

CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE



WE APPROACH THE SUBJECT OF *King Lear* in all humility, with a desire to interpret, so far as we are able, the magnificent and multifiform significance of this great symphony of human passion. We shall not speak in praise of its noble harmonies and savage dissonances, of the undercurrent of irony pervading it in subtle minor cadences from beginning to end. Many eloquent pens have done honor to *Lear's* surpassing quality as poetic drama. We shall merely endeavor to shed what light we may upon the magnitude of the dramatist's historical reference, the vast scope of his range, and the towering sense of human

catastrophe which in *King Lear* inspired his creative imagination to a pitch verging upon madness.¹

In our belief, Lord Oxford worked upon this, his crowning dramatic achievement, for years—off and on throughout the 1590's and after—in a gathering crescendo of passion and despair which drained his vitality and contributed to his death from physical and nervous exhaustion at the age of fifty-four.

Even in its genesis, the play had a certain complexity. Following closely upon the composition of *Macbeth*,² it must have been begun in 1589 or 1590 and, while based upon the old chronicle of "Leir," have symbolized fundamentally, or at least initially, the question of the English succession, the three daughters of Lear personifying the three lines of descent from Henry VII.

Since an analysis must follow the pedestrian method of one step at a time, although the subject be a fusion of all the parts in a supreme artistic whole, we shall begin with the germ of the plot, which furnished, in this case, as in that of the *Saxo Grammaticus* foundation of *Hamlet*, only a springboard for a leap into a torrent of mingled fact and fancy. The legendary Leir, a figure of the Bronze Age, accepts at face-value his three daughters' expressions of filial love, dividing his kingdom into two, instead of three parts, when the honesty of the youngest tempers her tribute, bestowing her, dowerless, upon a King who, in subsequent adaptations, became the King of France. He is mistreated by his two elder daughters but is rescued and restored to his throne by the King of France, reigns cheerfully again until his death, and is succeeded by Cordella, or Cordellia. (The name *Cordelia* is original with Oxford.) That is the substance of the tale as told by Geoffrey de Monmouth, by Holinshed, by Warner in *Albion's England*, in the main, by Sackville's *Mirror for Magistrates*, and in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (II.x.27-32).³ Oxford did not take the name *Cordelia* from Spenser, since his play preceded *The Faerie Queene*. The story of Gloucester is said to have been derived from *The Pitiful State and Story of the Paphlagonian unkind King, and his kind son*, related in a chapter of Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. Since nothing is less

¹ We have been guided in the historical phase of our analysis by two excellent studies, Mrs. E. T. Clark's *Hidden Allusions*, pp. 600 ff., and Lillian Winstanley's scholarly *Macbeth, King Lear and Contemporary History*. To these we shall refer merely by the authors' names.

² Miss Winstanley calls *Lear* a "companion-piece" to *Macbeth*, but she dates it according to the old Shakespearean canon, crediting Sidney Lee's assertion that it "was written during 1606," which is founded simply upon a record of its performance in Dec. 1606.

³ Cairncross says that *The True Chronicle History of Leir* was a pirated and botched edition of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, instead of Shakespeare's *Lear* having been built on it, as has often been supposed, that *King Lear* was written at "some time earlier than 1591."—*The Prob. of Hamlet*, p. 157.

likely than that Oxford would have taken anything from Sidney—on the contrary!—they must have drawn upon the same source.

One of the masterly strokes in *King Lear* is the way in which this sub-plot reflects and emphasizes the main situation, as if it were merely another facet of a cosmic truth, or a corroboration of some natural phenomenon. This correspondence might be compared with the repetition of the pattern of the sea's surface in that of desert sands, with their rhythmic waves and corrugations and whorls. In a similar fashion the Fool reflects, or epitomizes, Lear's own folly—he calls himself "Lear's shadow"—and is extinguished when that passes.

