

# CHARACTER DUPLICATION AND EMULATION IN *KING LEAR*: A STUDY OF *KING LEAR*

Maria Luisa Dañobeitia  
Universidad de Granada. Spain

The precise idea of this paper is that of studying the process of duplication and emulation which seems to govern the structural development of *King Lear*. The general tendency is that of seeing Lear as a monolithic figure whose tragedy arises solely from some flaw in his character. Yet, it cannot be so. Lear is not alone and thus he cannot be the only one responsible for his misfortunes. In many ways Kent and Gloucester follow a pattern of behaviour that is similar to that of Lear. This prompts us to conjecture that Lear acts in such an idiosyncratic manner, wanting to know who loves him most, because he is sure that the test is going to work out to the satisfaction to his personal needs<sup>126</sup>. Lear's drama arises not only from his attitude towards kingship, but from that of his chancellors. Surely they must have had to obey him regardless of the nature of his orders, and surely they must have humoured him to the point of emulating him in both deed and language.

Bearing in mind the idea of emulation and duplication we propose to explore two things. One is the manner in which Kent emulates Lear's language during his confrontation with Oswald<sup>127</sup>. The other is the way in

---

<sup>126</sup> Lear's personal motives have been explored in a paper written by this author, "Lear's 'You have some cause': A Study of *King Lear*," *Miscelánea*, (Universidad de Zaragoza, Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, 1989) 10:17-45. We wish to refer the reader to this paper for the required bibliography.

<sup>127</sup> As far as we are aware, a detailed analysis of the intriguing fact that, one way or other, all the characters act as a mirror of Lear, has not been made. Frances A. Shirley in *Swearing and Perjury in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: George Allen & Unwin) 129, comments that Kent emulates Lear.

which Shakespeare has manipulated the names of Lear's daughters in order to create a system of duplication, not to say inclusion. A system that makes it possible to contain, partially or completely, Lear's name in those of his daughters or vice-versa<sup>128</sup>. What is not contained yields similar phonetic patterns, which, in the case of Cordelia serve to express what she is going to signify in Lear's life, and in the nature of his drama through intriguing puns. His tragedy has been duplicated in that of Gloucester and indirectly in the person of Kent, although in the latter case it is grounded in a psychological attitude rather than in physical acts. The system of duplication and emulation indicates several things: that Lear is not alone; that Gloucester functions as Lear's surrogate when it comes to matters related to sex and procreation<sup>129</sup>; that Kent's becomes Lear's wrathful duplication of his verbal anger; and that his daughters are Lear's replicas, with the exception of Cordelia, and that in Cordelia's case what is not contained in Lear's name communicates what she must be in his life, that is, an ordeal.

---

<sup>128</sup> In this case we cannot argue in favour of coincidence because the names have been sufficiently altered for us to ponder the possibility of a deliberate alteration. Shakespeare has introduced a number of significant changes in his source, (if it was his source), *The history of the Kings of Britain*. The most important one is that of the kings' name. From Leir he has changed the king's name to Lear, so making possible the full inclusion of Cordelia's name in his. In addition the word-play that we are going to discuss would not make sense if Shakespeare had not changed the thematic development of the story. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), trans. Lewis Thorpe. Spenser in his *Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto X, does not feel the need to change Lear's name, and thus years later, instead of Lear we find Leyr and instead Goneril, Gonorill and Cordelia, at times, is Cordeill. Only Regan's name has not been changed. In *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, Lear's name is Leir and that of his daughters, Gonorill and Ragan and Cordella. In *Holinshed's* Lear is Leir, Regan is Regan, Cordelia is Cordeilla and Gonoril is Gonorilla. It is not always easy for the average reader to realise this because in some modern versions of *Holinshed*, published precisely for students of Shakespeare, the names have been changed to make them fit in with those of Shakespeare, See, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, ed. Richard Hosley (New York: Capricorn Books, 1968). In *John Higgins*, Lear is Leire, Goneril is Gonerell, Regan is Ragan and Cordelia is Cordell or Cordile.

<sup>129</sup> For some critics *King Lear* is a play about sex. See Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare, Spencer and Donne*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 178.

