

## Cordelia and Paulina, Shakespeare's Healing Dramatists

Eugene England

*The Winter's Tale* profoundly parallels *King Lear*, so directly it can serve as a kind of gloss on *Lear*. Cordelia's role as victim and healer reappears in the later play, divided between Hermione and Paulina. And Cordelia's creation of a drama that leads from guilt to atonement for the sinning Lear is even more explicitly patterned by Paulina's dramatic performances for Leontes. In both plays Shakespeare reveals his vision of the power as well as of the limitations of the Christian drama of salvation which had energized the development of English theater.

Cordelia's name emphasizes her function as heart medicine—a cordial. As she begins her role as healer she seems anything but cordial, intentionally wounding her father by responding to his request for a public expression of love with "Nothing." But she is, in fact, already cauterizing a festering sore so that healing can begin. As the audience knows, Lear has irresponsibly decided to abdicate his power and has already made a preferential division of the kingdom for his daughters, but he now compounds his errors by demanding a public show of flattery from them to "win" their portions: ". . . which of you shall we say doth love us most, / That we our largest bounty may extend" (1.1.51-52).<sup>1</sup> In order to initiate in *Lear* a true drama of redemption based in complete love, Cordelia boldly shatters the artificial drama of calculating love set up by the sinfully foolish old man.

The usual criticisms of Cordelia's "immaturity" in the first scene can be blunted by looking closely at Shakespeare's sources and noting his psychologically and morally acute development of the ideas available to him. Both principal sources for *King Lear*, *A Mirror for Magistrates* and Holinshed's *Chronicles*, show Cordelia using irony to shock Lear into seeing that the notion of love governing his egoistic

ritual is false and will lead to ruin. And Shakespeare's version of these sources, "Why have my sisters husbands, if they say / They love you all?" (1.1.99) is obvious satire. Thus Cordelia's next sentence, about her future husband taking half her love with her, cannot be, as some critics have thought, an expression of a Lear-like misunderstanding of love. It is just the opposite: Cordelia's ironic attempt to show that Lear's quantitative logic of love is absurd in its implications. The gentle tone of her first speech, an aside, has already given us an indication of her mature understanding: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (1.1.62). Her second speech, another aside after her two sisters have falsely played Lear's sinful game, shows her clear decision to act in the faith of her risky but love-inspired honesty: "Then poor Cordelia! / And yet not so, since I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.76-78).

Shakespeare knew that a love that envisions redemption must first be direct and uncompromising, even harsh, if it is to destroy false consciousness. Duncan Fraser makes a sensible defense of Cordelia's public challenge to her father in terms of modern reality therapy, defining it as an attempt to break through Lear's childish game and shock him into an adult relationship.<sup>2</sup> But Cordelia's action here is more coherently explained by her redeemer role throughout the play. In the Christian drama of redemption, which was the foundation of Shakespeare's own dramatic tradition and still central to the Morality Plays of his own time, Christ's first role is that of a second Adam: to make redeemable *sinners* of mankind—to make operative for each person the bitter-sweet fruit of the tree of knowledge, to teach them, dramatically, even with painful shocks, what is true about themselves and their universe and where they depart from that truth. Only when mortals are brought out of the innocence that is due to mere ignorance can they then be brought to repentance and to genuine virtue.

This harsh enlightening is what Cordelia achieves for Lear. Given his childishness and arrogance as father and king, she could do it no other way. A more palliative approach, involving the white lie some critics have seriously called for, would have left Lear ignorantly in his sins and destroyed the focus of Shakespeare's insight into the redemptive power and the tragic cost of the drama he is exploring. He shows us unflinchingly that Cordelia, precisely because of her Christ-like role ("It is [my father's] business that I go about" 4.4.24), not only creates with her drama what Lear calls "the tempest in my

mind," but she unleashes tempests throughout the familial, civil, and elemental orders. And Shakespeare concludes his drama with equal bleakness, with suffering and loss so severe that it blurs for many the clarity of the redemptive climax at the end of Act 4 even though that is perhaps the most moving image of atonement in all literature.