King Lear is larger than personal life, and seems to be a parable on an heroic scale of the tragic inevitability of man's self-destruction, through gullibility and pride. The tempest against which the old King is pitted in his nakedness is, in the final analysis, the inimical force which opposes the individual in a hostile universe, but it also had a more particular and literal significance too, as we shall attempt to show.

Henry VII of England left three children: Margaret Tudor, who married James IV of Scotland, and whose descendant, King James VI of Scotland, bore the added title of *Duke of Albany*; Henry VIII, King of England, who, upon the death of his brother Arthur, inherited the title of *Duke of Cornwall*; Mary Tudor, who married Louis XII, *King of France*, had previously been betrothed to the *Duke of Burgundy*, and was Henry VIII's favorite sister.

Here, then, we have the English historical prototypes of Goneril, wife of the Duke of Albany; Regan, wife of the Duke of Cornwall, and Cordelia, betrothed to Burgundy, then married to France. Lear says (I.1.45-8):

The princes, *France and Burgundy*,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd.

In 1589, the Catholic nobles of Scotland had been plotting with Philip for the landing of a Spanish force to remove James from the throne and defeat Protestantism. The Protestants of Scotland, as well as the Huguenots of France, counted upon Elizabeth's support.⁴ In this aspect, Edmund is a composite presentation of the ever-active Catholic conspirator, Henry Howard, and his nephew, Philip Howard, who was tried for treason in 1589.

The following passage takes cognizance of the trouble between England and Scotland at that time:

⁴ Hume: *The Gr. Lib. B.*, p. 490. For details of the Catholic plots, Mrs. Clark cites Spanish State Papers, Ediz. (To these, Oxford would, of course, have had access.)

Cornwall. Have you heard of no likely wars toward, 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?
Edmund. Not a word.
Cornwall. You may do then, in time. (II.1.10-13.)

Later, this passage would have been aimed at James's participation with Essex in the conspiracy against Elizabeth. This situation, in 1601, is adumbrated in part in Kent's speech (III.1.19 *et seq.*), although the participation of the French refers to that of the Guises of an earlier date, who backed up Spain:

Kent. . . . *There is division,*
 Although as yet the face of it be cover'd
 With mutual cunning, 'twixt *Albany and Cornwall*.

And this is made clearer when, in speaking of "division between the dukes," Gloucester refers to a letter so secret that

'tis dangerous to be spoken: I have lock'd the letter in my closet . . . If I die for it, as no less is threatened me, the king, my old master [i.e., England] must be relieved. There is some strange thing toward, Edmund. . . . (III.3.10-20.)

This is the letter King James (who was Duke of Albany) sent to Essex at the time of the conspiracy against Elizabeth (who stands for Cornwall, since her father was Duke of Cornwall), which Essex subsequently surrendered to the Council. It was, indeed, "dangerous to be spoken" and was kept a state secret.

The dramatic action of *Lear* moves upon different levels of time, and thus of historical reference. Each character has several prototypes, every one startlingly convincing, while Oxford has, as usual, identified himself with more than one. In the final version, comprehensive and philosophically symbolic, he is King Lear himself—King Earl—in his aspect of Vere, consort to the Queen. He is Kent, in his presentment of faithful servant, who, though "banished," nevertheless continues doggedly to serve his sovereign. He is Gloucester, the father of the Edmund and Edgar aspects of a son who is at once a bastard and not a bastard, a traitor and a high-minded, loyal prince: he is blind to Edmund's treachery and sustained by Edgar's love. And he is, as always, the Court Jester, "Lear's shadow"—or Earl's shadow—the motley side of the noble Earl, the epitome of his suicidal folly. Goneril calls him Lear's "all-licens'd fool," as Olivia-Elizabeth called her Clown "an allowed fool."

The last line the Fool speaks (III.6.87) is significant:

And I'll go to bed at noon;

for it refers to the dissolution of Oxford's theatrical company in 1590, at the height of his success, and his consequent retirement (going to bed): the temporary abandonment of his folly of traffic with the stage.

