ALTERITY, THE DIVINE AND ETHICS IN *KING LEAR*

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation challenges the dominant new historicist reading of Shakespeare's plays, characterized by unspoken ethical commitments and a certainty regarding about the ubiquity of political conflict. The ethical thought of Emmanuel Levinas is deployed in order to construct an opposing reading. The dissertation also draws on the ideas of Stanley Cavell, whose work on *King Lear* emphasizes the need to not merely know, but 'acknowledge' others.

The characters in *King Lear* make strong efforts to avoid ethical relations with one another. Such efforts are inspired by existential anxieties in the face of Being, and take the form of attempting to turn Others, if only intellectually, into objects of control. In the play as in Levinas's work, the ethical demands of the Other and conversely the means of appropriating him or her, are symbolized by the voice and the gaze, with the voice serving as a synecdoche for the Other as external, while the gaze is the means of appropriating the Other. The tendency of characters to understand human relations in terms of economics follows from a pervasive dehumanizing gesture. The Fool's awareness of the fictive world's economic substructure leads him only to a nihilism which corrodes his ethical motivation. Similarly, characters who attempt to escape the world by claiming independence find themselves frustrated in their attempts at suicide. The question of suicide raises questions regarding the gods whom the characters worship. I argue that these gods are in fact little more than projections of the characters' own feelings of self-worth unto the heavens. While the play, set in pagan times, does not directly incorporate a Christian revelation, it can at least stage the rejection of idols.

Despite the characters' efforts to avoid each other as Other, the play does contain moments of acknowledgement. While they do not offer what one might call 'a practical ethics', or a clear guide for moral action, moments of acknowledgement do provide the grounds for an ethically engaged politics. Unlike new historicism, such a politics would be able to make a good-faith admission of its own ethical commitments.

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Pour Karine, avec amour.

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Like most acknowledgements, these are written too late, and too quickly, and in any case, undertake a hopeless task. Some debts cannot be repaid, and perhaps I should not attempt to do so. Even acknowledgement is at best partial. I would, however, like to note the generous and tender support of my wife, Karine, and of my parents.

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Preface — New Historicism and War

In an interview in the 1970s, Michel Foucault distinguished his own thought from the structuralism popular among his contemporaries. Where structuralists understood the place of the human as within language, Foucault insists that

> one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. (Foucault 56)

Following upon the rise of New Historicism, this description has become axiomatic, even if largely unspoken, in Renaissance literary criticism. Stephen Greenblatt credited his own fascination with history to Foucault's visit to Berkeley (Wilson 1). Foucault's influence is felt throughout *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, which, as Richard Wilson points out, ends every chapter with some sort of execution or murder, "with the subject overpowered by social institutions" (Wilson 7).

Most criticisms stigmatize New Historicism as totalizing. In the name of Cultural Materialism, Wilson objects to New Historicism's tendency to make the victories of the institutions of power seem inevitable. The New Historicist reading, Wilson argues, renders power totalizing, and resistance therefore futile (Wilson 9). Edward Pechter, making a somewhat more extreme criticism of New Historicism, pronounced Greenblatt a determinist (Pechter 300). Certainly in an early essay illustrative of his method, Greenblatt claims that all subversion is not only contained, but produced by the forces of authority in order to be contained:

> Thus the subversiveness which is genuine and radical–sufficiently disturbing so that to be suspected of such beliefs could lead to imprisonment and torture–is at the same time

> contained by the power it would appear to threaten. Indeed the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its ends. ("Invisible Bullets" 89)

A further criticism of this essay follows in chapter six; for the time being, it suffices to point out that Wilson is correct to say that Kent's pessimistic end to Shakespeare's *King Lear*—"All's cheerless, dark, and deadly" (5.3.289)—could be New Historicism's "favorite line" (Wilson 8).

On the whole, I agree with Wilson's description of New Historicism, but argue that it is not the bleak description of the possibilities for subversion that makes New Historicism totalizing, but its exclusion of any real alterity. Jean Howard, in an essay written before the term "New Historicism" gained currency, argued that "the new history" held as one of its principal aims, "to recognize the radical otherness of the past." She contrasts in their respect for the alterity of the past, Jonas Barish, whose existentialist analysis of "the anti-theatrical prejudice" is ironically denounced as "essentialist," and Jonathan Dollimore, who "assumes that nothing exists before the human subject is *created* by history" (Howard 24-25). Historicism seems to contradict itself in this case, trying both to maintain "the radical otherness of the past" and the totalizing power of history, outside of which appeal is forbidden, as it were, since it is assumed ahead of time that nothing is prior to history. This premise coheres with Emmanuel Levinas's declaration that "the concept of totality [. . .] dominates Western philosophy." Within such a "totalizing" reason, he argues,

> Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of the totality) is derived from the totality. (*Totality and Infinity* 21-22)

Elsewhere he writes that even in space exploration, the western mind fails to move truly beyond, discovering only more of the same. The cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's statement that he did not find God in the heavens, Levinas writes, has a serious meaning:

> the new condition of existence in the weightlessness of space "without place" is still understood by the first man sent there as a *here*, as the *same*, without genuine *otherness*. ("Ideology and Idealism" 241)

The past, understood as history, which is to say, as relations of power, soon reveals itself to be familiar.

Cultural Materialism claims to have escaped the dead-end of New Historicism, by making a "return to history" (Wilson 12). Knowing that people are "killed and mutilated" for control of meaning, however, does not break with history in the sense used by Foucault, as having "the form of a war." Cultural materialism allows a struggle over "live issues," but only because the condition of being immersed within warfare (perhaps diminished to politics, but without losing its agonistic character) incorporates both the present political situation, and the past political situation. In this case, terms like "power relations" or "authority and transgression" furnish what Pechter calls "a universal knowledge, good for all concrete situations" (Pechter 297). If the existentialists failed to escape "essentialism" by examining fundamental features of the human as such, then the New Historicists have certainly failed, uncovering only a new "defining human essence" in Nietzsche's "will to power" (Pechter 301). In doing so, they render Goneril correct, in seeing all human relations as power relations. Whether we are to follow the relatively structuralist readings of Greenblatt's Cultural Poetics, or the more overtly political critiques furnished by Cultural Materialism, all remains "cheerless, dark, and deadly," because neither school of criticism has broken with Foucault's premise that the situation of man is one of war.

Pechter puts this nicely in saying that "whether the new historicism looks like a good or a bad kind of criticism will depend on whether or not we share its underlying intuition." He summarizes this intuition, not by quoting Foucault on power, but more acidly by saying that

> "It's a jungle out there" is a cliché, but the thing about clichés (or proverbs, or topoi) is that they express a common belief. But is this cliché the totality of legitimate belief, or even the dominant belief? (Pechter 301)

The first and most obvious explanation for why a large number of critics have embraced this implicit assumption is precisely that it does indeed express "a common belief." Perhaps this is also the reason for the wide diffusion of Foucault's ideas throughout the humanities and social sciences while Paul Ricoeur's works, for instance, have not enjoyed nearly so wide a readership. The assumption that "It's a jungle out there" saves us the embarassing exigency of trying to talk about things like love or generosity, and therefore of being suspected of some sort of romanticism. It also saves us from facing threats to our own mastery over the text, from facing words and scenes that are not easily incorporated within a rather cynical view of the world. In an appalling example, for instance, Jonathan Dollimore manages to write a fifteen-page discussion of the radicality of *Lear* without even broaching the scene of Lear's reconciliation to Cordelia (Pechter 299). Surely if anything would break out of the universalizing notions of New Historicism (broadly defined, in this case), it would be a scene where something is not exchanged in what Greenblatt terms "a subtle network of trades and trade-offs" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 7). New Historicism makes great claims to be recognizing "the radical alterity of the past," but ultimately only values the past as a confirmation of the universality of power relations, into which nothing else is allowed to intrude. Pechter ends his article by noting, correctly, that "New-historicist criticism is a criticism of recognition, of knowing again what one knew before" (Pechter 302).

"I began this work," writes Greenblatt in the first line of his book *Shakespearean Negotiations*, "with the desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 1). Over the course of the opening essay, Greenblatt becomes, or at least claims to become, disabused of this

nostalgic longing. Reading "The Circulation of Social Energy," in fact, one has the impression of witnessing a man losing his faith. While recognizing that "the literary traces of the dead" are able to "convey lost life," Greenblatt insists that there is no return through these traces to the dead individual as an interlocutor. Instead, language provides the illusion of life because it incorporates "social energy":

> The "life" that literary works seem to possess long after both the death of the author and the death of the culture for which the author wrote is the historical consequence, however transformed and refashioned, of the social energy initially encoded in those works. (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 6)

Because language is a collective creation–indeed, "the supreme instance of a collective creation" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 4)–it does not allow access to the dead person with whom Greenblatt desires to speak. Greenblatt claims to oppose the notion of a "totalizing society" just as he opposes the notion of a "total artist." "By a totalizing society," he writes, "I mean one that posits an occult network linking all human, natural, and cosmic powers and that claims on behalf of its ruling elite a privileged place in this network" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 2). Nevertheless, the criticism which he both proposes and practices achieves the status of a totalizing system, not by virtue of its rigour or consistency, but by virtue of excluding all that stands against it as Other. Greenblatt is quite explicit in avoiding any clear definition of the "circulation" which he describes and deploys. By the time that he wrote *Shakespearean Negotiations*, he had partly abandoned the Foucauldian fascination with power (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 2-3), and resists any other description which would raise the spectre of a "a single coherent, totalizing system" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 19). Instead, he prefers to describe his object in a list:

> What then is the social energy that is being circulated? Power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating

> intensities of experience: in a sense the question is absurd, for everything produced by the society can circulate unless it is deliberately excluded from circulation. Under such circumstances, there can be no single method, no overall picture, no exhaustive and definitive cultural poetics. (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 19)

While this plurality does, as Greenblatt claims, exclude the possibility of any single, coherent theoretical framework, its open-endedness is the source of its totalizing power. Greenblatt's approach is totalizing because, despite its refusal to be rigorous, it nevertheless excludes or appropriates all alternatives. Last among the "certain abjurations" which frame Greenblatt's approach are the declarations that "There can be no art without social energy," and that "There can be no spontaneous generation of social energy." Talking about anything else to do with art just becomes a roundabout way of talking about social energy, without which art cannot exist. Theories of mimesis, for instance, do not constitute a route of escape, since "mimesis is always accompanied by–indeed is always produced by–negotiation and exchange" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 12). Leaving aside the elision in logic by which Greenblatt implies that the undeniable fact that mimesis takes place within networks of social energy means that it is created by these networks, that it is not only *in* but also *of* social forces, one will note that this argument effectively rules out of bounds any appeal beyond the system. Greenblatt evades the need to define social energy, and therefore opens himself to criticism based on his definition, by claiming that "the question is absurd" since anything can circulate. In fact, to follow the logical elision just cited, everything is created by circulation. Greenblatt can therefore recognize that Shakespeare makes choices in his treatment of the traditional story of Lear ("in none of them, so far as I know, does Cordelia die in Lear's arms" [Greenblatt *Negotiations*, 17]), while continuing to deny the existence of individuals as anything more than "themselves the products of collective exchange" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 12). It is little wonder, then, that Greenblatt abandons his

desire to speak with the dead, at least insofar as the dead are understood as "other." Instead, he conflates both self and other into products of the circulation of social energy:

> I had dreamed of speaking with the dead, and even now I do not abandon this dream. But the mistake was to imagine that I would hear a single voice, the voice of the other. If I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice. The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property. (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 20)

New Historicism frankly excludes the voice of the Other as alterior, in favour of a set of anonymous competitions and exchanges, and therefore not only justifies accusations that it is totalizing, but also fails the aspiration which first gave it life.

One would think that feminist deployments of New Historicism would be overtly ethical, if any deployments would be. The classical materialist feminist reading of *King Lear* offered by Kathleen McLuskie, however, avoids overt engagement in ethical issues. McLuskie situates her work in terms of an earlier generation of feminist critics, and criticizes them for presenting "feminism as a set of social attitudes rather than as a project for fundamental social change" (McLuskie 90). Against such "judgement" of the text, McLuskie wishes to shift attention towards "analysing the process by which the action presents itself to be judged" (McLuskie 95). The text limits our responses to it, she argues. The final scene of Lear's suffering, for instance, elicits sympathy even from a critic who would not endorse "the patriarchal relations" which the scene is, McLuskie alleges, reinforcing. Siding with Goneril and Regan against Lear is not a very real possibility (McLuskie 102). Rather than finding another reading within the text, McLuskie wishes to resist the text itself, with its alleged reactionary politics. This resistance is to be accomplished

> by making a text reveal the conditions in which a particular ideology of femininity functions and by both revealing and subverting the hold which such an ideology has for

readers both female and male. (McLuskie 106)

Such a reading would reveal the contradictions of the ideology which created the text, as well as of the text itself (McLuskie 104). Such a move towards the material and ideological is overtly opposed to the text's "moral imperatives": "In the case of *King Lear* the text is tied to misogynist meaning only if it is reconstructed with its emotional power and its moral imperatives intact" (McLuskie 103). In a discussion of love and the so-called love test of the opening scene, McLuskie argues that Lear's view of love follows from an ideology which draws a "connection between loving harmony and economic justice." Cordelia responds with a "contractual model," against this "patriarchal model" (McLuskie 104). Lear's ideology hinges upon a model of "family organisation which denies economic autonomy in the name of transcendent values of love and filial piety" (McLuskie 105). The burden of McLuskie's criticism would therefore be to deny the "transcendent value" of love and moral issues as part of a general process of demystification. Within McLuskie's argument, ethics appears only as ideology.

Two major criticisms could be levelled at McLuskie's argument: first, it shows a tendency to confuse Lear's voice with the play's. For instance, she accepts Lear's claim that Cordelia's defiance is "tantamount to the destruction of nature itself," while, as I will show in chapter six, Lear's appeals to gods and nature are only the index of his narcissism. More seriously, McLuskie seems to believe that merely to reveal an appropriation of ethics to the service of a particular political ideology would be tantamount to contradicting that ideology. It is just as logical to conclude, however, that uncovering difficulties in a patriarchal ideology could simply lead to a more rigorous patriarchalism, or at least to one with fewer illusions about itself. Clearly, McLuskie's argument has a strong ethical motivation; unfortunately, its logic leads her to question any sort of moral given as such, thereby rendering her argument incoherent. An ethical statement that ethics is false collapses into what I will call, with reference to the Fool,

"the liar's paradox." Levinas noted this contradiction in a criticism of Althusser, where he claims that the move towards questioning Kantian morality, with its strong reliance on reason, proceeds from "a prophetic cry, scarcely discourse; a voice that cries out in the wilderness; the rebellion of Marx and some Marxists, before Marxist science!" Unfortunately, as he further notes at the beginning of his essay, the "least suspicion of ideology delivers to morality the most severe blow it has sustained." The suspicion of reason, arising from a rebellion against "the increasing spiritual miseries of the industrial era" also turns against the ethical imperative that first demanded it. "Ethics becomes the first victim of the struggle against ideology that it inspired" ("Ideology and Idealism" 237-38). The Fool, as I will argue in chapter four, shows a clear awareness of the economic and ideological foundations of his society, but such awareness, if it is not to decline into mere cynicism, must be supplemented by the sort of "moral imperative" towards justice or equity or the Good which McLuskie rejects.

In an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida claimed that philosophy in the twentieth century was marked by the fact that Martin Heidegger had, in displacing the nineteenth-century subject,

> recalled the essential ontological fragility of the ethical, juridical, and political foundations of democracy and of every discourse that one can oppose to national socialism in all its forms. ("Eating Well" 104)

I am not, of course, suggesting that New Historicist critics are National Socialists or sympathize in any way with their goals. I am, however, suggesting that a simple return to the axioms of liberal morality–as developed profoundly in R. W. Chambers's 1939 essay on *King Lear*, for instance–is no longer much of an alternative, but we should not simply celebrate their destruction either. The events of the 1930s and 1940s should have made it painfully obvious that the revolutionary is not simply identifiable with the Good. Materialist and New Historicist critics, I

suggest, are naïve to believe that by revealing structures of belief and ideology as a ruse hiding the operations of power, they are working towards social improvement. They might, on the contrary, merely be further destroying what would stand in the way of national socialism, or of all the less vitriolic political expressions of will to power and Darwinian competition. A third possibility must be found, other than atheoretical moralizing, or a mere destruction of the grounds of such moralizing. Historicism, in claiming that nothing exists outside history, understood exclusively as the arena of power, forbids itself returning to such a ground. Only on the basis of a prior ethical commitment (or, Levinas would insist, an imperative) can such clear-sighted analysis of the political system realize itself in social betterment, rather than empowering a manipulation of power towards selfish ends.

It seems vital, if we are to escape the dead-end of a sterile recognition of the operations of power, to return to the prior question of ethics. Levinas begins his *magnum opus*, *Totality and Infinity* by declaring that "everyone will agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality." He continues to argue that "being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought":

> The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means–politics–is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté. (*Totality and Infinity* 21)

Had he substituted "theory" for "philosophy" in the last sentence, Levinas would be strangely prescient in describing the presuppositions of Renaissance criticism in the early twenty-first century. It should be noted, however, that these words are not even a response to Foucault, much less a reaction to historicism. *Totality and Infinity* was first published in 1961, some time before Foucault claims to have "properly isolated" the "central problem of power" (Foucault 55). In any case, Levinas was already an active member of the Parisian philosophical scene, at least

since having introduced phenomenology into France with a 1929 article on Edmund Husserl, and had been developing the project that came to fruition in *Totality and Infinity* since being released from internment at the end of the second world war. Levinas's work, in other words, is not a reaction to Foucault or to his various followers at all. Much less is it reactionary. Rather than being simply ignorant of Foucault's turn towards power, Levinas seems here to anticipate it, finding the origins of such a move in the philosophy of Heidegger, and rejecting it. His philosophy is an attempt, by a person to whom the question was profoundly serious, to address the problem of ethics in the wake of Heidegger and of National Socialism, and to think morality outside of a history understood only as power and war.

Historicism and materialism both threaten, by virtue of their fascination with ideology, to exclude the ethical motivation which gave them birth, abandoning the desire to speak with the Other. The goal of the present dissertation is not to reject historicism, or the political and social commitments which gave it birth, but to make it admit the goals that it is serving, and save it from falling into paradox, or worse. To be political, to speak of politics and the play of power, even when diminished from war to social energy, is not, in itself, to be ethical. There can be an amoral, or even immoral, politics. On the other hand, however, there is no reason why a politics cannot be informed by ethics. It would therefore be given a stake outside its own game. In the last chapter, I will outline some reasons why a return to politics is necessary for ethics.

I began with the ambitious aim of relating the ethics of a few of Shakespeare's history plays to religious concerns current in his time. But I have only sketched a prolegomenon towards such a project, though I remain interested in the relation between the problems posed on Shakespeare's stage, and the religious thought which informs them. I hope, nevertheless, that the following analysis of *King Lear* in terms of Levinas's philosophy will open some alternatives to the dominant understanding of the world as "a jungle out there," and will allow a reading of

religion in Shakespeare not only in terms of power and ideology, but also in terms of ethical problems which have a reality not exhausted by their imbrication within the operations of power. This project was not as simple as it at first seemed: as a totalizing discourse, that of power has a limitless ability to explain new phenomena in its own terms. Part of the strength of New Historicism has come from its ability to appropriate other discourses, of anthropology, gender relations, psychology, and so forth, in order to extend the discourse of power, explaining what would seem to stand against it in its own terms, or even explaining it away. Thus, an act of generosity can become an act of homage, a cultural ceremony, a symbol of gender relations, a subconscious act of hatred, or any number of many other things, as long as it is not an act of generosity itself, which would constitute a rupture in a history "which has the form of a war." Even Debora Shuger does not quite succeed in breaking free of this totality. She insists that "Religion is, first of all, not *simply* politics in disguise, a set of beliefs that represent and legitimate the social order by grounding it in the Absolute" (Shuger 6). However, in explicating what she calls "habits of thought," she draws heavily on Dollimore's definition of ideology, as "the very terms in which we perceive the world, almost–and the Kantian emphasis is important here–the condition and grounds of consciousness itself" (Shuger 8-9; Dollimore 9). Dollimore's definition does not open the possibility for a definition of ideology "not confined to the production and maintenance of power," as Shuger argues, since ideology merely serves to subsume religion into politics. The marvelous utility of this term "ideology" is that it allows all other discourses to be treated as part of a political struggle, which becomes, as it were, free-floating, without any stake outside its own apparently groundless game. The "habits of thought" that Shuger finds in Renaissance thought could just be understood as prior socialization, ideological constructs serving specific interests, tools deployed to extend one's power over one's environment, or something else. They do not stand against a totalizing view of the world as

politics.

My goal is not to criticize Shuger, whose work on religious thought is certainly not ultimately a work on politics; nor is she promulgating a theory of literature so much as presenting a richly detailed description of some important English Renaissance assumptions and debates. I am, however, suggesting that part of what makes resistance to the New Historicism necessary is, ironically, its seemingly bottomless ability to appropriate other theoretical structures. Merely to offer alternatives, therefore, is not enough. Pechter admits that his own proposal–"love makes the world go round"–can no longer be seriously considered:

> it trails clouds of Wordsworthian diction, of something far more deeply interfused, or worse, of Tennysonian sentiment, of the hope that something good will be the final goal of ill. (Pechter 301)

A recourse to this sort of alternative would be no more effective than attempting to return to much of the criticism of the 1940s, with its already discredited assumptions and methods. What is at stake in this reading is not only our ability to see the past in terms other than those proposed by the New Historicism, but also our ability to escape an all-encompassing politics, that recognizes no authority outside itself. Levinas noted in a radio interview that it is unfortunate that politics has "its own justification" outside ethics ("Ethics and Politics" 292), and can therefore cut itself off from ethics. What is at stake in a Levinasian reading is the ability to move beyond politics, to what can provide its motive, its ground, and its stake.

Introduction and Methodology

A. C. Bradley's remarkably divided view of *King Lear* begins a dialectic that continues to the present day. He is forthright in acknowledging the darkness of the play, quoting Swinburne at length on the subject (Bradley 276-77), and declaring that "this is certainly the most terrible picture that Shakespeare painted of the world" (Bradley 272). This leads him to deny the importance of theology to criticism of the work. Revelation is specifically excluded: "Nor do I mean that *King Lear* contains a revelation of righteous omnipotence or heavenly harmony, or even a promise of the reconciliation of mystery and justice" (Bradley 278-79). Nevertheless, when discussing the character of Lear himself, Bradley suggests that we would be near the truth

> if we called this poem *The Redemption of King Lear*, and declared that the business of "the gods" with him was neither to torment him, nor to teach him a "noble anger," but to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life. (Bradley 285)

The reading of the play which Bradley favours implies Lear's realization of "the common humanity" beneath "the differences of rank and raiment" and his awareness that "all things in the world are vanity except love" (Bradley 285). The redemption, in other words, is strictly secular and substitutes "humanity" or "love" for God, as the object of revelation. It might not be too harsh to claim that Bradley's reading reconciles a godless and pessimistic world-view with a redemptive message, in a humanism which, like the nineteenth century "religion of humanity" (Davies 28-32), reverses the incarnation by turning man into God.

I do not begin the task of locating my own work *vis-à-vis* twentieth-century criticism with a summary of Bradley's reading in order to treat him as a sort of scapegoat by way of

justifying my own reading as less naïve. On the contrary, Bradley's reading is theoretically and critically sophisticated, drawing on a famously difficult philosopher to inform and shape a complex and subtle argument. Specifically, his dialectic between *Lear* as both redemptive and so secular as to exclude "omnipotence" is mostly Hegelian. In his lecture on "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," Bradley offers a series of "supplements" to his own paraphrase of Hegel's theory. For Bradley, Hegel's view of tragedy describes a conflict between "powers rightfully good in themselves" (for instance, family and state, or love and honour), which make exclusive and competing claims upon the ethical substance of the character. Bradley objects to the famous philosopher, however, arguing that Hegel's "language almost suggests that our feeling at the close of the conflict is, or should be, one of complete reconciliation. This it surely neither is nor can be" ("Hegel's" 83). Specifically, Hegel's "reconciliation" does not include the sense of elation which accompanies tragedy and which Bradley describes as "A rush of passionate admiration, and a glory in the greatness of the soul" ("Hegel's" 84). While no redemption comes from above, it is worked out by the sufferer himself. The final object of veneration in tragedy is the human. It is a measure of the strength of Bradley's reading that its dialectic, between a reading of the play as *The Redemption of King Lear* and as the depiction of a world in which no omnipotence enters, also characterizes *Lear* criticism in the twentieth century as a whole. This is not to say that the conflict between readers of *Lear* as a "Christian tragedy" and a nihilistic tragedy achieves a reconciliation of thesis and antithesis in a new synthesis. It is, rather, open-ended and widely productive.

The trend towards making *King Lear* a Christian tragedy, according to G. R. Hibbard's survey of twentieth-century criticism, seems to have reached a dominant position in the mid-century. Irving Ribner claimed that the play "affirms justice in the world, which it sees as a harmonious system ruled by a benevolent God" (Hibbard 9). Kenneth Muir linked such claims

with a theme of resurrection: "The old Lear died in the storm. The new Lear is born in the scene in which he is reunited with Cordelia. [. . .] He is resurrected as a fully human being" (xlix). If not quite indulging in claims of resurrection, a number of critics at least consider the suffering of Lear and Gloucester to be redemptive. "The gods," writes G. I. Duthie, "in benignity, permit Lear and Gloucester to die in a state of spiritual health" (Brooke 74). Variations on the theme of redemption continue in criticism almost to the present day. Cherrell Guilfoyle, in "The Redemption of King Lear," a 1989 article clearly influenced by Bradley, defends Edgar's exhortation to "Look up, my lord," on the grounds that "Cordelia is on her way to heaven" (Guilfoyle 65). Similarly, Stephen J. Lynch in 1986 declares that "the military victory of the old play is transformed by Shakespeare into a more profound form of spiritual triumph" (Lynch 171). The suffering of King Lear is acknowledged by such readings, of course, but it is always explained, and therefore contained, on the grounds that it leads to spiritual redemption, rebirth, or education.

What I find inadequate about this sort of Christian reading is that it is so easily adapted to humanism. In questioning what I call a "humanist" reading, I am not simply hoping to revive what some critics like to call "Christian humanism" against what others might term "secular humanism." Instead, I wish to avoid what might be called the "super-Pelagian" aspirations of the nineteenth century "religion of humanity," a replacement of Christianity by an elevated estimate of the importance of man, who works his own redemption. If God represents radical alterity, then this effort banishes the Other in favour of a universalized, totalizing "man." Muir claims that

> Shakespeare goes back to a pre-Christian world and builds up from the nature of man himself, and not from revealed religion, those same moral and religious ideas that were being undermined. (1)

The result may be the same–"those same moral and religious ideas" are once again proclaimed–but revelation is frankly excluded. Since revelation was itself (we assume) central to the "religious ideas" which Muir describes as being undermined in Shakespeare's time, its simultaneous restoration and rigorous exclusion strains comprehension. Knight declares that the characters bear their suffering "with an ever deeper insight into their own nature and the hidden purposes of existence" (Knight 196) and that "love" is revealed in the play to be "the sole ground of a genuinely self-affirming life and energy" (Knight 118). Knight and Muir remain upholders of a reading of the play as Christian tragedy, though one can see how their interpretations, relying on ideas of love or existence, could also be attractive to critics with no such commitment. D. G. James is just such a critic, for he declares not only that "there is no crumb of Christian comfort in" the play, but also that certain of the characters remain completely altruistic and that Lear emerges a changed man (Hibbard 7). There is redemption in this reading, but no Christianity. To Stephen Greenblatt, "the forlorn hope of an impossible redemption persists" in our secular age, though it is now "drained of its institutional and doctrinal significance, empty and vain" ("Exorcists" 121). It is back to this post-Christian redemption that humanist critics harken nostalgically. One can only agree with Nicholas Brooke, who claimed in a pugnacious 1964 article that metaphysics had "faded from respected philosophical academies: and here we have the spectacle of the literary critics metaphysicking for all they are worth" (Brooke 86). After discrediting the theological reading, secular critics nevertheless return to a Christian metaphysics, simply stripped of its religious overtones. We might summarize the last fifty years by saying that an effort to justify the play as presenting Christian doctrines slowly declines into what Harry Levin refers to as "a sort of lay religion" (Hibbard 3). The result, as Brooke quite rightly noted, is a secular reading implicitly reliant on Christian metaphysics; inversely, an understanding of the play as Christian has come to depend upon the prior acceptance of a

metaphysics that can easily be secularized and is, in any case, already discredited. To argue that the play is Christian is usually to argue that the God who governs the play is active and benevolent, and that this benevolence is demonstrated by the redemption, resurrection or at least education of Lear or one of the other characters. The ways of God–even a fictive God, or in the secular reading, Shakespeare–must be justified to man.

Is there a reading of *Lear* which is grounded in the Christian context from which it arose, but which does not rely upon humanism? This thesis attempts to undertake such a reading. The difficulty is not that of justifying God to man; on the contrary, the central problem of *Lear* is the *angst* most characteristic of Luther and the whole Reformation era: how can man be justified to God? In such a reading, the divine functions not as a transcendent endorsement of man, as in Christian humanism, but as a radical Other to man, and therefore a challenge to man's conceit. Such a reversal of what we may, in the context of Lear criticism this century, term a traditional Christian reading is not without precursors. In a brilliant article heavily influenced by the radical theology of Rudolf Bultmann, René E. Fortin points out that

> it is not at all presumed in the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy that God will intervene on call for his faithful; nowhere is a God of sweetness and light promised to man on this earth. (Fortin 118)

On the contrary, the play may be seen as an effort to "demythologize Christianity, to reassert the hiddenness of God against the presumptuous pieties and shallow rationalism of the Edgars and Albanys of the world" (Fortin 121). No study of the play is obligated to define theology starting from Feuerbach's declaration that "*homo homini deus est*" (Davies 28). As I will show in chapter four, it is precisely such a projection of the aspirations and hopes of men to a transcendent plane which is demolished by the play's so-called atheism, but this need not lead us to a nihilist reading of the play.

In contradistinction to humanist readings, the past fifty years have seen a number of readings that Jasper Neel labels "nihilist" (Neel 192-93). Hibbard notes "a crucial shift taking place around 1960," but the nihilist reading is considerably older. Swinburne claimed that "Requital, redemption, amends, equity, explanation, pity and mercy, are words without a meaning" (Bradley 277) in this play. Nevertheless, nihilism seems to have begun displacing redemptionism as the dominant reading shortly after 1960. In a powerful and widely influential essay, Jan Kott compares *King Lear* to various works of twentieth-century drama. If the play strips away layers of meaning and pretence, "the onion is peeled to the very last, to the suffering 'nothing'" (Kott 157). To the nihilistic reading, the play intimates the "nothingness" of human existence.

The nihilistic reading can mount a strong *prima facie* case, especially *vis-à-vis* the traditional Christian or secular humanist reading. Shakespeare makes a number of changes from the play's sources. Nahum Tate was not the first person to write a happy-ending *Lear*. The older and anonymous play from which Shakespeare was working also ended happily, as do the accounts of Lear in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and *A Mirror for Magistrates*. The difference must have been especially unsettling to the first audience, unaware that the play would violate their expectations of seeing divine justice triumphant (Lynch 170). Shakespeare's play moves away from what Howard Felperin calls a "morality vision of sacred unity" (Felperin 98). Cherrell Guilfoyle notes a formal resemblance to the mystery plays, but this leads her to propose that *Lear* is "an antithetical Lucifer play, with the wrong people being cast out of heaven" (Guilfoyle 52). One of Shakespeare's largest changes consists in transposing the play to pagan times (Lynch 161) and while Muir can argue that it shows "pagan characters groping their way towards" (li) some intimation of Christianity, the "pagans on stage," as Brooke writes, "give no hint of the ultimate benignity of the gods" (Brooke 74). According to Kott, the

irony of characters calling upon gods who never intervene becomes greater and greater as the play unfolds (Kott 158). In Gloucester's fall, an absurd mechanism takes the place of the divine (Kott 133). If he learns anything, it is the lesson of "an overtly fictive theodicy" contrived by Edgar (Keefer 153). Even Bradley, that well of self-contradiction, claims that Shakespeare's mind is "expressed in the bitter contrast between [the characters'] faith and the events we witness" (Bradley 274). The dreadful ending, in every sense of the word, which Johnson could not bring himself to re-read, would have struck the original audience as a shock, just as it surprises and baffles the on-stage characters and defies the expectations of those familiar with its sources and analogues, or perhaps even misled by the comic conventions which appear to govern the play (Snyder 140).

It is this ending which forms the most important piece of evidence exploited by nihilist critics. Kott notes that while, in most tragedies and histories, some Malcolm or Fortinbras comes along to reestablish order, such a device is conspicuous by its absence in *King Lear*, where "the world is not healed again" (Kott 152). We may be beguiled into thinking of Lear's reawakening at the end of act four as a resurrection, produced by Divine Love working through Cordelia, but we are left at the end of the play not with a resurrection, but with the dead Lear slumped across his daughter's corpse (Keefer 168). Until the entrance of Lear bearing the dead Cordelia, order is being more or less restored by Albany and Edgar. This scene of order restored is displaced by the suffering of the innocent, by Lear's madness and fury, and by his terrible, unanswerable question: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?" (5.3.305-06).

Greenblatt's claim that redemption has been "drained of its institutional and doctrinal significance, empty and vain" ("Exorcists" 121) points towards the major argument for the nihilistic reading, that there is no divinely-sanctioned order in the world of the play. Critics who subscribe to this view reject Kenneth Myrick's declaration that, to the original audience,

unbelievable elements in the plot were "quiet but solemn reminders of a divine order" (Neel 189) or G. Wilson Knight's contention that "Nature [. . .] though subject to disorder, was essentially ordered, and it was ordered for the good of man" (Knight 86-87). Knight also argues that "Man's morality, his idealism, his justice–all are false and rotten to the core" (Knight 192). The nihilistic argument consists in using the latter of Knight's observations to destroy the former. Nicholas Brooke declares that the progression of the last two acts continually sets ideas of poetical justice, the avenging gods, against the perceptions of experience, "and has not only made it impossible to retain *any* concept of an ordered universe, but also promoted the reflection that any system of order results in very strange notions of justice" (Brooke 85). If there is order behind the suffering of the characters, it produces Edgar's claim that the gods "of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to plague us" (5.3.169-70), the effect of which, according to Brooke "must be a rejection of these gods" (Brooke 83). Kott claims that even an appeal to malevolent gods is an attempt "to justify suffering" (Kott 159). Needless to say, he also dismisses such appeals as bootless. Gloucester's suicide is farcical because "it only has meaning if the gods exist" (Kott 149). In fact, Kott claims that "*King Lear* makes a tragic mockery of all eschatologies: of the heaven promised on earth, and the Heaven promised after death; in fact, of Christian and secular theodicies" (Kott 147). Not only does this claim denounce the traditional Christian interpretation, it also points the way towards a different theological reading of the play. Fortin observes that "if the absence of visible supernatural intervention is to be the cudgel to beat down Christian interpretations–or Christian interpreters–one had better take a second look at the traditional beliefs of Christianity" (Fortin 118). Kott's easy elision between "the heaven promised on earth, and the Heaven promised after death" shows that he regards the "eschatologies" as fundamentally related to the order of the world, rather than as, in Bultmann's understanding of the term, promising "a cosmic catastrophe which will do away with all

conditions of the present world as it is" (Bultmann "Jesus" 104). As long as God is seen as the source and ground of a social or political order, his abolition becomes an act of ideological subversion, kicking out the prop on which some humanisms are built. Conversely, however, a lack of justice in the world implies a lack of eschatologies only if such eschatologies are assumed to be transcendent but artificial endorsements of the world's justice.

Against this reading of eschatology, Levinas proposes an eschatology which he understands, perhaps following Bultmann, as "a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history." It is outside what is captured within the totalizing thought of war, which he anticipates before Foucault and rejects. Such an eschatology allows a victory of morality over the reality of war, with its *prima facie* apparentness:

> Morality will oppose politics in history and will have gone beyond the functions of prudence or the canons of the beautiful to proclaim itself unconditional and universal when the eschatology of messianic peace will have come to superpose [superimpose?] itself upon the ontology of war. (*Totality and Infinity* 22)

Nor surprisingly, he adds that "philosophers distrust" such an eschatology. So might the skeptical reader, especially given the overtly religious overtones of "messianic peace." Nevertheless, Levinas insists that his use of the term eschatology is different from the usual deployment in religion and theology. He contrasts his use of the term to that which is teleological: "It does not introduce a teleological system into the totality; it does not consist in teaching the orientation of history" (*Totality and Infinity* 22). It does, on the contrary, indicate a radical alternative to the history which is war: "peace does not take place in the objective history disclosed by war, as the end of that war or as the end of history" (*Totality and Infinity* 24). To overcome this history, Levinas claims, it is necessary to posit something which overflows the "totality," which can be neither explained nor contained by it. The eschatological, Levinas

protests, is not merely a matter of faith or opinion (*Totality and Infinity* 24-25), since he finds "such a situation" of excessiveness in "the gleam of exteriority or transcendence in the face of the Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 24). Infinity, he claims, is "found in the relationship of the same with the other" (*Totality and Infinity* 26). This relationship does not take place outside history and experience: "It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience" (*Totality and Infinity* 23). Rather than representing a mystical escape from the situation of the world and history, transcendence in Levinas is a relationship within the world, but not explained, much less explained away, in the terms with which we habitually understand history. It is not, in other words, ultimately a defense of the world as we know it, finding in higher powers or infinitely distant rewards a compensation for our own suffering and *ressentiment*. Nor, I might add, does it simply surrender to the totality of history, to the view that "The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war" (Foucault 56). Rather, it submits "history as a whole" to judgement, and not on the basis of success or by way of an historical dialectic, in which a final victory will eventually come about at the end of history. Levinas refers to Hegelian historicism, but he might just as easily refer to its Marxist inverse (*Totality and Infinity* 23). Instead of sketching a teleology, the eschatological recalls that the "True," the undeniable horror of war, is not the same thing as the "Good" (*Totality and Infinity* 24). This eschatology escapes Kott's criticism that the play makes a tragic mockery of both earthly and transcendent heavens; instead of representing a reward for Gloucester's suffering, it represents the possibility of not accepting a "cheerless, dark and deadly" world as inevitable.

I think that Levinas's philosophy offers a new solution to the question posed by *King Lear* which has vexed the twentieth century: Is the play fundamentally about the meaninglessness of the world, or the justice of the world? The nihilists would hold that the *Lear* world is fundamentally meaningless, showing only suffering and pain, and ultimately cynical

even about its own gods. New historicism seems, by and large, to align itself with this group, at least insofar as Wilson may be right in saying that Kent's dreary conclusion to the play could be the New Historicists' "favourite line" (Wilson 8), or that they take their cue from the bleak view of a world dominated by the anonymous play of power from Michel Foucault. The alternative view, of a world governed by a benevolent Providence, or of an optimistic assessment of man's nature and abilities, has been long ago discredited, and, in any case, depends on constructions of the human which are themselves discredited. A third possibility arises, however, in Levinas's trenchant defense of the claims of ethics in spite of the apparent ubiquity of politics. It is not merely a matter of whether the plays represent a world governed by Christian or humanistic morality, but whether the relations between the characters can be exhaustively described within the circulation of power, cash, the sign or whatever. The relationship with the Other can be understood, and is depicted as excessive to such systems, overflowing totalizing ideas. From this perspective, it becomes possible to think beyond the economy, to ask what gives the game its stake.

While Levinas's ideas offer provocative ways of reading *King Lear*, they also pose some challenges of their own. To begin with, Levinas is extremely critical of aesthetics. In an early essay entitled "Reality and Its Shadow," he makes the extraordinary claim that in art

> the world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility. The poet exiles himself from the city. From this point of view, the value of beauty is relative. There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague. ("Reality and its Shadow" 142)

Robert Eaglestone uses this essay to argue that Levinas's antipathy to art "is such that it simply prevents any direct attempt to apply his work to the aesthetic, or to the interpretation of works of

art" (Eaglestone 99). However, Levinas's antipathy is directed only towards a narrow definition of the artwork, characterized by its completion, whereby "it does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue" ("Reality and its Shadow" 131). The artist critiques himself, Levinas argues, as "a part of the public" not as an artist ("Reality and its Shadow" 131). Similarly, self-critical art avoids what Levinas does not hesitate to label the idolatrous aspects of the artwork:

> Modern art, disparaged for its intellectualism (which, none the less goes back to Shakespeare, the Molière of *Don Juan*, Goethe, Dostoyevsky) certainly manifests a more and more clear awareness of this fundamental insufficiency of artistic idolatry. ("Reality and its Shadow" 143)

In fact, Levinas's entire essay is better understood not as a criticism of art, but of its "hypertrophy" in the work of Martin Heidegger and the romantics, as Eaglestone recognizes (Eaglestone 110); moreover, its overt purpose is not to criticize the aesthetic, but to champion the role of the critic alongside that of the artist. Levinas opens his essay by claiming that, in traditional understandings of art "criticism seems to lead a parasitic life" ("Reality and its Shadow" 130), but closes by claiming that his observations on the failure of art to become engaged in the world is only "true for art separated from the criticism that integrates the inhuman work of the artist into the human world" and calling for a "philosophical criticism" ("Reality and its Shadow" 142). Rather than rendering an application of Levinas's ideas to artwork impossible, therefore, "Reality and Its Shadow" actually calls for engagement in the work of criticism.

In the course of delivering Levinas's funeral oration, Jacques Derrida quoted Levinas's introduction to his first book, which introduced phenomenology into France: "The fact that in France phenomenology is not a doctrine known to everyone has been a constant problem in the writing of this book" ("Adieu" 8). Levinas's work is not known to everyone in North America, either. Although I cannot claim anything like Levinas's achievement, his position as a relatively

unknown thinker among Shakespeare critics demands some sort of introduction. My project, as a result, may perhaps be best understood as a reading of Levinasian texts in parallel with *King Lear*, allowing the two texts, if not quite to deconstruct each other, at least to exchange examples and explications. This exchange is facilitated by two things: first, Levinas often has Shakespearean and other literary texts in mind while writing his own works, citing them as examples or illustrations; and secondly, he engages, originally and provocatively, with many of the critical notions which have migrated from continental philosophy to Shakespeare criticism in recent years. "It sometimes seems to me," he writes in *Time and the Other*, "that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare" (*Time and the Other* 72).[1] The second "of" seems usefully vague, allowing that all philosophy could be an act of Shakespeare criticism or, conversely, that "Shakespeare" might itself be able to meditate on all philosophy. The Shakespearean text is in any case not limited to non-philosophical questions, or to serving as illustrative material for the history of ideas. While I have gone to some efforts to show that the ideas I find in *King Lear* were available to the Jacobeans, I have nevertheless not been rigorously historicist in my hermeneutics. The argument does not start with research into or assumptions about Shakespeare's own time, its prejudices and beliefs, and work outwards to the ideas which might, therefore, be expressed by the play. On the contrary, I have tried to approach the text more or less as one might approach a philosophical text, critically and with my own philosophical commitments, of course, but not fundamentally as illustrative of a historical moment, nor as something which I must resist, as a hostile otherness. Like any sort of Other, the text can frustrate, challenge, and escape my grasp, but that is precisely what makes engagement with it so rewarding.

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[1]"*Mais il me semble parfois que toute la philosophie n'est qu'une méditation de Shakespeare*" (*Le Temps et l'Autre* 60).

I have therefore aimed to read Levinas and Shakespeare in parallel. While my own reading of *King Lear* has been influenced by Levinas, conversely my reading of Levinas has been influenced by my own position as a Shakespeare critic. The arbitrariness of Levinas's choice of sight and hearing, to indicate two distinct and opposed phenomenologies, seems particularly clear in light of some of the metaphors used by characters in the play, as the end of chapter two shows. Similarly, the possibility that one might acknowledge others in moments, rather than once and forever, is suggested by the rather uneven course of the characters' progress and Lear's inconsistent lurches from boasting about his own powers to mourning his daughter and back again in the final scene. Finally, the possibility of an exclusive society consisting of only two people and founded on the exclusion of others, which Levinas treats in only a cursory manner, is suggested by Lear's vision of "we two alone" in prison.

The organization of this thesis follows from the need to explicate Levinas's ideas, as well as from the internal logic of an argument about the position of ethics in *King Lear*. Since most readers cannot be expected to be already conversant with Levinas's philosophy, it is imperative first to sketch Levinas's ideas, and then to demonstrate their purchase on the text, before moving to the conclusions in chapters six and seven, which argue for a new reading of the play's religious notions and for the need to establish an ethical ground for politics and political readings of this play. The remainder of this introduction begins the task of introducing Levinas. The first chapter, on naming, power, identity, and their anxieties, uses Levinas's theory of selfhood to establish the existential issues of selfhood at stake in the characters' treatments of one another, especially Lear's treatment of his daughters. Chapter two pursues the same subject at somewhat greater depth, analysing the so-called "sight imagery" of the play in order to show its basis in anxieties regarding control, which lead to efforts to know rather than to acknowledge and to an avoidance of the faces of others. Both chapters two and three contrast Levinas's view

of language, as an exposure of oneself to and for an Other, with that of Derrida, who sees language in largely anonymous terms. Chapter two looks at problems of knowledge, and of subjecting the object or the Other to one's control by appropriation, while chapter three looks at economies, and how human relations tend to be expressed in terms of reciprocal exchanges, generally avoiding anything incommensurable with such exchanges.

The fourth chapter, on the Fool, shows that a demystification of social relations does not itself amount to ethical analysis. The Fool's philosophy, instead of leading to social change or ethical behaviour, leads only to an evasion of the Other, who is treated not as a person, but as an artwork. The question of the ontological status of the artwork, its lack of freedom and inability to present a face, leads to chapter five, on tragedy and the surprising difficulty which a number of characters have in committing suicide. Levinas's ideas concur with early modern religious thought in rejecting suicide as an overreliance on the self. Rather than escaping one's own being, one is freed only by responsibility to the Other. Not only suicide, but also idolatry, offers a false exit. A number of characters apostrophize idols who take the place of the Other, allowing the worshippers only a circular relationship with themselves as the idols' creators. Chapter six, focussed on questions of idolatry and the play's religion, provides a junction between the false escapes from Being through folly, suicide or idolatry, and the true transcendence of the Other, understood as god or man. This chapter revisits the critique of New Historicism, showing that the atheism which this critical school finds in the play is no more than the rejection of gods which a sixteenth-century audience would recognize as false. Atheism opens the route to a more rigorous theistic reading, in which the Divine is understood not as a social projection but as radical alterity. The destruction of the idols opens the way to an acknowledgement of the Other, a possibility realized in the seventh and last chapter. On the basis of an examination of the relationship between Lear and Cordelia in the final scenes, this last chapter asks questions of

how a state or society can be constituted on the basis of responsibility rather than of placing limits on warfare.

It seems easiest to begin the introduction to Levinas's ideas with an image, the image of the night. The horror of the night, to Levinas, is not merely a horror of death or of not-being, but of indeterminacy. In conscious opposition to Heidegger, according to whom anxiety is always a response to nothingness, Levinas proposes a "horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being" (*Existence and Existents* 62). Levinas follows Henri Bergson in not believing in the possibility of pure nothingness (*Existence and Existents* 63). He describes the night by presenting a thought experiment:

> Let us imagine all things, beings and persons, returning to nothingness. [. . .] [W]hat of this nothingness itself? Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness (*Existence and Existents* 57).

He proceeds to define "This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable 'consummation of being'" as the "*there is*"[2] (*Existence and Existents* 57, his italics). The impossibility of a vacuum is not reassuring, since it means that being has "no exits," that it is a sort of prison, resembling Sartre's Hell in being impossible to leave (*Existence and Existents* 62-63). For Levinas, what is truly terrifying is not horror in the face of nothingness, but the inescapable, indeterminate being which remains "behind" nothingness: "Being is essentially alien and strikes against us. We undergo its suffocating embrace like the night, but it does not respond to us" (*Existence and Existents* 23). In the original French text of *De l'Existence à l'Existant*,[3] he declares that "*Il est*

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[2]Some translators prefer to leave Levinas's "there is" in the original French, as "*il y a*."

[3]The original title, unlike the translation, indicates a movement from Being in general ("*l'existence*"), which would be anonymous, to an individual being (*l'existant*), capable of

le mal d'être," which Alphonso Lingis has chosen to translate as "a pain in Being." As John Caruana argues, however, this passage can equally refer to "the evil of Being" (Caruana 36). Levinas identifies this "return of presence in negation, this impossibility of escaping from an anonymous and uncorruptible [*sic*] existence" as "the final depths of Shakespearean tragedy" (*Existence and Existents* 61). The night is not merely the absence of light, nor any other sort of lack or deficiency which would imply nothingness, but the inescapable presence of being; moreover, "what characterizes pure being, above all, is its complete absence of determinacy" (Caruana 35).

Levinas uses the image of insomnia to describe an awareness of the anonymity of Being. Sleep, by contrast, is a limiting of the disorientation and excessiveness of the anonymous night: "In lying down, in curling up in a corner to sleep, we abandon ourselves to a place; qua base it becomes our refuge" (*Existence and Existents* 70). Where the night is indeterminate, the process of sleep provides a place, thereby limiting and defining the excessiveness of Being. In Levinas's *Existence and Existents*, as in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, sleep is a cure to the anguish of vigilance:

> Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,
>
> The which he lacks; that to provoke in him,
>
> Will close the eye of anguish. (4.4.12-15)

Throughout the play, in fact, sleep is presented as a process of healing. In act three, Kent claims that Lear might be cured were he allowed to sleep (3.6.95-98). If Lear's madness is symbolized by the indeterminate world of the storm, obscuring the stars and confusing earth and sky, then its potential cure is abandonment to a specific and determined base–sleep. Unfortunately Lear, like many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, is an insomniac. According to Levinas, insomnia is an

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bearing a name.

inability to give oneself a place and a home within the anonymous stirrings of Being:

> The impossibility of rending the invading, inevitable, and anonymous rustling of existence manifests itself particularly in certain times when sleep evades our appeal. One watches on when there is nothing to watch and despite the absence of any reason for remaining watchful (*Existence and Existents* 65).