Much of our trouble with the ending of the play derives from our resistance to an ideal of love which not only condemns the destructive *eros* of the animalistic Edmund-Goneril-Regan group but also finds wanting the attractive *filial* love of the figures that embody the essentially stoic virtues of reason, loyalty, and justice—Kent, Edgar, and Albany. There is in most of us a natural aversion to such an extremely demanding moral vision as Shakespeare demonstrates in *Lear*. Kent and Edgar give continued sacrificing companionship and care, largely on the basis of felt responsibility to deserving fellowship and rightful kingship and fatherhood. This is certainly an ethical standard, one rooted in preoccupation with justice and civility, and it appeals strongly to our modern secularized consciousness. But Cordelia's love is an absolute and penetrating constant, independent of justice or circumstance or separation; it is unconditional, governed by the bond of being rather than by any changeable obligation ("Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds"—Sonnet 116). Cordelia does not just temporarily accommodate her father; she is uniquely able to express herself toward his deepest needs in the very extremity of his banishment of her. And that is precisely the love St. Paul identifies as *agape*—love of those who are not desirable or deserving but only in need—after experiencing it himself: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6). The absolute love ethic transcends not only the evil daughters' appetite, an appetite masked with professions of love, and Lear's initially selfish concept of love, but even the civil order of justice—and justified love—re-established at the end under Albany and Edgar.

Lear is quickly exposed to the limitations of love based on merit when Goneril judges and rejects *him*, but as he turns to seek comfort with Regan, he still reminds his second daughter of her debt of *filia*, deserved love—the "bond of childhood, / Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude; / Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot, / Wherein I thee endow'd" (2.4.178-81). Lear has by this time begun to appreciate that at least superior to Goneril's false love is the spare, filial alternative Cordelia once ironically offered: "I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more or less" (1.1.92-3).

But his situation now stirs our imaginations to the wider, unpurchased bond of unconditional love—*agape*—that Cordelia had demonstrated in her first challenge to his folly; and it will soon become apparent that the image of that bond is working in Lear's conscience to bring him to the depths of self-knowledge and guilt, prerequisites for redemption.

Cordelia's dramatic effort to bring Lear out of the dark of his childish pride at first leads only to their estrangement. In the beginnings of his guilt and the regret that she has precipitated, Lear naturally tries to keep Cordelia out of his mind. He says, "No more of that, I have noted it well" (1.4.75), when first reminded of Cordelia's going to France. But his remembrance of her breaks through his first irrational ramblings: "O most small fault / How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!" (1.4.266), and "I did her wrong" (1.5.43). Cordelia's drama is then kept constantly on stage in the references to her by Kent and the Fool, especially in the way the Fool himself takes on her complex function of goad, teacher, and sustainer. Cordelia and the Fool alternate on stage in a way that made it possible for them to be played in Shakespeare's time by the same actor, and they are clearly identified in Lear's mind in their essential role: "My poor fool is hanged," he says of Cordelia (5.3.306). Thus the *agape* ideal acts deeply on Lear, even in Cordelia's physical absence, to guide him through his dark night of the soul to crucial understanding and the essential ability to forgive himself.

The central issue in the drama that Cordelia creates in Lear's mind and Shakespeare creates in ours is a fundamental religious and moral one: law or grace, justice or mercy. At first Lear equates quantitative expressions of love with merit and dispenses rewards accordingly, but Cordelia's loving challenge and his other daughters' unloving rejection begin to threaten his world view and shake his self-confidence. Then, in the resulting storms, both internal and external, the haunting image of Cordelia's integrity moves Lear to depths where he feels, for the Fool and then for "poor Tom," empathy that begins to bring self-knowledge: "Oh I have ta'en / Too little care of this!" (3.4.32-34). We see there the first flickerings of the light that will bring him through his purgation. But he continually reverts to a struggle with justice and punishment.