To proceed with the English topical allusions belonging to 1589, we find that Kent stands, in his more obvious presentment, for Sir Francis Drake. Although Drake's expeditions had consistently brought Elizabeth enormous gains and great wealth, and although he had been in actual command of the victorious English fleet in the battle of the Armada (Lord Admiral Howard having had only nominal command), yet when he returned from a post-war expedition aimed at the destruction in port of the remainder of Spain's ships, defeated by storms, sickness, shortage of provisions, Elizabeth treated him shamefully, refusing him any further command at sea. But he remained loyal, employing himself on fortification-work and bringing a water-supply to Plymouth, an engineering feat of which he bore the brunt and even the expense himself.

Lear's anger at finding Kent in the stocks (II.4.21 *et seq.*) is Oxford's resentment at Drake's humiliation and banishment; while the "all-licens'd fool" chides the Queen in the Fool's lines, which so perfectly express her ingratitude:

Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind,
But fathers that bear bags
Shall see their children kind.
 Fortune, that arrant whore,
 Ne'er turns the key to the poor. (II.4.47-52.)

Ingratitude is, of course, a dominant theme of the tragedy. Oxford would have been incensed at the Queen's ingratitude toward Drake, who died in 1596, in Panama, a disappointed and broken man.

Kent's disguise is apparently the symbol of Drake's change from seaman to one on land duty, Kent's banishment Drake's. Kent's language is not only that of a seaman—

[*To Oswald*] I'll teach you differences. . . . If you will measure you *lubber's* length again, tarry . . . (I.4.88-90)—

it is vigorous and fluent:

A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats: a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave; a whorson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd, in a way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pandar, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch. (II.2.15 *et seq.*)

Drake was said to have been "short-tempered, violent, autocratic, vain—and how he could swear!"⁵ (If Oswald is, in this connection, Sir Christopher Hatton, as we find he is in another, he may have influenced the Queen against Drake.)

⁵ E.T.C., p. 612; cf. Benson: *Sir F. Drake*.

Moreover, Drake was a staunch Protestant:

Kent. I do profess to be no less than I seem: to serve him truly that will put me in trust; to love him that is honest . . . to fight when I cannot choose; and to eat no fish. (1.4.13-17.)

Protestants had not to eat fish on special days; hence the expression in current use.

In his subsequent description of himself, Kent is not only Drake but Oxford too:

I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it . . . and the best of me is diligence. (1.4.32-5.)

Drake's biographer, Benson, notes that he "had always to be doing something; he hated idleness . . . like the devil."⁶ And Kent gives a name-clue in the line (1.2.105),

Sir, in good sooth, in sincere verity . . .

A further correspondence between Kent and Drake is that in 1589, Drake was forty-eight years old. In 1598, Oxford was forty-eight; and he was certainly working on *Lear* at that time. This was the year Authority imposed his official anonymity—a kind of banishment.

Lear. How old art thou?

Kent. . . . I have years on my back forty-eight. (1.4.36-9.)

Lear's daughters could hardly have stood, with any definiteness, for Oxford's daughters. Elizabeth Vere was only fifteen, while the others were small children, in 1590. There may, toward the end, have been some desperate sadness in his heart, some anguished sense of bafflement, because they belonged primarily to the Cecils, but of this we can take no measure. Cordelia stands in the dramatist's mind for his plays, as Miranda and Perdita do (to say nothing of Audrey). So that Cordelia's repudiation by Lear, who is now merely the monarch, partially represents the repudiation of Oxford's theatrical company and his dramas, in 1590, and Elizabeth's failure to give him sufficient support, when the plays had been serving her by telling her the unvarnished truth (as well as giving the populace the truth of their history and inspiring them with patriotism).

