ Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard,"
seemingly become, by ironic metamorphosis, the king himself sub specie
aeternitatis—for Lear, the portrait, perhaps, of confident Hal and
Henry V in old age, has been transformed into a frustrated senex,
bewildered at man's impotence before the Divine tricksters. In the
Shakespearean Pericles (II.i.63) we observe "A man whom both the waters
and the wind/ In that vast tennis-court, hath made the ball/ For them
to play upon." (5) Webster's Duchess of Malfi (V.ii) sounds the
despairing keynote: "we are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and
bandied/ Which way please them." (6) The comparison of men to tennis
balls tossed by supernatural forces occurs in two sources of Lear,
Arcadia and Harsnet, and a third possible one, Montaigne; Harsnet refers
(A Declaration, 1603, p. 153) to the "Witch of Endor, making them tennis­
bals, for their deuils to bandy on their stage." (7) Altering the sport,
but not the effect, Greville's Mustapha exclaims (IV.iv.21), "But see!
this Foot-ball to the Starres is come, Mustaphe I mean." (8) Defending
God from such charges as those implied in the above instances, Donne
upholds the divine providence against those who only saw tyche, taking
up Gloucester's sport-metaphor, and twisting it ad gloriam Dei: "Thou
mistakest God, if thou make him any such thing . . . God, as the Poet
saith, Ludere in humanic, to play but a game at Chesse with this world;
sport himself with making little things great, and great things nothing.
Imagine God to be but at play with us, but a gamester; yet will a game­
ster curse, before he be in danger of losing any thing? Will God curse
man, before man have sinned?" (9) But Donne's defense availed little
against the increasing Jacobean and Caroline sense of man's passive
victimization before the inscrutable and arbitrary-seeming divine
powers; that feeling is echoed in such allusions as John Davies of
Herford's Humours (1609), "The round world bandy like a Racket-Ball";
in Massinger's Fortune reference (The Bashful Lover, IV.i.418), "We
are her tennis-balls"; in Bretnor's A New Almanacke . . . 1618 (1617),

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"For man is like unto a Tennis ball/Now tossed aloft, now dash'd against the wall"; in Middleton and Dekker's A Courtly Masque; the Device Called, The World Toss'd at Tennis; in Burton's remark that the world is tossed in a blanket; and in the title of a 1640 volume, S. Sheppard's Fortune's Tennis Ball.

What these and similar references tend to show is that Gloucester's "flies . . . sport" speech is, amidst other such allusions and the curiously recurrent image of man as the gods' tennis ball, not an isolated expression, but one almost conventional instance among many of a growing awareness of the disintegration of a personal Providence.

II

In addition to alterations in the traditional concepts of Providence produced by Renaissance skeptical ferments, a second and perhaps profounder revision was introduced by both devout Reformers and the fideist Montaigne themselves. The major change can be summarized: (1) theologically, as a substitution for the medieval and Renaissance notion of rational analogia entis, or likeness between man and God, by the Reformers' voluntarist denial of any such likeness—at best, this likeness was an analogia fidei; the breakdown of the traditional analogy between Creator and creature in the reawakened consciousness of fallen man's

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rational incapacity, beyond human reason, the transcendent rather than immanent Deity inescrutably hid himself; God became a Deus absconditus, a Being, in relation to man, totaliter aliter; (2) in the secular realm, as a similar depreciation of human rationality and ability to know this depreciation appears notably in Montaigne's fideist demolition of the analogical, anthropomorphic Deity; in effect, that alteration may be interpreted as a Copernican revolution in the sphere of man's vanity, which served to distance the latter from God.

Roman Catholic tradition erects, on the basis of analogia entis, or likeness between man and God, an optimistic structure of perfectability of the soul, tending, with the help of grace, to the Beatific Vision. In contrast, under Calvin, human inability because of sin to reach God produces a Divinity of "absolute(y) Unsachhaftigkeit," whose

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83Hoopes,op.cit.,p.330. The analogical breakdown is reflected in Renaissance literature, for example, in the difference between Chapman and Greville. As Peter Ure points out (REB, n.s.1,1950,311): "While Chapman emphasized in Eugenia the correspondence between God and man's soul (11,23-30) and the 'Analogia Mundi & Corporis Principium partium' (11,721-75), Greville declares that any hope, such as is implied in Chapman's lines, that man might in 'flesh and blood Grow happily adorers of the Good' is checked by 'natural corruption' (stanzae 12-13, Treatise of Religion)."

84Chaning-Pearce,op.cit.,p.66.

85Marcel Raymond, op.cit., p.239.

86Chaning-Pearce,op.cit., pp.70-77.


The place of the Deity in Calvin's new dispensation is indicated by A.V.O. Allan (Continuity in Christian Thought, 1884,p.299), cited
relation to man, as Cassirer indicates, becomes finally and incontestably juridical: "God's decision is not bound by reasons, for every reason would be a barrier, annulling His absolute sovereignty." His justice looms larger than His love. "If God of His own free will has condemned the greater part of mankind and selected only the few to salvation without any efforts or deserts on their part, then both decisions are simply the expression of His own perfection which cannot assert itself otherwise or more forcefully than in just such unlimited power."

The change, according to Barth, is from the Cartesian Cogito, ergo sum to Cogitor, ergo sum; man exists for God, who carries his own credentials, and needs no "proof," being, as Calvin says, "autopistic." Relying on a tradition from Cusa's docta

in B.R. Warfield's "Calvin's Doctrine of God," Princeton Theological Review, VII (1909), 405 n: "... God ... is thus revealed ... a being outside the framework of the universe, who called the world into existence by the power of His will. Calvin positively rejected the doctrine of the divine immensity. When he spoke of that 'dog of a Lucretius' who mingleth God and nature, he may have also had Zwingli in mind. In order to separate ... God and man, he interposed ranks of mediators." And Allen adds (p. 302): "In some respects the system of Calvin not merely repeats but exaggerates the leading ideas of Latin Christianity. In no Latin writer is found such a determined purpose to reject the immensity of Deity and assert His transcendence and His isolation from the world. In his conception of God as absolute arbitrary will, he surpasses Duns Scotus ... The separation between God and humanity is emphasized as it has never been before, for Calvin insists dogmatically and formally, upon that which had been, to a large extent, hitherto unconscious ..."

88 Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, pp. 75-76.
89 Chaning-Pearce, p. 69.
90 Hoopes, pp. 336-337.
91 Chaning-Pearce, pp. 68-69.
ignorantia\textsuperscript{92} through Ockham,\textsuperscript{93} Luther had already expressed the Deus absconditus: "I do not know it and do not understand it, but sounding far above and ringing in my ears I hear what is beyond the thought of man." For Luther, indeed, at times, God is not only hidden, but angry, beyond reconciliation with fallen man,\textsuperscript{94} and even, as Otto suggests, inimical in the Job tradition, God being "not only above every human grasp, but in antagonism to it,"\textsuperscript{95} a circumstance reminiscent of the deities in King Lear.

In Montaigne's secular attack on divine analogy, destroying Sebond's hymn to man's privileged and glorious status under God, a new, impersonal, and unknowable Providence is instated: "Qu'est-il plus vain que de vouloir deviner Dieu par nos analogies et con-


\textsuperscript{93}On Ockham, cf. A. S. Zerbe, Karl Barth Theology (Cleveland, Ohio, 1930), p. 87; Hoopes, pp. 331-332.

\textsuperscript{94}Bainton, p. 425.

\textsuperscript{95}Rudolph Otto, Idea of the Holy (London, 1946), p. 184; John Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed: the interpretation of Luther's Deus Absconditus (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 97-98. God in antagonism to man; cf. the expression of this idea in relation to Shakespeare, by Arthur Sewell, Character and Society in Shakespeare (Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), reprinted in L. F. Dean, Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism (Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), p. 332 (italics mine): "Tragedy finds its origin not in a Christian idea of imperfection but in 'Renaissance anarchism' . . . Shakespearean tragedy is the product of the change in men's minds—the Renaissance change—by which men came to feel themselves separate from God; by which, indeed, the idea of God receded from men's habitual certitudes and became no more and often less than an intellectual construction, a merely credible hypothesis, a Being remote and not certainly just or beneficent, perhaps the Enemy."
jectures!" Montaigne delimits man's place in the cosmos as "depourvu de la grâce et connaissance divine": "... Ny que l'homme se monte au-dessus de soi et de l'humanité; car il ne peut voir que de ses yeux, ni savoir que de ses prises." Montaigne's new providence—theologically, the brave, new irrational providence of the Lear world—is, as Marcel Raymond describes it, "éternel, intemporel, indéterminé, partout présent et agissant, mais dont on ne peut rien dire sinon qu'il Est" in a world where all is "diversité, 'mutation et branle". In such terms as Raymond's, we recall the divinities of Shakespeare's tragedy: "Le Dieu de la grâce se tait, s'efface derrière le Dieu de la Nature; et celui-là même, 'le tout-puissant donneur,' qui a 'fait tout bon,' sa présence n'est guère sensible hors de l'ombre portée par sa Création. La Nature enferme tout en elle; elle subsiste dans son devenir, dans ce qui passe ... dans ce monde fluide, où tout roule sans cesse ..." Between 1588 and 1595, Montaigne, having read Cicero's De Natura Deorum, developed


99 Raymond, pp. 241, 239, 246.
doubts concerning the efficacy of prayer and found reasonable those who
denied the intervention of Providence. But his views of man's vanity
continued to evoke such advice concerning God as: "Attache toy à ce
quoyn tu es subjet, mais non pas luy; il n'est pas ton confrère, ou
concitoyen, ou compagnon. S'il est auncunement communiqué à toy, ce
n'est pas pour se ravaler à ta petitesse, ni pour te donner le contre-
rolle de son pouvoir." Montaigne accepts the Deus absconditus: "De
toutes les opinions humaines & anciennes touchant la religion, celle là
me semble avoir eu plus de vray-ssemblance & plus d'excuse, qui recon-
noissoit Dieu comme une puissance incompréhensible . . ." Consid-
ering the Christian God to be not unlike the Athenian, hidden and
unknown, he observes: "Nous disons bien, puissance, vérité, justice;
ce sont paroles qui signifient quelque chose de grand; mais cette chose
là, nous ne la voyons aucunement, ni ne la concevons. Nous disons que
Dieux craint, que Dieu se courrouce, que Dieu aime . . . ce sont toutes
agitations et émotions qui ne peuvent loger en Dieu selon nostre forme; ni
nous l'imagination selon la Sienne. C'est à Dieu seul de se connaître et
d'interpréter ses ouvrages.102 In the de-anthropomorphized Deity of Mon-
taigne—who, apparently, did not seem unorthodox to his contemporaries103

100 Busson, Sources, pp. lii1-lii2, liii-liii5.
102 Ibid., II, 248; cited by Raymond, pp. 239-240.
103 Dr. P. Walker, "Ways of Dealing with Atheists: A Background
to Pamela's Refutation of Cecropia," Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renais-
sance, XVII (1955), 258.
—we recognize the ambiguity of Lear's thunder.

Both Montaigne and Calvin shared, then, related views regarding not only the debilitas rationis, limitations of human reason, but also the Deus absconditus, the doctrine of the hidden God. In addition, Calvin, like Montaigne, rejects anthropomorphism: "The Anthropomorphites, who imagined God to be corporeal... are easily refuted... such forms of expression do not clearly explain the nature of God, but accommodate the knowledge of him to our narrow capacity." In both Montaigne and Calvin, God is distant from man, but in Calvin the Divinity comes, at times, to resemble a tyrant who arbitrarily and unpredictably saves and damns, just as, in Luther, He seems, at times, the enemy. As Calvin memorably pronounces his horribile decretum: "In conformity, therefore, to the clear doctrine of the Scriptures, we assert, that by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined, both whom he would admit to salvation and whom he would condemn to destruction. We affirm that this course, as far as concerns the elect, is founded on his gratuitous mercy, totally irrespective of human merit; but that to those whom he devotes to condemnation the gate of life is closed by a just and irreprehensible, but

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101 Montaigne saw reason as a source of human unhappiness. Cf. Essais, II.viii; II, 67-68. Skeptical similarities among Calvin, Luther, and Montaigne have been pointed out in the article by Hoopes; there, the latter also cites Bredvold's statement that the discovery and popularization of ancient skepticism in the sixteenth century is parallel with Christian apologetics of the time.

105 Inst., I.xiii.1.
incomprehensible judgment. "We are helpless in ourselves," as a leading Calvin scholar says, "before the divine tribunal—utterly without resource or rightful claim. . ." And it is a tragedy, remarks another, that Calvin should have plunged his followers into "a terrible conflict between their natural sense, justice and the mysterious ways of Providence." Regarding God's justice according to Calvin, Dilthey observes, "... die Ursache der ewigen Verwerfung bleibt den Menschen absolut verborgen, ebenso verborgen, als warum einen seiner Kinder blind, stumm, verkrüppelt auf die Welt kommen, die anderen in Wahnsinn verfallen lässt. Überall umgibt uns ein Rätsel." 

Like Montaigne, too, Calvin has a low view of man's intellectual capacity, and shares with him a skepticism regarding its use. If man's post-lapsarian reason is dark and incapable, God is not to be understood, but obeyed, and his apparent injustices swallowed, man (according)

106 Inst., III.xxxi.7. Cf. Calvin's remark that "it pleased God to hide from us all things to come, to this end that we should meet with them as things doubtful, and not cease to set prepared remedies against them, till either they be overcome, or be past all help of care" (Inst., I.xvii.4, italics mine). Compare this dichotomy with that proposed in Sidney's Arcadia with regard to the folly of superstition, below.


to Calvin, "a worm of five feet long") allowing that "to be ignorant of many things which it is not possible nor lawful to know is to be learned," of "the same invisible God whose wisdom, power, and justice are incomprehensible," we are not, that is, to "take upon's the mystery of things," and we are not to be "God's spies," as Lear's later paradoxical hyperbole defiantly announces (V.iii.17-18). We are not to pry into God's secrets, both Montaigne and Calvin and a host of Renaissance writers advise. It is, in part, because Lear refuses to swallow cosmic injustices, and, in part, because he has lost his previous sense of divine contingency, that his paradoxical defiance is uttered. In Calvin, law is rooted in divine omnipotence, which is unconditional and beyond human norms. "There is no asking for the grounds and justice of the divine decision . . ." remarks Cassirer; in Calvin, will stands for reason, "Stat pro ratione voluntas," reason being enslaved to its depraved desires and darkened by the Fall. The voluntarist tradition of Ockham and Calvin thus destroys the rational

110 Inst., I.v.4. Compare references from the Arcadia below, and similar references in Calvin, of which the following is a mild example: "From the putrified root . . . have sprung putrid branches . . ." (Inst., II.i.7). On the worm in Shakespeare's time, cf. Harry Keil, "Scabies and the Queen Mab Passage in Romeo and Juliet," JHL, XVIII (1957), 394-410.

111 Inst., III.xxxiii.8; I.xiv.1.

112 Ernst Cassirer, Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Boston, 1955), pp. 238-239.

113 Voluntarist tradition: It is becoming clearer that, at least as far as England was concerned, a significant voluntarist tradition existed which could be traced back to the work of Duns Scotus, who was
structure of moral law, whose rules now exist, not through reason or

himself probably a Briton. Along with Scotus, the Augustinian emphasis on will (especially the will as burdened by sin) was revived in the theology of Luther and Calvin, who stressed guilt and the individual conscience. These tendencies met and apparently served to displace the intellectualism of Thomas. Moreover, the doctrines of Thomas, it may be observed, were officially adopted by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent, after the Henrician reformation; and the Trinitarian influence was mainly confined to the continent (cf. Dejob's study of that influence on literature). While Hardin Craig notes the Aristotelian antithesis as the "prevailing intellectual principle of the age" (Enchanted OlaBa, pp. 139-140), agreeing that "the greater part of Renaissance thinking" resembled scholastic modes (ibid., p. 198), he nowhere mentions Scotus. However, Douglas Bush is among those who have more recently detected something amiss with the usual Thomist account: in his Classical Influences in Renaissance Literature (Harvard Univ. Press, 1952) p. 42, he remarks: "The Thomistic synthesis . . . gave way to the voluntarism, represented by William of Ockham [Scotus' follower], which made God not Absolute Reason but Absolute Will, a concept which passed on to Luther and Calvin, with all the added force of the Augustinian doctrine of natural depravity." See also Bush's "Two Roads to Truth: Science and Religion in the Early Seventeenth Century," ELH, VIII (1941), 63-84. Ruth Wellerstein's Studies in Seventeenth-Century Poetics (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1950, pp. 51-58), discusses the Augustinian influence in seventeenth-century England. An aspect of the voluntarist tradition is treated in Charles Trinkhaus, "The Problem of Free Will in the Renaissance and the Reformation," JHR, I (1964), 51-62. The most suggestive recent work on English voluntarism is by Robert Hoopes: "Fidelism and Skepticism during the Renaissance: Three Major Witnesses," HIQ, XIV (1951), esp. pp. 331-332, and "Voluntarism in Jeremy Taylor and the Platonist Tradition," HIQ, XIII (1950), 341-351. See Herrschel Reker, The Wars of Truth (Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), esp. pp. 135-151; Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance, New York, 1950 (as well as the review of it by P. C. Hellekant, JHR, XII, 1951, 498-497); R. W. Battenhouse, "The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism," JHR, IX (1948), 447-471. Cf. Charles Trinkhaus, "Renaissance Problems in Calvin's Theology," Studies in the Renaissance, ed. William Peery (Univ. of Texas Press, 1954), I, 59-80. The voluntarist tradition with regard to Shakespeare is briefly discussed in J. V. Cunningham, The World of Wonder, Univ. of Denver Press, 1951, yet it is to that extent an improvement on the author's fore­ runner, W. C. Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns, which does not sufficiently differentiate scholasticisms. See also Cunningham's unpublished dissertation, Stanford, 1945, Tragic Effect:...
knowledge, but simply because God has willed them. The culmination of this position appears in Pascal, who, following Isaiah and Jerome, affirms, "Vere tu es deus absconditus," and defends God's ways against our own "miserable justice"; God's justice, by definition, remains hidden; thus, according to God's standards, no human being suffers unjustly. In this way, God's justice and Pascal's title to "Athlete of the Faith" are both vindicated.

In addition to Calvin and Montaigne, a third tendency, which may be labeled the Baconian, furthered the cloaking of God's Providence. Indeed, the Deus absconditus concept, by distancing God from man, encouraged the empiricist of the Renaissance, in effect, to substitute a visible second cause for the concealed First Cause, while maintaining the appearance of piety. By shifting "nature" from theology to science, this third alienating process seems to be reflected in such instances as Lear's inquiries into the natural causation of things traditionally ascribed to heavenly causes, to be considered below, which are a measure of the protagonist's progressive alienation. An extremely large number of Renaissance treatises, especially those of Calvinist origin, warn against human presumption in attempting to read

116 Pensée 434; cf. F. T. H. Fletcher, Pascal, p. 133.
the mystery of the First Cause and to penetrate into God's secrets; such warnings were almost platitudes of the age. 118 Both panic and

118 Gabriel Harvey, in a letter to Spenser, denounced the new science's prying into the mystery of things, in relation to the earthquake of 1580: "I cannot see . . . how a man on earth should be of so great authority, and so familiar acquaintance with God in Heaven . . . as to be able in such specialities, without any justifiable certificate, or warrant to reveal his incomprehensible mysteries, and definitely to give sentence of his Majesty's secret and inscrutable purpose. As if they had a key for all the lockers in Heaven." Harvey, Works, ed. A. B. Grosart (London, 1884-1885), I, 56-57.

Bacon's emphasis on second causes was not without an awareness of the danger of removing the First Cause: "in the entrance of philosophy, when the second causes, which are next unto the senses, do offer themselves to the mind of man, if it dwell and stay there, it may induce some oblivion of the highest cause; but when a man passeth on further, and seeth the dependence of causes, and the works of Providence, then according to the allegory of the poets, he will easily believe that the highest limit of nature's chain must needs be tied to the foot of Jupiter's chair," Advancement, I.i.3.

Calvin's remarks on prying into the mystery of things include: "... in seeking God, the most direct path and fittest method is, not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence which is rather to be adored than minutely discussed . . . " Inst., I.v.9. "... we do further say, That the world is ruled by his secret councils . . . " Inst., I.xvii.2: In his influential Catechism, bought by Sidney, and reflected in Nowell's catechism, which Shakespeare is presumed to have studied, the child's reply is: "... he ordereth and disposeth all thymes by his unsearchable wisedom and providence: that he ruleth the world as it pleaseth him ... he guydeth al thynges ... after hys own good pleasuere" (1556 ed., p. 5).

Further, on prying into God's secrets, see Jean l'Espine, Excellens Discours (1587) who advises that such activity might lead to blindness (cf. Busson, Sources, p. 186); P. Crespel, De l'Âme (1588) (Busson, p. 188); Montaigne in Essais, II, XIII, IV, 23-5; Busson, Sources, p. 141, points out that Montaigne forbids such prying by "alchimistes, prognostiqueurs, judiciaires, chiromantiens, medecins," on the one hand, and, on the other, by "un tas de gens interpretes et contrerolleurs ordinaires des dessins de Dieu, faisons estat de trouver les causes de chaque accident, et de veoir dans les secrets de la volonté divine les motifs incomprehensibles de ses operations" (I.xxxii).
scorn must have been the secular and religious response to the new science and to the effrontery of those who with their fallen and "worm-like" reason would explain divine mysteries. In spite of such numerous warnings, Lear, having suffered the unfortunate ambiguity of the gods, does broach an inquiry into divine mysteries, and, in a culmination of suffering, hyperbolically promises Cordelia—who, in contrast, continues to revere the "bless'd secrets" (IV.iv.15)—to "take upon's the mystery of things" (V.iii.16).

III

In the England of Shakespeare's day, the providential doctrines of Calvin which we have summarized found a welcome home, the Genevan, in influence, exceeding, indeed, that of any other theologian; as his opponent, Hooker, unhappily observed, Calvin, for a long period, occupied the position which the "Master of Sentences" had held in the age of scholasticism, "so that the perfectest divines were judged they, which were skilfullest in Calvin's writings" (Works, ed. Keble, I, 139). Although modern Anglicans, especially after the Oxford Movement, tend to identify mainly the liberal or Anglo-Catholic branch as the true (Renaissance) Church of England, the fact remains that during Shakespeare's career the opposing side exerted a powerful enveloping force; interestingly, Godfrey Davies has associated the Arminians, seventeenth-
century rebels against Calvinism, with the Anglo-Catholics of today. Unfortunately ignored, as has been recently argued in the *Journal of Modern History,* is the fact that the strongest formulation of a basic Calvinist tenet (Predestination) was made, not by a Puritan, but by an Anglican bishop, staunch defender of the Establishment, and friend of John Donne, Joseph Hall; that tenet, A. L. Bowes, an anti-Puritan historian, admits was shared by all brands of Protestantism and by every important member of the Anglican clergy. In addition, the Thirty-nine Articles, known to every member of the Establishment, reflected Calvin's ideas. In the universities, further, Calvinism was taught by such men as William Perkins and William Whitaker at Cambridge, and John Reynolds at Oxford. "The leaders of the Elizabethan Church were Calvinists almost to a man." Whitgift was no less a Calvinist than his opponent, the Presbyterian Cartwright, his works being full of citations from Calvin in which the latter was twisted to contradict the main positions

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122 Cf. Charles Hardwick, *A History of the Articles of Religion* (London, 1938), p. 188: "... a cursory perusal of Jacobean literature will satisfy us that, in spite of all defections, there was still a large and acrimonious party, both within and without the Church, which went on preaching the "Divine Decrees" of Calvin.
124 *Loc. cit.*
of the Puritans. "The Calvinist struggle for England seemed victorious so far as doctrine was concerned," a recent historian of the subject has concluded; while another fairly deduces that, "Though not everyone in sixteenth-century England was a Calvinist, certainly almost everyone came in close contact with ideas which could have been accepted by Calvin." For example, Calvinism, through Dean Nowell, permeated the official catechism, which, according to T. W. Baldwin, Shakespeare studied. Evidence, in fact, exists to show that, in 1604, at least, shortly before the appearance of Lear, Shakespeare was dwelling at the house of French Calvinists, whom he knew so intimately as to be involved in subsequent family litigation. When, in addition, we recall that Shakespeare wrote King Lear under a Scottish Calvinist monarch, we

\[\text{"It is unhistorical," declares W. A. Curtis in A History of Creeds, p. 177, "to deny the Calvinism of the English Articles.} \]

\[\text{126} \text{C. D. Cremeans, The Reception of Calvinist Thought in England (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1931), p. 82.} \]

\[\text{127} \text{William Shakspere's Petty School (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1943), p. 222.} \]
\[\text{"It is inevitable that there should be a strong strain of Calvinism in the Church of England in Shakespeare's day. We have seen how through Dean Nowell it permeated official catechisms, for instance. Nowell and his catechisms are merely symptomatic, and a detailed study would only demonstrate in detail this essential fact" (ibid.).} \]
\[\text{Padelford, MP, XII (1914-1915), I, summarizes the Calvinist points, according to the Synod of Dort: (1) absolute predestination; (2) particular redemption; (3) total depravity; (4) irresistible grace; and (5) perseverance of the saints.} \]

\[\text{128} \text{E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare (Oxford Univ. Press, 1930), I, 85; II, 95.} \]

have indicated sufficient possibility of the influence of the Deus-
absconditus idea and the related conceptions of providence sketched
above on the cosmic dimensions of Shakespeare's tragedy.

IV

Between Calvin and Shakespeare's Lear still another link exists
in Sidney's Arcadia, which presents demonstrable Calvinist features.
That Sidney's romance is a source of the Gloucester plot was pointed
out as long ago as 1754 by Mrs. Charlotte Lennox, and since accepted
by scholarship; in addition, recent studies, such as those by Pyle,
McKeithan, Hardin Craig, Muir, Muir and Danby, and Armstrong, have
indicated, without exhausting, the more general indebtedness to the
Arcadia of King Lear.130

When it is recalled that Sidney's education and adult friend­
ships were, to a large extent, Calvinistic, it is not surprising that

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130 Fitzroy Pyle, "'Twelfth Night,' 'King Lear,' and the
'Arcadia,'" MIR, XLIII (1948), 449-455; D. M. McKeithan, "King Lear
and Sidney's Arcadia," Studies in English, Univ. of Texas Bull. no.
14 (1934), 45-49; Hardin Craig, "Motivation in Shakespeare's Choice
of Shakespeare, ed. Craig (Chicago, 1951), pp. 980-981; Kenneth Muir,
ed. King Lear (Arden ed.), (Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), pp. xxxviii-
xliii; Muir and John Danby, Notes and Queries, Feb. 4, 1950, pp. 49-51;
W. A. Armstrong, "'King Lear' and Sidney's 'Arcadia,'" TLS, Oct. 14,
1949, p. 665. Steevens (The Plays of William Shakespeare, 1773, IX,
440) had already connected Cordelia's and Philoclea's commingled smiles
and tears. Irving Ribner, "Sidney's Arcadia and the Structure of King
relation in the plots of each work. Cf. John Danby's Poets on Fortune's
his major literary effort should embody similar ideas. At Shrewsbury School, where Puritan officials were in charge, "we may assume," says Sidney's chief modern biographer, "that the pronounced Puritan atmosphere made a strong impression"; those officials included Ashton and Atkys, as well as Lawrence, who became master in 1568. We have a record of Sidney's purchase there of Calvin's Catechism; and there, as well as at Christ Church, Oxford, and throughout his life, his intimate friend was the Calvinist Fulke Greville. At Oxford, where Puritans were then strong, Sidney's tutors were such Puritans as Lawrence Humphrey and Nathaniel Baxter, later a vigorous Puritan controversialist. During his career, Sidney moved among a circle of French Calvinist friends, including Languet and Du Plessis-Mornay, whose theological treatise, De la Verité de la Religion Chrétienne, Sidney translated with the help of the Puritan, Arthur Golding. Golding also rendered large volumes of Calvin's sermons; and his Ovid's Metamorphoses, a version known to Shakespeare, appends a detailed demonstration that Ovid's cosmogony agrees exactly with that of Moses, a point significant in relation to the prisca theologica, considered below.

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131 W. Wallace, Life of Sir Philip Sidney (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1915), pp. 43, 45, 98, 102, 103, 107, 163.

In view of these facts, it comes at least within the range of possibility that a number of references to the heavens in the *Arcadia* should have a Calvinist tinge, in addition to conventional elements of pastoral despair. In this acknowledged source, Shakespeare—without necessarily reflecting a world-view beyond the effects of the *Deus absconditus*, which he might also have acquired from Montaigne and elsewhere—could have found ideas about Providence which may be echoed in his tragedy. Such ideas include the following attitudes toward Providence, adumbrated in the *Arcadia*, and, perhaps not coincidentally, in *King Lear* itself: the *Deus absconditus*; the gods as somehow not consonant with human happiness; human reason as corrupted and dark; man's position in relation to cosmic forces as one of helpless despair; and mankind a worm. While such conceptions are, of course, not necessarily in total accord with the intention of Calvin, they represent, at least in effect, the feelings which the Calvinist premises could have produced. The four major attitudes, which will be shown to be present in the *Arcadia*, and, perhaps by consequence, in *Lear*, include: (1) the *prisca theologia*, or virtuous heathen view, which may explain the quasi-Christian aspect of such pre-Christian characters as Cordelia; (2) the atheistic view; (3) the superstitious view; and (4) the view which falls into none of the previous categories, but is the result of human reaction to the effects of the hidden Providence. These four viewpoints will be considered in turn, first, as they occur in the *Arcadia*, and, then, in the next chapter, as they reemerge in *King Lear*. 
Further, by a coincidence of literary convention with religious mood, the pastoral Arcadia may simultaneously express both artificial melancholy and real loss. For, while its relation to current religious issues seems to have been neglected, evidence in the studies of Greenlaw, Briggs, and Goldman, indicates its concern with contemporary events. Indeed, Sidney's actualizing propensities beyond his sources are stressed by K. T. Rowe (Univ. of Mich. Contribs. to Mod. Philol., 1947, no. 4, p. 14): "Sidney's general independence towards sources and related works for the ethics and morals of the Arcadia has been shown, and also that he characteristically diverged from them in the direction of contemporary actualities." We may therefore admit the presence of such "Conventions of the Pastoral Elegy" (cf. George Norlin, Am. Jour. of Philol., XXXII, 1911, 294-312) as the "Riddle of this Painful Earth," the "feeling of bitter resentment against the cruel fate which blasts life in the bud," and the precedents of Bion, Theocritus, Tasso, and Virgil's fifth eclogue, as well as such later patterns as Drummond and Spenser (on Sidney's death, indicting the heavens which "foresaw, yet suffered this be so"), without also excluding contemporary religious concerns. Whether Shakespeare's cosmos derived from the "Trennung von Gott und Kreatur" implicit in Calvin and Montaigne and in the increasingly skeptical climate of the later Renaissance, or from the Calvinist Sidney's intensification of the pastoral melancholy, the materials of cosmic despair available in the romance emerge in the deeper tones of Shakespeare's tragedy.
Main attitudes towards Providence: (1) the "prisca-theologia" or virtuous-heathen view: Although this position is relevant also to the treatment of Cordelia below, it may be indicated here that, as D. P. Walker has shown, Pamela and certain other characters in Arcadia exhibit, as pagans, virtues and pieties which can be described because of their purity as foreshadowing Christian ones. Sidney was one of a group of liberal Calvinists who, like the Catholics, and unlike most Protestants, appeared to believe in the salvation of such heathens.

In the controversy between de Andrade (Andradius), a Portuguese delegate to the Council of Trent, and Chemnitz, a Lutheran theologian, the latter attacked a conciliar canon (Sessio Sexta, Canon VII, published in 1569), which held: "If anyone should say that all the works which were done before justification, for whatever reason they were done, are sinful or deserve God's hatred; or that the more vehemently anyone strives to be in a fit state to receive grace, the more gravely he sins; let him be anathema," a Catholic position which led to a liberal view of the prisca, and which gave offence to most Protestant opinion. Arguing from Augustine and St. Paul, Chemnitz further opposed the liberal views of Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and Epiphanius, who along with Eusebius, Lactantius, and Cyril, were the chief patristic inspirations for the prisca theologia; that the Greeks were saved by

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philosophy, Chemnitz asserted, in the same way that the Jews were saved by the Law, is impious doctrine. In a refutation later typical of the anti-Calvinists, one which Harsnet himself used, Andradius declared that the damnation of virtuous pagans implied a cruel God. Directly counter to the Tridentine canon, the thirteenth and eighteenth of the Thirty-nine Articles evince the impact of the Reformation on the Church of England with regard to the salvation of pagans: "XIII. Of Works before Justification. Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace . . . yea rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin." In Article XVIII, we read: "Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ. They also are to be had accursed that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved," once more apparently a Calvinistically-influenced formulation.

Despite these obstacles to the prsca theologia, a few liberal Protestants, in addition to Catholics such as Parsons, were able to sustain their views; in such cases as Sidney, Mornay, Pacard, and Ramus, for example, the general antipathy of Protestantism is opposed.

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13\textsuperscript{4} Walker, op. cit., p. 263.
These writers represent the positive position, which is conveniently summed up as follows: *the Gentiles as well as the Jews were being prepared for the Christian revelation. They had partial revelations, or reached God by natural reason, or learnt from the Mosaic tradition. Some of them were possibly saved.* The whole of religious truth is not plainly shown forth in the Bible; valuable, indeed essential, help can be gained from non-canonical writers, both Christian and Pagan.* In effect, this meant that the more noble and respectable of the ancients could reach a rapprochement with the pious moderns, as forerunners and prisci theologii. Through typology and prefiguration, Adam, Moses, Abraham, Job, Zoroaster, Orpheus, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, for example, might to an extent, share some measure of Christian truth; through their natural reason, Gentiles as well as Jews were prepared for the Christian revelation, and Greek philosophy was preparative to religious truth.*

On the other hand, the illiberal attitude holds: *the Jewish revelation was the only pre-Christian one. All the pagans were damned, and all their acts, including their thoughts and writings, were sinful and worthless. Everything in the Bible is true; nothing not in the Bible is true (with the possible exception of some things in Augustine).* The effect of the ultimately victorious liberal view was obviously to sustain an interest in the classic past, and to

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136 *ibid.*, p. 262.
promote Platonism and neo-Platonism in Renaissance culture and reli-
gion; to foster a cultural and religious tolerance which bridged the
gap created both by the Reformation and the Council of Trent; to inte-
grate philosophy with religion; and, paradoxically or not, depending
on one's point of view, to help create the secular world in which we
now live. Read in the light of the liberal prisca theologia tradi-
tion, it may be proposed, Shakespeare's favorable treatment of certain
pagans, including Cordelia and Edgar, the chief exemplars of heathen
virtue in King Lear, becomes a significant position to be comprehended
today through an acquaintance with Renaissance religious controversy.

Since Mornay's treatise, which Sidney helped translate, takes
the liberal Calvinist position, it may be, among other works, Sidney's
source for the view. In addition to Mornay's De la Verité . . ., which,
as Walker notes, is heavily Platonic and stuffed with the prisca theo-
logia view, Sidney would have found it in Ramus's Commentarii de reli-
gione christiana, in his friend Henri Estienne's collection of Orphica
and other prisca theologia texts, and the latter's edition of the Orphic
Hymns; probably, Sidney had read his co-translator Golding's version of
Ovid's Metamorphoses, which ends with a harmony of the cosmogony of Moses
and Ovid. In concluding his central study of Sidney and the prisca
theologia, Walker remarks: Sidney, "by getting Mornay's work translated
into English and representing Pamela, Musidorus, and Pyrocles as 'saved'
pagans, as pre-Christians who have reached religious truth, puts him-
sself in the 'liberal' camp and in some measure contributes to the
survival of platonizing theology, and thus to its eventual flowering with the Cambridge Platonists.\textsuperscript{137}

A "Grecian whom philosophie has brought to salvation,"\textsuperscript{138} as Walker points out, Pamela, in her prayer, had shown a Christian frame of mind, lovingly submissive to the will of God (Feuillerat ed., I, 382-383):

\begin{quote}
O all-seeing Light, and eternal Life of all things, to whom nothing is either so great, that it may resist; or so small, that it is contemned: looke upon my misery with thine eye of mercy, and let thine infinite power vouchsafe to limite out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to thee shall seem most convenient. . . make not mine unjust enemie the minister of thy Justice: But yet, my God, if in thy wisdom, . . . this low bondage be fittest for my over-his desires; if the pride of my not-inough humble harte, be thus to be broken . . . I yielde unto thy will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow thou wilt have me suffer . . . let never their wickednes have such a hand, but that I may carie a pure minde in a pure bodie . . .
\end{quote}

She is a good pagan, a \textit{prisca theologa}, who, through reading the book of nature, has reached the truth and preaches it, notably in her debate with the wicked atheist Cecropia, whom she defeats. Confining herself to natural reason, her only means of communicating with the Machiavellian naturalist, Pamela distinguishes between two types of "nature": one, a religious person may worship, if by "nature" is meant "a nature of wisdom, goodness, and providence, which knows what it doth"—i.e., \textit{natura naturans}, or God; the other may not be worshipped, for it signifies the blind, automatic regularity of the created world. Her

\textsuperscript{137}Walker, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 276-277.

\textsuperscript{138}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 264.
argument is from design, denying a universe of "chance," a term she uses, as Walker points out, with sophistical ambiguity; and she concludes by threatening Cecropia with God's vengeance in a section entitled, "The Auntes Atheisme refuted by the Neeces Divinitie" (Fueillerat ed., I, 407-410):

Peace (wicked woman) peace, unworthy to breathe, that doest not acknowledge the breath-giver... I speake to you without any hope of fruite in so rotten a harte... This worlde... cannot otherwise consist but by a minde of Wisedome, whiche governes it, which whether you wil allow to be the Creator thereof, as undoubt-edly he is, or the soule and governour thereof, most certaine it is that whether he governes all, or make all, his power is above his creatures, or his governement... Since then there is a God, and an all-knowing God, so as he sees into the darkest of all naturall secretes, which is the harte of Man; and sees therein the deepest dissembled thoughts, nay sees the thoughts before they be thought... assure thy selfe... that the time will come, when thou shalt knowe that power by feeling it...

In her prayer, her virtue, her hatred of atheism, and her loving sub-mission to the Divine will, Pamela compensates for her ignorance of the Trinity and the coming of Christ; despite Milton's sneers, her attitude towards Providence looks forward to the traditional Christian one of a watchful God who rewards good and punishes evil.140

Main attitudes towards Providence: (2) the atheistic view:

For this position, Cecropia is the obvious candidate, as we have seen

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139 Walker, op. cit., p. 270. Feuillerat ed., I, 408-409. Milton, in his Eikonoklastes (1649), attacking the unfortunate Charles I, who was supposed to have read the Arcadia in his last hours, disparaged Pamela's invocation as issuing "from the mouth of a heathen woman praying to a heathen god" (2nd ed., 1650, pp. 11-16).

140 Walker, op. cit., pp. 264, 276-277, would include also among the "saved" Musidorus and Pyrocles, judging by their discussion of the after-life (1593 ed., pp. 165-166).
from Pamela's virtuous diatribe against her. Like Satan flattering Eve, Cecropia commences by praising her niece's beauty, "so if she coulde make her lesse feeling of those heavenly conceipts, that she might easilie winde her to her crooked bias" (Feuillerat ed., I, 406). Religion was introduced to keep men in check: "... zeale of Devotion ... the best bonde, which the most politicke wittyes have found, to holde mans witte in well doing ... these bugbeares of opinions brought by great Clearkes into the world ... Feare, and indeede, foolish feare, and fearefull ignorance, was the first inventor of those conceates" (I, 406). Thunder, a significant instance, as we shall note in Lear, is Cecropia's naturalistic illustration of this needless fear: "For, when they heard it thunder, not knowing the naturall cause, they thought there was some angrie body above, that spake so lowde: and ever the lesse they did perceive, the more they did conceive" (I, 406). Among all creatures, only man foolishly avoids his own happiness by refusing to follow the course of his nature because of heavenly speculations: "... who while by the pregnancie of his imagination he strives to things supernaturall, meanwhile he looseth his owne naturall felicitie" (I, 406). Serpent-like, she concludes: "Be wise, and that wisedome shalbe a God unto thee, be contented, and that is thy heaven," echoing the later Montaigne; prayer is unefficacious, and special Providence is a mirage: "for els to thinke that those powers (if there be any such) above, are moved either by the eloquence of our prayers, or in a chafe by the folly of our actions; caries asmuch reason as if flies should thinke, that men take great care which of them hums
Resembling Montaigne's "il nous faut abêstir pour nous assagir," and Lear in some of his later utterances, she holds man to be, in appetite and other characteristics, not dissimilar to the world of beasts.