For Levinas, sleep is an escape, a resting of the endless play of Being.

According to Levinas, the act of sleeping, choosing a place, is the genesis of consciousness: "Consciousness comes out of rest, out of a position, out of this unique relationship with a place" (*Existence and Existents* 70). He later specifies that consciousness is to be taken as concurrent with subjectivity: "Through taking position in the anonymous *there is* a subject is affirmed" (*Existence and Existents* 81). The creation of a subject, in turn, allows the world to be enjoyed sensually: "The world offers the bountifulness of terrestrial nourishment to our intentions –including those of Rabelais; the world where youth is happy and restless with desire is the world itself" (*Existence and Existents* 39). Consciousness allows for a world that can be enjoyed. When Lear does, briefly, manage to rest, he falls asleep breathing the words "We'll go to supper i'th'morning" (3.6.82). The parallel between Lear's words and Ecclesiastes 10.16 implies sensual enjoyment, or even hedonism: "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!" (*KJV*). Only in exceptional circumstances, "When one has to eat, drink and warm oneself in order not to die, when nourishment becomes fuel, as in certain kinds of hard labor" (*Existence and Existents* 45), such as that in which Levinas was engaged while writing *Existence and Existents*, is the function of consciousness, reducing the world to things which exist for our enjoyment, defeated. When Lear is able to choose a place to rest, the world ceases to be an elemental, indeterminate scene of storm and chaos, and becomes a

source of pleasure. If achieving subjectivity over and against the elemental would be tantamount to a cure for Lear's madness, then Lear is well on his way to recovery when his rest is disturbed once again by the need to flee.

The subject, however, is unable to fully assure itself against the return of the night, according to Levinas. The victory over anonymous being which sleep represents is always contingent: "We must not fail to recognize the event in sleep, but we must notice that into this event its failure is already written" (*Existence and Existents* 83). The reason for this failure is simply that "the act of taking position does not transcend itself" (*Existence and Existents* 81). While overcoming the anonymity of the *there is*, the subject does not escape its own being; on the contrary, it assumes its own being as a burden (*Existence and Existents* 78). Levinas characterizes indolence (*Existence and Existents* 26) and fatigue (*Existence and Existents* 30) as the experience of this burden: "To be weary is to be weary of being" (*Existence and Existents* 35). The freedom of the subject "finds itself to be a solitude, in the definitiveness of the bond with which the ego is chained to its self" (*Existence and Existents* 84). Since nothingness is impossible, it is beyond the subject's power to free itself from its own being: "The ego returns ineluctably to itself; it can forget itself in sleep, but there will be a reawakening" (*Existence and Existents* 78). To kill or to die is to attempt to escape being, "to go where freedom and negation operate" (*Existence and Existents* 61). Suicides are frustrated in the play. The greatest horror of the tragedy is realized when death does not allow escape.

The night is inescapable, because efforts to bring it under control are merely a further extension of the subject's grasp, not a movement to true alterity. Knowledge reduces its object to its grasp ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 76), but this process robs such objects of their alterity. In seeking new worlds to conquer, the subject merely expands the horizons of its accustomed way of reducing the world to its object. And subjectivity, as Levinas makes clear, is not a true

escape from the anonymity of being. Like the moonscape in Levinas's "Ideology and Idealism" the night stretches out before one as

> a world of being without human traces, where subjectivity has lost its place in the middle of a mental landscape that one may compare to that which presented itself to the first astronauts who set foot on the moon, where the earth itself appeared as a dehumanized star. ("Ideology and Idealism" 240)

In the moonscape of Levinas's essay, or the blasted heath of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the subject cannot escape the night by any act of mastery or any expression of power.

That which the subject most requires is not more power, but something other than a further extension of the same. The approach of the Other constitutes "the event of the most radical breakup of the very categories of the ego, for it is for me to be somewhere else than my self; it is to be pardoned, to not be a definite existence" (*Existence and Existents* 85). A less anxious selfhood begins with an address from an Other. Responsibility for another makes one unique ("Diachrony and Representation" 108), and therefore frees from the anonymity of the night. True escape from the night of anonymous, indeterminate being is achieved only in the face of another. Levinas goes so far as to claim that ethics is prior to ontology. Many times throughout his career, Levinas makes the point that "To be or not to be" is not the ultimate question. Gloucester cries in his frustration "Is wretchedness depriv'd of that benefit / To end itself by death?" (4.6.61-2). The self is incapable of reaching alterity by its own efforts, not even by ceasing to be; even death is not truly an escape. The Other provides the only true freedom from the night.

The proximity of Levinas's ideas to Stanley Cavell's theory of "acknowledgement" provides a further opportunity to describe Levinas's thought, by way of distinguishing it. This is not, of course, to imply a causal link between the two men. In his work on *Lear*, Cavell makes

only a handful of references to any continental philosophers after Nietzsche, and most of these citations are parenthetical or in footnotes. Two thinkers, working out of very different traditions, have nevertheless arrived at similar ideas. Cavell's reading is therefore something of a reassurance that I am not just projecting my own interest in the relation with the Other onto the play. The problem for the characters in the play, according to Cavell, resembles that of the audience, failing to, or fleeing from, acknowledging the Other. His work has been taken over and expanded by Harry Berger, who, however, has a somewhat different reading of acknowledgement. In any case, these two critics are probably the closest of any *Lear* critics to Levinas in their ideas, and it is with their readings that I will be engaged most closely.

For Cavell, the ethical problem of the character follows from what we may recognize as the dramatic character's similitude to Levinas's Other, from the fact that literary characters are like other people. Neither the character nor the Other are chosen by the self. "Even if I kill the other or chase the other away in order to be safe from the intrusion," Adriaan Peperzak writes, "nothing will ever be the same as before" (Peperzak 20). Cavell says something very similar when he observes that not to respond to someone is still to respond:

> Some persons sometimes are capable of certain blindnesses or deafnesses toward others; but, for example, avoidance of the presence of others is not blindness or deafness to their claim upon us; it is as conclusive an acknowledgement that they are present as murdering them would be.[4] (Cavell 103)

In Levinas as in Cavell, the artwork (in Cavell's case, the theatre) always carries the risk of releasing us from our ethical burden, even as it imposes such a burden. Cavell argues that theatrical tragedy may find its purpose in confronting us with tragedy to which we do *not* have to

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[4]Here and throughout this dissertation, citations to Cavell by name are to *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*. His other works are cited by their titles.

respond (Cavell 103). If tragedy frees us from the obligation to respond, conversely turning the other person into a literary character is the ultimate avoidance, since it frees us of the responsibility to respond to him or her:

> There is fictional existence with a vengeance, and there is the theatricality which theater such as *King Lear* must overcome, is meant to overcome, shows the tragedy in failing to overcome. (Cavell 104)

Lear should awaken us, if Cavell is correct, to the need to draw the artwork into an ethical discourse. Levinas talks about a similar imperative: "the immobile statue has to be put in movement and made to speak" ("Reality and its Shadow" 142). To fail to acknowledge has political consequences, which Cavell explores in an affecting conclusion that has as much bearing on the Vietnam war as on *King Lear*. To both thinkers, our relation to the artwork should, ideally, involve ethics. According to Cavell, our failure to acknowledge another creates fictionality itself: "Then he is indeed a fictitious creature, a figment of my imagination, like all the other people in my life whom I find I have failed to know, have known wrong". (Cavell 108)

Cavell builds his argument about *Lear* toward a theoretical crux: why is drama passive, for the audience?

> The answer "Because it is an aesthetic context" is no answer, partly because no one knows what an aesthetic context is, partly because, if it means anything, a factor of its meaning is "a context in which I am to do nothing"; which is the trouble. (Cavell 91)

Why, in other words, do we not intervene in the events we are witnessing, warning Lear in the opening scene, for instance? Does the fact that we are not present to the characters free us of allowing them to be present to us, "acknowledging" them, to use one of Cavell's favourite terms? "Am I," he asks rhetorically, "to remember that I am not responsible for these people up there?"

(Cavell 90). Our liabilities in responding to characters, he argues, are precisely those we find in responding to real people: "rejection, brutality, sentimentality, indifference, the relief and the terror in finding courage, the ironies of human wishes" (Cavell 89). This does not mean, of course, that we should moralize, which would be to reduce the characters to objects in a moral lesson. We should, on the contrary, allow the characters to challenge our sense of the ordinary. This, Cavell claims, is the effect of the first scene, and its claim "to be called philosophical" (Cavell 87-88). Levinas similarly calls for a "philosophical criticism" which would "have to introduce the perspective of the relation with the other" ("Reality and its Shadow" 143). Cavell is seeking to go beyond the mere sentimentality of romanticism or dismissiveness of materialism towards a criticism in which the work neither invites us into an irresponsible dream, nor serves as the object of our powers, but challenges us ethically. The great theme of Cavell's essay (indeed, an important theme of his career) is the avoidance of acknowledgement, both by the characters who avoid acknowledging each other and by the audience who avoid acknowledging the stage. Cordelia's death, as Johnson also noted, "is so shocking that we would avoid it if we could" (Cavell 68).

Having sketched some of the similarities between Levinas's and Cavell's ideas, I should also note some of the differences. Cavell, unlike Levinas, tends to lionize the idea of presence, claiming that tragedy provides "an experience of *continuous presentness*" (Cavell 93). To Levinas, on the other hand, presence is always a matter of making present, of one's grasp and power (*Time and the Other* 72), and is therefore the opposite of the ethical response to the Other. Berger, who acknowledges his debt to Cavell, paraphrases him in saying that "to acknowledge others, to respond to their claims, is to make others present to me" (Berger xi). He then proceeds, however, to quote Cavell himself, saying the opposite, "there is no acknowledgement [. . .] unless we put ourselves in their presence, reveal ourselves to them" (Berger xi). Is

acknowledgement, then, an experience of vulnerability, acknowledging the other as Other, or is it ultimately self-referential? Cavell tries to reconcile these possibilities when he writes that

> there path from my location to his. (We could also say: There is no distance between us, as there is none between me and a figure in my dream, and none, or no one, between me and my image in a mirror). We do, however, occupy the same time. (Cavell 105)

In his choice of metaphors, at least, Cavell's logic is the opposite of Levinas's, to whom the non-coincidence of self and Other is the beginning of all temporal difference. Moreover, earlier in the same work, Cavell argues that "self-recognition is, phenomenologically, a form of insight" and that moreover, it has a "necessity in recognizing others" (Cavell 46). For Cavell, recognition of the Other is secondary to self-recognition, though he is not insistent on this principle. To deny the realism of the abdication scene, he argues, "suggests a careful ignorance of the quick routes taken in one's own rages and jealousies and brutalities" (Cavell 87). To recognize it, in other words, is to recognize something in oneself. To summarize, I would suggest that Levinas can provide an extension to Cavell, providing a model for acknowledgement that does not begin with the primacy of the ego, or end in the appropriation of the Other as an aspect of oneself.

What I find valuable in Cavell's work, in other words, is the idea of acknowledgement as acknowledgement of an Other, of the alterity of somebody else. My appropriation of Cavell's ideas is therefore somewhat different from that of Berger, to whom acknowledgement is almost always acknowledgement of one's own guilt. Textuality, according to Berger, offers "the opportunity to struggle against the temptation to use or reduce or praise or blame" the character (Berger 68), and in suffering "with and for Lear" we "acknowledge [. . .] his otherness as a person." Nevertheless, the primary definition which Berger accords to Cavell's title *Disowning Knowledge* is refusing "to acknowledge something within yourself you sense and fear, a fear you fear to confront and try to keep unknown" (Berger xii). Disowning knowledge is always to

disown a part of oneself. Conversely, to acknowledge is to recognize something within oneself. Seeing evil in others, even in fictional characters, is subversive because it might lead us to recognize the evil within ourselves (Berger 52). Berger separates two more or less subconscious motivations in Lear and Gloucester. The "darker purpose" consists in attacks against others, justified on the grounds of one's status as a victim. The "darkest purpose," on the other hand, is "an impulse to aggression against oneself that responds to feelings of guilt or remorse" (Berger 51). While the "darker purpose" may betray an allergic relation to other people, the further motivation removes even this dubious level of social interaction. Other people matter, in Berger's reading, insofar as they become factors within the self. Lear dies in order to protect himself against the guilt of allowing Cordelia to die (Berger 48), not in sorrow that she is dead.

Berger avoids the radicality of the Other as Other by melting the individual Other into a linguistic community. He credits C. L. Barber with making him recognize that

> unless the ironist was capable of a minimal level of sympathy for and generosity toward the fictional objects of his criticism, he could not hope to respond adequately to the human claims the characters in the plays make on him. (Berger 50-51)

Such sympathy, however, must be directed towards "characters within the context of their community" (Berger 51). Discourse for Berger is not, as it is for Levinas, a communication with someone who is completely Other ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 106). On the contrary, the linguistic community creates each of the characters and allows him or her to communicate with another (Berger 53). In reading, as opposed to performance, the overall language which subsumes each of the characters becomes apparent, whereas in performance the character "confronts us directly with individuals who 'own' their speeches" (Berger 54). His preference for reading over viewing plays tends to diminish the effect of characters as directly

confronting us, in favour of a status as products of a linguistic system (Berger xviii). As a result, the Other becomes dissipated in society, and society becomes a source of "social resources available to self-deception" (Berger 26). Berger does not broach the possibility that there might be worse things than failing the Socratic command to know oneself. I wish to propose, following Levinas, that respect for, and responsibility towards the Other is more important than self-awareness.

PART 1: ANXIETY AND THE AVOIDANCE OF THE OTHER

Chapter one — "The name and all th'addition to a king": Naming, Power and the Self

Levinas understands the self as a contingent victory over the anonymity of being. Despite the uncertainty of this victory, it is nevertheless an accomplishment, achieved, according to Levinas, in an instant (*Existence and Existents* 18; *Time and the Other* 52). "Mastery," as Caruana summarizes Levinas's position, "is not a given" (Caruana 35). On the contrary, it is specifically achieved by the act of naming oneself, which Levinas refers to as "hypostasis," borrowing a term from theology to indicate "the event by which the act expressed by a verb became a being designated by a substantive" (*Existence and Existents* 82). Elsewhere, he writes that the hypostasis "is still a pure event that must be expressed by a verb; and nonetheless there is a sort of molting in this existing, already a something, already an existent" (*Time and the Other* 52). Before Gloucester's sons fight their the final duel, the herald challenges Edgar with the words "What are you?" not only asking for his name but also demanding that he prove his substantiality, "your quality" (5.3.118-19). No doubt this question is informed by concerns of class; certainly that is how Edgar understands it when he replies that he is "noble as the adversary / I come to cope" (5.3.122-23). Nevertheless, such questions of class are secondary to the more fundamental "fact that there is not only, anonymously, being in general, but there are beings capable of bearing names" (*Existence and Existents* 98).

Edgar's assumption of the name of poor Tom is more than the adoption of a disguise. It is also an assurance of his own individuality against the anonymity of existence: "Poor Turlygod! poor Tom! / That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am" (2.3.20-21). As poor Tom, Edgar is still

"something" individuated against the anonymity of being; as Edgar, he's "nothing." If a thing is defined by its differentiation from other things, then Edgar's nothingness is not a pure void, but a failure to delimit himself, an inability to hold the anonymity of the night at bay. In fact, were he to maintain his role as Edgar he would literally cease to be–he would be killed. "Let him fly far," says Gloucester, not without reason (2.1.55). While Edgar is "nothing," poor Tom's "something" implies a certain individuation in the night. After his social role as Edgar has collapsed, leaving him alone and defenceless, Edgar adopts a more theatrically overt role, giving himself a delimited identity over and against the suffocating embrace of being. Stanley Cavell has argued that even when naked, Edgar does not become "unaccomodated man" (Cavell 56).

It must be emphasized that according to Levinas, the self is only a contingent victory over the night of being, and remains accompanied by anxiety. In constituting its selfhood, the self becomes enchained to itself (*Totality and Infinity* 55). The only true route to redemption lies through the Other: "The true object of hope is the Messiah, or salvation" (*Existence and Existents* 91). This salvation, however, must come from without. "It can only come from elsewhere, while everything in the subject is here" (*Existence and Existents* 93). For this reason, an Other who is reincorporated as part of the self does not stand over and against the self, and is unable to save the self from the horror of anonymous existence. Recognizing the Other as part of oneself does not always imply her or his acceptance, as Berger and to a lesser extent Cavell seem to believe. On the contrary, it may simply serve as a means to deny the claim of the Other as Other. It would be wrong to state that Lear has no isolated self. What he lacks is not selfhood, but an Other than self, which is not immediately assimilated to it. As a result, he is unable to establish anything but a contingent victory over the night. If the self stands over and against the Other, then, as Regan observes, "he hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.292-93). Similarly, Goneril accuses the knights of failing to be men "Which know themselves" (1.4.249).

Those who treat the world as a locus of enjoyment and consumption do not measure themselves *vis-à-vis* any Other. Their self-awareness is grounded in no more than an act of will. In a very real sense, they do not "know themselves."

In another sense, however, Lear does know himself. Knowledge will discussed more fully in chapter two; for now, it must suffice to say that knowing an object renders it capable of at least an intellectual assimilation by the self ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 76). Lear confuses other people with elements of himself, treating Cordelia as "his wrath" (1.1.121). Conversely, he several times refers to himself in the third person, trying to treat himself as other. In doing so, he makes elements of himself into objects which can be controlled, commanded and perhaps reincorporated. Lear resembles Edmund, who controls his body well enough to wound himself in order to "beget opinion / Of my more fierce endeavour" (2.1.33-34). One might compare the dynamic of Goneril's declaration with Lear's declaration that Goneril is "a disease that's in my flesh, / Which I must needs call mine" (2.4.220-21). To Lear, the daughters are both his flesh, and therefore himself, and also objects to be manipulated, worked over and controlled. Gloucester nicely conflates the distinction when he tells Lear that "Our flesh and blood, my Lord, is grown so vile, / That it doth hate what gets it." In Poor Tom's immediately following line, "Poor Tom's a-cold" (3.4.142-44), the speaker refers to his own pain in the third person. Susan Snyder notes that "Edgar is prolific in inventing fiends who objectify Poor Tom's condition" (Snyder 176n59). His hunger is personified as Hoppedance, for instance, who "cries in Tom's belly for two white herring" (3.6.30-31). It would not be unfair to consider this a motif, exaggerated in Tom, but spread across many characters, by which elements of the self are objectified in order to be better controlled.[5] In fact, Lear and Edgar conspire in their self-

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[5]For this reason, one might prefer the uncorrected quarto text rendition of one of Goneril's lines, "My foote vsurps my body" (4.2.28), since in this version of the line, she turns

punishment. Lear identifies with Tom, or rather identifies Tom with himself, then considers Tom's self-mutilation "Judicious punishment" against the flesh that bears "pelican daughters" (3.4.73-74). Lear does not objectify elements of himself in order to accept or respect them, but in order better to control them. When he treats himself as other, he merely demonstrates that all others are reincorporated into his self.

According to the Fool, Lear is, like Edgar, "nothing," even more insubstantial than the figure "O": "now thou art an O without a figure. I am better then thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing" (1.4.190-91). Alfred W. Crosby claims that to the early moderns "the terrible zero, a sign for what was *not*, was as conceptually discomforting as the idea of a vacuum" (Crosby 113). A zero is a signifier without a signified, but it nevertheless grants a certain substantiality to nothing by naming it, rendering it usable in equations, for instance. Leonard and Thomas Digges, in an introduction to military engineering, neatly summarized the paradox: "The Ciphra O augmenteth places, but of himselfe signifieth not" (Digges sig. Cii). Crosby notes that Shakespeare was able to use it in *The Winter's Tale* as a metaphor for multiplying generosity, in Polixenes's speech to Leontes:

> And therefore, like a cipher
> (Yet standing in rich place), I multiply
> With one "We thank you" many thousands moe
> That go before it. (*Winter's Tale* 1.2.6-9)

On the other hand, Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, uses the term to describe becoming a

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her husband into a part of her own body and then treats that part as an object. The corrected copies render the line as "A fool usurps my bed," though it seems that every early text renders the line slightly differently, with the folio giving "My Foole vsurps my body," and the second and third quartos giving "My foote vsurps my head."

nothing, but one still signified, still augmenting the place of something else, but meaning nothing in himself:

> Mine were the very cipher of a function,
>
> To fine the faults whose fine stands in record,
>
> And let go by the actor. (*Measure* 2.2.39-41)

To punish only the fault, which is already "condemn'd ere it be done" (*Measure* 2.2.38) and not the sinner, would render his position similar to that of a zero, multiplying condemnation without contributing anything substantial. Like an "O without a figure," Lear lacks even a name, an arbitrary signifier, to make him seem substantial. In his divestiture, he has already given up his power to multiply others. Although the Fool would "rather be any kind o'thing than a fool" (1.4.181-83), he would not wish to be Lear. A fool is at least a thing, albeit the worst kind. Lear, on the other hand, is "nothing."

In the same scene, the Fool claims that "I'd keepe my coxcombs myself" (1.4.106-07). In fact, his coxcomb is his self, or at least, wearing it provides him with a rôle. Bearing his coxcomb is an act of signification which is also a substantive. In fact, "a fool, simpleton" is the second definition of "coxcomb" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which also cites two uses of this metonym by Shakespeare. By putting on his coxcomb the Fool gives himself an identity, just as Edgar gives himself an identity by adopting the name and rôle of poor Tom. Edmund Blunden claims that after speaking his last line, the Fool should "tIs itake off his coxcombe for the last time" (3.6.83n). Though this line exists only in the folio text, and should not be given too much importance, one can only agree that if the Fool were to remove his coxcomb, which provides his rôle and identity, he would be preparing to disappear. The fool, because he enjoys the identity of a fool, is able to endure until his mysterious disappearance without suffering the madness and crisis of Lear himself. Lear, however, has lost exactly what he sought to retain:

"the name and all th'addition to a king". (1.1.135)

According to Levinas, hypostasis is the beginning of "the preeminence, the mastery and the virility of the substantive" (*Existence and Existents* 98). The substantive, the bearing of a name, allows for power and mastery: "The existent is master of existing. It exerts on its existence the virile power of the subject. It has something in its power" (*Time and the Other* 54). To name oneself is the first power, and the beginning of all other powers. Edgar seems to find this experience of power in self-creation addictive. "The bedlam disguise does more than cover Edgar," observes Susan Snyder, "it *possesses* him in some way. He elaborates his *persona* far beyond what is required for concealment" (Snyder 149). In fact, Edgar's metadramatics, his "sullen and assumed humor of TOM of Bedlam" raise him to the Q1 title-page, a place he shares with no other character except Lear himself. Pretending to be someone else is fundamental to who he is, or, more fundamentally, to his individual being over and against Being in general. Edgar relentlessly spins off new disguises.[6] Not only does he assume the name of poor Tom, but also he pretends to be a "most poor man, made tame to Fortune's blows" for the benefit of Gloucester (4.6.219), and a Dover peasant for the benefit of Oswald a few lines later. Commenting on Edgar's transformations, A. C. Bradley asks rhetorically,

> is it not extraordinary that, after Gloster's attempted suicide, Edgar should first talk to him in the language of a gentleman, then to Oswald in his presence in broad peasant dialect, then again to Gloster in gentle language, and yet that Gloster should not manifest the least surprise? (Bradley 257)

The levels of disguise are complicated, as Susan Snyder points out, by the fact that Edgar has adopted what Bradley calls "gentle language" before casting off his role as poor Tom, and "that

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[6]One is tempted, in fact, to place the name 'Edgar' between inverted commas, since it takes its place among other of his personas, like 'Tom o'Bedlam'.

the exaggerated fiend is yet another disguise imposed retroactively" (Snyder 150). In fact, none of these disguises are really necessary, though the "broad peasant dialect" is most strikingly gratuitous. Adopting a new identity does, however, augment Edgar's sense of his power and virility immediately before fighting Oswald. Other of Edgar's disguises are not only superfluous, but also probably counter-productive. Surely revealing his identity as Edgar would give his letter to Albany greater weight than presenting himself as a peasant and messenger (5.1.38). By fighting Edmund in disguise, Edgar provides a perfect opportunity for Edmund to avoid the duel altogether. Luckily for the plot, Edmund fights him anyway (5.3.140-44). Again, Edgar's self-presentation as an anonymous knight has no practical purpose. It does, however, once again allow him to experience the sense of power arising from self-naming immediately before combat, as well as allowing him to cap his victory over Edmund with a show-stopping revelation for the audience on-stage and possibly off, who forget all about Lear and Cordelia. "Great thing of us forgot," indeed (5.3.235). This is not, of course, the only occasion when Edgar's disguises give him power over the audience. The answer to Bradley's question above is that nobody in the audience cares about Gloucester's reaction or is even watching it. The actor playing Edgar provides a distraction. His transformation covers up its own unlikelihood by its very theatricality. To complete this list of pointless disguises with the most obvious, there's no good reason why Edgar should maintain his disguise before Gloucester for the duration of the play, leading only to his father's heart attack. Stanley Cavell ascribes Edgar's stubborn disguise to his guilt, to the fact that he knows that he failed "to confront his father, to trust his love" and that he therefore became "as responsible for his father's blinding as his father is" (Cavell 56). This argument is certainly reconcilable to Levinas's theories, as is Cavell's work generally. Avoiding recognition, a major theme in Cavell's work, is Edgar's reason for failing to reveal himself to his father. Rather than being defined by the gaze of another, Edgar avoids recognition and strives

instead to produce his own identity out of himself. He condemns himself by his very effort to avoid condemnation.

Edgar is not the only character who gains a sense of power by assuming a disguise. Kent names himself, oddly using the second person, as he begins his mission of helping Lear: "Now, banish'd Kent, / If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd, / So may it come, thy master, whom thou lov'st, / Shall find thee full of labours." He "raz'd my likeness" in order to be able to achieve "my good intent" (1.4.1-7). By controlling his own self–in fact, constructing his own self–Kent gains power. Like Edgar, Kent chooses a new identity immediately before fighting Oswald. In speaking with the Gentleman in the storm, Kent ratifies his word by specifying that "I am a gentleman of blood and breeding" (3.1.40). One might ascribe such confidence to class identity, but it proceeds more fundamentally from selfhood as such. Ostentatiously assuming the peasant garb of Caius does not make Kent any the less confident. He fights with Oswald and insults Cornwall with the excuse that "'tis my occupation to be plain." In both cases, choosing a self (any self) provides Kent with a subject position and power to speak, even to impose his views on others. And in both cases, as Cornwall observes, the identity which gives Kent confidence is in some ways an act, which he must "affect [. . .] quite from his nature" (2.2.89, 93-95).

While Lear does not assume a disguise, he also, like Kent and Edgar, is obsessed with controlling his own identity. No doubt, as in Greenblatt's "Self-Fashioning," the process is informed by "family, state, and religious institutions" that "impose a more rigid and far-reaching discipline upon their middle-class and aristocratic subjects" (*Self-Fashioning* 1); nevertheless, what Lear's control of his identity allows us to consider is not only the complex relation between individual processes of self-fashioning and the cultural codes which they resisted and which informed or even destroyed them, but also the more fundamental necessity to hypostasize any

sort of self at all. In Levinasian terms, Lear produces a self to stand over and against the anonymity of being, rather than becoming self-aware through responsibility to the Other. His eventual loss of sanity is considered "A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch, / Past speaking of in a King!" (4.5.200-01). The king, who should be powerful, is all the more pathetic when he loses power over himself, when he loses the position which is the self, and which gives power over and against the world. If hypostasis is an act of naming which simultaneously gives substance, then when the king can no longer name himself he becomes merely "Lear's shadow" (1.4.228).[7]

Lear's loss of control over his identity can be contrasted with Kent's control. The latter explains to Cordelia that "to be known shortens my made intent: / My boon I make it that you know me not, / Till time and I think meet" (4.7.9-11). Despite his claim to have some sort of master plan, Kent's disguise finds no further practical use in the play; control over his identity nevertheless allows him action. He is able to "make" his intention, avoiding being known by others, which would imply relying upon them for identity, and maintains independence by knowing himself. His power, in the above quotation, seems on a par with that of time. Practical advantages of disguise, when there are any, merely literalize the power flowing more fundamentally from naming oneself.

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[7]Complications between the two early texts concerning this line underline both its importance and its difficulty. The F1 text assigns the words "Lear's shadow" to the Fool, who is answering Lear's (probably rhetorical) question "who is it that can tell me who I am?" The Q1 text, on the other hand, has Lear answer his own question, though punctuating the question with a horribly vague italicized question mark. This might indicate either that Lear is making his own answer vaguely rhetorical, or that he is declaring it emphatically, since the Q1 text often uses an italicized question mark in place of an exclamation mark.

In Lear's case, hypostasis ceases to link the act of naming with possessing a discrete self over and against the anonymity of being. It has long been observed that, in Howard Felperin's words, "Lear cannot imagine any possible disjuncture between role and self, appearance and reality, 'sentence and power,' *signum* and *res*." What Felperin calls "this initial morality vision of sacred unity" (Felperin 98) is founded on the unity of the self, on its providing a home and a place, and therefore power. Edmund continues to answer for himself right up to his final and fatal duel with Edgar. Albany's name remains not only a symbol of his power, but also powerful in itself: "thy soldiers, / All levied in my name, have in my name / Took their discharge" (5.3.103-05). Lear's name, on the other hand, is incapable even of defending his servant Caius. Naming himself has ceased to provide him with power. Power isn't just a part of Lear's self-image; it is the corollary of his selfhood. Selfhood provides more than a particular power:

> As present and "I," hypostasis is freedom. The existent is master of existing. It exerts on its existence the virile power of the subject. It has something in its power. (*Time and the Other* 54-55)

When Lear's name ceases to hypostasize (to coin a verb), he loses more than a social position or a specific authority. He loses the power to have power.

By naming oneself, according to Levinas, one gives oneself a place in the anonymity of the night. Similarly, however, by naming, perceiving and "working over" things, they cease to be elemental, threatening forces. It is by naming, first oneself, and then other things and people, that the world becomes a setting for enjoyment. The named object becomes delimited and therefore capable of the sincerity of desire. "This structure," Levinas writes, "where an object concords fully with a desire, is characteristic of the whole of our being-in-the-world" (*Existence and Existents* 44). Levinas argues that in eating there "is a complete correspondence between desire and its satisfaction." He contrasts this relationship to love, characterized by "an essential

and insatiable hunger," where the object cannot be grasped, "access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused" (*Existence and Existents* 43). Lear, I will argue, not only names himself, providing himself with a self, but also names other people, appropriating them. In so doing, he attempts to reduce the Other, which is excessive, to an object of desire, which can be grasped. His challenge to Kent, disguised as Caius, anticipates that of the herald to Edgar: "What art thou?" (1.4.9). It is perhaps characteristic of Lear's role that he is named as Edgar's godfather, or more specifically, that Edgar is defined as having been "named your Edgar" by Lear (2.1.90-91).[8] Lear's flurry of insults towards first Goneril and then Regan are ever-more desperate efforts at naming and control. The fact that he alone can grant legitimacy, can underwrite the propriety of a name, is his appeal to Regan: "if thou shouldst not be glad, / I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb, / Sepulchring an adult'ress" (2.4.127-29). While this quotation shows Lear exercising his claim to confer identity, it also shows that this claim is anxious, and relies upon the mother's word to confer legitimacy, as well relying on Regan not to defy his description of her. He is not providing her with an "I," so much as attempting to render her familiar and knowable, rather than excessive and alterior:

> 'Tis not in thee
> To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
> To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
> And, in conclusion to oppose the bolt
> Against my coming in. (2.4.171-75)

It is as if Lear believes that by calling Regan kind, he can make her kind. Interestingly, his insistence on her character comes at a time when her character is most in question and its being unknown is most threatening.

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[8]At least in the quarto text. The line is rendered "nam'd, your Edgar" in the Folio.

As long as Lear's power over the world obtains, the world appears to him as a place to be enjoyed, as a world of food where nothing is truly external to his desire. It is, to quote a passage from Levinas's *Existence and Existents*,

> the world of Gargantua and Pantagruel and of Master Gaster, first Master of the Arts of the world, but it is also the world where Abraham grazed his flocks, Isaak dug his wells, Jacob set up his household, Epicurus cultivated his garden, and where "each one has the shade of his figtree and grape arbor". (*Existence and Existents* 44)

We should not discount out of hand Goneril's accusation that "this our court [. . .]/ Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust / Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel / Than a grac'd palace" (1.4.240-43). This does not mean, of course, that we should take seriously Regan's accusation that Lear's knights inspired Edgar's supposed plot to assassinate Gloucester, in order that they might have "th'expense and waste of his revenues" (2.1.99). What both quotations show, however, is that Lear's lifestyle in retirement quickly earns him and his retinue a reputation for enjoying the world. Lear's own behaviour, demanding his dinner and approving of Kent's violence towards Oswald, itself shows a certain understanding of the world as a locus of consumption, leisure, sport and enjoyment. In the earlier quotation, where Lear attempts to define Regan negatively by describing Goneril's bad acts, he makes the quite unjustifiable claim that Goneril "oppose[d] the bolt against my coming in." In fact, Goneril has done nothing of the sort. Lear stormed out of her home on his own. She has, however, questioned Lear's identity and his enjoyment of the world. To "grudge my pleasures" is, at least metaphorically, to send him back out into the night, to the state before one bears a name, and before the world can be named, known or enjoyed.

Not only does Lear show a rather epicurean enjoyment of the world, but also he treats other people as if they were also things to be enjoyed. This is implicit in his position as the giver

of names to Edgar, for instance, or Regan. To borrow Levinas's terms, Lear makes no distinction between the "other" and the "Other." Control of people, like things, offer him identity: "Ay, every inch a king," he proclaims himself in his madness, "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes" (4.6.108). In two lines, run together into one sentence in both the authoritative texts (1.4.8-9), Lear moves instantly from demanding dinner to accosting Kent. As the phrasing of the question–"What art thou?"–shows, Lear is attempting to turn Kent into a "what" rather than a "who," something in the world, to be enjoyed, rather than another person who demands respect and responsibility. Kent's service, in fact, is fitted into the course of a meal: "thou shalt serve me, if I like thee no worse after dinner" (1.4.40-41).[9] Immediately after speaking this line, he conflates his dinner, the amusement of his fool and the company of his daughter into three demands: "Dinner, ho! dinner! Where's my knave? my Fool? / Go you and call my Fool hither / You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?" (1.4.42-44). A few lines later, he calls for his daughter to speak with, then his fool to laugh at, then the steward to berate: "Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her. / Go you, call hither my Fool, / O! you sir, you, come you hither, sir. / Who am I, sir?" (1.4.73-78). Interestingly, his first question of the steward calls for recognition. Bearing an identity, as I have already argued, is the prerequisite for the power which Lear wields, to treat the world as something to be enjoyed. Lear's habit of treating Others as others to be commanded or enjoyed is a necessary background to the bizarre love test of the opening scene. "Our eldest born," Lear demands, "speak first." The barked order to "speak" is repeated three times in the quarto text (1.1.53, 85, 89). As generations of critics have observed, expressions of love are commanded, and apparently for Lear's enjoyment. Harry Berger argues characteristically that Lear is manipulating the opening scene for political ends, trying to avoid

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[9]Once again, this reading is aided by the punctuation of the early texts. In modern editions, a semi-colon is usually inserted after "me."

"future strife" (Berger 28). While this is no doubt correct, it misses the degree to which Lear is indulging himself in verse during the scene, how much he obviously enjoys describing Goneril's gift or Cordelia's charms and how such descriptions, in some cases quite literally, grant him power over the thing described. Without the verses describing how

> Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
>
> With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
>
> With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
>
> We make thee lady. (1.1.62-65)

Goneril would not be made lady of anything. Lear clearly enjoys the process of investing Goneril with power, indulging rhetorical excess in the process. He provides another example of the conflation of love and command when seeking an audience with Regan: "The King would speak with Cornwall; The dear father / Would with his daughter speak, commands, tends seruice" (2.4.97-99). The rhetoric of tending service seems deeply ironic in the context of a command. Rather than allowing his obligations to cancel his perquisites, Lear conflates them. Love can be commanded like dinner, or wakened like drowsy offspring. All other examples of treating people as things must pale, however, beside the trial scene in the quarto text, where Lear literally confuses objects with people. "Cry you mercy," says the Fool to the supposed Goneril, "I took you for a joint-stool" (3.6.51). While Regan's admission to Kent that she would treat a dog better than a "knave" is no doubt informed by class consciousness (2.2.133), it should be read against the background of a world in which people are often treated as interchangeable and manipulatable, like things. Similarly, Kent's treatment of Oswald is the enforcement of a certain class structure. For instance, Kent protests "That such a slave as this should wear a sword" (2.2.69). At a more fundamental level, however, Kent's challenges are attempts to fix Oswald both in place "stand, rogue, stand" (2.2.39) and in identity, as a slave, a villain, an unnecessary

letter, an eater of broken meats and so on. The fact that Oswald is literally a slave, or at least a member of the lower classes, neither obviates nor explains Kent's desire to call him one, to reinforce his status through rhetorical power, to fix Oswald in a definition by force of naming him. Kent, in fact, declares Oswald so inferior as to cease to be a creature, made instead like an object by a craftsman. He treats Oswald as something to be worked, like mortar (2.2.52-64). Both Lear and his most loyal follower treat Others as others, as manipulatable, and specifically as things named and therefore controlled.

If Lear treats Others as others, he therefore has no access to the redemption which comes only from the Other. His self, like any self on its own, is only capable of a contingent victory over the night and over the anonymity of being. Before leaping too quickly to a moralistic condemnation of Lear's treatment of others, we should recall that such treatment proceeds from an anxiety about his own individuation. For Lear, power is more than power. It is also selfhood, the ability to bear a name, and to name other things, reducing them to a world which can be enjoyed. Harry Berger points to the importance of "curiosity" in the first lines, which he follows George Steevens in defining as "a punctilious jealousy, resulting from a scrupulous watchfulness of his own dignity" (Berger 28). Some pages later, he draws attention to how Gloucester sees in the reduction of Lear's power a threat to himself (Berger 60). This "punctilious jealousy" is not simply an inflection of pride or class identity. Rather, it is a fear for the loss of identity as such, the annihilation which alone could be "worse than murther" (2.4.23). Actually, "annihilation" is the wrong term, since according to Levinas no escape from being is possible. Perhaps his term horror might more fully describe the reaction of Lear before the prospect of a loss of power:

> horror turns the subjectivity of the subject, his particularity qua *entity*, inside out. It is a participation in the *there is*, in the *there is* which returns in the heart of every negation, in the *there is* which has "no exits". (*Existence and Existents* 61)

Famously, Gloucester's suicide attempt fails, though a discussion of it will have to wait until later. Suffice to say that both Lear and Gloucester's "punctilious jealousy" has a basis in something other than pride of place or the niceties of social life. For these characters, the loss of power has existential corollaries, threatening their very selves. On being offered a loss of power by Edmund's rendering of Edgar's supposed opinions, Gloucester flies into a rage: "O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain! worse than brutish!" (1.2.72-74). As Berger has pointed out, Edmund offers Gloucester alternative reactions to rampant indignation, but Gloucester chooses the most extreme (Berger 60).

Power, in *King Lear*, is more than a means, or even some sort of perverse end in itself. To carry the importance which it does, power must have some significance greater than its traditional and political sense. Many persons adopt or discard appellations without serious psychological damage. But for Lear, a name is more than a sign for something that would subsist in any case. The first power is that of being able to reduce the elemental world to something to be enjoyed, of resisting the anonymity, the "evil" of Being, and as such it is related to the epicurean enjoyment of the world. "If only to go warm were gorgeous," Lear shouts at an apparently rather *chic* Goneril, "Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st, / Which scarcely keeps thee warm." Without such enjoyment, however, "Man's life is cheap as beast's" (2.4.266-67, 265). Lear's knights are not, as Goneril maintains, primarily a military unit which Lear might deploy against her (1.4.321-26). Even in fits of patriarchal rage, and with the advantage of having already invested the fortifications of first Goneril's and then Gloucester's homes, Lear does not stage a *coup d'état*. The knights are no more useful, in fact, than Goneril's wardrobe. Their purpose is less to provide Lear with practical power, than with the accoutrements of power, and therefore to reinforce his sense of identity, and his resistance to the

horrors of anonymous being. Oswald flouts Lear's sense of self, and is attacked as a result. Kent, on the other hand, obtains his position in Lear's train by flattering his aura of authority, as something "in your countenance" (1.4.26-27). In fact, Lear abandons the possibility of redemption through the Other in favour of defending his power. Rather than admit that he's wrong, he chooses to war against the elements, a topic that will be treated at more length in chapter five, as part of Lear's effort to assume a tragic role. Here a single example of abandoning humility in favour of a dynamic of power will have to suffice. For a few lines, after being told that Cornwall and Regan are unwell, Lear considers that perhaps he is too peremptory. However, he rejects such a possibility on seeing the indignity of Kent's confinement: "Death on my state! wherefore / Should he sit here?" Lear's "state", by which he swears and which seems so threatened by Kent's bondage, cannot tolerate recognition of the needs of others. Nothing in the mere fact of Kent's imprisonment should convince Lear "That this remotion of the Duke and her / Is practice only" (2.4.102-12). If anything, being wakened by a brawl in the courtyard is all the more reason for Regan and Cornwall to be tired. Rather than being convinced, Lear is simply terrified that any recognition of others will further erode his "state". His relation to Others is fundamentally one of struggle. His own hotheadedness leaves no room for "the fiery Duke," and Cornwall's and Regan's need for rest is subordinated to his own need for attention (2.4.101, 114-16).

Lear does more than simply disregard Others. He treats them as extensions of himself, or objects to be consumed and thereby reintegrated into the self. Perhaps the best example of Lear's confusion of the Other with his own intentions occurs in the first scene, when he orders Kent to "Come not between the Dragon and his wrath" (1.1.121). According to Keefer,

> what this conflation of object and emotion seems to imply is that both are understood by Lear as *his* attributes–or rather, for the moment, as a single one. Where we would

separate subject and object, self from other, he does not. (Keefer 157)

According to Levinas, our whole being-in-the-world is characterized by the structure of eating, "where an object concords fully with a desire." The concord of an object with its desire is the sincerity which makes "The man who is eating [. . .] the most just of men." It also, however, describes a closed loop, "a circle where there can be *satisfaction*" from which both the Other and the problem of existence are excluded (*Existence and Existents* 44).[10] Sartre, in a debate with French neo-Kantians, called theirs a "digestive philosophy" (Critchley 6). Levinas extends this claim to the whole of the western tradition. The goal of philosophy, in the west, has been to reduce alterity to the Same ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 93). Other people exist *for* Lear. When nobody answers him, he concludes that "the world's asleep" (1.4.47), as if the world's wakefulness could be measured by how well it attended to him. Regan, saying what her father wants to hear in the first scene, claims that

> Which the most precious square of sense possesses,
>
> And find I am alone felicitate
>
> In your dear highness' love. (1.1.71-75)

Note that she doesn't claim to be "felicitate" in loving him, but in being loved by him. Lear's love for Regan and its return are a closed loop, in which Regan is barely present. "Better thou / Hadst not been born" he coldly informs Cordelia, "than not t'have pleased me better" (1.1.232-33). Like "The barbarous Scythian / Or he that makes his generation messes / To gorge his appetite" (1.1.115-17), Lear treats his daughters–indeed, everyone around him–as things to be consumed. Like food, they are the objects of a desire which succeeds in satisfying itself, reincorporating its object back into the self and therefore not allowing it to stand over and against the self, as other. Hence we have the imagery with which Lear treats his daughters as extensions

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[10]Italics within quotations always indicate the author's emphasis and never my own.

of his own flesh. Is not filial ingratitude, he asks rhetorically, "as this mouth should tear this hand / For lifting food to't?" (3.4.15-16). Tom's laceration of his own flesh is "judicious punishment," declares Lear, since "'twas this flesh begot / Those [doubly ficticious] pelican daughters" (3.4.73-74). It is characteristic of what we should consider a habit of Lear's mind that he can understand Tom's suffering only as a reflection of his own: "has his daughters brought him to this pass?" (3.4.102-12). Goneril is internalized, while simultaneously being cursed and rejected:

> 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,
>
> A plague-sore, or imbossed carbuncle,
>
> In my corrupted blood. (2.4.219-23)

This final curse might represent a desperate attempt, immediately preceding Lear's escape through madness, to deny the alterity of his daughters.

Assimilating his daughters to himself saves Lear from facing them as Other. According to Levinas, the self is fundamentally alone:

> The subject is alone because it is one. A solitude is necessary in order for there to be a freedom of beginning, the existent's mastery over existing–that is, in brief, in order for there to be an existent. (*Time and the Other* 54-55)

Elsewhere, Levinas characterizes the unity of the self as a history, in that it absorbs new events without becoming something else ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 92). In assimilating others, the self maintains its own fundamental unity, denying the alterity which would divide it and force it to question its right to be ("Diachrony and Representation" 110). The crime for which Kent is banished is "To come betwixt our sentence and our power, / Which nor our nature

nor our place can bear" (1.1.169-70). He has attempted to frustrate Lear's power, his ability to assimilate the world, but more specifically, he has threatened to divide Lear's "sentence" and "power," his desire from its realization. Sending Kent into exile is a reunion of sentence and power, in which "Our potency [is] made good" (1.1.171). Later, Lear rejects any negotiation of a dowry for Cordelia with the words, "Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm" (1.1.244). What is striking about both declarations is the degree to which Lear's personal integrity is bound up with conquering the instability of the sign or rather, with conquering the instability of his own signs. Perhaps with pride, Lear informs Kent that he has "sought to make us breake our vow, / Which we durst never yet" (1.1.167-68). What Lear is fundamentally fighting for is the unity of his self, against the possibility of its internal division. Not only his "place," but also his "nature" cannot bear anything "to come betwixt our sentences and our power." Such solitude, such unity, is necessary if the self is to resist the anonymity of the night. It is the anxiety before the night which summons an ever-more narcissistic insistence on the powers of the self, but conversely, it is the return of the night, "When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding" (4.6.100-02), which both breaks Lear's faith in the stability of the sign and shows him the limits of his own capabilities: "Go to, they are not men o'their words; they told me, I was every thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof" (4.6103-105). As Stanley Cavell has argued, the characters are not whole. The theme of doubling in the play (the Gloucester family and the Lear family, for instance) "taunts the characters with their lack of wholeness, their separation from themselves, by loss or denial or opposition" (Cavell 79). While one can only agree with most of Cavell's observations, one should also note that their lack of unity provides an ongoing anxiety for all of the characters. The self, as Levinas writes, is only a contingent victory over the anonymity of being. Failure to be solitary and separated selves standing over and against the anonymity of being is always already inscribed within the

achievement of selfhood (*Existence and Existents* 84). Certainly, the seemingly irrational anxiety of characters regarding their selfhood, their "curiosity" to use Berger's term, recognizes the possibility of their failure. No wonder Kent conflates "difference and decay" (5.3.287).

A corollary of Lear's efforts to assimilate all things into himself is his unwillingness to be surprised. Pechter calls New Historicism "a criticism of recognition, of knowing again what one knew before" (Pechter 302). Lear seems to anticipate these critics, or rather to participate in the same sort of phenomenological gesture, in refusing to accept any news as a revelation coming from without, and preferring to understand new information always as something that he knew ahead of time. When the poor service in Goneril's household is pointed out to him, for instance, he informs the knight that "Thou but rememb'rest me of mine own conception" (1.4.65). When told that "the Fool hath much pined away," he replies "No more of that; I have noted it well" (1.4.72-73). Rather than allow himself to be surprised by Others, or to become indebted to them even for information, Lear treats all news as something he has already known. In these instances, Lear seems to follow Plato, in labelling knowledge as reminiscence. Levinas specifically contrasts such a view of truth as reminiscence with another strand of western philosophy in which truth is alterior, coming as revelation ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 96). According to Berger, the divestiture scene is an effort at anticipation, avoiding "the more absolute divestiture he fears at the hands of others" (Berger 32), though, of course, the divestiture is interrupted by Cordelia's silence, leading to the explosion of rage that serves as an index of Lear's anxiety. Here as elsewhere in the early scenes, Lear attempts to maintain control into the future, avoiding the possibility of anything arising which he might fail to assimilate, and which might threaten the sovereignty of his self.

I have argued that other people appear to Lear as things to be enjoyed or consumed. There is, however, another figure under which other people can appear to him: as tools. Levinas

describes tools in a section of *Existence and Existents* dealing principally with the working of desire as sincerity, in which the object of desire perfectly corresponds to the desire itself. Within this context, tools facilitate the satisfaction of desire, an extension of one's own grasp in order to expedite the act of grasping:

> In modern civilization, they do not only extend the hand, so that it could get at what it does not get at of itself; they enable it to get at it more quickly, that is, they suppress in an action the time the action has to take on. Tools suppress intermediary times; they contract duration. (*Existence and Existents* 90)

Lear's first line is a command: "Attend my Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloster" (1.1.33-34). More importantly, it is a command which delegates a task to another. A great deal of the awkwardness of Lear's attempt to win an audience from Regan and Cornwall results from the fact that he chooses to work through intermediaries. In sending Kent / Caius to speak with Regan, Lear is accelerating communication beyond what he could achieve on his own: "If your diligence be not speedy I shall be there afore you" (1.5.4-5). He is using Kent to suppress the intermediary time between what he wants to do and getting it done. Of course, kings generally issue orders, but what is interesting about Lear's commands is that they do not permit a range of independent action: his servant is treated simply as a tool. Goneril treats Oswald as a free agent in giving him the message to bear to Regan, telling him to

> Inform her full of my particular fear;
> And thereto add such reasons of your own
> As may compact it more. (1.4.336-338)

By contrast, and perhaps less than a minute of stage-time later, Lear orders Kent to "Acquaint my daughter no further with any thing you know than comes from her demand out of the letter"

(1.5.2-3). Perhaps this prudence is just as well, since Kent is a disastrously ineffective messenger. Nevertheless, where Goneril treats Oswald as an agent with initiative of his own, Lear treats Kent purely as the instrument of his own intention.