Cordelia's refusal to flatter Lear (1.1.87-93) is Oxford's refusal to flatter Elizabeth in the plays, which speak only the truth. The repetition of "nothing"—i.e., O—is significant. The protest Kent makes against Lear's treatment of the daughter who told the truth and did not stoop to flattery was just such a protest as Oxford would have made to the Queen; and there is an exceedingly definite *sous-entendu* in Lear's words about breaking his vow, which represent an attitude

typical of Elizabeth. It might be Oxford addressing the Queen when Kent says:

Royal Lear,

Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,

. . . What wouldst thou do, old man?

Thinkst thou that duty shall have dread to speak

When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound

When majesty falls to folly. . . .

Lear. Kent, on thy life no more.

Kent. My life I never held but as a pawn

To wage against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,

Thy safety being the motive.

Lear. Out of my sight.

Kent. See better, Lear; and let me still remain

The true blank of thine eye.

.

Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow

Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift;

Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,

I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

Lear. Hear me, recreant!

On thine allegiance, hear me!

Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,—

Which we durst never yet,—and with strain'd pride

To come betwixt our sentence and our power,

.

. . . take thy reward. (1.1.139-73.)

This passage has the authoritative and vital ring of actuality. We have here, beyond all doubt, a graphic record of a characteristic alteration between the mature Earl of Oxford and the aging Queen, a later version of the *contresens* of 1581, after which, in his subsequent banishment, he had written *Richard II* to warn her to beware of enemies who flattered her. His use of the words "true blank" is especially pointed:

See better, Lear; and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.

For by this he means, Let me record the truth for your eye to see, the word "blank" being a synonym for Hamlet's "tables," as "these waste blanks" of Sonnet 77 is also.

The expression, "on thine allegiance," was one Elizabeth frequently used to enforce obedience. For example, to prevent the Speaker of the House of Commons upon one occasion from presenting a bill of which she disapproved, she said: "I charge you, upon your allegiance, if any such bills be offered, to refuse them a reading."⁷

⁶ Op. cit., p. 16.

⁷ F. Chamberlin: *The Sayings of Q. Elizabeth*, p. 113.

"Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow": this is of high significance. Oxford had certainly sought to make Elizabeth abandon her fetish of chastity, which she euphemistically called her "vow."

Kent's speech to Cornwall (II.2.72 *et seq.*) is Oxford saying in another way what he has said in Sonnets 25, 124, and 125 about fawning courtiers, although here he is being boldly personal:

Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain
Which are too intrinse t' unloose. . . .

The long passage between Lear and the Fool (I.4.94 *et seq.*) replete with identity-clues, belongs to this early period:

Fool. . . . here's my coxcomb. . . . Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb. . . . *Truth's* a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out when Lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink.⁸
Kent. This is *nothing*, fool.

Fool. . . . Can you make no use of *nothing*, nuncle?

Lear. Why, no, boy; *nothing* can be made out of *nothing*.

Fool. Prihee, tell him, *so much the rent of his land comes to*: he will not believe a fool.

This was the time when Lord Oxford, having been deprived of his income by the sale of "his land," was called upon to pay a large indebtedness to the Court of Wards.

Fool. That lord that counsell'd thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,
Do thou for him stand;
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear;
The one in motley here,
The other found out there.

If Lear is placed beside the Fool, "the sweet and bitter fool" will be synchronously revealed: one is already "in motley," and the other—Lear—disclosed for what he really is; or perhaps he means, left out in the cold.

Lear. Dost thou call me fool, boy?

Fool. All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

Kent. This is not altogether fool, my lord.

As Lear has given away his kingdom, so has Oxford—not only his "lands," but his "titles" too, his very name.

Fool. . . . now thou art an *O* without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, *thou art nothing*. (191-3.)

⁸ A dog, like Caliban, who tried to destroy Prospero and his magic island, in other words, the earthbound sinking Puritans who had no imagination, were being coddled while companies presenting great works of the imagination, or spirit, were banned.