This carefully designed drama of self-discovery in the midst of "madness" has been well documented. I emphasize here only the *dénouement*, where the central theological paradox is faced squarely. In Act 4, Lear is finally brought near Cordelia, who is at Dover with a

French army sent for his relief; but he "by no means will yield to see his daughter" and face her forgiveness, because "a *sovereign shame* so elbows him" (4.2.43; emphasis added). Still distraught, he wanders out alone and then makes—to the parallel blind sinner of the subplot, Gloucester—the speeches that finally plumb deep enough. A hint of what is needed occurs in his awful vision of the corruption of lust, a vision which begins with the old pretensions of authority ("See how the subject quakes") but continues in a new spirit: "I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?" (4.6.109). Lear is moving past his old legalistic notions and can now grant a pardon even before learning what crime is charged to the accused.

He goes on in the next speeches to look beyond statutory human distinctions about guilt and innocence and see our common blame: "Which is the justice, which is the thief? . . . Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind / For which thou whip'st her" (4.6.153-54; 162-63). Then he is able to see even further, in the light of *agape*, to our common blamelessness: "None does offend, none, I say none: I'll able 'em" (4.6.168). As Edgar confirms a few lines later, this is truly Lear's "reason in madness." Lear is prepared by the moral vision he reaches in this scene to awake in the next into Cordelia's presence with the ultimate courage required for his redemption—what Paul Tillich calls the "courage to accept . . . acceptance" in spite of the consciousness of guilt.<sup>3</sup> Cordelia's unconditional love has judged Lear, taught him, and accepted and forgiven him; it has engendered necessary shame and then, when shame has done its work, overcome the shame. Thus that love has shown its unique power to move Lear to accept forgiveness and gain the freedom for renewal that lies past self-condemnation.

The next scene, where Lear and Cordelia reach full reconciliation in the power of unconditional love, is the most important and moving of the play. It is the play's true climax, a spiritual fulfillment for Lear that paradoxically transcends the anguishing dilemmas of the final act and yet makes them all the more challenging. Lear wakes in the presence of harmonious music to a vision of Cordelia as a "soul in bliss . . . a spirit" and comes fully to speak the truth about himself and yet to forgive himself as well as be forgiven. I will comment here only on one aspect of this familiar scene, to emphasize that Shakespeare designed it to be the culmination of Cordelia's carefully crafted drama of redemption begun in the first act. The father who had once rejected his supplicant child in a childish burst of tyranny now kneels, newborn, before the child who has radically changed

him. That child's absolute fidelity to an absolute ethic had in the first act required her to answer his demand with a harsh "Nothing." Shakespeare there, in the context of a series of regular pentameter lines, gives that word the emphasis of a single line of monometer verse and then repeats it after Lear's shocked "Nothing?" (1.1.92-94), making three dramatically shortened lines. The original "Nothing" had failed to answer the father's immediate desires but moved him toward his essential need. That "Nothing" destroyed a false drama and initiated a true one. And now at the conclusion of her drama Cordelia responds in echoes of that earlier "Nothing":

*Lear:* . . . I think this lady  
To be my child Cordelia. *Cor.:* And so I am, I am.

. . . . .

*Lear:* You have some cause, they have not. *Cor.:* No cause, no cause. (4.7.68-69, 74)

But Cordelia's responses are now beautifully softened by immediate repetition and by the fact that they complete her father's lines, in each case to make the full pentameter or more. The hard-won reconciliation is witnessed in the dramatic image of Lear and Cordelia kneeling to each other, in the new language of unconditional love, and in the verse form itself.

Robert Egan is right—in his fine book *Drama Within Drama*—that Shakespeare's willingness to subject that image of ultimate moral order created by love at the end of Act 4 to the assaults on it of Act 5 is what gives the image its unique authority in this play. Lear, after his redemption, experiences, protests, and remains undefeated by the worst of the world's disorder: "The order of love has survived the transition, imposed by the play's art upon itself, from the context of pure artifice surrounding the image of Lear and Cordelia reunited to the context of absolute reality surrounding the image of Lear and Cordelia dead."<sup>4</sup> But I would disagree with Egan that "it is the latter, a dark and painful emblem, which *King Lear* finally holds up to us, [an image that] retains the integrity necessary to communicate into our world an uncompromised vision of moral order."<sup>5</sup> It may well be that that is the best we can accept as a modern, secular audience. But I have seen the ending played with convincing recognition that what the words say is literally true: Lear's living spirit (and by implication Cordelia's) departs the stage in full completion of a process of redemption that points to a realm of ultimate meaning beyond the real world's chaos.<sup>6</sup> Our faith in such a realm has been aroused by the