Harry Berger argues that Lear's confusion of self and other follows mainly from his efforts to project his own guilt, referring to

> a zone of unstable oscillation between the desire to be forgiven and the desire to do things that bring on and justify the judgement one feels one deserves (which in Lear's case involves villainously hurting those one loves as a way of hurting oneself). (Berger xx)

In fact, Berger's general hypothesis is based on psychological displacement and the determination that in the plays "Such displacements are represented as conspicuously inadequate to repress or resolve latent conflicts" (Berger xvii). Lear, according to Berger, is externalizing, projecting his own psychology unto others. I would like to argue, however, that the opposite is true. Lear is internalizing others in order to avoid facing them as Other. The first lines, where Gloucester introduces Edmund to Kent, are a miniature of the fundamental difficulties faced not only by Gloucester but also by Lear. "His breeding, Sir," says Gloucester to Kent, "hath been at my charge: I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him, that now I am braz'd to't" (1.1.8-10). The antecedent of the impersonal "it" is clearly Edmund's breeding, but by its position, it could also refer to Edmund himself. The problem is not that Gloucester fails to recognize his own sin in copulating with Edmund's mother, a sin objectified in Edmund's existence. Gloucester's failure, as Stanley Cavell has argued, is a failure to recognize his duty towards Edmund himself: "He does not acknowledge *him*, as a son or a person, with *his* feelings of illegitimacy and being cast out" (Cavell 48). One will notice that Gloucester does not introduce Edmund until Kent makes an inquiry. When he does, he introduces Edmund mainly in terms of his own guilt.

Edmund is the signifier of Gloucester's state of mind, the "issue of" his fault, as Kent says, rather than being another person, deserving of respect and acknowledgement. When Gloucester says that he has "so often blush'd to acknowledge him," we should substitute "my fault" for "him." Edmund becomes Gloucester's "fault," in much the same way in which Goneril becomes Lear's flesh. As long as he is addressed in these terms, Edmund need not be respected as Other. He is an element of the self, to be acknowledged as one acknowledges one's weaknesses.

Lear also treats the relation with the Other as fundamentally internal, a matter which, at least in principle, could be resolved by sufficient self-control. He cries to his heart "as the cockney did to the eels" (2.4.119). Earlier in the same scene, he demands to see his daughter immediately after commanding his own madness:

> O! how this Mother swells up toward my heart;
>
> *Hysterica passio*! down thou climbing sorrow!
>
> Thy element's below. Where is this daughter? (2.4.54-56[11])

Later, his struggle is not to weep, precisely not to make any external sign of his state of mind. Lear is internalizing at least as much as he is externalizing. Near the beginning of the storm scene, the Fool tosses off one of his enigmatic sentences, "For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass" (3.2.35-36). Why this near-random snippet of misogyny? The answer has as much to do with narcissism as it does with misogyny. Like the woman "making mouths" in a mirror, Lear is carrying on a conversation with himself. Levinas argues that within "the traditional interpretation of discourse" starting from Platonic dialectic, "the mind in speaking its thought remains no less one and unique" ("Diachrony and Representation" 101).

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[11]Although one shouldn't place much reliance on the compositors of early texts, it seems worth noting that both early texts run together the last two sentences, further associating the efforts to control himself with the efforts to command an Other.

With more sympathy, he cites Plato's apparently contradictory declaration that the only true discourse is with gods, who remain external ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 106). Even the gods, however, are not truly external to Lear, as I will show in chapter five. In any case, the daughters are certainly no longer true interlocutors. Hence the "judicious punishment" of self-mutilation, as an attack against his children. One will notice that this self-punishment as punishment of others follows from a sort of cannibalism, by which Lear attempts to internalize the children as part of himself.

Such an effort at mastery carries a terrible risk, of course, as Lear's rising madness indicates. One of the Fool's many oblique declarations seems tantalizingly close to the point that I'm making: "The man that makes his toe / What he his heart should make, / Shall of a corn cry woe, / And turn his sleep to wake" (3.2.31-34). The Q2 and Q3 versions of Goneril's dismissal of Albany–"My foote usurps my heade"–seem similar (4.2.28). Kenneth Muir's explanation of the earlier of these two quotations is that "The man who cherishes a mean part of his body to the exclusion of what is really worth cherishing, shall suffer lasting harm, and from the very part he so foolishly cherished" (3.2.31-34n). Lear is doomed to prove the Fool's prediction, because he makes no meaningful distinction between the internal and the external. Kent's obedience makes his "potency" good, and Kent's imprisonment threatens his "state". Those who surround Lear–as things to be enjoyed, as objects to be controlled, or as instruments for controlling others–are intimately involved in his efforts to hold at bay the horror of anonymous existence. Nothing and no one is external enough to stand against him, but nothing is unimportant enough to be ignored, either. Because he makes others about him into objects of control, Lear denies himself access to the Other, which provides the only true assurance against the night. The self's failure, according to Levinas, is always already inscribed within its establishment. Lear nevertheless hastens this failure by extending the self's arena to everyone and everything around him, placing an

insupportable burden on the project of control. Even an apparently minor issue–the "corn" of the Fool's analogy–can carry Lear to the heart of his crisis.

Levinas links "the philosophy of the same", the attempt to deny the alterity of the Other, to narcissism ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 94-105). Thankfully, Levinas has not developed a developmental psychology plotting the development of the self against stages in early childhood; nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that Lear, whose *agon* consists in precisely the narcissistic attempt to deny the alterity of the Other, is seen as childlike by characters within the play as well as critics outside it. Goneril declares that "The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash," adding that senility will compound his irrationality (1.1.294-95), and anticipating her later declaration that "old fools are babes again" (1.3.20). Lear seems strangely not to have undergone the normal aging process. "Thou should'st not have been old," the Fool opines in his acid way, "till thou hadst been wise" (1.5.41-42). Goneril declares that Lear "should be wise" because he is "old and reverend" (1.4.237). The use of the subjunctive "should" indicates a gap between Lear's age and his maturity. In fact, it seems that Lear has not grown old so much as he has been declared old: "They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there" (4.6.96-98). Lear's maturity, as Susan Snyder indicates, is a lie (Snyder 147). The imagery associated with his immaturity is so rich that more than one critic considers his reawakening in act four to be a new birth (xlix; 4.7.45). From the beginning of the play, Lear's narcissism is symbolised by imagery of childhood. He wishes to rest in the "kind nursery" of Cordelia (1.1.123). Even near the end of the play, if the quarto stage direction is to be believed, Cordelia leads Lear by the hand (5.2.1sd). Only in the last scene is the imagery reversed, when Lear enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms (5.3.255sd), in a figure that we might think of as an inverse pièta.

The world of *King Lear* is a world in which selfhood is often assured by no more than an

act of will. As a result, the relations between people are characterised by a sort of allergic reaction, or even, in Hobbesian terms, a war of all against all. Goneril is not alone in seeing human relations as power relations (Berger 33, quoting Goldberg). The characters, in fact, seem to be trapped in a deadly zero-sum game, where the wilfulness of another blocks one's own will, and the efficacy of one's own will, one's "potency made good" to use Lear's terms, is the only barrier between oneself and the horror, the night, of anonymous existence. An anxiety regarding selfhood is far more fundamental to this play than any anxiety regarding the proper order of the universe, or the place of women within it. It is against the background of this world of anxiety and conflict, that Lear's banishments of Kent and Cordelia become intelligible.

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Chapter two — "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes": Images of seeing and efforts at control

It should be clear from the previous chapter, that narcissism constitutes an important theme of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This theme finds expression not only in how characters treat each other, but also in a pattern of images and metaphors often referred to as the play's "sight imagery." Perhaps by coincidence, a similar set of terms was adopted by Levinas to describe the relationship (or failed relationship) with the Other. In both the play's language and Levinas's prose, the gaze becomes a matter of staring down whereas the face of the Other becomes something to be avoided, even by violence. Even if this similarity is merely coincidental, the play is clearly drawing on a set of images that resonate in specific, though often implicit, ways within western culture, and which Levinas attempts to tease out in some of his most important works. The play's frequent images of sight and blinding therefore provide points of contact with Levinasian philosophy. Specifically, they provide an occasion for a discussion of Levinas's theory of knowledge as control, an idea enacted by characters who reduce each other to objects of knowledge, rather than Others to be recognized or, as Cavell would say, acknowledged. While this congruence allows a certain reading of the play's sight imagery and an analysis of some of the play's most important events, it also provides the opportunity for an introduction to Levinas's theory of language, of how the sign finds its origin not in free play, but in the word of the Other, presenting himself. The play of language (or economics in the next chapter) is not, in Levinas's philosophy or in the play, simply a self-sustaining game; on the contrary, it finds a stake in the voice of the Other.

What I am presenting is in some ways a Levinasian supplement to Cavell's classic and rightly admired argument. Gerald Bruns notes that Cavell does not promulgate an explicit ethical

theory. Nevertheless, he writes that

> if one were to extract an explicit theory from these [Cavell's] texts, it might well resemble the accounts of the ethical that the post-Husserlian French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas gives. (Bruns 87)

I take this to indicate that Levinas's philosophy provides a more explicit turn towards the Other. In at least one aspect, I would argue that Levinas is actually more rigorous than Cavell. Where Cavell's theory holds the potential–realized in the work of Harry Berger–to make acknowledgement a self-reflective gesture, ultimately returning to the self, Levinas rigorously works entirely in terms of the Other as alterior. Levinas's ideas, therefore, offers not only the possibility of new readings of the play, but also an escape from a tendency in criticism, ultimately derived from the enlightenment, by which the relations between people are seen, inevitably, as power relations.

"Levinas's thought," writes George Steiner, distinguishing him from Jacques Derrida, "is grounded in the *Logos*. Deconstruction proclaims the epilogue" (Steiner 24). While Derrida, in the first few pages of *On Grammatology*, defends writing against the claims of a logocentrism that privileges the spoken over the written word, Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity* and elsewhere, defends the spoken word, the word of the Other, against comprehension within anything else, including knowledge or writing. Both thinkers claim to be defending difference against the totalizing tendencies of western thought. In fact, both invoke the book as a negative example of language which has been betrayed or controlled (Derrida 18; "Diachrony and Representation" 101). Moreover, the two men knew each other well and influenced one another. Derrida delivered Levinas's funeral oration, recalling not only his work, but also his friendship and even the texture of his speech: "the radiance of his thought, the goodness of his smile, the gracious humor of his ellipses" ("Adieu" 3-4).

I will attempt, in what follows, to very briefly sketch Levinas's understanding of language, in part by contrast with Derrida. More fundamental, for Levinas, than the difference of signifier and signified is the distinction between Self and Other, a distinction all too easily effaced in favour of the anonymous free play of the sign. His treatment of language neither loses itself in the anonymity of free play, nor does it return to an understanding of language as representation, within the control of the speaker, author or auditor. In Levinas's view, western thought overcomes alterity by knowing, by making what is Other present, and the property of the self: "The other is made the property of the ego in the knowledge that assures the marvel of immanence" ("Diachrony and Representation" 99). Knowledge, in this sense, is an activity of

> thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one's own, of reducing to presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which *appropriates* and *grasps* the alterity of the known. ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 76)

In knowledge, he writes, alterity is lost: "the labour of thought wins out over the otherness of things and men" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 78). Specifically, "the *other* of thought becomes the characteristic *property* of thought" by an act of grasping. To Levinas, the notion of intellectual grasp is more than a metaphor. On the contrary, "knowledge [. . .] refers back to an act of grasping" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 76). He cites Edmund Husserl to the effect that even the most abstract of scientific truths find their foundation in the concrete relation to "things within hand's reach" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 79). To make something present is to make it graspable, at least by sight. The now is "the promise of a graspable, a solid" ("Diachrony and Representation" 98).

In "The Transcendence of Words," an essay published in a 1949 number of *Les Temps Modernes* dedicated to Michel Leiris, he expands on the relationship between sight and knowing, arguing that "to see is to be in a world that is entirely *here* and self-sufficient" ("Transcendence

of Words" 147). Within this world, the intelligible is equivalent to the visible:

> The sphere of intelligibility–the reasonable–in which everyday life as well as the tradition of our philosophic and scientific thought maintains itself, is characterized by vision. The structure of a *seeing* having the *seen* as its object or theme–the so-called intentional structure–is found in all the modes of sensibility having access to things. ("Diachrony and Representation" 97)

Vision provides a privileged structure of knowing, by which the alterity of the Other is overcome. Immediately following the sentence just quoted, Levinas argues that the structure of vision tends to be extended to the interpersonal, effectively evacuating the alterity of other people. Sound, on the contrary, is transgressive, "a ringing, clanging scandal" ("Transcendence of Words" 147). Specifically, though, this scandal isn't just any sound, but the spoken word: "The pure sound is the word" ("Transcendence of Words" 148). To Levinas, it is the spoken word that maintains the possibility of an Other, the possibility of difference against the proper. A Levinasian emphasis upon the directness of the spoken word, provides, I will argue, a better approach to the problem of language and knowledge in *King Lear* than does the free play of Derridean deconstruction. Language does not simply defer, in a self-sufficient game; on the contrary, this game finds a stake in the face of the Other.

Derrida's definition of logocentrism as "the metaphysics of phonetic writing" appears at the very beginning of his seminal argument, *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 3). According to Derrida, logocentrism's belief in the superiority of phonetic writing follows from an effort to reproduce the voice, which logocentrism takes to be prior to the written word. Logocentrism, therefore, is also a "phonocentrism" (Derrida 11). Derrida, on the other hand, valorizes grammatology, which "shows signs of liberation all over the world" (Derrida 3), and by which he names the study of a writing older than the spoken word, and which the spoken word merely

disguises. "In all senses of the word," he writes, "writing thus *comprehends* language" (Derrida 7).[12] Logocentrism denigrates the written word to a purely instrumental function, reproducing speech which is "fully *present* (present to itself, to its signified, to the other, the very condition of the theme of presence in general)" (Derrida 8). Derrida explains Aristotle's preference for spoken over written words on the grounds that "the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind" (Derrida 11). Similarly, he criticizes Hegel for idealizing sound as a relationship in which "by virtue of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak," the subject "affects itself and is related to itself in the element of ideality" (Derrida 12). Later, he declares that Heidegger's "Thought obeying the Voice of Being" may be little more than "pure auto-affection" (Derrida 20). Even the voice of God, as Derrida makes clear by a reference to Rousseau's *Emile*, is found by going within oneself. The imperative is still a matter of presence: "The beginning word is understood, in the intimacy of self-presence, as the voice of the other and as commandment" (Derrida 17). Derrida as well as Levinas, therefore, is interested in avoiding a metaphysics of presence, where the self is mainly related to itself (and not, at least in Levinas's understanding, to the Other). Derrida also agrees with Levinas in condemning, or at least suspending the power of, the book, totality and the proper. According to Derrida, logocentrism can only see writing as "good", insofar as it is "comprehended" and contained in a book:

> It [the idea of the book] is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, as I shall specify later, against difference in general. (Derrida 18)

The idea of the book is also, for Derrida, a totality. For both Levinas and Derrida, moreover,

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[12]I shall have occasion to return to this term in the discussion of Levinas's treatment of language.

what is "proper" ("self-possession, propriety, cleanliness" according to Spivak's note on her translation of *Grammatology*) is the opposite of alterior. In Derrida's case, "the effacement of writing in the logos" becomes part of "*the metaphysics of the proper*" (Derrida 26).[13]

In Levinas's philosophy, language, like theory or desire, implies an Other: "Language presupposes interlocutors" (*Totality and Infinity* 73). The I and the Other cannot even be comprehended within a single concept, since that would make the Other's alterity relative, not absolute (*Totality and Infinity* 39). Language as conversation is not simply a matter of reflectiveness or self-discovery: "One does not question oneself concerning [an Other]; one questions him" (*Totality and Infinity* 47). Moreover, while the same and the Other relate to one another in language, they remain distinct and do not become simply definable as opposites to one another: "For language accomplishes a relation such that the terms are not limitrophe[14] within this relation" (*Totality and Infinity* 39). Levinas also seems to anticipate and disagree with Derrida when he writes that the word allows the Other to be present, rather than absent as in his works or in a symbol, but the word only has this function when "disengaged from its density as a linguistic product" (*Totality and Infinity* 177). It is not *qua* structural linguistics that the word represents alterity, but as an address coming from the Other. "Language in its physical

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[13]Derrida's emphasis, and the translator's note.

[14]Surprisingly, this obscure term is not a neologism created by the translator. It has a use going back at least as far as the sixteenth century, when it indicated a frontier zone (*OED*, *sb*). Levinas seems to be using it here to indicate an understanding of the relationship of self and Other by which they touch upon and mutually delimit one another, while his own philosophy insists that the experience of conversation is not one in which self and Other are merely logical opposites which, following Heidegger, might need one another or might be deconstructed by a Derridean.

materiality" is similarly not an attitude towards the Other; on the contrary, language is more radically "an attitude of the same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to an intention of thought, irreducible to a consciousness of . . . " (*Totality and Infinity* 204; Levinas's ellipsis). John Wild in the introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, summarizes Levinas's view of the Other by saying that the Other "does not merely present me with lifeless signs into which I am free to read meanings of my own" (Wild 14).

The Other, Levinas specifies, is not the answer to a question, a challenge I might make towards him, for instance. On the contrary, "He to whom the question is put *has already presented himself*, without being a content. He has presented himself as a face" (*Totality and Infinity* 177). In the first lines of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, before the ghost appears, Barnardo challenges Francisco–"Who's there?"–but only draws another question in response: "Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself" (1.1.1-2). The effort to interrogate an Other, to make him or her an object of my knowledge, breaks down when the Other interrogates me, instead. The question of "who is it?" is "not a question and not satisfied by a knowing" (*Totality and Infinity* 177). Instead of explaining the relationship with the face of the Other as knowledge, Levinas refers to it as justice: "*We call justice this face to face approach, in conversation*" (*Totality and Infinity* 71). A few pages later, Levinas specifies that "To recognize the Other is to give" (*Totality and Infinity* 75), describing the relationship in terms of generosity rather than grasp. Finally, Levinas considers this face-to-face relationship with the Other inescapable. Even not to give, to refuse, still recognizes "the gaze of the stranger, the widow and the orphan" (*Totality and Infinity* 77). As the violent anxieties unleashed by the spectre of the Other in *King Lear* would seem to confirm, the self is not simply free to accept or disregard the Other.

Levinas, by way of a corollary to or perhaps image of favouring generosity towards the Other over knowledge of the Other, also favours the spoken over the written word. As already

explained, the spoken word is understood, throughout Levinas's work, as invasive or subversive, whereas the visual represents satisfaction because its object remains, at least in principle, within my grasp. Hence, Levinas treats the face not as a material object but as that which "formulates the first word: the signifier arising at the thrust of his sign, as eyes that look at you" (*Totality and Infinity* 178). The original signification, to Levinas, is this face to face relation: "it is not the mediation of the sign that forms signification, but signification (whose primordial event is the face to face) that makes the sign function possible" (*Totality and Infinity* 206). The Other presents himself by speaking (*Totality and Infinity* 66). Where the written word is always already past, and can be thematized as history, the Other person returns the word to the actuality and immediacy of speech (*Totality and Infinity* 69). The spoken language, Levinas specifies, is greater than the written language in that it, and it alone, can convey the expression of the Other, whereas signs constitute only "a mute language, a language impeded" (*Totality and Infinity* 182). Levinas is here anticipating, but rejecting, the so-called death of the author. The ability of signs to play among themselves, to exist independently of a person who presents himself in them, does not, for Levinas, represent a salutory liberation of the sign from the humanist subject; on the contrary, this anonymity of the written sign is precisely what renders it "a mute language, a language impeded." He makes a highly Platonic, deeply un-Derridean, argument that speech is able to teach, whereas writing cannot, because only speech can present me with "things and ideas" which are outside of myself "and not, like maieutics, *awaken* [them] in me" (*Totality and Infinity* 69). Likewise rhetoric, by which one addresses the Other only as "an object or an infant, or a man of the multitude, as Plato says" does not qualify as a true communication (*Totality and Infinity* 70). In phenomenality, Levinas writes, "nothing is ultimate, [. . .] everything is a sign, a present absenting itself from its presence and in this sense a dream" (*Totality and Infinity* 178). The Other, he claims, escapes this play of signs, because he is not represented by a sign: "The

signifier, he who gives a sign, is not signified" (*Totality and Infinity* 182). This is not to deny that speech can fall into non-speech, into another form of mastery through rhetoric, or become an activity or a product, like writing. This secondary non-speech "is to pure speech what writing for graphologists is to the written expression for the reader" (*Totality and Infinity* 182). Perhaps Levinas should have written "grammatologists." In any case, for Levinas a responsible reading would return from the play of signs as anonymous to the expression of the Other who gives them life, from what he would later, in *Otherwise than Being*, term a move from the Said to the Saying.

Much of my description of the play's so-called sight imagery is influenced by Cavell. In terms of his understanding of sight and hearing, as in so much else, Cavell's theory seems surprisingly close to Levinas's. Like Levinas, Cavell is deeply concerned with the limits of knowledge, and with the ethical problems involved in reducing the Other to an object of our knowledge. This fascination becomes particularly clear in the chapter entitled "Knowing and Acknowledging," which immediately precedes "The Avoidance of Love" in *Must We Mean What We Say?* and in a further consideration of the same issues in a chapter of *The Claim of Reason*, entitled "Between Acknowledgement and Avoidance." The problem which vexes Cavell in these two essays, and which he finds meditated upon in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, is the problem of how to maintain a relationship with another. This is, moreover, a pressing question, as he makes clear in *The Claim of Reason* by way of a declaration that Narcissus would have nothing to say to himself, or at least, nothing that would matter: "Narcissus can question himself, but he cannot give himself an answer he can care about" (*Claim of Reason* 331). True communication, as in Levinas, is with another. The question is restated slightly later in terms of the difficulty of knowing another person's pain, which leads more generally to the problem of "our access to one another, that we have this access at all" (*Claim of Reason* 340). In a move somewhat similar to

Levinas's declaration that the Other represents the limits of my freedom, Cavell claims that there is a point at which we can't control the Other's response, "at which the path of our communication depends upon your taking the next step" (*Claim of Reason* 358-9). One's feeling in trying to enter into the other's mind is "one of being *powerless*" (*Must We Mean* 261). The Other's self-expression is therefore not entirely within the domain of my intentionality: her word must be expressed by her, before it can be grasped by me. Cavell draws upon the dismissal of anthropomorphism by theology as an argument against understanding the Other by analogy: "Call the argument autological: it yields at best a mind too like mine. It leaves out the otherness of the other" (*Claim of Reason* 395).[15] Despite the evident difference between Cavell's background, rooted in Anglo-American philosophy and Wittgenstein, and Levinas's phenomenology and Talmudism, both show a strong commitment to the radical alterity of the Other. To Cavell one is responsible for one's separation from the Other, despite being unable to choose it:

> We are endlessly separate, for *no* reason. But then we are answerable for everything that comes between us; if not for causing it then for continuing it; if not for denying it then for affirming it; if not for it then to it. (*Claim of Reason* 369)

Human separation is therefore as tragic for Cavell as it is for Levinas, to whom, as I will show in chapter five, the inescapable singularity of the self is fundamental to the horror of tragedy. Reflecting on the order of essays in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell argued that he had juxtaposed the essay on the problem of other minds, "Knowing and Acknowledging," with his

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[15]It should be noted that this argument comes in a section written as dialogue, between two voices. The passage seems to carry a certain authorial weight, but it would be wrong to overstate it. Moreover, it should also be noted that Cavell immediately expresses reservations concerning the argument against the anthropomorphites.

famous essay on *King Lear* in hope of prompting an inquiry into how both skepticism and tragedy end with a renewed sense of our separation from one another, "a discovery that I am I." The "avoidances that tragedy studies" are studies in failed acknowledgement (*Claim of Reason* 389).

Of course, Cavell recognizes that acknowledgement itself is the object of a certain anxiety, as recognition of an Other prompts an anxiety analyzed by Levinas.[16] Where according to Levinas one who knows is at least intellectually active, and has a certain grasp of the known object, according to Cavell, to be known involves becoming passive, "the special requirement of passivity in being known, the thing I have sometimes described as letting oneself be known, and as waiting to be known" (*Claim of Reason* 459). Narcissism is the claim of being unknowable (*Claim of Reason* 463), and therefore the opposite of that passivity involved in being known. In fact, being unable to care about the other, or being impenetrable to the other's gaze, are both fantasies of separation. Privacy is a fantasy in this sense (*Claim of Reason* 366), and so is the fantasy of "necessary inexpressiveness," since "it would relieve me of the responsibility for making myself known to others" (*Claim of Reason* 351). What we refer to as the "necessary or metaphysical hiddenness of the other" is really our own failing. Avoidance is an effort to avoid, specifically, "a call upon me" (*Claim of Reason* 428). This avoidance itself, however, leads inevitably back to "the problem of the other," so that "Either way," by acknowledging or by failing to acknowledge, "I implicate myself in his existence" (*Claim of Reason* 430). Quite apart from the fact that attempts at avoidance can fail (which they can [*Claim of Reason* 433]), "the concept of acknowledgement is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success" (*Must We*

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[16]And Jean-Paul Sartre who, George Steiner speculates, could have been heavily influenced in his own philosophy of the Other from contact with Levinas in the late 1940s (Steiner 25).

Mean 263). "My hand is ever stretched out," writes Cavell elsewhere, "even in the form of a fist. It shows that I want something of another" (*Claim of Reason* 439). Avoidance is not merely a lack, "a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank" (*Must We Mean* 264). On the contrary, it is a positive gesture on my part, "a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (*Must We Mean* 264). In tragedy, we face the price of this avoidance, this failure to acknowledge (*Claim of Reason* 493); nevertheless, we must recognize that this failure springs from a certain anxiety regarding the Other, which is overcome neither by doubt nor by certainty.

Cavell expounds a statement of Wittgenstein to conclude that "in speaking of other minds, the skeptic is not skeptical *enough*: the other is still left, along with his knowledge of himself; so am I, along with mine" (*Claim of Reason* 353). A head-on attack on skepticism concerning other minds would miss the truth of skepticism, "that *certainty is not enough*" (*Must We Mean* 261). Even being certain that another person was in pain–even, in fact, feeling that pain as one's own–would nevertheless leave "a phenomenological pang" (*Must We Mean* 253). We can, or at least should, neither dismiss the Other entirely, by a really destructive skepticism, nor defeat skepticism; on the contrary, we must remember our skepticism, suspending knowledge in order to acknowledge other people (*Claim of Reason* 439). Skepticism concerning other minds can never be skeptical enough, but it can be lived. In fact, as Cavell argues (or rather, records as an intuition): "with respect to the external world, an initial sanity requires recognizing that I cannot live my skepticism, whereas with respect to others a final sanity requires recognizing that I can. I do" (*Claim of Reason* 451).

Were our anxiety regarding the other overcome by certainty, then knowledge would be a sufficient response to the other, since knowledge implies certainty, at least in its normal use (*Must We Mean* 255). On the contrary, what is needed is not knowledge of the other–as if I did

not know enough *about* him–but acknowledgement of the other, a distinction which is at the heart of Cavell's argument: "One could say: Acknowledgement goes beyond knowledge. (Goes beyond not, so to speak, in the order of knowledge, but in its requirement that I *do* something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge)" (*Must We Mean* 257). Skepticism regarding the Other is lived, Cavell argues, when we seem disappointed by our knowledge of other people,

> as though we have, or have lost, some picture of what knowing another, or being known by another, would really come to–a harmony, a concord, a union, a transparence, a governance, a power–against which our actual successes at knowing, and being known, are poor things. (*Claim of Reason* 440)

It is not that knowledge actually fails, that we fall into ignorance, but that it threatens to succeed in reducing the other to an object of cognition. Hence, Cavell's explanation of why he turned from philosophy to literature in order to address the problem of the other:

> The problem of the other was always known, or surmised, not to be a problem of knowledge, or rather not to result from a disappointment over a failure of knowledge, but from a disappointment over its success (even, from a horror of its success). (*Claim of Reason* 476)

In Cavell as in Levinas, contact with the other depends on him or her expressing him or herself, perhaps falsely. "At some stage," he writes, "the skeptic is going to be impressed by the fact that my knowledge of others depends upon their *expressing themselves*" (*Must We Mean* 254). Again like Levinas, Cavell argues that the meaning of words returns to their importance as the expression of another:

> My words are my expressions of my life; I respond to the words of others as their expressions, i.e., respond not merely to what their words mean but equally to their meaning of them. I take them to mean ("imply") something in or by their words; or to be

> speaking ironically, etc. Of course my expressions and my responses may not be accurate. To imagine an expression (experience the meaning of a word) is to imagine it as giving expression to a soul. (*Claim of Reason* 355)

In this sense, the body as a whole is the sign or "expression" of the soul (*Claim of Reason* 356-7). Cavell's version of expression is not as radical as Levinas's: rather than the other expressing himself by simply being, the other still means something for Cavell; his speech has a content concurrent with his self-presentation, rather than prior to his self-presentation. Nevertheless, we find ourselves exposed to the other, in the everyday: "I do not picture my everyday knowledge of others as confined but as exposed." Again, however, exposure is simultaneously to an Other, standing outside me, and to a concept of my own thought: "In knowing others, I am exposed on two fronts: to the other; and to my concept of the other" (*Claim of Reason* 432). Nevertheless, this concept of the other is itself foregrounded, and therefore questioned and subverted, by the process of exposure: "Being exposed to my concept of the other is being exposed to my assurance in applying it, I mean to the fact that this assurance is *mine*, comes only from me" (*Claim of Reason* 433). My ability to hold the other as the object of what Levinas calls "object cognition," and therefore to return to myself, is called into question by Cavell's argument.

Cavell's rhetoric several times makes a strong distinction between the immediacy of seeing, and therefore being certain, with recognition and acknowledgement. He contrasts, for instance, the certainty of seeing with the uncertainly of relationship with the Other:

> to base your claim to knowledge of a thing on your having seen it is generally to stake full authority for your claim; whereas to base your claim to knowledge of a person on that person's behavior is generally to withhold full authority from your claim. (*Claim of Reason* 445-46)

Later, Cavell constrasts material objects, "that I *see* them, see *them*" with "empathic projection"

towards other persons (*Claim of Reason* 421). He goes on to show the failings of empathic projection, and its inability to end skepticism concerning other minds, but it suffices to note here that the logic of sight does not manage to end such skepticism, either. "A statue, a stone," as Cavell says in reference to *Othello*, "is something whose existence is fundamentally open to the ocular proof. A human being is not" (*Claim of Reason* 496).

To conclude this brief treatment of Stanley Cavell's treatment of alterity, I would like to point out that neither Levinas's "responsibility" nor Cavell's "acknowledgement" fundamentally undercut the self's integrity, though both seem to do so, and even threaten to. To both thinkers, moreover, one relates to oneself, in "a stand" as Cavell says (*Claim of Reason* 386), or in finding place and therefore *hypostasis* in Levinas's *Existence and Existents*. To allow oneself to be acknowledged, according to Cavell, "means allowing yourself to be comprehended" (*Claim of Reason* 383), and we should, I think, read into the word "comprehended" all its philological associations with being swallowed up in something else, losing individuality.[17] Nevertheless, for Levinas, the Other provides a "salvation" from the horrors of anonymous existence, a horror not overcome by the existent who remains enchained to his being (*Existence and Existents* 91). In marked similitude to Levinas finding in the Other the possibility of salvation, Cavell claims that to recognize a stranger is to individuate oneself: "The moment at which I singled out my stranger, was the moment at which I also singled out myself" (*Claim of Reason* 429). While it may be the object of anxiety, the Other ultimately offers both philosophers the possibility of securing the self in its identity.

While Cavell's argument regarding choosing oneself when one chooses "my stranger" indicates a strong similarity between the ideas of Cavell and Levinas, it nevertheless also opens up an important distinction between them. Cavell favourably cites both Thoreau and Nietzsche

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[17]See chapter four for the philology of this term, especially with regard to Descartes.

on freedom as a grasp (*Claim of Reason* 384), and it seems in the sentence just quoted that one is free to choose one's other, rather than being chosen. For Cavell, tragedy is found in the avoidance of another, and hence in the avoidance of knowing oneself (*Claim of Reason* 389). To acknowledge, according to Cavell, is a matter of seeing another, but ultimately this recognition of the Other comes back to the Socratic injunction to know oneself. Perhaps this quibble is as much a matter of emphasis as of substance. Cavell is most closely engaged with Wittgenstein, after all, not with Heidegger. He did not spend the postwar period arguing against the exaggerated self-reflectiveness of phenomenology and its derivative, French existentialism, nor does he have the burning need to return to an ethical foundation that precedes the ground of being. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Cavell's acknowledgement takes place in the everyday, whereas Levinas's is radical. Where Cavell generally offers borderline cases, to call into question the normal way in which we approach the world in the post-enlightenment period, Levinas's notions are radical, returning to the root of how we generally understand the world in terms of knowledge, and knowledge starting from the self. It seems capable, in other words, of providing criticism with an ethical basis outside and even prior to the various ultimately self-interested negotiations in terms of which New Historicists especially tend to understand the world.

While a conception of the world starting from competition between selves is clearly important to historicism, it also has a central place in older traditions of thought, notably stoicism. In his article on stoicism in *King Lear*, Ben Schneider cites Epictetus to the effect that Fortune controls all but one's body and one's will (Schneider 38). Perhaps the best example of a stoic character is Kent, whose self-mastery approaches Socratic levels, and allows him to face Fortune with an imperturbability that borders on enthusiasm: "Fortune, good night; smile once more; turn thy wheel!" (2.2.169). While he obviously wants Fortune to return Lear to power, he also seems to be embracing whatever fortune might bring about; his prayer is not specifically for

a return to power of Lear, and his stoicism is not limited by such a desire. Levinas's definition of knowledge as grasp shows strong affinities, in fact, with stoic doctrines insofar as they are reflected in the play.

Knowledge, in the play, is understood as integrity or self-mastery, more fundamental than social position. "I would unstate myself," says Gloucester, "to be in a due resolution," as indeed he does (1.2.96-97). Similarly, Lear on awakening finds himself disoriented, unable to know himself and seeking assurance "Of my condition":

> Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
>
> I am mightily abus'd. I should e'en die with pity
>
> To see another thus. I know not what to say:
>
> I will not swear these are my hands:
>
> [. . .] Would I were assur'd
>
> Of my condition. (4.7.52-57)

A few lines later, he tries to guess where he is and fails, pathetically (4.7.75-77). According to Levinas, *hypostasis*, being able to call oneself by a name, is the beginning of freedom, though it is far more fundamental than any sort of political concern: "the freedom of the existent in its very grip on existing" (*Time and the Other* 54). Lear certainly cares about who and where he is before he starts asking questions about the current balance of power. His anxious questions are posed, in fact, at a moment of complete political passivity, when a suddenly humbled Lear is able to tell Cordelia that, "If you have poison for me, I will drink it" (4.7.72). While he might be attempting to gain, if not power, at least love by this gesture, it seems somewhat extreme to be entirely understood as a gambit, calculated to gain something. Both Gloucester and Lear are concerned with self-knowledge, before they are concerned with political participation or command.

The question of self-knowledge nevertheless has political ramifications. Goneril, for instance, considers the fact that Lear is no longer master of himself, that he is "full of changes" to serve as a sufficient reason to further reduce his power. Her sister later suggests that

> . . . you should be rul'd and led
>
> By some discretion that discerns your state
>
> Better than you yourself. (2.4.145-47)

In both the sisters's minds, knowledge is central to self-control and therefore the necessary precondition of personal freedom, much less political power. The struggle between Goneril and Lear on whether he should maintain a train of knights takes the form of debating whether the knights "know." Goneril suggests that they should be replaced by "such men as may besort your age, / Which know themselves, and you" (1.4.248-49). Lear, after a suitably enraged interval, responds that his followers "all particulars of duty know, / And in the most exact regard, support / The worships of their name" (1.4.262-64).

The idea of knowledge as self-knowledge has a continuing importance as an implicit assumption of *Lear* criticism, finding expression not only in Schneider's somewhat obscure article on stoicism in *King Lear*, but also and more importantly in Harry Berger's challenging and provocative *Making Terrors of Trifles*. While such readings recognize the anxieties preying upon the characters in the play, and the importance of issues of self, they tend to obscure the problem of acknowledging others by turning it into a circular gesture, wherein one ultimately recognizes only oneself. Berger generously recognizes the influence which Cavell's essay had on him, an influence so profound that he found himself actively resisting it (Berger xii). His own variation on Cavell's theory, however, exaggerates Cavell's tendency (described on page 38) to make acknowledgement a self-reflective activity. Guilt, in Berger's work, is understood as an awareness of the failure of acknowledgement, "the failure, that is, to acknowledge one's

complicity in what has been done to others or to oneself" (Berger xiii). Cavell's argument that acknowledgement "is entangled in the diffidence of apologetic speech acts" is given a particular twist by Berger, when he argues that the characters fail "to acknowledge complicity to themselves" (Berger xii). Within this context, acknowledgement, rather than being a recognition of other people, becomes an almost entirely self-reflective process: "the Other is internalized" as Berger says, and "the sinner is forced to become his or her own confessor, audience, judge and inquisitor" (Berger xiv). In fact, the sinner only seeks punishment from others out of a "suspicion of bad faith" (Berger xx-xxi). Writing on the character of King Lear, he argues that "aggression against others, the projective distortion of guilt feelings, is the bad faith that creates, intensifies, and festers the darkest purpose," which Berger defines as the urge towards self-punishment (Berger 35). If knowledge begins with self-knowledge, and therefore self-mastery, Berger elides the radicality of acknowledgement, as a limit on knowledge before the Other, in making it ultimately a knowledge of oneself, in a psychology which internalizes and therefore excludes the Other.

One would assume, following Berger's more or less existential language, that "good faith" would be something like a conscious anxiety before one's own possibilities for being, or perhaps constitutes true authenticity. On the other hand, though, nothing guarantees that what is authentic would also be good. Isn't Cornwall acting in complete, if psychopathic, authenticity when, before blinding Gloucester, he says that "our power / Shall do a court'sy to our wrath" (3.7.25-26)? At least one character in the play follows (or rather, precedes) Berger in viewing confession as acknowledging oneself. Immediately after recognizing Gloucester as a means of preferment and before attempting to kill him, the Steward instructs him with horrible perfunctoriness to "Briefly thy self remember: the sword is out / That must destroy thee" (4.6.226-27). Surely, though, this instance represents the very opposite of acknowledging

another person. To know oneself may represent virtue to the stoic, but it is not the same thing as recognizing an ethical obligation impinging from without. The blindness of the characters (sometimes literalized) is to the other person.

In a number of instances, knowledge is directly aligned with power in the play. Goneril, plotting against Lear, declares that "I know his heart" (1.4.329) and, a few lines later, specifically contrasts "wisdom" with "mildness" (1.4.342-43). Edmund, before the final battle, seeks certainty in the form of military intelligence:

> Know of the Duke if his last purpose hold
>
> Or whether since he is advis'd by aught
>
> To change the course; he's full of alteration
>
> And self-reproving; bring his constant pleasure. (5.1.1-4)

The last clause can be understood as either a call to bring continuous, up-to-the-minute reports, or, more likely, as a demand to uncover Albany's fixed intention.[18] Albany's decision has to be "constant" in order for it to qualify as knowable, and therefore to be something calculable within a military operation. One might note one further point about this speech: in the quarto text, Albany is accused of being full of "abdication," rather than "alteration." Not only does this term anticipate Albany's later surrender of power to Edgar and Kent (who also abdicates), but also it intimates how a failure of Gloucester's "resolution," his self-mastery and knowledge, can also lead to political failure, though, like Gloucester's need for resolution, Albany's ethical quandary is more fundamental than politics.

The search for knowledge by way of control is not limited to the so-called evil

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[18]As Kenneth Muir argues in the notes to the play, glossing "constant pleasure" as "fixed decision" and citing 1.1.42.

characters. Edgar claims to "know" Oswald:[19]

> I know thee well. A serviceable villain,
>
> As duteous to the vices of thy mistress,
>
> As badness would desire. (4.6.249-51)

In fact, Edgar has shown no previous familiarity with Oswald, though it isn't hard to imagine that they might have met or at least heard of one another. Nevertheless, Edgar is determined to reduce him to a type, a sort of mental shorthand by which to know people. As audience, we are perhaps inclined to agree with his description of Oswald, and Oswald quite possibly represents a type of evil servant, that the audience is expected to simply recognize for the sake of the plot. Cavell argues that we enact fictionality when we fail to acknowledge (Cavell 104). It is a mark of Oswald's fictionality, therefore, that he is known rather than acknowledged. What is strangely metadramatic in this moment is that Edgar also treats him as something to be known, and therefore as fictional. Rather than referring to an earlier (for the reader or audience member, imagined) encounter, Edgar's statement shows his need, as Levinas says, to deploy "the labour of thought" to conquer "the otherness of things and men" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 78). Cavell might put things slightly differently, that knowledge is an effort to avoid acknowledgement. Lear makes a similar effort, describing and defining Poor Tom with Montaignian abstractness, as an example of the *condition humaine*:

> Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. (3.4.100-04)

Where Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond* tended towards inspiring humility, however, Lear's speech helps him to (temporarily) ignore Edgar as a person, in favour of Edgar as the

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[19]Or at least, of the Steward, whose identity with Oswald is generally assumed.

representative of a general human malaise. Lear remains, in fact, in a position of at least intellectual control, pontificating in the rain. Similarly, Lear attempts to define and describe Regan, as if ascribing good qualities to her would actually make her kind:

> 'Tis not in thee
>
> To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
>
> To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
>
> And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt
>
> Against my coming in. (2.4.96-97)

Lear attempts to know people in order to reduce the threat which they pose as Other. "Thematization or conceptualization," writes Levinas, "are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other." Possession, he argues, "affirms the other, but within the negation of its independence" (*Totality and Infinity* 46). By closely defining Regan, Lear attempts to deny her independence, instead tying her identity to a concept of her which is his own, and which he therefore ultimately controls.

The relation between knowing, power and eyesight, and their distinction from love is presented most strongly by, of all people, Goneril. In the first scene, she answers Lear's question, "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" by contrasting her love to the value of eyesight: "Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter, / Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty" (1.1.50, 54-55). Of course, Goneril is a self-serving flatterer, but the structure of her argument is indicative of a general depiction of eyesight throughout the play in terms of personal freedom and an ability to grasp and appropriate: "space and liberty." It is, in this example as elsewhere, opposed to love, just as knowledge is opposed to acknowledgement. Lear also describes his power and authority in terms of eyesight. Suddenly feeling himself insubstantial, he asks "Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?" (1.4.224). On the other hand,

in the final scene a humbled Lear confesses that "Mine eyes are not o'th'best," refusing positively to identify Kent (5.3.250, 54-55).

Derek Peat has gone so far as to say that the audience itself learns not to trust its eyes, confronted by the play's stage (Peat 48). Jan Kott places the failure of eyesight at the heart of his reading of the play as pantomime. In his reading, the scene's realism is central to the disillusionment not only of Gloucester, but also of the audience. This realism, however, is understood in primarily visual terms. Edgar's description of the scene from the top of the cliff is "like a Bruegel painting thick with people, objects and events" (Kott 143). Indeed, as a number of critics have noted, the scene stretches out towards a disappearing point, the cock of the "tall, anchoring bark" in the distance. Edgar's rhetoric is a sort of intellectual *camera obscura*, reducing the situation to the perspective of a single viewer. Sounds are absent from the scene: from the top of the imaginary cliff, "the murmuring surge, / [. . .] / Cannot be heard" (4.6.18-22). Interestingly, Colman, in his variation on Nahum Tate's *King Lear*, decided to omit "without scruple" the scene on Dover Cliff altogether, citing Thomas Warton on "The utter improbability of Gloucester's imagining, though blind, that he had leaped down Dover Cliff." Oddly, Colman nevertheless maintained "that celebrated description of the cliff in the mouth of Edgar," more-or-less missing the point that it is a much greater example of deception, and one extending to the audience (iv-v). The centrality of sight to knowing–and anxiety at its failure–is not restricted to the characters of the play.

The face and the gaze are repeatedly aligned with power and independence in the play. As she is led to prison, Cordelia asks to "see these daughters, and these sisters" (5.3.7). As Harry Berger has noted, her goal is to "outface her sisters' frowns," and he cites Cavell to the effect that she wishes to "bid her sisters a morally triumphant farewell" (Berger 46-47). Besides serving as the sign of a final power of rebellion, the face also indicates authority. "Yes," says the

Fool to Goneril, "forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing" (1.4.191-93). Oswald's offence, in Lear's opinion, is to "bandy looks with me" (1.4.82). Confronting the blind Gloucester in Dover, he describes himself "every inch a king: / When I do stare, see how the subject quakes" (4.6.191-93). Earlier, in the trial scene recorded in the quarto, Lear seems to take the power of his stare more seriously. Edgar describes him entirely in terms of his gaze: "Look where he stands and glares" (3.6.23).[20] "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes," says Gloucester, briefly abandoning direction with sight, though he nevertheless instructs Edgar to lead him to Dover. When he fails to hear the sea, or to feel the ground slope beneath him, Edgar declares that "your other senses grow imperfect / By your eyes' anguish" (4.6.5-6), extending his blindness into a general inability to find his place in the environment. A few lines later, Edgar describes as deficient the sight which cannot appropriate its object, and as apt to betray its bearer to the void: "I'll look no more, / Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight / Topple down headlong" (4.6.22-24). Conversely, if Lear's order to have his boots removed indicates a sudden sense of being at home, it also follows his instructions to Gloucester to "get thee glass eyes" (4.6.168). Even the eyes of a "scurvy politician" imply an orientation in the world and a certain power over one's environment. To "look with thine ears," on the other hand, is to sense injustice (4.6.149). Face, in these examples, is presented by oneself rather than recognized in an Other. To stare is to stare down, rather than to find oneself first stared at.

Eyesight, in this play, is generally associated with control; moreover, the projection of an image of oneself implies self-control. Edgar will, by dressing down or even undressing, present himself, control his image and remain powerful *vis-à-vis* the elemental: "with presented

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[20]Theobald emended "he" to "she," making this statement refer to one of the "she foxes" Lear apostrophizes in the preceding line. There is, however, little reason why the pronoun can not refer to Lear himself.

nakedness outface, / The wind, and persecution of the sky" (2.3.11-12). When disguised as a Dover peasant, he describes his earlier persona as a fiend whose "eyes / Were two full moons" (4.6.69-70). This retroactive disguise not only dissimulates Edgar, but also describes him in terms of his own vision, not being seen but seeing others, and controlling his own image. Michael Keefer explains Lear's declaration to Gloucester and Edgar that he cannot be accused of counterfeiting as a declaration of authenticity, or at least of a necessary congruence between his self-representation and himself: "he cannot be accused of counterfeiting because as king he has sole authority over the dissemination of his image. Which is to say that his garb, his chosen self-accommodation, does not misrepresent him" (Keefer 153). Kent, like Edgar, controls his image, if only negatively, by destroying a former image when he "raz'd my likeness" (1.4.4). To create a visual image, in this world, is to maintain control over one's own signs.

Writing is power, because it is associated with the visible, the sphere of control and appropriation, not with Levinas's "ringing, clanging scandal" of the audible. Cordelia remains "queen / Over her passion" while reading Kent's letter in the quarto text, while it "most rebel-like, sought to be King o'er her" (4.3.13-15). Despite her occasional exclamations, her reading of the letter is private, in keeping with her retreat at the end of the Gentleman's description, "to deal with grief alone" (4.3.32). Lear is able to divide his kingdom only because it is available to him, at hand, as a map, and while in his supposed divestiture he obviously enjoys all the excesses of rhetoric, he exercises his power by drawing a line:

> Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
> With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
> With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
> We make thee lady. (1.1.62-65)

In preparing to hunt down Edgar, Gloucester declares that "his picture I will send far and near,

that all the kingdom may have note of him" (2.1.80-82). Similarly, the dying Edmund sends his sword as a "token of reprieve" to save Lear and Cordelia (5.3.248), assuring the authenticity of his word with a plastic sign, like Kent sending his ring to Cordelia (3.1.46-49). The word becomes an instrument of power by its commitment to an image, a thing within someone's grasp.

Writing implies not only power, but also secrecy. The written message remains private, as one's own. We have already had occasion to mention Lear's control over the letter which he sends to Regan using Kent as a messenger. There are other instances, however, of the association of writing with privacy. Most of Edmund's communication with the Captain who is acting as executioner to Lear and Cordelia is in the form of writing. Their spoken communication is only an encouragement and reference to writing:

> About it; and write happy, when th'hast done.
>
> Marke,–I say, instantly, and carry it so
>
> As I have set it down. (5.3.62-65)

Not surprisingly, suspicion is aroused by the extraordinary effort towards secrecy which writing implies. Hence, Gloucester's suspicion of the letter which Edmund produces, and his naïve acceptance of the contents. Slight gestures–"that terrible dispatch of it into your pocket"–are sufficient to confirm its importance, since the written word is already an object of suspicion (1.2.32-33). "The quality of nothing" would not need to be written down, hidden on paper as it is hidden in Edmund's pocket (1.2.32-34). Of course, Gloucester is also naïve towards Edmund's offer of "auricular assurance," but his naïveté towards the written word is qualitatively different (1.2.88-89). The spoken word is assumed to be correct by virtue of its frankness, whereas the written word is believed because of its secrecy. It is perhaps because writing implies a secret knowledge that Gloucester's otherwise reasonable explanation to Regan and Cornwall for his possession of a letter meets with incredulity (3.7.47-49). After all, he is aware of the invasion

before it becomes "sure and vulgar," heard of by anyone who "can distinguish sound" (4.6.207-08). "Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you [Oswald] / Transport her purposes by word?" asks Regan, jealous of her sister (4.5.19-20). The letter to which Regan refers travels around the final act, moving from hand to hand and assuming new importance in each, like the handkerchief in *Othello*. Oswald, loyal even in death, asks Edgar to deliver it; Edgar, instead, reads it himself. The letter then becomes Edgar's secret, which he passes in strict confidence to Albany, forbidding himself even to remain while it is read (5.1.47). Finally, Albany brandishes it at Goneril, threatening to stop her mouth with it as though it were a weapon, which by this point it is (5.3.154). Letters, as these incidents dramatically demonstrate, risk becoming alienated, moving about on their own, just as Lear's lines on the map come to assume a meaning he could not have wished.[21] More to the point, this possibility becomes an anxiety surrounding the written word, and implying a normal control over writing which is violated.