In reply, Pamela accuses her aunt of atheistic views, especially with regard to nature, in which term she distinguishes two meanings: (1) a beneficent, wise, and providential Designer (natura naturans); and (2) a fortuitous operation of chance (natura naturata). God is present and his Providence real. Pamela's argument against chance, and from design, runs (I, 407):

You saie, because we know not the causes of things, therefore feare was the mother of superstition; nay, because we know that each effect hath a cause, that hath engendred a true & lively devotion. For this goodly worke of which we are, and in which we live, hath not his being by Chaunce. . . . For if it be eternall (as you would seeme to conceive of it) Eternity, & Chaunce are things unsufferable together. . . .

Attacking the skeptical or Aristotelian notion of the world's eternity, Pamela follows the pious belief in creation in time out of nothing, a view whose significance for Lear will be considered below (I, 407):

And as absurd it is to think, that if it had a beginning, his beginning was derived fro Chaunce; for Chaunce could never make all things of nothing. . . .

This world, she says, exhibits a design which could never have existed without a designer (I, 408):

Lastly, Chaunce is variable, or els it is not to be called Chaunce: but we see this worke is steady and permanent . . . perfect order,

Walker, op. cit., p. 271. Pamela's distinction is paralleled in Pacard and Mornay, both supporters of the prisca theologia.
perfect beautie, perfect constancie, if these be the children of Chaunce, or Fortune the efficient of these, let Wisedome be counted the roote of wickednesse, and eternitie the fruitie of her inconstancie.

Against Cecropia's definition of nature as chance, Pamela sets her own view of nature as Design (I, 408):

But you will say it is so by nature, as much as if you said it is so, because it is so: if you meane of many natures conspiring together, as in a popular governement to establish this fayre estate . . . that there must needs have bene a wisedome which made them concurre: for their natures beyng absolute contrarie, in nature rather woulde have sought each others ruine, then have served as well consorted partes to such an unexpressable harmonie. For that contrary things should meete to make up a perfectio without a force and Wisedome above their powers, is absolutely impossible; unles you will flie to that hissed-out opinion of Chaunce againe.

Should Cecropia agree that there is design in nature from eternity, perhaps adopting an Aristotelian position, she ought to avoid blasphemy in her definition of that nature (I, 408-409):

But you may perhaps affirme, that one universall Nature (which hath bene for ever) is the knitting together of these many partes to such an excellent unittie. If you meane a Nature of wisedome, goodness, & providence, which knowes what it doth, then say you that, which I seeke of you, and cannot conclude those blasphemies, with which you defiled your mouth, & mine eares. But if you meane a Nature, as we speake of the fire, which goeth upward; it knowes not why: and of the nature of the Seawhich in ebbing and flowing seemes to observe so just a daunce, and yet understands no musicke, it is but still the same absurditie subscribed with another title. For this worde, one, being attributed to that which is All, is

\[142\] Chance, concealed under the cover of "nature," is rejected by Calvin as an explanation of events: "But even at this day the earth beareth many monstrous opinions which stick not to abuse the whole seed of Godhead that is sown in man's nature and to employ it to oppose the name of God. They will not say, that they are by chance made different from brute beasts. But they pretend a cloke of nature, whom they account the maker of all things, and so do convey God away" Inst., I.v.4.
but one mingling of many, and many ones; as in a lesse matter, when we say one kingdom which containes many citties; or one cittie which containes many persons, wherein the under ones (if there be not a superiour power and wisedome) cannot by nature regarde to any preservation but of themselves: no more we see they doo, since the water willingly quenches the fire, and drownes the earth; so farre are they from a conspired unitie: but that a right heavenly Nature indeed, as it were unnaturing them, doth so bridle them.

Againe, it is as absurd in nature that from an unitie many contraries should proceede still kept in an unitie: as that from the number of contrarieties an unitie should arise. I say still, if you banish both a singularitie, and pluralitie of judgement from among them, then (if so earthly a minde can lift it selfe up so hie) doo but conceave, how a thing whereto you give the highest, and most excellent kinde of being (which is eternitie) can be of the base and vilest degree of being, and next to a not-being; which is so to be, as not to enjoy his owne being? I will not here call all your senses to witnes, which can heare, nor see nothing, which yeldes not most evident evidence of the unspeakablenesse of that Wisedome: each thing being directed to an ende, and an ende of preservation: so proper effects of judgement, as speaking, and laughing are of mankind.

In the speech quoted above, W. A. Armstrong has detected a similarity to religious positions within King Lear: when Pamela replies to Cecropia's arguments she makes successive distinctions between beneficent, amoral, and malevolent conceptions of 'nature,' which are pertinent to the various interpretations found in King Lear, where 'nature' is a dominant motif in the imagery of the play." Distinguishing those positions, Armstrong notes: (1) the nature without purpose, in the imagery of the sea which, capriciously, "seemes to observe so just a daunce, and yet understands no musicke," parallel to astrological references in Shakespeare's play; (2) the nature of separate self-purpose, far from "a conspired unitie," which "cannot by nature regarde to any preservation but of themselves," similar to the nature of Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, whose "nature," contemning "its origin,
cannot be bordered certain in itself" (IV.ii.32-33); and (3) the beneficent and "right heavenly nature" which providentially pursues Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, which "as it were unnaturing them, doth so bridle them." While needlessly limiting himself to one passage, Armstrong's note seems the first to signalize the possible debt of Shakespeare to the Arcadia, not merely for plot, but for fundamental religious attitudes which, as will be shown, help to supply the play's conceptual structure: (1) the prisca theologia or devout; (2) the atheistic; and (3) the superstitious. To these may be added a fourth, which is a "pious-skeptical" configuration that, as the tragedy unfolds, becomes a testing of Providence, and the focal interest of the work as represented in the protagonist himself.

Sidney's Cecropia reflects not only the conception of her creator, but also conventions of Renaissance skeptical belief, as well as a climate of skeptical thought, largely unpublished because of the censorship. That climate should be understood in the light of evidence which is necessarily partial. In the sixteenth century, as Bredvold has noted, feverish intellectual activity accompanied feverish persecution, which "unquestionably prevented the publication of very important elements of Renaissance thought"; "there seems," he adds,

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143 "King Lear" and Sidney's 'Arcadia,'" TLS, Oct. 11, 1949, p. 665.

144 Sidney's interest, suggests Buckley, p. 77, in attacking Epicureanism may have been aroused by its prevalence in France (a fact noted above), as well as, perhaps, by English Epicureanism.
"to have been a large and growing class who, in spite of the statutes, held and propagated more or less secretly all sorts of dangerous heresies. . . . But these emancipated and sceptical gentlemen of the Renaissance rarely wrote and hardly ever printed. . . . In the nature of the case, therefore, the necessary documents must be rare."\(^\text{145}\) In Shakespeare's instance, it has been suggested that the danger of reflecting contemporary ideas is reflected, after the Essex scare of 1599, in his resort to Roman, Danish, Scottish, Trojan, and ancient British chronicle matter.\(^\text{146}\) Statistics, therefore, regarding the proportion of Renaissance religious writings deduced from the Short-Title Catalogue may be misleading, since that list, for the most part, generally represents works which passed the censor, and are usually, therefore, conformist in tendency.\(^\text{147}\)


\(^{147}\) See, for widely accepted statistics, Edith L. Klotz, "A Subject Analysis of English Imprints for Every Tenth Year from 1580 to 1640," HIQ, I (1937-1938), 417-418; similar percentages are given by Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1945), p. 294, basing his conclusions on proportions in
as in the cases of Marlowe and Bruno, from some printed works, and
from the enormous amount of apologetic writing specifically directed
against various types of skeptics, we have a substantial body of evi-
dence, which, suitably discounted in a number of instances, still
leaves a convincing case for the significant existence of a climate of
Renaissance free-thought.

Despite the theological interest of the Renaissance—which
should be distinguished from a necessarily religious interest—and
indeed, partly because of its ferment and schisms, doubts regarding
traditional views were far from uncommon. As Villey, Busson, and
others observe regarding this "poulelement de doctrines," "La multi-
plicité des églises a fortement contribué à troubler les consciences
au XVIe siècle." Charles Sainte-Marthe's In Psalmum Nonagensimn
(1550) complains that "l'unité chrétienne est aujourd'hui déchirée

Jaggard's Catalogue of 1619. It is important to remember that theo-
logical interest does not necessarily imply religious belief—indeed,
a case might conceivably be made for an inverse relationship; and
that the extreme dissidents and infidels generally did not, if they
were prudent, commit their private views to print. Some of the com-
plexities of determining intellectual history are set forth in
F. L. Baumer, "Intellectual History and Its Problems," Journal of
Modern History, XXI (1949), 191-203.

146 Pierre Villey-Desmeserets, Les Sources et l'Évolution des
Essais de Montaigne (Paris, 1906), II, 151 n.-152 n.

147 Émile Bréhier, Histoire de la Philosophie (Paris, 1928),
(Tome Premier, III), p. 739.

150 Busson, Sources, p. 347 n.
en tant de sectes . . . que l'athéisme élargit ses conquêtes";151 Guy Fèvre de la Boderie's Théomachie (1564) remarks of the whole continent, "En telle confusion et meslange de sectes et heresies qui de notre temps se sont élevées en tout l'Europe, se nourrit secretement celle qui est le comble de toutes les autres . . . je veux dire celle des athées";152 La Noue's Discours politiques (1587) notes the civil war as principal cause of atheism: "Entre les autres fruits, elle a apporté cestui-ci, d'avoir engendré un million d'épicuriens et libertins."153 In England itself, Nashe, Bacon, and Hooker, among others, blamed the numerous sects for the spread of atheism;154 as Fulke Greville points out, "I mean that many-headed separation which irreligious being, yet doth bear/ Religion's name, affects her reputation."155 In 1588, Franciscus Arcaeus' A Most excellent method of curing wounds, tr. John Read, observes a number of infidel sects:

"Some nulli fidians likewise be,/ Some atheists temporisers, and/some/ Machiavells a griefe to see,/ And some so stained are with vice,/ that


152 Avert. au lecteur, p. 6; cited by Busson, Sources, p. 599 n.

153 Busson, Sources, pp. 484-485.

154 Thomas Nashe, Works, ed. Mckerrow, I, 171-172; Francis Bacon, "Of Atheism"; Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book V, sec. ii. Etienne Gilson, Unity of Philosophical Experience (London, 1938), p. 120, says that the literature of the sixteenth century "attests the complete triumph of a universal skepticism," even leaving aside the publications of Sextus Empiricus and so many other treatises.

155 A Treatise of Warre and St. 5th (Works, ed. Grosart, v.II).
they more likely doe appeare,/ Incarnat divells for to bee,/ then such as live in Godlie feare . . ."\textsuperscript{156} The Bishop of Exeter in 1618 refers to "an infinity of sectaries and atheists,"\textsuperscript{157} while the\textit{ Anatomy of Melancholy} of Burton poses the logical question: "If there be so many religious sects, and denied by the rest, why may they not all be false? or why should this or that be preferred before the rest?"\textsuperscript{158}

While the fragmentation of Renaissance religious belief proceeded apace ("Averroistes et platoniciens, matérielistes et fidéistes, padouans et sceptiques," a recent historian notes, "... préchaient leurs doctrines à tout venant"),\textsuperscript{159} a pyrrhonist crisis\textsuperscript{160} of thought in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century developed which cast all knowledge in doubt; this crisis was fostered in large measure by the publication of the works of Sextus Empiricus\textsuperscript{161} (Latin versions in 1562 and 1569; a non-extant English translation of 1590 referred to by Nashe in his preface to Sidney's \textit{Astrophel and Stella}, 1591; and an undated

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{156}P. H. Kocher, \textit{Science and Religion in Elizabethan England}, pp. 240-241.
  \item \textsuperscript{157}Friedrich Brie, "Deismus und Atheismus in der Englischen Renaissance," \textit{Anglia}, Bd. XLVIII (neue folge, Bd. XXXVI) (1924), 160-161.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} III, 438.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Greenwood, "L'Eclosion . . . ," p. 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} The Term "pyrrhonist crisis" seems to have been introduced by Villey-Desmeserets, \textit{Sources . . . de Montaigne} (Paris, 1908), II, 230.
\end{itemize}
version, apparently first published in 1651, by Raleigh. In addition to Aristotle, according to Busson, "le plus grand ennemi de la foi au XVIe siècle." In Lucretian atomism permeated the ripening Renaissance; Miss Ellis-Fermor notes that allusions to a force resembling the Nature of Lucretius are frequent in the later Jacobean drama, and that Montaigne's liberal citations from Lucretius made the latter easily accessible after 1603, when Florio's translation appeared. Although the extent of Montaigne's influence on Shakespeare remains moot, having been tested mainly by parallels, there is little doubt that Montaigne's ideas were in the air; and Villey has noted a number of borrowings from Montaigne by other Renaissance dramatists.

163 Busson, Sources, p. 9.
164 Pierre Villey-Desmeserets, "Montaigne et les poètes dramatiques anglais du temps de Shakespeare," Revue d'hist. litt. de la France, XXIV (1917), 358. He adds: "l'attention des écrivains étaient tournée vers eux [Essais], et l'on peut dire même l'attention du public, car si le public ne les avait bien connus et reçus avec faveur, Ben Jonson n'en eut pas ainsi parlé sur la scène." On Shakespeare and Montaigne's influence see the standard work by George C. Taylor, Shakespeare's Debt to Montaigne (Harvard Univ. Press, 1925), which, however, is far from settling the issue, if one is to judge from later discussions. Nevertheless, Taylor's conclusions (pp. 37-38) may be significant with regard to Lear, which he finds heavily influenced by Montaigne: "It is difficult to come away from a close reading of Montaigne without carrying with one the fancy that in no play before 1603 [Florio's trans.] does Shakespeare have exactly the same conception of the world of nature as after that date... In Lear, and in other plays after 1603, the impression one gets of the forces of nature at play around us and outside us is vaster, more terrible, than before. It is rather remarkable that during and after 1603 some five or six times nature and art are definitely compared and contrasted in the plays, and always to the disadvantage of art... And human nature
Jonson expresses this debt when he writes in Volpone (III.v.87-90), about the time of Lear, "all our English writers . . . will deign to steal out of this author almost as much as from Montaigne."

To return to Lucretius, C. T. Harrison's study of the atomist influence concludes from Sandys' tables of editiones principes and from Munro's history of Lucretian scholarship 165 that both primary and secondary sources for the study of Lucretius, Democritus, and Epicurus were available well before the start of the seventeenth century, Lucretius having been first published in 1473, Diogenes Laertius in 1533; well known in the early English Renaissance were Aristotle, Plutarch, Cicero, and Seneca, in addition to Hippocrates, Suidas, Stobaeus, and Athenaeus, Burton's Anatomy in 1621 revealing an acquaintance with them all. 166 Lucretius' master, Epicurus, is evident in the strictures of Augustine, Tertullian, and Lactantius, 167 as well as

likewise is approached from a slightly different point of the compass about 1603 and thereafter. It is then . . . that those vast generalizations about 'man' begin, philosophizings about human nature; 'man, proud man, like an angry ape' . . . ."


167 C. T. Harrison, ibid.
in the discussion of Providence above. More insidious, however, than the influence of Lucretius and subversive Averroism was that of Cicero, whose editors claimed that they were interested in his Latinity rather than in his ideas; the eclectic and respectable Cicero's Stoic empiricism, his praise of man, his doubts, and his universal deism helped make him a favorite of the sixteenth-century rationalist. Questioning the existence of the gods, Cicero was often used to support the True Faith for having rejected the pagan deities. More than Cicero, Pliny, whom Shakespeare used, was reputed atheistic, and his Historia Naturalis, called the most popular natural history ever published, went through thirty-eight editions between 1469 and 1532. Still more popular was Lucian, whose reputation in the sixteenth century was surpassed by that of few other ancient authors; about 270 printings of his works or those attributed to him appeared before 1550, the Greek text being printed more than sixty times between 1496 and 1550, while numerous Latin and vernacular translations were issued.

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171 Busson, Sources, p. 23.

for his scoffing tone towards the gods, Lucian, a probable source of Shakespeare, bequeathed his name to Shakespeare's greatest English predecessor: Gabriel Harvey, after Marlowe's death, called him "a Lucian" or "mocker of the gods."  

Despite recent revaluations of the extent and quality of Renaissance skepticism, and the qualification of Busson's monumental studies by such recent critics as Febvre, followed by Kristeller, evidence exists to indicate contemporary disbelief, though not perhaps in the fashion formerly conceived by Pintard, Charbonnel, and Busson. Indeed, as Busson has more recently argued, the sixteenth century itself created the word "atheist" to meet a specific purpose, Gentian


175 Lucien Febvre, Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais (Paris, 1947), attacking especially Busson.

176 P. O. Kristeller's The Classics and Renaissance Thought (Harvard Univ. Press for Oberlin, 1955), pp. 71-72, as well as his paper, "El Mito del Ateísmo Renacentista y la tradición francesa del libreensamiento," Notas y Estudios de Filosofía (Tucumán, Argentina), IV, no. 13 (1952), 1-14; suggests that the extent of Renaissance atheism has been exaggerated: the atheism of Pomponazzi, Cremonini, and other Italians, described in Renan's Averroes and repeated in other French works down to Charbonnel and Pintard, is dubious, resting on innuendo or on such late and unreliable sources as Père Garasse or the Naudeana. D. F. Walker, "Ways of Dealing with Atheists ...," Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, XVII (1955), 255-256, while doubtful of some evidence, feels that we must not go too far, for incontestable cases of Renaissance atheism exist. Cf. Busson, "Les noms des incrédules au XVIe siècle," Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, XVI (1954), 273.
Hervet denouncing atheists as early as 1543, Gabriel Dupreau in 1559. In his rebuttal of Febvre appearing in the Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance (1954), Busson reasons: "Mais quand il sera admis (car cela est évident) qu'on a abusé du mot athée, quand il serait prouvé que pour quelques-uns leur prétendu athéisme ne serait que 'le superlatif de déisme,' il resterait encore que les Français, à partir de 1540, ont eu besoin de ce mot pour exprimer une incrédulité grave—athéisme réel pour certains, déisme, rationalisme, averroïsme pour d'autres. Ce qui est précisément contraire de la thèse soutenue par M. L. Febvre." Pointing out "l'élosion tout au long du siècle, de ces mots nouveaux: athée, achraste, libertin, déiste," he concludes: "Non seulement nous n'acceptons pas ce paradoxe que l'incrédulité est impossible au XVIe siècle; nous dirions plutôt qu'elle a toujours existé." Roger Hutchinson in the Image of God, 1550, attacks the "many late Libertins"; Calvin in the Institutes witnesses, "But even at this day the earth beareth many monstrous spirites which sticke not to abuse the whole seede of godhead that is sown in mans nature, & to employ it to oppresse the name of God"; Jean de Neufville in De Pulchritudine Animi (1556), like Hervet, Postel, and


178Ibid.

179Ch. xxiv. Cited in Brie, p. 89 n.

180I.v.4 (tr. Norton).
others, writes "pour la multitude, grandissant de jour en jour, des épiciurien et des athees de ce siecle"; 181 and Charles de Bourgueville in the Athéomachie describes the situation around 1560, listing among others "vrays atheistes . . . ne recoignoissans le Dieu Eternal" and those who deny immortality. Marlowe, whose imprudence and youthful indiscretion, perhaps, made him speak out where others were silent, is judiciously summed up by Kocher: "... the cumulative force . . . is to show him as a propagandist and instigator of revolt against Christianity, anxious to proselytize others to his views. On this point the evidence seems to me quite decisive"; 183 Gabriel Harvey sketches the climate: "the Gospel taughte, not learned . . . some after newe Heavens, and Helles to . . . every day, freshe span newe Opinions; Heresie in Divinitee . . . "; 184 Georges Pacard in Théologie naturelle (dedicated in 1574; second edition, 1611), observes, "... voyons la terre . . . couvert de d'estes, épiciurien, atheistes et autres tels monstrs." 185 "... we have so many Libertine Atheistes . . . " complains Pierre

181 Busson, Sources, p. 463.

182 In the ed. of 1564 of Charles de Bourgueville's Athéomachie, pref. leaves, C1-C2 (Busson, Sources, p. 468), the atheist is said to influence many others: he "... discourt d'une Ame impure/ L'infinité de Nature/ Et dict qu'il n'est autre Dieu . . . Du blaspheme de sa bouche/ Maintz foibles espritz il touche . . . ."

183 Paul Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, pp. 31-32.


185 Dedication, pp. 4-5.
Viret's *The World Possessed with Devils* (1583); and Thomas Cooper in *An Admonition to the People of England* (1582), remarks that the wounded "hearts of an infinite number" cause them "partly to revolt ... to Atheisme ...".187

In *Christ's tears over Jerusalem* (1593), Thomas Nashe—himself accused of atheism by Harvey—asserts, "These atheists ... are special men of witte. ... It is superabundance of witte that makes Atheists"; and he admonishes "University men that are called to preach at the crosse and the court, Arm your selves against nothing but Atheisme, meddle not so much with Sects & forraine opinions, but let Atheisme be the onely string you beate on; for there is no Sect now in England so scattered as Atheisme. ... You are not half so well acquainted as them that lyve continually about the Court and Citty, how many followers this damnable paradoxe hath: how many wits it hath bewitcht ...".190 Thomas Bowes, in his "epistle dedicatory" to his translation of La Primaudaye's *French Academie* (third ed., 1594), remarks on the Machiavellians and the "violent course of Atheisme

186 D5* - D6
188 Buckley, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.
dayly spread abroad by these pernicious..."; while Thomas Cooper in his *Admonition* (1589 ed.) laments, "there are an infinite number of Epicures and Atheists." As Thomas Bowes observes, in his dedication to La Primaudaye, "... he that hath but halfe an eie may see, that there are a great many amongst us of those foolish men of whom David speaketh Who say in their harts that there is no God..." In 1595, Francois de la Noue's *Discours politiques* asserts: "Trois maux desolent la France: l'atheisme, le blaspheme et la magie." Despite the popular view, James I, who at the Hampton Court conference (1604) displayed a theological learning more than tempered by political concerns, had already given signs of a possible private inclination; the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* (1595-97, p. 391; 19 April, Brussels; 1599, 7 December, Antwerp) affirms: "The King of Scots talks carelessly about religion, saying that as St. Augustine believed in purgatory, it matters not if the Papists believe it, and that as both parties believe the real presence in the Sacrament, why need there be any dispute of the matter? To the Catholics he wants to seem a Catholic, that he may have the Kingdom of England, and to the contrary party, he would be accounted one of theirs... Mr. Constable has been to Paris, but since his return

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192 P. 11.
193 Paraphrased by Busson, *Sources*, pp. 484-485.
from Scotland, he has been as backward for the king of Scots as he was forward before; he speaks of him as little better than an atheist. 194 Marston in Histrionomatics (V.iii) complains, "Now is the time/ Pity and Piety are both exiles,/ Religion buried with our father's bones,/ In the cold earth, and nothing but her face/ Left to adorn these gross and impious times . . . " In 1605, the probable year of Lear's composition, John Dove's A Confutation of Atheisme remarks that " . . . because now there are many atheists, it is to be wished that many would write against Atheisme," and he lashed out against "the swaggerers of our age, who are not ashamed to call themselves the damned crue. Of the salvation of such there is no hope." "These English Italianat and devils incarnat, doe holde," according to him, "these damnable opinions: that there was no creation of the world, that there shall be no day of judgement, no resurrection, no immortality of the soul, no hell . . . " 195 In 1605, too, Joshua Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas' Semaines alludes to England and "thine uncontrolled, bold, open Atheism." 196 Donne's "new philosophy calls all in doubt" is but one expression of a documented period of naturalistic skepticism. 197 Echoing Nashe, Ford's 'Tis Pity (I.i.113)

194 Brie, op. cit., p. 128 n.

195 Sig. A2.

196 Brie, op. cit., p. 160.

takes note of "Wits that presumed on wit too much, by striving how to prove there was no God . . . and fill'd the world with devilish atheism." "If the estimate of Mersenne that in 1623 there were 50,000 atheists in Paris seems rhetorical exaggeration," concludes Bredvold, "we have the statement made a generation earlier (1587) by . . . La Noue," cited above, regarding the still greater number of Epicureans and Libertines. 198

What these citations help to indicate is that, even if the charges of unbelief were exaggerated and loose, as undoubtedly some were, they cannot entirely be dismissed as referring to nothing in the age. It is thus reasonable to assume, that, during the period of Lear's original presentation, Shakespeare's audience could probably have recognized, and, in various ways, responded to, a theatrical depiction of skepticism.

The use of the term "skepticism," following the best recent account of Renaissance disbelief, implies "a tendency to challenge received opinions or the dicta of established authority and to submit them to the tests of reason and experience." Concerning himself with the challenge to dogmatism in religion, Strathmann adheres to a commonplace Renaissance convention of distinguishing between two types of religious skeptics, the "outward atheist" who gives vent freely to his doubts, and the more terrible "inward atheist" or Machiavellian hypocrite. Regarding the first of these, Strathmann provides a convenient

It is taken for granted that the atheist denies the existence of God, but the form of the denial is more likely to be refusal to credit the manifestations of his power than flat negation. He believes the world eternal, or he follows Lucretius or Epicurus in holding the creation to be an operation of chance. Compare Cecropia's view of chance, attacked by Pamela. In applying to Omnipotent God the natural limitation "ex nihilo nihil fit" he draws a false conclusion. With Epicurus the atheist believes providence faulty or nonexistent. If God made the world for man and controls its processes, why did He cover most of it with water, make half the land uninhabitable, and multiply such inconveniences as unseasonable storms, killing frosts, and creatures dangerous to man? Why do the righteous perish and the wicked prosper... With few exceptions, he denies the immortality of the soul. He makes his point by blowing out a lighted candle: there, says he, is your soul at death... man is no different from a beast, except that he is indebted to his nature (not God) 'for the better composition of the two.' In general, the atheist attributes to nature what belongs to God.

To summarize the criteria of the skeptic: (1) he considers God's providence faulty; (2) he denies the immortality of the soul; (3) he holds man not different from a beast; (4) he denies creation ex nihilo, deriding the traditional tenet that God created the world out of nothing, and he ridicules it by applying it to a natural context, concluding ex nihilo nihil fit; and (5) he attributes to nature what belongs to God.

Recognizable in Renaissance terms, if not in our own, every major criterion of the outward skeptic becomes visible, among other elements, in Shakespeare's depiction of Lear as will be more fully demonstrated below; indeed, in order to ensure that recognition, the dramatist sometimes repeats himself. It is important here to emphasize

199E. A. Strathmann, Sir Walter Ralegh, pp. 219, 86-87.
that no attempt is made to label Lear only a skeptic; but it is desir-
able to bring out elements of his depiction, overlooked by the modern
reader, which could, in all probability, have been differently inter-
preted by the Renaissance spectator. As will be shown in the following
chapter, the first three of the above criteria may be observed in
Lear's final scene: (1) he questions—rather, he denounces—God's
providence in allowing lower creatures to live, while Cordelia's
existence is cut short by the horror of a senseless hanging; (2)
pointedly and repeatedly, he questions the immortality of the soul;
her death is final; she is dead as earth, not only to her father, it
is implied, but eternally, without hope; and breath, not soul, is
emphasized, and equated with survival (as in the candle metaphor)—
indeed, it is shown that Lear's attitude towards Cordelia—"thou'lt
come no more" is, in almost the same words, the precise attitude of
the pagan mourner, as, for example, described by Bishop Jewell in the
sixteenth century; (3) man has no status differing from a beast's;
dogs, horses, rats—the declining order is significant—have even the
advantage of life. Lear's "Why?" it would seem, is the incessant
"Why?" of the Renaissance skeptic. In addition, Lear's "nothing will
come of nothing," twice mentioned, is meaningful in the light of the
Renaissance controversy over creation out of nothing. And finally,
Lear's questions regarding the cause of thunder, and the cause in
nature of hard hearts, tie up with the last criterion, attribution to
nature of what belongs to God.
While Cecropia, as has been noted, stands not alone, but within a flourishing climate of Renaissance free-thought, she represents, within that climate, one of two recognized types of skeptics, a distinction which, Strathmann remarks, is a commonplace in Renaissance discussions of atheism: (1) the "inward" atheist, Machiavellian and hypocritical; and (2) the "outward" atheist, who freely expresses his opinions.

The Renaissance distinction between the outward and the inward atheist, it seems not to have been pointed out, perhaps owes its genesis to a dualism established by Plato in the *Laws* (available in Ficino's translation, 1491, and earlier); cf. Book X (Loeb ed., trans. R. G. Bury, London, 1926, II, 381): "For whereas the one class will be quite frank in its language about the gods and about sacrifices and oaths, and by ridiculing other people will probably convert others to its views, unless it meets with punishment, the other class, while holding the same opinions as the former, yet being specially 'gifted by nature' and being full of craft and guile, is the class out of which are manufactured many diviners and experts in all manner of jugglery; and from it, too, there spring sometimes tyrants and demagogues and generals, and those plot by means of peculiar mystic rites of their own, and the devices of those who are called 'sophists.'"

For the Renaissance, among other instances, some of which Strathmann cites, Thomas Fitzherbert, whom he omits, repeats the distinction between outward and inward atheists, in an illustration not instanced. In his apologetically Catholic *The Second Part of a Treatise*
Concerning Policy, and Religion, 1610, pp. 73-74, occurs the following, with side-note reference to "Plato II de lege":

And Plato in his booke of lawes, teaching that there are two kinds of Atheists, ordaineth severe punishments for them, deviding the first kind into two sortes of men: the one of those, who though they held that there is no God at al, yet are so subtle, and craftie, that they dissemble their opinion, being nevertheless most wicked in life, and manners: whom he thinketh worthy not of one, but of many deathes: The other sort of Atheists, is of those, who though they think there is no divinity, yea, and publikely speake and profess it, yet are of so good disposition by nature, that they liue well, and vertuously: and for such he ordaineth that they shalbe punished with death. The second kind of Atheists are such, as though they beleueve, there is a God, yet denie his providence here on earth, and for such he assigneth perpetuall imprisonment, in such sort, that no free man, may ever have accesse unto them, ordaining also, that when they die, their bodies shalbe carried out of the convines of the countrie and left unburied.

The first kind of Atheist, then, includes, on the one hand, the covert, Machiavellian hypocrite, and, on the other the outspoken and relatively frank disbeliever. Discussing atheism in his Utopia, another Catholic, Thomas More, borrows from the same Laws of Plato, as recently Leland Miles has shown in "The Platonic Source of Utopia's 'Minimum Religion,'" Ren. News, IX (Summer, 1956), 83-90.

The distinction between "inward" and "outward" atheist appears, for example, in Nashe, Bacon, Dove, Burton, and William Vaughan's Golden Grove (1600), as well as in Fitzherbert's Second Part (1610), noted above. While the outward atheist manifests himself clearly by his opinions, the inward atheist is known by his wicked conduct; as Thomas Bowes says, in his translation of La Primaudaye's The Second

200 Strathmann, Sir Walter Ralegh, pp. 87 n., 87-88.
Part of the French Academy (1594), "if the tree may be judged of by the fruits, and the outward effects of men's lives do show the inward affections of their hearts, he that hath but half an eye may see that there are a great many amongst us of those foolish men of whom David speaketh, who say in their hearts that there is no God." In the inward category fall, together with Edmund and Cecropia, such Machiavellian villains as D'Amville of Tournier's Atheist's Tragedy and the Italianate politicians of Renaissance drama. "Thou hast spoken," declares Viret's World Possessed with Devils (1583), "of Libertine Atheistes, who dissemble their Atheisme, under the colour of haveinge some Religion in them, so farre forth as it tendeth either to their commodity or discmodity." Cecropia, resembling the frequently-mentioned Circe of anti-atheistic apologistics, may openly support religion as socially useful, but, within herself, believes, as Hooker would judge her, that "religion itselfe is a mere politique devise," she being one of the "wise malignants" who follow Machiavelli. In short, Cecropia shares with Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, in Hooker's terms, a "resolved purpose of minds to reap in this world what sensuall profit

201 Strathmann, loc. cit.
202 D8 - D8
203 On Circe, cf. M.Y. Hughes, "Spenser's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance," JHI, IV (1943), 361-399. According to Walker, Bibl. d'Hum. et Ren., XVII (1955), 266, Circe is mentioned very often in connection with atheism; and Pacard suggests that being enchanted by her is the same as being "ensorcelée par Satan." The resemblance is noteworthy among Circe, Cecropia, and Spenser's Acrasia.
or pleasure soever the world yeeldeth," mocking at religion with "a wanton superfluitie of wit." From this wickedly sensual category, Lear is, of course, excluded.

It is evident that, although she basely tries to convert Pamela to her views, Cecropia is, in general, sufficiently and unscrupulously covert and hypocritically Machiavellian to tend towards the category of inward atheist; and it is to this category, that Edmund, not to speak of the depraved sisters, specifically belongs. On the other hand, as the tragedy unfolds, Lear's views become more and more outspokenly skeptical with regard to the beneficence of the gods; we have indicated, and shall demonstrate more fully in the following chapter, the congruence between his attitudes and those of the conventional Renaissance skeptical position that Strathmann has summarized. In paralleling Lear's emerging "outward" views with Edmund's "inward" views, Shakespeare has, by contrast, effectively purged Lear's skepticism of the conventional Renaissance connotations of moral depravity, all the more so as Lear's skeptical views are shown not to be a priori or innate, but to develop through actual experience of the Powers of this world.

Main attitudes towards Providence: (3) the superstitious view:
Throughout the Arcadia, and in Sidney's life as well, a relatively consistent antipathy towards superstition and astrology may be observed.

Walker, op. cit., p. 257, agrees that she is an "inward atheist," one of the "wise malignants," according to Hooker (Eccl. Pol., Bk. V, London, 1597, pp. 6-7) who hold that "religion itselfe is mere politique devise."
Making use of the recently discovered Renaissance life of Sidney, Moffett's *Nobilis* (1940), M. S. Goldman, in a study of the anti-superstitious attitudes of Sidney and his follower Harington, has in several ways documented Sidney's feeling on the subject. That Shakespeare borrowed from the *Arcadia* 's depiction of the Paphlagonian king's plight the materials for the Gloucester plot of *Lear* is unquestioned; but that essentials of Gloucester's religious outlook are also available in the *Arcadia* seems to have gone unnoticed. In short, elements of Gloucester's thought, as well as his life, are, germinally, already present in Shakespeare's source.

Reminiscent of Lear's heroic stance towards the hidden Powers, in contrast to the vacillation of Gloucester, is Sidney's belief that the true hero masters his own destiny, as against those who weakly seek occult aid, and, by frequenting prognosticating soothsayers and astrologers, foolishly think they escape the dangers they dare not face. In keeping with the didactic purpose of his romance ("morall Images and Examples . . . directing threads to guide every man . . ." said his friend Greville), Sidney intends to show that "in wisdom and courage lie happiness and honor, in weakness and superstition, misery and shame." 207

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While it is possible that, in depicting the superstitious faith of Basilius, Sidney glanced at the astrological entourage of Elizabeth, Shakespeare, under James, would have met monarchical approval in Lear's treatment of Gloucester's prognosticating and astrological superstition; although James's Daemonologie (1597) permits astrologia naturalis (treating of astral effects on weather, time of planting, and similar matters), it condemns judicial astrology, which trusts "so much that to [the stars'] influence, as ther by to fore-tell what common-weales shall flourish or decay: What persones shall be fortunate or unfortunate: What side shall winne in anie battell etc. . . ." Similarly, Thomas Moffett's newly available Renaissance life of Sidney observes:

Astrology alone (which only chance and vanity have made an art) he could never be so far misled as to taste, even with the tip of his tongue. Nay he seemed purposely to slight it . . . even with a certain innate loathing. In fact, as a young man precisely excellent and inspired with true religion, he feared lest, too receptive to the fables of soothsayers, he might in rashness diminish the Divine Majesty, always held in reverence, everywhere and always the disposer of all things to particular modes and means.

In effect, as was strongly felt by many pious men, including Calvin (whose influence on Sidney's thought has been noted above), astrological superstition contradicted belief in Providence; in his Avertissement contre l'astrologie (1549), Calvin formally attacked it. In the

208 Goldman, op. cit., p. 528.
210 Moffett, op. cit., p. 75.
Arcadia's ironic account of Memnon, Goldman suggests, may be found an attempt to illustrate the deplorable effects of such superstitious faith. Offering other disapproving instances regarding superstition, the Arcadia, moreover, argues that prognostications, oracles, and horoscopes are either fraudulent or revelations of destiny; if the first, frequenters of such frauds are gulls, and if the second, they meddle with what may not be helped. Although literary requirements, explains Goldman, cause the predictions of the oracle of Delphi and the astrologer of the King of Phrygia to be fulfilled, Sidney's sympathetic characters express forceful objections to such practices, supporting the apparent purpose of the romance to dissuade readers from superstition. Further, in borrowing from Heliodorus' Asthiopica, Malory's Morte Darthur, and the Amadis of Gaul, Sidney tended to eliminate the supernatural prodigies and enchantments abundant in those works.

Of all the Arcadia's superstitious characters, Basilius perhaps interests us most in connection with King Lear, for Basilius is not only foolishly superstitious but also a lecherous believer in free love. This combination reminds us inevitably of Shakespeare's superstitious old adulterer, Gloucester, and may, indeed, as does not seem to have been noted, have suggested emphases in Sidney's blind Paphlagonian king which helped produce the character of Shakespeare's earl. For Basilius, as Miss Whitney points out, supports an ethical

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naturalism which he uses to defend his love for Zelmane, the course of free love being for him nature's course: "but that which most comforted him," says the narrator, "was his interpretation of the adulterie, which he thought he should commit with Zelmane . . ." (Feuillerat ed., I, 328). Basilius' superstition clearly appears in the letter addressed to him by his sensible minister, Philanax, when the latter learns of the oracle which has caused his credulous master fearfully to withdraw into rustic seclusion (Feuillerat ed., I, 24-25):

Most redoubted & beloved prince, if aswel it had pleased you at your going to Delphos as now, to have used my humble service, both I should in better season, and to better purpose have spoken; and you (if my speech had prevayled) should have beane at this time, as no way more in danger, so much more in quietnes; I would then have said, that wisdome and vertue be the only destinies appointed to me follow, where we ought to seeke al our knowledge, since they be such guydes as cannot faile. . . . I would then have said, the heavenly powers to be reverenced, and not searched into; & their mercies rather by prayers to be sought, then their hidden counsels by curiositie. These kind of soothsayers (since they have left us in our selves sufficient guides) to be nothing but fansie, wherein there must either be vanitie, or infalliblenes, & so, either not to be respected, or not to be prevented . . . if this Oracle be to be accouted of, arme up your courage the more against it: for who will stick to him that abandones himselfe?

In contrast to Basilius, Pamela attacks those who superstitiously blame Fortune and chance, instead of relying on Providence and the strength of their own virtue. In her fierce reply to Cecropia's substitution of chance for Providence, we have already witnessed Pamela's pious disposition. "My deere and ever deere Musidorus," she reaffirms (II, 123), "a greater wronge doe you to your selfe, that will torment you thus with griefe, for the fault of fortune. Since a man is bound no farther to himselfe than to doe wisely: chaunce is only to
trouble them, that stand upon chance" (cf. I, 156). Similarly, the pious Philanax skeptically inquires (II, 181), "... was all that by chance too? Had the stars sent such an influence unto you ...". 