reality we have seen forged by Cordelia's art in the midst of that chaos, and the image of the redeemed Lear stands against the "imbecile universe"<sup>7</sup> of the last act. Redemption is the emblem Shakespeare finally holds up to us: it is a creation made continually possible in our universe by a unique form of love, one capable of being dramatized in such a way that the redeeming effect of that love is recreated in those who enter with faith into the drama—whether Lear in response to Cordelia or the audience of *King Lear*.

The "colossal non sequitur"<sup>8</sup> of Cordelia's death was intended to strike us not only at the realistic level but also at the level which completes her symbolic role in the redemption process—like the death of Christ in a passion play, where we feel hope for the ultimate completion, the resurrection, as well as sorrow, loss, and awe at the apparently necessary suffering and death of God. But we feel Cordelia's death deeply at a realistic level as well, and Shakespeare's audience, despite better preparation and more congenial faith, must also have so felt it. If like many of us they were too devastated by such feelings to see clearly Cordelia's symbolic role, their failure to respond may be one reason why Shakespeare continued to struggle with the dramatic potential and means of the redemption story, attempting a more explicit and a less harrowing tack in *The Winter's Tale*.

Leontes, like Lear, is from the first afflicted with the apparently longstanding fault of willful, self-indulgent ignorance of the nature of love, a fault that suddenly bursts out into jealousy and destructive, sinful action against his wife Hermione and friend Polixenes, the visiting King of Bohemia. Leontes is opposed, judged, and ultimately healed not (as Lear is) by his victim but by Paulina, a noblewoman of the realm whose name is not only intentionally Christian but may even suggest her role as a healer in the Pauline tradition.<sup>9</sup> She is introduced as a "good" and "gracious" lady, the best one living "for this great errand," and she immediately identifies the King's "dangerous, unsafe lunes" and presents herself to him as "your physician." Her first attempt to heal is a dramatic unveiling to Leontes of his infant daughter, prefiguring the later unveiling of Hermione. Leontes, by rejecting this creation of nature, shows himself unready to respond to the natural healing of simple truth. He is guilty of a total lapse of faith in the ordered community of love surrounding him. Such willful doubt is indeed, as his councilor Camillo says, "sin," and Paulina immediately begins to deal with it, as St. Paul did, through the creation of an artistic drama of redemption. For this

sinner, as for Lear, quantitative love is not enough; *agape*, which looks beyond immediate comfort and desire to ultimate needs, and to a goal sixteen years away, moves Paulina to create for Leontes a purgatorial journey that can lead back to hope.

The dramatic journey corresponds to the one described by Paul to the Romans: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:3-5). Paulina is as tough as Cordelia in administering the necessary initial shock, and she is as persistent as the Fool in perpetuating the painful healing process. Leontes, exactly like Lear, is at first unwilling to face his healer; he is held back by his sinfulness even from the hope that will cure him. His refusal to speak directly to his self-appointed physician, in the long scene where she first unveils his daughter, becomes quite funny. Still, it conveys his latent yearning: "Away with that audacious lady! Antigonus, / I charged thee that she should not come about me. / I knew she would" (2.3.42-44). Despite Leontes' banishment of the baby (or because he can be persuaded to leave it to "chance," to the care of nature, rather than kill it), Paulina restrains her own efforts in the apparent hope that the oracle's vindication of Hermione will bring Leontes to sanity. But when that hope fails, she is ready with a powerful alternative: by suggesting that Hermione is dying she begins to improvise a healing drama, based in the natural punishment inflicted by Apollo himself through the death of the young prince, Mamillius: "This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down / And see what death is doing" (3.2.148-49). Leontes apparently repents on hearing of his son's death and Hermione's danger: "I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo" (3.2.155-56). But Paulina, already acting as his physician, knows that the death of the old spirit in Leontes must be fully accomplished before a new one can be born: "O thou tyrant! / Do not repent these things, for they are heavier / Than all thy woes can stir; therefore betake thee / To nothing but despair" (3.2.207-10).