To write is, at least normally, to create a sign within one's own control rather than being subverted by the voice of an Other. Rather than implying acknowledgement, as hearing does, writing implies relationships of power between people, wherein force becomes a sort of writing on the body. Kent threatens to "beat [Oswald] into clamorous whining, if thou deny the least syllable of thy addition," before calling Oswald "Thou whoreson zed, thou unnecessary letter" (2.2.21-23, 61). Perhaps we should call Kent's actions "textual assault": he turns Oswald into a text, into which he will interject an "addition." The link between violence and writing on the body is also implied by Edgar, who incidentally also once again demonstrates the connection between writing and secrecy: "To know our enemies' minds, we rip their hearts; / Their papers is more lawful" (4.6.257-58). Both the heart and the written document represent secrecy, and

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[21]Except, perhaps, in terms of Harry Berger's "darkest purpose" of self-punishment.

opening one can be compared to opening the other. One recalls Lear's desire, in the trial scene, to "anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart" (3.6.74-75). In opening the letter, Edgar treats it like a body to be torn open; conversely, in challenging Edmund, he prepares to write on his brother's heart, treating it like a letter:

> Say thou "No,"
> This sword, this arm, and my best spirits are bent
> To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak,
> Thou liest. (5.3.137-39)

He is anticipated by Albany in his choice of image (5.3.94). Edmund answers Albany's challenge by promising to prove his honour "On him, on you, who not?" and Edgar's challenge by promising to send Edgar's accusations back into his heart, where "This sword of mine shall give them instant way" (5.3.101, 148). To all three characters, and, indeed to the very economy of trial by combat, duelling represents an effort to write upon the body of another. In this image, the written word realizes the ultimate corollary of its status as that which is controlled.

If sight represents control, then hearing conversely represents exposure, loss of control. Kent's tale of woe nearly kills him; Edgar's tale does kill Gloucester and leaves Albany "almost ready to dissolve" (5.3.214-16, 195-98, 202). The difference between the written word, which Cordelia can master, and the spoken word, which masters Kent and Gloucester, is that one appropriates the written, whereas the spoken word invades before it is appropriated. To hear is to have contact with an Other, whereas one can read alone. At least twice in the play, the voice comes to stand for the person itself, or rather, to serve as a synecdoche for what is human and valued in the Other. We may, I think, discount Gloucester's recognizing Lear by "the trick of that voice" (4.6.106), since obviously there is no other way he might recognize Lear, other than smell or touch, and Lear probably smells quite differently when "fantastically dressed with wild

flowers" (4.6.80 S.D.). Shortly before, following Edgar's dramaturgical miracle in the same scene, the supposedly incredulous peasant that Edgar is now impersonating accosts Gloucester with a command to "Hear you, sir! speak!" A few lines later, still supposedly amazed at Gloucester's survival, he asks him to "speak yet again" (4.6.46, 55). To speak, in this sense, is to indicate being alive. One can see a dead person, but a corpse is not an interlocutor. It is not insignificant that Lear, in his last lines, pathetically tries to hear Cordelia speak (5.3.271). This gesture reflects the first scene, with its command to speak, but here the effort presents an image of the distance of the Other in a futile attempt to conjure the dead.

In the play, attempts to know and master oneself repeatedly fail. Likewise, pagan virtues, of stoic patience and self-command, are frustrated. "Sir," asks Kent of Lear in the trial scene, "where is the patience now / That you so oft have boasted to retain" (3.6.57-58). Edgar realizes the failure of efforts at control: "The worst is not / So long as we can say 'This is the worst'" (4.1.28). Being able to know and describe one's situation is still a sort of power over it. The characters, one after another, lose their mastery over events and themselves. Gloucester maintains his poise until his eyes are put out; Edgar maintains his until he meets his blinded father. Kent's loyalty and patience are rewarded only with death (Snyder 150). In a way, such loss of knowledge and control is just as well, since the project of knowledge, of vision and grasp, is antithetical to hearing an Other, to what Cavell terms acknowledgement. The burden of all the characters' sometimes desperately inaccurate or wildly overwrought efforts at knowledge is an avoidance of the difficulty–or better, the vulnerability–involved in really acknowledging an Other.

The play's first and most famous example of failed acknowledgement is Gloucester's failure to acknowledge Edmund, except perhaps as a sort of objective correlative of his own sin. Perhaps the best comments on this opening failure of human relationships come from Cavell and

Berger. The former, in fact, makes it the source of his term "acknowledge", though indicating that Gloucester's acknowledgement of Edmund is woefully incomplete:

> He recognizes the moral claim upon himself, as he says twice, to "acknowledge" his bastard; but all this means to him is that he acknowledges that he has a bastard for a son. He does not acknowledge *him*, as a son or a person, with *his* feelings of illegitimacy and being cast out. (Cavell 48)

In other words, Gloucester internalizes Edmund's claim, makes him a part of his own moral landscape; he does not recognize Edmund as Other. Merely to recognize his own sin–to know himself as Socrates might say–is insufficient to acknowledge his son. Gloucester indicates in the first few lines that he keeps Edmund in a sort of exile (1.1.31-32). His failure to recognize Edmund continues through the play. When Edmund injures himself in what could be interpreted as a really desperate bid for attention, Gloucester ignores his references to his injury, prefering to hunt down Edgar, instead:

> *Edmund.* Look sir, I bleed.
>
> *Gloucester.* Where is the villain, Edmund?

When Edmund finally does start to tell Gloucester what has happened, Gloucester interrupts him to bark orders at a subordinate (2.1.39-40). A second account of what transpired is answered by Gloucester's "Let him fly far," exiling another son, rather than recognizing the one in front of him. In fact the duke only, finally, mentions Edmund's injury in order to bask in reflected glory. Even here, he addresses Regan and Cornwall, not Edmund, whom he refers to in the third person: "He did bewray his practise, and received / This hurt you see, striving to apprehend him" (2.1.55, 106-07).

Part of the difficulty of acknowledgement has to do with the fact that the power of vision, its control over the visible, can not only be lost, as when a written letter falls into the

wrong hands, but can also be reversed. One can find oneself the object of the eyes of another. In Krzysztof Ziarek's reading of Levinas, subjectivity is displaced by "vocativity":

> the subject no longer exercises the power of seeing the other. Instead, it is defined through being seen by and exposed to the other, to the gaze of his eyes. Consequently, the subject is primarily not for itself but "subject" to the other. (Ziarek 102)

Edmund fears that the presence of Lear might turn his troops against him. Interestingly, he expresses the threat in terms of an attack on his own eyes. Lear might "turn our impress'd lances in our eyes / Which do command them" (5.3.51-52). Where seeing places objects within an intellectual grasp, being seen makes oneself passive, if not quite an object; moreover, confronting the "face" of another places one under an ethical burden. This is not merely a theory proposed by Levinas; on the contrary, it is illustrated by the many characters in the play who refuse to be seen. Edmund has no practical reason to keep Gloucester ignorant of his identity, and his predecessor, the son of the Paphlagonian king, made no such deception.[22] He and his father's fate, climbing the imaginary mountain together, Cavell argues, is a sort of exemplum of "what people will *have* to say and try to mean to one another when they are incapable of acknowledging to one another what they have to acknowledge" (Cavell 55). Gloucester and Edgar exchange information, just as they exchange services and payment, but they are unwilling to be seen by one another. Gloucester sends Edgar away before his suicide attempt, preferring to commune with the gods, who, as I will argue in chapter four, merely reflect his own thoughts. Edgar, conversely, spins endless webs of deception, adopting spectacular and pointless disguises, as if

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[22]"This sonne of mine" the Paphlagonian king in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* explains, "forgetting my abhominable wrongs, not recking danger, & neglecting the present good way he was doing himselfe good, came hether to do this kind office you see him performe towards me" (selected reprinted as "Appendix 5," in Kenneth Muir's second Arden edition, 232).

willing to appear to be anything but himself.

Where evil strives to be hidden, as when Edmund is ordered out of the house so that Gloucester may be blinded (3.7.6-9), good accepts the responsibility imposed by the face of the Other, even striving to be seen. The servant who defends Gloucester dies with the words "you have one eye left / To see some mischief on him" (3.7.79-80). Where Cornwall seeks to avoid–even, to borrow an archaism, "evoid"–Gloucester's sight, to face him down, the servant faces up to Gloucester's face. Justice, in Cornwall's terms, implies the opinions of others:

> Though well we may not pass upon his life
> Without the form of justice, yet our power
> Shall do a court'sy to our wrath, which men
> May blame but not control. (3.7.24-27)

The eyes of other men weigh even on Cornwall, even while dismissing them and contemplating one of the most horrifying acts of violence in the Shakespearean canon. In urging Edgar to flee, Edmund tells him first to "bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him: and at my entreaty forbear his presence" (1.2.7-9). Edmund draws, in this instance, not only upon Edgar's interest in self-preservation, but also upon the association of shame with hiddenness. One might note that Edmund's argument here is circular: Edgar has a need to hide himself, and therefore should try to find a reason for his shame; conversely, he is ashamed, and therefore should avoid his father's sight.

Occasionally, the avoidance of sight is literal. The anxiety regarding the reversal of the power of sight leads to violent actions. Lear sends Kent into exile with the words "Hence and avoid my sight," repeating himself a few lines later (1.1.123, 153). Kent, maintaining the image, asks to remain within Lear's sight, making his own action a response to the ethical obligation imposed by the face of an Other (1.1.157-58). A few lines later, bidding farewell to France, Lear

emphasizes that it is Cordelia's "face" which he is avoiding: "we / Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see / That face of hers again" (1.1.261-63). Gloucester commands not only a search for Edgar, but also his summary execution, an addition which Berger takes to be an effort to avoid his presence, never to see him again (Berger 59). Later, Lear flees Cordelia's century rather than allow himself to be recognized (Cavell 52). The threat which Lear avoids is not a delusion born of insanity, as Kent's description of him makes clear:

> . . . the poor distressed Lear's i'th'town,
> Who sometime, in his better tune, remembers
> What we are come about, and by no means
> Will yield to see his daughter. (4.3.38-41)

Rather than refusing to be seen in his insanity, it is when "in his better tune," when he remembers "What we are come about" that he will not see his daughter. "Lear's dominating motivation," according to Cavell, "is to *avoid being recognized*" (Cavell 46). Cornwall's blinding of Gloucester is the most violent action in the play, and perhaps the most cruel actually to be presented on the Shakespearean stage. His reasons are given clearly, as an effort not to be seen. "See it shalt thou never," he says before putting out the first eye, and "Lest it see more, prevent it" before putting out the other. In both cases, someone–Gloucester or the faithful servant–has said that Gloucester will see justice done: "I shall see / The winged vengeance overtake such children" says Gloucester in the first instance; "you have one eye left / To see some mischief on him" says the servant in the second instance (3.7.65-81). Cornwall's act is not a reaction to a threat to himself. Gloucester's seeing or not seeing mischief will not cause it to occur. Cavell comments, brilliantly, that this act "literalizes evil's ancient love of darkness," and proceeds to show how Gloucester regards the blinding as retribution for his avoidance of Edgar (Cavell 47). He avoided eyes, and so his eyes are literally "evoided." I will argue in chapter seven that

Gloucester's sense of retributive justice follows from his concern for Edgar: he is concerned for his son before he is ashamed of himself. Before they avoid a threat, even the threat of retailing one of their evil or at least imperfect actions to the world, the characters avoid becoming ethically responsible, "A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 83). There is a stronger, ethical sensibility to eye-sight, which is anterior to and informs the shame which Cavell finds in the characters.

The characters also make more metaphorical efforts to avoid being seen. Regan animalizes the servant–"How now, you dog!" (3.7.73)–making his face no longer the face of an Other.[23] Similarly, Albany's insult to Goneril is that she is "not worth the dust which the rude wind / Blows in your face" (4.2.30-31). Her face becomes worth less than the dust which, one assumes, obscures it. One might add Kent's indifference to any face that "stands on any shoulder that I see / Before me at this instant" (2.2.91-92). The strongest instances of a metaphorical blinding, however, refer to Gloucester who is, as it were, re-blinded by both his son and his king. After his supposedly suicidal leap, Edgar asks him to "Look up a height, [. . .] / Do but look up" (4.6.58-59). Cavell argues that Edgar has earlier re-blinded Gloucester by refusing to reveal himself, and therefore making it impossible for Gloucester to "say I had eyes again" (4.1.24). He also argues that Gloucester is the easiest of all characters to acknowledge, since his own lack of eyes renders him incapable of returning acknowledgement. Hence, Cavell claims, it is Gloucester "whose recognition Lear is first able to bear" (Cavell 50). Here, as elsewhere, Cavell seems to overemphasize the reciprocal function of acknowledgement. Moreover, Gloucester has already recognized Lear's voice, and Lear has already acknowledged the suffering of the cold,

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[23]In an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida cites Levinas to the effect that there is no animal face ("Eating Well" 105).

wet Fool in the storm. Lear delays recognizing Gloucester as an Other, even though he has already been recognized by Gloucester, because seeing implies power, while being seen implies passivity, even vulnerability. The choice of Cupid as a metaphor is instructive: love is often, and certainly in this image, pictured as a force attacking from without, against which Lear is attempting to maintain his self-mastery. Lear does not risk learning something about himself, which acknowledgement would often seem to imply, but losing his position as subject altogether. That Lear first delays, then acknowledges Gloucester, then refuses to acknowledge his daugher's centurion, is not terribly surprising: after all, Lear recognizes the Fool, but not Edgar, in the storm and seems to acknowledge anyone only in flashes. If Lear really answers Gloucester's "Dost thou know me?" he will not be in a position casually to redefine Gloucester as Cupid, shifting the sign of blindness along a chain of imbrication, rather than finding himself under the face of the Other. Similarly, he insists that Gloucester read (4.6.134-41). Cavell sees this as further evidence of Lear's cruelty, undertaken "in order not to be seen by this man, whom he has brought harm" (Cavell 52). Beautifully as this position is presented, there is another way in which to read Lear's insistence on reading, and on Gloucester's failure to read. Gloucester's blindness moves both characters away from the world of visual signs, over which the observer mantains at least an intellectual mastery. "Look with thine ears" says Lear, shifting to the auditory (4.6.149). With illiteracy, the debate moves from a semiotic struggle, over the meaning and interpretation of signs, towards the recognition of a responsibility, impinging from without. "If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes" says Lear, neatly subverting the predominant imagery of eyesight as control, into an image of generosity, and of surrendering his own, visual, power control (4.6.174).

The play, like Cavell usually, insists that a true ethical recognition exceeds the epistemological problem of knowing. In this respect, Cavell is quite willing to acknowledge the

congruence of his ideas with the Christian religion, and specifically Luther's idea of the *Deus absconditus*. Parenthetically, in his essay on *King Lear*, he defines the difference of acknowledgement and knowledge in terms of God, or rather, defines God in terms of the fundamental gap between knowledge and acknowledgement:

> The withdrawals and approaches of God can be looked upon as tracing the history of our attempts to overtake and absorb acknowledgement by knowledge; God would be the name of that impossibility. (Cavell 117)

Earlier, he specifically relates this notion of the Divine as the impossibility of absorbing acknowledgement in knowledge to Luther's unknowable God, arguing that Luther's "logical point is that you do not accept a promise by knowing something about the promisor" (Cavell 95). Acknowledging salvation, in other words, would be subtly but radically different from knowing something by way of a theodicy. What Cavell's citation of Luther indicates is that the idea of an acknowledgement beyond knowing–in fact, an idea more radical than Cavell's own idea of acknowledgement, with its implications of mutuality–is available to sixteenth-century thought. Lear does not recognize Cordelia and subject himself to her as an extension of knowledge, by which he might know where and what he is, and then know what other people are. On the contrary, he recognizes Cordelia when most confused, and just regaining his bearings:

> Methinks I should know you and know this man;
> Yet I am doubtful: For I am mainly ignorant
> What place this is, and all the skill I have
> Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
> Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
> For, as I am a man, I think this lady
> To be my child Cordelia. (4.7.64-70)

One might argue, of course, that he's trying to appeal by pathos to Cordelia's sentiments, but that seems like a rather elaborate plan to be hatched on the spur of the moment, while half-conscious, and by someone seldom able to admit his vulnerabilities before. Even when, as Albany says, "He knows not what he says," he nevertheless mourns his daughter. His final, desperate efforts to find some sign of life in her might be taken as rejections of his claim to knowledge: "I know when one is dead, and when one lives / She's dead as earth" (5.3.292, 259-60). In this scene especially, but also throughout the play, we see instances of acknowledgement, of care for other persons, that go beyond knowing.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, Levinas uses sight as an image of a certain phenomenology, rather than insisting upon an *ipso facto* difference between it and hearing. My argument is not substantially damaged, therefore, by the fact that the play sometimes inverts the imagery of sight in order to make it express acknowledgement. Edgar recognizes Lear with the words "O thou side-piercing sight!" (4.6.85). Lear remains a "sight", but as a spectacle that invades ("side-piercing") like Levinas's spoken word rather than as an object of the eyes. Gloucester describes "the superfluous and lust-dieted man" as one who "will not see / Because he does not feel." Perhaps Gloucester is describing himself in the "lust-dieted man" since "I stumbled when I saw," lacking a supplement of feeling to the power of his sight (4.1.67-68, 4.1.19). True sight, in this metaphor, is informed by feeling. The image is certainly in keeping with two of Gloucester's other images of sight lost and regained, first when he wishes to "see [Edgar] in my touch" and later when he tells Lear that he sees how the world goes "feelingly" (4.1.23, 4.6.147). As the example of the dying servant shows, one can also face up to responsibility, rather than only face down a potential opponent. Perhaps the finest example of the power of sight being reversed, however, comes in Lear's offer of his own eyes to Gloucester (4.6.174). Joseph Wittreich claims that the "master theme" of the play is "the cleansing of the

senses" (Wittreich 105). It might be more accurate to say that the master theme of the play is a battle between senses, or between the senses as means of appropriation of the world, and the senses as the means of an invasive assault by the Other. To "feel" in Gloucester's pet metaphor, seems to indicate a concern with other people, like Cavell's acknowledgement, or Levinas's spoken word, while sight, throughout the play, generally (but only generally) indicates a mastery over its object.

Before putting this topic aside, it is worth noting that the breach with order which hearing, or acknowledgement of the Other, represents, is only temporary. The recognition of the Other is an interruption, but one which closes again. At times, in fact, the reestablishment of order seems like an inevitable fall. Cordelia's prayers for the restoration of her father's sanity betray a rhetoric of order, even mechanism, although they are obviously intended as care for another person, and addressed to the infinitely distant gods:

> O you kind Gods!
> Cure this great breach in his abused nature!
> Th'untuned and jarring senses, O! wind up
> Of this child-changed father. (4.7.14-17)

Perhaps by virtue of its being spoken and committed to language, becoming, in other words, what one could write, the expression of concern turns into a movement to order, reinterpretable as something very different, control of the father as of a musical instrument (for instance) or a self-righteous blame of the children who have changed the father, or even a betrayal of Cordelia's own guilt in making Lear child-changed. One might, if sufficiently determined, associate Cordelia's statement with the tradition of nature as controlled, of madness as an excuse to infantilize the sufferer, or even with the worst excesses of an urge to order and control. Such possibilities for reinterpretation, some of them painfully familiar to literary critics, do not,

however, actually annul the generosity of Cordelia's care for her father.

Another example may be more clear. At the end of the play, Albany sets about the task of restoring order to the kingdom, with a more-or-less ruthless promise to mete out both punishments and rewards: "all friends shall taste / The wages of their virtue, and all foes / The cup of their deservings" (5.1.301-03). These lines travesty Christ's "cup of the new covenant," therefore substituting a more or less mechanistic version of justice for Christ's offer of forgiveness (Luke 22.20; 1 Corinthians 11.15). Michael Keefer points out that these lines also distort St. Paul: "For the wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Keefer 163; Romans 6.23). Such order, with its reduced and mechanistic sense of justice is interrupted by the sight of Lear himself: "O see, see" (5.3.85). Lear is referred to by Kent as a usurper, living beyond his allotted portion of life: "He but usurp'd his life" (5.3.316). The final couplet seems to return to this idea, imposing a limit and demarcation on life: "The oldest hath borne most: we that are young, / Shall never see so much, nor live so long" (5.3.324-25). While Lear's extraordinary suffering and presence interrupt the normal course of things, order will be restored, here symbolized by the measure of human life. While a period of true communication is allowed, it is strictly delimited by "this sad time": "The weight of this sad time we must obey; / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3.322-23). Kott claims that "unlike the Histories and Tragedies, in *King Lear* the world is not healed again" (Kott 152). Snyder, on the contrary, claims that order is restored, and specifically an improved order: "'What we ought to say,' with its reminder of the love test, yields to 'what we *feel*'" (Snyder 171). Nevertheless, a return to "what we ought to say" when the "weight of this sad time" is lifted is implied, if not quite promised. The niceties of social propriety will prevail. The spoken word, with its interpersonal surplus, falls into the world of interchangeable signs.

Nevertheless, the return to order leaves a trace. Ziarek summarizes Levinas's position by

writing that "The other's rupture of thought, as it is recovered in the next step of 'repairing' the interrupted movement of knowing, leaves an 'unevenness'" (Ziarek 98). There are traces of a break with knowing in the play which, even though they can be repaired and explained in other terms, are never quite explained away. At times, the desire to explain seems unavoidable. Cavell emphasizes Lear's desire to reduce what Levinas calls "the otherness of things and of men," but concludes that "It is the thing we do not know that can save us" (Cavell 96-97). Howard Felperin notes that Lear's efforts to reduce the world to knowledge anticipate the efforts of critics, readers and viewers to make sense of the play's action:

> Lear enacts in advance our own dilemma as interpreters, alternating between antithetical visions of experience, only to abandon both in favor of a pure and simple pointing to the thing itself. Interpreters of the play [. . .] have been understandably reluctant to follow him into this state of *aporia*, of being completely at a loss, so peremptory is the human need to make sense of things. (Felperin 105)

Of course, I would disagree with Felperin's Derridean emphasis on *aporia*. If Levinas is correct, then the failure of knowledge is not simply negative: it is enacted by the entry of the Other, which calls the self to responsibility. Nor does our knowledge fail by virtue of over-interpretation; on the contrary, interpretation is itself an effort to control, reducing the specific but excessive claim of the Other to an object of our own appropriation. Nevertheless, it seems clear that as readers we attempt to cover over the directness of the Other, substituting anonymous games of power or generic convention, or even the instability of the sign. After the horror of Gloucester's blinding we still write chapters on sight imagery, but that horror is never entirely lost. Exorcising it may, in fact, provide the motive for our criticism. In any case, the fall seems inevitable. At the instant of their creation, words can be a call from one person to another; immediately, however, they become unstable signs, capable of alienation, capable of being

written and therefore capable of appropriation.

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Chapter three — "A fair deserving":

Economic Reason and the Absence of Generosity

The question of language has been addressed in the discussion of the play's sight imagery, but the ramifications of Levinas's attack on totalizing ontologies extend well beyond a critique of linguistic structuralism to encompass a criticism of any sort of totalizing economy. In summarizing Levinas's theory of language, Richard A. Cohen describes the poverty of pure semiotic play by arguing that it "remains an economy" (*Time and the Other* 21). The tendency of the economic world, Levinas writes, is to compensate for the effort of existence with "wages," which can be earned. In an extended discussion, he contrasts the generosity of compassion with the reward of compensation. The true object of hope is not such a material reward for one's efforts, but is, on the contrary, radically external: "the Messiah, or salvation" (*Existence and Existents* 90-92).

In an essay on Jacques Derrida, Levinas's only disagreement with his friend's philosophy comes near the conclusion of a long and largely admiring summary of his work. The objection concerns their different understandings of the sign. According to Levinas the sign finds its origin in ethics: "The sign, like the Saying, is the extra-ordinary event [. . .] of exposure to others, of subjection to others. [. . .] It is the one-for-the-other" ("Jacques Derrida" 61). Despite its deferral, Derrida's "play" remains, in Richard A. Cohen's introduction to Levinas's *Time and the Other*, "an economy, the economy of what is *Said*" (*Time and the Other* 21). There is nevertheless an escape from this economy since, earlier in his essay, Levinas declares that "the Saying is not exhausted in this *Said*" ("Jacques Derrida" 61). The responsibility of oneself for the other is, Levinas argues elsewhere, prior to "the enunciation of propositions communicating information and accounts" ("Diachrony and Representation" 106). In *Otherwise than Being, or*

Beyond Essence, Levinas develops this distinction between the Saying, the fact of being addressed, and the Said, the content of such an address.[24] Another way to understand the distinction is to recognize that while the content of an address is subject to the general economy of the sign, the fact of being addressed by an Other is a rupture in this economy.

According to Eaglestone, the structure of the Saying and the Said explains why interruption always remains possible, and why the possibility of skepticism, of interrupting the Said, can never be exorcised from philosophy. Skepticism "is not a method of thought but rather in a constant relation to thought, interrupting it and disturbing it" (Eaglestone 150). Skepticism is also the beginning-point for Stanley Cavell's efforts to rescue ethics from philosophical rationalism. To live in a world where people are treated strictly as contents to be ascertained or observed would, claims Bruns, "be like living in a world in which people did nothing else but keep one another under surveillance." He adds that perhaps "our world is like this more than we think" (Bruns 87). Certainly the world of *King Lear* often seems very much like this; nevertheless, as I will show in chapter seven, it contains moments of genuine address, where the characters treat each other not as things to be known, but persons to be acknowledged. Such a recognition not only implies returning to the saying beyond the said, but also moving beyond other economies, of cash, honour, or prestige. The movement to economics is itself a sort of resistance to what is Other, assimilating it within the anonymity of the market. A pure gift, which is not purchased even by favours or by love, would serve as an interruption to the *quid pro quo* of wages and earning. It is precisely such an interruption which Lear avoids in insisting that "nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.89) or that "nothing can be made of nothing" (1.4.130).

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[24]One of the best summaries of Levinas's uses of these terms is found in Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*, to which I am very much indebted. See especially pp. 141-46.

Among Lear's defensive mechanisms is an insistence that the world is available for purchase: there isn't anything which can stand truly over and against him, incapable of assimilation.

Levinas's claim that the true object of hope lies outside economics–"the Messiah, or salvation"–provides a clue about the full theological importance of the ruthlessly economic logic by which Lear forbids the possibility of Grace. According to Alister McGrath, what most horrified Luther about the Catholicism which he was taught as a young monk was the *quid pro quo* structure of salvation, a notion borrowed from Roman law and most fully expressed by Cicero as "giving to each man what he is entitled to" (McGrath 101). Luther's discovery that the Hebrew *sdqh* held a very different meaning from the Latin *iusticia*, was, McGrath argues, central to his theological breakthrough. Moreover, while Luther arrived independently at his discovery of the righteousness of God as quite distinct from human economies of righteousness, and even in opposition to reason and the whole philosophical tradition that valorizes *quid pro quo* morality, he was foreshadowed not only by important figures such as Augustine and Anselm, but also by vernacular expressions of the Christian tradition, such as that of the *Pearl*-poet (McGrath 101-02). One therefore need not discern a relationship of source or influence between Luther's soteriology and Shakespeare's play, in order to find in *King Lear* a critique of an economic model of a world in which nothing is gratuitous and conversely everything can be purchased. In struggling desperately to maintain the model when challenges to it arise, the characters champion one tradition which Levinas detects in the history of the west, when he claims that philosophy is "fundamentally opposed to a God that reveals. Philosophy is atheism, or rather unreligion, negation of a God that reveals himself and puts truths into us" (McGrath 96). The characters do, as I argue in the next chapter, seem to treat the Divine entirely as a projection, rather than a relevation. One must of course assume that his own parallels with Luther are as unconscious as Shakespeare's; nevertheless, like Luther and like Shakespeare, Levinas criticizes an economic

view of the world in the name of revelation or at least in the name of gratuity, something which cannot be purchased.

I would quibble with Eaglestone in arguing that an interruption is not necessarily in itself an ethical act. If New Historicism has taught us anything, it is that such interruptions might be contained. I will argue in the next chapter that the Fool's interruptions of the economic order of things do not fundamentally challenge them. More importantly for our present purposes, certain critics of Shakespeare's *King Lear* join the characters of the play in relentlessly containing alterity within economic structures and categories. Correctly describing the Lear world as one of social and economic exchange, they do not proceed to show how the play might imply other possibilities. Berger accuses Lear of giving away Cordelia "in such a way as to get her back again by competing with her husband for her attention, and conferring on her the offices of the nursery," and claims that Lear "inflicts his generosity" on all three of his daughters. Lear's effort, according to Berger, is to establish a debt that they cannot repay, and which will keep them perpetually beholden to him (Berger 29-31). Schneider, in the course of his detailed claim that the play is informed by stoicism, cites Cicero to the effect that gifts inevitably return to the hand of the giver. The exchange of benefits, what Schneider terms "mutuality", precedes "contracts, constitutions and laws" (Schneider 28). What neither Berger nor Schneider seem to consider, however, are the deficiencies of seeing the world as a network of reciprocal exchanges. In doing so, they share in the weakness of Lear's own worldview, within which the possibility of a truly generous love seems all but unthinkable for most of the length of the play. To make systems of exchange exhaustive is to render the love test not only comprehensible, but inevitable.

What Berger terms the "darker purpose" of characters in the play, assumes a world in which characters are fundamentally at war and in which the self exists not only *vis-à-vis* the Other, but also actively in conflict with others, over and against them. His vision of the world, in

other words, is not markedly different from that of Foucault or even Thomas Hobbes. Lear's purpose in the first scene, according to Berger is

> to play on everyone's curiosity and to stir up as much envy and contention as he can among the "younger strengths" with the aim of dominating and dividing them, humbling and punishing them. (Berger 31)

One cannot disagree with Berger's sense that the resignation is less a gift than a gambit. By sacrificing what the quarto text calls "all cares and business of our state" (1.1.38) Lear hopes to win a claim on the love of his daughters and the "kind nursery" of Cordelia (1.1.123). The king's gambit conflates items of exchange–power, land, revenues–with items that are not purchasable, and cannot be earned, like love, respect, or Grace. Drawing attention to this fact is not terribly original; I would like to add, however, that Lear's confusion proceeds from a more general malaise in the world of the play, where reciprocal, economic relations are substituted for generous human relations.

Several immaterial things become objects of exchange in the play. Lear offers to buy sanity, for instance:

> Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary,
>
> To sweeten my imagination.
>
> There's money for thee. (4.6.129-31)

In his contract with Kent, disguised as Caius, Lear offers an exchange of love for service, securing the bargain with (what else?) a cash payment. The doubly-fictional Edgar who supposedly pens the letter which Edmund claims to have found, conflates love and material rewards in promising that "If our father would sleep till I wak'd him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother" (1.2.50-52). Even Oswald attempts to buy the help of Edgar, giving Edgar his purse in hopes that the latter will bury him and deliver

his letters (4.6.243-46). Practices of ransom and duelling similarly involve a system of exchanges. Thinking himself captured by Cordelia's troops, Lear immediately offers a ransom (4.6.190). Not all of these exchanges involve cash. Rather than offering a gage, Edmund offers "my exchange" to Albany's challenge (5.3.98). His forgiveness of Edgar is consequent on Edgar's being "noble" (5.3.164-65). Even death isn't gratuitous for Edmund: being vanquished by a noble opponent, he has actually succeeded in maintaining his honour, assuming that we understand honour as status. In the end, Edmund's "exchange" has purchased him a sort of vicarious nobility. Merely to be killed by a nobleman implies that he has at last shed the infamy of bastardy. Samuel Johnson is perhaps wrong to gloss the line "Let's exchange charity" by saying that Shakespeare "gives his heathens the sentiments and practices of Christianity" (Johnson 220). The good as well as the evil characters of the play show themselves to have a hopelessly Pelagian faith in their ability to obtain almost anything through exchange. Like Levinas's wage-earner, they do not hope for "the Messiah, or salvation"–something coming from without, radically alterior and unearned–so much as compensation for their efforts (*Existence and Existents* 91).

Cash is an abstract sort of purchasing power, but not really necessary to the logic of exchange. Despite Schneider's claim, Lear does not have to be a "free marketeer" in order to wish to divide his kingdom in accordance with how much love is shown to him (Schneider 31). On the contrary, the exchange of love as an economy of mutual obligations seems more characteristic of Schneider's stoic world view than of twentieth-century capitalist society, where even popular song lyrics inform us that "Money can't buy me love." Duty is also exchanged in the first few lines of the play, where Kent meets Edmund. Kent's expressions of duty are brilliantly glossed by Berger:

> . . . the resonance of his statement is concentrated in the word *must*: "as your father's

> honorable friend and fellow peer, I am *obliged* to love you, in spite of your unfortunate status." The obligations imposed on relationships by membership in the established order are reflected in the virtually oxymoronic force of the phrase "I must love you"–that is, "whether I actually do or not"; and the more one loves according to one's bond, the more love is compelled by social custom or legal rules, the less likely it is to be genuinely felt and freely given. (Berger 56-57)

What Berger does not mention is that Kent's expression of love is not merely gratis. As a requirement of a "social custom" it is an item in exchange, for which he can expect reciprocation. Unlike the eventual return which Cicero considers a reward for gift-giving, Kent's recompense comes immediately, or rather preemptively, in Edmund's pledge of "My services to your lordship" (1.1.28).

Schneider claims that Kent stands for "feudal ties" which antedate a movement where "the cash nexus" takes the place of human relations (Schneider 27), which Schneider identifies, following Karl Marx, with the rise of capitalism. Certainly, Kent's expression of loyalty is couched in feudal terms:

> Royal Lear,
> Whom I have ever honour'd as my King,
> Lov'd as my Father, as my master follow'd,
> As my great patron thought on in my prayers. (1.1.138-41)

If Berger is correct in his reading of Kent's expressions of duty towards Edmund, however, this pre-capitalist duty, derived from social norms, is at least partially also a matter of exchange. Moreover, if Kent's expressions of duty take place only within the context of reciprocal exchanges, then Kent's feudal duty is no more gratuitous than the love of Lear's daughters. His loyalty, certainly, outlasts that of those who serve for immediate gain, but so does Oswald's, who

no one would accuse of selflessness. No doubt there is a distinction between the service of Kent and that of Oswald, but it is not properly explicated by contrasting feudalism with capitalism, both of which are economies. Lear is never, contrary to popular opinion, completely abandoned. Oswald claims that

> Some five or six and thirty of his knights,
>
> Hot questrists after him, met him at gate;
>
> Who, with some other of the Lord's dependants,
>
> Are gone with him toward Dover, where they boast
>
> To have well-armed friends. (3.7.16-20)

The "dependants", if Oswald is correct in so referring to them, follow Lear, if not for gain, at least for lack of any viable alternative means to live. Like the "dependants", Kent still gains something from his duty towards Lear. He gains a reason to be: "My life I never held but as a pawn / To wage against thine enemies" (1.1.154-55).

While the play depicts a large number of characters exchanging service for love or money, often within patterns of social obligation, it also allows the possibility of serving others for reasons that have nothing to do with self-interest. Lear tries to integrate Edgar into patterns of feudalism–"You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred" (3.6.76-77)–but such efforts are of course bootless and parodied in the next few lines about Edgar obtaining a new wardrobe. Generosity takes a new and more generous form when Gloucester rejects the help of the Old Man, who offers aid on the grounds that "I have been your tenant, and your father's tenant, / These fourscore years" (4.1.13-14). Instead of accepting the Old Man's duties, he redirects them to Edgar:

> If, for my sake,
>
> Thou wilt o'ertake us, hence a mile or twain,

I'th'way toward Dover, do it for ancient love;

And bring some covering for this naked soul,

Which I'll entreat to lead me. (4.1.41-44)

In an influential article, Richard Strier argues that the play may be read as "an extended meditation on the kinds of situation in which resistance to legally constituted authority becomes a moral necessity" (Strier 104). In the course of the article, Strier draws attention to how Gloucester's aid of Lear is towards someone who is no longer his master, who is only his "old," in the sense of "former" master. "Gloucester is insisting on a duty that does not depend on the immediate political situation" (Strier 118). He loses authority, Strier argues, in the name of humanity. Similarly, Strier claims that in the determination of Cornwall's servant to fight and kill his master rather than allow him to blind Gloucester, who is in no position ever to offer any kind of reward, "Shakespeare is presenting the most radical possible sociopolitical act" (Strier 119). Even Strier's description, however, does not express its full radicality. If "service" is understood as an exchange, then the servant's act can not be understood as the "better service" (3.8.72) which the servant himself claims to be performing. On the contrary, the servant's act is apolitical, or rather, superpolitical. It may serve as an example of a generosity which goes beyond expectations of future reward. It is as excessive to the claims of feudalism as it is to those of capitalism. Its rationale and its motive go beyond, are more important than, are better than, what Levinas calls the "eventually inhuman but characteristic determinism" of politics ("Diachrony and Representation" 105). The servant's act is provoked by a radical responsibility for the Other, a responsibility which extends even to dying for the Other. It is moreover not a bid for any sort of reciprocal reward, since the servant dies and Gloucester is tortured and cast out. No network of exchange can entirely explain–or is it, "explain away"?–the ethical. On the contrary, in this and other instances, the play shows a sense of obligation quite beyond networks

of social exchange.

Perhaps the best examples of confusing the material and the immaterial, what is known and graspable and what is excessive, concern efforts to purchase love, often through gift-giving. It is notorious that the love test specifically lays down an equation of love and material reward. Cordelia, on whose kind nursery Lear hopes to set his rest, is bribed with the offer of "A third more opulent than your sisters" (1.1.85). Similarly, Burgundy makes his love for Cordelia contingent on her receiving a dowry from Lear. Lear fully expects this, and in fact the terms with which he confronts Burgundy imply a materialization of love, in which love and money mingle in a system of exchanges:

> What, in the least,
>
> Will you require in present dower with her,
>
> Or cease your quest of love? (1.1.190-92)

Not only does love become interchangeable with material things, however, but also those material things are described as consumable: "With my two daughters' dowers, digest the third" (1.1.127). In the first chapter, I argued that eating may be understood as an image for a circular relationship, in which the foreign object loses its alterity and is reincorporated into the self. By describing dowers as digesting one another, Lear goes far beyond expressing land and status as cash, expressing them instead as food.

The tendency to treat persons as interchangeable, and therefore as commodity items, is broached very early in the play. Having identified Edmund, Gloucester declares that "I have a son, Sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account" (1.1.18-19). Harry Berger draws attention to the negative structure of this phrase:

> This seems to mean that he likes Edmund as much as Edgar, but the phrase points with equal force in the other direction: he likes Edgar as little as Edmund. The words suggest

a criterion of filial value that measures the true limit of paternal affection. (57)

This limit, Berger argues, results from the fact that Gloucester does not value his sons as other people, but as repositories to his investments in them, "the shares of pleasure, shame, trouble, sacrifice, and legal tenderness he has deposited in their characters" (Berger 57). That love substitutes for money as the currency in "my account" is clear from the fact that Edmund stands to inherit pretty much nothing; nevertheless, the possible confusion of love and money is latent within Gloucester's statement. The term "account" already had a long-standing financial meaning by the time Shakespeare wrote these lines (*OED*, sb. II; the first recorded use is from 1300). While Gloucester's choice of words is perhaps influenced by the description of the scrupulously equal dowries offered to Albany and Cornwall which immediately precedes his declaration, it also anticipates the division of the kingdom between three daughters based explicitly on a test of love. Perhaps this statement stands in the bourgeois tradition of accountancy and material exchange, but one need not draw on economic history to find examples of numeracy run mad. Crosby, for instance, records the declaration of a group of fourteenth-century scholars that not only could size, motion, light, heat and colour be measured, but so could certitude, virtue and grace (Crosby 14). In any case, Berger is quite right to argue that this expression "measures the true limit of paternal affection" (Berger 57). Nor, I think, need we understand the reduction of love to exchange in bluntly monetary terms. If Edmund will not inherit money, then his father's love is not an abstraction of payment, but it is nevertheless understood in strictly delimited, measurable and social terms.

Others treat people as the means of social advancement, placing them within an economy, though not one based on the crude materiality of cash. Oswald is offered "preferment" should he manage to kill "that blind traitor" Gloucester (4.5.37-38). When he actually does meet with Gloucester, Oswald treats him accordingly, as "preferment" on the hoof: "That eyeless head

of thine was first fram'd flesh / To raise my fortunes" (4.6.223-25). Gloucester's status as a soul is to be dealt with perfunctorily: "Briefly thyself remember" (4.6.226). The Captain whom Edmund suborns to regicide accepts murder as the means of self-advancement (5.3.39-40). For both Oswald and the Captain, human life is exchangeable for favours, if not directly for cash. In any case, human life becomes an item of exchange, imbricated within an economy, and as Levinas writes, "The substitution of men for one another, the primal disrespect, makes possible exploitation itself" (*Totality and Infinity* 298). While one can describe this situation in Marxist terms, of commodification or values in exchange, a feudal model, where goods, services and social status are exchanged without being alienated into cash would be equally an economy.

The final act seems like a particularly dense nexus of exploitation and the use of people. Edmund, faced with Albany as an obstacle, hopes to use Goneril to "devise / His speedy taking off" (5.1.64-65), thereby both treating Albany as an object and Goneril as a tool with which to handle that object. The "object", conversely, has no sense of fraternity towards Edmund: "I hold you but a subject of this war, / Not as a brother" (5.3.61-62). As a subject, Edmund does not merit any unusual efforts at respect, or even decency for that matter. It is as enemies that Edmund and Albany discuss the treatment of Lear and Cordelia. Albany demands them as spoil, and Edmund plays for time, having already ordered them destroyed as obstacles to his advancement. In fact, from Edgar onward, Edmund seems to view other people primarily as obstacles to be destroyed; hence his considering the destruction of Albany as Goneril's task if she is to enjoy his love. What is striking about the competition of Goneril and Regan over Edmund is that neither sister really considers the competition to be Edmund's to decide. Love can be won, like a battle, in Goneril's unfortunate but revealing metaphor: "I had rather lose the battle than that sister / Should loosen him and me" (5.1.18-19). This line follows closely upon Regan's jealous instructions to Edmund, "Be not familiar with her" (5.1.16). Edmund's

affections are not considered to be a gift, like Grace, but something to be won by ever more murderous means, like spoils or territory. Goneril's murder of Regan is merely the logical extension of the entire competition between the sisters, by which the beloved becomes a sort of commodity to be enjoyed, contested and captured. The lover, rather than admitting "that access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused" (*Existence and Existents* 43), makes ever more violent efforts to possess.

The world in which many of the characters take themselves to live is, specifically, a closed economy in which all actions are reciprocal. One person's gain is always another person's loss in a vicious zero-sum game. Edmund's ambition is to have Edgar's rights transferred unto himself (1.2.15-18). After the success of this effort, it's scarcely surprising that he attaches an inevitability to his own rise at Gloucester's expense, expressing the principle in universal terms: "the younger rises when the old doth fall" (3.3.25). By his treachery, Edmund will gain "that which my father loses; no less then all" (3.3.24). Not only does Edmund view this process as inevitable, he also considers it both just and perhaps even merited, "a fair deserving" (3.3.23). Like Shylock, clinging to his bond, or Portia, applying an even more literal reading to the same bond, Edmund refuses to recognize any justice beyond reciprocity.

There is no true generosity in the context of such a network of reciprocal ties. Instead, every donation becomes a sort of claim. Incoherent with anger, Lear confuses giving with taking in his exile of Cordelia: "So be my grave my peace, as here I give / Her father's heart from her!" (1.1.124-25). The other sisters mull over the fact that Lear may continue to bear power despite his divestiture, in which case "this last surrender of his will but offend us" (1.1.304-05). For the most part, Goneril and Regan compete for Edmund's love in a manner which serves as a variation on the theme of the love-test, introduced in the play's first chords. Having learned quickly from Lear's example, Regan throws gifts at Edmund by way of claims. Before asking if

he loves Goneril, Regan reminds him of "the goodness I intend upon you" (5.1.7). Dying of poison, Regan marries Edmund with the following declaration:

General,

Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony;

Dispose of them, of me; the walls is thine;

Witness the world, that I create thee here

My lord and master. (5.3.75-79)

This sounds generous, until one realizes that it comes within the context of competition with Goneril for his love. Regan's gift stakes a claim.

To Lear, acts of generosity are understood as provoking reciprocal obligations, in frankly contractual terms. His right to his fifty knights hinges upon his donation of "all," upon his making his daughters "my guardians, my depositaries" (2.4.249). Of course, the donation is not "all" if he retains a hundred knights, fifty knights or even the clothes on his back. Under the guise of an absolute gift, Lear is attempting to produce an absolute reciprocal obligation. Characteristically, he expects nothing from the elements, because he has given them nothing:

I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;

I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,

You owe me no subscription: then let fall

Your horrible pleasure. (3.2.16-19)

By extension, however, he taxes his children with unkindness, for failing to repay his generosity in love. The use of the term "tax" is significant. Even to be able to make the accusation of unkindness is a sort of recompense, almost a payment. Not even this vicarious sense of righteousness can be extracted from the elements, however. Unlike everyone else on stage, Lear is unwilling to complain about the weather. To do so would be to ask for something which he

cannot pay for and which is not owed him as a debt. He will beg from the gods no more than he will beg for food and clothing from Goneril, or go to France and "squire-like, pension beg, / To keep base life afoot" (2.4.212-13). One can only note the yawning chasm separating this attitude from any sort of reformation notion of salvation through unmerited Grace. Within the context of debt and repayment, we can understand the apparently irrational importance placed on the knights, who are never deployed as a military unit, and apparently have no function at all. They are a possession which Lear can claim by right, owed to him as a clause of the contract by which he divested himself of rule. The quarrel about the knights, as Snyder argues, "is really a quarrel about his own autonomous identity" (Snyder 145). We can perhaps understand the term "autonomous" in the strong sense employed by Levinas, to whom "autonomy" is the maintenance of the independence of the self and the opposite of "heteronomy" ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 92). Nothing is truly outside Lear. His entitlement to his knights is an assurance that he need not beg, receiving anything that is not his own. We can profitably contrast Shakespeare's Lear with the Leir of the earlier anonymous play, who actually does journey to France to beg support and who accepts good fortune as a Divine, and quite unearned, gift: "Come, let vs go, and see what God will send; / When all meanes faile, he is the surest friend" (*Leir*, through-line numbers 2089-2090). Shakespeare's Lear is altogether more self-righteous, less capable of humility or of accepting anything as an absolute donation. To do so would be to recognize limits on his autonomous power, to base his selfhood on a gift coming from without rather than on his own act of will. This shunning of generosity is the avoidance of love which Stanley Cavell discovers as the central theme in *King Lear*. When Gloucester offers him love in act four, Cavell argues, Lear tries to understand it as a solicitation (Cavell 61). Lear turns love into commerce because love, like Grace, is undeserved and makes the receiver poor, unable to provide any repayment.

It is a measure of Lear's commercialization of love that his handover of power is neither generous nor even very real. Not only do images such as parting the coronet pose difficulties, but also, in banishing Kent, Lear issues a royal command after ceding power, as if unable to recognize that he had abandoned his prerogatives. "By Jupiter," he shouts, "This shall not be revok'd" (1.1.177-78), as if he any longer had power to render his own word irrevocable. Interestingly, Kent is banished for suggesting precisely what Lear does, issuing a royal command after abandoning royal prerogatives: "Revoke thy gift" (1.1.163). In principle, of course, Lear should be unable either to revoke or refuse to revoke his gift after he has given it away, just as he should not be able to banish Kent after surrendering authority to Cornwall and Albany. He should not be able to exercise any power, in fact, unless it is implicit in "The name and all th'addition to a king" (1.1.135). We have already examined, however, the manner in which Lear's name is caught up with selfhood as the basis of power.

The tendency to conflate love and items of material exchange is introduced even before the discussion between Kent and Gloucester turns to Edmund, in the very first lines of the text:

Kent: I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Gloucester: It did always seem so to us; but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most. (1.1.1-5)

Both characters take it for granted that "affection" should assume expression in material terms, and that therefore which of his sons-in-law Lear most values should be made clear in the division of the kingdom. Lear returns to the association between love and material donation in the phrases with which he implores Regan:

. . . thou better know'st

The offices of nature, bond of childhood,

Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude;

Thy half o'th'kingdom hast thou not forgot,

Wherein I thee endow'd. (2.4.175-79)

The last line echoes the lines spoken with the giving of the ring in "The Fourme of Solemnizacyon of Matrymonye" in the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer*: "with al my worldly goodes I thee endow" (Solemnizacyon 412). The reader sensitive to this reference may perhaps recall Cordelia's claim that her bond is limited, like matrimony. It suffices to say that reciprocal and therefore limited relations avoid the excessiveness of the Other, but that such specific and limited obligations characterize the world of the play.