The Fool's remark when he sees Gloucester approaching with a torch (III.4.111) may well refer in this version, to the device Drake used of sending out eight fire-ships, on July 29, 1588, to intimidate the Armada:

Look! here comes a walking fire.

And so may Lear's,

To have a thousand with red burning spits
Come hissing in upon 'em. (III.6.15-16.)

The allusions to contemporaneous events in France are too complex to be discussed here. Perhaps one reason why the French King never returns is because Henry III was murdered in the late summer of 1589.

We have identified the Edmund of this first version of *Lear* with Henry and Philip Howard. Corroborative evidence appears in several passages, the most striking being Edmund's scorn for the "foppery" of attributing bad fortune to "the sun, the moon, and the stars" (I.2.123 *et seq.*).⁹ This attitude corresponds with Henry Howard's attack on Richard Harvey's astrological studies, in a book entitled *Preservative against the Poison of supposed Prophecies*, which had caused him to be suspected of treason and heresy and again sent to the Fleet. Another book, *Discurtive Problems concerning Prophecies*, had been published by John Harvey in 1589; so the long dialogue between Gloucester and Edmund had topical interest.

The trial Lear arranges (III.6) has a strangely dual significance. In 1589-90 it alluded to the trial of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, at which Oxford was a member "of the Commission."

Lear. 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' the commission,
Sit you too. (36-40.)

In the final version, this represents the trial of Oxford's own beloved son, Southampton, with the Earl of Essex, for treason, in 1601. As first peer of the realm, Lord Oxford was compelled to sit at the top of the row of Commissioners, and to be a party to the unanimous verdict of guilty. It had gone hard with him when he had been obliged to act as one of the judges at the trial of the Queen of Scots, and no doubt equally so at that of Philip Howard. Now, when his own son's life was at stake, the ordeal almost unsettled his mind. He never recovered from the anguish of this experience. What bitterness

⁹ The word *foppery* meant *duffery*, (foreswear).

must have informed Lear's words to the Fool; "thou . . . yoke-fellow¹⁰ of equity!"

Lear cries:

Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place!
False justice, why hast thou let her 'scape?

The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweet-heart, see, they bark at me. (36-64.)

These must be dogs his son had had when he had first come to live with his father. Even they reproached him for sitting in judgment on their young master. The Earl loved the Fair Youth with all his heart.

Anne, the "sweet little Countess of Oxford," had died in 1588. Lord Oxford was, as we have said, suffering keen pangs of remorse at that time, and this may have contributed to the touching sadness of Cordelia's death in the original version of the play.

It is of striking note that Edmund plays the murderous part towards Cordelia that Iago, also principally Henry Howard, played towards Desdemona. This sharply enhances the analogy and the characterization. The fact that Howard was Oxford's cousin, as well as the Queen's, gives point to Edmund's remark (II.5.22-4):

I will persevere in my course of loyalty, *though the conflict be sore between that and my blood.*

Regan's and Goneril's judgment of Lear (I.1.294-7) sounds like a woman's judgment—perhaps it was Elizabeth's—upon Oxford:

Regan. . . yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.
Goneril. The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash.

And someone—Elizabeth again, or Burghley—may well have chided him when, in the early 1590's, he was spending so much time revelling with his "Jewd friends," somewhat as Goneril chides Lear (I.4.239 *et seq.*):

As you are old and reverend, should be wise.
Here you do keep a hundred knights and squires;
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd, and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a grac'd palace.

This was the time when Oxford, Nashe, and Greene were dining on "Rhenish wine and pickled herring," and when Nashe had written *Strange News*. In fact, just preceding another passage where Regan

¹⁰ In a letter to Lord Willoughby in 1596, Queen Elizabeth used the word "yoke-fellow."

refers to "the riotous knights That tend upon my father," Cornwall speaks of having heard "strange news." (II.1.88-96.)

Oswald calls Lear "this ancient ruffian." There seems very little doubt that the disillusioned Earl of Oxford took on some of Falstaff's convivial qualities during the early 1590's.