Immediately rebuked for such boldness of speech by one of the lords, Paulina seems to make a polite retreat, but she carefully constructs her drama so that verbal reminders continue to burn Leontes' conscience even while she ostensibly apologizes: "Sir, royal sir, forgive a foolish woman. / The love I bore your queen—lo, fool again! / I'll speak of her no more, nor of your children; / I'll not



remember you of my own lord, / Who is lost too. Take your patience to you, / And I'll say nothing" (3.2.227-32). Paulina's "nothing" is, like Cordelia's, actually a great deal, and this tribulation does indeed "work patience" in Leontes who meekly accepts his penance: "Come, and lead me / To these sorrows" (2.2.242-43). That patience then "works experience" for sixteen years, until hope is ripened enough to overcome guilt and shame and Paulina can complete the drama with a resurrection.

Paulina's drama is as carefully controlled for her purpose as it is prolonged. At the beginning of Act 5, even after his many years of purgatory, she is still willing to strike Leontes "sorely" with the accusation that he "killed" Hermione. She is shown doing this immediately after Leontes is counseled to give up his penance by Cleomenes, the person who had originally brought back the oracle's condemnation: "You have done enough . . . forget your evil" (5.1.1-5). Shakespeare thus suggests that Paulina's drama of redemption is more demanding than the rational expectations of the classical world, and necessarily so in order to be efficacious.

Paulina finally begins to prepare Leontes for Hermione's reappearance. But she does so only *after* he demonstrates faith in the oracle's implied hope for finding Perdita and promises to refrain from marrying until Paulina bids him: "That / Shall be when your first queen's again in breath" (5.1.83). This hint from Paulina is designed to nurture emerging hope in Leontes and in us; and then Leontes is further tested: Polixenes' son Florizel and Leontes' lost daughter Perdita are announced as emissaries from Polixenes, but this carefully designed artistic hoax (devised by Camillo to create a reconciliation when Leontes eventually recognizes Perdita) is interrupted by the angry arrival and denial by the father himself, which Camillo had also arranged.

As Camillo had hoped, Leontes has already proven his new spirit by his immediate and gracious acceptance of the couple, and he now shows even greater maturity of hope by agreeing to Florizel's request to plead the lovers' cause to Polixenes, in the process learning to accept in faith where he had before denied. Robert Egan traces how the contrived shattering, by Camillo, of his own contrived drama, forces Leontes "to confront the gap between the dramatic illusion he has so enthusiastically accepted as truth and the harsh facts of the actual world."<sup>10</sup> His demonstration of faith both prepares for the climactic success of Paulina's drama and shows the audience how its own response of faith can make such drama work. But, important as it is,

the drama being enacted is *not*, as Egan claims, a restoration or a "realignment with nature's cyclic order" that was broken by Leontes and then reaffirmed in his welcome and championing of Florizel and Perdita. Leontes' act of faith is not merely an evidence of his regeneration and his acceptance of nature's regenerative world, but an act of generation itself. He begins to shape the world actively after the vision he now, after long penance, carries for the first time in his heart: the vision of unconditional love.

As Leontes promotes in the real world his painfully acquired ideal order of love, the conditions imagined in Camillo's original play become literally true: Leontes is reconciled to Polixenes. Perdita, the lost, is found—indeed, as Camillo's drama proposed, *is* the daughter of a king and betrothed to Florizel. But more than natural order has been restored, as is directly suggested by the report that Camillo and Leontes appear to have "heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed" (5.2.14-15). There is only one process by which the *world* is ransomed, and that is the redemption of Christ. But that is no mere return to nature's original harmony. Leontes, who had been afflicted with his disease even in the midst of that natural "harmony," is not only cured of the original disease, but made healthy in a general way that would prevent a recurrence. Nature is not redeemed here any more than it is in *Lear*, where the continuing chaos is more apparent. The world that is ransomed by Christ is the world of adult, culpable human beings, the world of sinners, and it is redeemed only in potential, depending on the willingness of each person, motivated by healing love, to make the pilgrimage Paulina and Cordelia have shown us. Although the reference makes clear her specific symbolic credentials as a Christ figure, Cordelia is not, as she is described in appreciation of her efforts for Lear, "[one] daughter / Who redeems nature from the general curse / Which Twain have brought her to" (4.6.205-07). Nature very soon proves that in *Lear*, by killing Cordelia and Lear; such danger, though less apparent, is just as real in the *Tale*. We have no assurance that others—perhaps Florizel or Perdita—are not harboring a sinful madness that could erupt at any time, as it had in Leontes.

