THE BROKEN BOND MOTIF IN KING LEAR

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by
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William Shakespeare's *King Lear* "asserts the Perfection of God's harmonious order..."¹ The play is an example of what happens when a king deliberately lays aside his duties to God and to his kingdom. Although the play is painful to watch, it would have been even more so to Shakespeare's first audiences.

As a result of the long wars of the Roses, Englishmen had a horror of civil disorder. The wars ended when Henry Tudor established himself as the undisputed King of England, but order and stability in England was not established until the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and even then her subjects were worried about who might be the next heir to the throne.² It is precisely because of this tradition of civil disorder that the impact of *King Lear* would be so vivid to the Jacobean audience.

Although Shakespeare was writing *King Lear* under the reign of James I, he had Queen Elizabeth's reign as an example of what a well-ordered state could be when the monarch fulfilled his responsibilities to the kingdom.

"To be a King and wear a crown," Elizabeth says:

> is more glorious to them that see it than it is pleasure to them that bear it. For myself, I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a King, or royal authority of a Queen, as delighted that God hath made me this instrument to maintain His truth, and glory, and to defend his Kingdom from peril, dishonour, sic tyranny and oppression."³

God invests a King with the duty of defending and protecting a kingdom from "peril, dishonour, tyranny, and
oppression." In the family the father is the natural head; in a kingdom the monarch is the divine head. When Lear proposes to split his kingdom among his three daughters, he commits a sin against the law of order which is established by God. **King Lear** is a statement of what happens when divine order is defied.

We are prepared, however subtly, for a motif of broken bonds in the first scene of **King Lear**. Although the motif is not immediately evident, and does not involve a character in the main plot, Gloucester's conversation with Kent reveals that he has broken marriage vows by begetting a bastard son, which sets a precedent for broken or perverted human bonds throughout the play. Although this is a minor offense in the overall view of the work, we are aware that the precedent for broken, severed, or perverted bonds has been established.

However, the broken bond with which the play hinges is the bond which exists between King and kingdom. It is the King's first duty as a monarch and divinely appointed representative to preserve and protect the welfare of his kingdom. In the fourth line of the play, Gloucester tells us:

> But now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most... (I.1.3-5)

King Lear is about to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. The full impact of Lear's intended division
can easily be lost to the modern reader or audience, but the idea of Lear's division of the kingdom "would at once alienate a Jacobean audience, for they feared nothing so much as the prospect of a divided England."

Gloucester's and Kent's conversation in the first scene establishes that the King has divided the portions of the kingdom for Albany (Goneril) and Cornwall (Regan) equally, but from Lear's own speech we learn that he had intended for the third and finest portion to be Cordelia's. What King who has the welfare of his kingdom in mind would intentionally divide his land into three sections? This question is especially important if we are to assume that Lear knows anything about the nature of his daughters, which it seems he must if he chooses Cordelia over the two elder daughters.

In the first scene of the play, we have the stage set for both Lear's and Gloucester's undoing. Although we do not at this point have a clear picture of the character of Edmund, we can see why he is bitter about his relationship with his father. It would be somewhat less than comfortable for Edmund to hear his father make light of his begetting.

As Gloucester says:

Sir, this young fellow's mother could; where upon she grew round-wombed, and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault? (I.i.13)
In the central plot (the Lear story) we find that once Lear irrevocably breaks his sacred bond to his kingdom and to himself, he is lost. Lear accepts the false bond that Regan and Goneril offer him, and greedily demands their false exclamations of love. Cordelia, however, refuses to play her father's game. What would have been truth from Cordelia has been made gross lies by her sisters. To her father's question, "what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?" Cordelia can only reply:

Cordelia. Nothing, my lord.
Lear. Nothing!
Cordelia. Nothing.
Lear. Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.
Cordelia. Unhurry that I am, I cannot heave My heart into my mouth, I love your Majesty According to my bond; nor more nor less. (I.1.86-94)

One important word to consider in the previous dialogue is Lear's use of the word "opulent." Overstatement is the kind of public display Lear seeks from his daughters. He wants a display of overt affection, particularly from Cordelia. Lear has purposefully given Cordelia the strategic position of speaking last; and it would have been a simple matter for Cordelia to exaggerate the already exaggerated vows spoken previously by Regan and Goneril; however, Cordelia refuses to do this. Instead, she speaks the truth—"according to my bond." (I.1.94)

Cordelia has been Lear's favorite child. He has previously split the kingdom so that Cordelia will have the best portion, and he had fully intended to spend his last
days with her; but Lear now reacts like a retulant child. Later as Kent comes to Cordelia's aid, and tries to show Lear his folly, he too is met with the same cruelty and injustice for speaking the truth.