Evidence has not been wanting that Lord Oxford was abnormally unsuspicious of his enemies, indeed that he remained so until the end of his life; thus Edmund's words to Gloucester apply also to him:

Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy! (I.2.186-8.)¹¹

And Kent is Oxford, the secret dramatist, still serving the Queen, when he says (I.4.1-7):

If but as well I other accents borrow
That can my speech diffuse, my good intent
May carry through itself to that full issue
For which I raz'd my likeness.

He is Hamlet saying that he may "put an antic disposition on." And presently he will say, with Hamlet's special grace of phrase:

Some dear cause
Will in concealment wrap me up awhile;
When I am known aright, you shall not grieve
Lending me this acquaintance. I pray you, go
Along with me. (IV.3.53-7)

We are given unmistakable proof of one period at which *Lear* was being written—the same, incidentally, as that referred to above: the early 1590's—in three allusions pointing to Oxford's loss of Castle Hedingham, which, on December 2, 1591, he alienated to his daughters and Lord Burghley.¹² (This was, of course, also like Lear giving away his kingdom to his daughters.) The first is the Fool's remark that Lear is now "an O without a figure" (I.4.192); another is his statement (III.2.25-6),

He that has a house to put his *head* in has a good *head-piece*,¹³
stressing the pun on *Hedingham*; and the third the better part of I.5:

Fool. . . but I can tell why a snail has a house.
Lear. Why?
Fool. Why, to put his *head* in; not to *give it away to his daughters*, and

¹¹ Cf. *Hamlet*: IV.7.133-5.

¹² Ward: p. 396.

¹³ Cf. *Timon* (III.4.64-5):

Who can speak broader than he that has no house to *put his head in*?
The fact that Oxford seems to have revised *Timon* at this time indicates his determination to drive home the whole story.

leave his horns without a case. . . . Thou shouldst not have been old
before thou hadst been wise.

Lear. O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven;
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad! (27-47)

This loss of his ancestral castle must have been a tragic experience for Oxford. He felt he was frittering away his life, and he must have been bitter against Burghley, who waxed rich as he himself was reduced not only in lands but in influence as well. He was surely speaking from his own sore heart when he had Lear cry:

Life and death! I am asham'd
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them! (1.4.295-9.)

It is especially moving that a man in his early forties should have felt himself old; but so they did in that day, though, of course, Oxford was much older when he put his final seal upon and, we may feel sure, shed his final tears over, his old King Earl who was "more sinned against than sinning."

In the consciousness of a man of such intense feeling as Lord Oxford the fear of madness must more than once have presented itself. Lear speaks of this again when he so piteously says (11.4.218):

I prihee, daughter, do not make me mad.

Macbeth speaks of lying "on the torture of the mind . . . In restless ecstasy," and cries "O! full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife," while, with the tumult in his brain mounting, Lear turns to the Fool:

You think I'll weep;
No, I'll not weep:
I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
Or ere I'll weep. O fool! I shall go mad. (11.4.282-6.)

The Gentleman, in speaking to Kent (III.1) describes the distracted old King as one who

Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn
The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain.
.
.
.
Kent. But who is with him?
Gentleman. None but the fool, who labours to outjest
His heart-struck injuries. (10-17.)

"None but the fool": his "shadow," his other self. This is the sensitive creature we have come in a measure to know, who, "wrecked" by worldly snares and perfidies, strives to subliminate his sufferings and laugh his enemies to scorn.

There is no doubt that Lord Oxford, after the official imposition

of his anonymity and the imprisonment of Southampton for conspiracy, felt himself, at times, as Lear did,

A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man. (III.2.20.)

But he can still say to the Fool:

Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee. (11.2.72-3.)

He felt a poignant regret for his gaiety and foolery which was now extinguished for ever.