Lear gives the impression of being a man bent on having his will since he has never experienced in his life a real and direct opposition even from those who love him well. On account of this blind obedience he knows little about either his own family or his counsellors. At his court he is not the only one who knows little about himself and others. Gloucester's tragedy, in part, derives from his inability to evaluate the worth of his children properly. Gloucester is not only blind but irresponsible when he speaks to Kent about Edmund's birth and, very much like Lear, seems to know very little about the true nature of Edgar and Edmund.

Surely Gloucester's manifest lack of wisdom does not make him an ideal counsellor, because if he is not capable of seeing through the crude wiles of Edmund, how can we expect him to perceive the tricks of those who are not so close to him as his own children? In addition to this, he does not seem to have all that much tact or consideration towards the feelings of others, otherwise he would have not spoken as he did to Kent about Edmund's birth. The point is not, as some critics have stated, whether Edmund may or may not be close enough to hear him, but that he speaks slightly of Edmund's conception, thus showing little consideration towards both love and procreation. The point could be taken a little further since we do not know whether he was a widower or not by the time of Edmund's procreation. What we do know is that Edgar is older than Edmund and thus the possibility of adultery exists.

Gloucester's flippant attitude towards the act of begetting children and probably towards adultery serves to indicate that he is irrational and irresponsible when it comes to sexual matters, and this fact induces the reader to question Lear's attitude when it comes to sex and procreation. When considering Lear's age and that of his daughters, one is forced to ponder the embarrassing fact that Lear has not taken procreation as a serious duty to the crown, because he must have married very late in life. Even if his wife was not all that young, Lear, by natural deduction, has to be much older. The fact that Lear must have had a young wife is an explanation in itself of his natural proclivity to think in terms of adultery as soon as one of his daughters does not please him<sup>130</sup>. When Cordelia does not gladden him he rejects his

---

<sup>130</sup> K. Muir says, "The revulsion against sex, besides being a well-known symptom of a certain form of madness, is linked with Lear's earlier suspicion that the mother of Goneril and Regan must be an adulteress, with Gloucester's pleasant

paternity<sup>131</sup>. In doing so Lear is repudiating aspects of his daughter's character that he cannot acknowledge because in his mind they do not fit in with his preconceived idea of what his daughter must be and thus he becomes suspicious about his paternity.

With Cordelia's departure Lear's drama begins. At this point even his daughters are alarmed by his performance. After watching Lear's proceedings one is forced to grant his two daughters a certain amount of commonsense, and specially when recalling the fact that there is no direct textual evidence to prompt us to conjecture that they hate Cordelia, or that they are elated with Kent's misfortunes:

You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it has not been little: he always lov'd our sister most; and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.<sup>132</sup>

Basically there is nothing wrong with what they say about Lear and Cordelia. The way in which they answer Cordelia is acceptable in view of her open and direct accusation, since it is not a trivial one;

I know you what you are;  
And like a sister am most loth to call  
Your faults as they are named. Love well our father:  
(1.1.268-10)

---

vices which led to the birth of Edmund and ultimately to his own blinding." See "Madness in *King Lear*", ed. Allardyce Nicoll, *Shakespeare Survey*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971) vol.13. 31. Perhaps Lear's anger at Kent's intercession must be understood as a manifestation of Lear's distrust regarding his paternity of Cordelia. What Lear screams at Kent, "avoid my sight," is very provocative.

<sup>131</sup> According to David Sundelson, "King Lear contains Shakespeare's most terrible destruction of fathers, but it also contains the impulse to restore them." See *Shakespeare's Restorations of the Father* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1964) 2.

<sup>132</sup> *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1973) 1.1. 286-90. All quotations from this ed.

This is a severe statement coming from a person as young as Cordelia. Hearing her, one has the feeling that she is making a profession of her virtue, forgetting that she is about to leave Lear in their hands. The manner in which she answers her sisters serves to reveal one aspect of Cordelia's character that renders her similar to her father. She has a very strong character and can be as harsh as he is with those she does not like. Yet, what is contained of Lear's character in Cordelia's does not go beyond flaws that become serious only because she has been opposing a man who has the very same flaws. The confrontation of two strong wills makes it impossible for them to reach a sensible compromise because this must be on their own terms or nothing. Lear cannot accept Cordelia except on his own terms, but Cordelia cannot accept Lear's terms and thus they must part.