Like the other sympathetic characters, Musidorus expresses opposition to astrological prophecies in the tale of his own life (I, 188):

Dorilas ... having married his Evarchus sister, had his marriage in short time blessed ... with a son, whom they named Musidorus ... scarcely was Musidorus made partaker of this oft-blinding light, when there were found numbers of Southsayers, who affirmed strange & incredible things should be performed by that child; whether the heavens at that time listed to play with ignorant mankind, or that flattery be so presumptuous, as even at times to borrow the face of Divinity. But certainly, so did the boldness of their affirmation accompany the greatness of what they did affirm (even descending to particularities, what kingdoms he should overcome) that the King of Phrygia (who superstition thought himself touched in the matter) sought by force to destroy the infant, to prevent his after-expectations because a skilful man (having compared his nativity with the child) so told him. Foolish man, either vainly fearing what was not to be feared, or not considering, that if it were a work of the superior powers, the heavens at length are never children.

Referring to Philanax's epistle to Basilius cited above, Kalander affirms (I, 26): "By the contents of this letter you may perceive, that the cause of all, hath beene the vanity which possesseth many, who (making a perpetuall mansion of this poore baiting place of mans life) are desirous to know the certaintie of things to come; wherein there is nothing so certaine, as our continual uncertaintie."

From such general considerations, and such particular instances in the Arcadia, it is reasonable to conclude that Shakespeare may have found in that source suggestions for his depiction of Gloucester's superstitious attitude.
Four attitudes towards Providence: (4) shifting reactions to a hidden Providence: In order to indicate that Sidney's Calvinist cosmos may have supplied the basis for Lear's changing reactions to an ambiguous deity, instances will be cited from the Arcadia regarding the Deus absconditus and the consequent sense of the gods as cruel or otherwise directed against human happiness, the view of human reason as corrupted and darkened, man's position in relation to cosmic forces as one of hopeless despair, and man regarded as a worm—notions, it will be observed, which also provide some foundation for Gloucester's religious attitudes. In his study of the Arcadia, K. T. Rowe has delineated this fourth attitude towards the uncertain, mysterious, and, at least ostensibly, malignant Divine Power (italics mine):

The consciousness of a higher power, expressed sometimes in pagan, sometimes in Christian, terms, scarcely dominates, but certainly pervades the Arcadia. Many of the references to a higher power in relation to a particular circumstance reflect simply the sense of ignorance and helplessness of man in the hands of inscrutable fate, as for example, the comment of Evarchus unknowingly sitting in judgment on his son and nephew: "Whom the strange and secrete working of justice [compare Edgar's "strange mutations," IV.i.11]; had brought to judge over them, in such a shadowe, or rather pit of darkenes, the wormish mankinde lives, that neither they knowe how to foresee, nor what to feare: and are but like tenisballs tossed by the racket of the hyer powers" (II, 177).

(a) The "Deus absconditus": "O great maker and ruler of this worlde . . . Thy unsearchable mind" (Pyrocles, Feuillerat ed., II, 105); "O blame not the heavens . . . nothing done by the unreachable ruler

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212 "Romantic Love and Parental Authority in Sidney's Arcadia," Univ. of Mich. Contributions in Modern Philology, No. 4 (1947), p. 31. Thus Sidney's depiction of man's helpless despair regarding ambiguous or malevolent deities goes beyond the conventionally melancholy or elegiac pastoral tone.
of them, but hath an everlasting reason for it" (Musidorus to Pyro-
cles, II, 164); "Evarchus: whom the strange and secrete working of
justice, had brought to be the judge over them" (narrator, II, 177);
"their [the gods'] unsearchable wisedomes" (Pyrocles, II, 203); "Apollo
great, whose beams the greater world do light, . . . though hid from
earth by earthly shade, Whose lights do ever live, but in our darknesse
fade" (Basilius, I, 328); "My parents . . . have told me that in those
fair heavenly bodies there are great hidden deities, which have their
working in the ebbing and flowing of our estates" (Philoclea, I, 174);
"O tyrant heaven . . . blind providence, no justice, how is this done?
. . . hath this world a government? if it have, let it pour out all
his mischiefs upon me, and see whether it have power to make me more
wretched than I am" (Pyrocles, I, 483); "O ye deaf heavens (Philoclea);
"shall such high Planets ende to the losse of a worme?" (I, 358).

(b) The gods as cruel or otherwise directed against human happi-
ness: "... then beganne despaire . . . shee beganne then, to feare
the heavenly powers (shee was woont to reverence ) not like a childe
but like an enemie, neither kept she herselffe from blasphemous repyning
against her creation. O Gods . . . why doe you plague mee? Is it in
me to resist the mightines of your power?" (Gynecia, II, 160); "what
is the cause, that she, that heavenly creature, . . . should by the
heavens be destined to so unripe an ende? Why should unjustice so
prevail . . . " (Pyrocles, I, 487); "... it pleased the eternall
justice to make the suffer death . . . " (I, 205); "What greater ills
have now the heavens in store . . . " (Plangus, I, 227); "... that
life/ Nature to me for torment did emparte" (Klaius, I, 349); "... wherein he found himselfe hated of the ever-ruling powers" (I, 451); "Why lived I ... to be the example of the heavens hate?" (Pyrocles, I, 484); "... what spiteful God it should be, who envying my glory, hath brought me to such a waywarde case ..." (Anaxius, I, 518); "... the heavens have at all times a measure of their wrathefull harms" (Zelmane, II, 9); "heav'ns doo not good haps in handfuls bring" (Geron, I, 139); "Then since such pow'rs conspir'd unto our damage/ (Which may be know'n, but never help't with wailing" (eclogue, II, 138); "Justice, justice is now (alas) oppressed" (eclogue, I, 501); "... if the heavens ever held a just proportion ..." (Pyrocles, II, 164); "... when the conspired heavens had gotten this Subject of their wrath upon so fit place as the sea ... they ... began to breath out ... some part of their malice against him" (I, 160); "... our happs be but hard haps" (Dorus, II, 209); "O Gods ... have you spared my life to bear these injuries ...?" (Musidorus, II, 191); "O me ... the onely subject of the destinies displeasure" (Philoclea, I, 182); "the eternall hatefulness of my destinie" (Pyrocles, I, 94); "... it hath pleased the high powers to throwe us to such an estate, as the onely entercourse of our true friendshipe, must be a bartring of miseries" (Dorus, I, 153); "What can justice avails, to a man that tells not his owne case ... Nature against we do seeme to rebell, seeme fools in a vaine sute./ But so unheard, condem'n'd ... Selfe-lost in wandring, banished ..." (Zelmane, II, 209); "as if the heavens could not be more angrie than they were" (Dorus,
I, 193); "the angrie Gods" (Gynecia, II, 11); "the heaven roaring out thunders the more amazed them, as having those powers for enimies" (Dorus, I, 193); "whether the heavens at that time listed to play with ignorant mankind . . ." (Musidorus, I, 188).

(c) Human reason as corrupted and darkened; man's position in relation to cosmic forces as one of helpless despair; and mankind a worm: "... that humane reason may be the more humbled, and more willinglie gave place to divine providence" (narrator, II, 83); "poor Reasons overthowe" (Zelmane, I, 76); "O accursed reason . . . thou dimme, nay blinde . . . in preventing" evils (II, 10); "feeble Reason's spoils" (Passion vs. Reason, I, 340); "our darkned minds" (eclogue, II, 143); "Woe to poore man: ech outward thing annoyes him . . . So are we from our high creation slided" (Basilius, I, 231); "O strange mixture of humane mindes: onely so much good lefte, as to make us languish in our owne evills" (Gynecia, II, 11); "Reason hath eyes to see hiw owne ill case" (Passion vs. Reason, I, 339); "We Natures workes doe helpe, she us defaces" (eclogue, I, 501); "O all-seeing light . . . look upon my misery" (Pamela, I, 382); "O wretched state of man in self-division" (Dorus, I, 533); "feare not the danger of my blind steps, I cannot fall worse than I am" (Paphlagonian King to his son Leonatus, I, 207, transformed in Lear to the irony of Edgar's "O Gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'? I am worse then e'er I was," IV.i.25-26); "Sorow then cherish me, for I am sorowe" (Strephon, I, 349); note the imagery of "tragedy" (e.g., I, 159, 164, 476; II, 12) throughout the Arcadia; "O wretched mankind . . . we, like bastards,
are layd abroad, even as foundlinges to be trayned up by griefe and sorrow" (Dorus, I, 154); "Nature made all, but me of dolours made" (Dorus, I, 131); "... to ease their inward horrible anguish" (Dorus, II, 210); numerous references to despair, e.g., "blind despair" (I, 514); "Fortune, nature, love have contended about me/ Which should most miseries cast on a worm that I am" (Dorus, II, 208); "O Sunne ... art thou not ashamed to impart the clearnesse of thy presence to such a dust-creeping worme as I am?" (Gynecia, I, 145); "... am I so vile a worme in your sight" (Gynecia, II, 12); "shall such high Plannets end to the losse of a worme?" (I, 358); "Celestial powers to wormes, Joves children serve to claye" (Amphialus, I, 397); "To harm us worms" (Basilius, I, 228); (compare Gloucester's "I such a fellow saw,/ Which made me think a man a worm," IV.i.32-33, parallel to Job xxxv.6, and Calvin's other vermicular references)

The fourth and final position is, with dramatic logic, reserved for the protagonist, whose changing attitudes towards the ambiguous heavens project the testing of Providence which King Lear proposes to demonstrate. Against a background of characters who are relatively consistent, and who assume the three positions ascribed by Renaissance thought to pagans—atheistic, superstitious, or prisca theologia—Lear's experience of the heavens in relation to earth takes him from devotion to rejection of his deities. Framed, therefore, between total

213 Cf. above, references to man as a "worm of five feet," Inst., I.5.4; "... majesty of God is too high for mortal men, which creep upon the ground like worms to attain unto it," Inst. II.vi.1.
belief and total disbelief, Shakespeare's King Lear poses the ultimate question: given such an enigmatic new universe as the Arcadia, at least implicitly, describes, what can a man believe?

V

In order more freely to relate the problematic type of universe present in the Arcadia to the characters of the Lear plot, based, as such scholars as Greg, Muir, and Hardin Craig agree, on the old chronicle play of King Leir, Shakespeare would have had to banish the numerous direct Christian references of the dramatic source, the paganism of Shakespeare's tragedy, it may be suggested, being present in a proportion perhaps similar to that in the Arcadia. In the last century, Dowden had already perceived the need for such de-Christianizing changes so that Shakespeare might, with less restriction, put the question boldly, "What are the Gods?" From the following citations, the differences between the old Leir and the later play may be seen, and the intention of Shakespeare's work more clearly realized.

The extreme Christianity of the so-called pre-Christian old source-play has been summarized by Charlton:

\[\text{\footnotesize 214} W. W. Greg, "The Date of King Lear and Shakespeare's Use of Earlier Versions of the Story," \textit{The Library}, XX (1940), 377-440. Muir, ed., p. xxxii, suggests that Shakespeare carried the play in memory, from having seen its early performances; Hardin Craig, ed., \textit{Complete Works}, p. 980, agrees that the old play furnished events for Lear.\]

The outstanding feature of the older Lear's world is its pervading and even obtruding Christianism. Its opening lines strike a distinctive note of Christian belief (1.1-4). It adopts the whole institution of Christian practices, its offices, its sacraments, its liturgy, its creeds. It knows not the gods; it has God alone. Its worship is through the ecclesiastical system of holy church. Lear longs for relief from the ties of monarchical duty, so he may take himself to his prayers and his beads (1.557). Cordelia blames herself for neglecting strict attendance in the temple of her God and therein rendering thanks for all his benefits. If she could achieve again the love of her father, she would endure the harshest austerities of penitential discipline (1.1078-9): "Barefoot I would on pilgrimage set forth . . . / And all my lifetime would I sackcloth wear" (1.1080-2). In the meantime, "I will to Church and pray unto my Saviour" (1.1092). In a universe like this of Lear's, the Christian King of Heaven is a lord of the human world.

In addition to other differences between the two plays, it is important to note that the God of the source is not a Deus absconditus, but a realizable and clearly just anthropomorphic deity; the change in Shakespeare's work is crucial to the sense of the tragedy. Indeed, the God of Lear is also the anthropomorphized Hebraic Deity, and bears His name:

As Jehovah he is omnipotent. "Oh just Jehovah, whose almighty power Doth govern all things in this spacious world" (11.1649-50). His law is absolute. It is his pleasure that his subjects should submit: "it is the pleasure of my God/ And I do willingly embrace the rod" (11.610-611). It is impious for man to question God's will: "Let us submit us to the will of God:/ Things past all sense let us not seek to knowe,/ It is God's will and therefore must be so" (11.1656-8).

Once again, we remark the distance the later drama has traveled, for Shakespeare's Lear, at the end, will inquire into "things past all

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217 Ibid., p. 217.
sence," rejecting a quiescent acceptance of "God's will"; as he tells Cordelia, he plans to "take upon's the mystery of things,/ As if we were God's spies" (V.iii.16-17), since the gods that preside over Lear's world have shown themselves to be mysteriously absentee or ambiguously malicious. It may not be too extreme, therefore, to conclude that the old Leir is, in a sense, medieval, while the new Lear is, as we now realize, almost prophetically modern. The "... will of God," Charlton adds of the source-work, indicating a major contrast, is justice. The heavens are just, and God will always succour his obedient flock. "Come, let us go, and see what God will send:/ When all meanes faile, he is the surest friend" (ll.2089-90). This is a God, who first of all, is the God of justice. His vengeance falls on those who sin against him. He has set conscience in mankind to prompt in men remorse that their wickedness has earned for them: "heavens hate, earths scorne, and paynes of hell" (1.16h8). In the end, to compensate for the severity of this rigid moral discipline, God promises the joys of immortality: "Now, Lord, receyve me, for I come to thee/ And dye, I hope, in parfit charity" (ll.1670-1).218

In King Lear, on the other hand, the gods are anything but the surest friends, while their justice is far from clear, there seems little obvious compensation, and hardly any preliminary savoring of the joys of immortality. By such a juxtaposition of the two works, Shakespeare's deeply tragic purposes and related significances more sharply reveal themselves.

In addition to its suffusion with Christian piety, the old Leir has another feature which is strikingly different from Shakespeare's play. It is that the characters, and especially Leir himself, do not

218 Charlton, loc. cit.
generally change their views with regard to the heavens; the old play's protagonist becomes a bore with his incessantly pious sententiousness. Indeed, the intellectual and character distinctions which we find in Shakespeare's work do not seem to operate here; Shakespeare's dramatic use of ideas, a distinctive feature of his art, occurring, for example, in the attitudes towards the Ghost of Hamlet, which serves to distinguish character and provide a complex intellectual level, does not appear in the anonymous play at all. In the old Leir, virtually all the characters are Christians, often mouthing references not to the Gods, but to God, to hell, to the soul, to the after-life, and even, once, in Cordella's speech to the "Saviour." 219

A rapid sampling of belief-references in the transparent old Leir will help to show what Shakespeare probably had to work with, and may illuminate the religious meanings of his tragedy: Act I, scene i: Leir on his dead queen (3-4), "Whose soul I hope, possess'd of heavenly joys, Doth ride in triumph 'mongst the cherubins"; (25-26) "And I would fain resign these earthly cares, And think upon the welfare of my soul"—note, in contrast, that Shakespeare's King abdicates not for pious, other-worldly reasons, but reversing the ars moriendi injunctions, quits for reasons of personal comfort (I.i.38-41); his first words after the abdication scene are, "Let me not stay a jot for dinner: go, get it ready (Lear I.iv.9); Nobles ... "God" (I.42); L. "heavenly

powers" (55); **Perillus**, the source for Kent, who deviates earthly from his original's pious insipidity: "heavenly powers" (94). **Act I**, scene ii: Ragan: "For God's sake" (35), used in an obscene context. **Act I**, scene iii: Leir: "How dear my daughters are unto my soul, None knows but He, that knows my thoughts and secret deeds" (I.iii.6-7); Cordella: "But unto Him which doth protect the just, In Him will poor Cordella put her trust" (131-2).

**Act II**, scene i: Mumford, the Gallian King's companion: "Heavens grant . . . ." (12); Nobles: "Heavens send . . . ." (54). **Act II**, scene ii: Servant: "Now what in God's name . . . ." (13); Cambria (Morgan, King of Cambria, husband of Ragan): '"sblood" (51). **Act II**, scene iii: Ragan: "She [Cordella] were right fit to make a parson's wife: For they, men say, do love fair women well . . . ." (21-22), a Chaucerian yet Elizabethan slur on the clergy; Gonorill: "God forbid" (23), again in an obscene context; Gon.: "And she is far too stately for the church; She'll lay her husband's benefice on her back" (26-27); Rag.: "In faith, poor soul" (29); Leir alludes to the pelican, indicating its self-sacrifice (44), and in this sense it was often taken to allude to Christ; Cambria: "Since heavens do know . . . ." (69); Leir (a proud London father): "They are the kindest girls in Christendom" (91). **Act II**, scene iv: Cord.: "But why accuse I Fortune and my father? No, no, it is the pleasure of my God: And I do willingly embrace the rod" (26-28). Mumford: "God willing . . . . By sweet St. Denis . . . ." (38-39). The pilgrim disguise of the Gallian King and Mumford is, of course, a Christian significance. Gallian King: "holy
palmers' guise," "souls," "heaven" (88-91); Cord.: "thy holy prayers," "paradise" (119-120); Mum.: "Go to church" (150).

Act III, scene iii: Leir (again in contrast to Lear at the start): "The nearer we do grow unto our graves, The less we do delight in worldly joys" (3-4); "by Nature's sacred law" (81), a pious reference to natural law and the bond. Act III, scene v: Goun.: "would God" (32).

Act IV, scene i: Cord.: "I have been over-negligent to-day, In going to the temple of my God, To render thanks for all his benefits, Which he miraculously hath bestowed on me . . ." (1-4); "Yet God forgive both him, and you [the audience], and me; Even as I do in perfect charity. I will to church, and pray unto my Saviour, That ere I die, I may obtain his favour" (29-32), an imperfect rhyme by modern pronunciation, but a perfectly Christian allusion. Act IV, scene ii: Rag.: "For God's love . . ." (38). Act IV, scene iii: Messenger: "The King of heaven preserve your Majesty (?). Act IV, scene iv: Mess.: "If you will have your husband or your father, Or both of them sent to another world . . ." (58-59); "... the gainfullest trade in Christendom!" (66); Cord.: "The King of heaven renumerat my lord (62). Act IV, scene v: Mess.: "Oh, that I had ten hands by miracle!" (34). Act IV, scene vii: Gon.: "God" (50) in a slur; Ambassador: "... God release her grief" (53). Act IV, scene viii: Leir: "Even pray to God, to bless us from their hands: For fervent prayer much ill hap withstands" (16-17), indicating a traditional belief in the efficacy of prayer; Mess.: "And are provided for another world" (30);
Leir: "God grant" (l4); Perillus: "Deliver us, good Lord, from such as he" (69), reminiscent of the litanies and homilies of the English church; Mess.: "I am the last of any mortal race, That e'er your eyes are likely to behold" (123–124), even a murderer suggesting an immortality after death; Leir, noting God's all-watchful providence: "... unto God, who my injustice see" (140); "under heaven's bright eye" (159); Mess.: "You are the fitter for the King of heaven" (163)—compare Richard III I.ii.105; "thou shalt never wake until doomsday" (176); Leir, faithful, as his namesake is not, to heaven's providence: "Swear not by heaven, for fear of punishment: The heavens are guiltless of such heinous acts" (185–186); Mess.: "Why then, by hell, and all the devils I swear" (190).

Thunder and lightning at this point create panic in the would-be murderer's intentions, and awaken his conscience; note the crucial difference between Lear's defiant reactions to the thunder, culminating in a naturalistic question regarding the origin of thunder, and the messenger's stupefied terror, e.g.: "Oh, but my conscience for this act doth tell, I get heaven's hate, earth's scorn, and pains of hell" (203–204), whereupon assassin and assassinee bless themselves. The ever-pious Perillus, prototype of Kent, takes this occasion to invoke the Hebraic deity: "O just Jehovah, whose almighty power Doth govern all things in this spacious world, How canst thou suffer such outrageous acts To be committed without just revenge? O viperous generation and accurst, To seek his blood, whose blood did make them first!" an irony which is carried over with regard to Lear into Shakespeare's
play, and which in the old play suggests also man's ingratitude to his Creator, Who shed blood for man. In addition, this speech recalls Albany's outburst in the later work: "If that the heavens do not their visible spirits Send quickly down to tame these Wilde offences . . . Tigers, not daughters . . ." (IV.ii.46-57, 49). Leir, as Shakespeare's hero never does, submits to the will of heaven, more like Gloucester who may be fashioned on him: "Ah, my true friend in all extremity, let us submit us to the will of God; Things past all sense, let us not seek to know; It is God's will, and therefore must be so" (211-214), thus quelling the gigantic and Promethean conflict that Shakespeare's Lear provides. In a sense, the old Leir is more oriental, advocating a kind of religious Satyagraha, or Gandhian passivity, thus more appealing to Tolstoy, while the Shakespearean Lear may be conceived as truly a restless western force, the epitome of the Spenglerian Faustian man, or, perhaps, to follow Schlicking, of the baroque hero. Like the Job of Theodore Beza's Job Expounded (1589?), dedicated to Elizabeth, the old Leir passively bears God's yoke, trusting in His wise, all-seeing Providence.

Preparing to die, Leir goes through the *ars moriendi* routine, as Lear hardly does; he bids Perillus carry his blessing to Cordella, and following the homilies' recipe for repentance, asks forgiveness of the one he has most injured: "... carry her her father's latest blessing: Withal desire her, that she will forgive me; For I have wrong'd her without any cause. Now, Lord, receive me, for I come to thee, And die. I hope, in perfitt charity" (224-227). But the
messenger tells Leir that Perillus, too, must die; the King, affecting
to misunderstand, replies, "No doubt, he shall, when by the course of
nature, He must surrender up his due to death: But that time shall
not come till God permit" (233-235). Perillus invokes the King's
divine sanctity in a speech that would have pleased James: "Oh, but
beware, how thou dost lay thy hand Upon the high anointed of the Lord"
(250-251), and he paints a grim picture of punishments to come: "Oh,
then art thou for ever tied in chains Of everlasting torments to
endure, Even in the hottest hole of grisly hell, Such pains, as never
mortal tongue can tell" (289-292). At this point, it conveniently
thunders again; the messenger quakes, and he drops his dagger. Leir,
in a most un-Learlike speech, exclaims, "0, heavens be thanked, he will
spare my friend" (293), whereupon the murderer drops the other dagger
meant for him, and exits sneering, bereft of his unlawful prey.

Act V, scene ii: Ragan: "Oh, I do fear some charm or invoca-
tion Of wicked spirits, or infernal fiends, Stirr'd by Cordella . . .
brings my father timeless to his end. . . . the detested witch . . . ." (20-24), hypocritically shifting the blame, for Cambria's benefit.
He replies: "The heavens are just, and hate impiety, And will, no
doubt, reveal such heinous crimes: Censure not any, till you know the
right: Let him be judge, that bringeth truth to light" (30-33).
Ambassador: "Pray God . . . ." (85). Act V, scene iii: First Mariner:
"God be with you, sir . . . ." (43). With an Aquinian optimism, Perillus
replies, "Fear not, my lord, the perfitt good indeed Can never be cor-
rupted by the bad" (74-75). Act V, scene iv: Leir: "Sweet rest
betide unto our happy souls For here I see our bodies must have end" (28-29). To his evil daughters in absentia, he offers forgiveness:

"Well, unkind girls, I here forgive you both, Yet the just heavens will hardly do the like; And only crave forgiveness at the end Of good Cordella, and of thee, my friend; Of God, whose majesty I have offended, By my transgression many thousand ways: Of her, dear heart, whom I for no occasion Turn'd out of all, through flatterers' persuasion; Of thee, kind friend, who but for me, I know, Hadst never come unto this place of woe" (58-67), rehearsing, the method approved by the homilies for repentance—in lieu, as the older dispensation ordained, of confession to a priest, requesting forgiveness of those one has most injured was considered necessary for repentance and salvation. Miraculously brought to a table by Cordella, the old King is given restorative drink. "The blessed God," Perillus helpfully points out, "hath thought upon us" (92). Cordella seizes this occasion for a syncretic exercise, in which she joyfully mingles pagan and Old Testament mythology: "And may that draught be unto him, as was That which old AEson drank, which did renew His wither'd age ... And may that meat be unto him, as was That which Elias ate ... " (95-99). Leir, not to be outdone, alludes to "the blessed manna, That rain'd from heaven amongst the Israelites" (109-110). Later, he remarks of her, that "if she shew a loving daughter's part, It comes of God and her, not my desert" (193-194). Following this, there ensues a series of deep-knee bending exercises, in which Leir and Cordella strive to outdo each other in kneeling; the directions read,"She kneels."

And, finally, "Exeunt," no doubt tired (205-261). "The blessing, which the God of Abraham gave Unto the tribe of Judah, light on thee" (232-233), Leir bestows on Cordella. Act V, scene v: Ragan's soliloquy reveals her evilly obdurate, yet sensitive to conscience: "I feel a hell of conscience in my breast . . . For fear the world should find my dealing out . . . O God that I had been but made a man; Or that my strength were equal with my will" (1-16), her fear being this-worldly rather than other-worldly. Act V, scene viii: the King of Gallia invokes God after the fashion of Richard I's Dieu et mon droit: "God and our right for us" (11). Act V, scene x: Cordella still prays to God (32). The Gallian King once more invokes "God and our right, saint Denis, and saint George" (40). He confronts Cornwall with his righteous cause of Leir against the daughters: "But God protected him from all their spite" (51). When the youngest accuses Gonorill of lacking grace, the latter replies in Elizabethan Christian terms: "Peace, puritan, dissembling hypocrite" (68), but immediately shifts into the Catholic mode: "I'll make you wish yourself in purgatory" (71).

Act V, scene xii: Gallian King to the restored Leir: "Thanks be to God, your foes are overcome, And you again possed of our right" (1-2), to which Leir replies, "First to the heavens; next thanks to you . . . ."

In sum, the religious references in the old play are almost universally and explicitly Christian, although hypocritically so in
the case of the villainous daughters. Even the murderer heeds the voice of thunder, and, dropping his sharpened dagger, slinks away.

Divine and poetica justice rule all; the anonymous play never questions them or allows them to be questioned, and the work ceaselessly drums its pious message. The old Lear follows the pious ordinances in the a*r moriendi* tradition, which Lear does not; but both demand pardon of those they have wronged, as set down in the Establishment homilies. In contrast to Hamlet, a Christianized version of the pre-Christian Amleth story, Lear, in Shakespeare's hands, becomes a paganized version of a Christian play. We can deduce, therefore, that the old play furnished the groundwork upon which Shakespeare constructed his variations; the piety remained in the good characters, especially Cordelia and the interpolated Edgar; but the King himself, and the added Gloucester, are vastly different and more complex; further, they change and develop as the characters in the old Leir do not. The thunder is taken up and developed into an all-encompassing storm, and Lear's attitudes towards it are a measure of his confused alterations; and, more significant, the thunder itself, perhaps for one of the first times in Christian literature, becomes ambiguous—not clearly on the side of God or the good. At one point, Lear goes so far as to seek a naturalistic explanation for God's "voice." From the old Leir, the departures are, indeed, numerous; and those modern critics who still insist on viewing Shakespeare's play as a traditional drama of redemption might, comparing the two, measure the distance which Shakespeare has travelled into complexity, ambiguity, and dubiety, in his new creation.
Finally, while it appears self-evident that the customary
Renaissance Christian conception of pagans, especially pre-Christian
pagans, was to regard them, with the prisci theologi exceptions noted
above, as atheistic, superstitious, or both, some contemporary refer-
ence here may not be superfluous. For example, William Perkins, in
A Treatise of Mans Imagination (1607), pp. 42-49, speaks of Jews and
Mohammedans as atheists. The pre-Christian English are specifically
described as superstitious in Edward Grimestone's The Estates, Empires
and Principalities of the World (1615), p. 4; discussing the "Manners
of the ancient English," he writes: "They were wonderfully given to
Sorcerie, yea in such sort, as they were held more skillfull in that
wicked Art . . . to know the greatest secrets, and the deepest mis-
teries." Atheism and superstition are attributed at once to pagans
in Thomas Fitzherbert's Second Part of a Treatise concerning Policy and
Religion (1606), p. 48: "... the multitude, turpitude, and abiection
of their gods, honoured with such detestable sacrifice, rites and cere-
monies, that their believe . . . could not possiblie produce in time
any other effect in their common wealth, than contempt of God, and of
religion, that is to say, Atheysme . . ." Both superstition and
atheism, then, are the fruits of heathenism, as Fitzherbert observes
(pp. 69-70): "... it is no marvaile if an infinite number of Atheists
did spring in time of Paganisme, but of these two fountaines, whereof
Plutarck speaketh, to wit, ignorance of the true God, and the execrable
superstition of false, frivolous, and impious religion." Among others,
Thomas Cooper in his Chronicle (1560), p.33, setting it in 844 B.C., concurs
in dating Lear's reign in the pre-Christian era.
This chapter has attempted to sketch some of the evidence for the later Renaissance breakdown of a belief in Providence, especially a personal Providence, as a background for the comprehension of *King Lear*. In addition, it has shown that the attitudes towards Providence which the next chapter demonstrates in *Lear* are already present in its source, Sidney's *Arcadia*. If Shakespeare were to make dramatic use of such points of view, he would have had to remove the ubiquitous Christianity of his other source, the old *King Leir*; that he did so is established by an examination of the religious references of the earlier work. Further, that the religious positions which will be revealed in *King Lear* are consistent with the conventional Renaissance notion of pagan beliefs is evident not only *a priori* and by definition, but by a sampling of specific reference in contemporary treatises. This chapter, therefore, has offered testimony to the fact that a treatment of pagan religious belief might, in all expectation, result in the four-fold point of view which *King Lear*, indeed, presents.
KING LEAR: MAIN ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROVIDENCE

I

Cordelia, who appears in just four scenes of the play (I.i, IV.iv, IV.vii, V.iii), and in a total of thirty-one speeches, is the most taciturn of the main characters. In Cordelia's resolution to "Love and be silent" (I.i.62), we find the inception of a negative capability whose taciturn nature speaks louder than words; Cordelia absent is, perhaps, as powerful as Cordelia present. "Grace" (I.i.273), the "bond" (I.i.93), "love" (I.i.62, 77; IV.iv.28), "blessed secrets" (IV.iv.15), "benediction" (IV.vii.57), "deep dread-bolted thunder" (IV.vii.33), "restoration" (IV.vii.26), "thy reverence" (IV.vii.28), "cure this great breach" (IV.vii.15), "Th'untuned and jarring senses, O! wind up" (IV.vii.16), "kind gods" (IV.vii.11), "holy water" (IV.iii.31), "heavenly eyes" (IV.iii.31), "live and work to match thy goodness" (IV.vii.1-2)—these are some major relevant allusions, which, taken in their entirety, form a meaningful pattern of pious and reverent belief.

As several critics have pointed out, the keystone of her character is her belief in the "bond" or the Law of Nature, lex aeterna, by which order in the universe is preserved, the great chain maintained; violation of the bond, which Lear is bent on executing, is, per contra, the gateway to chaos. This grace is both asked of, and later for, her father: "stood I within his grace" (I.i.273), she regretfully remarks of Lear; she feels herself cast out of grace beyond the merely familial;
but it is a grace to which she ultimately returns, herself bearing it. A believer in Providence and Divine Justice, to her the gods are "kind gods" (V.vii.14); and it is to them that she prays for Lear's recovery, prayer for her having efficacy. Moreover, she inquires of Kent, "O thou good Kent! how shall I live and work/ To match thy goodness?" (IV.vii.1-2), an implication of work and good deeds. So significant is the bond for Cordelia, that she will fulfill her responsibilities to "obey . . . love . . . and most honor" her father (I.i.98), but will suffer punishment and exclusion from grace rather than from the chain of divinely-inspired being. When Kent exclaims, "The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid, That justly think'st and hast most rightly said!" (I.i.182-3), he is invoking a pagan pantheon which forms but one element of a complex syncretism. In her behavior and in her speeches, the pagan Cordelia comes as close to traditional piety as any other Shakespearean character. Again, she demonstrates her consistency with order, the principle of the bond, when she prays (IV.vii.14-16), "O you kind Gods, Cure this great breach in his abused nature! Th' untuned and jarring senses, O! wind up," where breach and discord are to be replaced by a cured wholeness and harmony, analogous to a restored cosmic harmony, related to the Platonic conception. Once more, it is deeds, in the tradition of works, rather than mere words, or lip-service faith, that Cordelia invokes against her hypocritical sisters (I.i.62, 72). For Cordelia, love involves forgiveness, a concept of Gnade and Vergebung: "O dear father!" she exclaims, in an analogical entendre, "It is thy business that I go about" (IV.iv.23-24); "my
mourning and importun'd tears have pitied. No blown ambition doth our arms incite, But love, dear love, and our ag'd father's right" (26-29). Similarly, she is called a "daughter who redeems nature from the general curse Which twain have brought her to" (IV.vi.206-208). For her, too, there is a deep reverence towards mystery: "All bless'd secrets (IV.iv.15) she calls those virtues implanted in nature by the Divine Power. There is reverence, further, in her petition to Lear for blessing: "O! look upon me, Sir, And hold your hand in benediction o'er me" (IV.vii.58-59), exhibiting here as elsewhere a pious regard for those relations implicit in the bond, familial, political, and heavenly. For example, in her reference to the "deep dread-bolted thunder," she is far from the naturalistic explanation of thunder that less pious souls of the Renaissance undertook; as we shall observe, regard for the mystery of thunder, as "dread-bolted" is an indication of regard for the heavenly powers. "Be governed by your knowledge" (IV.vii.19) she requests the Doctor, in one phrase summing up the governance of reason and intellect which Lear had neglected. Shakespeare allows her one allusion of an extremely conventional kind which may connect her with her ostensible paganism: "Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown" (V.iii.6), an observation any Renaissance

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1 Regarding Cordelia's invocation of "All blessed secrets" (IV.iv.15), cf. Henri Busson, Les Sources et le développement du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la renaissance (1533-1601) (Paris, 1922), p. 151, citing Montaigne on nature, which has her "secrets admirables" in Montaigne's terms; these "nous ne connaissons pas," explicates Busson, and these "expliquent bien des miracles."
Christian might have made, but one peculiarly fitting the Stoicism that Cordelia, both in speech and in silence, so eloquently exhibits.

We conclude, therefore, that in the light of the evidence, implying a belief-pattern of forgiveness; divine justice, kindness, and providence; grace; good life and works, rather than mere faith; efficacy of prayer; the universal bond; reverence for divine manifestations, such as thunder; blessing; and governance by reason, Cordelia could, in all probability, have been identified as a pagan priscus theologus, like Sidney's Pamela, one whom the Catholic and liberal-Protestant view would, in the Renaissance, have considered eligible for salvation. Contrary to Dante, who placed the virtuous heathen in the First Circle or Limbo of his Inferno, in Shakespeare's day, then, the controversy over the salut des infidèles might, according to the indications in King Lear, have been decided in her favor.

If Cordelia is silent and absent, Edgar is a loquacious and omnipresent Proteus with more lines than any character but the protagonist himself. He iterates and complements Cordelia's representation of the virtuous heathen. Edgar's religious-belief speeches reveal him, in the first-act exposition, as opposed to superstitious practices: "Do you busy yourself with that?" (I.ii.149), he responds with disdainful incredulity to his brother's hypocritical avowal of astrological faith: "How long have you been a sectary astronomical?" This scene establishes competing attitudes towards the supernatural: Gloucester as superstitious, Edgar as non-superstiticus, and Edmund as Machiavellianly skeptical or
atheistical, certainly naturalistic. Edgar is obviously not to be
taken literally in his Poor Tom epiphany, though his pre-Christianity
has a kind of Dostoievskian affinity with the lowest of the low, mad-
men and beggars. Yet even in a disguise fashioned complementarily after
his father's superstitious follies, a mask involving a madness of demons
requiring to be expelled, Edgar voices allusions to the "sweet face of
Heaven" (III.iv.89) and to a mingled chime of catechism, homilies, and
commandments: "Obey thy parents; keep thy word's justice; swear not;
commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud
array" (III.iv.80-83). His exorcism of Gloucester's despair is handled
without recourse to other devices than an imaginary vision of the abyss,
the worst after which all else is contentment.

A Vergil who is simultaneously a captive in his own Inferno,
Edgar conducts erring humanity through the conquest of its despair. His
is the philosophical voice corresponding to the nadir of Gloucester's
"flies" utterance: "O Gods!" he exclaims aside, at the sight of his
newly-blinded father, "Who is't can say 'I am at the worst?'' (IV.i.24).
Choral to the deepest expression of suffering, his view of this life is
the traditional syncretic one of mutability beneath the moon: "World,
world, O world! But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee, Life
would not yield to age" (IV.i.10-12). Despite all mysterious suffering,
his gods are not Gloucester's sportive divinities; they are rather Cor-
delia's "kind gods": "Think that the clearest Gods who make them honours
"clear" with historical justification contains several meanings: not
only "open and righteous," as Theobald has it, or "purest, . . . most free from evil," as Dr. Johnson surmises, and "clear-sighted," according to Capell, but also, as with Pamela, not hidden—and clarus, it may be suggested, as in Macbeth's reference to Duncan, "so clear in his great office" (I.vii.18), implying excellence, brilliance, or eminence. For Edgar, heaven is "the sweet face of Heaven" (III.iv.89-90). Furthermore, such is Edgar's underlying faith, in contrast to his father's despair and his brother's skepticism, that, as we have noted, he functions as a pious corrective in the conversion of both Gloucester and Edmund; and he is finally the norm of poetic or absolute justice, even as regards his erring father: "The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices, Make instrument to plague us" (V.iii.170-171). His ethic is the syncretic Stoic one of endurance under providence: "Men must endure Their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all" (V.iii.9-11), a view elsewhere discussed. Just as Cordelia mostly acts out her forgiveness, so Edgar mostly verbalizes it: "Let's exchange charity" (V.iii.167), he says to his malefactor brother; and like Cordelia, begs a paternal benediction: "I ask'd his blessing, and from first to last Told him my pilgrimage" (V.iii.196); and finally, like Cordelia and other characters, he makes the conventional Renaissance allusion to pagan fortune, again in keeping with his Stoic ethos: "the lowest and most dejected thing of Fortune" (IV.i.3) and "A most poor man, made tame to Fortune's blows" (IV.vi.222).

In his references, therefore, to charity and forgiveness; to the sweet face of heaven; to the clearest gods; to his belief that the
gods are just; to blessing; to his faith in patient endurance of the will of providence; and in his rejection of superstition as well as in his conversion of Gloucester and Edmund, Edgar would seem, in his own fashion, to parallel Cordelia's virtuous-heathen views; and thus, it is possible to propose Edgar, in addition to Cordelia, for the same kind of redemption, under the *prisca theologia* saving-clause, that D. P. Walker has proposed for the noble pagans, Pamela, Musidorus, and Pyrocles, of Sidney's *Arcadia*.

II

As has been indicated, Renaissance expectation was to view the pagan as "saved," superstitious, or atheistical. Through loose construction of both of these terms, the superstitious person could, in his deviation from the Christian mean, also be considered atheistical, and so, by a similar construction, might the converse occur. But, in general, the distinctions established in an earlier chapter held good: the two were conventionally paired; the first erred by excessive and irrational fear of the deities, while the second erred by inadequate and too rational regard for the heavenly powers. As the whole problem of Renaissance atheism is vexed, suffering, it would seem, from an ambiguous use of language, any attempt at definitive solution is here out-of-place; but whether or not atheists, in the modern sense, existed in Shakespeare's day, the facts are, first, that pagans could be, and often were, identified as such, and second, that the religious Renais-
sance, far from being the monolithic age that recent medievalizers have projected, was fissured by incipient, if not fully-formed, doubts.