It is at this time that Kent, in describing the storm, is, of course, referring to the symbolic storm which destroyed Oxford:

Since I was a man
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard; *man's nature cannot carry*
The affliction nor the fear. (III.2.45-9.)

This certainly would have been no exaggeration of Oxford's sense of personal catastrophe in 1601. "The affliction" of having Southampton in the Tower for life, "and the fear," must have caused him indescribable anguish. And Lear himself says shortly afterwards:

. . . *the tempest in my mind*
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there. (III.4.12-14.)

Gloucester, father of the son who is a traitor and also of the loving son who acts a part and cherishes him—the two a dual presentment of Southampton—is likewise unsettled by anguish:

The grief hath craz'd my wits. What a night's this! (III.4.167.)

"Grief" and "storm": the two were inseparable in the poet's imagination.

Some of Edgar's fantastic expressions, as "poor Tom,"¹⁴ are thought to have been derived from Harnet's *Declaration of Popish Impostures*, published in 1603; but a trial had been held before the battle

¹⁴ A word regarding the genesis of "poor Tom." After the dissolution of the monasteries, many beggars, formerly fed and befriended by the monks, were left to wander through the country living by their wits. Some feigned madness and were called Bedlam Beggars, Abraham men, and poor Toms. Diccon of Bedlam, of *Gammer Gurton's Nelly* (circa 1562-63) was one of the better type. It is significant that Decker, who was closely associated with Lord Oxford, wrote in one of his tracts: "Of all the mad rascals, that are of this wing, the Abraham Man is the most fantastic. The fellow that sat half-naked at table today, from the griddle upwards, is the best Abraham Man that ever came to my house, and the notablest villain. He sweats he hath been in Bedlam, and will talk frantically of purpose. . . . He calls himself by the name of Poor Tom, and counting near anybody cries out, 'Poor Tom is a cold!'"

of the Armada to examine Edmund Peckham's servants, and the book—which Oxford may well have seen in manuscript—was based upon evidence developed at this trial.¹⁵ Of course, he could have attended the trial. He would certainly have known all about it. Gabriel Harvey had said long ago that he knew everything that went on.

Edgar's speech (II.4.83 *et seq.*) tells much about the young Southampton, merged here—like Adonis, in *Venus and Adonis*—with the young Edward de Vere, and daringly too:

A servingman [to the monarch: the water-bearer perhaps?], proud in heart and mind; that *curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap, served the lust of my mistress's heart, and did the act of darkness with her*; swore as many oaths,¹⁶ as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven; one that slept in the contriving of lust and waked to do 't. Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramoured the *Turk*; false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey. . . . Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind; says *saum, mun ha no nonny, Dolphin my boy, my boy; sessa!* let him trot by.

Southampton, if not the young Oxford, had curled his hair; young gallants wore gloves in their caps, for a knight threw down his glove, his gage, for a challenge;¹⁷ Oxford had certainly "served the lust of [his] mistress's heart" and was called her "Turk" by Elizabeth, whether for the reason given here or not. As for the "hog in sloth . . . wolf in greediness," this fits Shylock's description of Launcelot (*M. of V.*: II.5.46-51.) "Saum"—I am, Edgar seems to be saying, "must have no"—whatever the nonsense-word "nonny" may imply; nomination, or name, perhaps? Then "Dolphin"—i.e., Dauphin—"my boy, my boy." This is madness with an abundance of method in it.

The scene on the heath (IV.1) in which Edgar soliloquizes about the depths to which fortune can reduce a man and is then joined by Gloucester, seems to offer one of the final blasts of pure pessimism uttered by Lord Oxford before his rebellious proud spirit bowed to defeat:

World, world, O world,
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life would not yield to age. (IV.1.10-12.)

Then,
As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport (36-7);

and,

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. (IV.6.183-4.)