To bring Cordelia's flaws to the audience's attention is not an easy task due to the emotional appeal of the events, yet it must be done. To achieve this the playwright has presented both sisters at this point using words that are characterized by a note of decorum, with the purpose of contrasting them with those of Cordelia. If both sisters would have been hard, unreasonable and cruel, the audience would have missed the point because of their preoccupation with Cordelia's fate.

Watching Cordelia's departure and a Lear rejecting his paternity, the audience can well expect something similar to this happening again. This fact is so much in the courtier's minds that as soon as something is not quite right they feel no qualms about staining their wives' good name seemingly for no other reason than their children's apparent conduct. On hearing Lear exclaim that "by the marks of sovereignty/ Knowledge and Reasons, I should be false persuaded I had daughters," (1.4.253-4), or calling Goneril "degenerate bastard," the inevitable reaction is to wonder why he is so lacking in faith when it comes to his wife's chastity<sup>133</sup>. Lear does not only reject his paternity

---

<sup>133</sup> Hamlet is very sensitive when it comes to sex, but, there is a reason, his mother's untimely wedding. Othello is blind because of his insecurity caused by the colour of his skin, but, there is nothing in Lear to justify this except his attitude to sex when he was young and the fact that his wife must have been a very young woman and he, old. During the storm, Lear's attention is focused on lust and even though Roland M. Frye in his *Shakespeare and the Christian Doctrine* (New Jersey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 255, comments that Shakespeare could have placed Lear, but does not, in a Dantesque or Miltonic Hell, he is mistaken because Lear is in hell and so are Kent and Gloucester, not

but in Goneril's case he curses her in a manner that cannot be accepted on moral grounds. He pleads to the gods to make her barren. His curse constitutes a very serious aggression against nature because by wishing her to be sterile he is hoping to deprive her of a natural function innate to her sex. This hope relates to his obsession with illegal procreation whereby sterility becomes a desirable flaw in his daughter. Yet his curse makes sense only if we understand it as the product of mind that thinks that Goneril's issue cannot stem from his blood and that therefore it must be unlawful.

Goneril, like Lear, is not willing to accept a situation in which she is not in full command. She tries to be the only master of her castle, and although we cannot praise her attitude towards Lear, we cannot accept Lear's brutal reaction so easily because what she says does not merit Lear's unnatural curse. At this point we have not been presented with a sort of Lady Macbeth plotting to kill, but with a headstrong woman who wants at any cost to place her father where she feels he ought to be. In spite of his dreadful insults, Goneril is far more in control of herself than he is: she does not respond with violence to his affronts but insists on what she wants, which is to curb Lear's will. In her turn, Goneril is doing to Lear exactly the same thing as Lear did to Cordelia, that is, trying to impose her will on him.

If Goneril becomes a replica of Lear, so does Kent when Goneril acts towards Lear as hardheartedly as Lear did towards Cordelia. Kent, at this point, becomes not only a duplicate of Lear but a replica of the Fool. He loves Lear and defends a cause that, according to the Fool, only a fool would: a king who has not only banished him but has been on the point of killing him. The Fool makes some caustic comments about Kent's foolishness and the problem lies in the fact that we cannot dismiss his words as trifling talk<sup>134</sup>. The Fool tells Kent that only a fool would remain attached to Lear's wheel when the wheel is rolling downhill:

---

to say the Fool. To grasp the fact that Lear is in Hell we need only bear in mind that in Dante's Hell, Canto V, the circle in which sins related to lust are punished, is described as a place where an everlasting tempest is raging so that whirling winds torment the sinners.

<sup>134</sup> According to John F. Danby, "The Fool appears to be as callous as the sisters, they are no more cruel than he. The Fool can see it all happening, and knows exactly how it works. But this knowledge leaves him no better off." *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: a Study of King Lear* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982) 104. To know exactly what the Fool stands for, is not easy, but he

We'll set thee to school to an ant, to  
 teach thee there's no labouring i'the' winter.[.....]  
 Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill,  
 lest it break they neck with following it; but the  
 great one that goes upwards, let him draw thee  
 after. When a wise man gives thee better  
 counsel, give me mine again:

(2. 4. 65-74)

According to the Fool's remarks, Kent is as imprudent as Lear and in consequence he offers them both his coxcomb. When Kent asks the Fool why he should take his coxcomb, his reply prompts the reader to ponder that the Fool is right because Lear's fate is that of a Fool who, impelled by foolish rage, gave away his crown as if it were a coxcomb.