In our examination of the major characters in King Lear we shall, as expected, identify the superstitious man in Gloucester; that is, the background evidence and the evidence of his belief-speeches, to a large extent, coincide. We have also shown that, despite expectations, which would exclude all pagans from the possibility of salvation, certain exceptional and virtuous heathens were in liberal circles, exempted from damnation; and this type of liberal view we found both in Shakespeare's source, Sidney's Arcadia and, it was suggested with regard to Cordelia and Edgar, in King Lear itself. In other words, we found sufficient evidence in these cases to account for the deviations from the anticipated Renaissance reaction to paganism.

Thus, through the identification of Gloucester as the conventional Renaissance conception of the superstitious pagan, and through the suggestion of Cordelia and Edgar as Renaissance exempted pagans, we are left with the remaining alternative view that the Renaissance spectator could have with regard to an "ethnic"; i.e., either (1) the latter was superstitious, or (2) he was virtuous enough perhaps to become like the viewer himself, or, finally, (3) he was atheistic. This last alternative is clearly applicable, with the exception of the great problem of Lear himself, to all the other major characters: to Goneril, to Regan, and to Edmund.

Whatever their particular religious inclination, however, pagans were, by definition, expected to be polytheistic and probably natural-
istic—that is, to find divinity in nature itself through a kind of pantheism. These characteristics the personages in *King Lear* share; but the particular bias the pagan données take in the individual cases is, of course, our primary interest. In Gloucester, as will be shown, polytheistic naturalism involves superstition; in Cordelia and Edgar, the same groundwork also supports an exempted heathenism; but in the villainous trio, the emphasis is on naturalism to a maximum degree, and thus to a preoccupation with nature and with self, with a minimizing of supernatural interposition, unless that should immediately accrue to the benefit of the natural self. Well-known and frequently rehearsed in the scholarship is the tradition of the Machiavellian villain, with which the pagan naturalist in *Lear* becomes intertwined; this union is facilitated by the common ground of atheism which both types share, the Machiavellian, by axiom, being a politic libertine and hypocritical disbeliever. Thus Shakespeare had at hand a conventional character type, already sketched with some important differences, in Iago and numerous times elsewhere, by which he could make dramatically viable his pagan freethinkers and libertines.

As a heathen villainess, sprung fully-grown from the head of the Renaissance Machiavel, Goneril exhibits few differences from her sixteenth-century Italianate model; the implication is, that, sharing the common ground of atheism, the pagan and the Machiavellian are expected to behave in a similar manner against God and their fellow man. In fact, despite her paganism, the striking thing is that Goneril never mentions the gods at all, an indication that her Renaissance garb has
completely covered her natural condition; totally self-preoccupied with her lusts and the expansion of her will, she is deaf to such counsels as Edgar's to Gloucester: "Do but look up" (IV.vi.59). In contrast to Cordelia's "governance" and "knowledge," Goneril's ideals are practical judgment and action; remarking Lear's "poor judgment" (I.i.291) in worldly self-regard, she is quick to act in her own self-interest: "We must do something, and i' th' heat" she replies to Regan's "We shall further think of it" (I.i.306-307). Indeed, for her, "mind" (II.iii.16) is almost the same as will (cf. IV.ii.12-13, IV.vi.265), a far leap from the Aquinian or Hookerian nous=reason; her world is a visible one, without cosmic hierarchy and principle, and must be constructed through frenzied acquisition, climbing, and opportunism; lacking Cordelia's bond, Goneril ironically creates disorder, and is indeed, in herself, an aspect of disorder—chaos and evil being twins in the Elizabethan view.

Ethics, in the universe of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, are Protagorean and extemporized, in a Hobbesian bellum omnium contra omnes. Analogously, a Renaissance audience would have interpreted Goneril's contempt for "our mild husband" (IV.ii.1) as disdain for mildness, with the associations of that word; stressing the body, rather than the soul, her scale of human value is measured in terms of force and physical virtù—when Albany calls her "a fiend," she retorts, "Marry, your manhood—mewl" (IV.ii.66, 67; cf. IV.ii.28). Compared to direct action, ethical consideration is folly: "a moral fool" (IV.ii.58) she calls her husband; thus pity is excluded from her cosmos: "Fools do those
villains pity who are punish'd Ere they have done their mischief" (IV. ii.54-55), and the end justifies the means. "Honour" (IV.ii.53) is equated with action in defense of self-interest, twisted, as is "judgment" above from its traditional uses; "honour" is clearer to her than it is to Hamlet, for she berates Albany in the same terms that Hamlet accuses himself: "Milk-liver'd man! That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs" (IV.ii.50-51), a conception of honor she shares with Macbeth's own lady. Contempt for traditional values accompanies disdain for religious forms: "the text is foolish" (IV.ii. 36), she sneers at Albany's warning.

Finally, it is ironical that she should, at her moment of loss, summon up a legal reference; when Edmund falls at the hands of his brother, she shrieks, "This is practice, Gloucester: By th' law of war thou wast not bound to answer An unknown opposite" (IV.iii.151-153), for immediately thereafter she exclaims, "the laws are mine, not thine: Who can arraign me for't" (V.iii.158-159). No one, her partners in evil might answer; everyone, the fearful Gloucester might reply; God, Cordelia and Edgar might return. In acting alone, in uniting through lust, in being above the law, Goneril has in truth cast herself outside order which is the law of heaven into chaos and damnation.

As Edgar complements Cordelia in goodness, Regan complements her sister in evil. Like Goneril, she reduces divine reason to practical consideration—"we shall further think of it" (I.i.307, cf. II.iv. 311, 236, 149, V.i.28; note "ignorance" in IV.v,viii)—and action—"our businesses, which craves the instant use" (II.i.127-128); and like her,
she measures value by material gain, as her imagery betrays, "I am made
of that self metal as my sister, And prize me at her worth" (I.i.69-
70). Like Goneril, moreover, she spares mentioning the gods, except
once hypocritically before Lear, "O the blest gods!" (II.iv.170), a
silence which is eloquent regarding her beliefs; she thus represents
the extreme antithesis to Gloucester's almost paranoid obsession
regarding the deities. Her ethics are pat: they involve vengeance of
inordinate kind ("If it be true, all vengeance comes too short," II.i.
88); a devilish parody of poetic justice ("O Sir, to wilful men The
injuries that they themselves procure Must be their schoolmasters," II.iv.304-306); an ironic perversion of the relation between goodness
and pity ("it was he . . . Who is too good to pity thee," III.vii.89);
and the proper place of weakness vis-à-vis power ("I pray you, father,
being weak, seem so," II.iv.202).

For Regan as for Goneril, the body and its uses are all that
exist; thus weakness of the body should be ruled by those who have
strength: "Nature in you stands on the very verge Of her confine:
you should be rul'd and led . . ." (II.iv.148-149), where nature is
equated with physical nature in the pagan sense; thus sexual obsessions
and jealousies arise, as in V.i.10-11, with regard to Edmund, and
"love" is a verb meaning also "recompense materially": "I'll love thee
much" (IV.v.21), Regan promises Oswald, if he lets her unseal the
letter. Like all Machiavellian opportunists, Regan lives in a material
time-space world, whose dimensions are present minutes rather than
eternity; "And in good time you gave it" (II.iv.252), she sneers at her
naturalism, Edmund witnesses the Jacobean disintegration of natural law and ethical absolutes; in the same year as Lear's probable composition was published Samuel Daniel's "Ulysses and the Siren," where the Siren, who significantly perhaps has the last word, observes, "That doth opinion only cause That's out of custom bred, Which makes us many other laws Than ever nature did"—corresponding to Edmund's "Wherefore should I Stand in the plague of custom, and permit The curiosity of nations to deprive me" (I.ii.2-4). Physis takes priority over nomos. Here the new relativistic skepticism is heard shattering the old absolutistic faith in the universality of God's law; in the place of the latter, an Epicurean libertinism is erected, whose model is Aretino and, even more, the Golden Age passage in Tasso's Aminta, a charter of free-thinking sensualism. "Thou, Nature, art my goddess," are Edmund's first words (I.ii.1-2); and commentators have apparently missed the point that its emphasis is exclusion, with the shock of recognition that what all men have hitherto accepted by nature, natural law, is no longer "natural." Thus Edmund's implicitly negative opening, carrying with it his negative stance towards values, and the recollection of the Aquinian notion of evil as the absence of good, is the preliminary crack in the Jacobean value-structure which is, both in the play and in life, shortly to become even more serious.

In the early seventeenth century, custom, previously associated with natural law, began to be seen as a hindrance to the operation of nature and to be classed with mere opinion; true nature was considered, as in modern Freudianism, to coincide with natural desires. Thus,
within a century, a major significance of that slippery word "nature," as natural law or the law of God, became metamorphosed to natural law, or the law of man. To this change, Edmund, as a confessed naturalist, gives voice; and as a libertine naturalist, despite his pagan devo-
tions to the fertility goddess Natura, he would tend to be considered an atheist. Moreover, we have seen that the Renaissance view of pagan-
ism led usually to three alternatives: priscia theologia, superstition, or atheism; it is clear that Edmund, failing into neither of the first
two categories, may legitimately be classed in the third.

On the disintegration of the law of nature, compare, for example, the Tragical Reign of Selimus (ed. A.F. Hopkinson, London, 1916, p. 7), I.1.109-110: "Bajazet . . . Oh! that our sons thus to ambition thrall/ Should set the law of Nature all at nought." The ambiguity of the term "law of nature" is continually complained of, and its validity itself is questioned in the Jacobean drama. Even Hooker comments on its ambiguity (cf. Works, ed. Keble, Oxford, 1888, I, 222; see Donne, Biothanatos, pt. 1, dist.1, sec. vii); the teacher of James I, George Buchanan, in his De Jure Regni Apud Scotus (tr. C.F. Arrowood, as The Powers of the Crown in Scotland, Austin, Univ. of Texas Press, 1949, pp. 46-47) makes a similar point. In view of Renais-
sance confusion over the concept which Hooker elsewhere upholds ("Obedience of creatures to the Law of Nature is the stay of the whole world"—quoted in Webster's Devil's Law-case, IV. ii. 276), and which was a doctrine of conservatism and stability against excessive indivi-
dualism, the inroads made on that concept become more understandable.
As Bredvold shows in his article on Donne's naturalism (JEGP, XXII, 1923, 471-502), the skeptics joined forces with the Epicureans against the Law of Nature, the latter positing pleasure as an end, while the former stressed the unknowableness of truth, and thus the acceptance of utilitarianism or the customs of the country as relative guides.

If, then, absolute Law of Nature is unacceptable, custom, habit, or, to use a favorite word, "opinion," must take its place. We comprehend Edmund's protest against the "plague of custom" (I.ii.3), all the more emphatic insofar as it is this merely relative custom which bars him, a bastard, from the advantages of his natural inferiors. Edmund is like Cecropia, a defender of relative morals and man-made gods; they would both agree with Berecinthius in Massinger's Believe as You List (IV.iii.149) that the gods and hell "are things we make ourselves." They, as Nashe says (Works, ed. McKerrow, II, 116), "followe the Pironicks, whose position and opinion it is, that there is no Hel or misery but opinion." A useful discussion is Peter Ure's "A Note on 'Opinion' in Daniel, Greville, and Chapman," MIR, XLVI (1951). Lois Whitney, writing of "... Nature in ... Arcadia," SP, 1927, observes that "Basilius and Cecropia invoke nature in defense of a naturalistic antinomianism that is opposed to custom and convention. The antithesis of nature and custom goes back to the Sophists ... and was revived and amplified in Sidney's time by Montaigne"; she cites Basilius: "Alas, let not certaine imaginative rules whose truths stand but upon opinion, keepe so wise a mind from gratefulness and mercie ...," II, 43; cf. Cecropia, I, 406; I, 329.
Since nature is not to be bound by mere custom, which is seen to rule the world in place of the traditional Law of Nature, what is natural determines what is lawful. Thus free reign is given to sensuality and libertinage, with such absolute powers as a Providential God, of course, no longer effective. While Montaigne, after much reflection, reaches the conclusion that we should follow nature, Marguerite of Navarre's *Heptameron* (1558; tr., 1929, pp. 195-196) observes that man, not nature, is perverse. Thus Nature becomes goddess to Renaissance libertines, such as Edmund; like Eleazer and D'Amville, he invokes Nature, perhaps Venus Genatrix, as the concluding line of his appeal (I.ii.22) may suggest (compare IV.i.261 of Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*).

If the peculiarity of Edmund, among other of Shakespeare's villains is understood, he will be seen in a different light from his comppeers, with whom he is usually indiscriminately joined. While, for example, he shares certain attitudes of Iago, he does not share all of them. One of the obsessions of Edmund, for example, is his bastardy birth and its determining effect upon his life; although he musters all his *virtue* against the misfortune of his coming into the world, and he partakes of the opportunistic morality of the evil sisters, he is conscious of his social exclusion (I.ii.2-10) and lovelessness: "Yet Edmund was belov'd" (V.iii.239), he consoles himself in the face of murder and suicide for his sake. In addition to his sense of lovelessness, one which his father is at pains to emphasize at the start of the play, Edmund comes to some self-knowledge of the
evil determining his nature: "Some good I mean to do/ Despite of mine own nature." While, therefore, Edmund reveals the energetic Renaissance impulse of virtù or individualistic freedom against the powers of fortune, it is not the freedom which Iago espouses. When Edmund mocks Gloucester's trust in the stars, it is the irony that, not the stars, but the adulterous Gloucester himself, caused his bastardy, which touches Edmund: "Fut! I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing" (I.ii. 138-140). In order to indicate a significant distinction of Edmund concerning free will, it may perhaps suffice to suggest that King Lear offers little or no evidence of the sort that Othello provides regarding Iago. One of the latter's most revealing speeches occurs in I.iii. 322-329:

Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the 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 of 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.

Man, according to Iago, has complete freedom, an idea not expressed by Edmund, and one which St. Augustine labored, in his anti-Pelagian writings, to eradicate. Iago has succinctly and recognizably expressed the Pelagian heresy; that this is so may be seen in an apparently unstressed parallel from the writings of Pelagius himself:

We have implanted in us by God a possibility for acting in both directions. It resembles, as I may say, a root which is most abundant in its produce of fruit. It yields and produces diversely according to man's will; and is capable, at the cultivator's choice, of either shedding a beautiful bloom of virtues, or of brist-
ling with the thorny thicket of vices . . . But that we really
do a good thing, or speak a good word, or think a good thought,
proceeds from our own selves . . . Nothing good, and nothing
evil, on account of which we are deemed either laudable or blame­
worthy, is born with us, but is done by us: for we are born not
fully developed, but with a capacity for either conduct: we are
formed naturally without either virtue or vice: and previous to
the action of our own proper will, the only thing in man is what
God has formed in him.3

Like Iago, Pelagius attributes man's actions for good or ill, not to
God, but to man's own will; and like Iago, he proposes the potential
in garden imagery, man being the gardener to his own body. In this
crucial matter, the fifth-century British monk and the Renaissance-
conceived Eternal Demonic are seen to be at one; while, despite the
usual tendency of critics to generalize about Shakespearean villains,
the Bastard that Shakespeare drew is unpreoccupied by such pretensions.

Directly and by implication, evidence for Edmund's atheism has
already been presented. His libertine sensuality conjoined with his
materialistic naturalism is blasphemously expressed in the invitation
of the sexual athlete: "Now, gods, stand up for bastards!" (I.ii.22).
This concludes a medieval topos which Curtius has isolated, the invoca-
tion of Nature,4 that, in Edmund's soliloquy, joins still another topos

3Basic Writings of St. Augustine, ed. W. J. Oates (New York,
1948), 1, 596; Paul Lehmann, "The Anti-Pelagian Writings," A Companion
to the Study of St. Augustine, ed. R. W. Battenhouse (New York, 1955),
p. 208. Ultimately, of course, the garden imagery is Biblical; cf.
Matt. vii.18 which Augustine cites, and 1 Tim. vi.10. See Hiram
Haydn's Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1950), p. 649, for another
approach to the same conclusion regarding the Edmund-free will dis-
tinction.

4E. R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages
concerned with the Goddess Natura; in Guillaume de Lorris's portion of The Romance of the Rose, in Jean de Meun's continuation, in Alan of Lille's De planctu Natura, and in Chaucer's Wife of Bath, the sensual Mother-of-us-All is celebrated. In Shakespeare's eleventh sonnet, Nature as the plenitude-principle is mentioned in a sense close to Edmund's: "Let those whom Nature hath not made for store, Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish: Look, whom she best endow'd, she gave thee more; Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish. She carv'd thee for her seal, and meant thereby, Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die." Although Curtius admits that "the peregrinations of this topos since the Middle Ages remain to be investigated," it is clear that in the Renaissance an exclusive worship of Nature, at a time of increasing empirical interests, and the breakdown of the medieval synthesis and the law of nature, was one indication of libertine atheism. Like Bussy "full-manned" (V.ii. 37-45), Edmund would reject Macbeth's "supernatural soliciting" (I.iii.130); both his bastardy and his knavish prowess are the consequence of natural causation.

Yet, hypocritically, Edmund assumes a superstitious role for the benefit of his father, first practicing on Edgar, who sees through

Goddess: Edmund and Renaissance Free Thought," J. Q. Adams Memorial Studies, pp. 331-349, is to a large extent an application of the ideas of Bredvold on Donne's naturalistic patterns (JEP, XXII, 1923, 471-502) to the case of Edmund.

it; "how long have you been a sectary astronomical?" the latter (I.iii.
157) inquires. Like a Vice Dissimulation, the Machiavellian Edmund
panders to Gloucester's fixed credulity. Continuing to gull Gloucester
and slander Edgar, Edmund describes the latter, for his father's bene-
fit, in superstitious language: "Here stood he in the dark, his sharp
sword out, Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon To stand
auspicious mistress" (II.i.39-40); "I told him," resumes Edmund, "the
revenging Gods 'Gainst parricides did all the thunder bend; Spoke with
how manifold and strong a bond The child was bound to th' father" (II.
i.45-48), alluding both to Gloucester's obsession with nemesis, and to
the traditional notions of thunder as the divine voice, and the all-
uniting bond. Hypocritical, too, in the face of his ally, Cornwall,
who has expounded an Edmundian position regarding personal responsi-
bility, the Bastard piously exclaims: "O Heavens! that this treason
were not, or not I the detector!" and "How malicious is my fortune,
that I must repent to be just!" (III.v.12-13, 9-10).

In his practicality, his ends-justify-the-means ethic, and his
Protagorean moral relativism, Edmund is at one with the evil sisters
to whom he was "contracted" (V.iii.227), a term possessing not only a
physical, but an ethical and metaphysical significance as well. "Yours
in the ranks of death," he loyally enjoins Goneril (IV.ii.24), a vow
which implies also that they are of the ranks of death and hell.
Rejecting mercy (V.i.65), he is the voice of rugged relativism: "if
thou dost As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way to noble for-
tunes; know thou this, that men Are as the time is" (V.iii.29-32).
Yet, as we have noted, Edmund's rational powers, in contrast to the evil sisters' bestial depravity, bespeak a rational soul, and therefore a power of repentance. In addition to the Renaissance dramatic convention of the repentant villain, represented, for example, by D'Amville in the Atheist's Tragedy, who repeats Edmund's ideas, Edmund's initial recognition of his evil contrasts sharply with the deep-rooted unconscious wickedness of Goneril and Regan, and thus provides the motivation of his ultimate contrition. Though, like them, he wagers on the quick grab ("Briefness and Fortune, work!" II.i.19), "this fortune" at the play's end (V.iii.165) turns against him: "But what art thou," he asks Edgar, "That hast this fortune on me?" Thus, Fortune deserting Edmund, he deserts to the pious mode of charity: "If thou'rt noble, I do forgive thee" (V.iii.165-166) he tells his brother; and he has already anticipated a change of sides when, preceding the duel, he shouts at him, "With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart" (V.iii.117), no longer a hypocritical maneuver, and proceeding from the chivalric formality. Acting as conveyor of the message of Divine Justice and Providence, Edgar is the medium of conversion of both father and son: just as Gloucester finally replies to his "Ripeness is all" with "And that's true too" (V.ii.12) so Edmund replies to Edgar's "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.170-172) with a similar "Th'hast spoken right, 'tis true. The wheel has come full circle; I am here."

Thus, at a tremendous cost, the gods are justified; or are they?
On the one hand, Edgar preaches endurance; on the other, he justifies frightful retribution. Piety, to survive in such a hard age as Shakespeare's, was driven to similar sleights. So that, while Edgar is clearly good, his message, an implicit pious norm of the play, reveals the discrepancies of the contrasting heavenly effects on earth. The result is a play which both accepts and questions devout belief at the same time; this is a typically Shakespearean device, an earmark of dramatic complexity. We are meant, then, to accept Edgar and his values at the same time as we see that these are, from the Jacobean standpoint, pious values of desperation, proselytizings in a more and more narrowly constricted will-to-believe void. As Christianity opens the tragedy up to the illimitable mystery, Edmund finds his circle closed: the Fortune upon which he wagered reveals itself to be a turning wheel: "The wheel is come full circle; I am here" (V.iii.174). The wheels in Lear include the Mirror-for-Magistrate-like ones on which the wicked characters have ridden (cf. III.iv.25-27), of these only Edmund recognizing the futility of the ride as he drops off (cf. also Kent, II.ii.173); the practical wheel which the prudent man will dismount as it heads into peril, as the Fool advises: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after" (II.iv.71-74); the "wheel of fire, that mine own tears Do scald like molten lead" (IV.vii.66-67), upon which Lear himself is bound; and finally, the larger wheel, the unmentioned mysterious wheel of the universe and the "mysteries of things," which the Divine Power turns, and
whose meaning is not yet revealed to mortals. In a final sense, whatever "meaning" King Lear has perhaps lies in the celebration of the mystery of that ultimate wheel.

III

Dormit ratio sed vigilat semper metus. . . .
Astrologues menteurs . . .
—Ronsard, "Tombeau de Marguerite de France," 1575.

Summarizing Renaissance attitudes to pagan belief, we suggest that the age accepted the conventional dualism between superstition and atheism as extremes to the mean of true religion, and that pagans, usually considered to be those outside the Christian faith, regardless of time or place, were, by definition, held to share those extremes.

Given the pagan premises of King Lear, therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate the usual superstitious attitudes ascribed to pagans in Renaissance treatises. What were the traits associated with the superstitious type, according to the Elizabethan view?

First, the superstitious were fearful. Lacking faith in providence, their world was filled with hidden menaces, dark threats, and frightening omens, a world in which the gods, if they existed, killed men for their sport. These "skie-staring cocks-combs," as

On superstitious fear, cf. Christopher Heydon, A Defence of Judicial Astrologie (Cambridge, 1603), pp. 26-27: "... as Plutarch noteth, the superstitious alwaies thinke the gods readie to doe hurt. By means whereof he accounteth them in worse case then malefactours or fugitives, who if they once recover the altar are there secured from Feare, where nevertheless the superstitious are in greatest thraldom.
Jonson called them, were the frequent butt of Elizabethan dramatists, such as Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton, and earned the opposition of such men of letters as Sidney and Harington. Their perpetual unease is remarked, for example, by John Weemes: "The labourer after his labour findes his sleepe comfortable unto him, Eccles. 5.12, but the superstitious is as much troubled, when hee sleepe, as when hee waketh... hee is not freed from that which troubled him when he was awaked, dormit ratio sed vigilat semper metus, his reason is asleepe, but his feare alwayes waketh."

Secondly, the superstitious replaced providence with destiny, chance, or fate. But destiny, as Roger Hutchinson, in the Image of God (1550) declared, made all things licit, for "If we thinke all thynge to be governed by destinye, we must needes agree to the libertines, which made no difference between good and bad... callinge notable vices, vocations commaunded of God." Moreover, destiny detracted from


8John Weemes, A Treatise of the Foure Degenerate Sonnes (London, 1636), p. 19. The fear which fed Gloucester's superstition is described also by Greville (Peter Ure, RES, I, 1950, 312), discussing superstitious fear as distinguished from voluntary reverence: "When Fear's dim eyes look in, They guilt discern; when upwards, Justice there;/ Reflects self-horror back upon the sin"; for Fear "Fashions God unto man—not man to God... ."

9Sig. Siii.
God's sovereignty; those who believe in it, charges John Chamber, in *A Treatise Against Judicial Astrologie* (1601), "most blasphemously impeach the divine providence. For if all our actions depend of the stars, then may God have an everlasting playing day, and let the world wag."° Obviously, then, destiny was incongruous with Christian faith: citing the esteemed Sidney, probably the *Arcadia*'s Pamela-Cecropia episode, Henry Cuffe, in *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (1607), affirms "Eternitie and Chance being (as the learned Sir Philip observed) things unsufferable together; If Chanceable then not Eternall"; and William Covell's *Polimanteia* (1595), which contains one of the first references to Shakespeare ("All praise . . . Sweet Shakspere . . ."), having therefore been perhaps noticed by the dramatist, condemns those who put destiny and "caelestiall causes" in their prognostications superstitiously "before Gods promises." In short, the future was in God's hands, and, as Chamber concludes, "none harken to Figure-flingers but Fooles, since God hath reserved the knowledge of future things to himselfe."³

Thirdly, believing in destiny rather than providence, the superstitious held their fate to be sealed at their nativity, the stars continuing to have power over men's lives. Any omen, therefore, of a  

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⁰Chamber, *op. cit.*, p. 4.  
²Covell, *op. cit.*, Sig. [GhIV].  
³Chamber, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
planetary nature, especially an eclipse, was considered of great moment, and was sufficient to throw their lives into confusion. These many, who, as Montaigne said, "estudient et glosent leur Almanachs," were conceived, in some quarters, as superstitious violators of the commandment against worshipping false gods. Such writers, for example, as John Hooper, in *A Declaration of the Ten Commandments* (1588), cite "the law of man" forbidding always "the Superstition of fore-destenieng," condemning offenders to the sword and the loss of their heads; while William Lambarde, linked with Shakespeare in several ways, in *The Duties of Constables* (1583, and numerous times thereafter), classes among rogues those who tell destinies.

Associated with paganism—Hooper's *A Declaration of the Ten Commandments* (1588) calls it "this Egyptiacall and Ethnickes foolishness"—illicit star-knowledge evoked much ridicule, especially from the clergy and the court; so fantastic, indeed, did the predictions become, that to "lie like an almanac" passed into proverb. More interestingly relevant to Gloucester's belief than the solemn astrologers were the satirical mock prognostications, paralleling Gloucester's fearful reaction to eclipses almost in his own words, "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. . . . Nature finds itself scourg'd by the sequent effects" (1.ii.107-110): "Eclipses both of

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15 Ibid., p. 332.
Sun and Moone, with their dangerous and subsequent effects," sneers the Epistle to the Reader (sig. A2²) of Vox Graculi or Jack Dawes Prognostication (1623), as does one Simon Smell-Knave's Fearefull and lamentable effects of two comets, which shall appear in 1591, of which, in 1604, a plagiarism appeared by one Adam Eavesdropper, The Penniless Parliament of Threadbare Poets. Weak Christians, wrote James in his Daemonologie (1597), could be lured by the study of astrology, so that, through curiosity, they might exceed the lawful arts and invoke Satan, finding, however, their knowledge "nothing increased." In Basilicon Doron (1603), James further advises his son against necromancers, false prophets, and sooth-sayers.

Since opponents of astrology tended to class it as a pagan superstition—cf. "this Egyptiacall and Ethnikes foolishness" above—astrology and paganism were closely linked. Thus, it is dramatically appropriate, and, within the Renaissance conventional view, to be anticipated, that Gloucester should be both pagan and superstitious in his Augustinian caecitas, ironically one of the "blinde prophets" whom Hooper, in the same context, condemns. In numerous ways, Shakespeare could have acquired knowledge of pagan superstitious belief, among the most obvious being the presumptive grammar school curriculum, his favorite, Ovid's Metamorphosis, his acquaintance with Plutarch, and, as shown above, his use of Sidney's Arcadia in King Lear. Simultaneously

16 James, Daemonologie, pp. 11-14.
17 Hooper, op. cit., p. 332.
with Lear, it is worth noting, in 1605, there appeared, dedicated to James I, a translation of Loier's treatise, associating paganism with fear of eclipses, and attempting to remove their terrifying aspect by a naturalistic explanation. Referring to the pagan Romans, Loier asserts: "The thing that did most terrifie and astonish them . . . was an eclipse of the moone, which put them in a fansie and conceipt, that the gods were angry and displeased with them for that their enterprise." Interestingly, in view of Gloucester's later contact with demonology, Loier, following Aquinas, suggests that the devil imprints in men's minds "a certaine terror and feare of the puissance and power of the starres," so that "at this day there be many men that take all things unknowe unto them, to be Specters and Prodigies," being "afraide of them, without any iust occasion," a clear view of Gloucester's position. Bacon's essay "Of Superstition," includes, among its causes, "the taking an aim at divine matters by human, which cannot but breed mixture of imaginations: and, lastly, barbarous times, especially joined with calamities and disasters," the final reason seemingly connected with Gloucester's case. Among other associations between paganism and astrological superstition, Renaissance explorers and travel-writers provided evidence, for example, regarding savage reactions to eclipses. Purchas, in his Pilgrimage (1613), observes of the Philippines,

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18 Pierre Le Loyer, A Treatise of Specters (London, 1605), fol. 67- [67v].

19 Works, edd. James Spedding et al. (Boston, 1860), XII, 136–137.
"If an Eclipse of the Sunne or Moone happen, they howle and make piteous lamentation, persuading themselves, that their King, or some great man amongst them will die. Experience thereof was the sixt of August 1599, when the Moone was eclipsed"; and Peter Martyr of Angleria, in The History of Travels in the West and East Indies, 1612, remarks that the natives "foretel the Eclipses of the Moone . . . which they hold ominous."

Gloucester's is the view that man is a bound victim of the gods who sportively destroy man's lives; a universe ruled not by the "clear-est gods" but by the darkest gods, improvidential, unjust, and malignly mysterious; and, finally, the despair, to which these positions—emotional rather than rational—logically would lead. In general, the superstitious person would be seen as a weak and passive type, overimaginative and dangerously unstable, terrifyingly vacillating, pathetic rather than tragic, and, rather than a hero, a victim.

In Gloucester, we find the readily identifiable superstitious type, who, as a rehearsal of some of his belief-speeches will demonstrate, exhibits all of these traits; in his weak vacillation between terror and appeasement, the earl is the perfect anti-type to his King's ultimate defiance. Superstitiously, Gloucester's attitude to the governing powers is expressed symbolically in his passion, at the hands of Cornwall and Regan: "I am tied to th' stake, and I must stand the

21 Peter Martyr of Angleria, Sig. Rh.
course (III.vii.53); the implication of man as a baited bear torn, pour le sport, by human curs is present in the image, but the microcosmic image corresponds also to Gloucester's macrocosmic theology of pointlessly malicious divinities. Moreover, a summary of Gloucester's expressions regarding himself and regarding the cosmos would show a certain congruence: in the first act, he reveals himself to be gullible, rash, and vengeful, while he appeals blindly for harsh personal retribution to the heavens; he is melancholy, gloomy, and pessimistic, being struck by portents in eclipses, the ensuing decay of the world, the significance of predictions and almanacs, and the conviction that necessity rules via nativity, and the heavens, governing all, produce men's vices and virtues; in the third act, he exhibits fear, suspicion, and desire for vengeance, while on a cosmic level he falls into a Stoic resignation, and an acceptance of endurance, and appeals to the presently "kind" gods for mercy; in the fourth act, he shows humility and repentance, seeing man as the lowest animal, and ruling all are cruel gods, killing men for their sport; he expresses sympathy for the poor, and views suicide as a kind of Schopenhauerian release, while the gods are seen as punishing powers, alternately as possibly good, then as cruel and invincible, and as tyrants making men's lives unbearable; ultimately, Gloucester repeats his conviction of the decay of the world, along with his final acceptance of the truth, too, that "ripeness is all," while the gods in his blinded eyes become "gentle."

In Gloucester's own words, the superstitious type is readily recognized: the important exposition of I.ii points him out to the
audience, as, for example, gullible and naive (23-26) with regard to
Edmund's manipulation of the forged letter; in I.ii.99-103, it shows
him again to be gullible, full of self-pity, lacking objectivity in
his appeals to "Heaven and earth!" and rash, impatient, and vengeful
regarding Edgar's alleged misdeeds, the chaos and irresponsibility
implicit in Lear's abdication being echoed in these lower quarters:
"I would unstate myself to be in a due resolution." Having witnessed
Gloucester's personal and family attitudes, the audience next observes
the old earl as cosmic Metaphysiker: "These late eclipses in the sun
and moon portend no good to us. . . . Nature finds itself scourg'd by
the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide:
in cities mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason . . .
This villain of mine comes under the prediction. . . . all ruinous dis-
orders follow us disquietly to our graves" (I.ii.107-119), revealing
his superstition regarding eclipses in the sun and moon and portents,
as well as a fearful pessimism, involving the three analogical levels
of family, state, and cosmos. Explicating his father's follies, Edmund
explains the latter's superstition: "This is the excellent foppery of
the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of
our own behavior, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon,
and stars; as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly com-
pulsion, knaves, thieves, and treACHERS by spherical predominance,
drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforc'd obedience of planetary
influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An
admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition
to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the
dragon's tail, and my nativity was under *Ursa major*; so that it follows
I am rough and lecherous . . . I should have been that I am had the
maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing" (I.ii.
124-140). Here we observe some of the bases of Gloucester's mode of
thought, involving necessity and heavenly compulsion through nativity
as causing man's virtues or vices; he is, indeed, as Edmund concludes,
a "credulous father" (I.ii.186).

After an interval of an act, the audience next sees Gloucester
again as fearful, gullible, and suspicious (III.iii.1-6, 8-22); but in
III.vii.53, as has been noted, he evinces premonitory Stoic resigna-
tion to suffering contrived by evil-doers, "I am tied to th' stake, and
I must stand the course," followed by sympathy for the victim, Lear,
and desire for supernatural vengeance: "but I shall see the winged
vengeance overtake such children," conceiving, as often, the gods in
harmful terms, while his obsession with the stars appears in his refer-
ence to the "stelled fires" (III.vii.63-64, 60). After his physical
blinding, and mental illumination regarding Edgar, he reverses his
general position to exclaim, "O my follies! Then Edgar was abus'd.
Kind Gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!" But this crucial reversal
occurs under the intense experience Gloucester has just suffered, and,
as the sequence shows us, it is not a permanent change. Yet, repentant
grief dominates his mind, along with a new-found humility (IV.i.18-24);
the gods, nevertheless, are still cruel, indeed, at their cruelest:
"As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods; They kill us for their
sport" (IV.i.31-37), while man is the lowest of animals: "... I such a fellow saw, Which made me think a man a worm" (IV.i.32-33). Gloucester's Schicksalvision is followed by expressions of humility and sympathy for the poor, while the heavens are re-invoked as punishment; there is a causal relationship suggested between man's degradation and heaven's plagues, paralleling the two speeches just quoted; in short, the cosmic degradation implies the human one. "Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns plagues Have humbled to all strokes ... Heavens, deal so still!" (IV.i.63-66); but, in apparent antithesis to the sportive infliction of the gods, there is supposedly, in addition, a reason for their torments—they operate by ordinances: "Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man, That slaves your ordinance, that will not see Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly" (IV.i.67-69).

This dualistic attitude towards the gods, first, as nemesis, and second, as reckless torturers, is present elsewhere in Gloucester's speeches; moreover, retributory punishment would seem to run counter to nativity determining one's character. Such inconsistencies mingle in the weak, senile mind of the superstitious earl, but all indicate his sense of the malignity present in the heavens and the consequent human victimization. In his prayer (IV.vi.34-41), he reveals the

22 Gloucester's references to fairies whom he conjoins with gods (IV.vi.29-30: "fairies and Gods Prosper it with these!") suggest a paganism leaning towards superstition. King James had already, in the Daemonologie (1597), pp. 73-75, condemned such belief as deluded paganism: "That fourth kinde of spirites, which by the Gentiles was called Diana, and her wandring court, and amongst us called the Phairie ... of our good neighboures, as one of the sortes of illusiones that was
fundamental Gloucester in his attitude towards the gods: "O you mighty
Gods! This world I do renounce, and in your sights Shake patiently my
great affliction off; If I could bear it longer, and not fall To
quarrel with your great opposeless wills, My snuff and loathed part
of nature should Burn itself out," where the gods are both mighty and
"opposeless," an attitude which contrasts with Lear's final challenge;
the gods, moreover, are watching the spectacle. Gloucester's attitude
is, then, totally hopeless; man, lowest of the animals, is a passive
victim of an unbearable and incurable disease—life. Consequently,
suicide is the only escape from the gods, just as once it was the refuge
from a tyrannical ruler's oppression: "Is wretchedness depriv'd that
benefit To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort, When misery
could beguile the tyrant's rage, And frustrate his proud will" (IV.vi.
60-61).

After the "suicide" attempt, Edgar convinces him that the gods
have intervened "miraculously" to preserve him from the temptation of
the devil to self-destruction, and the credulous old man accepts his
son's account as motivation for patient endurance: "henceforth I'll
bear Affliction till it do cry out itself 'Enough, enough,' and die"
(IV.vi.75-76). Throughout, Gloucester has, as in the present instance,
superstitiously believed in the reality of fiends, and the fiend who

rifest in the time of Papistry: . . . vaine trattles . . . nor anie
thing that ought to be beleued by Christians . . . the devil illuded
the senses of sundry simple creatures, in making them beleue that they
saw and harde such thinges as were nothing so indeed . . . a kinde of
vision . . . wherein he the Devil counterfeits God among the
Ethnicks . . . ."
led him to the brink is no exception. In contrast to his pre-suicide prayer (IV.vi.34-41), he begs that he be not tempted again to self-destruction; he places his life in the gods' hands: "You ever-gentle Gods, take my breath from me: Let not my worser spirit tempt me again To die before you please" (IV.vi.219-220). At this point, as at the moment after his blinding, Gloucester mitigates his obsession with divine cruelty; here the gods are "ever-gentle," there they were "kind"; and presently, they are bountiful, all through the influence of Edgar's virtuous conversion: "The bounty and the benison of Heaven To boot, and boot!" (IV.vi.226-227), he wishes his son. Gloucester's final vision mediates between his pagan superstition and a kind of Stoic resignation, which does not, however, totally displace his previous attitude. Too firmly rooted in the old earl's brain to be extirpated entirely, his fearful superstition can only answer Edgar's "What! in ill thoughts again? Men must endure Their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all" with "And that's true too" (V.ii.12). These four final onstage words of Gloucester perhaps indicate an ultimate syncretism, to which, through the agency of the pious Edgar, the superstitious old pagan has tenously attained.

From an examination of Gloucester's belief-speeches, we may conclude that an Elizabethan audience would have observed in him the usual characteristics of the superstitious man, which, indeed, as a heathen, it might have expected him to be.

Retributive justice, to which reference is made in Lear, most strongly, perhaps, by Edgar (V.iii.170: "The Gods are just, and of our
pleasant vices/ Make instruments to plague us") a pious vote of confidence in an equitable Providence, is shown generally to operate, by contrast, in an uncontrollably excessive or erratic manner. Through Edgar's offices, both Gloucester and Edmund are brought to touch the "truth," or, in one respect, an implicit norm of the play—the values for which Edgar is the raisonneur, the virtuous donnees, against which opposing values swirl and clash. Edmund, for example, in the lines immediately following, agrees with Edgar, "Th' hast spoken right, 'tis true," acquiescing, though perhaps too late, in "the divinity that shapes our ends," the antithesis of his opening soliloquy. And, in parallel fashion, Gloucester, also too late, finds a kind of peace through Edgar's "Men must endure/ Their going hence, even as their coming hither:/ Ripeness is all"; the old man's last speech is, "And that's true too," in reply to his son (V.i.i.9-11), although anxiety regarding the absence of Providence had previously dogged most of his steps.