What is striking about the terms of the love test, as Berger has shown, is that Lear does not ask "'which of you doth say you love us most,' but 'which of you *shall we say* doth love us most?'" (Berger 30). The value of his daughters does not impinge on Lear; on the contrary, he himself decides their value. Lear actively avoids allowing his daughters to stand outside him by doggedly insisting on his own prerogative to set their price. This process is clearest in relation to Cordelia, because her defiance goads Lear to ever greater insistence on his own power over her. He most fully conflates her dearness to him, however, with a monetary value in answering Burgundy:

Right noble Burgundy,

When she was dear to us we did hold her so,

But now her price is fallen. (1.1.194-96)

Interestingly, when Cordelia was his dearest daughter she was described as "least." Lear loves her not because of what he would later call her "substance," but despite her lack of it. When she is dearest, her importance is understood in the least material terms (1.1.82). It is upon withdrawing his love from her that Lear describes Cordelia as "that little seeming substance," using her lack of substance to diminish her (1.1.197). The same lack of substance, however,

earlier expressed love, outside relations of substance. "Substance" appears in this case to be close to the opposite of what it is one loves, but all of the characters seem to have been infected by the tendency to reduce love to material terms. Though familiar in Lear criticism, the *naïveté* with which Lear decides to stay with Goneril remains shocking: "Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty, / And thou art twice her love" (2.4.257-58). Such a calculation allows Lear to choose competing offers, rather than forcing him to recognize that he has no power to compel the daughters' loves. By treating love as a material relation, he avoids the radical difference of the Other.

Cordelia similarly insists on a delimited, socially sanctioned love, precisely dividing her love into two halves, one each for her father and her future husband. "I love your Majesty / According to my bond;" she says, adding emphatically, "no more nor less" (1.1.91-92). In saying this, Cordelia is merely acknowledging the terms of the love test, rendering love an exchange. Since Lear has "begot me, bred me, lov'd me" she will, reciprocally, "Obey you, love you, and most honour you" (1.1.95,97). Lear responds by asking if she is "untender," but fails to recognize his own inability to make himself vulnerable, capable of being injured–in a word, his untenderness. Cordelia's response merely reflects the coldness of Lear's love test. In turn, Lear's denunciation of Cordelia carries the understanding of love as a series of exchanges somewhat further: "Let it be so; thy truth then be thy dower" (1.1.107). Since he has insisted on placing her love within a network of exchanges where it becomes interchangeable with lands and revenues, she measures her reply to precisely what she owes him as an exchange for services rendered, such as begetting her in the first place. He, in response, abjures any residual generosity towards her, refusing her even a dowry. Because both characters are unable to acknowledge a gift that they are unable to repay in kind, the logic of love as a series of reciprocal exchanges is carried through to its necessary and logical conclusion, reducing the interpersonal surplus until

the truly human relations disappear into increasingly mechanical exchanges.

Holding one's children at a wary distance makes paternity into a relation of power and property. Levinas views paternity as the only way in which "the ego [can] become other to itself." While remaining alterior, the child is also "a myself." In this way, the return of the self to itself, the burden of selfhood, "is not without remission." Lear, however, tends towards avoiding any view of his children couched in terms other than "the categories of power" (*Time and the Other* 91). His rejection of Cordelia requires that he first view his child in terms of his investments in her, of love or land, in order that he be able to liquidate these investments, leaving her as a "little-seeming substance" (1.1.197). The understanding of paternity in political terms is as forcefully exemplified in the Gloucester family. Berger argues that the father is in competition with his sons: "The heir is a potential enemy and competitor, the eventual replacement whose appearance prophesies his father's death" (Berger 55). Here, as elsewhere, Berger does not explore the possibility of familial relations that would be different from and more human than competitions of power.

Nevertheless, his observation largely holds for the Gloucester family, for the simple reason that its members also recognize an understanding of paternity as politics, but do not seriously oppose it. Gloucester's anxiety in the face of the forged letter follows from the fact that Edgar, as legitimate heir, is likely to take over his position. The letter collapses love into "reverence" and paternity into "policy": "This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them" (1.2.45-47). It voices Gloucester's own suspicions that his "legitimate" son will undo him, a suspicion which Berger claims that Gloucester is "almost too eager to entertain" (Berger 55). The career of Edmund is a sort of critique, by the method of *reductio ad absurdum*, of the whole conception of fatherhood as a political position, beginning with his exploitation of the system of

inheritance to disown Edgar and win himself a position, and continuing to the point where he becomes Cornwall's son by betraying Gloucester, and in fact wins "a dearer father" (3.5.23-24). Cornwall certainly seems more open-handed in using his power for Edmund's benefit than Gloucester ever was, although Gloucester should have greater reasons to favour the advancement of his son (2.1.111-15). Edmund's chillingly political declaration that he will betray Gloucester is not only an example of the use of people for political ends, as I argued earlier, but also a statement of the central premise of a society where paternity is understood as a matter of inheritance of land, status and power, and of the anxiety against which Gloucester strives desperately: "The younger rises when the old doth fall" (3.3.25). Even more chillingly, this assessment of the political system in which Edmund finds himself proves accurate, with Cornwall, as a father of sorts, giving Edmund his natural father's title and territories. The seduction of Regan is merely an extension of this pattern, with Edmund usurping the place of another, adoptive, father in order to advance himself to a plenary power.

If paternity is understood as a power relation rather than an absolute commitment–"through my being, not through sympathy," as Levinas says (*Time and the Other* 91)–not only can anyone with the means of offering patronage become a father, as Cornwall does, but also anyone can withdraw paternity by withdrawing patronage. Lear, famously, does just this:

> Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
> Propinquity and property of blood,
> And as a stranger to my heart and me
> Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
> Or he that makes his generation messes
> To gorge his appetite, shall to our bosom
> Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd

As thou my sometime daughter. (1.1.112-19)

What is striking about Lear's speech is how fully he equates "paternal care" with "property of blood" or "pitied" with "relieved." If, for Lear, blood is a "property," paternal love is also a matter of wealth, expressible as patronage. Cordelia can be transformed into his "sometime daughter," can be un-daughtered, by simply withdrawing such patronage.

The fact that Lear's paternal patronage is the opposite of generous is rendered vivid in this anthropophagic image. Berger points out that "generation" can mean either children or parents, both of whom therefore become potential cannibals: "Against Lear's intention to liken Cordelia to the Scythian, the phrase likens the Scythian to Lear" (Berger 34). A similar image occurs later, where Lear refers to "those pelican daughters" (3.4.74), Goneril and Regan. There is a traditional image which compares Christ to a pelican, feeding children on his own blood, as Cherrell Guilfoyle points out (Guilfoyle 60). In Lear's phrase, however, the pelican image is inverted, with the daughters as potentially devoured, and Lear as feeding on their blood. Even if we were to see Lear as the "life-rend'ring pelican," as Laertes might say (*Hamlet* 4.5.147), he is still not giving generously, but being destroyed to nourish them, as his use of the accusative indicates. The particular image, of offspring destroying their forebears for nourishment, does not occur among the sources and analogues listed in the extensive notes to the second Arden edition, and seems original to Shakespeare's play. It is, nevertheless, perfectly in keeping with the view of blood relationship as a mortal competition; moreover, it undercuts the Christian imagery of blood shed generously for sinners. According to Guilfoyle, there is an element of parody in this image and in the crown of flowers which Lear wears. Both show that "Lear is not the true Christ-figure" (Guilfoyle 60). Rather than loving his children unconditionally, like Christ, Lear views his relationship with them as primarily economic or political. The pelican therefore ceases to be a model of generosity, and becomes instead an image of cannibalistic battle.

Lear often attempts to withdraw paternity by making charges of bastardy, or viewing himself as a cuckold. The illegitimate child, as Edmund shows in his famous speech, is not a threat to the father, since he stands to inherit nothing. On hearing of Edgar's supposed treason, Gloucester's response is chillingly brief and immediate: "I never got him" (2.1.78). Berger interprets this as meaning that Gloucester is "Disclaiming paternity," and "recreates [Edmund] as his wife's bastard" (Berger 59). Removing legitimate paternity exorcises the threat which the child imposes, but the child would only be threatening if viewed as a competitor within a power relation in the first place. The Fool seems to suggest in one of his apparently random catches both the threat which the child represents and how to avoid it: "The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, / That it's had it head bit off by it young" (1.4.213-214). The child can rise to usurp or succeed the father, but by recognizing the child as a bastard and oneself as a cuckold, one can escape this fate. To continue the metaphor, the hedge sparrow could cease feeding the cuckoo. This is precisely what Lear, like Gloucester, does. "Degenerate bastard!" he growls at Goneril, "I'll not trouble thee: / Yet have I left a daughter" (1.4.251-52). He makes the legitimacy of Regan contingent upon her happy welcome:

> . . . if thou shouldst not be glad,
> I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
> Sepulchring an adult'ress. (2.4.127-29)

Only if she is glad to see him can he be certain that she is not the cuckoo waiting to bite off his head. If she is not glad to see him, then he can distance himself from her by declaring her a bastard and remove the threat of usurpation which only a legitimate child can present in the economy of inheritance. Meeting Gloucester on the heath, in fact, Lear questions the whole premise of legitimacy, calling down a cosmic orgy in its place:

> The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly

Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son

Was kinder to his father than my daughters

Got 'tween the lawful sheets. (4.6.112-16)

This passage has an interest beyond the dramatic irony by which Lear does not know that Gloucester's companion actually is Edgar and that Edmund was not at all kind to his father. Lear, in his readiness to believe ill of a legitimate heir, echoes Gloucester's eager credulity to Edmund's accusations. Because paternity is seen predominantly in this play in political terms, as patronage for instance, it often takes the form of competition, particularly with legitimate heirs. Perhaps such anxieties were endemic to the early modern world, but this does not rob it of its ethical import. The habit of almost all characters to regard the world as an economy aims to avoid the burden of a really gratuitous paternity, of facing the child as Other. In the attempt to avoid the anxieties implicit in dealing with an Other, it merely raises other anxieties, of competition and bastardy.

This is not to say that the possibility of a generous parenthood simply does not exist within the play. Gloucester recognizes his own sin toward Edgar when he declares, shortly after having been blinded,

The food of thy abused father's wrath;

Might I but live to see thee in my touch,

I'd say I had eyes again. (4.1.21-24)

First, Gloucester recognizes that his wrathful treatment of Edgar was, if not quite cannibalistic, at least in keeping with a relationship to food. The importance he places on contact with his son extends beyond his own powers to grasp, see or know. In losing his eyes, Gloucester has lost a fundamental power. "Light," according to Levinas, "makes objects into a world, that is, makes

them belong to us" (*Existence and Existents* 48). In paternity, however, Levinas finds a situation which exceeds an understanding of the world in terms of our perception and appropriation. Where in Sartrean existentialism, one's future remains a projection, and therefore within one's own freedom, the son's existence, as related to the father, allows existence to be more transcendent than in even "the boldest existential analyses" (*Time and the Other* 91).

On the whole, however, views of the world which do not start from the economics of exchange are not only rare in this play, but sometimes approach being literally unthinkable. Burgundy is not merely surprised at being offered a dowerless bride, but completely stupefied: "I know no answer" (1.1.200). "Election makes not up" in the absence of any exchange (1.1.205). To love gratuitously is simply absurd, for Burgundy. Perhaps, as Cavell argues, the love test is not a sign of *naïveté* in Lear, so much as a bid for false love (Cavell 60). Love which is false, after all, requires no acknowledgement, only an exchange. Lear, writes Cavell, "cannot bear to be loved when he has no reason to be loved, perhaps because of the helplessness, the passiveness which that implies" (Cavell 61). As I have already argued, a loss of power, for Lear, is tantamount to a loss of self. The non-answer of Cordelia frightens him because he has a fundamental "terror of being loved, of needing love" (Cavell 62). Berger argues that this fundamental terror recurs when Cordelia's troops encounter Lear near Dover. They offer him "anything." She will give all, gratuitously, to which he can give nothing in return (Berger 41). Perhaps characteristically, he immediately understands the situation as one of combat: "No seconds? All myself?" (4.6.192). The scene ends with the old king fleeing rather than facing someone who loves him without reason. Lear is terrified of anything coming to him from beyond an economy, outside even his theoretical power, absolutely exterior to his purchase. Hence the "avoidance of love" which is Cavell's title.

Generally, however, economics is so totalizing in this play that love dares not even speak

its own name. Any attempt to speak the Saying, what is outside the economy of the sign, betrays it into the Said. Such a betrayal is inevitable in language, Levinas argues, but it nevertheless takes specific form in the opening scene of this play. For Cordelia to confess her love for her father would make it a part of a *quid pro quo* economy, exchangeable for territories and titles. It would become the false love which Lear solicits, and which is probably all that he can stand. The disjunction is not a Platonic one between imperfect expression and ideal love. Cordelia claims that "my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.76-77).[25] Goneril also claims "A love that makes breath poor and speech unable" (1.1.59), but is making this claim as part of an act, involved in a network of exchanges, whereas Cordelia's response is literally silence, falling outside the economy of the Said. Both claim to be speechless. The true contrast is therefore not between what is spoken and what is silent, but between what is generous and what is exchanged within an economy. Cordelia is unable to offer false love, not because she is any less eloquent than her sisters, but because an expression of love coming from her would actually be true. "Nothing she could have done," Cavell argues, "would have *been* flattery" (Cavell 65; italics in the original). For Goneril to make a false statement of love is simply to participate in the economy, but for Cordelia to make a false statement of true love would betray that love.

The only proper response is not to respond. If anything that one might say would become flattery, it is best to refrain from saying anything at all. Silence at least seems to offer an escape from the zero-sum game which is everyday life in the Lear household. "Nothing will come of nothing," says Lear; nothing does not purchase; it has no value in exchange (1.1.89). Lear's "nothing" offered as a dowry for Cordelia literally purchases nothing from Burgundy. Unfortunately, as the remainder of the scene shows, not to respond is still to respond. Throughout the play, silence is greeted with suspicion, and with efforts to give it substance and

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[25]The quarto text reads "More richer."

return it to the economy of the Said. When Edmund informs Gloucester that he has been reading "nothing," Gloucester immediately becomes doubtful: "The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself" (1.2.33-34). Edmund asks Edgar if he has spoken against Cornwall, to which the latter replies "I am sure on't, not a word" (2.1.26). This very silence, however, is what makes any suspicion possible. Throughout the play, silence is taken to indicate a content which has been hidden. Defending Cordelia, Kent assures Lear that

> Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
>
> Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
>
> Reverb no hollowness. (1.1.151-53)

In this world, expression is generally understood as the exhibition of something previously hidden. Lear's stoic declaration in the storm that "I will say nothing" (3.2.38) may be understood as a determination to guard a secret, not speaking aloud what he does think.

Cordelia's nothing in the opening scene is, I would argue, quite different. The expression itself–"The Saying"–comes to have a content when it is spoken. It does not have a content waiting to be revealed, as in a depth model of meaning; on the contrary, it is a moment of revelation that risks losing its extraordinary importance as revelation. Nothing Cordelia says, not even "nothing" itself, can avoid the fall of the Saying into the Said. She is being asked to betray her love, as Cavell argues (Cavell 63). The remainder of the scene, including Kent's defense of her, is an attempt to impose meaning on her silence. She herself is forced to "mend your speech a little" (1.1.93). Sure enough, her expressions of love immediately take their place within a network of exchanges, in which they reciprocate past favours:

> You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
>
> Return those duties back as are right fit,
>
> Obey you, love you, and most honour you. (1.1.85-97)

Lear ascribes Cordelia's silence to pride (1.1.128). Goneril tells her that she has scanted obedience, and France ascribes her silence to a possible

> . . . tardiness in nature
>
> That often leaves the history unspoke
>
> That it intends to do. (1.1.234-36)

Lear proposes a love test in which love will become debased, interchangeable with territories and revenues. Cordelia is asked by this love test to convert the Saying of love into a Said, which would be become interchangeable like any other content, and measurable against other statements of love. Her resistance, in the form of silence, is bootless in that even silence can be construed to have a content. A great deal of the sound and fury of the opening scene is signifying "nothing."

To summarize this chapter, the pattern of the play as a whole is one in which the Saying tends inevitably to be converted into a Said. The radical fact of an address is replaced by its content. Although it constitutes a radical rupture, Saying becomes absorbed into a network of interchangeable Saids. Relentless efforts by the characters to understand the world in economic terms, made up of items capable of being exchanged reciprocally, lead inevitably to the exclusion of what is outside the system. As an item within a system of reciprocal exchanges, the address ceases to be a challenge to the self and becomes merely its object. Love becomes interchangeable with land, and expressions of love become acts of duty by the same gesture whereby human lives become obstacles to advancement or means of preferment. I will conclude this chapter by mentioning that many critics seem engaged in a similar project. For these, an address is always to be understood within a general text where it is treated as a sign interchangeable with other signs. A variation on this reductiveness is to treat all addresses as items of exchange within an economic system. We are encouraged, as a result, to treat characters

in terms of power relations, which is how–in their worst moments–they treat each other. It is necessary to return to what Levinas considers the alterity which precedes *différance*, the alterity between self and Other. Such a return is made by interrupting the totalizing tendency of economy generally, not merely the economy of the sign, but also the economy of duty or honour or any sort of reciprocal obligation or exchange. It is such a return that I am attempting, somewhat tentatively, in analyzing the relations of the characters in ethical terms. Such an analysis, perhaps, already betrays the Saying into the Said, treating words as subjects of analysis, rather than direct addresses, but this is the price of thematizing such concerns at all.

PART 2: FALSE EXITS

Chapter four — "A bitter fool":

The Failure of Folly as an Ethics

In a paper delivered in Jerusalem as part of a conference on Talmudic law, Levinas sought to address the postmodern critique of ideology, and simultaneously to ask about the basis of ethics "on behalf of that Jewish youth [. . .] which sees in the rejection of all morality an end to violence, an end to repression by all forms of authority" ("Ideology and Idealism" 236). His aim, in other words, is to place ethics on a basis which is resistant to charges of being itself the product of amoral forces, such as economics, politics, or, most of all, ideology. "The least suspicion of ideology," he writes, "delivers to morality the most severe blow it has ever sustained" ("Ideology and Idealism" 237). Where traditionally ethics is based on "the moral Logos," building itself since Immanuel Kant on the basis of reason alone, "the concept of ideology," deriving originally from Hegelianism, but amplified in Marxism, and borrowing much of its persuasive force from Nietzsche and Freud, deals ethics "a nearly fatal blow" by suggesting that rationality can itself be mystifying ("Ideology and Idealism" 237). Ethics therefore "loses its status in reason for the precarious condition of Ruse" ("Ideology and Idealism" 238). It becomes an object of suspicion, like the reason on which the Enlightenment had sought to secure it.

Levinas does not merely seek to historicize the situation where ethics has become an object of suspicion in order that it might be relativized in its turn. His concern is not only that Marxism has managed to place ethics within brackets, as it were, but also that in so reducing ethics, it undermines its own motivation. The concept of suspect reason, Levinas declares, did not appear spontaneously, nor did it come about by a sort of slackening of effort, by which

"philosophical discourse [. . .] simply allowed itself to lapse into suspicions instead of furnishing proofs" ("Ideology and Idealism" 237). On the contrary, it finds its origin in

> agonized groaning, or in a cry denouncing a scandal to which Reason–that Reason which is capable of considering as ordered a world in which the poor man is sold for a pair of sandals–would remain insensitive without this cry. ("Ideology and Idealism" 237-38)

This cry, he argues, comes from outside the philosophy which it inspires, or even any philosophy as such. "It is not always true," he answers Jacques Derrida, "that not-to-philosophize is still to philosophize" ("Ideology and Idealism" 238). Levinas's ethics is based not on universals which absorb all alternatives, but on interruptions, coming from outside an otherwise totalizing discourse. The Other, in Levinas's philosophy, represents absolute difference: "The other, absolutely other, is the Other (*L'autre, absolument autre, c'est Autrui*)" ("Ideology and Idealism" 245). Responsibility for the Other is presented as deeply opposed to ideology, though it might be considered an idealism:

> Is this idealism suspect of being ideological? We see here, however, a movement, so little ideological, so unlike the repose in an acquired situation, so unlike self-satisfaction, that it is the putting into question of the self, positing oneself from the start as "de-posed", as for the other. ("Ideology and Idealism" 243)

Ethics is based, in Levinas's conception, not on the various ultimately self-interested motivations of the ego, which might be suspected, by Nietzsche or Freud, of being subconscious or moralizing outgrowths of *ressentiment* or the pleasure principle, but on something coming from exterior to the self, transcendent in the most radical and also most basic sense of the word. Levinas insists that an ethics which breaks in on the self from without, avoids the stigma of ideology: "Ethics is not superimposed on essence as a second layer where an ideological gaze would hide, incapable of looking the real in the face" ("Ideology and Idealism" 244). Levinas's

effort, in this essay, is to free ethics from the implication of being an ideology. His effort has importance not only for Halakhah, the legal side of Judaism and the subject of the conference at which he presented these ideas, but also for Marxism itself, which is freed from the situation where it has turned its ethical foundations, in a passionate concern for the proletariat, into a "ruse." The concern for the Other is a "return to morality" but one which, as a disorder, "escapes the doubtful finality of ideologies" ("Ideology and Idealism" 242). It therefore allows an ethics which is neither open to the accusation of being an ideology, nor threatening to collapse into contradiction by destroying its own grounds.

Of all characters in the play, the Fool seems the most critical, or at least aware, of the economic organization of his fictive world. One might certainly argue that he looks beyond the ideological superstructure to the true, economic substructure underneath. Kathleen McLuskie claims that he "reminds Lear and the audience for the material basis of the change in the balance of power" (McLuskie 105). At least in his first scene, he seems uniquely aware that the world of the play functions in terms of exchange. His first lines, in fact, parody the systems of exchange which define and sometimes seem to serve as the horizon of the Lear world: "Let me hire him too: here's my coxcomb" (1.4.93). On the other hand, his argument insists that Kent / Caius accept the coxcomb, the sign of the fool, by insisting upon the relativism of a commercial world: "Nay, and thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly" (1.4.98-99). In a fascinating speech later in the play, the Fool correctly describes the operation of power, but while mildly condemning it, offers no alternative:

> Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again: I would have none but knaves follow it, since a Fool gives it. (2.4.69-74)

Of course it might be valuable to make the ubiquity of self-interest plain. The problem is that the Fool proposes no alternative, at least not seriously. He does not, for instance, question Lear's contention that "Nothing can be made of nothing" but merely extends it to show that Lear is powerless since "the rent of his land comes to" nothing (1.4.131-32). In a snatch of verse about "Fathers that wear rags" (2.4.46 ff.), the Fool makes a further reduction of sadness ("Dolors"/dollars), fortune ("that arrant whore, / [who] Ne'er turns the key to th'poor") and kindness to money. Reducing to the economic, however, does not necessarily show the economic to be absurd; in fact, the Fool's description of the ubiquity of economic reason seems to make it totalizing and inescapable.

The Fool's description of the world is not inaccurate. "Jesters do oft prove prophets" (5.3.72), Regan observes, and indeed, most of the Fool's cynical suggestions regarding the future course of events do come horribly true. He recognizes that the daughters are taking over, making Lear "an obedient father" (1.4.232), warns Lear against Regan (1.5.18), for instance, and urges him to be equally perceptive in understanding how the world operates, declaring that men have eyes in order "that what a man may not smell out, he may spy into" (1.5.24). His definitions of madness and folly are sometimes ambiguous, as when he describes himself and Lear as "grace and a codpiece; that's a wise man and a Fool" (3.2.40-41), without specifying which is which. Generally, however, the folly which the Fool denounces in others and in social convention represents a lack of self-interest. Lear is a fool "To give away thy land," for instance (1.4.138). While one might argue that Lear's folly is some sort of sin against the providentialist Elizabethan world picture, the Fool makes no mention of others who might suffer by Lear's folly, or the wider issues at stake. As he shows by his response to Kent's query about why Lear's retinue is diminishing, he views the failure to understand self-interest as the true folly: "And thou hadst been set i'th'stocks for that question, thou'dst well deserv'd it" (2.4.62-63). In the medieval

tradition, fools were often deployed to point out the "moral corruption" of those around them (Wenzel 227). Siegfried Wenzel points to a series of late-medieval *exempla* in which a fool teaches a lesson

> not the general truth that all sinners are fools, or that everybody is a fool, but rather that one particular moral flaw puts the master's spiritual health and his salvation in jeopardy. (Wenzel 233)

Shakespeare's Fool, however, seems mainly to point out his master's lack of political acumen. The Fool is extremely perceptive in uncovering the political nature of the world in which he lives.

Regan's description of Edmund's mission to kill Gloucester and scout the French army shows that in this world mercy is incidental, if indeed it truly exists at all:

> where he arrives he moves
> All hearts against us. Edmund, I think, is gone,
> In pity of his misery, to dispatch
> His nighted life; moreover, to descry
> The strength o'th'enemy. (4.5.11-14)

The Fool perceptively describes such a world. He is, he correctly claims, incapable of lying (1.4.175-76) and he seems equally incapable of *naïveté*, declaring that "He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, or a whore's oath" (3.6.18-19). Such conventional suspiciousness, even when it leads to clear political perceptions, does not amount to an ethics, however, unless it is accompanied by some sort of appeal beyond self-interest. Goneril herself, when told that she might "fear too far" responds that at least her course of action is "Safer than trust too far" (1.4.327-28). Left on their own, without the interpersonal supplement of the Fool's relations to other persons, the Fool's snippets of Machiavellian advice–to follow a rising

leader, to keep all power that one can, and to abandon a falling leader–could be just as easily spoken by Oswald or the Captain who executes Cordelia, if either of these characters were given to making general statements.

This is not to criticize the Fool as a character, who fails to achieve a really moral position; much less is it a criticism on ideological grounds, that the Fool has created a sort of subversion doomed to be contained by the forces of authority. Instead, I am arguing in this chapter that the Fool is structurally incapable of moving from a criticism of the existing social order to a positive, ethical engagement with another person. His response to disaster is to be ever more

foolish, exacerbating his own suffering and that of others around him, even while he tries to escape it. More to the point, this response is dictated by his dramaturgical function. My criticism depends upon separating the Fool *qua* dramatic function, from the Fool as a character, or, to put it in different and less theatrical terms, upon separating what Jan Kott chooses to call "the clown's philosophy" from the Fool's person, who interacts with other persons on stage. The decision to separate the two doesn't follow from a particular animus against character criticism, but rather from the conviction that the Fool's redeeming character traits cannot be accounted for by using a philosophy derived from his statements and implicit in his dramatic function. His personhood, and the interpersonal relations that it implies, constitute a precious remainder, a surplus outside the apparently all-embracing cynicism of the Fool's alleged philosophy. None of this is proposed by way of denying that the Fool is sometimes seen to follow a certain ethical imperative. It is, instead, proposed as an argument that such an imperative is ultimately betrayed by the "clown's philosophy" that renders everything incoherent. The Fool as character has certain ethical interests, but these are contradicted by the cynical philosophy which the Fool, as a dramatic function, personifies. After explaining to Kent how best to advance oneself by merely

tactical loyalty, for instance, the Fool ends with a lyric which anticipates his future, completely untactical loyalty to Lear:

> That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
>
> And follows but for form,
>
> Will pack when it begins to rain,
>
> And leave thee in the storm.
>
> But I will tarry; the Fool will stay,
>
> And let the wise man fly:
>
> The knave turns Fool that runs away;
>
> The Fool no knave perdy. (2.4.75-82)

While this passage certainly shows the Fool turning his back on knavery, it also undermines his own heroism in loyalty to Lear, by labelling it as folly.

Certainly as a character and within a fictive world, the Fool stands over and against King Lear, is Other to him and recalcitrant to his control. In fact, the Fool levels several accusations toward Lear. "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" Lear asks. The Fool more or less confirms that he does: "All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with" (1.4.145-46). He misses Cordelia so much that he has "much pined away" (1.4.72) in her absence. Innumerable voices, starting with the Gentleman's, have pointed out that the Fool is the only character to doggedly stand by Lear throughout the storm-scene. This might be explained on the grounds of self-interest, but he could, after all, just turn his cruelly humourous appraisal of Lear's situation to his own benefit in Goneril or Regan's service. He certainly cares enough for Lear to urge him to remain clothed in the storm: "Prithee, Nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in" (3.4.108-09). Moreover, as an Other to Lear he is the first character whom Lear recognizes as alterior, and for whom he expresses concern. Such involvement in the interpersonal world of

relations, I would nevertheless contend, does not follow from the Fool's alleged philosophy, which rests "on the assumption that everyone is a fool" (Kott 164). On the contrary, rather than being put in motion by the Fool's cynicism, the Fool's acts of charity subsist in spite of a cynical philosophy, which, if carried to its logical extreme, renders them incoherent. To consider everyone a clown is to claim to "know" them, which, Levinas claims, is to grasp and control ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 76).

As we have seen in chapter two, knowledge is among the means deployed to avoid the interruptive force of the Other. Knowing reduces the Other to the Same, robbing it of its radicality as Other. Insofar as he is an outsider to the action, commenting upon it, the Fool has at least a choric, if not narrative, function. Like a narrator, it seems that he "cannot [. . .] make anything happen" (Cavell 106). As a chorus, he retains a certain distance from the action, though knowing about it; hence his moments of metadramatic awareness (3.2.80-96, 1.5.48-49). Especially by the end of his performance, he does not seek to relate to the other characters on stage. In fact, he seems to avoid any sort of relation by asking only leading questions or directing his address to inanimate objects which, as Lear observes of the stool standing in for Goneril, "cannot deny" (3.6.50) whatever he might accuse them of. Alternatively, he addresses the audience who is, as it were, forbidden from responding. Knowing, according to Levinas, is central to the subject's ability to withdraw from events, "an ability always to find oneself behind what is happening to us" (*Existence and Existents* 49). Moreover, he identifies knowing with the subject's identity and freedom, despite whatever might happen to it: "Knowing is a relation with what above all remains exterior, it is a relationship with what remains outside of all relationships, an action which maintains the agent outside of the events he brings about" (*Existence and Existents* 86). To know is to maintain a distance from events, even if one might still affect them. Kott's declaration that the Fool's independence is a product of his realization "that the world is

simply folly" (Kott 162) seems in keeping with this definition of knowing. By knowing the world as peopled by fools, the Fool holds events at a distance and maintains his freedom over and against events. Like Feste and Touchstone, in Kott's example, fools "do not produce the performance any more; they do not even take part in it, but merely comment on it. That is why they are jeering and bitter" (Kott 163). One cannot disagree with this assessment, but it seems worthwhile to add that commentary from without is not only symptomatic but also productive of disengagement from the action of the play. Kott is quite right to say that the Fool makes his observations from "outside society and does not follow any ideology" (Kott 166-67). The Fool knows what is happening, but this knowing is a function, perhaps even the price, of his non-engagement.

The Fool's philosophy, at least if Kott is to be believed, is built upon "the assumption that everyone is a fool" (Kott 164). To claim that everyone is a fool is to claim to know them–ahead of time, as it were. This premise does not constitute a disruption or recognition of the Other, but a reduction to the Same. It seems the height of narcissism when Lear identifies Edgar as an abused father, like himself, but the Fool recognizes all people everywhere as Fools. In his first few lines, we find him trying to foist his coxcomb on Kent. Shortly later, he tries to give it to Lear, telling him to "beg another of thy daughter" by way of making him doubly a Fool (1.4.107). In the next scene, he assures Lear that "thou would'st make a good Fool" (1.5.36), and exits by accusing women in the audience who laugh at him of being too foolish to protect their chastities (1.5.48-9). Meeting Kent in the stocks, he casually addresses him as "Fool" for failing to grasp the political exigencies of the play world (2.4.84). Most broadly, he argues that even a monopoly would not defend him against others assuming his role of Fool:

> No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if I had a monopoly out, they would have part on't: and ladies too, they will not let me have all the fool to myself; they'll be

> snatching. (1.4.149-52)

While his choice of lords and great men perhaps hints at a social critique, and the criticism of "ladies" is an example of sexism, the wider issue at stake is the Fool's habit of treating his whole society as fools, what Kott calls his "great and universal *reductio ad absurdum*" (Kott 168). This *reductio* has the effect of avoiding human relationships:

> it is when, and because, he sees the world as a stage that he sees it peopled with fools, with distortions of persons, with natural scapegoats, among whom human relationship does not arise. (Cavell 78)

Lear's description of the world as "this great stage of fools" (4.6.181) moves him from recognizing Gloucester to once again plotting revenge on his sons-in-law. By labelling others as fools, the Fool reduces them to performers, or even literary characters, with all the implications of unreality that attach to this stigma. To use Cavell's phrases, the Fool brings about "fictional existence with a vengeance" and therefore "the tragedy which theatre such as *King Lear* must overcome, is meant to overcome" when he treats other people as unreal (Cavell 104).

R. A. Zimbardo, in a deconstructive reading of the play, argues that the Fool "may stand for the underlying instability or doubt that erases all demarcation" (6). I would merely add that such a destruction of demarcation might extend to demolishing the ethical injunctions by which the Fool's criticism is ultimately motivated. While his cynicism may be originally driven by concern for Lear, Cordelia, or, in any case, persons other than himself, it ultimately corrodes, or at least obfuscates, its own grounds. In a sense, as a fool, he cannot suggest anything seriously. In an essay clearly influenced by a very different philosophical tradition, William O. Scott argues that the Fool's wisdom is undercut by a structure referred to as "the liar's paradox." Its simplest form would be "this sentence is false." A recent version arose in the form of Russell's paradox, and an earlier one in Epidemides the Cretan's famous statement that "all Cretans are liars." This

example from the ancients was actually known in Shakespeare's time, and published in logic texts. If the statement is correct, that all Cretans are liars, then Epidemides is no longer a reliable interlocutor, since he is himself Cretan, and the statement must therefore be false (Scott 73-74). Similarly, the Fool's advice, because proferred by a self-described "Fool," comes immediately into doubt. As long as he is "Fool," nothing he says can be taken very seriously:

> the Fool's parables, because they are self-evident in their contrived messages but also carry their own obviously-ironic [*sic*] dismissal as a fool's satire, sustain a paradoxical doubt of the process by which a fallible interpreter finds meaning in events. (Scott 77)

As a result of this irony suffusing and undercutting the Fool's declarations, his political critique exists within brackets, effortlessly contained by the forces which surround it. Insofar as the Fool's political observations have any relevance they are immediately labelled "not altogether fool" (1.4.148). The Fool interrupts his own political observations with bits of nonsense at least twice (1.4.222, 215), avoiding responsibility for his actual political observations by taking refuge in the label of fool. He could only do so if foolishness is presumed to be fundamentally imcompatible with actual engagement. In fact, the Fool himself gives his observations weight by declaring that "If I speak like myself [i.e., as a Fool] in this, let him be whipped that first finds it so" (1.4.160-62). The Fool is capable of subversion, of introducing an element of disorder into the ideology in which he finds himself immersed, only by betraying himself, by ceasing to be a fool. If Lear learns anything through contact with the Fool, he does so by recognizing the Fool as a person, not by subscribing to a philosophy which the Fool allegedly embodies.

In his clear-sighted analysis of the economic and political underpinnings of social order, the Fool is clearly, to borrow Dollimore's distinction, a materialist rather than an idealist (Dollimore 249). An interest in social progress is not, however, a default result of abandoning ideals, as Dollimore seems to imply. Even if we accept that ideals are basically products of

mystification, virtue need not follow from the abandonment of illusions. Such demystification might on the contrary merely remove the last fetters on a fascist will to power. This is not, to repeat, to say that the Fool does not show concern for those around him, sometimes touchingly. It is, however, to say that the Fool cannot show such concern in good faith, after declaring that money, influence and power make the world go around, and that definition in these terms is so ubiquitous that without power and wealth Lear becomes a "shadow," or an "O without a figure" (2.4.228; 2.4.89-90). If the Fool's philosophy consists in what he says, rather than what he does, then it in fact succeeds in excluding love, and the face of the Other as interruption. In the Fool's philosophy, as in the discourse of power which dominates the opening scene, love dares not speak its own name.

The Fool ironizes conventional morality in Merlin's prophecy, showing that it would, in fact, lead to the collapse of society itself:

> When priests are more in word than matter;
> When brewers mar their malt with water;
> When nobles turn their tailors' tutors;
> No heretics burn'd, but wenches suitors;
> When every case in law is right;
> No quire in debt, nor no poor knight;
> When slanders do not live in tongues;
> Nor cut-purses come not to throngs;
> When usurers tell their gold i'th'field;
> And bawds and whores do churches build;
> Then shall the realm of Albion
> Come to great confusion. (3.2.81-92)

Gottlieb Gaiser compares the Fool's prophecy to a text which was ascribed to Chaucer and circulated widely. He points out, however, that "In the Fool's prophecy, the syntactic structure [starting with a series of conditions, and ending in national dissolution] is imitated, but only the first four lines correspond in substance" (115). Rather than a series of destructive offences leading to national collapse, in the Fool's prophecy even an ideal society with a perfect social order where no one of status is poor, and where even the most notorious sinners give their wealth to build churches, ends in confusion. "Confusion seems to be the invariable quality of the world as such," Gaiser concludes. I would go further and point out that in this speech, most of the confusion results from actually following conventional morality and turning away from economic gain such as usury. Such a utopian society, however, would still return to the material conditions of life: "Then comes the time, who lives to see't, / That going shall be us'd with feet" (3.2.93-94). A move away from the economic exigencies of life would lead only to confusion and ultimately end in a return to involvement within the material. Not surprisingly, the Fool follows his prophecy by demystifying his own fictive existence, stepping outside the time of the play. While the reference to Merlin gives the prophecy and its implicit materialism a certain timelessness, it also reveals briefly the unreality of the stage, and the fictiveness of its characters.

Earlier, in his "lesson" to Lear, the Fool presents conventional morality as a means of gaining "more / Than two tens to a score" (1.4.124-25); in other words, a form of economic advancement. Lear immediately dismisses the whole sermon as "nothing" (1.4.126), which leads the Fool to further reinforce the theme of exchange: "you gave me nothing for't" (1.4.127-28). No doubt he would denounce acquisitiveness as folly–he certainly denounces "snatching" as folly (1.4.152)–but the universality of folly undermines any ability to build an ethics against which such foolishness might be transgressing, or which, conversely, might present a true

disorder in the economic system. On the heath, the Fool's universal folly stands over and against Poor Tom's conventional morality:

> *Fool*: This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.
>
> *Edgar*: Take heed o'th'foul fiend. Obey thy parents; keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array. (3.4.77-80)

The Fool draws attention to the madness of established morality, and Poor Tom's ravings seem like an illustration of his point. Again, this is not to say that the Fool has no ethical motivation. His implicit protests against the reduction of morality to self-advancement must have some ethical motivation, but it is a motivation betrayed into mere relativism.

Folly and ignorance were, in fact, used by many Renaissance thinkers to justify following authority. "What a perilous thing were it to commit unto the subject's judgement," declares the Homily Against Disobedience, "which prince is wise and godly and which otherwise" (Strier 108, quoting the homily). Montaigne makes a similar argument in his essay "That it is Folly to Measure Truth and Error by our Own Capacity," which concludes with a declaration that "It is not for us to settle what degree of obedience we owe" the Catholic church (*Essays* 90). If everyone is only a Fool, then this is all the more reason not to take a stand on the basis of (flawed) individual judgement, and to simply accept the operations of power. In fact, removing conventional morality through the Fool's critique only leaves a wider scope for self-interest and the operations of power. If, as Kott writes, the absolute "has been replaced by the absurdity of the human situation" (Kott 137), then there is no longer any grounds on which to protest such absurdity. More to the point, there is no longer anything outside the self, who knows the world to be absurd, which would oblige the self to undertake any sort of action in the first place.

In his description of the world to Gloucester, Lear shows a similar talent for discovering the economic basis of conventional morality:

> Thorough tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
>
> Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
>
> And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
>
> Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it. (4.6.162-65)

This new awareness does not lead him to recognize his own sin, or to propose reforms–as when he confessed in the storm that he had taken "Too little care" for the "Poor naked wretches" (3.4.33)–but simply to universalize guilt: "None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em" (4.6.166). Reading this line, one feels grateful that in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, as opposed to Nahum Tate's, Lear is never returned to power. One might read this passage as a parallel with the gospels in which Christ contends that only "He that is without sin among you" should cast the first stone, but Lear's claim, filled with a sense of his own authority, to be entitled to "able 'em" would be the opposite of the humility and lack of self-righteousness that Christ presumably intended to inspire. A better source reference might be found in Florio's translation of Montaigne, in which Montaigne claims that "I say not, that none should accuse except hee bee spotlesse in himself: For then none might accuse" (qu. by Muir 4.6.166n). Montaigne does not permit a counsel of perfection to stand in the way of developing a reasonable system of justice, whereas in Lear's case, the ubiquity of crime merely leads to complete ethical relativism. This relativism might, in turn, be considered an effort on the part of Lear to evade his own sin, and his responsibility towards others. Lear's cynicism about "a scurvy Politician" leaves him commanding that his boots be taken off, showing the same privilege of a leisurely aristocrat returning from hunting which he displayed in calling for his dinner at Goneril's home.

Neither Lear nor the Fool become notably more kind as a result of their association with

folly. The Fool's own uncomfortable status is eased as long as he can accuse Lear of being even more insubstantial: "I had rather be any kind o'thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, Nuncle" (1.4.181-83). Lear reciprocates by calling him "A pestilent gall to me" (1.4.112), and twice threatening him with whipping (1.4.108, 1.4.177). Muir is quite right to note that the Fool's jests "coming on top of Lear's afflictions, and concerned as they are with the afflictions, help to drive him mad" (lvii). Cavell notes that, "in riddling Lear with the truth of his condition he increases the very cause of that condition" (Cavell 59). The Fool does not offer consolation, but only furthers pain. One might argue that such pain is salutary, but Lear's own indulgences in the Fool's philosophy do not show him markedly improved. The Fool offers pain because by ridiculing Lear's position, his own position will seem slightly less ridiculous, or at least less painful. The "bitter Fool" remains self-interested in his Folly.

Lear's madness is not an ethical gesture so much as an evasion of ethical demands, a further effort at "The Avoidance of Love." It is in madness that Lear is able to treat an offer of love as a solicitation, comparing Gloucester to "blind Cupid," the sign on a brothel (4.6.136; Cavell 61). Similarly, a few lines later, he treats his would-be benefactors as attackers. After they offer him "anything," he treats them as challengers in a duel, responding "No seconds? all myself?" (4.6.191-92). In his famous scene on the heath, he refuses to accept shelter in his madness, worrying that it might "break my heart" (3.4.1-5), though he had been willing to accept such generosity in a moment of sanity, shortly after he recognizes the Fool (3.2.68-73). In a repetition of the same pattern, Lear turns from Gloucester's offer of food and shelter to "my philosopher," Poor Tom, raving in metaphysical inquiry. Rather than make himself vulnerable, accepting the gratuitous generosity of another, Lear flees into madness. It is sometimes suggested that the line "This a good block" from the meeting of Lear and Gloucester near Dover indicates a mounting block, to help in pulling on boots, for instance. If this is so (and really, it

can only be indicated by an unscripted gesture in performance, and is therefore the actor or director's decision), then Lear's recognition of Gloucester and offer to him of "my eyes" is framed by removing (or at least trying to remove) his boots (4.6.171), and putting them back on again, as the generosity of recognition is replaced by the triviality and inhumanity of a "stage of fools" (4.6.181). Not only would such a reading be in keeping with the images of divestiture which many critics have found in the play, but also it would show Lear preparing to ride off after making himself vulnerable. Before Cordelia's attendants arrive, in other words, Lear is already preparing to run away. Faced with kindness, which he cannot earn and does not deserve, Lear's first instinct is to flee. He runs into madness, where he can remain self-righteous, raging against Goneril, Regan, the gods and the weather, where he can put them on trial to avoid putting himself on trial, and where he can confidently describe himself as "More sinn'd against than sinning" (2.2.60).

Not surprisingly, madness is futile as a strategy of evasion. The night, as the Fool observes, "pities neither wise man nor Fools" (3.2.12-13). The effort at escaping Being through selfhood is ultimately futile, because the self represents a bond to Being. The inability of the self, in its freedom, to escape Being is made by Levinas into the basis of a theory of tragedy:

> The return of the present to itself is the affirmation of the *I* already riveted to itself, already doubled up with a *self*. The tragic does not come from a conflict between freedom and destiny, but from the turning of freedom into destiny, from responsibility. (*Existence and Existents* 79)

Tragedy is the subject of the next chapter; for the time being, we should note that the mad Lear, like the foolish Fool, avoids the other, and therefore avoids the only salvation from the tragedy of their Being. The process of seeking escape through madness is reproduced in miniature by Gloucester's reflections on the mad Lear, in which he more or less admits that insanity is a

strategy of evading not only other people but also selfhood, when he claims that "better I were distract" than face the sources of his own sorrow:

> So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs,
>
> And woes by wrong imaginations lose
>
> The knowledge of themselves. (4.6.278-81)

The present, argues Levinas, finds itself a burden: "It is a being and not a dream, not a game" (*Existence and Existents* 79). Gloucester's yearning, in his call for madness, is to lose the relationship of knowing between his "thoughts" and his "griefs". Gloucester's dream of escape is something at least metaphorically like self-disintegration. But the self cannot be shaken off, and efforts at avoidance through madness ultimately bond the self back to itself all the more strongly. Madness, in the play, should be seen as an effort to avoid selfhood which inevitably falls back into self-righteousness and recrimination. It does so because it seeks to avoid the self by turning inward, not outward to the Other.

Madness, therefore, avoids rather than catalyses the movement towards social justice. Lear asks the Fool to "teach me" and in his madness echoes the Fool's reductiveness, without gaining any sense of humility or making any recognition of others. In fact, he just becomes more self-righteous. In claiming that a justice and a "simple thief" are interchangeable, Lear demolishes the social order, without moving to an acknowledgement of Others, or to his own responsibility for and before others, much less proposing any sort of more equitable social relation, showing "the concern 'for a better society'" that Levinas finds coinciding with the interruption of the Other. Lear's description of the world is spoken as an accusation of apostrophied others:

> Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
>
> Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back;

> Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
>
> For which thou whipp'st her. (4.6.158-61)

A dog may be obeyed in office, and Lear may recognize that authority is arbitrary, but at least at this point, he does not recognize his own guilt for the situation of the world. Lear's nauseated (in the most Sartrean sense) denunciation of the world crescendos into a call for an orgy. Madness certainly stands outside the economic order of things, as the Fool informs Lear: "He's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him" (3.6.13-14). Lear in his madness decorates himself with what Cordelia calls "all the idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn" (4.4.5-6). The accoutrements of madness form a superfluous manifestation in the midst of an economic system of values and utility. This superfluity should not, however, be confused with the generosity which would provide a true rupture in such a system.

In a series of lectures delivered in 1946, Levinas seems both to anticipate and reverse Kott's thesis that the "clown's philosophy" represents the deepest message of the play:

> The buffoon, the fool of Shakespearean tragedy, is the one who feels and bespeaks with lucidity the unsubstantiality [*sic*] of the world and the absurdity of the situations– the one who is not the principal character of tragedy, the one who has nothing to overcome. (*Time and the Other* 59)

The Fool's wisdom, in other words, is cheap. He can recognize the foolishness of the social order only because he has no personal investment in it. In moving beyond the pretensions of civility and material relations, he has "nothing to overcome". He does not experience the problem of solitary existence, weary of the burden of Being and terrified by the night. Lear's hypostatis relies upon these things to escape the anonymity of Being, but the Fool does not. He can retain his name of Fool even when Lear has lost the name of king; moreover, the name of the Fool is easier to assume and more easily forgotten. If the hypostasis indicates the "fact that there

is not only, anonymously, being in general, but there are beings capable of bearing names" (*Existence and Existents* 98), then the Fool's individual being is only equivocally separated from the anonymity of the night. Neither the folio nor the quarto text italicize the word "foole" as they italicize all other names, and the quarto doesn't even capitalize it. Although I follow the convention of capitalizing "Fool" when it applies specifically to the character, and leaving it uncapitalized for the generic, impersonal noun, it seems worth noting that this convention is somewhat arbitrary, and not entirely intuitive. The name of the Fool could also just be a description, like those vague late medieval appellations which only later congealed into proper names.

The pain of assuming an individual existence is contrasted by Levinas with the "levity" by which "Games also begin, but their beginnings lack seriousness" (*Existence and Existents* 26). The Fool's existence lacks seriousness because it does not participate in the difficulty of assuming an individual being over and against the anonymity of the night. In contrast to the Marxists, Levinas does not understand individuation as a falling away from a more authentic sociality, but as a stand against the anonymity of being. The self needs salvation because the existent's position against the anonymity of being is ultimately self-defeating:

> The present is subjected to being, bonded to it. The ego returns ineluctably to itself; it can forget itself in sleep, but there will be a reawakening. In the tension and fatigue of beginning one feels the cold sweat of the irremissibility[26] of existence. The being that is

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[26]Surprisingly, this is not a neologism created by the translator of Levinas's works from French. On the contrary, the word "irremissible" is first recorded in English in a book by William Caxton. Its most important definition is theological: "That cannot be forgiven; unpardonable" (*OED*, *a.* a). It combines, therefore, the inescapability of being with its evil (see the Introduction).

> taken up is a burden. Here what is called the tragic in being is grasped in its very origin (*Existence and Existents* 78).

In Levinas's writings, unlike Sartre's, man is not "condemned to be free" (Sartre 803), so much as he is condemned simply to be. The assumption of an identity ties oneself back to Being, if only in the burden of one's self. "The freedom of the present," Levinas argues, "is articulated in a positive enchainment to one's self; the ego is irremissibility itself" (*Existence and Existents* 87). The Fool, however, as buffoon, does not feel "the cold sweat of the irremissibility of existence" and has no need for salvation, or the Other. Gaiser argues that the Fool's reduction of the world to "this great stage of fools" means that "he has retreated into a 'counter-world' devoid of all existential necessities: to him, life is but a game" (116). "No one," declares Levinas, "will recommend madness as a way of salvation" (*Time and the Other* 59). Salvation, instead, comes from the Other, but the Fool does not represent a welcome of the Other, because he does not participate in the problem of maintaining an individual self over and against the anonymity of being in the first place. The anxiety of the self, trying to hold itself against the experience of the night, is not experienced by the Fool, *qua* fool, who is a dramaturgical function rather than a literary character.