When Kent becomes enraged beyond reason with Oswald, the audience perceives why the Fool gave him his coxcomb. However Oswald should wear the fool's cap as much as Kent or Lear. Oswald, like Kent, is another fool by virtue of his devotion to Goneril. He, like Kent, does not question whether his lady is worthy of such attachment and loyalty, because serving means fidelity. When Kent becomes so angry with him, he cannot perceive that Oswald is merely a fool, a perfect idiot who serves a worthless cause and dies for it. At this point Kent is blind and his sightlessness causes in him a wrath that renders him Lear's equal. In his fury he mirrors Lear's vivid image so that unawares he is emulating Lear in both deed and language. He calls him,

---

could be the embodiment of a will to survive, signifying that heroic deeds are foolish if one cannot come out victorious. To live seems to be the basic principle of the Fool. Considering that in Shakespeare's time life was held cheap, his attitude makes sense. Thus to see him, as Danby does, merely as an "unilluminated head" is not the answer to the problem inherent in the Fool. *Ibidem* p.113. We agree with Robert H. Goldsmith, when he says that "about the Fool's doglike fidelity to Lear, a few further words are needful ... Perhaps, we ought to recall, parenthetically, that the Fool wavers in his loyalty for a long moment and only hurries after his king when commanded by Goneril." *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1963) 65. This appreciation of the Fool renders the emulating process more dramatic, because the Fool must behave as a fool since he has no other choice, but Kent does and so did Lear at the opening of the play.

A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy worsted-stoking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking, whoreson, glass-glazing, super-serviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting-slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch: one whom I will beat into clamorous whining if thou deni'st the least syllable of thy addition.

(2. 2. 13-23)

This is not a very satisfactory speech. The catalogue of insults is too strong, gross, long and shocking coming as it does from Kent. Here Shakespeare is twisting the screw very tight upon his audience. We wait to see what Oswald has to say but till Kent has finished reviling him, he says nothing. The problem with this type of vituperation lies in the fact that it always touches on a very delicate issue, that of the mother's reputation, this being a point that seems to obsess them all.

To think of mothers as creatures who must be adulterous or "a mongrel bitch" is like a dreadful infection that affects both innocent and guilty alike. To enhance this point, Oswald's reply comes as an unexpected shock which is difficult to digest in view of Kent's vituperation. There is continence, patience and control in Oswald's words, "Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known to thee nor knows thee!" (2.2.24-5). A word like "monstrous" sounds almost like a kind complement when compared with "heir of a mongrel bitch" and the like. Is Oswald so tolerant to Kent because he thinks he is facing a mad fellow that belongs to the household? Be that what it may, the fact is that this type of language characterizes not only Lear, but Kent and Gloucester also.

It is not for nothing that Gloucester has to suffer the ordeal of being blinded, on account of Lear. Why he must undergo such a atrocious ordeal is clarified when he reveals that he has acted in such a way because "I would not see thy cruel nail/ Pluck out his poor eyes," (3.7.45-6). In essence both are blind because both have committed an aggression against nature by rejecting their children and therefore their paternity. Gloucester commits the deed, because owing to his sinful disposition there is an illicit child bent on destroying his legal one. Yet, he could not see this because his rash nature did not permit him to see things in their exact perspective, thus proving



himself to be as unenlightened about his children's nature as Lear has been. When he rejected Edgar he was blind and now he must become physically blind in order to perceive that he has been a sightless man. In his painful awareness that he has been like Lear, he is willing to become blind in Lear's stead so that, metaphorically speaking, because he takes Lear's place, Lear becomes, like him, a blind man.<sup>135</sup>

Now Lear's daughters are bent on destroying his world, so they must destroy all that is like Lear. Their act of annihilation begins with that person who in their minds, and according to the text, is Lear's replica, Gloucester. He has sent Lear to Dover and so he stands alone to answer Goneril and Regan, and thus he becomes physically blind, while Lear has to withstand the blind rage of the tempest and consequently his ethical blindness<sup>136</sup>. The situation becomes a sequence of a dramatic replica because while Lear confronts the storm and therefore his moral blindness, Gloucester, blinded in his stead, achieves the required anagnorisis and gives Lear the occasion to see that he is blind. His act places Lear in a situation what will permit him to see. Yet, in his madness Lear cannot perceive that Gloucester has become physically blind expressly because he is a blind man, and that because of Gloucester's physical blindness he will be able to perceive his moral blindness.