In an interesting treatment of the "ripeness is all" crux, J. V. Cunningham has challenged all comers by a resolute Christian interpretation: "... Shakespeare means that the fruit will fall in its time, and man dies when God is ready." So certain is Cunningham that this is what Shakespeare means, that he apparently rejects or minimizes a Stoic interpretation, especially with regard to Hamlet's similar speech (V.i.i.230-233). That Cunningham is partly right, but that he is too exclusive, in view of the complex and syncretic nature

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of King Lear, may be indicated by additional citations. "Men must endure their going hence" is the burden of the service for the "Burial of the Dead" in the Book of Common Prayer, whose rhythms must have continued, especially in those recent times of plague, to ring in Jacobean minds; the citation is from Job xix and the burden is acceptance: "Man that is borne of a woman, hath but a shorte tym to lyve... he cometh up and is cut downe like a floure..." Yet the concept "men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither," was a commonplace of the Renaissance, and such independently radical ethical Paulinists as Mutianus Rufus can analogously observe, "Being born we die, and the end hangs already from the beginning," implying the necessity of our patient endurance of both entrance into, and exit from, this world. Compare Bacon's "It is as natural to die as to be born" ("Of Death"). The pagan Plutarch observes, "... a man that is in his wits cannot be ignorant that he is... born to this very end that he must die" (Essays, ed. A. H. Clough et al., I, 328).

Gloucester's remark has, in addition, a demonstrable Stoic sense. The acceptance of passive resignation and endurance in a universe of suffering is both fundamentally Stoic, and an element of the Christian outlook, both in early times of Roman admixture, as well in neo-Stoic Renaissance times of disintegration and crises. In short, from one point of view, Christianity and Stoicism merge indistinguishably with

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regard to the harsh necessities of this temporary life and the need for their endurance. For the Middle Ages, Boethius can become a Christian symbol, and later be translated by Elizabeth. The popular Renaissance neo-Stoic, Du Vair, expresses an outlook similar to Gloucester's final one: "Trials and misfortunes to our bodies or to our friends and possessions are of small moment if we keep our minds free from grief and torment"—as Edgar advises Gloucester (IV.vi.80), "Bear free and patient thoughts." Man, says Du Vair, "comes into the world naked and goes out naked." But closer perhaps to Gloucester's "men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither" than anything cited by Cunningham is the Stoic Epictetus: "I came into the world when it pleased Him, and I leave it again at His pleasure" (Discourses, III.xxvi.30). Epictetus was known and translated in Shakespeare's day. Further, according to our evidence, as Lear is a play which seeks, on an ostensive level, the appurtenances of pagan local color, it is entirely in keeping that Gloucester should reach a position which is both quasi-pagan and quasi-Christian. The mingling of Stoic and Christian belief, evident at the beginning of Christianity, is manifest also at the time of Shakespeare. Such pagan-Christian

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26 Du Vair, ed. R. Kirk, p. 31.

Syncretism was encouraged, for example, in the preface to Guillaume De Vair's Moral Philosophie of the Stoics, in which Thomas James (1598) advises (Sig. [A5r]-[A6v]): "... no kinde of philosophie is more profitable and neerer approaching unto Christianitie ... than the philosophie of the Stoicks." In the 1620 ed. of Seneca’s Works, Thomas Lodge bids the reader, "What a Stoicke hath written, Reade thou like a Christian ..." As early as 1567, James Sanford's introduction to his edition of the Manual of Epictetus informs his Christian readers that "there cane be no Booke to the wel framing of our life more profitable and necessary." In 1606, Joseph Hall's Heaven upon Earth, explaining Stoic thought to Christian Englishmen, showed how a Christian might more readily than a heathen Stoic attain the peace of mind sought by Seneca. In addition, the works of Justus Lipsius consciously attempted a reconciliation between Stoicism and Christianity. "And that's true too" (V.i.i.11) affirms the hedonist pagan father to his virtuous-heathen son, finally accepting a Stoicism which mediates between paganism and Christianity, a conclusion partially


29 Joseph Hall, Heaven upon Earth and Characters of Vertues and Vices, ed. Rudolf Kirk, introd. (Rutgers Univ. Press, 1946), pp. 19-51. Du Vair, it is interesting to note, was a Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church, while Joseph Hall was an Anglican Bishop.

implicit in the resignation which Dante (Par., III, 85) had already defined: "E la sua volontade è nostra pace."

IV

Up to this point, we have, in examining the major characters of King Lear, shown that they correspond closely to main Renaissance religious attitudes, especially those which Elizabethans would have attributed to heathens: priscæ theologia, superstition, or atheism; to the first type, it has been indicated, belong Cordelia and Edgar; to the second, Gloucester corresponds; and to the third, belong Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. But what of the protagonist of the tragedy, Lear, himself? An investigation of Lear's belief-utterances excludes him from groups one and, in a sense, two; moreover, he starts with no a priori negativist atheism, such as characterizes Goneril, Regan, and (except of the goddess Natura) Edmund. That Lear is not, according to the above categories, simply classifiable, and that his various manifestations occupy the central interest of the play, are, of course, to be expected in a work of such complexity that, even at the present day, it would be difficult to find scholars fully in agreement concerning its meaning. In order to determine Lear's attitudes regarding the heavenly powers, it will be useful to inspect his speeches throughout the drama.

Before discussing the lines themselves, we may inquire whether, within the pagan scheme itself, it is not possible further to distinguish a fourth religious stance. If pagans were superstitious,
atheistical, or prisci theologi, none of these categories allows for the "representative" or prototypical pagan who does not happen to be a candidate for pre-Christian salvation; a polytheist-naturalist, in short, who has none of the abnormal terrors of Gloucester, none of the rationalist contempt for the supernatural powers of Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, and none of the pre-Christian purity of Cordelia and Edgar. In other words, we have not, till this point, considered, in this ostensibly pagan play, a character who, in his universal heroic strength, can identifiably represent mankind as heathen, unmarked by the eccentricities, admirable, absurd, or vicious, of the other personages. Without such a character to operate with, to poise against the forces to be explored, to offer values for the crucible of his tragic understanding, the play would collapse of its own inanition: powers of goodness ranged against powers of evil, and in the middle a gullible old lecher blindly stumbling about, muttering of flies. In short, up till now, our analysis has lacked a hero, and in a real sense, ideologically, the play without Lear would be like Hamlet without the Prince. We conclude regarding our previous statement that an Elizabethan would have expected a pagan to be superstitious, atheistical, or "saved," while true, to require qualification; for the superstition may be prima facie absurd and the product of senile terror, or it may be representatively and dignifiedly genuine, from the heathen point of view, and analogically correspond, on its own level, to that of a "believing" Renaissance Christian. It is possible, then, that the donnée of the play includes, on a heroic level, a serious
representation of pre-Christian pagan belief of elevated mind and strength. Whether this is true remains to be determined from an examination of the text of King Lear.

In considering the complex character of Lear who, as protagonist, mirrors the thematic complexities of the play, we shall have to confront a technique different from that which depicted the relatively perspicuous portrayals of Gloucester, Cordelia, Edgar, Edmund, Goneril, and Regan; in Lear the threads of the work's central sense merge, unwind, come together and apart, on more than one level. If, therefore, as we take it, King Lear's thematic preoccupation is belief, we shall expect to find confluences and contradictions in belief, perhaps ambiguous, perhaps simultaneous; in short, we suggest that if Lear is, as many critics hold, Shakespeare's most complexly symphonic work, its protagonist might, in all probability, be approached as a microcosm of that complexity.

The opening scene discovers to us a king apparently firm in his polytheistic-naturalistic faith, a ruler convinced of his dependence on the higher powers, who support him and from whom he derives his being and his end: "For by the sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Hecate and the night, By all the operation of the orbs From whom we do exist and cease to be" (I.i.109-112), he swears; and the extent and emphasis of the lines would seem, expositionally, to ensure our awareness of Lear's piety qua pagan, far from the self-sufficiency of the heathen atheists and the excessive superstition of Gloucester. Thus it may be suggested that, just as Edgar and Cordelia function as
a norm of pre-Christian piety, Lear establishes himself at first as the norm of pagan fidelity. Hence, in a sense, the king is a "good" pagan, as who should say a "good" Catholic; he is, as we shall see, however, a more complex analogue of the Jacobean Christian believer, the spectator of Shakespeare's play. To return to Lear's preliminary heathen apologia, his worship of the sun's sacred radiance, and Hecate and the night's mysteries, and his belief that celestial spheres give life and take it away, is standard pagan fare, according to the Renaissance view; we recall, for example, the religion of a segment of More's Utopians: "Some worship the sun as a god, others the moon, and still others some one of the planets." Lear's "normal" pagan polytheism is reinforced by further interjections: "Now, by Apollo," he shouts at Kent, who significantly—and foreshadowingly—underlines Lear's religious exposition: "Now, by Apollo, King, Thou swear'st thy Gods in vain" (I.i.159-161). Again he exclaims, "By Jupiter" (I.i.178), whose connection with Hecate, the goddess of ghosts mentioned by Lear above, is interestingly suggested in Henry Stephanus' Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, editions of 1573 and after: "Hecate . . . cui Jupiter elemente subiecit, & caelo hereboque potentem fecit . . ." A fourth time, Lear reinforces the conviction of his pagan reverence and piety, when he swears "by the power that made me" (I.i.207).


Yet if Lear were only a simple believer, as Gloucester is a foolish, superstitious man, the symphonic complexity which we sense, above all of Shakespeare's works, to be present in this play would be lacking. Certain counter-currents, anticipatory of Lear's later defiance, may, we suggest, be present even in the beginning. In other words, having strongly established Lear's pagan piety at the start in order to have a norm against which to work, and against which to measure Lear's departures at the end, Shakespeare's dramaturgical job was not finished; he would also have had to plant anticipations of that end, perceptible if muted, for such essential purposes as motivation and verisimilitude. What we are suggesting is the obvious solution of a playwright's paradoxical task: how, at the same time to establish character firmly, and to allow for an eventual great, almost total, reversal of that character. For if anything is clear in this tragedy, it is that the protagonist's faith in the gods whom he adores is severely shaken by the events of the tragedy. In addition to the events of the storm in Act III, such ultimate speeches, for example, as V.iii. 256-259, and 305-308, give explicit evidence of Lear's change, just as tacitly the irony-of-sequence reveals it, when, following the pious Albany's prayer, "The Gods defend her!" Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms (V.iii.255).

In order, therefore, to avoid a catastrophic last-minute introduction of a radically new orientation, i.e., Lear's later revulsion against the gods in a peripeteia of belief, Shakespeare, in the interests of verisimilitude, may have had to anticipate that change. It is
conceivable, moreover, that elements of Lear's complexity which would have been fairly comprehensible to an Elizabethan audience, engaged in topical controversies, may have escaped the secular eye of modern criticism. In short, we suggest that, even at the beginning, certain allusions, typical of pagan naturalism, reveal a concurrence of counter-patterns accompanying Lear's firmly expressed heathen piety.

As we have observed, Lear, in the opening scene, staunchly reiterates his faith in his gods. Nevertheless, although neglected by critics unfamiliar with the dramatic importance of the Renaissance religious milieu, and pointed out by a few more perceptive scholars, such as recently by L. C. Martin, Lear's repeated exclamation in the first-act exposition, "Nothing will come of nothing," had a meaning that was centrally relevant to the religious crisis of Shakespeare's age. This twice-mentioned notion, expressed by Lear in two contrasting moods, angry and calm, occurs in the crucially expository first hundred lines of the play: "Nothing will come of nothing," he shouts (I.1.90) at Cordelia; while in a more reflective mood, he replies to his Fool's "Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?" "Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing" (I.iv.136-139). "Nothing," echoed throughout the play as an ironic refrain, is, in typically Shakespearean analogy,
relevant to the individual, the family, the state, and the created universe; "nothing" and "something" are ironically substitutable in numerous ways, such as, for example, Goneril and Regan's acquisitions, something which results in nothing; and the universe itself, upon whose substance and upon whose gods Lear relied, turns out, in a sense, to be nothing; in "nothing" and "something," then, we have a pair analogical to Shakespeare's favorite "shadow" and "substance" and to the appearance-versus-reality motif which fills his dramas.

Yet "nothing," a basic paradox of the play, has a pointed irony especially in King Lear, which probes the reality of the heavens in regard to the realities of earth. A keystone of the accepted theology of Shakespeare's day was the paradox that God created the world out of nothing; and it was a keystone that was, at a time of increasing naturalism, materialism, and skepticism, in danger of crashing. So agitated were Elizabethan theologians concerning the retention of this paradox—which, in the Creation, the Catholic Encyclopedia, for example, considers the foundation of religion itself—

that numerous polemicists engaged in its defense, Catholics as well as Protestants. Indeed, Don Cameron Allen indicates that it did, at this time, excite "feverish attention." Even intellectuals and relatively sophisticated independents claimed adherence to the doctrine

34 (New York, 1913), IV, 475.

in face of the clearly *credo-quia-absurdum* aspect of the tenet, which skeptics strove more and more to undermine; for, if materialism, whose premise is naturalistically-existent substance, accepted the idea that substance could be made out of non-substance, its own being would be threatened. Thus, the battle over the theological doctrine became one which was central to Renaissance scientific development; either the doctrine or science would have to go, for the belief threatened science at its foundation. In the conflict concerning God's creation of the world out of nothing, religious faith and scientific certainty joined issue in a clash which is one of the world's decisive battles. But the place of *King Lear* as among the first tragedies of the modern world becomes clearer only as one examines the religious milieu from which it derived.

Among those who enlisted in defense of the paradox that something could be made out of nothing was Mutian, who opposed the pagan philosophers' view, echoed by Lear, that nothing can come from nothing: "We leave behind the entelechy of Aristotle and the ideas of Plato. God created all things from nothing." In contrast to the heathen Lear, Romeo, a Christian Italian, seems to assert the paradox "of nothing first create" (*Romeo and Juliet* I.i.183). Symptomatically, the Janus-faced Bacon, though elsewhere not as convinced, manages, in at least one place, a fideist defense: "... things with regard to this subject which we

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know by faith. First, that matter was created from nothing. ... Creation out of nothing they [the old philosophies] cannot endure. ... In these points we must rest on faith. ..."  Jean de Champagnac, in his Physique française (1595), similarly insists that "la creation des choses venant de rien ne repugne à la lumière naturelle." Later, Geoffrey Goodman's Fall of Man (1616) takes as dogma that "God created all things of nothing," while Cudworth, even later, stoutly ridicules and refutes those atomists who denied creation out of nothing. In an orthodox fashion, John Donne could several times proclaim his faith in "the first nothing." Finally, Sidney, whom we have seen to be significant in relation to King Lear, is twice connected with support of the orthodox tenet that God created the world out of nothing: the tenth chapter of his friend's work

37 Bacon, De Principiis atque originibus. Works, ed. James Spedding et al. (Boston, 1864), V, 344, tr., X, 386; Bacon's other side is reflected in such comments as G. W. Whiting, Milton's Literary Milieu (Univ. of N. C. Press, 1939), p. 10: Bacon, like Milton, believed the world was created from pre-existing chaos. Further discussion and reference occurs in Thomas Fowler, ed., Bacon's Novum Organum (Oxford, 1889), pp. 15, 500-501. Fowler's note (p. 501) observes of one of Bacon's formulations of the ex nihilo dogma: "It will be noticed that this statement guards the maxim from any theological objection."

38 Champagnac, 1597 ed., p. 15; cited by Busson, Sources, pp. 494-495.

39 Victor Harris, All Coherence Gone, p. 19.


which Sidney helped translate and arranged to have Golding complete
rendering, A Woorke concerning the trewnesse of the Christian Religion
(1587), is entitled: "That God created the world out of nothing; that
is to say, without any matter or stuffe whereof to make it." And in
the Arcadia, where Shakespeare could have seen it, Pamela refutes the
atheistic Cecropia's dependence upon chance rather than Providence:
"for Chaunce could never make all thinges of nothing" (Feuillerat ed.,
I, 407).

Opposed to the orthodox position were adherents of Aristotle,
Lucretius, the apparently influential Paduan school, and the pyrrhonists;
recognizing these enemies of faith, Donne (Ess. in Div., ed. Simpson,
p. 28) confutes "the quarrelsome contending of Sextus Empiricus the
Pyrrhonian, who . . . thinks he cuts off all Arguments against produc­
tion of Nothing." In Bruc's Dialogues (1558), the poet Baif indict
scientists and philosophers, who, having gone against the truth of reli-
gion particularly on such topics as the impossibility of the creation of
the world ex nihilo, would lead men to blasphemy and atheism. In
Marlowe's Jew of Malta (c. 1589), the Machiavellian atheist, Barabas,
like Lear, outside the Christian faith, appears to confute the orthodox
view: "Christians . . . of naught is nothing made" (I.ii.104), throwing,
with Marlovian irony, their own favorite doctrinal paradox, altered,
into the Christians' teeth when his property is threatened. Among
those who dared publicly to question the belief and commit their doubts

42 Busson, Sources, p. 421.
to print was Montaigne, who rejected it for the common-sense reason of the scientists: "Par ce que rien ne se fait de rien, Dieu n'aura sceu bastir le monde sans matiere." And, typical of those scientists, one of the most eminent of the age, the mathematician Thomas Harriot, Raleigh's protege, is described by Aubrey as follows: Harriot "was wont to say, that he did not like (or valued not) the old story of the creation of the world. He could not believe the old position; he would say ex nibilo nihil fit."

Now, from one point of view, Lear's clearly recognizable affirmation of the skeptical Renaissance tag was entirely in keeping with the characterization and milieu of a pagan man, living before the Christian illumination; for the pagans, as indicated above, were supposed, philosophically, to believe, with Aristotle, that nothing could come of nothing, Bacon observing that "creation out of nothing" the pagan philosophers could "not endure." Shakespeare has here seized upon the perfect dramatic ambivalence, for from the viewpoint of the pagan realism the playwright proposes, Lear could be a pious man; from the viewpoint of a Renaissance spectator, his speech was, with regard to an Elizabethan, one of the clearest indications of skepticism.

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43 Busson, Sources, p. 140.

44 Aubrey provides the ironical sequel regarding Harriot: "But said Mr. Haggar, a nihilum killed him at last: for in the top of his nose came a little red speck (exceedingly small), which grew bigger and bigger and at last killed him." Strathmann, Sir Walter Raleigh, pp. 105-106.

45 Works, edd. James Spedding et al. (London, 1858), V, 491.
Thus, Lear as pagan, was expected to hold such a view; but, in the ana-
logical transformation by which Lear was both heathen and Renaissance
contemporary, an ambivalence was set up by which he was both "pious"
and "skeptical" at the same time. In other words, in rejecting crea-
tion ex nihilo, Lear was a pious pagan but a skeptical Christian; and
the manifold hermeneutic of the Renaissance allowed for such a
multiple interpretation. Dramatically, then, Lear's speech functioned
both as contribution to local-color and atmospheric verisimilitude
from a pagan standpoint, and, as foreshadowing, from a Christian stand-
point, Lear's eventual rejection of the gods. Any confusion in our
account should, we trust, be attributed to the confusion in the multiple
vision of the Elizabethan age, to its illogical syncretism, and to its
mingling of disparate and divided worlds.

Once again, Lear asserts his polytheistic belief, addressing
Nature as "dear Goddess," just as in that other pre-Christian British
play of Cymbeline, Belarius, a British nobleman, sympathetically
invokes her: "O thou goddess, Thou divine Nature" (IV.ii.168-169). 46

46 Such references to Nature are conventions of drama set in
pre-Christian eras; cf. Gorboduc, I.ii.10; I.ii.174; I.i.220; II.i.80;
II.i.140-141; IV.ii.15-18; IV.ii.125; IV.i.155, 162-164; IV.ii.214-
216; IV.ii.259-260; V.i.16. Ed. J. Q. Adams, Chief Pre-Shakespearean
Dramas (Boston, 1924). In the pre-Christian British plays of Gorboduc
and Cymbeline, in contrast with Lear, a relatively responsive heaven
seems to operate; cf. J. M. Nosworthy, ed. Cymbeline (New Arden ed.),
p. xxxiv: "The gods play a big part in Cymbeline, and are throughout
represented as responsive to supplication . . . ." Similar conclusions
are reached by H. D. Swander, The Design of Cymbeline (Ph.D. diss.,
Univ. of Michigan, 1953), as summarized in Shakespeare Newsletter, IV
(1954), 16: "The plot is designed to show that the gods may inter-
vene in human affairs." The uniqueness and deliberateness of
Thus Lear's invocation of Nature as goddess is closer to Belarius' than to Edmund's, who claims exclusive veneration, "Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law My services are bound" (I.ii.1-2); for Edmund is a votary negating other obligations, whilst Lear's devotions are part of a more widespread and more responsible bond. Yet, a similar divinity is named in all cases, the fructifying goddess whom antiquity, the Middle Ages, as well as the Renaissance knew: "Hear, Nature, hear!" the old King appeals; "dear Goddess, hear! Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend To make this creature fruitful! Into her womb convey sterility!" (I.iv.284-287). Directly, or by implication, Lear continues to invoke this goddess for his curses; nature betrayed requires Nature to wreak vengeance. As a "good" pagan, Lear feels entitled to call upon the services of his heathen dispensation; and, in cursing his ungrateful elder daughters, Lear is well repaid by the gods that he worships. "Blasts and fogs upon thee!" he wishes Goneril, much like another and less worthy heathen, the freckled son of Sycorax, who swears, "All the infections that the sun sucks up From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall" (Tempest II.ii.1-2). As in the first act, Lear, in Act Two still plays the pious pagan: "By Jupiter, I swear, no!" which as before, Kent answers with "By Juno, I swear, ay!" (II.iv.21-22).}

Shakespeare's methods in Lear are thus emphasized by contrast with Cymbeline, as well as by the demonstrable care he took to depart from the providential old Leir.

The traditional dissension of Jupiter and Juno foreshadows, in Kent's remark, the disintegration of the pagan pantheon which Lear is to experience, having sworn his gods in vain, according to Kent
The King refers, in II.iv.108, to Nature, "When Nature, being oppressed, commands the mind To suffer with the body," but it is a sense of human nature, of natural condition, perhaps as a derivative of the all-embracing Nature that Lear implies. Continually, he appeals for divine vengeance, again with satisfying results, this time against Regan: "All the stor'd vengeance of Heaven fall On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones, You taking airs with lameness!" (II.iv.163-165). Other elements of Nature are also called upon: "You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty, You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the pow'rful sun, To fall and blister her!" (II.iv.166-169). Here, as elsewhere, Lear is motivated by a polytheistic animism, in which all Nature is alive, personified, and shares in divinity.

Yet, as his sufferings intensify, the old man's tones become more pleading, and, for the first time, the great word "if" enters his prayers: "O Heavens, If you do love old men, if your sweet sway Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old, Make it your cause; send down and take my part!" (II.iv.192-194). A new humility obtrudes with a new, and still unspoken, doubt; unrequited suffering, unavenged bestiality, bespeak a less creditable divinity. Lear's reliance upon "the power (I.i.161). Cf. S. Batman's Golden Book (1577), f. 2: "Iupiter and Iuno are sayd to bee at variaunce, because Iupiter being hoat and drye, not hauing his heate repressed with moystnesse, thinges are burned and parched; agaym, when Iunos moystnesse is not qualified with Jupiter's heate, all thinges are drowned and overflowed: but when their qualities are with equal temperaunce combyned together, then the Earthe doth yelde her fruites with greate plentye and abundaunce."
that made me" (I.i.207) begins to sway, and he takes on some of the tone of Gloucester under duress (III.vii.92, IV.vi.219-220), a tone anticipated at the end of Act One, when Lear shouts, "O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (I.vi.46), an early foreshadowing of a later development. Throughout the second act, his humility increases with his bewilderment and his insecurity; as the ground reels under his feet, he clutches at the heavens more wildly, more pathetically; and his curses, for a time, diminish in virulence, as his subjective state struggles for purchase: "I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot, Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove," with enormous and yet deceptive control, he advises Goneril (II.iv.229-230). No longer sure of himself, the gods, or anything else, keenly aware for the first time of human bestiality, a bestiality ironically that he himself, from his own flesh, has bred, the old man resolves to try the shelter of the heavens, and to taste the community of animals in animal form: "No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose To wage against the enmity o' th' air; To be a comrade with the wolf and owl, Necessity's sharp pinch!" (II.iv.210-213). Already, Lear had made the human-beast equation, which is to be a major motif of the tragedy; see, for example, "thy wolvish visage" (I.iv.317), "most serpent-like" (II.iv.162), etc. But the identification, consummated in the dog-horse-rat allusion at the end, is fully explicit at II.iv.269 when he says, "Man's life is cheap as beast's."

At this point, it is possible to suggest that another counter-pattern has crossed the exposition of Lear's pagan piety; and, in
addition, a progression towards Lear's ultimate religious disillusionment has been sketched. For the beast-in-man pattern, so often noted by old- and new-style image-Forscher, though less often related to its intellectual context, is a significant aspect of the King's piety-skepticism configuration. Lear's view that man, despite his pretensions, is no higher than a beast is a standard skeptical concept which, heard in the sixteenth century, receives stronger affirmation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Lovejoy, Boas, Miss Hastings, and others have traced the unhappy descent of man's pride. Like Swift's Yahoos, Goneril and Regan help to destroy that medieval and Renaissance pride in the unique and exemplary possession of a rational soul, that "dignity of man" which the "wars of truth" help to demolish. Goethe's Mephisto sneers at man, "Er nennt's Vernunft und braucht's allein/ Nur tierischer als jedes Tier zu sein," later, in Nietzsche, "das Tier 'Mensch'"; Swift, told that someone was a fellow Protestant, recalled that the rat is a fellow creature; and Lear, in his last lines,

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over the body of Cordelia, demands, "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all?" (V.iii.306—307), the culmination of the beast-imagery of the play. Lear's descending animal order in this speech is significant, for that is the order in the drama; to appreciate King Lear, less a Freudian twentieth-century view than a more exalted medieval and early Renaissance view of man's place and potential is requisite. The best of man is less than the worst of beasts, according to Lear's final judgment. Reiterating that man's life is as cheap as beast's, the play's lines reverse the great intellectual tradition from Aquinas to Hooker. Despite the flattering orthodox tenet, Lear affirms that man is no more than this.

Numerous apologetic tracts demonstrate the skeptical affiliations of Lear's position regarding the place of man and beasts. In his Warning for Worldlings (1608), Jeremy Corderoy attacks the atheist who will not "excel man above beasts." L'Athésomachie of Charles de

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49 Dogs and horses were considered beasts superior in intelligence, and thus comparable in their own kingdom, perhaps, to Cordelia; but Lear's sudden shift to rats is dramatic in its encompassing even the lowest and most vicious beasts. Cf. La Primaudaye's Third Part of the French Academie (London, 1618), p. 825: "Among perfect beasts the Dog and Horse do by good right deserve the first and chiefest degree, as well because of their admirable sense, as also because of the utility, pleasure, and commodity, which they bring to men." Perhaps a source of the dog-horse distinction is Epictetus, or, at least, antiquity; cf. Epictetus, Discourses, tr. W. A. Oldfather, Loeb Lib. (London, 1928), II, 421: "... nature has not made dirty even the animals which associate with man. A horse doesn't roll around in the mud, does he? or a highly bred dog? No, but ... the creatures farthest removed from association with human beings."

50 Corderoy, op. cit., p. 166.
Bourgueville (1564), refuting numerous objections made to the existence of God, and to immortality, includes in his attack those who assert the "ressemblance des animaux avec l'homme." In his influential French Académie, Second Part (1594), La Primaudaye describes the complaint of atheists who "say that God or Nature hath brought men into the world, onely to make them more miserable and more wretched than all other creatures: so that they can finde no better happinesse and felicitie for themselves, then during their life to become like to beastes." For the sixteenth century, the locus classicus of the beast-in-man notion, as of theriophily and similar ideas generally, was Montaigne, who was, in turn, anticipated by Plutarch's Gryllus, Landi, Erasmus, and others. Seeming to echo the notorious seventh book of Pliny's Natural History, Montaigne provides close anticipations of the skeptical-animal passages in Lear; see, for example, the following: "Considérons pour cette heure l'homme seul, sans secours étranger, armé seulement de ses armes et depourvue de la grâce et connaissance divins, qui est tout son bonheur? ... nous sommes le seul animal abandonné, nud sur la terre nue, lié, garrotte, n'ayant de quoy s'armer et couvrir que la despouille d'autrui ..." with which may be compared both Lear's "Man's life's as cheap as beast's" (II.iv.

51Busson, Sources, p. 469.
52La Primaudaye, op. cit., pp. 591-592.
53Pliny, ed. G. Brotier (Paris, 1779), II, 84-85, Liber VII.
54Montaigne, II, xii, 155 (p. 168).
270) and "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (III.iv.106-111). If any further evidence were required of the skeptical character of Lear's beast-in-man view, Tourneur's Atheist's Tragedy (c. 1607), which probably owes much to Shakespeare's tragedy, with its avowed atheistical D'Amville and Borachio, may furnish it: "D'Amville. Observ'st thou not the very self-same course Of revolution, both in man and beast? Borachio. The same, for birth, growth, state, decay and death" (I.i.6-8), where the exposition of the attitude immediately identifies the speakers.

In considering Lear's relationship to the gods, which, first, we have seen to be confident and unquestioning reliance, and next, to be a kind of bewilderment, we arrive at a major turning point, where the apparent avenger seems to become the Avengers' victim, where, in short, Lear's active state enters the realm of passive affliction: "I am a man more sinned against than sinning" (III.ii.59-60). In effect, Lear recognizes, at the moment of his imprecations against others, himself as a victim. It is a moment of anagnorisis, to be followed by later ones; and it occurs on the heath, amidst thunder and lightning, at the end of his prayer to the Gods: "Let the great Gods, That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads, Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch, That hast within thee undivulged crimes Unwhipped of Justice; hide thee, thou bloody hand, Thou perjur'd and
thou similar of virtue That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming Has practis'd on man's life;
close pent-up guilt, Rive your concealing continents, and cry these
dreadful summoners grace. I am a man More sinn'd against than sinning"
(III.ii.49-59). The "good" pagan, confident in his deities, becomes,
after Lear's significant if speech to the Gods, "0 Heavens, If you do
love old men, if your sweet sway Allow obedience . . ." (II.iv.192-194),
more placating and more fearful; at the same time, referring both to
"great Gods" and "dreadful pudder" (III.ii.49-50). While the thunder
of the Heavens beats at his ears, and the thunder inside his brain
beats at his mind, threatening his sanity, Lear revises his view of the
Gods; they seem to side with destruction, and in an appropriate anti-
fertility ritual he prays all the four personified elements to let
loose their force, "the extremity of the skies" (III.iv.104), with the
thunder, traditionally the Divine voice, especially invoked against
human wickedness: "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout Till you have drench'd our
steeples, drown'd the cocks! You sulph'rous and thought-executing
fires, Vaunt-couriers of the oak-cleaving thunderbolts, Singe my white
head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, Strike flat the thick rotundity
o' th' world! Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once That
makes ingrateful man" (III.ii.1-9), an appeal which, in its imagery,
microcosmically parallels Lear with universal Nature, both having
injudiciously brought to birth unnatural creatures.
Bare-headed in the storm, the old King's reborn attitude towards the Heavens accompanies his revised attitude towards mankind, just as Gloucester's sense of divine arbitrariness in the "flies" speech accompanies his degraded notion of man as a worm. "Rumble thy bellyful," Lear shouts at the elements, which Lear's pagan perspective endows with an animism that seems to have been neglected by commentators. Thus, to him, the elements are an aspect of divinity, almost a Spinozistic Deus sive Natura. "Spit, fire! spout, rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters: I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness; I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children, You owe me no subscription: then let fall Your horrible pleasure" (III. ii.14-19), a phrase which implies "horrifying will," and suggests also a paradox which is inherent in Lear's new-found ambivalence towards the ruling powers. Those which, at the outset, were the powers that made him, that gave him life, and by whom he swore, those he was so sure were his—echoing or anticipating the traditional motto of English sovereigns, the countersign chosen by Richard I in 1198, Dieu et mon droit—now are in command of "dreadful pudders" threatening "horrible pleasure" to their victim: "Here I stand, your slave, A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man, But yet I call you servile ministers, That will with two pernicious daughters join Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul" (III.ii.14-24). The elements, personified, are servile intermediaries of the gods, performing an unworthy cruel function against an even more abject slave; Lear's speech is in extremis, pitiful and self-
pitying, far from the confidence of Act One. Peripeteia and anagnorisis coincide; suffering becomes knowledge, pathema, mathema.

In his obsession with justice, human and divine, Lear, we have seen, interprets the "dreadful pudder" (significantly a confused noise) also as an instrument of justice against the enemies of the Gods: "Let the great Gods, That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads, Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch, That hast within thee undivulged crimes, Unwhipp'd of Justice" (III.i.i.49-53). But justice cuts all ways; it is a knife-edge also directed at himself and at his keen recollection of his own injustice. Thus Lear's self-knowledge, previously lacking (cf. his behavior in I.i.292-293), becomes reconstructed under the auspices of a new view of the heavens, powers which in his mind, and he implies, in the view of others, must seem ambiguous. Like Milton, therefore, at a time of similar dubious battle, Lear attempts to justify the gods. Significantly, at this point, the gods are in some need of justification; and it is evident how far we have traveled from Lear's initial confident credo, "Poor, naked wretches, whereso'er you are," his great prayer runs, "That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp; Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, And show the Heavens more just" (III.iv.28-36). In this speech, the intensifier "more" suggests the heavens' want of even such secondary testimony; divine justice, it is
apparent, undergoes a test in Act III, along with Lear himself; and charity from above, Lear moderately proposes, would then be manifested in human charity.

The storm, symbol of cosmic cruelty as well as, perhaps, cosmic vengeance, produces in man himself, unprotected by the skins of other creatures, and lacking the gods' special providence, a death-wish coupled with a grave-symbol: "Thou wert better," Lear advises "Poor Tom," "in a grave than to answer with thy uncover'd body this extremity of the skies" (III.iv.103-105). What has happened, in short, is, analogically, the naked revelation of the heavens at a time when bare, unprotected man reveals himself for what he is, the most vulnerable of creatures. As noted elsewhere, the heavens and man correspond, both in the Renaissance analogical scheme, and in the drama itself. Hence, at this middle of Lear's tragic journey, Lear's attitude towards the gods as towards man is, despite his sad need to "show the Heavens more just," one of confusion and disappointment.

It is to be expected, therefore, that Lear's piety-skepticism configuration, which we have indicated earlier, should at this point weigh more heavily towards the latter pole. And, indeed, in sequence, Lear gives voice to a further series of notions which the Renaissance spectator would probably have associated with questioning rather than acceptance. It should be emphasized, however, that while no attempt is here made to label Lear a mere skeptic, as a pagan, such an attitude in him would not have seemed implausible or offensive, although the starting premise of his characterization is that, as a pagan, he is
fundamentally pious; the complexity of the drama and the varying viewpoints involved, allow for a free and ironical interplay of seemingly contradictory positions. In passing through a religious crisis, in his own religious terms, Lear expresses attitudes which the Elizabethan theatre-goer could have recognized as signs of belief-crisis, generally; but sympathy with the protagonist's suffering might have been forthcoming even from the most devout Christians, for Lear was a poor benighted heathen; further, in questioning his own polytheistic faith, he was, in a sense, abandoning false gods and progressing towards a truer belief. In fact, Shakespeare has so loaded the dramatic dice, by presumably altering the old _Leir_ to the diminution of direct Christian piety, and emphasizing pagan atmosphere in the new play, that he could have caused no offence even in showing a heathen man at grips with his own theological presuppositions; thus, it is not at all surprising that the pious Tolstoy should have preferred the old Christianized _Leir_ to Shakespeare's paganized version. Further, it should be emphasized that incipient doubts in Lear's theological _Weltanschauung_ ought not, therefore, to be considered as a tragic flaw, for it is obviously not a flaw, from the Renaissance Christian standpoint, to become disillusioned with false pagan notions; it is not a flaw, similarly, in Gloucester, to be rid of his paranoid superstitions. It only approaches a tragic flaw if one insists that the play is more ostensibly Christian than it is, or if one approaches it as a simple problem in allegory or camouflage, or by any other manner of facile one-to-one correspondence. Finally, it is evident that _King Lear_ is,
in an intentional sense, about pagans, and that it strives to delineate the beliefs of pagans as the Renaissance understood those beliefs. Whatever else it is, and it is much else, Shakespeare’s tragedy is, in its manifest donnees, pre-Christian and heathen.

At this mid-point of the play, when Lear could be expected to begin his questioning of the gods, the old man, his wits unsettled by ingratitude within and the storm without, delays his acceptance of Gloucester’s fire and food to address the ragged, supposedly mad and demon-possessed Edgar. “First,” he begs, “let me talk with this philosopher. What is the cause of thunder?” (III.iv.158-159). If Danby exaggerates the place of the Thunder in this play, it is not an inconsequential role; one might suggest that the Fool, in his worldly wisdom, is the counterpoise to the Thunder in its cosmic ambiguity. From both directions, they offer wisdom or warning to Lear; in both directions, Lear has given offence and requires forgiveness. And one might conclude that the King is caught, literally and figuratively, externally and internally, between the Fool and the Thunder, imprudence and anger, untruth and consequences. Yet, in contrast to the morality play tradition, even to Marlowe’s Faustus, to the convention general in Renaissance drama as well as in Shakespeare’s other plays, of the Thunder as the unequivocal voice of heaven, this common device is, in Lear, ambiguously presented, for it is not clear whose side the Thunder is on, for whom it acts, and to what ends; what is clear is that it numinously accompanies human suffering. As in many other respects, Shakespeare’s play is modern, and not least in regard to its
conception of the Deus absconditus, considered in Chapter II, which, one might suggest, provides some of the climate for the tragedy; the ambiguous relation of the heavens to earth is prefigured in the Thunder. "What the Thunder Says," not the "dry sterile thunder" of Eliot, is loud, significant, and unclear; it seems the anticipatory counterpart to Gloucester's existentialist and Kafkaesque "Trial."

We know that man is on trial, but the thundering judges are not fully visible; man is doomed to suffering, he knows himself "guilty," but the legal equity is never fully established.

Thus, when Lear asks of Edgar, whom he takes to be a "philosopher," most likely a natural philosopher or scientist, "What is the cause of thunder?" he is both reinforcing the impression we receive, at this juncture, of his failing faith in the gods, and running counter to a universal convention identified with piety. Previously, his repeated observation, "Nothing will come of nothing," he, at the same time, expressed himself as a pagan would regarding a fundamental Christian tenet, and foreshadowed the decline in his own reverence. Now, however, in his deeply-revealing madness, he expresses an attitude which more surely associates itself with doubt, for it is one which suggests the abandonment of a strong religious and literary tradition, shared by both pagan and Christian alike (although the ancients also took a skeptical view), and one which, simultaneously in its probing

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51 Compare the "natural philosophy" of AYLI (III.ii.21-33): "Corin. . . . I know . . . . that the property of rain is to wet, and fire to burn. Touch. Such a one is a natural philosopher."
of causation in the natural realm, seeks for a cause beyond the divine. In contrast to Bacon's "Of Atheism," "... troubles and adversities do more bow men's minds to religion," Lear, in his suffering, seems to bow the other way.

In his second allusion to thunder, Lear sees it as a destructive force, afflicting all mankind, including himself; he summons it, not as a mere agent of divine justice, but nihilistically, as an agent of dissolution, of the "nothing" which he presently wishes the creation to dissolve into; so that dramatic irony was at work, also, in his early repeated "nothing will come of nothing." "You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires, Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world! Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once That makes ingrateful man!" (III.ii.1-9).