In a 1982 production by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Adrian Noble decided to have Lear accidentally kill the Fool on stage during the trial scene, "and the other characters simply fail to notice what has happened to him, their concentration being fixed entirely on Lear's collapse" (Sher 163). This production decision is curiously bivalent: on the one hand, it draws attention to how little the Fool is noticed on stage; on the other, it still shows a conscious need to account for the Fool's disappearance, when, as Anthony Sher noted in his account of the production from the standpoint of the actor playing this character, the Fool has been disappearing for some time: "the character speaks less and less and with decreasing effectiveness indicating

[. . .] that his function–both as a dramatic device and as a companion to Lear–is coming to an end" (Sher 162). If the RSC production accounted for the Fool's disappearance only by indicating how easily he's forgotten by the other characters, Kott's suggestion that Lear becomes his own fool (Kott 168) seems inadequate for the simple reason that Lear goes mad long before the Fool disappears. On the contrary, the Fool is able to disappear so quietly because, as the "pure fool," the most clearly fictive of characters, his entity is only a game. A game, writes Levinas, "can end so splendidly because it never really began for good" (*Existence and Existents* 26). The Fool's being is so light that his disappearance need not even be accounted for, or at least, none of the characters feel a need to account for it.

In seeking an explanation for the Fool's disappearance, critical desperation centers around two lines. Insisting that the Fool must be aware of his impending death, Edmund Blunden draws attention to the line "And I'll go to bed at noon" (3.6.83n). Leaving aside altogether the fact that this line does not occur in the quarto text, it seems unnecessary to argue that literary characters as well as real people go to bed at all times of the day and night without disappearing in a puff of textuality. Levinas argues that to sleep is to find a place, like a name, in the anonymity of night (*Existence and Existents* 69), but this would tend to make the Fool more substantial after his final scene, not less. Lear's howl in his final speech that his "poor fool is hang'd" has also been forced to refer to the Fool ever since Sir Joshua Reynolds, of all people, first made the suggestion (5.3.304n), but it seems obviously to refer to Cordelia and no reference to the Fool is necessary. The really conspicuous thing about the Fool's disappearance is that no explanation is made, or even deemed necessary by the on-stage characters, none of whom show sufficient concern ever to ask what happened to him.

In fact, long before the Fool disappears, there is a general tendency of all the characters to ignore him. Lear notices that the Fool isn't present, but after two days. In fact, when Lear

abandons Goneril's home for Regan's, he frankly forgets the Fool, who is sent after him by Goneril, and exits shouting "tarry, take the Fool with thee" (1.4.314-15). In his final scene, Kent's imperative "Come, help to bear thy master, / Thou must not stay behind" seems like an after-thought (3.6.97-99). If the Fool is "all-licens'd" as Goneril claims (1.4.198), it is because he is so much outside his society that his various jokes are not treated as seriously subversive. Goneril herself seems to tolerate him, allowing him to escape with a mild insult when he is abandoned to her by Lear (1.4.312-13). Since she isn't generally noted for her "milky gentleness" (1.4.340), it would seem to follow that this mild treatment follows from Goneril's mere indifference towards him. According to Leszek Kołakowski, who Kott quotes, "The Clown is he who, although moving in high society, is not part of it, and tells unpleasant things to everybody in it" (Kott 165). The tendency to ignore or even forget about the Fool might be taken as an indication of his distance from society, and the fact that he is barely participating in, much less producing, the action of the play. The show goes on without him, just as Lear's train could continue its journey to Regan's home from Goneril's without even noticing that he's missing.

Does the Fool, as a literary character, strive to escape his own dubious status as a dramatic function? In what follows, I argue that he does not, or at least, that unlike certain literary characters that manage to produce an illusion of reality, he does not succeed. Rather than showing his superiority to the drama which contains him, the Fool's metadramatic moments merely serve to avoid any interpersonal contact. The Fool recognizes that he is in an artwork, but rather than using this recognition to commence a dialogue, he proceeds to label others as artworks, as well. In what Eaglestone has called a "very Platonic formulation" (Eaglestone 106), Levinas insists that art does not offer transcendence, but merely a substitute for transcendence, even "a dimension of evasion" from "a world of initiative and responsibility" ("Reality and its Shadow" 141). Not all escapes from the world constitute a real alternative. Like madness in the

play, art does not offer the transcendence of the Other, and might, in fact, even evade the face of the Other. Levinas criticizes the phenomenology of images as transparent, insisting, against Sartre, that the intention of someone who gazes on an image need not go through it, to what it represents, but may simply rest on it. "In the vision of the represented object a painting has a density of its own: it is itself an object of the gaze" ("Reality and its Shadow" 136). An image, Levinas argues, differs from "a symbol, a sign, or a word" by virtue of resembling its object, and therefore having a certain opacity similar to that of the object itself. The image constitutes, alongside the object, "its double, its shadow, its image" ("Reality and its Shadow" 135). Art takes us out of the world we create, over and against the anonymity of Being, but it does not take us to the Other, who represents salvation from this anonymity; rather, it merely takes us back to the elemental: "In art, sensation figures as a new element. [Or][27] better, it returns to the impersonality of *elements*". (*Existence and Existents* 53)

One is reminded of the manner in which Protestant polemicists worried that an image of God would tend to become substituted for God himself, if imagery were permitted. The homily "Against Peril of Idolatry" argues that a picture "expoundeth [not] it selfe" (*Elizabethan Homilies* 2.2.3-1361). In fact, Levinas compares the art work as a caricature of reality to an idol: "The insurmountable caricature in the most perfect image manifests itself in its stupidness as an idol" ("Reality and its Shadow" 137). Frozen in an instant, or animated by its own fictive time, the artwork does not participate in time as such, which implies a relation with the Other. The artwork "does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue" ("Reality and its Shadow" 131). The ability of the artwork to present a face is, for Levinas, both "its greatness and its deceit" ("Ethics and Spirit" 8). In doing so, it becomes a fetish, blocking access to the Other, and assuming its place. Idolatry cuts off dialogue.

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[27]The translation reads "On better," clearly a typographical error.

The function of the "philosophical criticism" for which Levinas calls ("Reality and its Shadow" 141-43), would be to draw the artwork back into dialogue: "the immobile statue has to be put in movement and made to speak" ("Reality and its Shadow" 142). "The necessity of critique" follows, Levinas claims in an essay on Michel Leiris, from the "need to enter into a relation with someone," our unwillingness to allow the artwork to rest in its completion ("Transcendence of Words" 147). One might, in the Fool's metadramatic awareness, find an element of criticism built into the Shakespearean text. The Fool is the only character to step outside his own fictionality, violating his fictive historical location and that of the play when he anticipates Merlin (3.2.95-96), and when he ruptures the audience's complacency by tossing a gratuitous insult at "She that's a maid now" (1.5.48-49). If this moment "blurs the boundary of the text itself" (Neel 186), it also blurs the reality of the Fool's world. In a sense, he possesses something like a Socratic wisdom, in which he knows his own unbeing, rather than his own ignorance. According to Kott, the Fool in *King Lear* is unlike his counterparts in other plays in being "the first fool to be aware of the fool's condition" (Kott 163). Certainly, the Fool is unique among the characters on stage by virtue of his awareness of the theatrical nature of his existence, but this dubious liberation leads him only to abandon all pretense of seriousness and efforts at action.

Rather than overthrowing the idolatry of the artwork, the Fool merely inverts it in his treatment of those around him. Instead of substituting an artwork for a person, he turns the persons around him into artworks, fools, characters in drama, which can therefore be treated with distance, known rather than acknowledged. He extends the domain of the artwork, rather than drawing it into discourse. Of course, the strongest efforts at mimesis notwithstanding, the characters in the drama remain unreal to the audience. What is strangely metadramatic about the Fool's role and function is that he treats the characters around him as unreal to him. Such

caricature does not represent a true reform of evil, merely a sort of symbolic victory over it:

> Revenge is gotten on wickedness by producing its caricature, which is to take from it its reality without annihilating it [. . .]. It is as though ridicule killed, as though everything really can end in songs. ("Reality and its Shadow" 141)

If the Fool is bitter as a result of his treatment–"they'll have me whipp'd for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipp'd for lying; and sometimes I am whipp'd for holding my peace" (1.4.97-99)–he can at least take revenge by verbally annihilating Lear, calling him "nothing," "an O without a figure," "a shell'd peascod" and "Lear's shadow"[28] (1.4.183-84, 1.4.189-191, 1.4.197, 1.4.228). Such a resort to ridicule, I would argue, is fundamental to the Fool's definition, especially as an archetypal "pure fool." Theatre, according to Levinas, "has always been interpreted as a game" because while it is "made up of gestures, movements, decisions and feelings," it is "essentially made of unreality" (*Existence and Existents* 26). As the most self-consciously theatrical of all the characters, the Fool participates most fully in the insubstantiality of the theatre.

The Fool's failure, the betrayal of the character's presumably ethical ideals by his dramaturgical function as a fool and by the clown's philosophy which a fool embodies, parallels that of certain tendencies in twentieth-century thought and, derivatively, literary criticism. The Fool as function undertakes a sort of rebellion, revealing the social and political motivations of the stage-world, and even its unreality. Such gestures are not, however, necessarily ethical acts in themselves, though they might be prompted by an ethical concern. Understanding the corruption of the world might, rather than leading to rebellion, on the contrary just lead to overt evil, as in the case of Oswald, who certainly understands how the world goes. At times, as when

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[28]The last of these is only assigned to the Fool in the Folio text; in the quarto, Lear answers his own question.

the Fool's jests seem to drive Lear mad or when Lear's madness becomes an escape from other people, the questioning of social order and conventional morality undermines even its own motivation. That the Fool nevertheless manages to retain a certain sense of loyalty–at least until his last scene when he must be told not to stay behind (3.6.98-99)–is a sort of heroism, which A. C. Bradley has accurately described:

> his heroism consists largely in this, that his efforts to outjest his master's injuries are the efforts of a being to whom a responsible and consistent course of action, nay even a responsible use of language, is at the best of times difficult, and from whom it is never at the best of times expected. (Bradley 312)

Conversely, one might understand the Fool's ethics as a sort of surplus, which remains after he has failed to label people as fools thoroughly enough to actually succeed in avoiding interpersonal contact. In more extreme terms, one might say that the Fool is saved from psychopathy only by hypocrisy. If really carried out consistently, his philosophy would force him to lose contact with the Other, who would become known, rather than acknowledged. The distance he maintains from those around him is tantamount to treating them as aesthetic objects, rather than people deserving of respect and calling him to responsibility; nevertheless, they maintain a precious surplus despite all efforts to reduce them.

The Fool becomes, if Kott is to be believed, a sort of signifier of the inescapability of the world: "When established values have been overthrown, and there is no appeal, to God, Nature, or History, from the tortures inflicted on the cruel world, the clown becomes the central figure in the theatre" (Kott 141). In the same essay in which he critiques modern thought as having lost its ethical bearings, Levinas argues that the horror of a scientific understanding of the world is that it does not allow any escape. Knowing is able to stretch out infinitely, but without encountering anything outside the Self ("Ideology and Idealism" 241). This sameness, in fact, becomes

boring, even tragic:

> Nothing, in fact, is absolutely other in the Being served by knowing, in which variety turns into monotony. Is that not the thought of Proverbs 14:13: "Even in laughter the heart is sad, and the end of joy is grief"? ("Ideology and Idealism" 245)

The Fool, as Lear points out, is bitter rather than jocund (1.4.133). To know is to bring into the present, to appropriate or grasp, and the Fool does nothing else. This denies him any recourse to the Other, by which, alone, the present is avoided and time becomes possible (*Existence and Existents* 93-94). Imprisoned within the present, he becomes like Levinas's description of an artwork, a caricature of a person, whose freedom congeals into fate:

> *Every image is already a caricature.* But this caricature turns into something tragic. The same man is indeed a comic poet and a tragic poet, an ambiguity which constitutes the particular magic of poets like Gogol, Dickens, Tchekov – and Molière, Cervantes, and above all, Shakespeare. ("Reality and its Shadow" 138)

The transformation of the caricature into "something tragic," was literalized on stage in a 1968 production, where the Fool "was played beautifully by Michael Williams with a grin permanently frozen on his face as if the clown had wiped off his cartoon make-up only to find that the crude outlines had stuck" (Sher 151). The Fool is many things, but among them, he is a prisoner of his own caricature, unable to escape his self. The character is trapped by its role as a dramatic function personifying a cynical philosophy. Insofar as he is a Fool, he is unable to approach the world with anything other than knowing mockery.

The fact that the Fool seems not to encounter any Other is not an argument that he is entirely uninvolved in ethical relations. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas argues that death is that which cannot be appropriated by the "I", and goes on to argue that the relationship with death is like that with the Other:

> This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very existence is made of alterity. (*Time and the Other* 74)

If a clown bears a unique relationship to death, finding his model in a grinning death's head, he perhaps conflates in his person the approach of death as the limit on one's own powers of grasping and appropriating, with the approach of the Other. While the Fool's philosophy teaches Lear very little, or at any rate, only the wrong things, his presence, *vis-à-vis* Lear, calls Lear to some of his most touching moments of responsibility. Recognizing that he is losing his mind, but turning away from insanity, he asks the Fool about his condition:

> How dost, my boy? Art cold?
> I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
> The art of our necessities is strange,
> And can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.
> Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
> That's sorry yet for thee. (3.4.68-73)

He understands his own condition as a mirror to the Fool's, rather than (as when he meets Poor Tom), understanding the Fool's condition as a parallel to his own. It is after recognizing the Fool that Lear is content to accept Kent's generosity. When they actually reach the hovel, Lear insists that Kent and the Fool enter first, reversing the social order of priority with the words "In boy, go first" (3.4.26), and then turning from the immediate "Poor naked wretches" to consider more distant Others, in his famous prayer. This prayer is not a distraction from the poor at his feet, but a sign of his realization, facing up to them, that his position in the world has been "the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out

into a third world" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 82), and an enlarging of generosity from the immediate other person to all the others on whom Lear's position and comfort depend. This recognition of the Fool as Other is anticipated earlier in the play, when Lear feels the first stirrings of madness, and turns, instinctively, to the Fool: "O Fool! I shall go mad" (2.4.284). After shouting bombastically at his family, it is to the Fool that Lear turns in vulnerability. Kent similarly recognizes the Fool as an Other, defending him against Edgar (3.4.41). It is the Fool's function as the Other—poor and wretched, and not someone from whom Lear might expect any sort of reciprocation for his kindness–that provides the occasion of Lear's ethical realization, not anything which he says.

We must make a distinction between the fact that the Fool addresses Lear and the content of his address. This is not a distinction between what he says and what he means, but between the nihilistic content of what he says and his strong ethical drive to speak at all. The Fool, like many recent critics of this play, is driven by real ethical imperatives to criticize the social and political order which he finds in the play world. This does not mean that either the critics or the Fool are nihilistic, only that they find themselves (despite themselves) promulgating a cynical philosophy. Perhaps, like Cordelia, the Fool bears a love for Lear which dares not speak its own name, for fear of betraying itself into an economy of exchanges, or simply into the economy of the Said. But like Cordelia's, the Fool's love is betrayed anyway. Cordelia's silence becomes pregnant with the meanings which others read into it. In the Fool's case, the cynicism of his philosophy becomes self-sustaining and corrodes its own motive. The Saying must betray itself into the Said, but without a reference back from the Said to the Saying, the Said loses its ground in ethics, just as without a reference from the self to the Other, the self's existence decays into sameness, boredom and tragedy.

Chapter five — "Away, and let me die":

Tragedy and the Inescapable

Levinas uses the word tragedy in three distinct but related ways, to describe the limits of an artwork, the existent's inability to escape Being, or the heroic assumption of death in certain types of classical tragedy and, more importantly, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. We have seen in the previous chapter how the Fool's characteristic stance of knowing others to be fools blocks him from real human relations, and similarly, how his position as Fool becomes a sort of cruel caricature, frozen in time. These two types of tragedy are closely related: time finds its basis in "relationships between humans" according to Levinas, but time is denied by the "frozen instant" of the artwork. The Fool is denied involvement in time, in the sense of relationships with Others, because he has a dramaturgical role which makes him an artwork, which does not participate in time. Conversely, his non-involvement in ethical relations condemns him to the status of an artwork, and turns his dramaturgical role into a sort of prison. While this double movement provides a means to understand the most overtly, albeit equivocally, comic character in the play, it also finds a strong expression in the play's most tragic events.

The play contains a curiously large number of thwarted suicides. Not only is Gloucester's suicide famously frustrated, but also Lear returns reluctantly to the world of the living, and Cordelia is saved from imputation of suicide, though her suicide occurs in at least one of the sources. On the other hand, Goneril actually does succeed in killing herself. Suicide is always possible, in the way that what is forbidden is necessarily possible, or else it would not need to be forbidden. While Lear's reluctant return from the grave and Gloucester's failed suicide literalize an inability to escape Being, therefore, they do not represent a declaration of the physical impossibility of suicide, so much as what we might call its ethical impossibility, the

impossibility of escaping Being through one's own efforts alone. Frustrated efforts to escape also have a metadramatic import: the characters are victims of the artwork, unable to move outside its narrative. Levinas developed his theory of art, or rather his theory against art in response to the romantic overestimate of the importance of art which dominated continental thought under the leadership of Heidegger (Eaglestone 103). In opposition to this "hypertrophy of art in our times when, for almost everyone, it represents the spiritual life," Levinas suggests that art

> is not the supreme value in civilized life, and that it is not forbidden to conceive a stage in which it will be reduced to a source of pleasure–which one cannot contest without being ridiculous–having its place, but only a place, in man's happiness. ("Reality and its Shadow" 142)

Hence, his counter-Heideggerian theory of tragedy and art. The tragedy of the artwork, outside of time and trapping its characters, allegorizes and perhaps even realizes the tragedy of inescapable Being. Like Folly, suicide is not a true escape from Being. Not only is suicide, according to Levinas, "impossible", but also the characters seek to become tragic, to become figures in an artwork, in seeking their own deaths. They therefore encounter the tragedy of art as such, turning themselves into artworks. In seeking to escape their beings through tragedy, the characters only tie themselves more forcefully to their own situations. In some sense, the entrapment of characters in the artwork is not only represented, but also enacted by the play.

According to Sartre, the self as cogito contains a nothingness within itself, the origin of all nothingness: "Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world." In order to serve as this being, man "must be able to put himself *outside* of being" (Sartre 59). This ability to detach oneself from Being is freedom itself, and central to the structure of time: "Freedom is the human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness" (Sartre 64).

While Levinas apologizes for leaving out of *Existence and Existents* "any consideration of those philosophical works published, [. . .] between 1940 and 1945" when he was in captivity (*Existence and Existents* 15), he seems to be responding at least to Sartre's pre-war ideas or at least to the endemic Sartreanism of 1940s Paris in a section entitled, "Existence without Existents" (*Existence and Existents* 57-64). Here he argues that a true nihilation is impossible: "Let us imagine all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness. [. . .] Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness." Being is not extinguished by the destruction of beings; on the contrary, it merely becomes "impersonal, anonymous, yet indistinguishable" (*Existence and Existents* 57). One might attempt to escape being through death: "To kill, like to die, is to seek an escape from being, to go where freedom and negation operate." Tragedy, however, shows that such efforts to escape being are futile. Levinas points towards the return of Banquo's ghost, or the manner in which "Evil-doers are disturbed by themselves," which might remind one of Richard's disturbed sleep before the battle of Bosworth field. One might, however, also include Lear's return to life and Gloucester's failed suicide attempt. "This return of presence in negation," writes Levinas, "this impossibility of escaping from an anonymous and uncorruptible existence constitutes the final depths of Shakespearean tragedy" (*Existence and Existents* 61).

Death does not constitute nothingness, since death can never be grasped, and therefore is never present. "Death is never now," Levinas claims in *Time and the Other* (72). In his arguments regarding death, Levinas is most clearly responding to Martin Heidegger, who considered death to be the most radically individual of one's possibilities, since no one else can suffer my death. It is what is most one's own, or, to borrow one of Heidegger's neologisms, one's "ownmost."[29] In fact, death is fundamental to the structure of *Dasein*, allowing it a

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[29]This word is used by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson to substitute for the

foundation outside of all relations with Others:

> The ownmost possibility is *non-relational*. Anticipation allows Dasein to understand that that potentiality-for-being in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just "belong" to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an *individual* Dasein.[30] (Heidegger H263)

Later in *Being and Time*, in a discussion of historicity, Heidegger claims that the projection of oneself unto death guarantees "the totality and authenticity of one's resoluteness" (Heidegger H383). To grasp the finitude of one's own existence is to free oneself from everything happenstantial and grasp one's genuine and individual fate:

> The more authentically Dasein resolves–and this means that in anticipating death it understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost distinctive possibility–the more unequivocally does it choose and find the possibility of its existence, and the less does it do so by accident. (Heidegger H384)

To live in the expectation of one's own death, in this reading, is to live one's own life authentically. In Heidegger's reading, the tragic hero, who faces and grasps his own death, becomes the most authentic of men.

It is against this reading of death and time that Levinas's *Time and the Other* is directed. Rather than representing as it does for Heidegger "*the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*" (Heidegger H262), which the individual must then grasp through anticipation, for Levinas death is that point at which all of the individual's powers fail: "When death is here, I

German "eigenst," which itself seems to be a coinage (Heidegger, "Index of English Expressions," *s.v.*)

[30]Page numbers preceded by "H" refer to the marginal page-numbers in the Macquarrie-Robinson translation, which, in turn, represent the page numbering of the eighth German edition.

am no longer here, not just because I am nothingness, but because I am unable to grasp" (*Time and the Other* 72). We cannot grasp death, and therefore cannot make it our own. In Levinas's reading, it is logically impossible to make one's death one's own, even by anticipation: "Death is the impossibility of having a project." It is the point at which "we are no longer *able to be able*" (*Time and the Other* 74. Levinas is therefore very critical of tragedy in the traditional and Heideggerian sense, which he understands as a heroic, though ultimately futile, effort to appropriate one's own death.

Levinas both describes and critiques this view of tragedy by reference to Shakespeare. Juliet's cry that she retains "the power to die" is still a sort of mastery (*Time and the Other* 50).[31] On the other hand, after a reading of the penultimate scene of *Macbeth*, he concludes that "Prior to death there is always a last chance; this is what heroes seize, not death," and proceeds to argue that "*Hamlet* is precisely a lengthy testimony to this impossibility of assuming death" (*Time and the Other* 73). The self cannot assume[32] death, according to Levinas, for the simple reason that it can never leave the present, and its own death is never present. On the contrary, "Death *qua* nothingness"–which is to say, the death which frees from Being–"is the death of the other, death

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[31]Richard A. Cohen translates Levinas's "*Je garde le pouvoir de mourir*," which presumably comes from a French translation of the play, as "I keep the power to die," although the Shakespearean text is actually "myself have power to die" (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.1.242). Somewhat more embarassingly, Cohen retains the French spelling of "Juliette"!

[32]Levinas seems to use this, following Heidegger perhaps, in a way best expressed by the its broadest English definition as "To take unto (oneself), receive, accept, adopt" (*OED*, v. I) rather than the now more current "To take for granted as the basis of argument or action; to suppose" (*OED*, v. III.10). To "assume death," then, is not to take the biological fact of death for granted, but rather to take on death as one's own.

for the survivor" ("Reality and its Shadow" 140). The self can only escape its suffocating self-presence through a relationship with the Other: "The condition of time lies in the relationship between humans, or in history" (*Time and the Other* 79). When time is understood in this way, as a relationship with the Other, it moves from being a tragic fate to the means of escape: "Time, far from constituting the tragic, shall perhaps be able to deliver us from it" (*Existence and Existents* 78-79).

It is not only to Heidegger that the approach of death provides the situation in which one achieves authentic individuality. The characters of *King Lear* attempt to assume their deaths and thus escape fate. Lear swears, "So be my grave my peace" (1.1.124), making his ability to die into the foundation of his own integrity. Gloucester, in his final prayer before supposedly jumping off the cliffs of Dover, says that he will "Shake patiently this great affliction off" (4.6.36) in order to maintain self-control. *Hamlet*, as Caruana notes, is Levinas's exception to traditional tragedy, in that the title character comes to understand the irremissibility of Being in his famous soliloquy, where the possibility of "not to be" is replaced by the dreams which may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil.[33] *King Lear*, however, also allows a critique of a traditional reading of tragedy, showing that the individual can not escape the darker tragedy of inescapable Being by any act of will or mastery, not even suicide. Cavell argues that Lear's so-called rebirth in act four shows "that tragedy itself has become ineffective, outworn" (Cavell 111). Gloucester, more blatantly, is frustrated by his inability to die. "Away" he cries to Edgar,

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[33]The soliloquy to which Levinas refers is found in act three, scene one; Levinas's comments on *Hamlet* are in *Time and the Other*, 73, with an interesting annotation by Richard A. Cohen; Caruana refers to Levinas's reading of *Hamlet* on page 34 of his article, already cited; my own article, on *Hamlet*, Levinas and the New Historicism, is forthcoming in the *European Journal of English Studies*.

"and let me die" (4.6.48). Lear, similarly, protests that "You do me wrong to take me out o'th'grave" (4.7.45).

Levinas's understanding of tragedy is closely related to his view of art. All art, Levinas declares, should aspire towards being alive: "The artwork does not succeed, is bad, when it does not have that aspiration for life which moved Pygmalion." Such an aspiration, however, is always frustrated. On the contrary, "the artist has given the statue a lifeless *life*, a derisory life which is not master of itself, a caricature of life" ("Reality and its Shadow" 138). All representation is caricature, in that the artwork grants its subject a freedom, but a freedom congealed into impotence. It is not merely that an artwork might portray characters trapped within their situations, but that the artwork as such is a congealing of freedom into fate. Hence Levinas's insistence on the ambivalence of tragedy and comedy as generic distinctions:

> The same man is indeed a comic poet and a tragic poet, an ambiguity which constitutes the particular magic of poets like Gogol, Dickens, Tchekov – and Molière, Cervantes, and above all, Shakespeare. ("Reality and its Shadow" 138)

What is truly tragic in art is its own status as art, and therefore its finality, its inability to escape itself and to move to completion. The temporalizing of certain art works, such as novels, do not overcome their position, like statues, outside time: "The characters of novels are beings that are shut up, prisoners" ("Reality and its Shadow" 139). The freedom of characters in fiction or drama is a parody of human being, in that they are condemned always to act out the same events. In this sense, the present of art "can assume nothing, can take on nothing, and thus is an impersonal and anonymous instant". ("Reality and its Shadow" 138)

It should be borne in mind that Levinas's essay on art was first published in Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, albeit with an extraordinary editorial note berating the author for ignoring Sartre's writings on art theory (Hand 129). The direction in which the a-temporality of art is to

be overcome is not, however, as in Sartre's case, towards the freedom of the ego, but towards "the relation with the other without which being could not be told in its reality, that is, in its time" ("Reality and its Shadow" 143). Levinas is hinting here at what he insisted upon in *Time and the Other*, that temporality can only be understood in terms of a relation with an Other. While the instant of an art work is "an impersonal and anonymous instant" ("Reality and its Shadow" 138), even the present which does assume something ultimately becomes a trap according to Levinas: "The price paid for the existent's position lies in the very fact that it cannot detach itself from itself" (*Time and the Other* 55). As with the artwork, the self's present becomes congealed in an instant, and its freedom hardens into fate:

> Here what is called the tragic in being is grasped in its very origin. It is not simply the sum of misfortunes and deceptions which await us and occur to us in the course of our existence because it is finite. It is, on the contrary, the infinity of existence that is consumed in an instant, the fatality in which its freedom is congealed as in a winter landscape where frozen beings are captives of themselves. Time, far from constituting the tragic, shall perhaps be able to deliver us from it. (*Existence and Existents* 78-79)

Levinas's terminology in *Existence and Existents* does not merely anticipate his treatment of the aesthetic in "Reality and Shadow," which appeared two years later. On the contrary, he overtly conflates aesthetic tragedy with the self's incapacity to escape Being, associating the horror of the night with both Shakespearean and ancient tragedy (*Existence and Existents* 61). The inability of the self to leave itself is so closely analogous to the completion of art that Levinas draws on Shakespearean examples, quoting Macbeth's horror at the return of Banquo's ghost as "a decisive experience of the 'no exit' from experience" (*Existence and Existents* 62).

A number of critics seem to believe that the characters are largely successful in their attempts to choose their own meanings within the meaninglessness of the events on stage.

Schneider argues that Lear reaches an apex of stoic virtue immediately before his death, showing "his acceptance of his common humanity, his perception of its abasement and of his participation therein, his capacity to reciprocate love, and his courage against all odds" (Schneider 42). Even Cavell argues that *King Lear* is a drama "about the soul [. . .] as the provider of the given, of the conditions under which gods and earth can appear" (Cavell 81). Nothing, in either of these readings, is able to stand over and against the self. On the contrary, tragedy seems to be the genre in which the self realizes its mastery over the conditions of its existence. It is little wonder that Northrop Frye observes that tragic characters are almost always alone (Frye 207).

"It is," as Martin Esslin notes parenthetically in his introduction to the English translation of Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, "no coincidence that Kott has translated Sartre's plays into Polish" (Kott xx). His work, in fact, borrows extensively from existentialism, and can be taken as exemplary of an existentialist reading of the play, to which a Levinasian reading can be profitably compared. If tragedy is defined in humanist terms, then Levinas's tragedy of irremissible Being is better understood as "grotesque," to borrow Kott's distinction. Kott claims that "the downfall of the tragic actor is a confirmation and recognition of the absolute; whereas the downfall of the grotesque actor means mockery of the absolute and its desecration" (Kott 132). This definition can be accepted, with the reservation that the absolute which the tragic confirms is absolute free-will, that man is ultimately master of his fate, whereas the grotesque (which would correspond to Levinas's tragedy of irremissible Being) makes a mockery of such pretentions. This seems, in part, to be Susan Snyder's description of the effect of grotesque:

> Individual importance and uniqueness are the norm for a tragic hero. By diverging from these, contradicting them, the grotesque endangers the tragic sense; it hints subversively that the hero is not so different from everyone else, and that his suffering does not really

matter much. (Snyder 160-61)

Snyder's definition seems slightly different from Jan Kott's, in that for Snyder the grotesque undermines a certain humanist reading of human capability, whereas for Kott the clown maintains at least existential freedom by virtue of his superior awareness. Kott's existential commitments lead him to give death a central place in the drama, defining, though in this case not individuating, the human being. The undeniable universality of death helps Kott to describe man as "A nobody, who suffers, tries to give his suffering a meaning or nobility, who revolts or accepts his suffering, and who must die" (Kott 155).

The difficulty with Kott's description is not only that he inverts Tillyardian social order without changing the terms of the debate, as Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield have argued (Dollimore and Sinfield 208), or that he retains a universalist notion of the human being as mortal and suffering, a position that might recall G. Wilson Knight's description of the "absolute peace of death, of nothingness" in the play (Knight 204). On the contrary, Kott's reading fails on the grounds that mortality is not a certainty in this play. Nothingness can not be achieved. Characters pray for death, but often they pray in vain. Gloucester's suicide does not merely mock eschatologies, as Kott argues (Kott 147); it mocks the whole notion of anticipating, much less choosing, one's death. Suicide is not mocked simply because "Death exists in any case," and therefore its acceptance is mere surrender (Kott 151), but because death cannot be commanded. To command death is impossible, according to Levinas, and sinful, according to almost all theologies. Levinas and the theologians concur in seeing suicide as the ultimate effort at self-sufficiency, whereas in both cases, salvation can come only from without. In fact, Levinas waxes religious in describing the "true object of hope" as "the Messiah, or salvation" (*Existence and Existents* 91). While insisting on the absurdity of all action, Kott does not point the way–as Levinas, the theologians, and the play ultimately do–to salvation through the Other.

Frye's observation that tragic characters are almost always alone has more than empirical validity. As a genre, tragedy is about those who attempt to escape Being by their own efforts, rather than recognizing that escape from Being comes only through the Other. The characters in *King Lear* certainly turn the approach of death into what Heidegger might call their "ownmost" possibility, which would also be "non-relational", worked out in splendidly individual isolation. Levinas returns to the death of Macbeth at the beginning of *Otherwise than Being*, where he argues once again that there is no escape from being through death. In this instance, he characterizes Macbeth's ending as a desperate attempt to attach cosmic significance to the demise of the self: "My death is insignificant–unless I drag into my death the totality of being, as Macbeth wished, at the hour of his last combat" (Levinas *Otherwise* 3). This effort is in keeping with tragedy's status as the last chance to gain meaning through the self, in that such an apocalyptic death, were it possible, would constitute a rupture in Being itself and provide an escape from the horrifying irremissibility of the Night. Like Macbeth, the characters in *King Lear* also attempt to transform their own losses into cosmic losses. In doing so, they actually seek their own tragedy, and they succeed in ways more tragic than they had imagined.

A great deal has been written about the apocalyptic imagery of *King Lear*, but not enough attention has yet been devoted to how much of the play's apocalyptic rhetoric is spoken in the imperative. Lear's speeches are certainly, as Tillyard noted, "the greatest of all examples" of correspondences between the storms in the heavens and those within the mind of man (Tillyard, *World Picture* 93).[34] Peter Milward notes the parallels between Gloucester's description of the decline of the world in the second scene, and various eschatological passages in the Gospels (Milward 12-13). Certainly Lear sees parallels between the external storm and his internal "tempest in the mind" (3.4.12). His views are echoed by Gloucester: "O ruin'd piece of

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[34]He repeated his observation in *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Tillyard 26).

Nature! This great world / Shall so wear out to naught" (4.6.132-33). The parallel itself, however, seems far less interesting than the fact that the parallel is willed. Lear does not simply observe that the storm mirrors his own turmoil: he explicitly aggrandizes himself by describing the storm in the heavens as less than his misery (3.4.6-14). Moreover, he calls upon the world to reflect his own suffering. He asks for the storm to be worse, wanting the world itself to end when his world has become incoherent: "Blow winds and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!" (3.2.1), he rages, and a few lines later, "Rumble thy bellyfull! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!" (3.2.14). Like Macbeth (or to save argument, Macbeth as Levinas describes him), Lear wants the world itself to end when his own identity comes into question. The Gentleman describes him to Kent as

> Contending with the fretful elements;
> Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
> Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,
> That things might change or cease. (3.1.4-7)

and a few lines later adds that Lear "bids what will take all" (3.1.15). When we actually meet Lear, alone with the Fool, he is ignoring the Fool's suffering and calling for the thunder to "singe my white head" and

> Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th'world,
> Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
> That makes ingrateful man. (3.2.6-9)

Like Heidegger's tragic hero, Lear is trying to choose his own death; moreover, like Levinas's Macbeth, he tries to give his own death cosmic significance by dragging down the world in his demise.

Lear's response to the storm is not helplessness, much less humility, but rage. He

assumes a position of self-righteousness, protesting against the

servile ministers,

That will with two pernicious daughters join

Your high-engender'd battles, 'gainst a head

So old, and white as this. (3.2.21-24)

In his rage, he attempts to implicate the world's fate in his own, striving "in his little world of man to out-storm / The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain" (3.1.10-11).[35] As long as he is ranting against the injustices of the world, and giving his own situation world-embracing import, Lear does not recognize his need for Others in order to escape Being. He does not see, as Caruana says that tragedy does not see, "to what extent *existence requires justification*" (Caruana 34). One will note that the storm-scenes bring Lear to the zenith of his habitual self-righteousness. In his famous speech calling for an apocalypse, Lear accuses others of "undivulged crimes," in order to conclude with his own righteousness:

Hide thee, thou bloody hand,

Thou perjur'd, and thou simular of virtue

That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,

That under covert and convenient seeming

Has practis'd on man's life; close pent-up guilts

Rive your concealing continents, and cry

These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man

More sinn'd against than sinning. (3.2.53-61)

As long as he rages against the storm and the world, Lear does not become aware of all the suffering he might have caused, "a fear for all the violence and murder my existing might

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[35]The quarto text reads "outscorne" for "out-storm."

generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 82). It is in a sudden moment of calm, when he is not raging against the world, that Lear recognizes the Fool and prays for the wretched. Similarly, he recognizes Cordelia only after "the great rage / [. . .] is kill'd in him" (4.7.78-79). Lear's efforts to find meaning for the self within the self, reinforce his isolation from those around him, and therefore make his tragic situation ever more accute. Every effort to avoid the meaninglessness of the Night through the self only makes its embrace all the more suffocating.

While Lear seeks to make his own demise into the death of the world, he also seems to seek suffering. The suffering which constitutes his grandeur and grants his existence a certain tragic weight is largely his own choice. This is not only, as Berger has argued, an effort to ratify the "monstrous ingratitude" of his daughters (Berger 35), but to ratify his own, individual, existence. Suffering, especially physical suffering, is the moment at which we are most inescapably ourselves and most exposed to Being (*Time and the Other* 69). As has already been made clear, Lear refuses to ask for anything which he cannot earn, which would constitute an unrepayable debt. What is interesting for our present purposes is that he opposes the tragic grandeur of suffering to the indignity of begging:

> Return to her? and fifty men dismiss'd?
> No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose
> To wage against the enmity o'th'air;
> To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,
> Necessity's sharp pinch! (2.4.205-09)

An alternative to his suffering always exists, as the Fool makes clear: "Good nuncle in, and ask thy daughter's blessing" (3.2.11-12). There is, of course, an element of the heroic in Lear's resolutely independent course of action. "Solitude," according to Levinas, "is [. . .] not only a

despair and an abandonment, but also a virility, a pride and a sovereignty" (*Time and the Other* 55). In act four, Lear's solitude becomes the basis of his claim to royalty when confronted by Cordelia's patrol:

> No seconds? all myself?
>
> Why this would make a man of salt,
>
> To use his eyes for garden water-pots,
>
> Ay, and laying autumn's dust. I will die bravely,
>
> Like a smug bridegroom. What! I will be jovial:
>
> Come, come; I am a king, masters, know you that? (4.6.192-97)

Lear's discovery of his solitude and, as he thinks, mortal danger, leads first to sorrow, but then gives way to the tragic possibility of making his death meaningful by embracing it, "like a smug bridegroom" (4.6.196). Finally, his determination and power as an individual lead back to his kingship. The line of reasoning which Lear traces only leaves him more solitary, however, running away from an encounter with the Other. Lear's action is tragic in the sense that Levinas finds tragedy in Heidegger and in *Romeo and Juliet*; it is a seizing of the last chance to make one's existence meaningful through one's own powers. But by choosing this heroic type of tragedy, Lear moves ever closer to its inverse, the horror which Levinas finds in Shakespearean tragedy at the "impossibility of escaping from an anonymous and uncorruptible existence" (*Existence and Existents* 61). In choosing to be a tragic hero, dying "like a smug bridegroom," Lear also exiles himself from the Other, who alone offers an escape from Being. Both definitions of tragedy rest upon the solitude of the self, in either the heroic sense of being powerful or in the horrifying sense of being inescapable.

Gloucester makes a similar movement from suffering, to tragic resolution, and finally to the deeper tragedy of inescapable Being twice in the play. Confronted by Regan and Cornwall,

he specifically echoes Macbeth when he claims that he is "tied to th'stake, and I must stand the course" (3.7.53; *Macbeth* 5.7.1-2), before producing his own meaning out of the events, promising to "see / The winged vengeance overtake such children" (3.7.63-4). Although his situation is hopeless, he nevertheless finds hope by accepting it. Even if we do not follow Pechter's suggestion that Gloucester is here choosing the winning side in the civil war which he anticipates (Berger 436n11), he remains an agent rather than a mere victim. One cannot help but notice that Gloucester's response is heroic, in a sense that perhaps Heidegger would approve of. In the midst of terrible agonies, he looks forward to seeing the arrival of vengeance, maintains a sense of self as projection, and is therefore still an agent despite his helplessness. Gloucester's stirringly courageous response, however, is not the last word. The stoicism with which he accepts his position and seeks to maintain his agency is eclipsed altogether by the sheer misery of his first line after the blinding, "All dark and comfortless" (3.7.83). Levinas pays particular attention in *Time and the Other* to "the suffering lightly called physical." This represents, in his mind, a greater challenge than "moral pain," since "physical suffering in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence. It is the very irremissibility of being" (*Time and the Other* 70). Suffering, he argues, announces death, which cannot be grasped, and in the face of which one becomes passive. "Where suffering attains its purity," he argues, the authenticity and freedom by which Heidegger's *Dasein* anticipates death, turns into its opposite, passive sobbing (*Time and the Other* 72). Gloucester's world has become "All dark and comfortless" (3.7.83). In the physical misery of losing his eyes, he finds himself passive, unable to give his situation a meaning, or himself a heroic posture. Had he been executed, as Regan initially suggested (3.7.4), he could have gone down denouncing the daughters. He could, in other words, have been tragic, as indeed he briefly is in this scene. The death he anticipates and prepares for is, however, denied him. Instead of finding himself heroically tragic,

individuated by his authentic projection towards death as his ownmost possibility, he finds himself powerless, and unable to escape Being.

This moment of suffering does not, however, permanently dissuade Gloucester from attempts to appropriate his own death. By his next scene, he has already recovered his sense of courage and direction. Perhaps, as Bradley argued, the choice of Dover as a venue for suicide is arbitrary and even impractical,[36] but Gloucester approaches it with determination, hiring Tom as his guide. Like Lear hiring Kent in act one, Gloucester offers an immediate payment and promises future reward. Gloucester hands Edgar a purse (4.1.63), while Lear hands Kent "earnest of thy service" (1.4.92). In addition, both pledge a future reward, in the form of Gloucester's "something rich about me" (4.1.76) or Lear's vaguer promise that "I'll love thee" (1.4.85-86). Even after the blinding, Gloucester succeeds in approaching the world as a sphere of *quid pro quo* relations. He is still not accepting gratuitous charity, telling the Old Man to provide clothing for Tom "for ancient love," or do whatever he likes, and in any case to "be gone," not to trouble Gloucester with charity that he would be unable to repay (4.1.43; 4.1.47-48). One will note the similitude between Gloucester's rediscovered stoicism, and Edgar's stoic view of the world, which he both discovers and abandons in the first few lines of act four. The scene opens with Edgar congratulating himself on not being destroyed and therefore having grown stronger, despising the air since he "owes nothing to thy blasts" (4.1.9), and making a statement of hope, since he has already been "blown unto the worst" (4.1.8) and risen above it. Immediately following upon this statement of the power of the individual over events, the blind Gloucester enters, as if summoned to crush optimism. Edgar's immediately abandoned stoicism seems in turn designed to ironize Gloucester's renewed sense of his own

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[36]"Why in the world should Gloster, when expelled from his castle, wander painfully all the way to Dover simply in order to destroy himself?" (Bradley, 257).

power, if only to choose his demise. The play mercilessly contradicts stoic doctrines of mastery in the face of death.

Gloucester's "suicide" provides the best example possible of the failure of the traditional tragic theme, the "last chance" to create meaning by appropriating one's own death. In the prayer which he offers immediately before his suicide attempt, Gloucester makes the following explanation for his actions:

> O you mighty Gods!
>
> This world I do renounce, and in your sights
>
> Shake patiently my great affliction off;
>
> If I could bear it longer, and not fall
>
> To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
>
> My snuff and loathed part of nature should
>
> Burn itself out. (4.6.34-40)

Besides the obvious point that Gloucester, in shaking off his "great affliction," is taking control over his life if only to end it, one will note that Gloucester is committing suicide lest he question the gods. In a sense, his suicide in an act of faith, but of faith understood as sheer will-power. The contrast with Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* could not be stronger. In this, one of his last theological works, Luther argued against Erasmus of Rotterdam that man has no free will at all, or rather, that "man without grace can will nothing but evil" (Luther 318). Luther makes his question succinct in asking

> whether [man] has "free-will" God-ward, that God should obey man and do what man wills, or whether God has not rather a free will with respect to man, that man should will and do what God wills, and be able to do nothing but what He wills and does. (Luther 310)

Gloucester seems to favour the former possibility in making the gods take notice of his suicide, and making his virtue a function of his will. Luther trenchantly declares the latter possibility, arguing that man is powerless even to believe the gospel by his own will (Luther 310-11). This example is not offered in a spirit of historical determinism. There were many different theological treatments of the problem of free will current in Shakespeare's time, and Luther's late position would probably be most closely associated with the Calvinists who strove for largely unrelated reasons to close the theatres. The contrast, however, shows that Gloucester's version of faith as a sort of extreme form of authentic resolvedness, was not the only, and probably not even the dominant, possibility available in Shakespeare's time. The first audience of the play would certainly be able to detect the irony in Gloucester's claim to patience.

Jan Kott, in his famous treatment of this scene, claims that "Gloucester's suicide has a meaning only if the gods exist" (Kott 149). More specifically, Gloucester's suicide has a meaning only if Gloucester can, by committing suicide, compel the gods to take notice of him. Kott's formula, like Gloucester's prayer, makes the gods into witnesses to a meaning which Gloucester attempts to generate. It does not actually ask the gods for a meaning from without. While it "refers to eschatology," as Kott says, it points towards an eschatology which Gloucester still controls, in which his suicide is still chosen and still meaningful (Kott 149). Unlike the approach of an Other, the death which Gloucester attempts would be entirely of his own choosing. While eschatology, at least according to Rudolf Bultmann's reading of the historical Jesus, comes from without, and calls man to choice (Bultmann, "Jesus" 99), Gloucester's eschatology is called up by himself, through his own choice. Even for an existentialist theologian and friend of Heidegger such as Bultmann, eschatology is closely tied to the alterity of God, but for Gloucester and for Kott, eschatology seems like the ultimate effort to make meaning out of oneself. Kott claims that whereas tragedy "is a confirmation and recognition of

the absolute," grotesque "means mockery of the absolute and its desecration" into a blind or even a malicious force (Kott 132). Snyder follows him in arguing that "we are deflected from tragic meaning to the very long, flattening-out view of comedy that makes nonsense of the heroic posture and of any individual who takes himself too seriously" (Snyder 138). But the destruction of the tragic hero, and his failure to be a hero, might be less a questioning of the absolute than a declaration of its transcendence, or even a claim that transcendence is definitive of the absolute. The shift which Kott and Snyder detect, from tragedy to grotesque, might also be understood as an undermining of the idea of tragedy as giving meaning to and from the self to an idea of tragedy as a frustrating of all the self's powers. In his determination to throw himself off the cliff, Gloucester is tragic, but in his inability to commit suicide, he becomes grotesque. Rather than upholding himself as an absolute, his "circus somersault" shows him to be powerless. If there is to be an escape from Being, it will not come through the self, but from outside, from the Other.

In his famous description of *anxiété*, Jean-Paul Sartre offers the example of a man on the edge of a cliff. While he may be afraid of the height, he suffers "anguish"[37] at the thought of his own possibilities, knowing that he could always throw himself off, or at least not pay attention and slip. Anguish is a fear of one's own possibilities, and therefore distinguished from a mere fear of danger:

> But I am in anguish precisely because any conduct on my part is only *possible*, and this means that while constituting a totality of motives *for* pushing away that situation, I at the same moment apprehend these motives as not sufficiently effective. (Sartre 68)

I always know, in other words, that I could throw myself over the cliff, and my freedom in this

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[37]Hazel E. Barnes translates "*anxiété*" as "anguish," in the edition of *Being and Nothingness* which I am following here.

regard is terrifying: "it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom" (Sartre 65). In fact, one's own freedom to choose a course of action may become so terrifying that it causes one to simply jump, since, as Sartre adds parenthetically, "suicide would cause anguish to cease" (Sartre 69). In Gloucester's case, however, even a suicide attempt cannot end the possibility that he might, in the future, perform some evil act, such as quarreling with the gods. Even more than being condemned to be free, however, he is condemned simply *to be*. Levinas denounces Sartre as well as Heidegger, when he makes the following suggestion:

> Anxiety, according to Heidegger, is the experience of nothingness. Is it not, on the contrary–if by death one means nothingness–the fact that it is impossible to die? (*Time and the Other* 51)

The peace of nothingness which G. Wilson Knight finds in the play is recalcitrant to the characters' grasp. As Joseph Wittreich points out, in this play as in the Apocalypse, men seek death, but death flees from them (Wittreich 100-01; Rev. 9.6). Gloucester cannot leave Being. His attempted suicide is a caricature of choice. Like a character in an artwork (which, of course, is what he is), Gloucester finds his freedom frozen into fate. Rather than being able, in anguish, to choose to die, he chooses to die but his act becomes no more than theatrical buffoonery: "a circus somersault on an empty stage" (Kott 149). The comedy of his position turns into something tragic, or perhaps *vice-versa*. The tragedy and the comedy of Gloucester's situation both arise neither in the fact that, as Kott puts it, "death exists in any case," nor from the Sartrean anguish in which Gloucester finds himself condemned to be free; on the contrary, Gloucester's position is both comic and tragic because death does *not* exist in any case, and it cannot be freely chosen. Gloucester's situation represents a break with classical tragedy. Juliet may recognize that she, alone, has power to die, but Gloucester loses even this power. "'Twas yet some

comfort," Gloucester observes, "When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage, / And frustrate his proud will" (4.6.62-64). Levinas's ideas provide a better reading of this play than that provided by Sartreanism, Heideggerianism, classical tragic theory, or even Jan Kott. In the play, as in Levinas's philosophy, the impossibility of nothingness "deprives suicide, which is the final mastery one can have over being, of its function of mastery" (*Time and the Other* 50).