The point has been brought to the surface by means of Lear's attitude and apprehension of Gloucester's blindness, for, before he can recognize him,

---

<sup>135</sup> The process of acting in the king's stead is common and conforms to systems oriented to preserve the king's life in times of danger: systems that can be explained in anthropological terms. See Frazer's *Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, Part VI, "The Scapegoat" (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1933). The point is important because when a process of substitution or willingness to spare the king from pain occurs, the person who suffers the punishment is like the king because he is the embodiment of the royal spirit, and thus the king.

<sup>136</sup> "Both Lear and Gloucester are the victims of filial ingratitude: the blinding of Gloucester is the physical equivalent to the madness of Lear." See Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1974) 136. Yes, but why blindness in Gloucester's case? The only explanation resides in the merging of the two men into one. What is interesting is to indicate that Spencer's conception of the play's development is that of one violation leading to another, till they resolve in death. *Ibidem*, 243.

he equates his blindness with Cupid's and thus with the general workings of love, as something to be avoided. The scene is unbearable but necessary. In this scene Lear is not only morally blind but physically blind because he cannot perceive that Gloucester has no eyes in his sockets, yet, his physical incapacity to see is not like that of Gloucester because he, unlike Gloucester, has eyes and therefore this prepares the reader for confronting Lear's imperfection when he must grasp the magnitude of his offence and its consequences, as opposed to Gloucester's ability to see the nature of his own shortcomings and their repercussions.

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me?  
 No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love.  
 Read thou this challenge; mark but the penning of it.  
 (4. 5. 135-7)

Lear begins to perceive, but not far, because he, like blind Cupid, lacks reason. In addition he is saturated with blind wrath and so he starts to blame others, such as his sons-in-law, for his misfortunes. His fury is now oriented towards his daughters' husbands but he is deceiving himself because, like blind Cupid, he is shooting arrows in the wrong direction: France and Albany are worthy men and as such undeserving of such anger:

It were a delicate stratagem to shoe  
 A troop of horse with felt; I'll put't in proof,  
 And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,  
 Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!"  
 (4. 5. 182-5)

The idea of destruction, death, and even treachery is very much in his mind. Now he is talking about "a troop of horse with felt" so that, much that characterizes his two daughters' disposition still controls of Lear's proclivities. In order to perceive how much of Lear is contained in his daughters we need only compare their names, using a phonetic deductive method. A method that shows that Lear and his daughters, because of their blood ties, and in spite of the father's doubts about his paternity, have much in common with the exception of Cordelia. We shall begin with Cordelia and Lear, Goneril and Lear and Regan and Lear.

### **Cordelia / Lear**

- 1.- Corde[l]ia/[L]ear:l/l.
- 2.- Cord[e][l]ia/[L][e]ar: e-l/l-e.
- 3.- Co[r]d[e][l]ia/[L][e]a[r]:r-e-l/l-e-r.
- 4.- Co[r]d[e][l]i[a]/[l][e][a][r].r-e-l-a/l-e-a-r.

Lear's name is fully contained in Cordelia.

When looking at the scheme it is evident that there is not one single phonetic sign left over and therefore what is left is nothing and consequently its value must be that of 0. What is left from Cordelia's name is exactly Cod+i. The combination of "cod" and "i" is provocative because in addition to "cod" we have a phonetic sign that leads directly to the visual evocation of a phallic symbol. This evocation prompts the reader to relate it to the inherent or understood meaning of the word "cod". In Cordelia's case her father's name is not only fully contained in hers<sup>137</sup> but what is missing from Lear's to become Cordelia takes the reader directly to elements pertaining to sex and thus procreation.

---

<sup>137</sup> Iris Murdoch, in her novel *The Philosopher's Pupil*, uses the Lear theme, so to speak. The interesting point is that she has transformed the old father into a grand-father whose preoccupation is his grand-daughter's marriage. Lear's obsession with the mother-figure has been pointed out by Adrian Pool. He says, "the mother-figure for whom he is waiting is Regan, and she will enter reluctantly in a moment or two. It is then that Lear recalls the image of the dead wife in which he puts such absolute trust. If a man can talk about the 'mother' inside him, then one answer to this question 'where is this daughter?' might be that she was inside him too. [...] The 'mother' was an accepted medical myth in Shakespeare's time, a name for hysteria (which itself comes from the Greek for womb). In Harsnett's pamphlet exposing the Jesuit exorcism-racket, one of the demoniacs called Richard Mainy is supposed to suffer from the 'mother.'" *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 232-3. We completely agree with this because it explains why Lear's name is fully contained in that of Cordelia. Yet, if Lear thinks of Regan it is because she is the only daughter left. In reality the one that is fully accommodated in Lear's heart because he is fully contained in her, as the 'mother', is Cordelia.