Lear is supposed to be the shepherd of his people, their leader—not their divider; but as he lays aside his duties to be able to "unburthen'd crawl toward death," (I.i.42) he gives away his rights and power. However, he cannot, in the natural order of the universe, lay aside his duties for his own convenience, and through his unnatural act, he disturbs both his kingdom and the balance of the universe.

Kingship in King Lear is not conceived of as sovereignty of a political body only, not as an office only, but as a divine institution, the King being the voice of God and the embodiment of God's will. It follows that God installs a King, determines the length of his reign,...a King is part of the grand structural unity of the universe.5

Lear soon realizes that by giving away his power and breaking his kingly bond and duties, he will lose the respect that a king with power and authority can command. The chaos he has caused has already begun.

Once he is their subordinate, Lear fails to recognize his daughters' treachery, until he begins to feel the effects of what he has done. When we meet the Fool, who tells us what the broken bonds mean, he realizes to us the severity of what Lear has done. As the Fool shrewdly observes, Lear has given all his titles away, but he still
wants to pretend that he has them. Lear asks his Fool why he calls him, Lear, a fool, and the Fool replies, "All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with." Notice that the Fool says that the titles were "given away" by Lear; they were not taken away from him. The fact that Lear has intentionally given the titles away is the beginning of the tragedy.

Shortly thereafter, the Fool again relates the exact nature of the breach caused by Lear when he observes that Lear:

maddest thy daughters thy mother, for when thou gavest them the rod, and cut'st down thine own breeches. (I.iv.187)

The King's bond to his kingdom is broken, but there now also exists an inverted bond between father and children.

The first of the natural or human bonds to be disrupted as a result of Lear's division is illustrated by the preceding speech of the Fool's. Not only has Lear given over his kingdom, but he has also shirked his responsibilities as a father, especially to Cordelia.

Paralleling Lear's own disrupted family relations are those in Gloucester's family. Gloucester tells us in the first scene of the play that he intends for Edmund to be removed from England. "He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again." (I.i.32) It is apparent from this statement that Gloucester knows very little about Edmund. He has, in effect, carted Edmund off to be rid of a bothersome bastard son, and he intends to remove him from the
scene again. The reader would assume that Gloucester knows his elder and legitimate son somewhat better—but does he? On rather sketchy evidence, Gloucester rages against his elder son, Edgar, while he accepts the accusations of his bastard son, Edmund. As a result of Edmund's manipulation of false evidence, Gloucester is quickly led astray. This becomes particularly horrible to us when we remember Edmund's invocation to the gods to "stand up for bastards." (I.ii.22) Just prior to his father's entrance, Edmund refers to himself as "Edmund the base." (I.ii.20). After his father exits in this scene, Edmund boasts:

I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. (I.ii.142-3)

As Edgar later charges in Act Five, Edmund has been traitor to bond and duty, "false to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father." (V.iii.133-4). So too in the house of Gloucester the familial bonds are askew.

We have father turning against faithful child to support the unfaithful child, child against father in deceit, and sibling turned against sibling. Here too there occurs a parallel between the Gloucester plot and the Lear plot. A "good" child is banished, while the treacherous children are rewarded. To the Jacobean audience the significance of the turn of events would have been extremely acute. They would have recognized how far the actions of the characters had degenerated.
To the Jacobean audience, this first soliloquy of Edmund's is equally an indication of monstrous villainy, for it is a direct challenging of the hierarchical ordering of its society.

If the chain of order is broken in just one link, then all the other chains or bonds are ineffective or perverted. Gloucester summarizes the situation in his own superstitious way as he tells Edmund:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction, there's son against father. The king falls from bias of nature, there's father against child...all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. (I.ii.112-24)

At the time of Gloucester's speech, the bonds in King Lear are more than "cracked" and encompass far more than Gloucester recognizes at the time. The above speech catalogues those bonds already broken, and those bonds yet to be broken in the play. Later in the same scene Edmund warns Edgar:

I promise the effect he writes of succeed unhappily as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, death, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces, and maldictions against King and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breeches, and I know not what. (I.ii.156-63)