The crucial moment of change toward redemption for Leontes is when, prepared by the love shown in Paulina's long ministry to him, he lets hope make him "not ashamed." He not only becomes the advocate of Florizel and Perdita, but he is drawn in affection to his yet unrecognized daughter and put unashamedly in remembrance of Hermione: "I thought of her, / Even in these looks I made"

(5.1.228). Until then his wife stands in his mind as a necessary reproach, kept burning there by Paulina. But for the final stage of redemption she must become, with Paulina, a source of confidence to him of his worthiness and ability to become new. Like Lear after his last speeches with Gloucester, where he finally exorcises his preoccupation with judgment and thus with self-condemnation, Leontes can now accept his acceptance. Paulina, the wise physician who has waited for this moment, knows, because "the world" has indeed been ransomed, that now "every wink of an eye some new grace will be born" (5.2.110). She takes the members of this ransomed world to her home for the promised end, made clearer here to us than in *Lear* as the ultimate reward for successful redemption. In a phrase that recalls Cordelia, Leontes asks for "cordial comfort" (5.3.77), and that is what is provided him. Paulina, with confidence, challenges Leontes and by implication the audience, "If you can behold it" (5.3.87), and gives the condition, which she is now certain Leontes can satisfy: "It is requir'd / You do awake your faith" (5.3.95). Then, with a background of music like that Cordelia arranged for Lear's awakening, Paulina brings forth the "resurrected" Hermione, who had kept hidden, in sacrificial love, for those years of Leontes' purgation.

What does Paulina's more explicit, schematic, and optimistic working out of the drama of redemption teach us about *King Lear*? In evoking the morality play version of this drama in the Gloucester subplot and in Camillo's contrived drama of reconciliation for Florizel and Perdita, Shakespeare shows the initial success but ultimate limitation in the real world of such versions that are not grounded in the tough absoluteness of unconditional love. Cordelia and Paulina, however, each create a painful, educative, and ultimately generative drama that moves inside the sinner's mind and shocks him to self-knowledge and guilt, to the shame which is necessary for rebuilding basic concepts. The drama can then move him to an ultimate self-acceptance and hope sufficient to overcome the shame, a hope based on the most fundamental of those concepts—that he is, despite his very real sins, worthy and loved. The unsentimental respect shown for Lear and Leontes by Cordelia and Paulina in their initial painful confrontations with them, as well as in their continuing love and service, is a foundation for these sinners' ultimate self-respect.

Shakespeare recognized that the specific drama that heals is based on healers who, in Tillich's words, "can realize guilt, who can judge and who can accept in spite of the judgment."<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare

had faith that the dramatist can lead souls to repentance if he is willing, like Cordelia and Paulina, to risk all. And he demonstrates explicitly, through the redemptive dramas within their two dramas, how that risk can be taken. Just as Paulina invites all who *cannot* believe—both those in her audience on the stage and all of us who form the audience of *The Winter's Tale*—to depart before she unveils Hermione, Shakespeare's militant esthetic in these plays seems to challenge all of us to share more fully his faith in the power of the tragic mode to take on the most serious human task, redemption. But in accepting for himself such an ultimate challenge, Shakespeare is not merely rephrasing Christian orthodoxy or demonstrating in a new form the traditional Christian drama from which his own dramatic tradition derived. He is making heretical implications and asking painful questions which can only be suggested here for further study.