Also there is a magnificent quibble in Cordelia's name that indicates what she must become in Lear's life: a dreadful ordeal, her death by hanging<sup>138</sup>. To see this we must break her name into its components, Cord/delia; delia=deal. The breaking process offers the deal of the cord, or C-ordeal[i]. One must note that the phonetic sign that must be deducted is the [i]. In Lear's mind Cordelia is his ordeal, a tribulation that becomes a dreadful bargain, the cord that is used to hang her. The type of irrevocable trial that Lear must undergo is appropriate when considering the nature of his fault. The deal of the cord must be understood with all the sexual puns inherent in the word cord, (symbolized by the rigid and straight line of the "l" and "i"), and in that of the noose because it functions as a conceit of the metaphor inherent in the "wheel of fire."

### **Goneril / Lear**

- 1.- Goneri[l]/[L]ear:l/l.
- 2.- Gon[e]ri[l]/[L][e]ar:e-l/l-e
- 3.- Gon[e][r]i[l]/[L][e]a[r]:e-r-l/l-e-r.

As expected Lear's name cannot be fully contained in that of Goneril because Goneril becomes the fearful fiend. Yet, what is left of Goneril's name is in accord with the development of events. What we have is "GON[e]" plus the fearful symbol of the cord,"i". This indicates that Goneril is not fully contained in her father because what is positive in Lear, and must have been in Goneril's nature owing to their blood ties, as the action of the drama unfolds, disappears, is gone. Thus of what was positive there is left in her only a marked hatred that leads to the killing of Cordelia: a slaughter that is symbolized by the phonetic sign "i". What is left of Lear, an "a", is the beginning of the alphabet symbolizing the fact that she is his first issue.

### **Regan / Lear**

---

<sup>138</sup> There are other quibbles inherent in Cordelia's name. In addition to the pun on heart with the word "cord" and the derivations inherent in Lear, such as the verb "lie", to bind, to tie, there is the obvious one on Heart with Cord. The possible act of severing the umbilical cord when Lear cuts the rope from which Cordelia hangs has been discussed in "Lear's You have somecause."

- 1.- [R]egan/Lea[r]: r/r
- 2.- [R][e]gan/L[e]a[r]:r-e/e-r.
- 3.- [R][e]g[a]n/L[e][a][r]:r-e-a/e-r-a.

This scheme yields similar results. In Regan's case, as in that of Goneril there is nothing left of Lear in her, and therefore what remains are two phonetic symbols that can be read as gone,"GN". There is another intriguing possibility about the meaning of GN, or NG, that of a date, the 28th of Oct. This possibility is not a far fetched one because according to the Beth-Luis-Nion calender "the NG tree was the Ngetal, or reed, [...] an ancient symbol of royalty"<sup>139</sup>: a symbol that directs the reader to the "l" and the "i". What Shakespeare may have tried to conceal with this date is difficult to know. However this information could cast some light on Shakespeare's life and therefore on the cause of his "dark period." What is not contained of Lear in her, makes Lear responsible for Cordelia's death since it is not only the phonetic symbol,"l" but a graphic representation of the reed.

#### **Cordelia / Regan**

- 1.- Co[r]delia/[R]egan:r/r.
- 2.- Co[r]d[e]lia/[R][e]gan:r-e/r-e.
- 3.- Co[r]d[e]li[a]/[R][e]g[a]n:r-e-a/r-e-a.

When looking at the phonetic signs that have been isolated we have a very similar configuration to that of Goneril/Lear and Regan/ Lear. In Regan's case the G & N materializes again, signifying the same as it did in relation to Lear: a date, the 28th of Oct., and that the elements of Cordelia that were enclosed in Regan are gone. With Cordelia we have the same pattern as that of Lear because what is not included in Regan's name is COD+l+i. This is exactly what was left when we enclosed Cordelia's name in that of Lear.