All of the things that Edmund mentions become dramatized in the course of the play, but at this point the bonds have been perverted without the full impact of the perversion having been felt. The breach between Lear and Cordelia has occurred, but in his moment of pomp and glory, Lear has not yet recognized his loss.
As she makes an alliance with Regan, Goneril tells us in the first scene, that Lear in "The best and soundest of his tire hath been but rash." (I.1.298) We have seen his rashness at work in the two part division of his kingdom: the banishment of his favorite child for being truthful, and the banishment of a trusted friend and counselor, Kent. As the Fool later says on this point:

"Truth's a dog must to kennel. He must be whipped out, When lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink." (I.11.124)

Cordelia and Kent are banished; Edgar is soon to follow; and Regan, Goneril, and Edmund (by Lear's own doing) now have the authority and power to bring about the final collapse of an ordered existence.

The nuptial bonds to which Edmund refers can be of two sources. The first deals with Edmund's own parentage. Since Edmund is the younger son, Gloucester has obviously broken marriage vows. The second source also concerns Edmund directly—his relationship with Regan and Goneril. By the conclusion of the tragedy, both women have been wooed by Edmund; each are pitted against the other; each finds fatal end as a result of her own jealousy and treachery.

"Maledictions against the King" soon become painfully apparent from many directions. The most horrible are brought about by the treachery of Lear's daughters. Lear becomes painfully aware of his reduced status when he is stripped of his hundred gentlemen knights. In the original provision of his division of the kingdom, Lear was to have the
"Title and addition" of a king. It soon becomes all too apparent that his daughters, Regan and Goneril, consider him a bothersome, senile old man. We finally reach a point where it is almost impossible to grasp the awesomeness and unnaturalness of the twisted bonds. We watch in dread and awe as we see Lear saying to his daughters:

I will have revenges on you both
That all the world shall--I will do such things--
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. (II.iv.274-77)

The former speech is spoken to the daughters, who, in the previous act, have heaped all the exclamatory phrases of love they had at hand on their father the King. Once a king, Lear is now powerless--having once blindly accepted the exaggerated love offerings. Even more hideous is Lear's curse on Goneril:

Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.
Into her womb convey sterility.
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derelict body never spring
A babe to honor her! If she must bear,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart dismatared torment to her.
Let it start wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cedent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and content, that she may feel
How shenser than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child! (I.iv.207-311)

Although Lear curses Goneril, he does not forget the bond which he shares with both of his treacherous daughters.

He reminds himself that they are of his own flesh:

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
In my corrupted blood. (II.iv.216-19)
It is, after all, Lear who has sired Regan and Goneril, as well as Cordelia, and it is Lear who has given them the opportunity to turn him over their knee. At this point in the play, Lear has not yet accepted his part of the responsibility for what has happened. Even if he were not a king, natural order demands that a father, not the children, be the head of a household; but Lear is not a respected member in either of his daughters' homes.

Even Goneril's husband, Albany, is horrified by the grossness of his wife's actions against her father; and he has partially benefited from them. He accuses her with:

What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd:
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence the head-lugg'd bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madd'd.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefited! If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep. (IV.11.39-49)

Albany himself, who has profited as a result of Lear's folly, is outraged by the old man's treatment, and he foresees much of what will happen. The daughters have worked "vile offenses" against the former king their father. Edmund has worked "vile offenses" against Edgar and his father, Gloucester. And humanity does indeed turn and "prey on itself, like monsters of the deep."
The Elizabethan child was taught not only the fifth commandment, 'Honor thy father and thy mother,' but also that he should imitate the youth of Rome, which had one in such reverence that everyone did honour to elders, as to his parents.  

Goneril and Regan have completely disregarded the ethical canons of their age, which is appallingly apparent to the audience of Shakespeare's day. Edmund, too, disregards the commandment to honor his father. He also defies an even higher duty of honor to the old King as he conspires with the plans of Regan and Goneril to turn the weary old man out into the storm.

Even the King's messenger is "vilely offended" when he comes bearing the King's message to Regan.

Albany's speech about "tigers not daughters" is directly pointed at Regan, but others in the play do not escape the idea that purveys it. Goneril is deliberately cruel to her father, and at one point she tells her servant, Oswald, to fabricate even more lies against Lear in her letter to Regan. The idea that a servant is allowed to add lies to lies about the former King illustrates how much the pompous Lear has become the "child changed father." (IV.v11.7).