Lear's early reference to the Thunder is relatively assured; thunder is the clear instrument of the gods' vengeance, and the gods are the clear agents of justice. His first allusion implies a court, a judge, and an executioner who could be summoned in a just cause. "I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot," with exploding patience he assures Goneril; "Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove" (II.iv. 229-230). He could, in other words, if he would, have her punished by Jupiter's thunder, as by the Jupiter Tonans or Zeus Keraunos of the ancients; justice sits high and watchful in the heavens. Here, the King takes the traditional view, expressed, for example, in Calvin's belief in God's power "sometimes to shake the heaven with the noise of
thunders . . ." and in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* as the third of Cleanthes' reasons for belief in God, "the terror we experience in the presence of thunderbolts . . ." Lyly continues the pious convention in *Euphues* and *Atheos*, where the godless one is warned, "thou shalt see him appeare in thunderinge and lyghtninges," and even such dramatists as Marlowe in *Tamburlaine*, Greville in *Mustapha*, and Massinger in the *Unnatural Combat* employ the same device; indeed, as Miss Welsford has indicated, Elizabethan playwrights conventionally invoked belief in thunder as the voice of the Divine Judge. In homiletic references, such as Bishop Pilkington's to storms as the instruments of God's wrath, Corderoy's "a . . . use of these fearfull thunders . . . is to confute such as you," in Donne's "He may heare God . . . in the voice of Thunder"; in poems, where the "celestial thunderbolt"

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55 *Calvin, Inst., I.v.5.*


57 *Tamburlaine* II.iii.19; II Tamb. I.ii.25; II.ii.7, 11; II.iii.1-2; V.i.182-184. Cf. Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 102: "This, surely, is the unity, and the only unity, underlying all the diversity of the religious attitudes in both Tamburlaine plays—that God is a God of thunder." *Mustapha* I.i.18-19; II.i.6-7. *Unnatural Combat* V.i.227.


of *Purgatorio* (XII.28) recurs, as in Donne's "Litany" (XXIV), alluding to God's "threats in thunder"; and even in Renaissance historiography, such as Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, where storms have the moral purpose of warning men of their evil ways, thunder was a clearly meaningful and divinely inspired phenomenon.

In the fourth act, Lear's next reference to thunder appears, and there we should expect him to be even less firmly attached to his early standpoint. Still deranged, Lear is more explicitly dubious about the thunder: "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" (IV.vi.102-105). The lunatic king has significantly lost all sense of his capacity to "bid the thunder-bearer shoot" in the latter's role as "high-judging Jove" (II.iv.229-230). His insane chatter reveals the deep impression made upon his mind by the fact that not only was the thunder beyond his control, but, more significantly, beyond any rational control, beyond any meaning perceptible to him. Lear's insights into the characters of his daughters and the nature of the cosmic powers, he indicates, arrive at the same time, during the storm on the heath.

To return to Lear's third-act question regarding the cause of thunder, such probings were, in the Renaissance, the earmarks of the revived tradition of classical skepticism, which included Leucippus, Democritus, Aristotle, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Pliny, all of whom tended to explain thunder in naturalistic terms. Similarly, Boaystuau
in his *Theatrum Mundi* (1581), Vicomercato in *Sur les Quatre livres des météorologiques* (1556), and Dolet, a leader of the Paduan school, for whom "La suprême science, c'est de connaître les causes, puisque tout a une cause naturelle," carried on, in the sixteenth century, the ancient skeptical tradition. Seeking to identify a skeptic to his audience, an Elizabethan dramatist might be able to do so by having him reject the divine admonition in thunder, for, as Nashe, in *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*, expressed it, "Who heareth the thunder that thinkes not of God?" In his question inquiring into causes, the King leans more towards the tradition of the ancient skeptics than of the probable source-play *King Leir*, which, in its Christian piety, has a murderer frightened into repentance by a sudden clap of thunder sent by heaven. If Shakespeare adapted his tragedy from this old drama, as seems likely, the altered conception of the religious role of thunder is significant. Either Shakespeare replaced the pious view because he felt that the skeptical notion of thunder was more pagan, or, as seems more probable, he wished to use Lear's attitude towards thunder as a measuring device for his increasing doubt; but it is possible that both reasons, complexly related, were implicit in the change. It is important to recognize, therefore, that the thunder,

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64 Busson, *Sources*, p. 127.
in more than one way, is bound up with Lear's religious transformations. For *King Lear* probes still more daringly than Marlowe's drama: "When I behold the heavens," cries Faustus, "then I repent."

If any further proof were needed that attitudes towards thunder on the Renaissance stage were clues to the religious positions of the characters, we have only to glance at a play which seems to have borrowed from *King Lear*, Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* (1607); the latter is useful, because, in its more naive outlines, the complex problems which Shakespeare's work presents are illuminated. In the later work, the avowed atheist D'Amville knows that thunder is merely a physical phenomenon: "What! Dost start at thunder? Credit my belief 'Tis a mere effect of Nature . . ." (II.iv), while, in contrast, the faithful Castabella presents the orthodox view: "O patient Heaven! Why dost thou not express Thy wrath in thunderbolts . . ." (IV.ii); and even D'Amville himself, when fearfully facing death, discards his skeptical attitude. In addition, the *Revenger's Tragedy* sounds thunder three times in answer to petitions to God, or as sign of his approval. And finally, if Lear tends, at one point, to resemble the atheist D'Amville's position, they both resemble that of eminent Renaissance naturalists, whom the popular mind would associate with skepticism.

Indeed, the unnoted probable source of D'Amville's etiology of thunder is an oft-reprinted scientific almanac, popular through the last half of the sixteenth century, and reissued in 1605, the year of *Lear*'s probable composition, the eminent naturalists, Leonard and Thomas Digges' *Prognostication*:
... thunder is an exhalation of hote and dry, mixt with moysture, carried up to the middle region, there thicked and wrapped into a clowde: of this hote matter coupled with moystnes, closed in the clowde, groweth a strife, the heate beating, and breaking out the sides of the clowde with a thundering noyse... which is repeated in D'Amville's explanation that thunder is:

... an exhalation hot
And dry involved within a watery vapour
I' the middle region of the air; whose coldness,
Congealing that thick moisture to a cloud,
The angry exhalation, shut within
A prison of contrary quality,
Strives to be free and with the violent
Eruption through the grossness of that cloud,
Makes this noise we hear.

Finally, Shakespeare could have derived the criterion of attitudes to thunder as a clue to religious belief from the Arcadia. In the crucial exchange between the atheistic Cecropia and the pious Pamela, from which Shakespeare could have borrowed so much for his play, Cecropia (Feuillerat ed., I, 406) skeptically observes: "Feare, and indeede, foolish feare, and fearefull ignorance, was the first inventor of those conceates. For, when they heard it thunder, not knowing the natural cause, they thought there was some angrie body above, that spake so lowde: and ever the lesse they did perceive, the more they did conceive."}


67 The Arcadia presents not only the skeptical view of thunder, but repeated references to the orthodox view; e.g., "... let the
It may be concluded that, in his attitudes to thunder, Lear was (1) either representing a pagan point of view, typified by the ancient skeptical tradition regarding the natural causation of that heavenly phenomenon, or (2) he was expressing an increasing doubt as to the reliability of the gods; in the first case, as a heathen, Lear would have given no offence to his Elizabethan audience, while, in the second case, his developing distrust of "ethnic" deities could be construed as a fortunate change towards a theologically more enlightened position. Probably, as in the instance of the tenet ex nihilo, Shakespeare seized on an ambiguous idea which could be exploited in both directions for the complex ends of his multiply-significant tragedy.

We have observed the progressive disintegration of Lear's religious confidence; his "failure of nerve," to use the term Gilbert Murray applied to the Hellenistic period and Sidney Hook gave to our own, is the unnerving discovery of eighty-years' commitment to an unreliable presiding pantheon. And we have noted that the thunder, traditionally the voice of the providential heavens, is in actuality...
an ambiguous accompaniment to human suffering. So that as, on the one hand, Lear registers a pained surprise at the macrocosm, the microcosm, which, on the other hand, parallels it, is the subject of his disaffected shock. In the same crucial third act, which registers Lear's intellectual and personal peripeteia, there seems to be a complementary echo of his increasing skepticism, one which would be more perceptible to the Jacobean age of transition than to our own; and this shock of discovery communicates itself, not to the thunder, but to his own flesh and blood: "Then let them anatomize Regan," the mad King exclaims, "see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?" (III.vi.76-79).

In this seemingly innocent question, presumably a product of his madness, Lear reveals the distance he has traveled from his reliance on "the power that made me" (I.i.207) of the first scene. From one point of view, as a pagan polytheist and naturalist, he would be expected to refer to a "cause in nature" for the solution to his problems; seen from another point of view, however, Lear's resort to natural rather than divine causation is a measure of his developing skepticism. Thus Shakespeare, as we have emphasized above, has protected himself in two ways: first by depicting a heathen in expectedly naturalistic terms, and second, by showing a heathen unhappy with his gods. Yet, on the other side, the Renaissance could have observed in Lear an analogue with itself, with the growing naturalism of which the ambiguous Bacon is the buccinator; this appeal to second causes rather than to first, to nature rather than to God, was a mark of the new
materialist doubt. But, to aggravate the problem, Lear turns para-
doxically to natural causation for the solution to a question tradi-
tionally within the divine realm; "hard hearts" were caused, as every
devout Elizabethan knew, by falling from grace, by reprobation and
sin. As innumerable Renaissance texts testify, "hardening of the
heart" is an ailment peculiarly theological (cf. Exodus 1:21, 7:3 and
13; Dr. Faustus II.i.i.18; etc.), to be remedied, if at all, by repen-
tance and grace, and subject to the spiritual, rather than to the
anatomical art ("More needs she the divine," as was said of Lady
Macbeth, "than the physician," V.viii.62). From a Renaissance point
of view, Lear's question indicates a two-fold falling away: first,
by the substitution of nature for the divine, and second, by the
imputation of a heavenly-inflicted malady to physical causation—to
the body rather than to the soul. John Yates in Gods Arraignment of
Hypocrites (1615), p. 128, for instance, cites the popular Perkins as
follows: "... God is independent from all second causes; yet all
second causes are dependant upon him..." Even Montaigne observes
that the Stoics conceived the soul to be situated "within and about
the heart." In his influential Golden Chaine (1592), Sig. Fl, Perkins
defines "hardness of heart, or carnall securite, when a man neither
acknowledge Gods judgement nor his owne sines, dreaming that he is
safe from Gods vengeance and such perils as arise from evil. Romans
2:5... Luke 21:34..."

Thus, at this juncture, Lear finds himself at the skeptical
pole to Gloucester's superstition. Compare the conventional
superstition-skepticism dualism sketched below; "though the wisdom of Nature, can reason it thus and thus," Gloucester remarks of those who would naturalistically explain eclipses, "yet Nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects" (I.ii.108-110). Between Gloucester and Lear stands another old man, the sympathetic Lafeu, who, in All's Well, is a negative barometer of the new Jacobean dispensation: "We have our philosophical [i.e., scientific and skeptical] persons, to make modern [i.e., commonplace] and familiar, things supernatural and causeless" (II.iii.1-3); neither superstitious nor skeptical, Lafeu would preserve the old mysteries. There are some mysteries of things which are in God's hands, as William Fulke, in A Goodly Gallerye (1571), Sig. Aiv
, points out: "Concerning the formall and finall cause, we have little to saye because the one is so secret, that it is known of no man, the other so evident that it is playne to all men," running counter both to Aristotle, who holds that we know things when we know their causes, and to Hobbes (Leviathan, part I, ch. 12), who asserts, "Ignorance of natural causes disposeth a man to credulity, so as to believe many times impossibilities."

The problem of "the mystery of things" has been broached in the discussion of Calvin above; almost innumerable Renaissance treatises warn the reader against the very thing Lear presumes to undertake; thus, in the light of those references, the Renaissance spectator would have been prepared, as the modern viewer is not, to grasp the magnitude of the distance Lear has traveled from piety and respect for the mystery of things. Cf. Haydn, Counter-Renaissance, pp. 516-517; Montaigne; Ronsard; Bussy, Sources, p. 427, etc. See Howard Schultz, Milton and Forbidden Knowledge (New York, 1955), on the seventeenth-century continuation of the obscurantist tradition.
In his question, then, Lear is, in effect, withdrawing an area from the Department of Theology and requesting a grant for a scientific research project: "Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?" Implying a connection with the scientific anatomist, Lear’s remark recalls the naïve assumption of pioneers in morbid anatomy who associated abstract human vices and virtues with anatomical changes—a kind of pre-Lombrosan typology, for example, reflected by Antonio Benivieni, who, early in the sixteenth century, attributed the evil character of a hanged villain to his cor villosum found in autopsy. But the strongest evidence for the interpretation of Lear’s seemingly innocent remark, aside from its contextual significance among similar observations, is the duplication in a work which apparently borrowed from Shakespeare’s play, Tourneur’s Atheist’s Tragedy (c. 1607); as has been pointed out in a thunder-parallel, Tourneur’s work,

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70 Antonio Benivieni, De Abditis Nonnullis ac Mirandis Morborum et Sanationum Causis (1507), tr. Charles Singer (Springfield, Ill., 1954), pp. 163-165: "XXXII. Heart covered with hairs. Jacopo, a thief and gallows bird had been hanged and was taken down, to all appearance dead, but actually still alive, and after treatment recovered. Being of evil and depraved character, he at once returned to the same course of crime for which he had before merited the extreme penalty, and was again taken and hanged. In amazement at the fellow’s wickedness . . . had the body opened. His heart was found to be everywhere covered with hairs, on account of its extreme heat." Cf. G. Sarton, Appreciation of Ancient and Medieval Science during the Renaissance (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), p. 119: "A new stream of anatomical knowledge was opened by the study of morbid conditions, and the initiator was Antonio Benevieni (d. 1502) of Florence who made about twenty autopsies, the account of which was posthumously published and is considered the first treatise of pathological anatomy . . . "
by its relatively naive proportions, helps reveal significances in the
more complex tragedy of Shakespeare. In Tourneur's play, the avowed
atheist D'Amville, not satisfied with urging upon the Doctor closer
physiological scrutiny of dead bodies, proposes an anatomy in terms
whose equation of moral traits with physiological substance precisely
echoes Lear's "... let them anatomize Regan ... Is there any cause
in nature that makes these hard hearts?" Seeking to determine, in
Lear's phrase, "what cause in nature" makes Charlemont's virtue, the
skeptical D'Amville, like Shakespeare's hero, proposes an anatomy:
"I beg a boon ... His body when 'tis dead For an anatomy ... I
would find out by his anatomy What thing there is in Nature more exact
Than in the constitution of myself ... The cause of that in his
anatomy I would find out" (V.ii).

We have shown, then, that at this point in Shakespeare's play
(III.iv,vi) where the thunder and anatomy speeches occur, Lear's
skepticism of his gods reaches a climax; and it is reasonable to
assume, therefore, that his growing doubt should, in a Jacobean play,
be manifested in conventional terms familiar to its contemporary audi­
ence. We have suggested that two of the most convenient ways would

71The relation in the Renaissance mind between physicians and
atheism has been explored by Kocher, "The Physician as Atheist,"
239-257; cf. Jonson's Magnetic Lady (I.ii.38-40): "That is a young
physician to the family, that letting God alone, ascribes to nature
more than her share ..." and Massinger's A Very Woman (II.ii.266),
"I have heard ... most physicians, as they grown greater in skill,
grow less in their religion, Attributing so much to natural causes,
That they have little faith in that they cannot Deliver reason for."
have been to insinuate a doubt on the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, and to body it forth in terms of the scientific Renaissance's transition from divine to natural causation. We have further indicated that such doubts were to be expected in a pagan, who lacked Christian revelation, and that such a character could still maintain the sympathies of his audience, who may well have been, at least on the intellectual levels, similarly torn by contemporary changes, exemplified in Donne's "new philosophy" which "calls all in doubt."

And finally, such doubts, in an avowed heathen, could not, as it might in a Christian, be interpreted as a tragic flaw; in the complex reversal of perspective that King Lear affords, such skepticism might ironically come to seem a tragic virtue. At the same time, however, the implications for the Jacobean audience, in its own theological crises, were not lost; its multiple vision could have understood the tragedy in several ways at once.

"When the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out," the mad Lear recalls (IV.vi.103-105); disillusionment in his gods, during the storm scene, accompanies disillusionment in his daughters. "To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing that I said: 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity" (IV.vi.100-102), he observes, lapsing, as does the play from time to time, into biblical paraphrase (James V.12). Such syncretistic mixture is present, too, in his Church-Fatherly excoriation of female depravity: "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" (IV.vi.128-130),
mingling St. Augustine with Centaurs (126), the gods with the Christian vision of hell.

But Lear's disillusionment, once begun, sweeps all before it, toppling the analogical edifices of God and man, divine and human justice. In addition, this radical questioning of human justice, as Morphos' introduction to the sixteenth-century dialogues of Bru's suggests, was characteristic of Renaissance skeptics. The connection between religious skepticism and attacks on worldly justice, made manifest in Lear, is illustrated by the skeptical voices in the Dialogues of Bru's, ed. Morphos, Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance, Extra ser. XXX: p. 56, laws are mere opinion (cf. discussion of Edmund above); p. 57, laws favor a certain class, as Lear asserts; p. 60, laws create economic inequalities—Lear makes a point of poverty as against superfluous wealth, just as the skeptic in Bru's speaks of the rich gorging themselves with more than they need, while the poor are miserable; and, finally, p. 62, the attack on magistrates in Bru's parallels that by Lear—"laws are administered by magistrates who act like wolves, instead of functioning like watch-dogs [Lear: 'A dog's obey'd in office,' IV.vi.161], and who, abusing authority [Lear: 'There thou might'st behold The great image of Authority,' IV.vi.159-160], become ambitious and tyrannical, and dispose of goods to their own advantage."72 In short, "laws are ineffective. They punish only the small

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72 Nashe, Works, ed. McKerrow, II, 155, refers to magistrates who "will have theyr eyes put out with gyfts, and will not see it, but wincks" at justice.
transgressors, but not the powerful criminals" (p. 62), precisely the point that Lear emphasizes: "Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear; Robes and fur'r'd gowns hide all. 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.166-169). In addition to the other evidences of Lear's increasing skepticism, we may take his attacks on worldly justice as an indication of his developing point of view. Thus Lear's condemnation of human equity operates parallel to, and coordinate with, his shattered vision of divine justice. So we have, in two great scenes, the theological (IV.vi.182-185) and the secular (III.vi.36-56), Lear as stage-manager of bitter sermon and parodied trial. In III.vi.36-56, he has his daughters tried by the mad Poor Tom, the unstable Fool, and the rustic Kent, all disguised, and all addressed with judicial esteem by the insane King: "I'll see their trial first. Bring in their evidence. [To Edgar] Thou robed man of justice, take thy place; [To the Fool] And thou his yoke-fellow of equity, Bench by his side. [To Kent] You are o' th' commission, Sit you too." As world-upside-down reversal, this scene of "reason in madness," the insane yet all-too-sane, probing of sane, yet all-too-mad, human justice, leads into Lear's naturalistically skeptical speech, "Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III.vi.76-79).

Having passed the turning point in the bitter disenchantment of Act Three, Lear's denunciation of human justice becomes in Act Four
more savage; and as it does, it implies a more-than-secular attack on Authority, on the powers that be, which he has so long worshipped and represented; the King's "fourscore and upward" makes the disillusion both more unbearable and more dramatic. Lear, the guardian of justice himself, and the vicar of the gods on earth, turns against law and piety in an implicit self-denunciation that at once transforms his earth and his cosmos; order is seen as non-order, justice as specious, the gods as dubiously attainable. So we note in Act IV, in one condensed passage (vi. 151-185), Lear's denunciation of the principle of Authority which he has so long represented and venerated. The Great Chain of Being, whose bond, disintegrating, sounds metallically like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh: disorder in the heavens, disorder in the state, disorder in justice, disorder in the family, disorder in the brain produce the contrapuntal cacophonies of the middle acts of King Lear.

Before blind Gloucester, Lear shows justice to be all but blind: "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? Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar? And the creature run from the cur? There thou might'st behold The great image of Authority. A dog's obey'd in office" (IV.vi.151-161). Presumably, this canine office is similar to that in the bear-baiting allusion of Gloucester, "I am tied to th' stake, and I must stand the course" (III.vii.53), where, in keeping with the old earl's
view of the gods, man is a creature torn for sport. When we recall the proximity of bear-pits to the Globe, and the fact, as a recent writer reminds us,\textsuperscript{73} that sometimes the very theatres themselves were dismantled—like Madison Square Garden for circuses—for bear-baiting, we recapture part of the powerful analogy in the spectators' minds. "A dog's obey'd in office" suggests that "they that have power to hurt" will do some, recklessly disinheriting themselves of heaven's graces; but, as we deduce elsewhere, if "they that have power to hurt" are themselves also the heavens, then their graces are inconsiderable.

It is important to recognize, as against those critics, for example, who still intone, "after being bound upon his fiery wheel in this life, attaining humility and patience," Lear "is fit for heaven,"\textsuperscript{74} that the King has here touched the abyss of disbelief in a nihilism that discounts the heavens themselves.

"Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!" he continues. "Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back; Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind For which thou whipp'est her. The usurer hangs the cozener. Thorough tatter'd clothes small vices do appear; Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. 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.162-169), where vices and sin suggest at once the secular and the non-secular. It is thus appropriate that Lear's conclusion should be "None does offend, none, I say, none" (IV.vi.170), applying, in its anti-Pauline overtones, to both realms at once. It therefore becomes clear, once again, that Lear's negation is total, and includes, as well, the religious sphere.

In addition, it is appropriate that Lear should at once slip into the religious mode of discourse; whereas, before (III.vi.36-56), he stage-managed a trial scene denying human justice, now he undertakes the role of a preacher, denying human felicity (IV.vi.180-185): "Thou must be patient," he admonishes Gloucester; "we came crying hither: Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air We wail and cry. I will preach to thee: mark . . . When we are born, we cry that we are come To this great stage of fools." Again, like Cordelia, Edgar, the Fool ("Fortune, that arrant whore," II.iv.52), and Kent, Lear makes the conventional reference to Fortune: "I am even the natural fool of Fortune" (IV.vi.192-193), but the significant point is the progression in his awareness of himself as victim, from the turning point of Act Three (III.ii.60), "I am a man More sinn'd against than sinning." Approaching the nadir of Gloucester, though consistently and with more heroic courage and more articulate power, Lear has reached the Tantalus-vision, the insufficiency of all aids, human and divine.

The lower depths, the point of no apparent return, have been reached; but, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, in Hamlet, for example, the depths are the areas of conversion, Hamlet's sea and grave seeming to
function as transforming devices. Lazarus-like, Lear, in short, has reached the brink foreseen by Kent (II.ii.165-166): "Nothing almost sees miracles, But misery." If, from one point of view, miracles are a manifestation of the intervening power of God's Providence, in a world where the providence of the gods has been shown to be, at best, a baffling thing, miracles have no place; that accounts, in part, for the "almost" of Kent's remark, and for the fact that no other unqualified reference appears in the tragedy. Two other qualified allusions are: France's incredulous reply (I.ii.222) to Lear's mistreatment of Cordelia, "which to believe of her, Must be a faith that reason without miracle Should never plant in me," or, the possibility is so unlikely that only the unlikely possibility of a miracle would persuade me; and Edgar's to Gloucester, after the attempted suicide, "Thy life's a miracle" (IV.vi.55), which, in the context of deception—it is obvious to the audience that no miracle, but Edgar's benevolent trickery, was operative—and in light of the continual superstitious language in which the old man is addressed by his sons, makes the allusion doubtful. In an improvidential universe, it is suggested, miracles are absent, and prayers, as will be shown below, are generally ineffective. Such mention of miracles dramatically recalls to the spectator their absence—a sharply contrasting beam of tenuous light in a grimly dark and God-forsaken world.

The King, in the imagery of this great line, climbs up the Jacob's Ladder of misery to the "almost" miracle (cf. II.ii.165-166) of Cordelia's forgiveness: "You do me wrong to take me out o' th'
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears do scald like molten lead" (IV.vii.46-48), once again a syncretistic image that the New Arden editor annotates merely as Christian in its reference to Hell and Purgatory. On the other hand, the authors of the recent Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries explain it merely in terms of pagan mythology perhaps derived from Thomas Cooper's Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Britannicae (1578), suggesting that "the story of Ixion and his offspring was in Shakespeare's mind throughout a good part of Act IV." Cooper's account is of "Ixion, a king of Thessalie, who falsely brake promise with his wife's father and threw him into a pit of fire. He also called by Jupiter unto a feast, stirred Juno to commit adultery, which Jupiter perceiving, made a cloud like unto Juno, and delivered her to him, on whom he begat the people called Centauri. But when he had auaunted that he had companied with Juno, he was driven downe into hell, and there bounde to a wheele alwayes turning and full of Serpentes, as poetes feygn." The authors of this study of Renaissance dictionaries conclude that "the excerpts from the play and the Thesaurus show that Lear was father of the lustful daughters as Ixion was of the lecherous Centaurs; that Lear, like Ixion, was bound to a wheel (of fire)." But both the New Arden annotator and the authors of this treatise ignore the point that the wheel-of-fire

allusion, like others in Lear, is syncretic, a product of the play's peculiar multiply-syncretic vision.

After the death of an illusion, in a life that converges, in madness, to a living death, Lear (like Gloucester by Edgar) is taken back to "life" by Cordelia's forgiving grace. To say, with some commentators, that Lear repents and attains humility and patience, thus becoming fit for heaven, in a kind of revivified morality pattern, is to underestimate the complexity both of the play and of Lear's character. Such yearners for poetic justice are well, if only partially, answered in the memorable words of Lamb (New Variorum ed., p. 421):

"A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through,—the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. . . . As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station . . . " For Lamb's "gilt robe and sceptre," substitute the neo-Christianizers' "salvation," and one again has the creeping disease of poetic justice, which, along with its insidious cousin, the tragic flaw, has afflicted a large portion of our criticism. Lear, we conclude, returns "purged," but with a difference; the drama is not reversible, and nothing is as it was; the "living martyrdom" has been intellectual as well as physical, religious as well as secular, and has gone much too far. When the convalescent old man murmurs, "You are a spirit, I know; where did you die?" (IV.vii.i.49), and when he attempts to kneel before her as Cordelia asks benediction of him, we reach the forgiveness scene which
some critics, conveniently forgetting that the tragedy has an act yet to run, take, in effect, to represent the conclusion. Brought back from the living-dead, Lear can only murmur, "Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish" (IV.vii.84); in his momentary decline to passivity, he falls from the Lear we know, to something else, not Lear, but more like his partner-in-sorrow, the Earl of Gloucester. "This is not Lear," as he himself earlier (I.iv.234–235) exclaims; "does Lear walk thus? speak thus?" With the exception of this brief interlude after a lengthy madness, which commentators mistakenly take as the be-all and the end-all of the play, the defiant Prometheus and Lear-Agonistes of the previous passages comes back to us in the final scene.

Nevertheless, it is true that still, for a time, Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia may involve a kind of return to "piety," but it is a "piety" that hangs by the single thread of reunion, and is expressed solely in terms of his daughter. The prison to which, captive, they are led is, microcosmically, the world which surrounds good; yet evil has no power over the Stoic and the Christian martyr. At once, Boethian and monastic in their contemptus mundi view, and perhaps syncretic, Cordelia and Lear make a clearing in the universe of evil through their love. Evil and the failure of justice in this world are accepted: "We are not the first," she explains, "Who, with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst. For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down;

Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown" (V.iii.3-6), suffering not for herself but through her love for her father. When she asks, "Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?" Lear replies, apparently purged of the rancorous threats we found earlier, "No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison; We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage: When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down, And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live, And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too, Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out; And take upon's the mystery of things, As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones That ebb and flow by th' moon" (V.iii. 8-19). By a transcendent stroke, Shakespeare has replaced the gods, who are now almost inert in Lear's pantheon, with a pair of doomed prisoners, who in their earthly suffering become, in turn, the observers of mortals. To this cyclical irony does the vision of the gods lead.

If Gloucester's "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods; They kill us for their sport" (IV.i.31-37) has been more than appreciated for its comment on the human condition, Lear's "We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage" (V.iii.9) appears in its implicit sense of passive affliction to have escaped critical emphasis. Indeed, it seems to carry Gloucester's observation further: while there may be a purpose, play or sport, in the gods' cruelty, and man can at least have the flies' illusion of escape, Lear's later and perhaps equally
terrible vision is of a cage—a prisoned microcosm worse than the
cage of Richard II—stationary and enclosed, perhaps at times
covered, or borne about for unacknowledged purposes by those greater
powers who imprison man. "Flies" (IV.i.31), "birds" (V.iii.9),
"butterflies" (V.iii.13)—fragile creatures of an at most trifling
raison d’être, and, on their various levels, passive, hunted, and
ephemeral. Humanity is the passive victim of—what? for—what? Human
suffering, Gloucester and Lear imply, is meaningless, at best, trivial,
anticipating Hobbes's vision of primitive human life as nasty, brutish,
and short.

Like Chaucer's Troilus rising at the end to the "eighth spere"
whence he "fully gan despise This wroched world, and held al vanite"
(Book V, II.1809, 1816-1817), like Lydias, "sunk low, but mounted
high," Cordelia and Lear seem momentarily cleared of earthly despair.
Indeed, Lear affirms, developing the irony expressed above, that "Upon
such sacrifices . . . The Gods themselves throw incense" (V.iii.20-21).77
As in Donne's "Canonisation," the paradoxical reversal of orthodoxy
has the function of illuminating an altered perspective. Just as, a
few lines earlier, Lear and Cordelia are to assume the mantle of
divinity by virtue of their sufferings, at least to the extent of

77The pagan use of incense is described by E. G. C. E. Atchley,
p. 76: "... though all could offer it, it could only be presented to
a deity or deified man, and to offer it was to acknowledge the divinity
of the person to whom it was offered," supporting the "apotheosis"
interpretation above.
becoming "God's spies," i.e., exalted and fixed observation-posts overlooking transient folly and mutability, so here the father-King protracts the reversal: the Gods themselves are to do homage to unique mortals, and a Platonized version of Donne's poem is suggested, paradoxical canonization or ironical apotheosis-through-suffering.

No human power, Lear asserts finally, is ever again to sever them: "Have I caught thee? He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven, And fire us hence like foxes" (V.iii.21-23). The old King's defiance, at the moment of their remanding by Edmund ("Take them away," V.iii.19), is hardly the humility and patience that are, according to critics mentioned above, to make him fit for heaven. Instead, we are given warning of the return of an intensified old Lear whom we have known for most of the play; and this warning occurs in his last speech before his final and most choleric outburst. We next see him some two hundred lines later, cued by the weakly pious Albany's "The Gods defend her!" (V.iii.255); pat upon this cue enters Lear with Cordelia dead in his arms, an irony noted by Bradley, as well as by Wyndham Lewis, who saw in it evidence of Shakespeare's nihilism.\(^7\) If such

7\(^{7}\) Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox (London, 1927), p. 180. While Bradley recognizes the irony at V.iii.255-257, Lewis feels he draws back from the nihilistic implications of that recognition: "He implies that in this irony there is no ultimate despair, but rather that it is likely to be referred to a Christian optimism. That does not seem likely ... But the punctual arrival of Cordelia, brought in like a Christmas present, so marquis and pat, cannot be anything but what it forces us at once to see it as: an expression of the poet's mockery at the vanity of human supplications, and notions of benevolent powers, of which we are the cherished children."
critical antipodes as Bradley and Wyndham Lewis can discern similarly, it may not be implausible to affirm that this juxtaposition provides irony which annihilates claims to heavenly reconciliation. The ritual aspect of Lear's dead march, his entrance carrying Cordelia in his arms, is matched by the verbal accompaniment of his blasphemous defiance of the gods: "Howl, howl, howl! O! you are men of stones: Had I your tongues and eyes I'd use them so That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever. I know when one is dead, and when one lives; She's dead as earth" (V.iii.256-261). "I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever! Cordelia, Cordelia; stay a little" (V.iii.270-271).

In the light of our earlier discussion, it is evident that Lear is a pagan; and if superstition is a pagan manifestation, so, as Fitzherbert in 1610 (p.74) suggests, "atheisme" is "on of the children of Paganisme." Whatever Christian meanings may be present in King Lear, we have attempted to demonstrate that, for the most part, the play is at least ostensibly pagan in its premises—Shakespeare is deliberately striving for fidelity to pagan life and experience as the Renaissance understood them. As a further blow to the simple Christian-salvation hypothesis, it may be added that Lear's attitude towards Cordelia's death, his sense that death ends all, as opposed to the Christian view of eternity, is essentially the heathen attitude as the Renaissance knew it. The sixteenth-century Bishop Jewell, for instance, observed: "We are not, therefore, forbidden to mourn over the dead; but to mourn in such sort as the heathen did we are forbidden." What, then, was
different about the heathen, as opposed to the Christian, mode of mourning? Jewell explains of the pagans that "They, as did neither believe in God nor in Christ, so had they no hope of the life to come. When a father saw his son dead, he thought he had been dead for ever," almost the words of Lear over Cordelia, "now she's gone for ever!" (V.iii.270), and his five-times-shouted "Never!" (308). Like Lear, Jewell's pagan, at the death of his child, "became heavy, changed his garment, delighted in no company, forsook his meat, famished himself, rent his body, cursed his fortune, cried out of his gods. O my dear son! (saith he), how beautiful, how . . . virtuous wast thou! Why shouldest thou die so untimely? why have I offered sacrifice, and done service to my gods? they have made me a good recompence. I will trust them no more, I will no more call upon them. Thus they fell into despair, and spake blasphemies."

The pagan in Jewell's description who laments over his child, "Why shouldest thou die so untimely?" is echoed by the pagan in Shakespeare's play. When, once again, the weakly pious Albany proffers the poetic-justice recipe which it seems one of the play's aims to question, the indomitably blasphemous Lear makes it a cue for denunciatory passion.

"All friends," Albany predicts, "shall taste The wages of their virtue, and all foes The cup of their deservings. O! see, see!" into which neatly optimistic calculus Lear violently intrudes: "And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never, never!" (V.iii.302-308).

In sum, Lear as a pre-Christian pagan could only with difficulty have believed in a type of Christian corporeal life-after-death in eternity. After death, instead of Christian lux aeterna, occurred pagan nox aeterna. To the pagan, as Nilsson points out, "it was self-evident that the body decays in death"—"thou'lt come no more." This distinction accounts for the violence and vehemence of the father's grief, and for the dramatic impact of his expression. To have turned Lear, at the last moment, into a sentimental Christian believer in immortality would have made Shakespeare's tragedy ridiculous, reducing pathos to bathos. That this desire for a happy ending mindlessly

[80 Lear's reference to a horse and a dog (cf. discussion above of Lear on the beast-in-man for other references) is repeated in Coverdale's attack on heathen heresies: "In this book my handling is of natural death, which before our eyes seemeth to be an utter destruction, and that there is no remedy with the dead, even as when a dog or horse dieth; and that God hath no more respect unto them. Yea, the world swimmeth full of such ungodly people . . ." (italics mine), Myles Coverdale, "Treatise on Death," Remains, Parker Soc. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1846), p. 148. Samuel Rowlands, Look to it. For Ile Stabbe Ye (London, 1604), sig. N3, attacks such as accept the heresy of "God-lesse Atheism" which holds "that the dead in earth shall make abode and never rise out of their graves again."

[81 M. P. Nilsson, Greek Piety (Oxford, 1951), p. 155. He notes that "the resurrection of the body was unintelligible to the pagan."
transcends the mere facts of the play and common sense itself is demonstrated by Nahum Tate's sugar-coated travesty which "improved" Shakespeare for over a century-and-a-half; by the preference of Tolstoy for the unconsciously comic and pietistic old Lear; by the misreading of respectable contemporary scholars motivated less by the text than by anti-Burckhardtian a priori commitments; and by the inveterate pull and conditioning of the twentieth-century Hollywoodized mind in a climate of revived theologizing dedicated to the more consoling aspects of the paradox of the fortunate fall. The conclusion follows from the heathen premises as they are prepared throughout the play; neither as pious polytheist, nor as blaspheming skeptic, was the pagan (with the possible exception of the priscia theologia type, which Lear is not) in any position to expound Christian immortality. In every respect, Lear fulfills the criteria for pagan behavior in life, and, according to Jewell's description, for pagan behavior regarding death; indeed, he even follows Jewell's heathen into total blasphemy at the moment of his irredeemable loss.

We have found, in Lear's last speeches, the following ideas to be touched on: immortality ("She's gone for ever," "Thou'lt come no more"); providence, general or particular (see earlier discussion, and

82 Cf. Herbert Weisinger, Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (Michigan State College Press, 1953), p. 216: "Poetic justice, then, stems from the distrust of the audience and is intended to bring about mass deception on a mass scale. But tragedy can exist only when the issue is left in doubt, when the conflict of forces is left free to play itself out, when the audience can be trusted to understand what is at stake . . . ."
Lear's speech, "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, And thou no breath at all?"; man's special status above the beasts (see earlier discussion, and the previous passage). In earlier analyses, we have indicated similar attitudes, questionable from the point of view of Christian orthodoxy, deviations which may, indeed, lead one to suppose that Shakespeare might have conceived Lear's views partially in relation to Renaissance outward skepticism, towards which his disabused polytheism could logically and credibly have led him. Un-Joblike, certainly un-Christlike, the King, "unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled," goes to a reward the premises for whose existence he has just vehemently questioned; in his case, rather than an angelic chant in Paradisum or a Faustian exit with devils, the rest is a perplexing silence.

Finally, among other aims, this discussion has tried to show that the obstacles to an orthodox theological reading of King Lear, in which the protagonist moves from sin and suffering to redemption, are more formidable than has generally been realized. The so-called stumbling block, to the Shakespearean neo-Christianizers, of Lear's last appearance is, it may now be evident, scarcely a hapax legomenon, but a carefully anticipated culmination of Lear's previously expressed tendencies. Shakespeare has, in the character of Lear, included a pagan who moves from polytheism to negativism. Needless to say, it is not here suggested that Lear is only a pagan unbeliever, or that Shakespeare's play is merely the expression of such a view; but within the complex orchestration of Shakespeare's most cosmic drama, the strain of pagan disbelief may not be ignored.
To sum up Lear's development is to rehearse the development of the play, its gigantic inversions and its complexities. From an opening scene of maximal religious confidence of a heathen sort, we move towards a testing of that confidence—Lear's love-test of the opening scene begins to involve an extra-familial, political, and cosmic love-test, one which encompasses the heavens themselves. Human love betrayed reaches into divine love betrayed; thus the question of providence obtrudes, analogically, into the question of a daughter's affection. As a "good" heathen, Lear's polytheism impinges on an animism whose deities are extensions of nature, as, for example, Apollo, the sun-god; hence, the King's devout polytheism, adoring the Nature goddess, could yet embrace what would seem, to a Renaissance Christian, symptoms of naturalism, and therefore skepticism. Living before the Christian Revelation, as well as outside it, Lear could not know or accept the basic paradox of Creation, that God created the world out of nothing. Thus Shakespeare's ascription to him, expositionally twice-mentioned, that nothing could come of nothing, could signify, ambiguously, that Lear was a pagan, although a skeptic from a Christian standpoint; and that, although a good pagan, his expression of his belief in such terms might serve as a foreshadowing of disbelief to come.

In Acts Two and Three, Lear's pagan devotion begins to undergo its trial, commencing that tension between belief and fear-not-to-believe that surcharges his already strained mind. Again, the failure in humanity parallels the failure in the heavens; the storm occurs on all levels at once, cosmic, familial, and personal. And Lear's
questioning of man's state above the animals is a corollary of his questioning of divine providence and justice above man. Once more, from the Christian view of Shakespeare's audience, such denial of man's unique place was characteristic of skepticism; and, from a pagan view, Lear's doubtful defiance of the heavens is also a manifestation of a growing skepticism. The latter becomes even clearer when, at one point, the King dares, in his madness, to question the divine source of thunder, which to Christians, and to many pagans, was ever the dread voice of the heavens. When Lear exclaims at the mid-point of the play, "I am a man More sinn'd against than sinning" (III.ii.58-59), we know we have proceeded to a point where ambivalence has overtaken faith, and where a previous confidence in divine and poetic justice has become, in his own person, a bewildered sense of injustice. The storm is the test of the gods. Divine justice above, Lear hopes, will be shown by human justice and charity below (III.iv.33-36); their mutual dependence is the reason for the paramount significance of the religious meaning of this play. In Act IV, the maddened Lear has given up his confidence in the sense of the thunder: "When the thunder would not peace at my bidding" and this cosmic debacle involves a human one, as he continues, "There I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out" (IV. vi.103-105). As Lear hints at natural causation for the traditional voice of the gods, thunder, so he hints at natural causation for a traditional divine malady in humans, "hard hearts" (III.vi.76-79); Lear implies skepticism on the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, operating here, as elsewhere, analogically, in thrusts which could have been
evident to Shakespeare's audience, but which may be lost on our own. Indeed, the measure of religious change between Shakespeare's time and the present is perhaps a measure of the incomprehensibility to modern spectators of his most cosmic tragedy.