*The Winter's Tale* does not quite fit Egan's symmetrical vision; it does not end in a mere return to its "original state" of natural order. A new and better Leontes has been created by Paulina's art, a Leontes who is much more mature and virtuous than he would have been had he never sinned against Hermione. The "fall" has been a happy one, a *felix culpa*, and is emblematic of what can and should happen continually in human experience. And that happy fall both suggests that art will continue to be necessary and makes Shakespeare at the very least an *unorthodox* Christian. These plays indicate that the fallen and redeemed world, despite the costs, is superior to the original "paradise" of perfect nature created by God before the Fall.

*King Lear* also confronts us with that kind of happy fall. Lear becomes a much finer man than he was at the beginning, infinitely so if we take seriously the Christian distinction between a guilty and a redeemed man. But the cost in *Lear* is much more clearly given; we do not see Leontes' or Hermione's sixteen years of pain. To see Cordelia's death as the ultimate denial of value, specifically as destroying what she has achieved in *Lear*, is to succumb to a secular faithlessness incompatible with the evidence for Shakespeare's intellectual and religious views. But to see her death and Lear's heartbreak as less than devastating is to ignore the bleak horror of a universe that requires, for redemption, the suffering and death of the best beings we know, even of our gods. However, if we insist too far on the injustice of those events, as somehow denying the potential and value of redemption in that universe, if we agree with Kent that "all's cheerless, dark, and deadly" (5.2.291), we essentially place ourselves with the stoics, who are found admirable but ultimately inadequate at the end

of the play, as exemplified by Kent contemplating suicide. We remain with them—and the unredeemed Lear—in an understanding of love that is too small.

As Albany admits, a merely fair "judgement of the heavens," such as has come upon Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, "touches us not with pity" (5.3.232). Shakespeare, in denying us the ending in justice that we yearn for, takes us into a realm where pity (and grace) can exist. He asks us to believe that a love which transcends mere justice is worth any sacrifice, worth dying for, and the only thing that really continues living. Cordelia's "life" is indeed, as Lear affirms, the "chance which does redeem all sorrows" (5.3.267), and I believe that life is, in fact, given to Lear. If we deny that, I think we deny Cordelia and the truth of what she, at great cost, taught Lear. Lear's final vision should be ours: He calls us—"Look at her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!" (5.3.311-12)—to see clearly and retain as our focus the being and the drama, spoken by those lips, that led from "Nothing" to "No cause, no cause" and redeemed him.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All references to the plays are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974).

<sup>2</sup>Duncan Fraser, "Much Virtue in Nothing: Cordelia's Part in the First Scene of *King Lear*," *Cambridge Quarterly*, 8 (1978), 1-10.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 166.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Egan, *Drama Within Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup>Egan, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival, 1973 (directed by Edwin Sherin).

<sup>7</sup>This is J. Stampfer's term in "The Catharsis of *King Lear*," from Allardyce Nicoll, ed., *Shakespeare Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), reprinted in *King Lear: Text, Sources and Criticism*, edited by G.B. Hartison and Robert F. McDonnell (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), p. 182.

<sup>8</sup>Egan, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup>See Louis Martz, "Shakespeare's Humanist Enterprise: *The Winter's Tale*," in *English Renaissance Studies* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 114-31. Martz demonstrates the classical coloring of the play, yet he shows, too, a Christian note more and more "struggling to be born." He recognizes the appropriateness of the single Christian name in the play for *Paulina*, who is clearly Leontes' conscience and whose words lead toward a scene that may be called a "restoration by faith," and he sees that that scene is not a simple orthodox Christian fable. However he does not note the possible relation of Paulina to St. Paul and, like Egan, he sees an essentially humanistic ending, with faith, nourished by art and grace, restoring the world to its original goodness. He does hint that the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonous, and Paulina's pointing to Hermione's wrinkles, give a "fine touch" of "Shakespeare's realism." I, of course, see more than that: those are reminders that the "world ransomed" is still one in which sin and death can occur and the drama of redemption will continue to be needed.

<sup>10</sup>Egan, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup>Tillich, p. 166.

EUGENE ENGLAND is Professor of English at Brigham Young University and has published poetry, personal essays, biography, and criticism of American, especially Mormon, literature. He is currently working on a book on Shakespeare and Melville.