Kneeling, Lear comes to his daughter, to ask for the bare essentials of life—"reiment, bed and food." (II.iv.158) He begs her to remember what a child owes to his father:

\[
\text{Thou better know'st} \\
\text{The offices of nature, bond of childhood,} \\
\text{Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.} \\
\text{Thy heft o' the kingdom has thou not forgot,} \\
\text{Wherein I thee endowed.} \quad (II.ii.180-84)
\]
However, Lear (i.1.95) has himself refused to recognize the "bond of childhood" when he refuses Cordelia's honesty in speaking no more than her bond will allow. In that same first scene, Lear does not recognize the "effects of courtesy" when he banishes Kent. He has also refused to accept "the offices of nature" both as a king and as a father. No matter how much we can feel Lear's pain, we cannot forget that he brought it about.

Lear is not the only one to suffer "maledictions." Referring again to Edmund's speech (i.ii.156-63) we are also made painfully aware of "maledictions against" a nobleman--Gloucester. As she vents her wrath on Gloucester for aiding Lear, Regan has the old man's eyes put out. If Lear suffers in spiritual agony, Gloucester's suffering is the physical counterpart. We are able to recognize how inhumane and cold Regan and Cornwall have become when Cornwall says, "Out, vile jelly! Where is thy luster now?" (III.vii.83) Gloucester's mistreatment is handled so cruelly that even Regan's servants take pity on the old man. The desensitization is crowned with Regan's topping insult as she bids Gloucester to "smell his way to Dover."

We are not to suppose that the fate which overtakes Gloucester is mere retribution for lechery, for his sin goes deeper than that. Gloucester violates the laws of primogeniture, as surely as Lear violates the duties of kingship. Gloucester's sin is thus also a denial of God's Law and of the harmonious order of the universe, although on a plane slightly lower than that of Lear: the two sins work the universal collapse of order with which the clay is concerned.
Once Lear has broken the highest bond—divine representative of God and shepherd of his subjects—there is no loyalty to any bond or any duty that can exist in the new chaotic world.

A statement of what must inevitably result when the order is disrupted appears in Shakespeare's play, Troilus and Cressida, when Ulysses says:

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows! Each thing
Meets in mere capricious. The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a son of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead;
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong
(Between whose endless jar justice resides)
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Power into will, and will into appetite;
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforse an universal prey,
And last set up himself. (I.iii.109-24)

We are reminded of Albany's speech when he says that,

"Humanity must perforse prey on itself, /Like monsters of the deep." (IV.ii.48-9) The order has been broken; chaos rules the universe.

In King Lear the only bonds that still hold meaning are those either in exile or those in disguise. Since Cordelia has been removed from the scene by a "noble" France, she cannot be further punished for her compliance to her child's bond. Not until after the raging storm, and Lear's pursuit on the heath can she return, and then we find that she has not returned in safety.
Although Kent has been banished by Lear, he disguises himself in order to aid his master. He has made very clear in the first scene of the play his relationship to the King, and his position regarding the bond that lies between them. When Lear cautions Kent to say no more in Cordelia's behalf, Kent replies:

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thy enemies, nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive. (I.i.158-60)

It is precisely for his own stated reasons that Kent returns, despite his own danger, to aid the King, even though he must disguise himself from the man he chooses to serve.

Kent recognizes both the danger he places himself in, and the danger the King faces now that Goneril and Regan wield authority. In a soliloquy he explains his purpose further:

If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned,
So may it come, thy master whom thou lovest
Shall find thee full of labors. (I.iv.5-7)

Although in secrecy, Kent remains loyal to his master, the King. However, Kent does not escape the indignities that those who aid the King suffer. He is the true messenger the King, and is received irrevocably. He is put into the stocks for telling the truth about Goneril's servant, Oswald, and he must also suffer the indignity of watching Oswald being warmly accepted into Regan's household. Kent calls Oswald a "beggar, coward, parader, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch," (II.i.22-3)
and we are inclined to agree with him. Oswald refuses to draw his sword: he has been allowed to compound the lies that Goneril has written in the letter to her sister; and when a servant is allowed to speak against the former king, we have another strong reversal in bonds.

Although the scene between Kent and Oswald provides the dramatic function of comic relief between the two scenes involving Lear and his daughters, there is still a thematic truth here. Kent accuses Cornwall and Regan of deceit as he says:

Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain
Which are too intricate to unloose; smooth every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel;
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Renew, affright, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught, like dogs, but following. (II.ii.79-86)

Kent fully understands their ability to agree or disagree according to the circumstances at hand. Their changeability has been more than adequately illustrated in the opening scene of the play, where they complied fully with what Lear wanted—as long as it was to their own advantage. Now that authority has been invested in them, they are free to show their more dangerous sides, which Lear had evidently not known.