Edgar claims, twice, to be saving his father from despair (4.6.62-64; 5.3.190). In the play, despair is generally linked with suicide. As Goneril makes her final exit, Albany describes her as "desperate" (5.3.160); shortly thereafter, it is announced that she and Regan "have foredone themselves / And desperately are dead" (5.3.290-91). The report is actually wrong, since Goneril poisoned Regan, but it nevertheless shows the association between desperation and suicide. Interestingly, Goneril's suicide is also immediately anticipated by her unwillingness to submit herself to the judgement of others: "Say, if I do, the laws are mine, not thine: / Who can arraign me for't" (5.3.157-58). Her suicide, in this context, seems, like Gloucester's, a further extension of her choice of isolation, turning inwards to herself, not outwards to the Other. One will moreover note that only the most thoroughly evil character succeeds in being sufficiently independent as to succeed in killing herself.

Cordelia, on the other hand, never becomes desperate, though Edmund's orders are "To lay the blame upon her own despair, / That she fordid herself" (5.3.253-55). John Higgins's Cordila, in his additions to *A Mirror for Magistrates*, moves towards despair and finally suicide in isolation, communing only with the personified sin itself, who predictably urges suicide. In this case, despair is not understood as a sin in itself, though suicide is a branch of murder, "To kill a corps: which God did liuely make" (Higgins l. 371).[38] Nevertheless, it is worth noting that

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[38]This line was much improved for the 1587 edition, to describe the suicides as those "Which kill the corps that mighty *Ioue* did make."

suicide is undertaken when helpless and alone, and again represents a final, but frustrated, effort at empowerment. Despair appears as Cordila's "frend" when she has reached a sort of apogee of suffering and isolation, imprisoned and unheeded:

> For lacke of frendes to tell my seas of giltlesse smarte,
>
> And that mine eyes had sworne to take swete slepe no more,
>
> I was content sithe ares[39] oppreste me sore,
>
> To leaue my foode, take mourning plaintes and crie,
>
> And lay me downe, let griefe and nature trie. (Higgins ll. 262-66)

Like Gloucester's suicide, that of Higgins's Cordila is prefaced by a prayer. The gods are called upon to witness her injuries: "O *Phoebus* cleare I thee beseech and pray likewise, / Beare witnes of my plaints well knowne to Gods are true" (Higgins ll. 332-33). Moreover, they are asked to inflict a curse on her enemies: "God graunt a mortall strife betwene them both may fall, / That one the other may without remorse distroye" (Higgins ll. 337-38). Of course, as she later argues in a predictable moral, suicide is actually disempowering, "Syth first thereby their enmyes haue, that they desire" (Higgins l. 365), and she actually increases her pains by sending herself to Hell. Like Gloucester's suicide, Cordila's is a last chance at creating meaning out of herself, and to seek annihilation, but like Gloucester, Cordila is frustrated in her aims. In Shakespeare's source, the first definition of tragedy, as an affirmation of one's own possibilities, turns into a declaration of the inescapability of Being. R. W. Chambers points out that in not allowing Cordelia to commit suicide, Shakespeare makes an innovation, which, while it is anticipated by medieval versions of the story, breaks with all the sources likely to be available to him and he therefore "*does* depart from historical fact, as he had received it" (R. W. Chambers 21). The

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[39]Presumably "airs" as in Hamlet's response to Polonius's question "Will you walk out of the air, my lord?" where he treats the air as opposite the grave (*Hamlet* 3.2.206-207).

changed fate of Cordelia might have been, if not quite as surprising to the audience as Gloucester's failed suicide, a similar frustration of an expected suicide. Shakespeare seems, at least in Chambers's reading, intent on saving Cordelia from Edmund's slander:

> In our days [Chambers writes in November, 1939] the message has been smuggled out of Concentration Camps: "You will be told that I committed suicide: it will not be true." The sender of the message has wished to save his reputation from what he feels would be a slur upon it. [. . .] Shakespeare feels this about Cordelia. (R. W. Chambers 22-23)

The play seems to meditate upon the question of suicide, and therefore of the approach of death, of the heroic subject's ability to choose death. In Shakespeare's play, unlike most of its predecessors, death is not something which is chosen.

In addition to standing as a sort of synonym for suicidal depression, despair was also understood in the period theologically, as a temptation. "Extreme dread," John Calvin warns, "tends to make us shun God while he is calling us to himself by repentance" (Calvin 3.3.15). Despair is a risk of recognizing our sin, Calvin argues, but only to "the reprobate." This link between sinfulness and despair is explained, in part, by a declaration which he makes elsewhere in the *Institutes*: "if we are to seek our worthiness from ourselves, it is all over with us; only despair and fatal ruin await us" (Calvin 4.17.41). A works-based theology leads only to despair (Calvin 3.8.3). The faithful, on the other hand, will, while "divesting themselves of an absurd opinion of their own virtue," nevertheless take comfort in "mercy alone" (Calvin 2.7.8). The difference is that the reprobate seek salvation by virtue of their own (all too unworthy) selves, whereas the faithful are open to salvation through Christ. In this argument, Calvin is anticipated by Luther, who concludes his book *On the Bondage of the Will* with a note of gratitude that his salvation is not in his own hands:

> But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it

> under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me [. . .]. (Luther 314)

It is not only the founders of Protestant and reformed thought who drew a continuum between self-assertion and despair. Blaise Pascal made a similar argument in his dismissal of Montaignian egotism, arguing that it is impossible to find repose in oneself and that any such effort leads only to *ennui*. On the contrary, Pascal argues in his Jansenist way, "the infinite abyss can be filled only by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say by God."[40] To Luther as well as to Calvin, Christ has a unique salvific role. David P. Scaer summarizes some of Luther's ideas by writing that, "Without Christ and His cross the Christian is trapped in his *Anfechtungen*[41] with a God of wrath. Left in this condition he must face eternal destruction and may take his own life" (Scaer 22). Gloucester's suicidal despair may seem inevitable in a pagan setting, before "Christ and His cross" provided the possibility of salvation. Nevertheless, in spite of the pagan setting, there is the possibility of turning from oneself to an Other. In any case,

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[40]Trans. by Reinhard Kuhn. Kuhn's three-page description of the action of *King Lear* in terms of Pascalian *ennui* follows immediately on this quotation (Kuhn 155). It may be worth noting, briefly, the parallel between Levinas's theory of the self and Pascal's argument as summarized by Kuhn: to both philosophers, neither external distractions nor internal selfhood are sufficient to distract us from death. Levinas, in fact, cites Pascal throughout his writings and seems to have been heavily influenced by him.

[41]A technical term in Reformation thought, *Anfechtung* is variously translated. Alistair McGrath favours "'temptation', although this does not convey the full meaning of the word. Luther frequently uses this term to emphasize the existential aspect of Christian faith" (McGrath, "Glossary of Theological Terms," *s.v.*).

whether we see Gloucester as a pagan cut off from Christ or an Ego unwilling to open itself to the Other, he is approaching death as his "ownmost" possibility, projecting authentically from within his own powers.[42] And in both sixteenth-century theology and Levinasian philosophy, the Self is unable to assure itself against the absurdity of existence. To the theologians, suicide represents a sin, the sin of despair, whereas to Levinas it is futile, since even death cannot give the self meaning or cause a breach within Being.

The theological understanding of despair was not merely available to Shakespeare, but actually deployed by him in a number of his plays. In *King John*, Cardinal Pandulph, arrogating to his church power over salvation, argues that the force of his curses will be such that King Philip will "die in despair under their black weight" (*King John* 3.1.297). Similarly, Wolsey tempts Henry to despair on account of his marriage (*Henry 8* 2.2.26-28). Horatio, obviously fearing suicide, worries that the ghost might put "toys of desperation" into Hamlet's mind (*Hamlet* 1.4.75). In wooing Anne, Richard explains the seriousness of suicide as despair and therefore self-accusation (*Richard 3* 1.2.85). Later in the same play, "Despair and die" is a curse that is repeated, almost liturgically, over the sleeping body of Richard before the battle of Bosworth Field (*Richard 3* 5.3.120 ff.), and Macduff urges Macbeth to "Despair thy charm" (*Macbeth* 5.8.13). In the first instance at least, despair should be understood as a curse in addition to death, by which the dead person is condemned. Occasionally, Shakespeare plays on the theological meaning, as when Romeo, referring to kissing as praying, urges Juliet not to leave him in despair (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.5.104), or when Prospero, calling for applause at the end of

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[42]Incidentally, Waldemar Molinski's definition of despair in Karl Rahner's *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise* Sacramentum Mundi, conflates the two possibilities. Despair is "the voluntary rejection of a consciously recognized dependence of man upon his fellowmen and upon God" (Molinski *s.v.*).

his play, claims that "my ending is despair / Unless I be reliev'd by prayer" (*The Tempest* Epilogue, 15-16). In *The Taming of the Shrew*, despair is used in its specific opposition to presumption when Bianca urges Lucentio to "presume not [. . .] despair not" (*Taming* 3.1.44-45). Sonnet 144 is structured in its entirety by an opposition between two lovers/spirits, who tempt towards "comfort and despair."

Derek Peat claims that the spectators might "recognise in Edgar and Gloucester an emblem of the Devil tempting Christ to leap down from the pinnacle of the Temple" (Peat 48), reinforcing his claim with the note that Edgar describes his earlier self to Gloucester as "some fiend" (4.6.72) tempting to suicide. If the image does recall Christ's temptation in the wilderness in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, then it neatly conflates presumption, the sin to which Satan tempted Christ, and despair, the sin to which Gloucester actually does succumb. Douglas Cole, in an essay on Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, quotes the Homilies, Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne and others on the proximity of the two sins (Cole 218). By attempting suicide, Gloucester attempts to impose himself on the gods, while feeling that his position is beyond their aid. It is as proud, in assuming that he can, by his actions, force the gods to take notice of him, as it is desperate, in abandoning any hope of salvation in this world or the next. We must not forget that, according to the scholastics, all sin follows from pride, placing oneself above God. In neither despair nor presumption is one's reliance on the Other–God or the other man–sufficiently recognized.

There is, however, another possible approach to death in the play. Oswald's final and rather ignoble words–"O! untimely death. Death!" (4.6.247-48)–dramatize the obvious fact that death can come to the characters, rather than being chosen by them. Praying for death, as Gloucester does after his suicide attempt, at least implies a relationship with something outside himself:

> You ever-gentle Gods, take my breath from me:
>
> Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
>
> To die before you please! (4.6.214-16)

By asking for the gods to kill him, Gloucester is still trying to avoid his future possibilities, but not through his own will. He recognizes, in other words, limits to his own projection. Kent withdraws from the stage at the end of the play, but he does so in response to a summons: "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; / My master calls me, I must not say no" (5.3.320-21). Lear's words on being wakened by Cordelia should, I think, be played with a level of horror:

> You do me wrong to take me out o'th' grave;
>
> Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
>
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
>
> Do scald like molten lead. (4.7.45-48)

His return to the world of the living represents the terrifying impossibility of dying. Within a few lines, however, his view of death has shifted from despair of his own ability to die to recognition of another, and of death as coming from without: "I pray weep not. / If you have poison for me, I will drink it" (4.7.71-72). Even Edmund, whose career has been a series of bold gambles and seized opportunities, lets go of his accomplishments in the face of death:

> What you have charg'd me with, that have I done,
>
> And more, much more; the time will bring it out:
>
> 'Tis past, and so am I. (5.3.161-63)

Having abandoned his accomplishments and his future, he is able to recognize others, to be moved by Edgar's speech (5.3.198-99), acknowledge the love which Goneril and Regan felt towards him (5.3.238), and, most startlingly of all, send a reprieve for Lear and Cordelia, reinforcing it by urging haste on the messenger (5.3.242-46). Death is not always seized, as by a

tragic hero. In some cases, perhaps even normally, it is simply accepted, as external to the self. This is the beginning, at least in Edmund's case, of recognizing the Other, also external to the self.

In fact, there is a general pattern in the play, by which characters recognize others immediately after facing the loss of all their own powers. Gloucester recognizes his sin towards Edgar immediately after being blinded. While, of course, there are practical reasons for this, it also does not seem coincidental that his first prayer for another person (and his second prayer at all) follows immediately on the recognition of his own sin in sending Edgar into exile (3.7.90).[43] Similarly, he acknowledges Lear's suffering after having made his suicide attempt (4.6.106-07). Lear recognizes the Fool in the storm, after he has lost everything and failed, like Canute, to control the elements (3.2.68-69). The gratuitous charity which he accepts from Kent indicates his own failure to work anything through his own powers. Similarly, he recognizes Cordelia after being rudely wakened from a sleep which he took to be death (4.7.45). This pattern is in keeping with Levinas's declaration that

> only a being whose solitude has reached a crispation[44] through suffering, and in relation with death, takes its place on a ground where the relationship with the other becomes

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[43]The first prayer would be his cry of "O you Gods" on having his first eye gouged (Lear 3.7.68).

[44]The word "crispation" seems to derive from a French medical term, meaning "*Contraction brève, involontaire ou à peine volontaire du certain muscles (signe de nervosité, d'émotion*" (Brief contraction, voluntary or partially voluntary, of certain muscles [sign of nervousness, of emotion]; *Le Grand Robert*). It seems to be used by Levinas to indicate a contraction into selfhood, as the result of pain. Shortly earlier in the same work, Levinas describes how pain makes selfhood inescapable (*Time and the Other* 69).

possible. (*Time and the Other* 76)

Only someone whose efforts at developing meaning out of the self have actually failed is in a position to accept redemption as external. To return to the theological example, Luther first failed to achieve salvation through works, before coming to believe that he could receive grace by faith alone. In *King Lear*, characters actually seek out or call down tragedy, hoping thereby to confirm their authentic individuality in the face of death. Such an effort, however, merely confirms the self's tie to Being, and leads to the second definition of tragedy, the irremissibility of Being. Nevertheless, it is within the context of this second tragedy that the Other can be recognized and salvation can be found. In Lutheran terms, attempts to work one's own salvation by an ever-more scrupulous adherence to the law only leads to a greater awareness of one's own sinfulness, within which it may be possible to turn from a salvation through works to one which is truly gratuitous. Formally, at least, the two narratives of salvation are very similar, and in both cases, the crucial moment is a turn from one's own capacities to the Other.

This is not to say that the pattern which I have sketched is teleological, or "eschatological", as Kott might prefer. This tragedy, as Frye correctly noted, does not yield to a divine comedy (Frye 215-16). As noted above, Gloucester reaches the depths of suffering twice, first when he is blinded, and again when he fails in his suicide attempt. Similarly, Lear recognizes the Fool, but turns again to metaphysical speculations, rages against his daughters, and gives sermons on the injustice of the world, before recognizing Cordelia. The final scene seems particularly ambiguous, with the two definitions of tragedy overlapping. Lear enters, as Milward has noted, echoing the apocalypticism of the Old Testament Prophets: "Howl, howl, howl!" (5.3.256; Milward 24-25; Jeremiah 25.34). He immediately seizes a last chance to show that Cordelia is still alive, or at least that he can regard her as still alive, in asking for a mirror. The other characters on the stage recognize this as a rather ambiguous apocalypse–"Is this the

promised end?" asks Kent–while Albany, like one of the earlier incarnations of Lear, calls for a catastrophe: "Fall and cease" (5.3.263). These words can be taken in more than one way, as verbs, spoken in the imperative, in which case Albany is asking for the world to reflect the suffering around him and to give tragic weight to Lear's (or his own) suffering or, alternatively, as substantives, answering in the affirmative Edgar's "Or image of that horror?" (5.3.263). Johnson is right to call these lines "very obscure" (Johnson 220-21). Kent then tries to impose himself on the scene of misery, asking Lear to recognize him. Lear's concentration flickers, and he accuses those who have interrupted his thoughts of causing Cordelia's death, as if his concentrated will was sufficient to keep her alive, or at least to imagine her alive. He returns to her within three lines, however, speaking to her familiarly, then drifting off into referring to her in the third person, sliding from acknowledgement to knowing. His description of killing her executioner (5.7.273), leads him to a self-centred description of his former powers, when he "with my good biting falchion / [. . .] made them skip" (5.7.275-76). Lear may have killed to defend Cordelia, placing her above himself and certainly above "the slave that was a-hanging thee," but his recollection of the action seems specifically self-aggrandizing. Immediately after these lines, however, Lear returns to his own powerlessness, before recognizing Kent. His engagement with those around him wavers yet again, and Albany declares that "vain it is / That we present us to him" (5.7.292-93), before laying down a new political order, and promising to divide punishments and rewards. This speech is in turn interrupted by Lear, crying out against the death of Cordelia, seeming to recognize at last that Cordelia is dead regardless of what he does. Lear dies, in the folio and most conflated texts, concentrating all his energies on the Other, looking to Cordelia or at least, outwards: "Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!" (5.3.310). According to the Folio stage direction, Lear dies at this point. But the quarto text has no stage direction for his death, and assigns him a further line, "Break, I prithee, break," which is

given to Kent in the folio. Does Lear die concentrating entirely upon the Other? Or does he seek his death in calling on his own heart to break? If we follow Steven Urkowitz in believing that the folio text represents authorial revisions, it would seem that Shakespeare meditated on this very question. In any case, the limits of the self's power and the possibility of recognizing an Other are ongoing questions in the play, though not themes which are resolved once and for all.

Once again, one finds paralllels between Levinas's thought and that of early modern theologians. According to Luther, *Anfechtungen* always return. The play's failure to complete the narrative of salvation in comedy may, as Frye noted, show "its characters moving according to the conditions of a law, whether Jewish or natural, from which the audience has been, at least theoretically, redeemed" (Frye 221). On the other hand, this may simply indicate that the move towards salvation is an ongoing process, that, as McGrath writes,

> *Anfechtung*, it must be appreciated, is not some form of spiritual growing pains, which will disappear when a mystical puberty is attained, but a perennial and authentic feature of the Christian life. (McGrath 171)

Furthermore, according to Luther, *Anfechtung* involves doubt about God's existence, about whether he is hidden in, or behind, his revelation, or simply doesn't exist at all (McGrath 171-72). It involves, in other words, questions regarding the *Deus Absconditus*, which I will address in chapter six. In any case, the Other is not recognized once and forever. One continues, inevitably, to slide back into what Levinas, following Husserl, termed an "egological" view of the world and which Luther might recognize as a doctrine of justification through works. The characters in the play, even after crises where they recognize limits on their own powers, continue to try escaping from Being through the self. They continue, in other words, to seek suffering and tragedy in order to give themselves individual dignity. Their efforts lead, again and again, to tragedy in the darker sense of inescapable Being. The Lear world is one in which, all

too often, characters find themselves unable to die.

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PART 3: FROM IDOLATRY TO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter six — "Gods that we adore": The Divine and Narcissism

No one would deny that the divine figures prominently in the world of *King Lear*. Bradley notes that references to religion are "more frequent than is usual in Shakespeare's tragedies" (Bradley 271), and one can hardly disagree that references to gods, by name or generically, recur frequently in the play. Nevertheless, a large number of critics find that these references to the gods only render their absence all the more conspicuous. Bradley himself asks whether Shakespeare's mind is truly expressed "in the bitter contrast between [the characters'] faith and the events we witness" (Bradley 274), though he, in turn, cites Swinburne, driving the history of this reading back into the nineteenth century. Knight turns doubt regarding the power of the gods into "one of the primary motives of the play" and argues that "the gods here seem more natural than supernatural" (Knight 187). In a rigorously historically grounded reading, William R. Elton demolished what he called the "Christian optimist" reading of the play, showing that each of the characters' beliefs derives from Elizabethan notions about the beliefs of pagans. Kott, writing from a completely different Polish existentialist perspective, observes that "the gods do not intervene. They are silent. Gradually the tone becomes more and more ironical" (Kott 158). Snyder, in part following Kott, agrees that "prayers go unanswered so regularly that asking for a divinely initiated action just about guarantees it will not happen" (Snyder 174). Greenblatt observes that while Lear may try to make the storm "*mean* something [. . .] the thunder refuses to speak" ("Exorcists" 119). A large number of critics, especially recent ones, seem to view the play as atheistic.

Many of these readings, however, leave open the possibility that the failure of the various theologies floated in the play might indicate not so much an absolute atheism, as the inability of characters to command gods. In Greenblatt's reading, Lear is trying to interpret the thunder, to make it "*mean*", as Greenblatt emphasizes, something for him, perhaps serving as "a symbol of his daughters' ingratitude, a punishment for evil, a sign from the gods of the impending universal judgment" ("Exorcists" 119). As Knight suggests, the problem is that "the gods here seem more natural than supernatural" (Knight 187). In fact, a number of characters treat the gods as figures for their own political and social order. Lear calls for an apocalyptic deluge to continue "Till you have drench'd our steeples" (3.2.3), turning the churches into a synecdoche for the civilization that would be swept away in a deluge. The Fool replies by also reducing the sacred to the political, referring to flattery as "court holy-water" (3.2.10). According to Keefer, Lear's efforts to find life in the "dead as earth" Cordelia are "attempts to reconstitute the broken image of a redeeming sense of order" (Keefer 162). Given the examples above, Lear seems to understand religion as a part of such an order. If the gods are "natural", as Knight suggests–projections of the human mind, abstractions of natural forces, or objects of human reason–the silence of the gods would speak more about human society and the beliefs it projects than it does about the existence or non-existence of gods. The failure of a quasi-political, cosmic order to come about would therefore only constitute a questioning of what these gods represent: "Man's morality, his idealism, his justice–all are false and rotten to the core" (Knight 192). The play's political order–Tillyard's "Elizabethan World Picture"–would be reinforced were Cordelia's resurrection and the forces of good given a final victory.

The failure of any god to descend from a theatrical machine does not, I think, only call into question a particular political order, but undermines all political uses of the divine, along with all other orders projected unto the heavens by man. Greenblatt argues that the absence of

divine intervention leaves us with only the human: "Nothing answers to human questions but other human voices; nothing breeds about the heart but human desires; nothing inspires awe or terror but human suffering and human depravity" (Greenblatt "Anxiety" 115). I would like to suggest, on the contrary, that the destruction of certain notions of the Divine does not leave us only with the human. Instead, the action of the play strips away only those gods that are mere human constructs. As I will show in reference to both Descartes's ontological proof and Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, the early modern view of the Divine is not limited to a political function, or any sort of human construct at all. A failure to understand the Infinite (to borrow Descartes's term), might merely indicate its excessiveness to our own constructs of it. The play, since it is set in the pagan world, cannot portray a Christian revelation without falling into anachronism, but it can stage the moment in which idols are abandoned. It is therefore a sort of negative declaration of a transcendence beyond such images of the Divine. While the idolatrous images of the Divine offer yet another false exit from the suffocating presence of one's own being, their abandonment offers the possibility of access to the Other.

In his old but still important work, *"King Lear" and the Gods*, Elton begins his demolition of the "Christian optimist" reading of the play with a chapter on the history of ideas, providing many examples (most of them negative) of breaks with Providentialism, and concluding with a very few pages on the *Deus absconditus* of Luther, Calvin, Montaigne, and (most briefly of all) Pascal (Elton 29-33). What he seems to fail to recognize, is that these criticisms of received religious opinion were themselves religious declarations. Quite apart from the fact that all of these thinkers range from popular to seminal theologians, the idea of a *Deus absconditus* is itself a theological concept, and offers the possibility of a reading of the play, in terms of theology, which does not merely collapse back into the Christian optimists' desperate efforts at discovering a vaguely happy ending. Elton does not pursue this possibility of a

different Christian reading and neither has practically anyone else.[45]

The idea of a radically alterior God was clearly available in Shakespeare's time. In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, René Descartes makes alterity into the lynch-pin of his ontological proof for God's existence. Most of the ideas which the *cogito* is able to grasp, in increasing certainty, are in the *cogito* itself, and may even find their origin in it. If one of these ideas could not have been created by the *cogito*, however, then this is proof of the existence of an Other:

> if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is of such a nature as clearly to make me recognise that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea. (Descartes 64)

Descartes, of course, finds exactly such an Other in God. This is not to say that God is entirely known; on the contrary, "it is of the nature of the infinite that my nature, which is finite and limited, should not comprehend it" (Descartes 67). Since the words "should not comprehend" serve here as a transliteration of Descartes's Latin *non comprehendatur* (*Méditations Métaphysiques* 120), "comprehend" should probably be understood in its earliest latinate meaning, as "To seize, grasp, lay hold of, catch" as well as "To lay hold of with the mind or senses," and the further meaning of "to contain" (*OED*, *v.* I, II, and III). Since the finite cannot contain, much less create, the infinite, it follows that the idea of the infinite cannot arise from the *cogito* but "must necessarily have been placed in me by a being which is really more perfect" (Descartes 68). Later in the same meditation, Descartes argues that the idea of God could stand as a sort of "mark of the workman imprinted on his work" (Descartes 71), impressed from

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[45]One exception to which I would like to draw attention is René Fortin. While I am not drawing heavily upon his reading, the discovery of his article was reassuring (Fortin *passim*).

without. One need not agree with this ontological proof to recognize the understanding of God which supports it: the proof fails completely if even the idea, much less the reality, of God is not alterior, standing over and against the thinker. To at least one early modern thinker, God is not exhausted in His image, but indicates something outside the thinker himself, a surplus which is not exhausted by knowing.

Levinas takes up Descartes's argument and deploys it as a model for one of his own arguments regarding the alterity of the Other, beyond phenomenological intentionality, in the most important statement of his philosophy, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. The separation of the "I" from God, he argues, is fundamental: "The separation of the I is thus affirmed to be non-contingent, non-provisional. The distance between me and God, radical and necessary, is produced in being itself" (*Totality and Infinity* 48). "We could conceivably have accounted for all the ideas" other than that of the infinite. The idea of the infinite does not represent its objectification. "To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object" (*Totality and Infinity* 49). Levinas uses this argument of Descartes to refute Plato's claim that any relationship with the absolute would mean that the absolute is relative, not absolute. Moreover, Levinas identifies the Infinite not only with the transcendence of God, but also with the infinite difference of the other person. "The infinite is the absolutely other," he writes, and proceeds to identify it with "the Stranger." To "acknowledge" the Other, as Cavell might say, or as Levinas says "to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I," is "to have the idea of infinity." Later, he draws together the two notions of the Infinite God and the infinitely alterior Other when he describes the face of the Other as an "epiphany." He strongly opposes *maieutics*, Plato's model of learning as recollection, with a model of teaching as conversation, which "brings me more than I contain" (*Totality and Infinity* 49-51). Descartes's proof furnishes Levinas with the example of a thinker thinking more than himself: "I think of

Descartes," he claimed in an interview for Radio France-Culture in 1981, "who said that the *cogito* can give itself the sun and sky; the only thing it cannot give itself is the idea of the Infinite" ("Ethics and Infinity" 60). The Infinite is an example of something the idea of which "has been *put* into us," rather than being grasped and appropriated ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 107). It therefore precedes ("is behind") intentionality ("God and Philosophy" 175). Levinas's philosophy of "the Other" builds upon Descartes's philosophy. At least the germ of the theory was therefore available to the early modern world, which understood God not only as an object of belief, but also as radically separate from, and independent of, the believer.

The truly alterior, the Other, is not something which I relate to by knowing it. Such knowledge would be only a reduction of the Other to the Same. Beyond what I create or imagine or phenomenologically intend, there is still the Other who can never be reduced to an object, not even to an object of thought. The relationship with the Other, according to Levinas, is one of "generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands" (*Totality and Infinity* 50). Such generosity can take place only within "economic existence" (*Totality and Infinity* 52), but it should not be understood from this phrase that Levinas imagines the site of ethics as that of anonymous, economic forces, as in Marxism. On the contrary, in the same paragraph where he describes the relationship with the Other as within economic existence, he condemns the schools of historiography which reduce persons to playthings of historical forces: "If [history] claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 52). While Levinas is probably referring to Hegelianism, his argument seems equally applicable against its inverse, Marxism. While the self may not be able to claim a transhistorical position, as New Historicists argue against the pretensions of humanism, it may nevertheless encounter in the Other "a point that is absolute with regard to history" (*Totality and Infinity* 52). To Levinas, Descartes's description of

the Infinite provides a model for the alterity of the Other, which resists the totalizing claims of any sort of historical *geist*, or, by an elementary extension, dialectical materialism. Alterity, the relationship with the infinite, is resistant to an historicist reduction.

A further problem remains, however, with Levinas's reading of Descartes's philosophy of the Infinite. The relationship with the Infinite, in Descartes at least, is clearly a relationship with God, and Levinas himself compares it with Platonic accounts of "Possession by the god, enthusiasm" (*Totality and Infinity* 50). On the other hand, Levinas claims that the account of transcendence which he is sketching is different from that provided by religion:

> Philosophical transcendence [. . .] differs from the transcendence of religions [. . .] from the transcendence that is already (or still) participation, submergence in the being toward which it goes. (*Totality and Infinity* 48)

The distinction, I think, follows from the fact that Levinas has two separate senses of the divine in mind. Later in *Totality and Infinity* he further develops the distinction between an alterior God and gods of mysticism and participation. "The element which I inhabit," writes Levinas, "is at the frontier of a night" (*Totality and Infinity* 142). As described in the introduction, Levinas uses the image of night to describe the anonymity of Being in *Existence and Existents*: "When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence" (*Existence and Existents* 58). It is this night which is the proper abode of the pagan divinities: "The nocturnal prolongation of the element is the reign of mythical gods" (*Totality and Infinity* 142). The anonymity of Being remains a threat, just outside the world which the self inhabits and has domesticated. The elemental world is marked by "Faceless gods, impersonal gods to whom one does not speak" (*Totality and Infinity* 142).

The very distance of these faceless gods, though, represents *hypostasis*, the rise of an

existent in anonymous existence. If the existent had not taken a place over and against anonymous existence, it would be unable to recognize these faceless gods as distant. Caruana describes the relationship of these gods to anonymous existence in anthropological terms when he writes that

> Fascinated–that is captivated and horrified at the same time–by the elements, humans deify them, projecting onto them the presence of mysterious gods that require appeasing. This way of relating to the impersonal elements represents, as Levinas notes, the very structure of the mythical outlook. ("Beyond Tragedy" 25)

One might think of any number of examples from the play, though Lear's oath in banishing Cordelia, "by the sacred radiance of the Sun, / The mysteries of Hecate, and the night" (1.1.108-09) is a particularly striking example of deification as a relation to the otherwise impersonal elements. The gods to whom Gloucester prays before his suicide attempt, with their "great opposeless wills" (4.6.38), also seem rather faceless. In a fascinating sentence, Levinas argues that the pagan gods are necessary to allow for the separation of the individual self, but must be abandoned before any true communication with an Other can take place:

> The separated being [*i.e.*, the self, the *hypostasis*, the I] must run the risk of the paganism which evinces its separation and in which this separation is accomplished, until the moment that the death of these gods will lead it back to atheism and to the true transcendence. (*Totality and Infinity* 142)

To unpack some of the complexity of this sentence, it is necessary to recognize that the divine, in Levinas, can represent one of two things: Infinity, the possibility of true transcendence to which he alludes in the quotation above, or the paganism which achieves separation, but little else. The separation of the pagan gods from man allows the *hypostasis*, but the death of such gods, the atheism which follows them, allows a relation to an Other, god or man, in the way of "true

transcendence." Shakespeare's *King Lear*, I would argue, is a dramatization of "the moment that the death of these [pagan] gods" leads "back to atheism and to the true transcendence." The characters lose the gods which are silent, in order to enter into conversation with one another and to recognize the possibility of the divine as radically alterior.

Idols, like the pagan gods to the mythical outlook, are not transcendent, though they tempt us with a substitute for transcendence. As Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, it is the atheism which follows the death of such gods that allows for true transcendence, or as he writes in "Reality and Its Shadow," "The proscription of images is truly the supreme command of monotheism" ("Reality and its Shadow" 141). Levinas's occasional references to idolatry are taken up by Jean-Luc Marion, a Catholic theologian and postmodern philosopher, who develops them at length in his book *God without Being*. He opens this work by opposing the idol and the icon in a relationship wherein they need one another: "That the idol can be approached only in the antagonism that infallibly unites it with the icon is certainly unnecessary to argue" (Marion 7). Their opposition, as he makes clear, is not simply the sort of logical opposition by which X is not Y, but a distinction between "two modes of apprehension" that is to be explored by a "comparative phenomenology" (Marion 9). In outlining the distinction, Marion notes that the same object can be both idol and icon for different men, or even for the same man at different times. While his examples are mostly drawn from Old Testament history or patristics, his point would certainly also apply to the sixteenth century, in which the altars were stripped of images considered idolatrous, but which had been, for another generation, or even for the same generation and other members of the same community, objects of true piety. The distinction therefore is not between two sets of beings but, as Marion puts it, the distinction is "a conflict between two phenomenologies" (Marion 7). Specifically, these are phenomenologies of the Divine. Both the idol and the icon are images of the Divine which refer to the Divine, or to the

artist's experience of it (Marion 9).

The idol is a product of the gaze. "The idol never deserves to be denounced as illusory," writes Marion, "since by definition, it is seen" (Marion 9). One might even say that it is the proper product of the gaze, in that the gaze finds a satisfaction in the idol: "It dazzles with visibility only inasmuch as the gaze looks on it with consideration" (Marion 10). Despite the fact that it is seen, however, the idol renders itself invisible. "Since the idol fills the gaze, it saturates it with visibility, hence dazzles it" (Marion 12). By so fixing the gaze and marking its limit, the idol also obscures what remains invisible to the gaze or, as Marion says in an untranslatable pun, *invisable* (literally, un-aimable). The idol is the gaze's landing point, beyond which the gaze becomes, as it were, constitutively unable to pierce. Each idol represents the scope of the gaze which envisions it (Marion 14). Having coalesced, as it were, into a plastic form the furthest scope of the gaze, the idol's reflectiveness ensures that the gaze does not look beyond it. As in Levinas, the idol obfuscates that which is radically alterior, in favour of that which is an object of the gaze. The gaze possesses its idol, writes Marion, as "its solitary master" (Marion 24).

Although the term "idol" obviously implies the plastic arts, Marion extends it to describe concepts as well. A conceptual idol also freezes the gaze and provides it with something that it knows, in the sense that Levinas gives to knowledge, especially ocular knowledge, as grasping (see chapter two). In the case of the philosophical concept of God, "such a grasp is measured not so much by the amplitude of the divine as by the scope of a *capacitas*." In this sense, many ideas of God are idolatrous, because they fix the Infinite into a finite concept as perhaps Levinas, following Descartes, would say. "The measure of the concept," writes Marion, "comes not from God but from the aim of the gaze." He approvingly quotes, with emphasis, Feuerbach's declaration that "it is *man* who is the *original model* of his idol." A god so constructed, and limited, by the scope of the believer is characteristic, Marion declares, of both theism and "so-

called 'atheism'." He offers not only Kant's god of morality as an example of a concept that "limits the horizon of the grasp of God," but also Nietzsche's death of God as limited by the same horizon, quoting Nietzsche's admission that "At bottom it is only the moral God that has been overcome" (Marion 16).

Does the casting down of idols, as Nietzsche seems to have felt, represent the death of God? Or is such iconoclasm the first doctrine of monotheism, as Levinas declares? The "so-called 'atheism'" is, according to Marion, only possible as a destruction of idols, but the destruction of idols need not lead to dismissing the possibility of religion as conversation with an infinite Other. The destruction of idols, moreover, is a theological act. If Marion is correct, then not to theologize is still to theologize. As I have shown in the introduction, twentieth-century criticism of *King Lear* has tended to fall into two broad camps, either subscribing to a Providentialist reading, in which the world of the play is seen to be ruled by just gods, or to an atheistic reading (for want of a better word), in which the horrifying events of the play erode confidence in Providence. Neither of these positions, however, really addresses the central problem of a Divine which is radically external.

In the first few pages of his celebrated essay, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion," Greenblatt describes as subversive to the early modern period Niccolò Machiavelli's "atheistic" reading of religion as the foundation of social order. In Machiavelli's reading (or rather Greenblatt's reading of the early modern world's reading of Machiavelli's reading) of religion, the significance of religion is mainly political: "the *Discourses* treat religion as if its primary function were not salvation but the achievement of civic discipline and hence as if its primary justification were not truth but expediency" ("Invisible Bullets" 20). Machiavelli had held, it was alleged, that the miracles of Moses were merely clever tricks, and that therefore the whole of Christian religion had a purely political *raison d'être*. Although admitting that

Machiavelli never actually expressed such opinions, and that they were derived from "early pagan polemics against Christianity," Greenblatt nevertheless sees the anxiety surrounding them as part of a wider anxiety regarding the entire "social function of religious belief" ("Invisible Bullets" 20). In fact, he claims that the more modest idea, which Machiavelli actually does express, that religion can be deployed as a form of political control aroused fears of atheism: "From here it was only a short step, in the minds of Renaissance authorities, to the monstrous opinions attributed to the likes of Marlowe and Harriot" ("Invisible Bullets" 20-21). Later, he argues that accusations of atheism directed towards Thomas Harriot were responses to his investigations into the natural and physical sciences and the aspersions which he cast on native American religions ("Invisible Bullets" 25). The mere possibility of a "Machiavellian anthropology" would, Greenblatt suggests, undermine religion, even were it only applied to native American religion rather than Christianity ("Invisible Bullets" 22). The destruction of a Providentialist claim by the New World settlers is extended to making "all meanings [. . .] provisional" ("Invisible Bullets" 26), and Greenblatt spends the greater part of his energies in the opening section of his essay trying to explain how such a corrosive possibility could be contained.

My question is different from Greenblatt's: rather than asking how such "monstrous opinions" could be contained, I would ask whether an exposure of the political uses of religion would destroy religion as such. The accusation made against Christopher Marlowe, which Greenblatt quotes to open his essay, that "Moses was but a juggler" ("Invisible Bullets" 18) is of a different order altogether from claims that religion might be manipulated in the services of political power. The strength of the accusation against Marlowe rests on the word "but". Marlowe's crime, in other words, would be his claim that "juggling" exhaustively describes the miraculous. Moreover, even if one were to cast off the miraculous, as many twentieth-century

theologians have done, this does not call into question the existence of God, but merely redefines his attributes. Given that the bishops in *Henry V* were able frankly to admit that "miracles have ceased" (1.1.67), it seems that thaumaturgy constituted considerably less than the keystone of Elizabethan orthodoxy. As Greenblatt admits, there is no reason to believe that Montaigne (whom we shall have occasion to revisit), Machiavelli, Harriot or even Marlowe were not actually orthodox in their opinions, with atheism merely ascribed to them as a "smear" ("Invisible Bullets" 21). Claims that particular religions are deployed for political purposes do not, in themselves, amount to a universal claim that all religions everywhere are frauds, which would indeed have to be "contained". A somewhat easier explanation for the phenomenon which Greenblatt observes, by which subversive ideas about religion are authorized by the power structures themselves, would be to say that to the early moderns, aspersions toward other religions did not, as Greenblatt seems to think, extend to corrosive doubt about the nature of Christianity; moreover, the reason that such doubts did not, as if inevitably, extend to Christianity, is that relations of power and of knowing do not exhaust the definition of religion in the sixteenth-century mind. It is only to our own, enlightened age that religion seems capable of exhaustive definition, of not following from a radical, and epistemologically unstable alterior, but is entirely the creation of man or of power. Greenblatt seems rather un-historicist when he assumes that atheism constitutes the default result of doubt about particular beliefs. It is because God is not known, because he is the Infinite, that he must exist, according to Descartes.

Greenblatt is presumably unconscious of the proximity of his own diction to Levinas's when he writes that "Renaissance political theology" is "totalising" ("Invisible Bullets" 28). Ironically, his own treatment of theology as politics itself makes a totalizing claim for the political. Within his argument, Greenblatt uses the term "other" only in its negative sense, as something monstrous. It is in this sense that Greenblatt ascribes to the late sixteenth century the

notion that "atheism is one of the characteristic marks of otherness" ("Invisible Bullets" 19). The other is not encountered, if Greenblatt's reading of the sixteenth century is to be believed, as a call to responsibility, but simply to anathematization. More importantly, within his own work, Greenblatt does not recognize the possibility of a genuine Other. He offers a perverse definition of the subversive as what is closest to our own beliefs:

> "subversive" is for us a term used to designate those elements in Renaissance culture that contemporary authorities tried to contain or, when containment seemed impossible, to destroy and that now conform to our own sense of truth and reality. ("Invisible Bullets" 28-29)

Greenblatt does not deny that the plays express nothing that would be truly subversive to us. On the contrary, notions which to do not conform to our own ideas are precisely what we recognize as "the principle of order and authority in Renaissance texts" ("Invisible Bullets" 29). This observation is not offered by Greenblatt in the interests of drawing us towards a more truly subversive recognition of what falls outside our categories. In listing those things which "we would, if we took them seriously, find subversive for ourselves," Greenblatt offers only psychological or political examples: "religious and political absolutism, aristocracy of birth, demonology, humoral psychology, and the like" ("Invisible Bullets" 29). Nothing really external to the categories with which we approach the world in our habitual, even banal, way is presented. In this sense, Greenblatt does not break with the tradition of knowing in western philosophy, of totality rather than infinity, nor does he make any attempt to do so. What is really subversive to his approach to the sixteenth century is that early modern idea which he does not even deign to place within his list: alterity. The reason that alterity cannot be absorbed into these examples of subversively conservative notions is that it tends to corrode the idea of an economy as such, which Greenblatt inherits from poststructuralism. A pure gift from without, which is how

Levinas understands the approach of the Other, would not conform to networks of social exchanges. Greenblatt defines the "power" which he extends in a Foucauldian manner to cover even its own subversion as

> in effect an allocation method–a way of distributing resources to some and denying them to others, critical resources [. . .] that prolong life or, in their absence, extinguish it. ("Invisible Bullets" 27)

A true gift, like Grace in Luther or love in *King Lear*, falls outside the purview of such an economy of distribution. The gift therefore subverts totalizing systems as such.

In Greenblatt, religion is almost always understood in terms of social order; the sacred reinforces the social elite. His treatment of *King Lear* in "Shakespeare and the Exorcists" is no exception. He quotes Edward Shils, a sociologist, to the effect that elites "attribute to themselves an essential affinity with the sacred elements of their society." Greenblatt proceeds to identify these sacred elements as "explicitly religious" in the context of early modern England ("Exorcists" 104). The denunciation of exorcism in Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* becomes, under this reading, an attempt by a new elite to remove from centrality a mechanism used by a previous elite, in which voice had been given to "the rage, anxiety, and sexual frustration that built up particularly easily in the authoritarian, patriarchal, impoverished, and plague-ridden world of early modern England," after which cathartic experience the community would be able to return to "psychic health" ("Exorcists" 107). The denunciation of this ceremony is a process by which it is "emptied out" ("Exorcists" 110). A similar process of "emptying out" also describes the various rituals performed in *King Lear* ("Exorcists" 115). As Greenblatt explains in a footnote,

> Words, signs, gestures that claim to be in touch with superreality, with absolute goodness and absolute evil, are exposed as vacant–illusions manipulated by the clever and imposed

upon the gullible. ("Exorcists" 180n25)

It is not only the formality of ceremonies which is emptied of meaning by the play, but "redemptive hope" itself in the last scene ("Exorcists" 120). In Shakespeare's theatre, the distinction between true and false religion is lost: "if false religion is theater, and if the difference between true religion and false religion is the presence of theatre, what happens when this difference is enacted in the theatre?" ("Exorcists" 121). This question would be nonsensical had Greenblatt not implied that Christianity was, in fact, represented in *King Lear*, whose title character's final hope would "almost invariably recall the consummation devoutly wished by centuries of Christian believers" ("Exorcists" 121). It now seems to be Greenblatt who has forgotten Elton's strident argument that the play does not, in fact, represent Christianity under the guise of paganism.

While I will argue that the characters do, indeed, see through the idolatry of the pagan gods, I question whether the denunciation of false religion spreads by a sort of necessity to all religious conviction whatsoever. Anyone familiar with the English Reformation will see that tearing down idols was itself an act of religious devotion. Greenblatt argues that the possibility of terrible human evil which the play raises, causes "a deeper uncertainty, loss of moorings" ("Exorcists" 118), from which we still flee to the rituals of the play, even though such rituals have been emptied out. My argument is based on a different strand of continental philosophy from Greenblatt's Foucauldianism. According to such thinkers as Marion and Levinas, it is not the inability to face evil that calls for gods, but the inability to face the Other which creates idols as substitutes, both for the other man and for the radical alterity of the Divine. In fact, Greenblatt's argument is precisely bounded by a view of the sacred as rituals by which an elite defends itself with a guise of sanctity. It does not touch on the possibility that the Holy is radically alterior to such rituals, coming from without, like grace or the Other, rather than being

created and therefore controlled by the believer or his society. One does not, of course, have to believe in such a Holy in order to see that it is available to the play and its time, as indeed it is to ours, or to see that it remains an open possibility for the play. To say that there is something exterior to the system of social exchanges is no more inherently absurd than to say that the system is all-encompassing. In any case, the failure of beliefs which are part of the social order need not lead to the failure of belief as such.

Michel de Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond* provides an early modern example of an attack against idolatry, in the sense that Marion gives to the term. Montaigne daringly extends the notion of idolatry to cover certain interpretations of Catholicism in his first few pages, claiming that "we accept our religion only as we would fashion it, only from our own hands – no differently from the way other religions gain acceptance" (*Apology* 8). Similarly, near the end of the work he anticipates Feuerbach in declaring that man is the original of his idol, quoting a stoic commonplace to the effect that "Men cannot conceive of God, so they base their conceptions on themselves instead; they do not compare themselves to him, but him to themselves" (*Apology* 104).[46] On the next page, he mocks polytheism and perhaps also the cults of saints by claiming that "The powers of the gods are tailored to meet our human needs" (*Apology* 105). If we therefore assume that the world is created for us, he adds, then "The lightning flashes for us; the thunder crashes for us; the Creator and all his creatures exist just for us" (*Apology* 106). This, I have argued, is precisely what Lear believes. His failure to command the lightning perhaps indicates what Montaigne would approve of: the collapse of an understanding of God as power tailored to our own needs. Pagan gods, Montaigne maintains, in maintaining, are made in the image of man, rather than the other way around:

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[46]Montaigne leaves the quotation in Latin. The translation provided here is that of M. A. Screech, the translator of Montaigne's work from the original French.

> I believe that, in the Ancient World, men thought they were actually enhancing the greatness of God when they made him equal to Man, clothed him with Man's faculties and made him a present of Man's fair humours and even of his most shameful necessities. (*Apology* 91)

The very beasts, he paraphrases Xenophanes, would have created gods who resemble themselves. He quotes Pythagoras to the effect that each of these gods, like Marion's idol, is constructed according to the individual capacities of the believer (*Apology* 82). Specifically, they are made in order that the believer need not lose individuality in the face of death. Montaigne argues that the Aristotelians supported the doctrine of the immortality of the soul on the basis that it allows for fame and social control. Man "has tombs to preserve his body and fame to preserve his soul" (*Apology* 130).

Montaigne's goal, however, is to move beyond such idolatry. In fact, he argues that even having discovered immortality, man's reason is still woefully insufficient to establish a belief: "it is a source of wonder that even those who are most obstinately attached to so just and clear a persuasion as spiritual immortality fall short, being powerless to establish it by their human ability" (*Apology* 130). The idea of immortality, as only an idea produced by reason, can command no faith. Unlike Descartes's Infinity, immortality is not an idea which implies the reality of its *ideatum*. In fact, such idolatries of the reason, both pagan and Catholic, fail. Theodicies, insofar as they try to justify God to men by making him fit human categories, collapse into contradiction: "Justice, which distributes to each his due and which was begotten for the good of society and communities of men; how can that exist in God?" (*Apology* 66). "Nothing of ours," Montaigne insists, "can be compared or associated with the Nature of God, in any way whatsoever, without smudging and staining it with a degree of imperfection" (*Apology* 94). As this last quotation would imply, it is the alterity of God, his difference from us and the

rules of our society, which makes efforts to understand him by human reason ultimately futile. The law of society is merely a by-law, declares Montaigne. Dollimore notes this, but turns it into a license for the human being who lives under the law, and a condemnation of the idea of law as naturally given (Dollimore 15-16). He fails to note the corollary of Montaigne's declaration, that such by-laws do not restrict God, and that therefore He falls outside the human grasp: "The laws you cite are by-laws: you have no conception of the Law of the Universe. You are subject to limits: restrict yourself to them, not God" (*Apology* 95). In fact, Montaigne goes further, freeing God from destiny itself (*Apology* 101). In this sense, his God is quite distinct from Levinas's "idol", which represents fate ("Reality and its Shadow" 141). It is, as the last quotation implies, and Descartes would certainly argue, the Infinity of God which is the measure of man's finitude.

Man is not the measure, declares Montaigne against Pythagoras, and indirectly against Pico della Mirandola:

> Man is so full of contradictions and his ideas are so constantly undermining each other that so favourable a proposition is simply laughable: it leads to the inevitable conclusion that both measure and the measurer are nothing. (*Apology* 136)

In fact, Montaigne argues that reasoning by analogy, the *analogia entis* of the Middle Ages, leads only to the creation of idols (*Apology* 102). Nevertheless, it is impossible to go beyond analogical reason, and therefore impossible to grasp the Divine by our own efforts: "our intellect can do nothing and guess nothing except on the principle of such analogies; it is impossible for it to go beyond that point" (*Apology* 105). In this argument Montaigne finds himself–despite their obvious differences–agreeing with Luther, who held that analogy is incapable of understanding God, who appears *sub contrario* (McGrath 159). In Luther, also, the break with analogical language describes the gap which separates God and man. According to McGrath, "the word of

the cross reveals the gulf between the preconceived and revealed God, and forces man to abandon his conceptions if he is to be a "theologian of the cross" (McGrath 160). The rejection of analogy is, of course, a rejection of the whole "Elizabethan World Picture" constructed on the correspondence of planes of being, of macrocosmos with microcosmos. This gesture of rejecting analogy also evades capture within the terms in which the Elizabethan world picture comes back to haunt contemporary criticism, like a ghost not quite exorcised, as the dominant ideology. To think the Divine otherwise, not as a social or political force–a righteous one for Tillyard or the Christian optimists, or an insidious one for Greenblatt and Dollimore–was not only possible in the Reformation, but actually within the orthodoxy of both the warring parties to the great schism of Latin Christendom. The more that Montaigne demolishes what Dollimore would term "essentialist humanism", the more he is proclaiming the alterity of the Divine.