By the end of Act IV, Lear's madness has run its course, as have also the tension and breakdown caused by the failure of belief on all levels; and he is ready for "belief" of some kind, though not, of course, for anything resembling his previous tenets. Like Gloucester's, this belief has here a syncretic Christian-Stoic coloring, though there is no reason that we should not reverse the usual order and say it is Stoic-Christian, for the pagan has as great a claim to the syncretism as the Christian element. Boethius, we remember, was possibly a heathen. Lear's new belief is negative and exclusive, one of abnegation, contemptus mundi, and forfeit; it is not simply one of "salvation," which recent commentators have sought to fasten on him. It is, ironically, one whose fixity will, Lear vainly hopes, oppose all mutability, although it is immediately to be undermined. Lear's new-found "faith" is pathetically and suddenly withdrawn from him by the murder of Cordelia. His laments against Divine Providence, his repeated "why?" his sense of man's reduced place in the scheme of things beneath the lowly animals, his offering of violence to heaven's vault, are in large part motivated by an inconsolable view that death, excluding Resurrection, ends all. This view, which is the premise of the play, implicit in its beginnings, and never contradicted, is by definition a pagan, not a Christian, attitude to immortality. It thus explains
the funereal chorus at the end of the play, which, syncretically, also invokes the Last Judgment (V.iii.263-264), while, at the same time, heathenishly, denies that any immortality is possible; here syncretism intensifies despair, implying the disparity between pagan hopelessness and Christian possibility. The pagan attitude also disposes of modern critical contentions that Lear is saved, or that salvation operates in the denouement. For we have the evidence of a Renaissance English bishop that Lear's attitude was explicitly, and even verbally, the pagan attitude towards death, with the grief consequent upon an awareness that death ends all; Bishop Jewell admonishes that "to mourn in such sort as the heathen did we are forbidden. They, as did neither believe in God nor in Christ, so had they no hope of the life to come. When a father saw his son dead, he thought he had been dead for ever," as Lear exclaims of his daughter, "now she's gone for ever!"

Finally, we have indicated that Lear's skepticism could not be considered as a tragic flaw, given the pagan premises of the play; his disbelief in his own gods is consequent to certain events in the play which act upon his confident piety. Further, even analogically, Lear's doubts could have corresponded to certain ambiguous alterations which had commenced in the faith of Shakespeare's Christian spectators, and illuminate the complexities of the Jacobean religious crisis, circa 1605; thus religiously, Lear's resemblance to certain levels of the audience would have tended to preclude its interpretation of his attitudes as the consequence of a tragic flaw.
CHAPTER IV

KING LEAR: FURTHER EVIDENCES OF PROVIDENTIAL TENDENCIES

I

Having indicated that in the major characters of King Lear, four main religious positions may be delineated, we turn next to those characters who, regardless of the number of their lines, are yet in a subordinate role to the more prominent figures. What is implied by this statement is that, disregarding quantitative measurements, Cordelia, Edgar, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Gloucester, and Lear conduct the business of the two plots and are the substance of the two interrelated families. Behind them stand their servants, their followers, and those who, like Albany, are so unfortunate as to be married into them. In brief, we are to consider the retinue of Lear, such as Kent and the Fool, and the son-in-law Albany, in which characters, appropriately, the main attitudes are echoed, but more diffused chorally and symphonically, both as an expression of themselves and of the ironical and dramatic needs of the moment. Thus we cannot here expect the relatively clear-cut manifestations of the Cordelia-Edgar group, the Goneril-Regan-Edmund group, or of Gloucester, or of Lear; we sense these subordinate characters also as refractions of those they serve and of the dramatic circumstances in which they appear.

In addition, then, to the clearly individual expressions of the four groups above, there are those whose characters sound chorally, such as Kent, whom we see first as a pious polytheist, or good pagan,
totally devoted to his master, Lear, whom he regards almost as a vicar of the gods: "Royal Lear, Whom I have ever honour'd as my King, Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd, As my great patron thought on in my prayers" (I.i.139-142). Indeed, Kent worships the gods through Lear; the King almost fills his religious horizon. When Lear exclaims, "Now, by Apollo," Kent returns, "Now, by Apollo, King, Thou swear'st thy Gods in vain (I.i.159-161), no necessary sign of impiety, but rather, perhaps, recognition that Lear's gods are not to be taken vainly in such a false cause. But more important, it is ironic foreshadowing of Lear's disappointment in his gods. For we observe Kent's true regard for the heavenly powers elsewhere, and his whole aspect shows him to be a man who believes, even unto death; the worldly counterpart to Cordelia, Kent bears Lear out even to the edge of doom. Indeed, Kent functions analogously to Cordelia throughout the play: "The Gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid" (I.i.182), he reverently observes. Despite his pagan piety, however, Kent, like Cordelia, and other characters in the work, expresses sentiments which contain ambiguous Christian overtones. To a Protestant Elizabethan audience, "to eat no fish" (I.iv.18) could imply religious loyalty, as opposed to Catholic practice, Kent being "none of the wicked," to cite Marston, "that eate fish a Fridaies." ¹ Similarly, the Good Servant, and perhaps the parable of the talents, is prefigured in Kent's soliloquy,

"If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd, So may it come, thy master, whom thou lov'st, Shall find thee full of labours" (I.iv.4-7). Again, referring to the unworthy Oswald, he remarks, "Such smiling rogues as these, Like rats, oft bite the holy chords a-twain Which are too intrice t'unloose" (II.ii.74-76), suggesting an evil severance of the bonds of natural law. Further, Kent's regard for the heavens is but the analogous counterpart of his regard for Lear, "the grace and person of my master" (II.ii.132); and in a proverbial phrase, he refers to "heaven's benediction" (II.ii.161). In one of the great lines of the play, Kent continues his quasi-Christian vein: "Nothing almost sees miracles But misery" (II.ii.165-166), suggesting the paradoxical equation between suffering and religious insight, the vision granted to the unfortunate and lowly, ironically anticipating Lear's vision of Cordelia after his suffering. Like the pagan he ostensibly is, however, Kent, paralleling Cordelia and other characters, ends his scene with an allusion to Fortune; and, in his reference to Fortune's wheel, he touches on, as we have seen, one of the underlying images of the play: "Fortune, good night; smile once more; turn thy wheel!" (II.ii.173).

In replying to Lear's confident "By Jupiter, I swear, no," with a foreshadowing "By Juno, I swear, ay" (II.iv.22-23), the Stoic Kent continues, with dissenting premonitions, the pagan pattern. In at least two instances, however, his pious polytheism seems to veer in the direction of Gloucester's astrological fatalism. While Lear gives credence to the stars for human creation and extinction ("By the
sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Hecate and the night, By all the operation of the orbs From whom we do exist and cease to be," (I.i.109-112), the King lacks some of Gloucester's superstitious instinct. More lowly, Kent shares the regard of men of lesser station for those whose "great stars" have "thron'd and set" them "high" (III.i.22-23). It is the horror of ensuing events, however, that presses from Kent's Stoic-fatalist lips a still keener sense of the possibility of astrological determinism: "It is the stars, The stars above us, govern our conditions; Else one self mate and make could not beget Such different issues" (IV.iii.33-36), implying that human virtues and vices are beyond human control; compare Edmund's "admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star!" (I.ii.132-133). Kent's hyperbole, the product of an intense dramatic moment, is less characteristic of him than his pious polytheism with its quasi-Christian overtones; Kent's speech perhaps places him, for the occasion, outside the priscia theologia exemption shared by Cordelia and Edgar, who never defer to the stars; it serves, indeed a choral function, yet, as it points to a Renaissance indecision over the role of the stars in human affairs, it partakes of the questionable denial of some freedom, as, on the other hand, Edmund's speech reveals a denial of planetary control.

Kent's reference to the "wrathful skies" (III.ii.142) suggests a supernatural sense of the causation of thunder; while his comment, "The gods reward your kindness" (III.vi.5), is further evidence of his faith in divine justice. "Benediction" (IV.iii.104) and such quasi-
Christian observations as "the powers of the kingdom approach apace" (IV.vii.93) and "Is this the promis'd end?" (V.iii.263) suggest the two-fold allusiveness of Kent's piety, for the Stoics also held that the world was doomed to perish. In similar fashion, Kent's exclamation at Lear's death, "Vex not his ghost: O! let him pass" (V.iii.313) lends support to the soul-body dualism shared by Christians and some pagans alike. Suggesting Lear's heathen sense of the finality of death, he declares, "I am come To bid my King and master aye good night" (V.iii.235); and his last words imply a pagan attachment: "If Fortune brag of two she lov'd and hated, One of them we behold" (V.iii.280-281); "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; My master calls me, I must not say no" (V.iii.321-322).

Relative to Gloucester and Lear, we may conclude, Kent is a Stoic character, at times forthrightly Cynic, who is steadfast in his beliefs, and changes little; Horatio-like, he is one of the measuring figures in this work, such as Cordelia and Edgar, Goneril and Regan. Against these more or less fixed outlines, Gloucester and Lear move, while in the inner circle, Lear's more complex alterations are

2Kent's proposed death has pagan overtones; cf. J. E. Hankins, Character of Hamlet . . . (Univ. of N. C. Press, 1941), p. 238: "Among early peoples, the sacrifice of slaves or wives upon the funeral pyre of the king was a regular part of the ceremonial. The voluntary 'following in death' of loyal vassals has at times been common in Germany, Persia, and India, and survives in the junshi of Japan. Shakespeare derives his use of this form of suicide directly from Plutarch." Cf. Joannes Boemus, Fardle of Facions (1555), sig. Ciii, regarding the Ethiopes and their ancient customs: "... when the king dieth, his friendes should wilfully despatche their salues and die with hym, for this compte they glorious and a testimony of very frendship."
measurable against Gloucester's vacillating development. In sum, Kent belongs clearly with the Cordelia-Edgar group, but is a little below their perfection, sharing more directly an earth-bound loyalty in his service to his master, while their nature is touched by the more heavenly orientation. On the other hand, Kent, as shadow and echo, is closer to the pagan polytheism of Lear, and although briefly, in his Stoic fatalism, he seems to approach the stellar superstition of Gloucester. We deduce that Kent's is a set of beliefs good in its kind and reflecting, in its spectrum, the ideology of more than one character; Kent, in brief, is positive, individual, and choral.

In addition to Kent, Albany functions individually and chorally in support of the main characters. As mildly virtuous, he is foil to his toughly evil spouse, Goneril; his "milk-livered" goodness, to use her term, is necessary to bring out her tigerish wickedness, the transposition of the usual gender-characteristics providing the dramatic paradox. In addition, his almost mindless support of poetic justice is contrastingly paralleled by Edgar's normative support; and both orthodoxies are foils to the swirling cosmic injustices that mark the tragedy. Albany, in short, is the good citizen, slow to anger, and a bit obtuse; but once he sees his Duty, he resolutely does it, whether it be in defense of his gods, his country, or his marriage bed. All of which does not prevent Albany from being a likely cuckold. If, as has been suggested by J. W. Draper, Albany represents James I—or eventually the latter's son—by virtue of his
title, 3 it is a topicality that seems unreasonable, perhaps to the extent that the character is vulnerable. Yet, as upholder of justice, both divine and political, and as a staunch supporter of public and private morality, and as final executor, Albany does seem to have a quasi-hierarchical status, one which is, however, flecked with irony. We have noted, for example, two instances at the conclusion of the play where Lear breaks in devastatingly upon Albany's wholesome platitudes: Once, at V.iii.255, after Edmund has exposed the plot to hang Cordelia, Albany exclaims, "The Gods defend her!" Entering upon his next line, Lear carries Cordelia dead in his arms, and sets up a howling against the very gods in whom Albany had put his trust. Again, at V.iii.303-304, promising that "All friends shall taste The wages of their virtue, and all foes The cup of their deservings," his position is demolished by Lear's next line, "And my poor fool is hang'd!" If Albany did not exist, he would have had to be invented; having chosen, married, and bedded with Evil, his outlook is yet, almost to

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3J. W. Draper, "The Occasion of King Lear," SP, XXXIV (1937), 182. Albany's character has enough superficial virtue and hierarchical status to conceal the flecks of irony which mingle in his depiction, and to prevent Shakespeare from sharing the fate of his less subtle colleagues, such as Jonson, Chapman, and Marston, who, in the same year as Lear, presented Eastward Ho! (1605); their satire on James and the Scots led to the imprisonment of the first two (E. K. Chambers, Elizabethan Stage, Oxford, 1945, III, 254-256). Thus, at the time of Lear, audiences may have enjoyed such satire on their disappointing new monarch and his knighted favorites; and, if the more knowing made such an identification at all, the double perspective of Albany as virtuously important and, at the same time, something less than wholly admirable, may have appealed to the more sophisticated of the spectators.
the very end, despite all his experience of the worst of all possible worlds, the persistence of innocent optimism.

Early in the play, Albany's piety is established, along with his befuddlement: "Now, Gods that we adore, whereof comes this?" (I.iv.299), he asks regarding Lear's complaint against Goneril, his wife, who immediately tells him to mind his business: "Never afflict yourself to know more of it." In her indictment of her husband, there are dramatically viable Christian overtones revealing the horror of her character: "This milky gentleness and course of yours Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon, You are much more attax'd for want of wisdom Than prais'd for harmful mildness" (I.iv.351-354) and "Milk-liver'd man! That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs" (IV.ii.50-51); she calls him "a moral fool" (IV.ii.58), one who moralizes and considers too nicely while the times call for expedient action; he is a preacher, and a silly one, according to her: "No more; the text is foolish" (IV.ii.36). Albany is a staunch believer, as has been suggested, in public order; his are the norms of the body politic, as Kent's are those of loyal private service, and as Cordelia's and Edgar's are those of the heavenly order. While Cordelia merely mentions the bond, Albany, a "moral fool," duly expounds on the evil consequences of departure from the bonds of nature, from the moral community of mankind: "That nature, which contemns its origin, Cannot be border'd certain in itself; She that herself will sliver and dis-branch From her material sap, perforce must wither And come to deadly use" (IV.ii.32-36). His chivalry and his civilized respect for women
are to the fore, intensifying his horror at his wife's behavior—a Pharisee (to some extent) to have bedded with a fiend! "See thyself, devil!" he exclaims at her. "Proper deformity shows not in the fiend So horrid as in woman." A kind of respectful chivalry prevents his stooping to punish her: "howe'er thou art a fiend, A woman's shape doth shield thee" (IV.ii.59-67). Yet her retort, "Marry, your manhood—mew!" may have some womanly reason to it; her previously expressed contempt for Albany indicates a possible inferiority to Edmund: "Oh! the difference of man and man. To thee a woman's services are due: My Fool usurps my body" (IV.ii.26-28).

Albany's un-Hobbesian goodness sees in her a threat to moral order; her very existence is a sign of the possibly imminent collapse of civilization and all restraint: "If that the heavens do not their visible spirits Send quickly down to tame these wilde offences, It will come, Humanity must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of the deep" (IV.ii.46-49), a complaint both personal and choral, reminiscent of the Second and Third Servants at Gloucester's blinding by Cornwall: "Second Serv. I'll never care what wickedness I do If this man come to good. Third Serv. If she live long, And in the end meet the old course of death, Women will all turn monsters." Yet Albany finds his doubts, and the doubts of these servants, answered, in the death of Cornwall; perhaps too easily answered, for Albany is an addict of divine justice: "This shows you are above, You justicers, that these our nether crimes So speedily can venge!" ("nether," perhaps, being sublunary, yet also venereal, as in Gloucester's case).
Yet Albany's next line ironically comments on, and cancels out, his happy encounter with heavenly justice. "But, O poor Gloucester! Lost he his other eye?" (IV.ii.78-81). Significantly, Albany's non-pejorative term, "justicer," is the very word Lear has previously used in his questioning of justice. At his fantastical arraignment of his daughters in a Lewis Carroll courtroom scene, Lear's "most learned justicer," whom he bids, "Come, sit thou here," is the ragged madman, Poor Tom.

In conclusion, Albany's proof of heavenly justice is, as usual, a bit premature. At the end of the play, the deaths of Regan and Goneril again evoke his assurance: "This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble, Touches us not with pity" (V.iii.231-232); fear, not pity, is the result of this further demonstration of ever-watchful and nicely-balancing providence. But, again, Albany's next line serves to reduce his majestic utterance of heaven-caused trembling to a preoccupation with trivial social form and mannerliness: noticing Kent, he adds, "O! is this he? The time will not allow the compliment Which very manners urges" (V.iii.232-233), possible evidence of an obsession with form and order, in the midst of murder, suicide, and chaos. In addition, we have noted earlier how twice more, at the close, Albany's almost fatuous optimism is detonated by Lear's brutal evidence that the gods do not defend, and that not all receive the cup of their deservings (V.iii.255, 304). Like other characters, Albany pays the conventional tribute to Fortune, "Fortune led you well" (V.iii.142). Chorally, he joins Kent's "Is this the promis'd end?" at sight.
of Lear with Cordelia dead, with Edgar's "Or image of that horror?" with his own "Fall and cease" (V.iii.263-264). "Friends of my soul," he addresses, in pious terms, Kent and Edgar (V.iii.319).

Relatively unchanging religiously, in comparison with Lear and Gloucester, Albany, like Kent, Cordelia, and Edgar, among the good characters, and like Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, among the evil ones, furnishes a relatively fixed theological frame for the developments of the two central figures. In the great crisis act of the play, the fourth, Albany, like Kent, Gloucester, and others, is driven to an utterance beyond his usual sphere. As Kent, for example, is pressed by the horror, to exclaim with Stoic fatalism, "It is the stars, The stars above us, govern our conditions; Else one self mate and make could not beget Such different issues" (IV.iii.33-36), so Albany in the same act (IV.ii.46-49) fearfully gives utterance to a panic beyond his usual optimism: "If that the heavens do not their visible spirits Send quickly down to tame these wilde offences, It will come, Humanity must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of the deep"; in both Kent and Albany, the conditional mode of expression is here significant. Resembling Edgar in the latter's faith in poetic justice, he also briefly resembles the mad Lear who, at one point, remarks, "Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot Those pelican daughters" (III.iv.74-76), an observation in its bitterness not greater than the King's general distrust of justice, either poetic or divine. Edmund, too, has a vision of poetic justice, regarding the popular effects of Lear, "Whose age had charms in it, whose title more, To pluck the
common bosom on his side, And turn our impress'd lances in our eyes
Which do command them" (V.iii.49-52), a foreshadowing of the evil
engineer hoist with his own petard, but also, perhaps unconsciously,
in its eye-imagery, an allusion to his father's blinding, for which
he may soon have to account. Foil to Edmund's evil potency, and most
acceptable, hierarchically, in a social system that finds Edmund, as
bastard, most unacceptable, Albany is thus good and decent, but inade­
quate—perhaps in more than one sense, as Goneril broadly hints (IV.ii.
26-28); his is the impotence of mere goodness in a cruel storm which
deranges the cosmos and snaps the great chain of being.\footnote{Albany's weakness has been signalized by a number of critics:
out that through the ineffectiveness of Albany, Cordelia is murdered;
and A. H. R. Fairchild (Shakespeare and the Tragic Theme, Univ. of
Missouri Studies, 1941, p. 56) speaks of him as "nerveless with moral
flatulency"; he "stands for some right things, but he does nothing"
(p. 46 n.), recalling that when Gloucester's eyes were torn out, it
was the nameless servant who drew his sword against Cornwall. What
Chambers and Fairchild do not go on to deduce is that not only Albany
but also his blind faith in justice is on trial in this tragedy. To
adopt a metaphor, Albany's faith is unpurged by the fires of evil,
which have already tempered the different faith of Cordelia and
Edgar—Albany's naive or "cloistered virtue" is, perhaps, doomed to
be "cloistered," no matter how far he righteously pronounces; while,
ironically, Cordelia and Edgar know evil for what it is—cf. Cordelia
to her sisters, I.i.269: "I know you what you are"—and preserve a
piety tempered by the fires of this world.}

We come, at last, to the Fool, who seems, in part, less a
person than a kind of nameless entity, like the Thunder; too personal
and pointed in his utterances, he is the opposite of the Thunder's
impersonal and ambiguous "pudder." In contrast to the macrocosmic
disorder, his concern is with microcosmic imprudence, disorder of practical reason; and his allusions, like those of the evil sisters, primarily concern the earth, not the heavens. A kind of benevolent Iago ("I am nothing if not critical"), his function is to whip Lear into an awareness of his folly; thus he works oppositely to Cordelia, whose purpose is to soothe her father's cut brain. The Fool disappears early; Cordelia late; but both conjointly in Lear's "And my poor fool is hang'd!" (V.iii.305). The Fool's last words are, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (III.vi.88), in reply to Lear's "We'll go to supper i' th' morning," his final utterance being an expression of inversion and of "handy-dandy," the see-saw to Lear's folly; and it is after Lear's own sleep, that the King's reason returns to him. Clearly, then, the Fool is the head, as Cordelia is the heart—knowledge and faith, words and deeds, appearance and reality, reason and forgiveness—the poles of the tragedy; too much wrong "faith" and too little true self—"knowledge" led Lear into his moral and religious impasse. Finally, as has been noted in connection with Edmund, the Jacobean sense of value-inversion is expressed in the Fool, who is the raison-neur of chaos, as Edgar is of belief, and Edmund of naturalistic denial.

Although it is a constant refrain, heard in Louis le Roy in 1557, "everywhere the publicke estates have bin afflicted, changed, or destroyed; and everywhere the Religion troubled with heresies . . . there was never in the world more wickednesse, more impietie, or more disloyaltie. Devocion is quenched . . . there remayneth but the
shadow of Justice. All is turned upside down . . .," and in Montaigne, "I live in an age, wherein we abound with incredible examples of this vice [cruelty]. . . And read all ancient stories, be they never so tragical, you shall find none to equall those we daily see practised . . . then I could hardly be persuaded, before I had seen it, that the world could have afforded so marble-hearted and savage-minded men," the Jacobean sense of the inversion of values, echoed in the Fool's adynata, is revealed also in Chapman's Byron: "The world is quite inverted, Virtue thrown at Vice's feet, and sensual Peace confounds Valour and cowardice, fame and infamy" (I.ii.14-16). As raisonneur of chaos, the Fool's "handy-dandy" is the eternal chorus of value-inversion, reminiscent of the adynata topos traced by Curtius in Virgil, in the medieval Carmina Burana, Theodulf, Nigel de Longchamps' Mirror of Fools, as well as, among others, in Rabelais. This inversion of the "world upside-down," which, iconographically, appears in Breughel's "Dutch Proverbs," continues its literary career to a point beyond Curtius' purview, in Swift's Gulliver's Travels, whose method

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6 Montaigne's essay "Of Cruelty," II, xi (II, 121).

7 Nigel de Longchamps, also, perhaps less correctly, called Wireker.

8 Cf. E. R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Age (New York, 1953), pp. 94-98; E. Dutoit, Le Thème de l'adyunata dans la poésie antique (Paris, 1936); R. M. Grant, Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman Thought (Amsterdam, 1952), pp. 37-56; R. V. Canter, "The Figure Adynaton in Greek and Latin Poetry," Amer. Jour. of Philol., LI (1930), 32-41.
Dr. Johnson similarly perceived, and whose substance has more than one analogy with Shakespeare's drama. 9

We find that the Fool casts his practical sense on everything, and is, in everything, the antithesis of the sentimental, the feeling, and the religious. For him, holy water becomes "court holy water," and indeed, practically, "court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door" (III.i.10-11), flippantly antithetical to Cordelia's "holy water from her heavenly eyes" (IV.iii.31).

"Good nuncle, in, ask thy daughters' blessing" (11-12), he adds, mockingly indicating the reversal of the religious act. Continuing his unsentimental education of Lear, or rather, his de-sentimentalizing of him, the Fool as raisonneur of chaos, spins a prophecy in a poem that is a series of adynata; and, indeed, parts of the poem are also upside down, apparently on purpose, though the disorder has given editors no end of concern. "When priests are more in word than matter... No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;... And bawds and whores do churches build; Then shall the realm of Albion Come to great confusion:

9 Cf. Villey, Sources... Montaigne, II, 489, who speaks of "... chaos intellectuel ou le XVIe siecle s'était debattu." In England, moral values were overturned; J. E. Neale, in The Elizabethan Political Scene (Oxford Univ. Press, 1948), asserts that "... gratuities were fundamental to Elizabethan court life," courtiers profiting from sales, while the standard of public morality sharply declined during the last decade of Elizabeth. The old Queen told Lambarde in 1601: "Now the wit of the fox is everywhere on foot, so as hardly a faithful or virtuous man may be found." Neale adds (p. 23): "The accession of James I, a weak sovereign who had neither the character nor the political skill to maintain the discipline of the post, gave reign to the forces of corruption." Cf. Arnold Williams, "A Note on Pessimism in the Renaissance," SP, XXXVI (1939), 243-246.
Then comes the time, who lives to see't, That going shall be us'd with feet" (III.ii.81-94). The first reference indicates a bad, verbose, and Polonius-like state of affairs; the second a good, tolerant, if too amatory, condition; the third is clearly bad. The consequence is farcically disastrous, and/or really a commonplace; or, in one sense, England is in a state of confusion, and people do walk on foot. The Fool's prophecy is in the tradition of the comic prognostication, and is a rational and satirical antithesis to Gloucester's emotional and superstitious prediction of the first act. Not satisfied with having destroyed, by patent nonsense, his own solemnity, the Fool, in a sense, attempts to destroy the validity of the pagan atmosphere Shakespeare has built up, stepping out of his frame, winking at the audience, and impudently observing, "This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time" (95-96).  

II

If we examine the relationship between man and the gods as exemplified by prayers and curses, all of which are essentially pleas for divine intervention in human affairs, we find that their efficacy or inefficacy in King Lear may be significant in interpreting the

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10By this remark, the Fool also indicates the would-be antiquity of his creation. Charlton, Shakespearian Tragedy, pp. 219-220, says that "The Fool doubly underlines his prophecy; it is twice-removed from contemporary reference, and it will still be a prophecy when in ages to come Merlin shall first pronounce it, for the Fool lives before Merlin's time . . . ."
problem of cosmic justice in the tragedy. Edmund's flippant and irreverent prayer, for instance, "Now, gods, stand up for bastards!" (I.ii. 22), is, of course, temporarily granted, though ultimately denied. On the other hand, Lear's prayer to Nature, which is the next heavenly invocation, may, in its similar appeal as well as its proximity, be meant to be compared with Edmund's address to the Goddess, and is granted: "Hear, Nature, hear! dear Goddess, hear! Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend To make this creature fruitful..." (I.iv.284-286); while the event does not produce any child to "fret channels in her cheeks" (294), the first part of Lear's prayer is satisfied in Goneril's childlessness. Further, Lear's curse, "Blasts and fogs upon thee! Th'untented woundings of a father's curse Pierce every sense about thee!" (I.iv.308-310), a sequel to the foregoing, is, in substance, granted. On the other hand, Lear's prayer, "O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven; Keep me in temper; I would not be mad" (I.vi.46-47), functioning as foreshadowing, is, of course, denied, yet subsequently, ironically and momentarily, allowed. What the gods grant, it becomes clearer, is too often malign; and when the good is given, it comes too late. Lear shouts, when Kent tells him that his daughter and son-in-law have stocked him, "By Jupiter, I swear, no"; to which Kent replies, "By Juno, I swear, ay" (II.iv.21-22), perhaps implying or anticipating a certain heavenly discord and irrelevance. When, again, Lear fulminates against Goneril, "All the stor'd vengeance of Heaven fall On her ingrateful top!" (II.iv.163-164), we sense a ready willingness of the powers to comply, as they eventually do,
although not in the wonderfully gruesome detail desiderated by Goneril's father (164-165, 166-169). Once more, the gods are seen alert to the possibilities of mischief, even should it light on the wicked, and once more the good comes out of season: "O Heavens," Lear exclaims, "If you do love old men, if your sweet sway Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old, Make it your cause; send down and take my part!" (II.iv.191-193); of course, when they do send down, they take nobody's part, but strike at good and bad alike. The patently beneficent is denied: "You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need! You see me here, you Gods, a poor old man, As full of grief as age; wretched in both! If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts Against their father, fool me not so much To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger, And let not women's weapons, water-drops, Stain my man's cheeks!" (II.iv.273-280); Lear, in his incoherence, asks for both patience and anger at once, and, recognizing by now the malignity of the heavens, is rewarded with the more harmful alternative.

In the storm scenes of the third act, Lear's nihilistic prayers (III.ii.1-9, 14-19), now intended more universally, more germinally ("nature's germens"), no longer restricted to an individual, seem to be answered, or on the way to be answered; the elements, servants of the gods, are now seen in terms similar to those of Gloucester's "flies" speech: "... let fall Your horrible pleasure" (III.ii.19), implying that their will is evil, and that they receive some gratification in expressing it against man. The prayer is gratified; an anthropomorphic heaven is meaningful in terms of corresponding human evil, and the
ontological argument of St. Anselm is stood on its head—the least
Perfect Being exists for the reason that we can conceive of it. "Let
the great Gods, That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads, Find
out their enemies now" (III.ii.49-51), but ironically, they find out
their friends as well; and their "pudder" implies an ambiguous busi-
ness, certain dire preparations in the wings. In the fourth scene,
Lear's "prayer" before sleep ("I'll pray and then I'll sleep," III.iv.
27) is significantly directed at man rather than at the gods; this is
the last of the great prayers of the protagonist; and it seems that he
has given up hope of succor from the heavens—indeed, it is man's
actions now that are the sole hope of justifying the hopeless heavens:
"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.33-36), biting in its ironical despair—the relations
are reversed, and weak man is to be the exemplar of charity to the all-
powerful heavens. Ambiguously, then, man's fellow-feeling is to remove,
in the eyes of man, some of the stigma of heaven's feelinglessness; and
"more justice" is to be "shown" to the heavens, as a pattern of desir-
able action. Here, at his intellectual verge, the King exhibits the
same paradoxical reversal, previously noted, that marks his later speech
regarding "Gods' spies"; since the heavens are not doing what the
heavens are depended on to do, the divine and human roles are exchanged;
out of hope, no longer troubling deaf heaven with his bootless cries,
Lear, in an apotheosized inversion reminiscent of Donne's "Canoniza-
tion," informs Cordelia, "we'll... take upon's the mystery of things, As if we were Gods' spies" (V.iii.14-17).

After this point in the third act, Lear no longer prays to the heavens; the burden of invocation is assumed by the other characters. Gloucester, for example, predicts, "but I shall see The winged vengeance overtake such children" (III.vii.64-65), and the indirect prayer is gratified; in a bitter irony, the next line shows the vengeance overtaking Gloucester as well. Blinded, he exclaims, "O cruel! O you Gods!" (III.vii.69), an ambiguity which suggests that both men and gods are cruel, at the same time as it appeals to the gods. For Lear and for Gloucester, the heavens are malign. For Gloucester, "plagues" seem to be "heav'ns plagues" (IV.i.64-65), and the phrase almost a tautology; yet, paralleling Lear's appeal for human charity, on an appropriately more sensual level, he yet invokes the vengeance of the skies: "Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns plagues Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched Makes thee the happier: Heavens, deal so still! Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man, That slaves your ordinance, that will not see Because he does not feel,


11 At times, then, Lear seems to adopt the supposed Epicurean view that the gods are deaf. Compare Epicurus (Cyril Bailey, Greek Atomists, Oxford, 1928, p. 477), who is said to have remarked with contempt: "If God listened to the prayers of men, all men would quickly have perished: for they are forever praying for evil against one another." As Bailey (p. 477) observes, Epicurus has "no place for the ordinary religious notion of prayer as an appeal to divine beings who can hear the appeal and grant the blessings which are asked; if the Epicurean had nothing to fear from his gods, he also had nothing to hope."
feel your power quickly; So distribution should undo excess, And each
man have enough" (IV.ii.64-71), again humanly justifying the heavens,
which are in need of such justification. Like Gloucester, Albany
wishes the heavens to avenge and punish; but in his case, the sense
of poetic justice violated is stronger than Gloucester’s, who is beyond
such need for reassurance: “If that the heavens,” Albany pleads, “do
not their visible spirits Send quickly down to tame these vilde offences,
It will come, Humanity must perforce prey on itself, Like monsters of
the deep” (IV.ii.46-49). In other words, Albany and Gloucester are
praying from two opposite premises: hope violated and needing to be
reinforced; and hopelessness wishing for a reproving lesson to mankind.
For, in the issue, Albany triumphantly announces, at the news of Corn­
wall’s death at the hands of a servant, “This shows you are above, You
justicers, that these our nether crimes So speedily can vengel” and, at
once, in a sad and comic irony, he adds, “But O poor Gloucester! Lost
he his other eye?” (IV.ii.78-81). Twins in their weakness and folly,
presumptive cuckold and cuckold-maker, the first “committed” to an
unrealistic poetic justice, the second “committed” to a superstitious
despair, Albany and Gloucester join hands at this ironical moment; both
“marry in an instant.”

In almost the only example in the play, a character pleads with
supernatural forces, and is benignly rewarded; inevitably, that char­
acter is Cordelia, and her petition on behalf of another is kind rather
than vengeful; more significantly, it is not to the gods that she
appeals first, but rather to the “bless’d secrets” of the earth: “All
bless'd secrets, All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth, Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate In the good man's distress! Seek, seek for him, Lest his ungovern'd rage dissolve the life That wants the means to lead it" (IV.iv.15-19), a prayer for his health and sanity that is soon to be rewarded. Nature's restoration is to be found within nature itself. Although Cordelia significantly first begs nature's aid in healing her father, she later adds a prayer to the gods: "O you kind Gods, Cure this great breach in his abused nature! Th' untuned and jarring senses, O! wind up Of this child-changed father" (IV.vii.15-17), a speech which is followed by Lear's entrance, restored to sanity.

Final illustrations of heavenly petitions issue from Gloucester, first, at his "suicide" attempt, "O you mighty Gods! This world I do renounce, and in your sights Shake patiently my great affliction off; If I could bear it longer, and not fall To quarrel with your great opposeless wills, My snuff and loathed part of nature should Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O, bless him!" (IV.vi.34-40). If the heavens are "opposeless wills," prayer, clearly, is futile; and just as futile, in the light of the play, is Gloucester's prayer that the gods bless the already-blessed Edgar; and ironically futile is the denial of Gloucester's wish for suicidal departure. The last the old earl recognizes, when he prays, "You ever-gentle Gods, take my breath from me: Let not my worser spirit tempt me again To die before you please!" (IV.vi.219), to which the incognito Edgar cries amen: "Well pray you, father" (220). And this prayer of Gloucester's is granted, as his beneficent wish for
Edgar: "Hearty thanks: The bounty and the benison of Heaven To boot, and boot!" (225-227).

In the light of our examination of these instances of heavenly petition in King Lear, it may be concluded that in almost all cases, especially those of curses, the issue is malign, and the Powers have a predilection for human suffering; this view Gloucester commences with, and after much suffering, learns to endure, but Lear only comes to grasp it after much suffering, and, in a heroic non serviam, dies refusing to endure. "Who hearkens to the gods, the gods give ear," wrote Homer in the Iliad; in the dissolving theophany of another age, the gods give ear malignly, and all the baleful prayers are answered, while whatever good, such as Edmund's repentance, arrives, arrives too late. Only in relation to the virtuous characters of Cordelia and Edgar do petitions operate beneficently; the former pleads successfully for the sanity of Lear, while the latter stands in heavenly auspices to the survival of his father.

III

In addition to investigating the efficacy of prayers and curses within Lear, we may, in order to discover the place of cosmic justice, examine some dramatic ironies, and especially the sequential ironies, in which the play is particularly rich. By sequential irony is meant the tacit commentary which the dramatist, operating ab extra, can legitimately introduce; for, as other artists work through lines and tones, the histrionic sensibility operates through a dynamism of action in
which certain sequent juxtapositions themselves may take on meaning.

In 1 Henry IV, for example, the mere fact that a scene at the tavern is followed by one at the court may involve a meaning-dimension, the sequence in its contrariety suggesting a significant assertion on the part of the author; and the sharp contrast, in sequence, between the dark, cold, supernatural opening scene of the Ghost in Hamlet, and the subsequent superficial and glittering scene in court, presided over by Claudius, offers, by simple collocation, a type of commentary.

In regard to the dramatic dialogue itself, we find, for example, in Julius Caesar, an instance of ironical juxtaposition-as-meaning; in the crucial exposition of Caesar's character, Shakespeare has broadly sketched the hybris and vanity, the susceptibility to flattery, of the emperor, who reveals himself ripe for the kill. And two successive lines brilliantly uncover him to the audience (I.ii.212-213) when he ha_ just vaunted himself above such common human failings as fear:

"I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar." The very next line undoes him: "Come on my right hand," he tells Antony, "for this ear is deaf." The moral, of course, is either that gods ought not to be deaf, or that humans ought to have self-knowledge. Eventually, the irony comes full circle through Prince Hamlet: "Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, Might stop a hole to keep the wind away" (V.i.236-237).

Such ironies, which may reflect the religious nisus of the play, may be illustrated from King Lear. When the aged sire petitions the heavens for the first time, "O Heavens, If you do love old men, if
your sweet sway Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old, Make it your cause; send down and take my part!" (II.iv.192-194); as if in reply, the evil daughters join forces both by gesture and by word: "O Regan! will you take her by the hand?" (II.iv.196), and both attack him with their reprobate complaints (196-265). Either the heavens are deaf, that is to say, or they delight in malicious mischief. Once again, Lear appeals to the heavens, "You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!--You see me here, you Gods, a poor old man, As full of grief as age; wretched in both" (II.iv.273-275); his appeal is answered by a devastating storm that threatens the earth. Perhaps, the sequence seems to imply, the gods are indifferent to weakness and oppression; perhaps, even further, such appeals serve only to exasperate them and summon their cruelty. At the end of this speech, Lear had shouted, "I will do such things, What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be The terrors of the earth," when the sound of the storm is heard; mankind is, ironically, an impotent and pathetically miserable creature, futilely absurd in his powerless rage, in contrast to the irrational menacings of the skies.

In the next act, when Edmund has concluded, within Gloucester's castle, his cold calculation against his father, "This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me That which my father loses; no less than all: The younger rises when the old doth fall" (III.iv.25-27), we are thrown, in the following line, into the cold and inhuman atmosphere of the storm on the open heath. The sequence is here meaningful, but not so much in the way of ordinary irony, as of the coincidence between
human and natural evil; and this, in itself, may be irony, insofar as humankind and kinship are expected to provide love and warmth, while the more distant heavens are not. Once again, when Lear concludes his "prayer" before sleep, beginning "Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are," and pleading, through charity, to "show the Heavens more just" (III.iv.28-36), the next lines reveal a "poor, naked wretch" in the person of Edgar as Poor Tom, and the Fool terrified, running out of the hovel: "Edg. [within] Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom! Fool. Come not in here, Nuncle; here's a spirit. Help me! help me!" (37-40). This is, ironically, how, in the presentation of the poor naked wretches, the heavens are apparently to be justified. Later, at the point when the mad King seeks restorative sleep, "Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains: so, so. We'll go to supper i' th' morning" (III.vi.85-87), Gloucester enters, revealing, "I have o'erheard a plot of death upon him" (92). The gods whom Lear adored seem very busy.

Even when, Job-like, man feels himself at the worst of his misfortunes, the gods can, directly afterwards, with a few swift strokes, make him yearn for the good old days. Thus Edgar, banished, deprived of love and property, homeless, may describe himself at the bottom of his misfortunes: "Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd, Than, still contemn'd and flatter'd, 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. Welcome, then, Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace: The
wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst Owes nothing to thy blasts" (IV.i.1–9). Having rationalized his depression into a reasonably bearable state, he at once sees enter his newly-blinded father, led by an old man: "My father, poorly led? World, world, O world! But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee, Life would not yield to age" (10–12). The irony of the gods has delivered its message; Edgar now understands: "O Gods! Who isn't can say 'I am at the worst'? I am worse than e'er I was" (25–26). Human misery, in other words, is bottomless. And divine cruelty apparently has no limits.