Everyone but Lear seems to recognize the natures of Regan and Goneril. In an effort to give "honest council" (I.i. iv. 34), Kent warns Lear that he is about to:
Kill thy physician and the fee bestow
upon the foul disease. (I.i.166-7)

Even Cordelia says to them, "I know what you are." (I.i.272)

Kent also serves Lear during the storm scenes. He is
the one calm, sane character in the madness and raging
delerium that prevails on the heath. He remains the wise
counselor, the loyal follower to the end.

Edgar too must disguise himself if he is to survive,
and as a result of his peril, he dons the guise of a
bedlam beggar (II.iii). Under the banishment invoked
by his father, Edgar cannot now exist in the chaotic
kingdom. He says, "Edgar I nothing am." (II.iii.21). He
has accepted the responsibility of existence, and complies
with what he must do. Although he does not intentionally
set about to aid the king or his father, he does so in the
hovel. Edgar, too in his pretended madness, points out
that treachery has abounded. In his description of the
servants, he could just as well be describing Regan and
Goneril when he says:

Swore as many oaths as I seake words and broke
them in the sweet face of Heaven. (III.iv.90-1)

With a great deal of animal imagery, he continues to
describe the sins and excesses of others in the play as:

False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand,
bog, in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness,
dog in madness, lion in prey. (III.iv.94-7)

Regan and Goneril have previously been described in terms
of animals before, as having "wolfish visages" and being
foxes, monsters, wolves, and crabs.
All three of the unfaithful children have been "false of heart." Before the motion of the play is completed, all of them have murder laid to their account, and even Cornwall falls into this category. Edgar describes them in the most repulsive terms of animal imagery as "hog in sloth" and "dog in madness." The greed and cunning of Edmund, Regan, and Goneril is illustrated throughout the play, both in their dealings with one another, and in their quest for power.

It is at the point where Lear encounters Tom O'Bedlam that he finally asks himself, "Is men no more than this?" (III.iv.106). All meaningful bonds have been shattered, all meaningful relationships are in chaos, and even nature protests the outrages and disruption of order in a violent raging storm. To Lear's question, "Is man no more than this?" there are only partial answers. One such partial answer is Lear's own endurance of the storm on the heath. He finally recognizes the disaster man can cause when he fails to fulfill his duties; but he also possesses a new compassion:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That hide the velvet of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your loosed and windowed raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en  
Too little care of this! Take physic,omp.  
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)
Upon this outward turning, this realization, Lear can now establish a bond with "poor naked wretches," and, as he says to himself, "expose thyself and feel what wretches feel." These things give the universe—If not Lear, some answer to his heart rending question.

Cordelia is yet another kind of answer to his question. Although she has fulfilled a bond as duty requires, she receives the wrath of a childish, old man, banishment and finally she is hanged like a dog. Is the acceptance she receives from the King of France, and the Reconciliation with her father enough of a balance for the terrors she endures? I think Lear comes to the final conclusion that man can be like "monsters of the deep" that "prey upon themselves," but the most important thing is that man can, if he chooses, be more.

The others who embark upon the journey of the storm with Lear cannot help but become more aware of themselves. They come to know what they have been, and finally what they are. Indeed, all those worth savins are cursed of any taint that will interfere with the re-establishment of order that must later come about.

The Fool's role is not a casual one in King Lear. He is not the standard court jester. As stated previously, he serves a choral purpose as he recounts to the King what he has done, as well as foreshadowing certain events to come.
The Fool has his own natural disguise of folly to protect him. Although he "kites" for the banished Cordelia, he remains by his master's side. Because he is a "fool" his words are protected by his station. He is free to speak the truth precisely because he is the "folly-maker" in the play. There is a paradox of wisdom in folly surrounding the role of the Fool throughout the parts of the play in which the Fool appears. "The Fool is used as a reminder both to Lear and the audience of Lear's initial behavior."