¹⁵ E.T.C.; p. 615. The coincidence of the name Edmund is not to be overlooked. In Jonson's *Every Man In*, the provincial Stephano, evidently Shalpsper, as in *The Tempest*, makes it his ambition to swear like Lorenzo, *ju-Southampton*. He says (II.3): "So I had as lief as an angel I could swear as well as that gentleman."

¹⁷ See *H. V.*: IV.7, 118 *et seq.*

"All the world's a stage," he had said long ago, "And one man in his time plays many parts." Before that, Antonio had likened the world to a stage, his "part a sad one." Later, from the depths of disillusionment and despair, he had cried:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more.

Thus he had seen it, for the stage had been his life; and he had dramatized his experience.

The cliff at Dover Lord Oxford would have seen and speculated about when he had embarked on the *Edward Bonaventure* in 1588 and when he had written certain of the Sonnets to the Fair Youth. Sonnet 60 says:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
and Edgar,

The murmuring surge,
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes. (IV.6.21-2.)

Now he uses it as symbolic of the height from which, in his blindness, he himself has fallen. Edgar, Gloucester's son, preserves and comforts him, as, in the end, the Fair Youth comforted the poet as preserver of the name William Shakespeare.

It is to be supposed that the Earl of Oxford, when his son was restored to him, felt as Gloucester did when Edgar succors him after his imagined fall:

. . . henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
"Enough, enough," and die. (IV.6.75-7.)

Edgar's password, "Sweet marjoram" (94) recalls Sonnet 99—

And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair—

and may have been used as a deliberate clue. (A few minutes later Lear is lamenting,

They told me I was *every* thing.)

Moreover, there could be no more obvious identification than that of Edgar, when he says (V.3.122-5):

Know *my name is lost*
By *treason's tooth* bare-gnawn and *canker-bit*;
Yet *am I noble* as the adversary
I come to cope.

Here we have the Fair Youth of the Sonnets, his true name "lost," Beauty's Rose, "canker-bit" by illegitimacy, or by being unacknowledged.

edged, and now convicted of "treason." Regan has spoken of him (II.1.93) as,

He whom my father nam'd? your Edgar?—

which makes us wonder if Elizabeth, who is the sovereign, as Lear was, had named Southampton Henry, more because it was her father's name than because it was that of his foster-father, the Second Earl of Southampton, who had, of course, been named for Henry VIII. Or had Oxford—who "in sleep," or in his dreams, had been a King Earl—named him for the character with whom he had always identified himself, Henry V, Prince Hal? These things we cannot know, but they are provocative and dramatic.

There is a reference to Southampton's taking part in the revels of Oxford's literary friends—the poets who courted his favor, causing the father so much concern, as the Sonnets attest—when Regan adds:

Was he not companion with the riotous knights
That tend upon my father? (95-6.)

The dramatist describes Elizabeth too, while he is about it, in Gloucester's words about the Duke of Cornwall, whose title was, as we have said, one belonging to the King of England:

You know the fiery quality of the duke;
How unremovable and fix'd he is
In his own course. (II.4.91-3.)

We have seen this illustrated in the dialogue between Kent and Lear. The Earl of Oxford had suffered bitterly enough, in all conscience, from Elizabeth's selfish obstinacy.

If she ever talked to him one half so badly as she did to Leicester and even Burghley, no record of it remains, except in a letter to his father-in-law of October 1593, where he says, "I was browbeaten and had many bitter speeches given me." Nothing is said about it in the plays, beyond the dialogue of which we have just spoken. Through the complete effacement from the pages of history of Shakespeare's conversations with his Queen, political, literary, personal, the world has—we repeat—suffered an incalculable loss. It is an act of Philistinism which has surely never been surpassed for cold-blooded wickedness.

The war between the poet and the Philistine is age-old. Worldliness usually wins the present, the spectacular, victory, but the poet, as Edward de Vere knew, conquers in the end. Someone has remarked that "To say that anything can be really *poetical*, and yet *not true*, is a mere contradiction." The Philistines will continue to protest, but Vere must ultimately triumph.