As the most optimistic believer in poetic justice, possessing an outlook which seems to have its roots less perhaps in piety than in a kind of solemn fatuity, Albany is the voice of a pathetic fallacy. When, for example, the killing of Cornwall by a servant is described to Albany, he exclaims, "This shows you are above, You justicers, that these our nether crimes So speedily can venge!" (IV.ii.78–80). Yet in the same breath, with a kind of comic, unconscious irony, he hastily recalls himself, "But O poor Gloucester! Lost he his other eye?" (80–81). In short, Albany's first impulse is to pontificate on cosmic justice, heedless of the evidence which seems to negate it. At another point, Gloucester has been converted to existence rather than suicide: "You ever-gentle Gods, take my breath from me: Let not my worser spirit tempt me again To die before you please!" (IV.vi.219–220); the old man, in other words, looks forward to a gradual deliquescence. Reconciled both to life and the heavens, he thanks his benefactor Edgar: "Hearty thanks: The bounty and the benison of Heaven To boot,
and booti" (225-227). At this point of Gloucester's achievement of a modus vivendi and acceptance of continued inspiration, the villainous Oswald enters with drawn sword as a potential instrument of fate: "A proclaim'd prize! Most happy! That eyeless head of thine was first fram'd flesh To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor, Briefly thyself remember: the sword is out That must destroy thee" (227-231). Gloucester, it seems, cannot die; but at the very moment of persuasion that life is preferable, it seems he cannot live. Little wonder that he earlier compared men to flies whom the gods kill for their sport; not only does Gloucester express that sentiment, but the gods appear to make it good.

The concluding act delivers a consistent series of ironic blows. Edgar, having brought his blind father into "the shadow of this tree For your good host" prays "that the right may thrive," and assures him, "If ever I return to you again I'll bring you comfort" (V.ii.1-4), to which Gloucester replies "Grace go with you, sir!" Instantly, Edgar runs back upon an alarum and a retreat: "Away, old man! give me thy hand: away! King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en. Give me thy hand; come on" (5-7). So much for human comfort. Like Gloucester and his son, Lear, too, even at the end, has a momentary blind faith; if Cordelia be near, "we'll live And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too, . . . we'll wear out, In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones That ebb and flow by th' moon" (V.iii.11-19), a permanence and immutability that is rudely
to be shattered by Edmund's harsh "Take them away" (19), and Cordelia's hanging. So much for human comfort, even that which is resigned to oppression and hopes merely for endurance.

With poetic justice, the demolition of poetic justice is left to Albany; aptly, his hierarchical status analogically allies him with the heavens. As we have noted, some of the most powerful and significant ironies are reserved for the tragedy's end. When, for example, having heard about the plot against Cordelia, he exclaims, "The Gods defend her!" (V.iii.255), his answer arrives immediately, in the person of Lear carrying Cordelia dead in his arms. Replies come rapidly at the denouement. Grandly, Albany, in an ironical echo of the old Leir's happy restoration, offers to relinquish the throne to its rightful owner: "For us, we will resign, During the life of this old Majesty, To him our absolute power" (V.iii.298-300); ten lines later Lear is dead. With officious and equitable magnanimity, he promises Edgar and Kent, "you, to your rights, With boot and such addition as your honours Have more than merited" (299-301). And finally, he announces, "All friends shall taste The wages of their virtue, and all foes The cup of their deservings" (302-304), which is interrupted by Lear's last speech, and the final annihilation of human trust in divine justice: "And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never!" (305-308). Beyond the lines themselves of this concluding scene, however, there is an irony in the lack of inevitability, which Bradley points out, in the catastrophe; at various
moments, for example, in the unnecessary delay of Edmund's confession, the tragedy could have been avoided. "It is not even satisfactorily motivated. In fact it seems expressly designed to fall suddenly like a bolt from a sky cleared by the vanished storm." This is true, and its Tragik des Zuspält is a transcendent illustration of sequential irony.

In conclusion, we have found, through an inspection, less of the lines themselves, than of what is expressed in the relation of the lines, in the sequence of dialogue and event, confirmation of the implicit direction of the tragedy: annihilation of faith in poetic justice, and within the confines of a grim, pagan universe, annihilation of faith in divine justice. In this dark world, the last choruses tell us, we find the promised end, or the image of that horror, in which man's chief joy is to be removed from the rack of this tough world, and in which man's pathetic solace is—ultimate irony!—the illusion that that which he has most loved still breathes: "Look on her, look her lips, Look there, look there!" (310-311). No redemption stirs at this world's end; only suffering, tears, pity, and loss—and illusion.

IV

The fact that King Lear, uniquely among the tragedies, combines a fully developed and repetitive double plot, presents a dramaturgic

problem which critics have seemingly, but not actually, solved. Why, it may be asked, when he has, before and after, revealed an extraordinarily mounting sense of dramatic economy, should Shakespeare, at this mature point in his career, decide on such an apparently wasteful duplication? Two replies usually satisfy commentators: first, that it universalizes the situation, and secondly, that it intensifies the tragic effect. "Were Lear alone to suffer from his daughters, the impression would be limited to the powerful compassion felt by us for his private misfortune," declares A. W. Schlegel. "But two such unheard-of examples taking place at the same time have the appearance of a great commotion in the moral world: the picture becomes gigantic, and fills us with such alarm as we should entertain at the idea that the heavenly bodies might one day fall out of their regular orbits." Gervinus agrees with Schlegel, whose opinion seems to have become standard. Accounting for the repetition of plots, Sir Edmund Chambers, for example, deduces, "It is part of the intention that the theme of the play should be of universal significance." R. W. Chambers remarks that "Shakespeare has provided in King Lear a sub-plot which simply repeats the theme of the main story. And as critic after critic has pointed out, this is done so that we may feel that we are witnessing

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something universal—a conflict not so much of particular persons as of the powers of good and evil in the world." A. E. Taylor regards it in such terms: "It is the episode of Gloucester ... which ... makes it clear that the passions exhibited for our edification are neither those of woman nor those of male humanity, but belong to human nature universal." As usual, Bradley offers the most eloquent defense; the double action's chief value ... is not merely dramatic. It lies in the fact—in Shakespeare without a parallel—that the sub-plot simply repeats the theme of the main story. ... This repetition does not simply double the pain with which the tragedy is witnessed: it startles and terrifies by suggesting that the folly of Lear and the ingratitude of his daughters are no accidents or merely individual aberrations, but that in that dark cold world some fateful malignant influence is abroad. ... Hence too ... comes that feeling which haunts us in King Lear, as though we were witnessing something universal—a conflict not so much of particular persons as of the powers of good and evil in the world.

The second defense of the duplication, that it intensifies the tragic effect, appears in such critics as Hardin Craig, who, regarding Shakespeare's source-adaptation, sees it as "permeating the Lear story with the tragic tone and temper of the Gloucester story." J. I. M. Stewart views the duplication as "a device of intensification. Two planes of torment, each with its own tempo, are built into the

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17 "The Case of Lear," Univ. Mag. (McGill), VI (1907), 209.
play," while Fitzroy Pyle considers it as achieving "cumulative tragic effect," and Fairchild believes that Shakespeare thereby "increased the emotional intensity of his theme.”

Although these justifications seem cogent, and doubtless contain some truth, they are obviously and unsatisfyingly ad hoc, explaining part, but not all, of Shakespeare's unique and apparently unessential dramatic expense of spirit. For in other plays, such as Othello and Macbeth, he managed to achieve both intensity and universality without such extensive and monotonously parallel iteration; what tragedy more intense than Othello, what drama more universal than Macbeth in its involvement of the cosmos in the horrible deed? While the reasons alleged for Lear's plot-repetition are not entirely to be dismissed, they do not wholly account for Shakespeare's questionable dramatic economy. Indeed, to a man of the theatre such as Granville-Barker, for example, the duplication appears a source of weakness: the play "suffers somewhat under the burden." In addition, despite his comment above, Bradley similarly observed: "The principle structural weakness of King Lear ... arises chiefly from the double action, which is a peculiarity of King Lear among the tragedies."

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21 "Twelfth Night," 'King Lear,' and the 'Arcadia,' MTR, XLIII (1948), 453.
22 Univ. of Missouri Studies, 1944, pp. 47-48.
23 Prefaces to Shakespeare (Princeton Univ. Press, 1946), I, 270.
If, however, it can be shown that Lear and Gloucester, while paralleling each other, have, in addition, separate and contrasting functions, some significance may be found in Shakespeare’s singularly uneconomic deviation.

Among other proposals is that which would see in Lear and Gloucester the traditional aspects of the sensitive soul, the irascible and the concupiscible, anger and lechery being notable characteristics of the protagonists. This traditional dualism would, because of its deeply-rooted medieval and Renaissance conventionality, tend to dramatic recognition. While this suggestion has merit and some truth, it, again, presents difficulties; for while Lear’s intellectual sin of anger receives the conventional punishment of madness (ira furor brevis) and Gloucester’s physical sin of lechery the conventional retribution of blindness (not only Renaissance but universal associations between the two exist; cf. Milton’s self-defense, etc.), it is evident that

25 K. Whitaker, *Shakespeare’s Use of Learning* (San Marino, 1953), p. 310. Cf. L. B. Campbell, *Shakespeare’s Tragic Heroes* (New York, 1952), p. 242, refers to Gloucester as “complementary picture in the traditional sequence of the passions.” James I’s teacher, George Buchanan, points out that “two most loathsome monsters, anger and lust, are clearly apparent in mankind. And what else do laws strive for or accomplish than that these monsters be made obedient to reason? And where they do not conform to reason, may not the laws most justly impose limits upon them? He, therefore, who releases a king, or anyone else, from these bonds does not merely release a man, but sets up two exceeding monsters in opposition to reason...” (italics mine). George Buchanan, *De Jure Regni apud Scotos*, trans. as *The Powers of the Crown in Scotland*, by C. F. Arrowood (Univ. of Texas Press, 1949), p. 128.

26 Milton’s Second Defense of the English People (1654), *Works* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1933), VIII, 63; “Immoderate and unseasonable use of Venus... doth of all things most hurt the sight, and soonest induce blindness,” says Richard Banister’s *A Treatise of... Diseases of the Eves* (London, 1622), Sig. L7v.
Gloucester also shares Lear's angry propensities, his rash and premature fury at Edgar paralleling Lear's outburst at Cordelia. Furthermore, the irascible-concupiscible explanation, while it may appear adequate on a personal level, does not sufficiently connect with the general preoccupation of the play, which is belief. If, on the other hand, the paralleling of Lear and Gloucester can be functionally apprehended in relation to the work's over-all structure and prevailing tendency, a satisfactory explanation may emerge for the double plot.

In order to explain Shakespeare's method in King Lear, it may be helpful, with regard to the problem considered above, to glance first at his processes in other plays. In addition to such obvious instances as the juxtaposing of attitudes to love in Romeo and Juliet (a spectrum ranging from Juliet's to the Nurse's) and of types of friendship in Julius Caesar (youth-friendship, mentioned by Cassius of Caesar, I.i.i.100-113; schoolboy-friendship, mentioned by Brutus of Casca, I.i.i.299-300, and by Brutus to Volumnius, V.v.26; military- or disciple-friendship, Caesar and Antony; marital-friendship, in which the erotic role diminishes to that of confidant and confider, in Portia and Brutus, Calpurnia and Caesar; servant-friendship, Brutus and Lucius, etc.), an example may be chosen from Hamlet's collocation of attitudes to the supernatural, which resembles that of Lear.

If we examine the opening of Hamlet, to take one example out of a number, we find that Shakespeare, in rapid free-hand, has sketched the characteristics of his personages in relationship to the idea of the Ghost. That is to say, by setting up an intellectual topicality,
one on which many of his audience were undecided—Purgatory had been abolished officially but not entirely—and one which would have excited the dissenting responses of the spectators, Shakespeare was able at once to capture their interest, provide the necessary exposition, identify his characters, and introduce a major plot element; further, the clashes in belief operated to provide essential dramatic conflict. In Hamlet, we find the religious topicality of the Ghost approached, first, through the eyes of Bernardo and Marcellus, hardened soldiers both; if they appear disturbed by the vision, it may be implied, the audience might likewise become involved. But the audience may, on the other hand, throw in its lot with the sophisticated and skeptical Horatio; thus the message of the Ghost reaches the spectators through the aroused sensibilities of naive and tough sentries, as well as refined and cautious student. If these are excited, surely then the audience could catch some of their terror and awe; and surely then, Hamlet, whom we have yet to see, could, through the previous exposure of his alter-ego Horatio, likewise be affected: "Marcellus: Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy, And will not let belief take hold of him Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us: Therefore I have entreated him along With us to watch the minutes of this night; That if again this apparition come, He may approve our eyes and speak to it. Hor. Tush, tush, 'twill not appear. Ber. Sit down awhile; And let us once again assail your ears, That are so fortified against our story What we have two nights seen" (italics mine; I.i.23-33). Thus the intellectual conflict, affecting both characters and audience is set
up, for significant religious reasons, and remains unresolved through
the course of the play; indeed, the conflict over the Ghost, established
at the opening, is a cause of perpetual agitation, and provides much of
the unrest in Hamlet's own concerns. In scene two, we find that the
skeptic Horatio, having been convinced, retails the spiritual fact to
his fellow student: "And I with them the third night kept the watch:
Where, as they had deliver'd, both in time, Form of the thing, each
word made true and good, The apparition comes" (208-211). Thus is
Hamlet also involved, and the excitement communicated to him. To sum
up, we have noted a spectrum of attitudes of the contemporary Renais­
sance religious mind towards the reality of ghosts; we do not here speak
of the controversy over their provenance or motives. At the start,
these attitudes include: naive and apparently credulous faith of the
untutored soldiers Bernardo and Marcellus; the skeptical, though later
to be transformed, view of Horatio; and the central and unsettled
attitude of Hamlet, which is later to become almost unmanageably
agitated by related ghostly concerns.

If Hamlet shows the mature Shakespeare deliberately exploiting
parallel ideas for dramatic effect, the more complex Lear reveals him
employing such ideas to provide the very structure of the play itself.
Nowhere else does Shakespeare exhibit such seemingly questionable
economy; and the critical reasons-after-the-fact, such as the need for
expanding man's ingratitude on a cosmic scale, remain somewhat uncon­
vincing. But Renaissance conventions adequately account for Shake­
speare's unprecedented duplication; and we suggest that there may be
no real loss of economy, since Lear and Gloucester stand for antithetical religious positions in this tragedy of man's relation to the heavens. Hence, Renaissance spectators would, in their comprehension of the religious issues of the play, have perceived Lear's and Gloucester's polarity, as well as the conventions which at once established both their paganism as well as the traditional quality of superstitious "excessive belief" and skeptical inadequate belief. This parallel, represented by Gloucester and Lear, was, as a matter of fact, a frequently used, and therefore readily recognized, one.

Conventionally paired, superstition and skepticism (or atheism) assumed a relation of polarity as well as, inevitably, of similarity: extremes to the mean of true faith, they were equally irreligious. In so far as they were similarly opposed to true faith, they could credibly be assigned to the theology of paganism, to—usually—the indiscriminately grouped Jews, Turks, ancient and modern savages, and the antique Greeks and Romans, virtually all outside the sanctified periphery. In its subjective and unhistorical world-view, the Christian-centered Renaissance could ignore time and space in the interests of easy characterization of the infidel. Thus, if any attention at all is to be paid to the ostensibly pagan premises of King Lear, we may conclude that contemporary expectation was to perceive, through admittedy anachronistically transforming eyes, a depiction of pagan personages either superstitious or skeptical in belief.

Evidence for the conventional duality of superstition and skepticism appears frequently in Renaissance writing. After castigating
atheists, for example, Hooker turns his ire on practitioners of superstition: "Therefore to let go this execrable crew [of atheists and Machiavellians] and to come to extremities on the contrary hand." That superstition was the counterpart of atheism, that both were irreligious is, typically, the conviction of Joseph Hall, who, in his Characters of Vertues and Vices (1608) observes: "Superstition is godless religion, devout impiety ... the superstitious hath too many gods: the profane hath none at all." Suggested by Plutarch in "Of Superstition" and expounded by Thomas Aquinas, the concept of true faith as the via media between superstition and skepticism was restated, in terms favorable to itself, by Renaissance Calvinism, which conveniently consigned Catholicism to the atheists' limbo.

Between reason, the soul's left hand, and faith, her right, true religion walked; any deviation to the left led to atheism, any excess to the right led to superstition. Among numerous texts, including Bacon, Donne, John Bate, Henoch Clapham, and John Day, illustrative of the dichotomy, Burton may be cited: "For method's sake, I will reduce them [the fallacious doctrines] to a twofold division,

29 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, ii*2*2, Qu.92 et seq., in Opera (Venetia, 1745-1785), XXII, 480 ff., cited in Schultz, op. cit., p. 265.
according to those two extremes of Excess and Defect, Impiety and
Superstition, Idolatry and Atheism." A mock prognostication of 1601,
A Penniless Parliament of Threadbare Poets, announces, "Atheistes,
by the Law, shall be as Odious as they are Carles: and those that
depend on Destiny, and not on God, may chance looke through a narrow
Lattice at Footmans Inne," meaning prison. More seriously, John
Weemes' A Treatise of the Four Degenerate Sons, sums up the conven-
tion:

The ignorance of God hath two rivers proceeding from it; the first
Atheisme, and the other is Superstition; and as seed sowe in some
hard ground, brings forth no fruit at all, but in other ground it
grows so rank and luxuriant, that the labourer reapes no profit
of it. The Atheist is like unto hard ground where no come growes;
the Superstitious againe exceeds in his worship, and runnes as
farre unto the other extremitie. . . . It is a good observation

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30 Schultz, op. cit., p. 265, provides the following references:
Bacon, Essays, in Works, ed. Spedding, XII, 131, 135; cf. De Aug.,
VIII, 162-163; Med. Sacrae, XIV, 94; Donne, Works, ed. Alford, VI, 187;
cf. p. 160 (line 1); John Bate, The Portraiture of Hypocrisie (1589),
p. 12 (atheism "a feather of the left wing"); Henoch Clapham, Errour
on the Left Hand, Through a Frozen Securitie (1608), where atheism
(chiefly mortality) goes with libertinism and Popish "merits" in opposi-
tion to sectarian Errour on the Right Hand, Through Preposterous
Zeale, 1608; John Day, Day's Dyall (1514), p. 16.

Additional references given by Schultz include: John Smith,
Select Discourses (1660), pp. 36 ff. (Nos. 2 and 3); Margaret (Lucas)
Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, The Worlds Olio (1655), p. 46; Henry
Smith, Works (2 v., 1666), I, 474; John Robinson, "Of Atheism and
Molesworth (1839-), II, 227; Jeremy Taylor, Works (10 v., 1890-), IV,
249-250; George Whitehead's title, Enthusiasm Above Atheism, 1674;
religion shown between two thieves, superstition right and atheism
left, in Alexander Ross, Pansebeia (1653 1655), Ep. Ded., Sig Aa;
Robert Some, Treatise Touching the Ministrie (1588), pp. 9-11; Thomas
Adams, Workes (1629), pp. 178-185; Sir Robert Dallington, Inference
(51), in Aphorismes, 1613; Thomas Scot, Philomythie (1616), pp. 49-50.

31 Sig. B3.
As Bacon observes in his essay "Of Superstition," the one, atheism, is unbelief, while the other, superstition, is contumely, and "certainly superstition is the reproach of the Deity." Significantly, Bacon views the latter aberration with more alarm: "... as the contumely is greater towards God, so the danger is greater towards men. Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not; but superstition dismounts all these and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men." Just as atheism, Bacon implies, is related to reason, so superstition is totally unreasonable, and therefore the greater threat to political stability: "... atheism did never perturb states, for it makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further; and we see the times inclined to atheism ... were civil times. But superstition hath been the confusion of many states and bringeth in a new primum mobile that ravisheth all the spheres of government." Hobbes, of course, rejects both: "I deny there is any reason either in the atheist or in the superstitious ..." 33

As has been indicated, pagans were conceived to be either superstitious or skeptical-atheistic, or both. By virtue of their


superstition, especially, they were led to atheism, polytheism tending to break down men's faith. "It is no mervaille," observes Thomas Fitzherbert in *The Second Part of a Treatise Concerning Policy and Religion* (1610),

if an infinit number of Atheists, did spring in time of Paganisme, out of these two fountaines, whereof Plutarck speaketh, to wit, ignorance of the true God, and the execrable superstition of false, frivolous, and impious religion . . . But what doe I speake of contempt of the gods, growing of paganisme, seeing it is manifest, that it bred in verie manie meere Atheisme, which was well observed by Plutarck in the Egiptians, whereby he also condemned at unawares the religion both of the Greekes and the Romans, which he professed himselfe . . . the multitude, turpitude, and ablection of their gods, honoured with such detestable sacrifices, rites and ceremonies, that their beliefe, and the practise of their whole religion, could not possibly produce in time any other effect in their commonweale with their contempt of God, and of religion, that is to say, Atheysme . . ."

In like fashion, what has been termed the first sixteenth-century English treatment of the pagan gods, Batman's *Golden Book* (1577), in its dedication, proffers "this smal Treatise of the putative and imagined Gods of the Gentiles . . . Wherein we Christians, now lyvinge in the clearest light of the Gospel, may evidently see, with what erroneous trumperies, Antiquitie hath been nozzeled . . . into what Apostacye, Atheisme, Elasphemy, Idolatrye, and Heresie, they have plunged their Soules, & affiaunced their beleueus." If Batman's attitude, and that of other authors who could be cited, represents a typical segment of Elizabethan opinion, it is evident that Shakespeare ran little risk in depicting pagans as superstitious or atheistical; while, on the other hand, he would, in certain quarters, have won

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34 P. 69.
commendation for showing the more virtuous of them, as did Sidney's 
Arcadia, progressing on the path to Christian salvation.

As superstitious "over-believer" and skeptical "under-believer,"

Gloucester and Lear tend to two of the best-known pagan philosophical 
attitudes in the Renaissance, the Stoic and the Epicurean, which 
reflect themselves especially in the contrasting resolutions of the 
characters. In 1604, Abraham Willet's Thesaurus Ecclesiæ (pp. 24-25) 
presents two outstanding points of view among the pagans, which we 
may see reflected in two major attitudes of Lear: the fatalistic, 
estrological, and ultimately Stoic view of Gloucester, and the ultim­
ately unprovldential and Epicurean view of Lear:

First, both the Stoicks and Epicures (which were two of the most 
famous sects of Philosophers amongst the Gentiles, as we may read 
Act. 17, 18) are confuted: The first whereof did bring in a fatall 

tion of necessity, making all things to depend, not upon the will 
and 

providence of God, but upon a certain connexion of causes, to which 
the divine power it selfe should be subject: like as vaine Astrolo­
gers and star-gazers do attribute all to their constellations and 

aspects of starrs. But the Scripture teacheth us, that the Lord 
doeth in heaven and earth whatsoever it pleaseth him (Psal. 135:6; 
he is not forced by, or tyed to any such fatall conjunction of 

causes.

Having piously derogated Gloucester's fatalistic, astrological, and 

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35 Cf. the similar recognition of Stoic and Epicurean tendencies 
in Elizabethan Protestantism, as indicated in the citation in Chapter 
II of John Carpenter's An Argument against Contemnation (1597). Thomas 
Jackson's Treatise of the Divine Essence, part 2 (London, 1629), en­
titles Chapter 22 (p. 179), "The opposite opinions of the Stoicks and 

Epicures...": "The Stoicks did well in contradicting the Epicures, 

which held fortune and chance to rule all things, or at least to bee 
in themselves something, not mere denominations of such events as 

had no certaine or constant cause, apprehensible by man. The Orginal 
of their Errour, was, their desire to be extremely contrary to 
the Epicureans in a matter contingent, or rather in contingencie it 

selfe..."
Stoic pattern, Willet turns to its equally disliked Epicurean counterpart, which, with the later Lear, removes God's providence from earthly cares:

The Epicures . . . (like) many carnall men . . . cannot look into God's providence, as the Preacher speaketh in the person of such, Eccle. 9.10. Time and chance commeth to all. Ambrose hereof writeth well: Epicurei putabant nihil Deum curare de nobis, & Aristoteles usque ad lunam tantum Dei descendere providentiam: sed quis operator negliget operis sui curam? I.c. The Epicures think, that God taketh no care of us; and Aristotle, that God's providence descendeth no lower than the Moon: but what workman doth cast off the care of his works?

In paralleling the deaths of Gloucester and Lear, between joy and sorrow—Gloucester's "flaw'd heart, Alack, too weak the conflict to support! 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, Burst smilingly" (V.iii.195-198) resembles Lear's own ecstatic death between extremes of grief at Cordelia's murder and joy in the illusion that she still breathes, "Look on her, look, her lips, Look there, look there!" (V.iii.310-311)—Shakespeare points to the disparate attending circumstances; as usual, in dramatic fashion, he compares in order to contrast (e.g., Hamlet with Laertes and Fortinbras; Hal with Hotspur, smoothing out their ages). Renaissance psychology recognized the perverse and convulsive effects of such extremes of joy and sorrow, Nashe (Works, ed. McKerrow, II, 114-115) speaking of "many whom extreme joy and extreme griefe hath forced to runne mad," and Timothy Bright's Treatise of Melancholie (1586), which Shakespeare probably knew, remarking (pp. 148-149): "What marvell . . . if contraries in passions bring forth like effects; as to weep & laugh, both for joy and sorrow. For as it is oft seene that a man weepeth for joy, so is not straunge
to see one laugh for griefe."\(^{36}\) In comparing the ends of Lear and Gloucester, Shakespeare illuminates, apart from such relatively committed positions as virtuous piety and Machiavellian atheism, two alternative human resolutions, the anti-heroic and the heroic, given such a hopeless universe in which the gods are either cruelly indifferent or indifferently cruel: (1) Gloucester's self-pitying, pathetic, all-too-human *homme moyen et sensuel*, or old man carbuncular, gratuitously blinded, passively accepting, after his "No farther, sir; a man may rot even here" (V.ii.8), Edgar's further turn of the wheel: "Men must endure Their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all: come on," with "And that's true too" (V.ii.9-11)—weakness and despair, in the lowly earl, merging with a tenuous Stoicism; and (2) the monarchical Lear's heroic and ultimate defiance of the arbitrary and aimlessly cruel heavens, whose vaults, had he the power to wreak, should crack (V.iii.257-259). In relation to the servant at two moments of arch-suffering, Gloucester's blinding and Cordelia's hanging, Gloucester's passive and Lear's active natures are exemplified: while a servant defends the passive Gloucester, reversing hierarchical roles mortally to wound the Duke of Cornwall (III.vii.78-80, Cornwall: "My villain!" . . . Regan: "A peasant stand up thus!"), Lear actively destroys the servant who is hanging Cordelia (V.iii.274-275, Lear:

"I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee." Captain: 'Tis true, my lords, he did). Progressively skeptical and Epicurean with regard to the gods, Lear is set up against the superstitious and ultimately Stoic Gloucester, their differences, like their similarities, being great.37 Ironically, while Gloucester, in his early prognosticating speech, rejects naturalistic explanations of heavenly phenomena ("though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects," I.ii.113-116), Lear, whose actions are here foreshadowed, progresses towards just such naturalistic questioning and "wisdom" regarding thunder and similar matters considered above. Moreover, while for Gloucester, the sun and moon, in their eclipse, are subjects of fearful speculation, inevitably bringing mysterious harm ("These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us," I.ii.112-113), Lear commences by worshipping the sun and the other orbs as holy sources of all good, including his very creation ("For, by the sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Hecate and the night; By all the operation of the orbs From whom we do exist and cease to be," I.iii.111-114); this disjunction, in tone and attitude, in the opening act, sets the stage for the providential changes to ensue. And, at the end, Gloucester's spying into the mysteries of things via astrological prognostications (I.ii.112-124) having, with dramatic irony, been fulfilled ("love cools, friendship falls off, brothers

37 Some critics regard Gloucester merely as a small Lear; cf. Irving Ribner, "Shakespeare and Legendary History: Lear and Cymbeline," SQ, VII (1956), 50. Epicureanism had been earlier employed by Shakespeare as a measure of a character's shifting viewpoint; cf. Cassius, Tit.Caes., V.1.77-79, "You know that I held Epicius strong...."
divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father"), it is relinquished, while Lear himself hyperbolically assumes the role of taking "upon's the mystery of things, As if we were God's spies" (V.iii.15-16).

Whatever, then, the analogizing and centripetal mental habit of the Elizabethans may ultimately have transformed Lear into, they would, prima facie, have tended to see the characters as pagans, and, as pagans, as superstitious or atheistical. This polarity of deviations from the mean of true belief was, moreover, so firmly established as to facilitate recognition on the stage, extremes of "over-belief" and "unbelief" having been constant objects of admonition. Too-ready embrace of the preter-human was as dangerous as skeptical rejection of the preter-human; the one replaced true piety with fear and trembling towards the unknown, the other lacked sufficient piety towards the unknown; the one held the causes of things to be blindly supernatural, the other held causes of things to be merely natural; the one insisted that no rational explanation could satisfy the obscure terrors of a world he never made, the other sought persistently for explanations which he felt either existed or were inevitably to be found. In the present study, we are not concerned with such modern refinements of skepticism as agnosticism or unitarianism, but with the inveterate Elizabethan disposition to lump doubters into the atheistical camp.

One distinction was preserved, that between "outward" or candid skepticism, and "inward" or hypocritical skepticism; this dichotomy, conventional in the Renaissance, derived ultimately perhaps from Plato's
Laws. Thus, the distinction between superstition and atheism was further subdivided into that between outward (Lear) and inward (Edmund) atheism. In general, therefore, both superstition and skepticism were regarded as excesses, as deviations from the rational or Aristotelian mean, which the Renaissance, in its ideal view, upheld. In conclusion, it seems probable that the convention was so strong which related the pair, superstition and skepticism, that the mention of one could readily evoke the idea of the other, for both were threats and extremes to the true Christian faith; further, the concept of paganism would result in the invocation of either of the two alternatives. Understanding Renaissance notions of paganism, and Renaissance attitudes to pagan belief, we are in possession of certain conventions helpful towards interpreting King Lear.

Finally, in addition to Lear and Gloucester, Cordelia, Edgar, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund represent not only themselves, but also the polar positions they maintain, the priscă theologia and atheism. King Lear, we conclude, is misleadingly described as a union of main plot and sub-plot. It rests, rather, on the complex interplay of four polar religious positions, reflected in the four groups of pagans: Prisca theologia piety, Superstition, Skepticism, and Atheism. Although a number of commentators have remarked on the unusual abstract tone of the work, its characters being, as one critic, following Bradley, observes, "distinguished and opposed with . . . precise sharpness,"

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this quality, we suggest, is accounted for by the fact that, while not precisely a *drame à these*, it *is*, to a large extent, a drama of ideas, the working-out, through antithetical religious positions, of major problematical relationships between man and his God.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I

In order to answer the question with which this study started, "What is the validity of the optimistic Christian interpretation of King Lear?" we have had to consider the play in relation to its Renaissance religious background. A brief recapitulation of the conclusions of each chapter will serve to bring to mind the relevance of the parts to the aim of the whole study.

The first chapter indicated that the majority of recent interpretations of the drama tended to the theory of Christian optimism in one or both of its aspects: (1) that, by analogy with the morality tradition or with Dante, the protagonist was somehow redeemed; and (2) that presiding over the human action was a benevolent or personal Providence.

The second chapter offered evidence that in Renaissance Italy, France, and England, the concept of a Special Providence increasingly came into question; this questioning coincided with a period of renaissance skepticism. In addition to the skeptical disintegration of providential belief, another factor was the breakdown of the medieval analogical relation, and the progressive distancing of God from man, so that the Deity became, in effect, a Deus absconditus whose seemingly arbitrary and capricious workings were, according to such
influential figures as Calvin and Montaigne, beyond the power of feeble human reason to evaluate. As would be anticipated, the effect of such altered perspectives was, in many quarters, helpless despair, reflected, for example, in the sense of cosmic malevolence of Shakespeare's source, the Arcadia, in the not exceptional "flies" speech of Gloucester, and in the ambiguous thunder of King Lear. Since Calvin exerted a major influence over Renaissance England, and could have reached Shakespeare through numerous directions, it is reasonable to assume that an awareness of the Deus absconditus, at least, was present at the time of the writing of his tragedy; nevertheless, if the concept of a de-anthropomorphized and unappealable Deity did not come through either Calvin or Montaigne, it could have entered Shakespeare's mind during the composition of Lear through his use of the Arcadia, whose author was formed and moved in a Calvinist ambiance, and whose personages continually lament their victimization in a mysteriously hostile universe. Indeed, while expressing that leit-motif of inescapable human affliction, the Arcadia, in its rendering of a heathen landscape, also presents three other attitudes to Providence: (1) the prisma theologica or virtuous heathen, foreshadowing the Christian, exemplified in such characters as Pamela. In her pious devotion emerge Christian feelings similar to those of Cordelia, whose depiction has misled critics, unaware of the convention and its relation to the source, into exaggerated Christian interpretations of the whole tragedy; (2) the atheistic, represented by Cecropia and foreshadowing Goneril, Regan, and Edmund; (3) the superstitious, illustrated by the adulterous old lecher, Basilius,
anticipating Gloucester. Such attitudes to Providence, the *prisca theologia*, the atheistic, the superstitious, as well as the indeterminate, constitute the major religious positions in the *Arcadia*; moreover, they comprise the religious alternatives ascribed in the Renaissance to heathens; and they foreshadow, as the third chapter indicated, the providential attitudes of the chief characters in *Lear*. In connection with the second, or atheistical, attitude, evidence for a significant climate of Renaissance free-thought was presented. Next, it was shown that Shakespeare's probable source-play, the old *King Leir* is permeated with Christian emphases that, from comparison of the two works, it is evident that Shakespeare wished to avoid; the change from the orthodox to the ambiguous use of thunder is especially noticeable in the later work. From such comparisons, it was concluded that Shakespeare intended a more complex perspective than that afforded by the Christian optimism of the old *Leir* and of many recent interpretations. Finally, although it would seem to be self-evident, or, at least, to follow by definition, citations were adduced to show that Renaissance expectation, except for the *prisca theologia* exemption, was to view heathens as atheistic or superstitious, or both.

Chapter III demonstrated that in the major characters of *King Lear*, comprising the members of the Gloucester and Lear families, the four attitudes appearing both in the *Arcadia* and in the Renaissance conception of paganism, clearly emerge, a conclusion verified by an examination of their "belief-utterances." (1) In the first category, or *prisca theologia*, are Cordelia and Edgar; (2) Goneril, Regan, and
Edmund possess an atheistical outlook; (3) Gloucester is evidently superstitious; and (4) Lear is shown to move from pagan belief to dis-belief.

In addition to relating the minor characters of Lear to the thematic preoccupation of the play, the fourth chapter, by an inspection of the efficacy of prayers and curses within the play, and of sequential ironies, revealed the work's implicit as well as explicit direction regarding Providence. Evidently, such directions move far from the Christian optimism broached by modern critics. Finally, if the explanations advanced thus far are correct, they may aid in accounting for the anomaly that Lear alone, among all of Shakespeare's tragedies, has a fully developed and repetitive double plot. Insofar as Lear and Gloucester have contrasting and complementary functions, evidence has been adduced to indicate that King Lear is not a wasteful conjunction of primary and iterative secondary plot, but a juxtaposition of four attitudes towards Providence, which help to provide the structure of the play itself.

From the evidence presented above, it may be concluded that the optimistic Christian interpretation of King Lear is invalid as: (1) no evidence exists to show that Lear arrives at "salvation," "regeneration," or "redemption," and (2) the purported benevolent, just, or Special Providence cannot be shown to be operative. While reasons which have misled modern criticism into such interpretations have been suggested earlier, a full account is beyond the scope of this study.
Finally, whatever else may be true, it is clear that the views of many recent critics regarding the play's Christian optimism will have to be revised; such positions, for example, as those which see the tragedy as a traditional morality, and those which see it as following the sin-suffering-redemption pattern, are, it should by now be evident, a result of unhistorical, a priori distortion of the work's significance. To a certain extent, those critics seem to be correct; the play seems to start with such premises and appears to progress to such a conclusion, but only through the fourth act; for the devastating fifth act shatters, more violently than an earlier apostasy might have done, the foundations of faith itself.

What, therefore, are we left with, and how shall we answer the question regarding the tragedy's religious significances? Several points of view suggest themselves, and their result indicates no simple solution. For one thing, the play ends with the death of the good at the hands of the evil; and among the sacrificed good is a virtuous heathen believer, while among the evil are atheists. Thus, it may seem to be a play which leans to the side of faith overcome in this world by the forces of evil, and so, from a Christian point of view, an indictment of atheistic wickedness. But we find that, among these forces of evil, the chief villain is a man who, at the end, becomes converted to a virtuous view, exchanges forgiveness and repents. And further, among the good who are destroyed is a King who blasphemes against the heavens. Hence, we are left with a Hamlet-like confusion
of values in terms of a chiasma of ethical and religious ideas and consequences.

To add to the confusion, moreover, we have the problem that the play is, in its premises, ostensibly pagan. Thus, from one point of view, whatever happened to its characters might be irrelevant to the Christian universe of Shakespeare's spectators. It might be said, for example, that in a pagan world of unbelievers, religious values are both confused and erroneous, and thus the consequence of such values would not concern the Renaissance viewer's own religious problems. Hence, the play, in its temporal irrelevance, might have failed to interest the egocentric spectator.

But, on the other hand, if we assume that the Shakespearean spectator analogically transformed the characters and situations in Lear into Christian terms, we are left with the spectacle of a Christian tragic hero who ends as a skeptic blaspheming his Deity, a unique occurrence in the dramatist's work, and one fraught with danger, both politically and artistically; at a time when The Atheist's Tragedy (c. 1607), in all its naive scourging of the disbelieving villain, trod the boards, are we to expect the limited sophistication of a Jacobean audience to have applauded a Shakespeare turned Shavian?

We must, therefore, in view of the antinomies of dramatic evidence and contemporary circumstance, conclude: (1) that Shakespeare's creation was intended as an ostensibly "realistic" depiction of pagan life; (2) that, nevertheless, an unhistorical, Christian-conditioned Renaissance author and audience could only, with difficulty, have
objectively and detachedly viewed a presentation of religious problems, without converting them to some extent into Christian terms; that, therefore, while the play's paganism weighs heavier, and is intended as *prima facie* data, the work contains, in addition to the *prisca theologia*, certain Christian allusions which would have, in relation to the conditioned audience, made the pagan depiction more dramatically palatable and effective; and (3) the audience would have the more sympathetically regarded the heathen's difficulties with his gods insofar as the Jacobean age was experiencing a similar crisis in religion and the idea of providence; further, an attack on heathenism could have been taken as a blow for Christianity.

The conclusion, in brief, of this study is that Shakespeare's *Lear*, despite its Christian allusions, is, intentionally, more directly a syncretically pagan tragedy; on the other hand, although its "realistic" depiction of heathen religious attitudes, far from simple camouflage, is not intended to provide allegorical one-to-one correspondences with the world of Jacobean Christianity—and could not, without serious consequences to the author—its contemporary analogical significance would not have been lost on members of a sympathetic audience, *circa* 1605, undergoing, in related terms, its own theological crisis. By depicting a superstitious pagan progressing towards doubt of his gods, Shakespeare secured for the play both the approbation of the less speculative devout, who saw in its direction the victory of the True Faith, as well as the interest of those more troubled and sophisticated auditors who were not to be stilled by pious assurances in the unsteady
new world of the later Renaissance. For the latter, *King Lear* carried its own *tua res agitur* significance; it made more vivid the image of
that horror, the all-dissolving chaos, for those who could not turn
aside and stop their beating minds.
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