---

<sup>139</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 184-5.

There is a minor difference here because there are two phonetic signs, the "l" and the "i". The dissimilitude is not a coincidence because it can be explained in terms of death. In the case of Lear only one symbol of death was left over because he is one person and therefore one single, inclusive symbol is enough. In this situation, surely the two symbols are necessary because two are the persons who want Cordelia's death. Both symbols serve to unite Goneril and Regan in the achievement of the same deed because both are the cause of her execution.

**Cordelia / Goneril**

- 1.- C[o]rdelia/G[o]neril:o/o.
- 2.- C[o][r]delia/G[o]ne[r]il:o-r/o-r.
- 3.- C[o][r]d[e]lia/G[o]n[e][r]il:o-r-e/o-e-r.
- 4.- C[o][r]d[e][l]ia/G[o]n[e][r]i[l]:o-r-e-l/o-e-r-l.
- 5.- C[o][r]d[e][l]ia/G[o]n[e][r]i[l]:o-r-e-l-i/o-e-r-i-l.

The pattern is almost the same. The "A" has appeared again, but as a surplus of Cordelia's name thus indicating that in Lear's mind there are no differences with regard to birthrights. The point achieves full force when bearing in mind that in the next scheme, the "A" has been allotted to Regan, proving that the action leads to an overlapping of roles and situations that takes place not only in Lear's mind but in that of the characters. At the end Cordelia must fight for the crown as if she were the eldest-born in order to restore her father to the throne. The three sisters fight for the same thing, for the crown, although their reasons are not identical. As occurred with Cordelia/Regan, the "GN" has emerged. The "CD" has materialized, and only the "O" is missing for it to be able to return to the configuration of the "COD".<sup>140</sup>

**Goneril / Regan**

- 1.- Gone[r]il/[R]egan:r/r.
- 2.- Gon[e][r]il/[R][e]gan:e-r/r-e.
- 3.- [G]on[e][r]il/[R][e][g]an:g-e-r/r-e-g.
- 4.- [G]o[n][e][r]il/[R][e][g]a[n]:o-i-l/a.

---

<sup>140</sup> An additional meaning of "cod" is that of deceiving, mostly used now in Ireland. It is a fitting correlative in consideration to the fact that Lear's love trial is a trap, a way of deceiving his daughters and thus a gross joke. I am indebted for this observation to Ms. M. Gleeson.

In Regan's case what is left is again an "A". The meaning is obvious and indicates the final fight between the three sisters. What is left of Goneril's name is the fearful noose, that is to say, the "o" and the two symbols of the rope, the "i" and the "l".

Cordelia/Lear: Lear=O. Cordelia=Cod+i.

Goneril/Lear:Goneril= Gon+I/Lear=A.

Regan/Lear=Regan= GN/Lear= I.

Goneril/Cordelia: Goneril=NG/ Cordelia=CD+A.

Regan/Cordelia: Regan=GN/Cordelia= Cod+I+i.

Goneril/Regan:Regan=A/Goneril=O+i+l.

When looking at this chart it is obvious that the play's development of the plot evolves around a system of wheels within wheels. Lear, as we have stated at the beginning of this essay, is not a monolithic figure but part of a system that must include what he has created, three daughters. The scheme shows that the drama is made possible precisely due to the meaningful interrelation of characters. Owing to this interrelation one can conjecture on Lear's individuality since what he is and what he is not depends on what others reject or accept of him which, at the same time, depends on degrees of similarity with Lear rather than on differences. Goneril and Regan may have been badly treated by Lear since he is contained only in Cordelia and so they learn to hate him rather than to love him, till one day, blind rage and hatred controls them. Their love for Edmund could have become a horrifying replica of Edmund's begetting since he is the issue of Gloucester's lust, and thus Gloucester's lust becomes a source of lust for Lear's daughters. Kent is so much contained within Lear that when we see him emulating him so well, we wonder, at certain moments, if he is not repeating Lear's words. When bearing this in mind it becomes evident that the power of the play arises from a close-knit system of emulation and duplication: a system that owing to its dense pattern of interrelations awakes despair and terror in the audience. Such feelings arise from the ultimate effect of the play, that of not knowing where to turn for a breath of air because everything blurs into a hopeless



mass of nothingness since negative similarities abound while positive differences are scarce.