The Fool constantly refers in jest and in song to the misjudgement that Lear has made. "He reminds the former King:

Fools had ne'er less wit in a year,
For wise men are grown foolish,
And know not how their wits to wear,
Their masters are so stupid. (I.iv.181-4)

It is Lear who has age, but lacks the wisdom that age is supposed to bring. The Fool naturally points out the inversion that has begun to take place as he says:

May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse? (I.iv.244-45)

And soon afterward he says to the King, "they will make an obedient father," which underlines the inversion even more clearly. At this point Lear is as yet unaware of the full consequences of such an inversion.

Although the Fool is pertinent in his remarks to Lear, he is given "ree rein. However, the Fool does make a conscious effort to stay out of Goneril's reach. He realizes that the treacherous daughters will not tolerate
They do not want Lear to know what the Fool has to tell him; that he indeed:

hadst little wit in thy bold
Crown when thou savest thy golden one away.
(I.iv.128-9)

As the Fool shivers and whimpers on the heath, we see an added dimension to the chaos that Lear has brought about. It is because of Lear that the Fool too must endure the fury of the storm. Although the Fool remains loyal to his bond with the King until his purpose in the play is served, once Lear reaches a self-awareness of his folly, he no longer needs the Fool to tell him what the folly has been. Since Lear, after the storm, is no longer just a "shadow" (I.iv.251) of the King, the Fool is removed from the scene. This occurs in the third act. Granville-Barker intimates that tragedy takes us out of ourselves, while comedy restores us to ourselves.10 It is for this reason that the Fool serves Lear so well. By his own doing, Lear creates the tragedy which frees him from his "old" self. Through his suffering and the Fool's understanding, Lear becomes a renewed, receptive, and compassionate human.

Once Shakespeare has dramatized the terrors that fill a disordered world, he must bring us back to some elements of order if the play is to have any meaning for us. Lear is now truly able to say, "I am the King himself." (Iv.vi.84) When Gloucester asks him, "Is't not the King?" Lear
can truthfully reply, "Aye every inch a King." (IV. vi.108-11). However, the lesson of the tragedy cannot stop at this point. There are still disrupted bonds and disloyalties that reign in the kingdom; the disruptive forces represented by Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund are taken care of among themselves. By the very nature of their evilness they bring about their own disastrous ends. Although they establish bonds among themselves, they do not intend to, nor do they keep them. Edmund has betrayed his brother and father; but he cannot leave well enough alone; he must also play Goneril and Regan against each other. As he dies, the irony cannot escape us when he says:

Yet Edmund was beloved. (V.iii.239)

Because they have no true loyalty to one another, the relationship between Regan and Goneril must also founder. They have been "monsters" to their father, and by the end of the play, they are little more than that to each other. What feeds on chaos cannot help but end in the same kind of chaos. Their evil has been their own self-destruction. Along with Lear, we see them as "unnatural hogs," and if the world is to regain its order, they cannot be allowed to live.

Through her love and the faithfulness of her bond to her father, Cordelia partially helps to restore order. She will not allow the now chastened King to kneel at her feet. She recognizes that if Lear is to be a King he can
make no exceptions in his authority. She calls him "your Highness," which begins the re-establishment of bonds and order to the chaos-ridden kingdom.

Oh, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.
No, sir, you must not kneel.

Cordelia is also re-establishing Lear as the father head of the household. Although Kent has been willing to follow Lear before this time, and has called himmaster, it is Cordelia's reinstatement of Lear as the Head that serves as a catalyst for the order that must be returned.

Lear, however, has not yet paid the full and final price for the rejection of his kingly bond. The final price to be paid is the life of Cordelia. The new order cannot be founded upon the old one. As a result, Lear pays his price in the end for his folly, and Kent, always loyal will follow his master to death. "My master calls me, I must not say no." (V.iii.322)

There is a reason for the catastrophe that befalls Lear and Gloucester. Man is not as Gloucester says:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport. (IV.i.37-8)

Gloucester and Lear both pay mightily for the wrongs they have done: Lear because he revoked his duty as "divine" representative of God; Gloucester because he breaks the law of primogeniture (his bond with Edgar his older son).

In the new order that is to be established, we are left with Albany and Edgar: Albany, who was horrified at Goneril's treatment of her father; and Edgar who says:
Men must endure 
Their going hence, even as their coming hither. 
(v.11.10-11)

Edgar's statement is a reflection of what Lear has learned on the heath. It is in the re-realization of what order and duty to bonds mean that the new kingdom can finally be established.
Footnotes


3Harrison, p. 27.

4Ribner, p. 124.


7Watson, p. 374.

8Ribner, p. 130.

9Harrison, p. 665.

10Ribner, p. 135.

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