The human inability to grasp God may be seen as evidence of what Marion would term the inevitable twilight of idols (Marion 16). If man is the original of his idol, then it only requires a different gaze to overthrow the existing idol in favour of a newer, or higher one–hence the images torn down in favour of concepts, and the concepts torn down in their turn. In the *Apology*, Montaigne makes the variance of human truth into evidence of its failure:

> If our human grasp were firm and capable of seizing hold of truth by our own means, then truth could be passed on from hand to hand, from person to person, since those means are common to all men. Among so many concepts we could at least find one which all would believe with universal assent. (*Apology* 141)

Of course, such universal truth is simply not encountered. Our own grasp on the true, therefore, is called into doubt. As examples of failed sciences, Montaigne offers cosmography, citing Copernicus (*Apology* 149-50) and anatomy, which he sees as a bootless effort to understand man, but which renders man the object of the anatomist: "Man is an object to be seized and handled"

(*Apology* 112). One is reminded of Lear's desire to "anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart" (3.6.74-75), which is also an effort to reduce her to an object of his control, to be "seized and handled," though such an autopsy would ultimately be unable to answer his questions. If what is outside the order of nature is monstrous, Montaigne argues, then everything should be a monster, since the human reason which constructs such an order of nature is groundless (*Apology* 98). The solution to the failure of natural reason is to follow local customs, but since customs vary, "our rules of conduct are based on chance" (*Apology* 159). He offers the serial changes in English state religion as examples of changing laws (*Apology* 160). A truly natural law, he argues, would automatically attract universal consent: "not only all nations but all human beings individually would be deeply aware of force or compulsion when anyone tried to make them violate it" (*Apology* 161). Natural Law, in other words, does not exist, at least not as something that human beings are able to grasp and hold, and even the Scriptures prove opaque (*Apology* 168).

Of course, it is with such limited reason that we are stuck. Human reason is *only* natural, in the sense of impermanent (*Apology* 155). Laws, therefore, are arbitrary (*Apology* 164). A human being cannot aspire to the Divine because "man is full of weakness and lies" (*Apology* 180). Reason is incapable of understanding God: "Human reason goes astray everywhere, but especially when she concerns herself with matters divine" (*Apology* 90). Montaigne's conservatism, his absolute submission to the church, is not a mere fearful shirking, as Dollimore argues, but a logical corollary of his discovery of human ignorance. Such ignorance is not, however, final, because we are not condemned only to the resources of our own selves. True reason, Montaigne claims, is housed only in God (*Apology* 117). One can still bear a relationship to the divine, but it is not a relationship of our own creation:

The knot which ought to attach our judgment and our will and to clasp our souls firmly

> to our Creator should not be one tied together with human considerations and strengthened by emotions: it should be drawn tight in a clasp both divine and supernatural, and have only one form, one face, one lustre; namely, the authority of God and his grace. (*Apology* 10)

Knowledge of God, and thus of anything at all, comes from without. Like Levinas, Montaigne opposes the view of learning as *maieutics*, or recollection, in favour of a view that "what we learn is precisely what we do *not* recollect" (*Apology* 125).

Montaigne's overt project in this, the longest of his celebrated essays, is to "trample down human pride and arrogance, crushing them under our feet" (*Apology* 12). His goal is not, as a New Historicist would perhaps wish, to melt self and Other into an all-embracing and ultimately anonymous history or ideology, but to reduce the status of the self in order to force recognition of an Other. Near the end of his work, Montaigne begins an extended quotation from Plutarch, claiming that we cannot grasp our being:

> And if you should determine to try and grasp what Man's *being* is, it would be exactly like trying to hold a fistful of water: the more tightly you squeeze anything the nature of which is always to flow, the more you will lose what you try to retain in your grasp. (*Apology* 186; his italics)

Our grasp is insufficient to assure us against anonymity. Our self-definitions would collapse "if Man were no longer a political animal able to reason" (*Apology* 97). This is not merely to say that our self-definitions are superficial, but that an existential problem of self-definition would continue to present itself even were there no politics at all. The political definition, like all human efforts at self-definition, at granting oneself a stable being, simply fails. As Montaigne puts it even more bluntly, "In truth we are but nothing" (*Apology* 65).

Hence Montaigne's move towards the Divine as radically Other. The self, claims Montaigne, is the opposite of the Divine: "Where there remains anything of mine, there is nothing divine" (*Apology* 88). As in Luther, God's justice is contrary to our own notions. If it is not to become a solipsistic system of self-justification, "God's vengeance must presuppose our complete resistance to it" (*Apology* 93). In fact, Montaigne offers the example of pagans who asked their gods for a reward being granted death: "so different from ours, where our needs are concerned, are the opinions of heaven" (*Apology* 157). Is this not also the irony of Lear calling for "the great Gods, / That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads" to "Find out their enemies now" (3.2.49-51)? Montaigne insists that one cannot rise "above humanity" by one's own means:

> Nor may a man mount above himself or above humanity: for he can see only with his own eyes, grip only with his own grasp. He will rise if God proffers him–extraordinarily–His hand; he will rise by abandoning and disavowing his own means, letting himself be raised and pulled up by purely heavenly ones. (*Apology* 189-90)

Where to Descartes the idea of God must be placed in us, and to Luther grace cannot be earned, to Montaigne man cannot escape the wretched condition of humanity by his own means. Even faith must come from without if it is to possess its "dignity and splendour" (*Apology* 4), and as a pure gift: "it is, purely and simply, a gift depending on the generosity of Another" (*Apology* 66). Elsewhere, Montaigne makes the decision of Another, as opposed to one's own choice, into the basis of a true location: "I accept Another's choice and remain where God put me. Otherwise I would not know how to save myself from endlessly rolling" (*Apology* 149). In both cases, "Another" is a translation for what the original French renders as "Autruy" (*Essais* 554, 639), the archaic form of Levinas's "Autrui," which most translators, following Alphonso Lingis, render

as "Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 24n). While Levinas does not cite Montaigne as he does Shakespeare or Descartes, it is at least clear that Levinas shares with him a preoccupation with the Other as greater than the self, outside all economies and histories, and necessary to the self's very selfhood.

Montaigne argues that the best possible product of natural religion would be the *Deus absconditus* on which St. Paul remarked in his visit to Athens, and quotes Pythagoras to the effect that the First Mover must be free of all definition (*Apology* 82). Natural theology, in other words, can get at least as far as ignorance. Marion quotes Isaiah to the effect that "the heavens can be rent only of themselves, for the face to descend from them" (Marion 21). In *King Lear*, the heavens are never rent asunder; the stage is presided over only by the anonymous, faceless gods of the element. Nevertheless, the characters within the play can refuse the temptation of idols, and turn towards gods that are unknown. To put it in other terms, they can get at least as far as the death of the gods of the elements, "back to atheism" and perhaps even "to the true transcendence" of the Other (*Totality and Infinity* 142), though they will never get to "that holy and miraculous metamorphosis" which, according to Montaigne, is found only in the Christian faith and allows one to escape the human condition. The pagan characters of the play are not Christians *avant la lettre*, nor are they twentieth-century Marxists anticipating the death of God; they are, on the contrary, pagans who are turning from their idolatry, if not to receive revelation, at least to acknowledge one another.

It is curious that the references to the Divine in the play do not seem to coalesce around a consistent theology, or even a single recognizable religion. While one would not wish to subscribe to the so-called "Christian optimistic" reading of the play, its mere existence indicates that for a whole generation of critics, the play's many and sometimes florid references to the pagan gods seemed to leave room for a Christian divinity. My argument is somewhat different:

appeals to the pagan divinities ultimately point towards a more distant, inscrutable and alterior *Deus absconditus* by virtue of their very failure. In any case, it seems clear that the characters are not expressing a consistent theodicy, much less a systematic theology. Brooke argues that the play contains multiple versions of the gods, and offers as an example the fact that Lear's gods in his famous statement to Cordelia that they will become "gods spies," is "worlds apart from Edgar's stoic endurance" and the gods which seem to endorse it (Brooke 83). More directly, Susan Snyder notes that

> it gradually becomes apparent that images of the gods in *Lear* have a close subjective relation to the characters who offer them. Kind and protective themselves, Kent and Cordelia see the gods as kind and protective. Edgar and Albany, who value justice, see them as just. (Snyder 174)

The pagan gods, in other words, function as projections of the characters' own values, needs and aspirations. Nature is invoked as Edmund's god when he begins his ambitious project: "I grow, I prosper; / Now gods stand up for bastards!" (1.2.21-22). In a curiously and perhaps characteristically self-reflective gesture, Lear swears "by the power that made me" (1.1.206). Albany, a man always acting like a feeble Fortinbras, vainly attempting to restore order to the kingdom, calls the gods "you Justices" (4.2.79).[47] Even Edmund's fictionally patricidal Edgar is "Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon / To stand auspicious mistress" (2.1.38-39).

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[47]The heavens are addressed as "your Iustices" in some quarto texts, and "You justicers" in others, while the folio text refers to "You Iustices." While all imply judgement, the confusion seems to arise from whether Albany is referring to the heavens as themselves judges, or as the agents of judgement, and whether he is addressing them in prayer, or merely apostrophizing them, or using "your" in an indefinite sense. In any case, human aspirations are once again projected towards the divine.

The real Edgar, standing vengefully over the dying trunk of Edmund claims that

> The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
>
> Make instruments to plague us:
>
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got,
>
> Cost him his eyes. (5.3.169-72)

In this brief speech, Edgar appropriates divine judgement to avenge himself, if only vicariously, upon both the brother who slandered him, and the father who murderously believed the slanders. "The measured affirmation of *justice* in these terms shocks everyone," writes Nicholas Brooke; "its effect must be a rejection of these gods" (Brooke 83). We must also recall, however, that these gods are tactical. In another context, Edgar seems stoic, declaring that "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither: / Ripeness is all" (5.3.9-11). Edgar's ethos, in other words, seems contingent and the gods whom he invokes in its support are therefore equally contingent.

Lear uses Jupiter as a guarantor of his own power (1.1.177-78). Two of his struggles with Kent take the rhetorical form of duelling oaths, each invoking gods to reinforce their own position. In the first instance, both draw upon the same god, though of course with different intents:

> *Lear* Now, by Apollo, –
>
> *Kent* Now, by Apollo, King,
>
> Thou swear'st thy Gods in vain. (1.1.159-60)

Kent's claim invokes the Homily on Swearing and Perjury, which states that an oath taken over-hastily or rashly, should be considered unlawful:

> Therefore, whosoeuer maketh any promise, binding himselfe thereunto by an oath: let him foresee that the thing which hee promiseth, bee good, and honest, and not against the

> commandement of GOD, and that it bee in his owne power to performe it iustly. (Homily on swearing 193-97)

It offers as a specific example, Jephthah, who, as readers of the footnotes to *Hamlet* will know, sacrificed his daughter. Lear's oath is similarly "vain," because like Jephthah he is promising something that he should not, in conscience, do. Kent's jibe might also imply that Lear is swearing to do something–abolish his paternity–which is, in fact, beyond his power. In any case, the two oaths imply a struggle between Lear and Kent, into which both attempt to conscript their gods, and in which Kent attempts to negate Lear's appeal to Apollo. In this instance, a struggle of wills takes the form of a struggle between rival theologies. In the second of Kent and Lear's duelling oaths, Lear once again draws on a pagan tradition of patriarchal Jupiter:

> *Lear* No, I say.
>
> *Kent* I say, yea.
>
> *Lear* No, no; they would not.
>
> *Kent* Yes, yes, they have.
>
> *Lear* By Jupiter, I swear, no.
>
> *Kent* By Juno, I swear, aye. (2.4.16-21)

The characters each reinforce their own sense of truth with gods who, as it were, personify it. Kent draws on Juno, the female god who wins power indirectly, and Lear draws on Jupiter, the patriarch. In both instances, Kent's oaths seem ironic, but it is nevertheless significant that Lear's oaths still leave room for contradiction, and specifically that a contradiction of Lear takes the form of invoking alternative gods. The ever-changing theologies of some of the characters reflect a tendency to alter their understanding of the divine to suit their own positions.

Lear's are perhaps the most audacious attempts by any of the characters to appropriate the gods to his own purposes. As Lynch observes, "Instead of submitting to the will of the gods,

Lear repeatedly assumes command over them" (Lynch 163). Lear's use of the imperative in addressing the heavens is not limited to his calls for apocalypse. His prayer to Nature to render Goneril sterile is also spoken in the imperative (1.4.273-87), as is his call for "all the stor'd vengeances of Heaven" to fall on her (2.4.159). While prayers are often spoken in the imperative, Lear's seem to consist almost entirely in demands. To repeat a particularly damning example, Lear swears "by the power that made me" (1.1.206). Apart from providing yet another instance of Lear's habitual self-righteousness, this quotation shows the sources of this self-righteousness in defining the gods as powers that made himself, and to which he can appeal in asserting his own power, rather than as sources of judgement which stand over and against him. Lynch draws attention to an exemplary illustration of Lear's inability to recognize divine judgement in Lear's call for "the great gods" to "Find out their enemies now." "Convinced of his god-like stature," Lynch asks, "and scorning the elements as 'servile ministers' (III.ii.21) is not Lear one of the gods' enemies?" (Lynch 167). But it is precisely because Lear thinks of himself as possessing "god-like stature" that he does not recognize his distance from the gods. Like the pagans to whom Montaigne refers, who ask for a reward and receive death, Lear does not recognize that the judgement of heaven is different from his own. He cannot think of himself as sinful, because he has so badly confused the will of heaven with his own.

In Nahum Tate's revision of the play, Cordelia prays for victory over her sisters by drawing a close analogy between gods and monarchs:

> You never-erring gods
> Fight on his side, and thunder on his foes
> Such tempests as his poor ag'd head sustain'd:
> Your image suffers when a monarch bleeds. (Tate 4.5.67-70)

A number of critics act as if this statement were in Shakespeare's play, not Tate's. Guilfoyle

argues that Lear "in his rage and madness" acts like an Old Testament god (Guilfoyle 55). Keefer argues that Lear resembles Calvin's God, "by a species of synecdoche" (Keefer 148), though also admitting that any sort of accommodation of Calvin's God to human understanding "must be in some sense fictive," because "the object of this knowledge transcends any possible analogy" (Keefer 149). Specifically, Lear is anthropomorphizing, a sin to which John Calvin draws attention (Elton 31, citing *Institutes* 1.13.1), and which is also central to the Homily against Peril of Idolatry ("Against Peril of Idolatry" 216). Lear's gods are, like himself, "old" (2.4.189), and so they are assumed to "love old men" (2.4.188). Gloucester echoes Lear's theology, in telling Regan that "By the kind Gods, 'tis most ignobly done / To pluck me by the beard" (5.7.35-36). Specifically, the gods are, for both Gloucester and Lear, abstractions of the principle of patriarchy. Appealing to Gloucester's sensitivities, Edmund claims that he argued against Edgar that "the revenging Gods / 'Gainst parricides did all their thunder bend" (2.1.44-45). More generally, Albany sees the gods as undergirding social order. Without a Providential punishment of evil and reward of good, "Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep" (4.2.49-50).

A surprisingly large number of critics accept the fallacy of the characters, that the gods represent transcendent sanctions to the characters' own senses of justice, and are therefore fundamentally signs of psychic health. Keefer argues that while the miracle which saves Gloucester from suicide is a fraud, it shows the degree to which "a persuasion that the gods care for human lives is [. . .] one of the most basic of human accommodations" (Keefer 154). Snyder argues that Edgar's fake miracle shows that "even though the gods have no objective reality, it is a sign of moral health to invoke them" (Snyder 177). Knight economically expresses both the anthropomorphic source of the pagan gods in this play, and the inevitable failure of such attempts to project one's own needs unto the heavens when he writes that the characters'

> own rough ideas of equity force them to impose on the universal scheme a similar judicial mode. We, who watch, who view their own childish attempts, are not surprised that "the gods" show little sign of a corresponding sense. (Knight 193)

In his seminal commentary on Romans, Karl Barth writes that "What men on this side resurrection name 'God' [. . .] does not declare himself to be God, but is the complete affirmation of the course of the world and of men as it is" (Barth 40). He finds the sources of what he terms the "No-God", in self-righteousness, even self-worship:

> Our conduct calls for some deeper sanction, some approbation and remuneration from another world. Our well-regulated, pleasurable life longs for some hours of devotion, some prolongation into infinity. And so, when we set God upon the throne of the world, we mean by God ourselves. In 'believing' on Him [*sic*], we justify, enjoy, and adore ourselves. (Barth 44)

He could have been describing not only his historicist professors and all the other European theologians who appalled him by invoking the name of God in the first world war, but also almost all the characters in Shakespeare's play. "Religion in *King Lear*, then," writes Snyder, "does not contradict heroic self-creation but reinforces it. Men make gods in their own images" (Snyder 177), though she nevertheless finds in this god-smithing "a sign of moral health." The gods, in other words, reflect human values, rather than judging them. The pagan religiosity of the characters would, perhaps, be recognized by the first audience as a species of idolatry. In any case, the names of the gods are invoked frequently in this play, but, as Cavell writes, "no play can show more instances and ranges than *King Lear* in which God's name and motive are taken in vain" (Cavell 89).

The proximity of natural order and the gods worshipped by the play's characters underlines the need to create gods as an effort to control the natural world. L. C. Knights writes

that in the sixteenth century,

> It was taken for granted that Nature was often cruel (there had, after all, been a Fall from Paradise), but the whole disposition of things, independent of man's will, served a providential plan. Nature, in this sense, though subject to disorder, was essentially ordered, and it was ordered for the good of man. (Knights 86-87)

While the natural order may have existed "independent of man's will," it was still assumed to be "ordered for the good of man." Projections of a natural order render the elemental controllable, less frightening and arbitrary; hence, the "faceless gods" which are central to Levinas's understanding of the mythical. G. Wilson Knight goes further than his contemporary, arguing that the appeals to the divine which the play incorporates "show at most an insistent need in humanity to cry for justification to something beyond its horizon" (Knight 188). This observation leads him to the inescapable conclusion that

> These gods are, in fact, man-made. These are natural figments of the human mind, not in any other sense transcendent: *King Lear* is, as a whole, pre-eminently naturalistic. (Knight 188)

As further evidence, he cites Lear's "early curses and prayers," addressed almost entirely to either natural objects or Nature itself (Knight 189). In fact, Lear at one point confuses his own judgement with Nature's, calling Cordelia "a wretch whom Nature is asham'd / Almost t'acknowledge hers" (1.1.211-12). While this is something of a gratuitous insult, it is also symptomatic of Lear's–indeed of all the characters'–use of Nature as a transcendent (in the broadest sense of the term) sanction for their own positions, and their own failures of acknowledgement. In this sense, Lear's Nature is not as different from Edmund's as is often assumed. Both are fundamentally means of providing a sanction for their own selfhood and power, rather than serving as an alterior which calls such narcissism into question. "Thou Nature

art my goddess," says Edmund, choosing his god rather than allowing it to choose him (1.2.1). In order not to threaten one's power and subject-position, the gods must themselves be objects of the grasp. Rather than being truly transcendent and alterior, the gods are transcendent only in the weak sense used by Knight, as "natural figments of the human mind," even "man-made." Edgar's religion, like Lear's, is fundamentally a justification of his own sovereignty and power. Gloucester, similarly, associates nature with his own interests. Edmund, supposedly defending him against Edgar, becomes a "loyal and natural boy" (2.1.83). Gloucester assumes that Nature respects patriarchy, just as Edmund worships a Nature that will reward his "composition and fierce quality" (1.2.12), and Lear declares that his own "nature and position" cannot survive contradiction (1.1.170), then later denounces Goneril in a prayer to "Nature" (1.4.273). Of course, personifying nature or treating it like a god does not produce a divinity notably more stable than the pagan gods themselves. According to Elton, the failure of human justice in the play leads to a "more-than-secular attack on authority, on the powers that be" (Elton 229). As we have seen, however, the order of the heavens was a man-made construct in the first place. Demolishing it opens the possibility of true transcendence, as Levinas would say, beyond the idols.

The arbitrariness of the Lear world, by which nothing seems to bear a relationship to a proper cause, leads to a reliance on Fortune. Such a belief in Fortune is vaguely empowering, as it is in Machiavelli's *Prince*, if only because it provides a certain, albeit vague, structure to the apparently random events of the play. Kent's stoicism in the face of the night and his own treatment is characteristic: "Fortune, good night; smile once more; turn thy wheel!" Though bound in a "shameful lodging" (2.2.168-9), he is nevertheless able to make himself reasonably at home, in a universe governed by Fortune. According to Schneider, "In Stoic language, the word *fortune* differed from *chance* in nothing but its being *chance* personified. She is as arbitrary as a

set of dice" (Schneider 37). Schneider's use of the term "personified" is not quite strong enough; rather, Fortune was understood, by everyone from Boethius to Machiavelli, as a goddess, if only figuratively. If Fortune is a personification of chance, it is also, like the pagan gods in Levinas's element, a sort of deification of the arbitrary unfolding of the universe. It is, in other words, a sort of Providentialism stripped of any specific theodicy, or attempt to grasp what Providence might intend. "Fortune led you well" says Albany to Edmund, by way of negating his achievement in winning a hard-fought battle (5.3.42). Snyder observes that "if we mean by 'gods' anything more than 'the way things turn out,' they do not seem to exist in the play at all" (Snyder 173). In fact "the way things turn out" seems to be exactly what the characters deify under the name of Fortune. Of all the supposedly divine forces in the play–Nature, the panoply of gods, etc.–Fortune seems to be the most clearly circular. *Que sera, sera.*

Despite its vagueness, Fortune still lends the characters a sense of position and individual being, which Levinas would refer to as an existent or *hypostasis*. But like *hypostasis*, this position is finally inescapable because it is one's own (*Existence and Existents* 88). The last reference to Fortune's wheel occurs in the lines of the dying Edmund: "the wheel is come full circle. I am here" (5.3.173). Edmund's words may be an act of assent to the somewhat ruthless "justice" which Edgar describes in his summation of the story of Gloucester, but it is also a gesture of realization that his own position is inescapable. "Fortune," writes Stanley Cavell, "in the light of this play, is tragic because it is *mine*; not because it wheels but because each takes his place upon the wheel" (Cavell 111). One thinks immediately of Lear's "wheel of fire" which he invokes at precisely the moment in which he finds himself unable to die, trapped within Being. If there is an escape from this horrible return of the same, it comes not through a further individuation of the individual–who could be more painfully aware of his individuation than Edmund, saying "I am here"?–but by contact with the Other. Lear recognizes Cordelia after he

has failed to die, and been taken out of the grave. Similarly, Edmund declares that "some good I mean to do, / Despite of my own nature" (5.3.242-43), recognizing and acknowledging Others for the first time after finding himself trapped within himself, "here." Fortune is painful because, like the self, it cannot be escaped. It offers no transcendence.

It should be clear by now that I consider the gods, throughout the play, as distractions from the Other, like Levinas's or Marion's idol. Rather than looking towards the truly alterior, characters close themselves in a circular gesture, by which they worship their own projection as divine. Certainly the idolatry of this gesture would not have escaped a commentator like Montaigne, had he ever seen this play. This closed circuit of self-worship is not only a distraction from the Divine understood as radically alterior, but also from the other person acknowledged as Other. Albany's "heavens" serve as a case in point: "This judgement of the heavens, that makes us tremble, / Touches us not with pity" (5.3.230-31).[48] His understanding of the heavens as raining judgement down on those whom he hates is not merely a reflection on his own frustrated search for justice, but a positive barrier to recognizing the Other, and therefore, in all probability, of ever achieving any sort of justice. Pity is excluded. Edgar's gods are similarly just, in punishing Gloucester's resort to "the dark and vicious place" where he conceived Edmund, by making his world dark (5.3.171). In propounding this theodicy, Edgar turns away from both his father and brother as persons to be acknowledged or pitied, and makes them into negative examples of his own righteousness. If Gloucester deserves to be blinded, then Edgar becomes the victim of a wrathful sinner, and his own sin in not acknowledging his father, in failing to reveal himself to him while maintaining the disguise of Mad Tom, need not be considered. Edgar makes himself righteous, by making others sinners. Berger makes a larger

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[48]The Q1 text reads "Iustice" for judgement, which is at least equally applicable to my purposes.

claim, arguing that Edgar gives himself a Christ-like role (Berger 62). Similarly, Gloucester sends Tom away before praying to his gods as objective correlatives of what Heidegger would call "his ownmost possibility," his ability to master his world through death (4.6.30-32). One is reminded of Lear's prayer for divine vengeance, concluding as it does with the conviction that "I am a man, / More sinn'd against, then sinning" (3.2.49-60). According to Gloucester, the daughters refuse to hear Lear when "If wolves had at thy gate howl'd [. . .] / Thou should'st have said, 'Good porter, turn the key'" (3.7.61-2). They defend their decision with a certain righteousness, reasoning in their moralizing way that "to wilful men, / The injuries that they themselves procure, / Must be their schoolmasters" (2.4.300-02). But Lear himself makes a similar argument in rejecting Cordelia, drawing upon his gods in order to disown his daughter:

> For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
>
> The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
>
> By all the operation of the orbs,
>
> From whom we do exist, and cease to be,
>
> Here I disclaim all my paternal care. (1.1.108-12)

Lear makes his curse, literally, in the name of his gods. And once again, his gods are defined in terms of his own existence, "From whom we do exist, and cease to be." Moreover, Lear and his idols form a closed circuit which fundamentally excludes other people. Lear invokes his gods in order to avoid acknowledging his children. He calls on "you gods" for "noble anger" against his daughters, and to avoid weeping, to avoid acknowledging how much they matter to him (2.4.270-276). One might adapt Caliban's claim in *The Tempest*: Lear has learned religion, and his profit on it is that he knows how to curse.

To conclude, the characters in the play create gods in their own images. In a treatment of Levinas's element, Caruana declares that the work of both Plato and Descartes show that

"Nothing terrifies us more [. . .] than to feel we are the mere playthings of forces beyond our appeals or prayers" ("Beyond Tragedy" 24). In the case of Descartes, our failure to know and dominate the world takes the form of an encounter with an evil genius, a god that we do not control, and who frustrates, rather than assures, our subject position. Caruana might have added Calvin to his examples, who seems to be describing the angst of Shakespeare's characters when he writes in the *Institutes* that

> surely no more terrible abyss can be conceived than to feel yourself forsaken and estranged from God; and when you call upon him, not to be heard. It is as if God himself had plotted your ruin. (2.16.11)

Luther had described such attacks of doubt as *Anfechtungen*, and as necessary to the process by which one comes to the cross. The hiddenness of God causes the believer to doubt his own salvation (McGrath 172), though this doubt is resolved by Christ coming into the world and by the receipt of unearned grace (McGrath 173).

Of course, the pagan characters of *King Lear* do not have access to this revelation. Nevertheless, they can get at least as far as the death of the pagan gods, cloaked in night, which will lead them back to "atheism and the true transcendence" (*Totality and Infinity* 142). The play is a prolonged demonstration that idols cannot hold the night at bay forever. The pagan gods, one at a time, fail and the characters must face the possibility that their gods do not correspond to their projections, even that their gods might "kill us for their sport" (4.1.37). Lear rejects the flattery which he had received as king: "To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing I said! 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity" (4.6.98-100). This passage, as critics have pointed out, is a reference to the Epistle of James, and his injunction against oaths: "swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (5.12). As I have argued, Lear's oaths are taken on himself. His ability to

change his mind frequently, to be surrounded by people who would "say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing I said" rather than by Others, who stand over and against him, questioning him or at least opposing him with their very Otherness, is indeed "no good divinity" because it represents a state of idolatry. Gloucester's gods who "kill us for their sport" (4.1.37) are preferable in that they are at least exterior. I believe that from the Elizabethan point of view, the characters go precisely as far as they are able using only natural religion, unaided by Revelation. Though they do not receive a revelation, they at least cast off their idols. And they can, as I will argue in the next chapter, experience true transcendence in the approach of the other person.

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Chapter seven — The Game and the Stake:

Free Play and the Ethical Imperative

Near the beginning of *Otherwise than Being*, seen by Eaglestone as Levinas's response to Derrida (Eaglestone 135), the author almost parenthetically dismisses the possibility of absolute play, arguing that every game must have a stake: "But is play free of interest? Right off a stakes, money or honor, is attached to it. Does not disinterestedness [. . .] indicate an extreme gravity and not the fallacious frivolity of play?" (Levinas *Otherwise* 6). The game depends upon a stake which is transcendent as far as the game itself is concerned. If the goal of a game of cards, say, is to win money, then turning a profit has more than any tactical or even strategic significance which could reside entirely within the game. Specifically, Levinas's critique of Derrida is that the play of the sign comes to an end in expression, or what he elsewhere refers to as Saying. In other words, the alterity of the Other precedes the anonymous free play of the sign. We could, however, extend Levinas's argument about the game of the sign not being without grounds to other sorts of games, economies and circulations, such as those discovered by New Historicism and its various analogues and derivatives. Greenblatt describes the past as "a subtle, elusive set of exchanges, a network of trades and trade-offs, a jostling of competing representations, a negotiation between joint-stock companies" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 7). One will note Greenblatt's choice of anonymous "joint-stock companies," but we need not look to specific citations to see the past described as an anonymous game; on the contrary, the very title of Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* betrays a view of the Shakespearean corpus as a sort of game, best described by using metaphors of economics. New historicism seems to accept as normative the situation described in chapter two, where human relations are seen in economic terms. This is not to say that the economic world, or the marketplace as agora is simply

irreconcilable with human relations. Nevertheless, if taken alone, in isolation, economic relations can assume the appearance of an all-embracing game, producing its own players and claiming to be produce its own stake so as to exclude anything external to itself. If Goneril can indeed only view human relations as power relations, as Goldberg and Berger contend (Berger 32-33; Berger is citing Goldberg), then New Historicism presents no reason why she might be wrong, because it implicitly forbids reference outside a game of power, money, or any other of several terms that are understood mainly in reference to one another.

In rendering out of bounds a recourse to anything truly alterior, New Historicism renders inescapable the tragedy of existence. "The first moment of selfhood," as Caruana summarizes Levinas's position, "[. . .] represents only a partial escape from the suffering of impersonal being. Only the self *qua* ethical subject can repair the disaster of being" (Caruana 33). Lear's nearly automatic tendency to treat other people as extensions of himself or objects of his grasp is not without exception; much less is it inevitable. A reduction of the Other to the Same may be characteristic of philosophy in the west from Plato onwards, as Levinas argues in "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite," but it is balanced by another tradition, which "does not read right in might and does not reduce *every other* to the Same" ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 92-93, 105-06). Recourse can be made to what is outside the system. An absolute gift may be a problematic concept, but it is no more problematic than a stakeless game and offers the promise of escape from such a stakeless, and ultimately anonymous, system of exchanges.

There is a need for something better (in the ethical sense) than an economic view of the world, if the ethical claims which inspire those who expound the various economies, negotiations and circulations of the early modern world are not to play themselves out as the amorally mechanical and sometimes ethically appalling logic of the marketplace. A description of the world as an economic and political game does not necessarily lead to the good. If the mere

revelation of injustice and economic logic–the Fool's realization and his message–are to have any weight at all, they must be informed by an ethical claim which informs the act of deconstruction or social critique. Power, politics, language or whatever may not be in anyone's hands, may even speak the actor who claims to speak it, but its resistance to the grasp of an agent does not mean that it has no reliance on an ethics prior to its economy. Just because I cannot choose my language does not mean that I cannot be chosen, before language, by the face of the Other, and cannot, therefore, offer my language as an expression to him, or that his very distance from me would not constitute a Saying, an expression, anterior to the content of the said and the anonymous free-play of the sign.

At times, even Stanley Cavell does not seem to allow a recourse outside the totalizing logic of the Same. He follows the German romantics in describing the soul as "the provider of the given, of the conditions under which gods and earth can appear" (Cavell 81). Although Cavell immediately links this to responsibility "including the responsibility for fate," he does not (at least, not here) break with the egological assumption of the power of the agent. In Levinas's philosophy, on the other hand, the Other's alterity "is precisely accomplished *as* a calling into question of my spontaneity, *as* ethics" (*Totality and Infinity* 43). What is accomplished is, as Bruns notes in a gloss on this passage, "a skepticism or at least critical ethics" (Bruns 87). In this instance, Levinas seems more skeptical than Cavell, making a skepticism of the self, in the face of the Other, into the lynchpin of his ethics. One might even say that in Levinas's works, skepticism undoes itself, calling into question the power of the skeptical thinker in order to find a place for the Other, who is so often the subject of doubt in traditional skepticism. What is called for is not a return to the "humanist individual," but a recognition of responsibility towards others, as the bedrock of an ethics which can sustain politics without betraying itself into a mere political game. To return to Cavell's terms, 'acknowledgement' is not merely a piece of

knowledge but a call to action; and its absence is not merely a piece of ignorance, but rather "a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (*Must We Mean* 264). Neither thinker is calling for greater awareness, but for something not entirely exhausted by knowing, which might provide a weight and ground for what is known.

Levinas names the relationship with the Other "religion", over and against those relations which fall back into totality: "For the relation between the being here below and the transcendent being that results in no community or concept or totality–a relation without relation–we reserve the term religion" (*Totality and Infinity* 80). He adds, a couple of paragraphs later, that relationships between separate things "are not produced on the ground of totality, do not crystallize into a system" (*Totality and Infinity* 80). Levinas's specialized use of the term "religion" distinguishes it from politics, where one can only "appear in history"; in religion, on the contrary, one is able to "appear to the Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 253). Politics tends to view people only as interchangeable, within history, because it views them only in terms of their works, which enter into an economy and the anonymity of money, never in terms of their expression, their Saying:

> In political life, taken unrebuked, humanity is understood from its works–a humanity of interchangeable men, of reciprocal relations. The substitution of men for one another, the primal disrespect, makes possible exploitation itself. (*Totality and Infinity* 298)

The Other cannot be understood by politics as incommensurably alterior; instead, politics insists upon making her interchangeable with all others, thereby removing her specific claim upon the Self. Such a melting of the other into the anonymity of interchangeable things is, as "the primal disrespect," the basis of all abuse. The accomplishment by politics of this fundamental disrespect for the Other as individual, leaves it in constant need of an ethical corrective. While politics finds its origin in ethics, in the relation of self and Other, and the need to relate to more

than one Other, "politics if left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus in absentia" (*Totality and Infinity* 300). Politics is not an end in itself, or at least it ought not to be an end in itself; like the play of the sign, it finds its stake outside itself, but can collapse into something literally anarchic, without a ground.

Years before the New Historicists learned their fascination with power from Michel Foucault, Levinas criticized Heidegger's late philosophy for remaining a philosophy of power. Levinas, on the contrary, wishes to understand the subject otherwise: "Is the subject only a subject of knowings and powers? Does it not present itself as a subject in another?" (*Totality and Infinity* 276). Similarly, the Heideggerian *Logos* is criticized because it is not spoken by or to anyone; it becomes anonymous, rather than inscribing the subject as subject to another. Even before Foucault entered the philosophical scene, I would argue, Levinas saw the possibility of a philosophy of power in Heidegger, and rejected it in favour of a philosophy of alterity, beginning with the face:

> To begin with the face as a source from which all meaning appears, the face in its absolute nudity, [. . .] is to affirm that being is enacted in the relation between men, that Desire rather than need commands acts. Desire, an aspiration that does not proceed from a lack–metaphysics–is the desire of a person. (*Totality and Infinity* 299)

This is not, of course, to say that Levinas is simply inimical to the social causes for which Foucault is rightly credited, and to which his followers still deploy his thought. Continuing his critique of Heidegger, phenomenology and existentialism, Levinas specifies that he is not questioning the idea of freedom, but seeking its basis (*Totality and Infinity* 302-03).

The image which Levinas uses to describe the relationship with the Other is "face": "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here

name face" (*Totality and Infinity* 50). Since the face exceeds "*the idea of the other in me*" it is not known. Hence, Levinas's declaration that the difference of a thing and a face is not a difference between two types of knowledge at all, because "The relation with the face is not an object-cognition" (*Totality and Infinity* 75). The face's self-presentation is contrasted strongly with any sort of "work", in which the I is "integrated" and ultimately betrayed: works "can be exchanged, that is, be maintained in the anonymity of money" (*Totality and Infinity* 176). In a conclusion to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas distinguishes labour from language, by which he means the expression of oneself to an Other:

> There is an abyss between labor, which results in works having a meaning for other men, and which others can acquire–already merchandise reflected in money–and language, in which I attend my manifestation, irreplaceable and vigilant. (*Totality and Infinity* 297)

Similarly, objective existence, "by which I count in universality, in the State, in history, in the totality, does not express me, but precisely dissimulates me" (*Totality and Infinity* 178). Relationship with the Other is "apologetic," producing self-consciousness because it involves a bad conscience. On the other hand, "an impersonal reason" removes consciousness altogether: "Existence in history consists in placing my consciousness outside of me and in destroying my responsibility" (*Totality and Infinity* 252). Both economics and history are fundamentally impersonal, according to Levinas. In the first of several conclusions to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas claims that there is no external point of view which could count me and the Other and combine them into a single, anonymous number (*Totality and Infinity* 251). Levinas is not claiming that an impersonal view of history or economics is simply impossible, but it would fail to grasp the relationship with the Other in itself, instead betraying it, or reducing it.

So far the definition of the relationship with the Other has been presented mainly in negative terms. It does, however, have a positive import as responsibility. Politics would

understand the relation as a blurring of the distinction between self and Other, and dissolve its terms into a whole (*Totality and Infinity* 182). Levinas instead offers the example of a teaching, which he contrasts with Plato's maieutics, and in which "the master can bring to the student what the student does not already know." "The man open to teaching" reconciles the contradiction between "free interiority" and "the exteriority that should limit it." In responsibility, the self's separation from the Other is necessary in order to welcome the Other. Responsibility indicates "an existence already obligated," interior but nevertheless bearing a relationship with the Other before choosing this relationship. Interiority, in fact, implies responsibility: "To be in oneself is to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 183). Speech, once again, is originally neither interior dialogue, hearing oneself speak, nor an anonymous game. On the contrary, it takes place

> in a world where it is necessary to aid and to give. It presupposes an I, an existence separated in its enjoyment, which does not welcome empty-handed the face and its voice coming from another shore. (*Totality and Infinity* 216)

The ego does not welcome the Other "empty-handed" but "with all the resources of its egoism: economically" (*Totality and Infinity* 216). Contact with the Other takes place within economics, in this sense, but not in economics understood as an anonymous field in which persons are constituted; on the contrary, generosity towards the Other is necessary in order for the economic to have weight and be justified, rather than falling into what Levinas elsewhere calls "the anonymous field of the economic life" (*Totality and Infinity* 176). Before I give you the shirt off my back, somehow I have to have obtained my shirt, and the shirt has to have a certain value in exchange, but this doesn't mean that my act of generosity needs to be explained as an ethical superstructure relying on a more fundamental economic substructure. Economics does not explain away ethics; on the contrary, every social relation, Levinas insists, refers to "the

presentation of the other to the same without the intermediary of any image or sign, solely by the expression of the face" (*Totality and Infinity* 213).

The erotic relation in particular is used by Levinas as a prototype of the relationship with an Other. Eroticism, as he describes it, avoids the possibilities of a monistic, Parmenidean Being, since it is always contact with an Other (*Time and the Other* 85). Despite his use of eros as such a prototypical relation with alterity, however, Levinas nevertheless recognizes "the ambiguity of Love" which could also be taken as an ambiguity in sex. Voluptuosity, he argues, implies both fusion and distinction. He argues that "Love as a relation with the Other can be reduced" to immanence, "be divested of all transcendence, seek but a connatural being, a sister soul, present itself as incest" (*Totality and Infinity* 254). Nevertheless, while love is the satisfaction of a physical need, it remains metaphysical desire. It therefore preserves duality, the independence of its terms: "The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery" (*Time and the Other* 86). Since the object of eros "withdraws" it is neither within possession, nor simply resistant to possession. It is, in fact, outside the purview of power altogether: "If one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be other. Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power" (*Time and the Other* 90). "To love," on the other hand, "is to fear for another, to come to the assistance of his frailty" (*Totality and Infinity* 256). In eros the Other presents herself as vulnerable rather than being an object of power. While eros can be understood, if one wishes, in terms of power or politics, such terms betray what they are meant to describe. The erotic relationship "is impossible to translate into powers, and must not be so translated, if one does not want to distort the meaning of the situation" (*Time and the Other* 88). The caress, to borrow another of Levinas's images, is a seeking without an intention: "The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks" (*Time and the Other* 89). The

caress, he specified a few years later, seeks something that "*is not yet*." Distinguishing his own description of the caress from Heidegger's phenomenology, in which *Dasein* discloses being,[49] Levinas insists that the caress "is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search: a movement unto the invisible." In any case, it is not a grasp, or at most, it is a grasp which fails, "seizing upon nothing" (*Totality and Infinity* 257-8). The grasp fails to come to grips with the Other because, in love, "access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused" (*Existence and Existents* 43). Violence and possession would be the opposite of fear for the Other.

While the Other in an erotic relation is not possessed, neither does the beloved simply possess the self. Subjectivity is maintained in eros (*Totality and Infinity* 300-1). The face is not lost in the erotic relation (*Totality and Infinity* 261). Levinas disagrees with Plato's Aristophanes, who suggests in the *Symposium* that each person is a half, and a couple forms a whole (*Time and the Other* 86 and note). Lovers do not simply become "engulfed" in an impersonal love (*Totality and Infinity* 264). Instead, Levinas insists that a lover remains an individual; "the subject is still a subject through eros" (*Time and the Other* 88). As subject, of course, the lover is still capable of viewing the beloved as an object, rather than as an Other. The subject, with his grasping, knowing and possessing, is not simply cancelled out.

Ethical imperatives and moments of ethical encounter occur even within the fictive society of *King Lear*. A number of critics have written on the theme of renunciation in the play, of how the characters surrender their self-interests, or even their selfhoods. This line of reasoning finds a twentieth-century champion in George Orwell, whose awareness of the power of politics ought not be doubted by anyone, but who claimed that the play was fundamentally about "renunciation," though Lear himself never recognizes that "If you live for others, you must

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[49]"To Dasein's state of Being, *disclosedness in general* essentially belongs" (Heidegger I.6.44b, H221).

live *for others*, and not as a roundabout way of getting an advantage for yourself" (Hibbard 7). Knights, on the other hand, claims that in Lear's recognition during the storm that "I have ta'en / Too little care of this," self-pity gives way to true pity, for somebody else (quoted by Guilfoyle 51). Even Greenblatt concludes his comparison of Shakespeare's tragedy with exorcisms by claiming that the play maintains "the forlorn hope of an impossible redemption" though one "drained of its institutional and doctrinal significance," returning, in his dogged way, to the play of social forces ("Exorcists" 121). Generally, I would agree with Knights, though recognizing that while generosity to Others can only take place *in* a world constituted by the play of social, economic and political forces, acts of generosity are not *of* the play of social forces.

Generosity in the play is not always presented as Orwell's "roundabout way of getting an advantage for yourself." The blinded Gloucester, for instance, shows a concern for both the Old Man and Poor Tom. First, he urges the Old Man to leave him, since "Thy comforts can do me no good at all; / Thee they may hurt" (4.1.16-17). In fact, the Old Man could provide Gloucester with food or clothing, which he actually does provide for Poor Tom at Gloucester's behest. With sufficient imagination, one might also think of the Old Man arranging transport to Dover with the contents of the purse that Gloucester gives to Edgar. One might argue, in a Cavellian manner, that Gloucester is still avoiding the sight of others, but he makes no effort to flee Lear, and Edgar's calling attention to Gloucester's blindness–"Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed"–doesn't disqualify him as a guide and travelling companion (4.1.53). Rather than seeing the argument that "Thee they may hurt" as an excuse to get rid of someone whose "comforts can do me no good at all," I think that the converse argument works at least as well: Gloucester is sending the Old Man out of harm's way with a false pretense. Instead of taking the Old Man as a guide, Gloucester takes a madman as a guide, whose insanity would protect him against retribution. Rather than accept the Old Man's generosity for himself, he asks him to provide "some covering

for this naked soul" (4.1.44). Instead of accepting charity, in the way of self-interest, he extends it to another person.

The Old Man's actions are generally explained more or less in the terms he chooses for himself, that "I have been your tenant, and your father's tenant, / These fourscore years" (4.1.16-17). His enormous age–older than Lear himself, especially if he is speaking only of that time in which he has been a tenant in his own name–commends him as a representative of an old system of values, now, as Greenblatt would say, drained of significance. He is, however, freed of his feudal responsibilities three times: by Gloucester's loss of power, by Gloucester's command for him to leave, and, finally, by Gloucester's last words to him "Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure," which invests the Old Man with power over himself, even as it divests Gloucester of his ability to "bid thee" (4.1.47). If "ancient love," however, were only a play of power, one would imagine that it would have died like a straw fire when Gloucester lost power. Rather than ascribe its persistence to a sort of psychic inertia, one might equally (and more simply) recognize that love is not exhausted by relations of power.

Though Edgar's disguise guards him against being recognized by others, it does not guard him, or at least, does not guard him sufficiently, against facing up to Others. Even his (pseudo-) mad snatches seem to be responses to the suffering around him. Given the fact that Lear is freezing to death outdoors[50] and teetering on the verge of insanity, the phrase "go to thy bed and warm thee" carries a surplus of concern for an Other, especially as it immediately follows the observation that "through the sharp hawthorn blow the cold winds" (3.4.45-47). The instructions to stay warm may indicate that Edgar is calling upon the other characters on stage to avoid exposure, while the proverbial "wit to keep warm" would indicate that he is asking them to

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[50]In the traditional explanation for the fool's departure, he is literally dying of exposure at this point.

remain sane. Similarly, he later offers to guard Lear against the dogs which "bark at me" (3.6.62). Of course, one could see this as an ever-more sophisticated effort to act mad, and therefore reinforce his sense of power by way of assuming the name and identity of Poor Tom. However, it seems equally in keeping with those moments where his disguise fails him. "I cannot daub it further" he says near the beginning of act four, though he nevertheless succeeds (4.1.51, 53). Later, in the quarto's trial scene, he claims that "My tears begin to take his [Lear's] part so much / They mar my counterfeiting" (3.6.59-60). There is a moment of mutual recognition between Gloucester and Edgar in spite of Edgar's disguise and Gloucester's blindness. Edgar provides a place for Gloucester to rest before the battle and leaves him with the words "If ever I return to you again I'll bring you comfort." Gloucester answers by blessing his son: "Grace go with you, sir" (5.2.3-5). One might find it rather ironic (and a stunning dramatic reversal) that Edgar returns immediately and without comfort. This circumstance, however, hardly cancels out the exchange of good wishes; on the contrary, it rather reinforces them, since Edgar actually does return, and saves Gloucester from despair once again. Just because Edgar keeps himself hidden does not mean that he is able to avoid the appeal which the face of an Other makes, or that his own face cannot take on the importance of Levinasian face, expressing the person rather than masking him. He remains, as Lear would say, "the thing itself" (3.4.104); hence, his desperate need to avoid exposure by maintaining and even generating masks, finally presenting himself to his father only when shielded in armour and the role of a combatant (Cavell 57).

The character of Albany is a study in the survival of ethics despite the exigencies of politics. Oswald, incapable of grasping why anyone would work against self-interest, exclaims in bafflement that "What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him; / What like, offensive" (4.2.10-11). What is interesting in Albany's description of his reasons for fighting given at the

beginning of act five is that he implicates himself in the evils of the regime, even while fighting to maintain it. He describes some of the forces aligned against him, Edmund and the sisters as "others whom the rigours of our state / Forc'd to cry out" (5.1.22-23). In an extension of the same speech, preserved only in the quarto text where it remains desperately obscure and possibly corrupt, he describes the invaders as including "others, whom, I fear, / Most just and heavy causes make oppose" (5.1.26-27). Despite the reluctance of his duty, he fights hard enough actually to win, then moves with energy to disband Edmund's forces. One might argue that Albany's reaction to events is hypocritical, or that he hedges his bets against a French victory. Nevertheless, a great deal of his reaction to the invasion is communicated privately to Oswald, not stated publicly by way of providing deniability. Such arguments cannot, in any case, explain why Albany would wish to restore Lear's rule for the short period of his remaining life, or would seek to preserve that life after the battle has already been won. One need not, in other words, attach inordinate importance to Albany's use of the word "others" in order to argue that his awareness of the evils of the regime are ethically motivated. What is curious is that he does not act on this ethical realization as one might wish. Nevertheless, despite being more or less repressed for political reasons, the realization is still there: Albany's motivation cannot be reduced to self-interest. He is attentive to Edgar, despite the pressing political issues around him, or Edgar's guise as one of the powerless (5.1.38-39).

At a number of points, the motivations of characters cannot be described in terms of self-interest, not even subconscious self-interest. Edgar, Albany and other characters play out a pattern whereby the suffering of *others* breaks mastery. Where, as was discussed in chapter five, Gloucester's suffering becomes inescapable like Being itself, Albany's interest in other people breaks the circularity of his self-interest. He fears his own dissolution in grief for the suffering of Gloucester and Edgar:

If there be more, more woeful, hold it in,

For I am almost ready to dissolve,

Hearing of this. (5.3.201-03)

Cordelia, similarly, claims that she would be capable of stoicism in the face of her own suffering, but not that of her father: "For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down; / Myself could else outfrown false Fortune's frown" (5.3.5-6). Of course, this is at some level a bid for pity, and perhaps even a gesture of self-pity. This does not, however, detract from the interest which the statement has ethically. Cordelia's second line parallels a line from the Elizabethan translation of Seneca's *Œdipus*, as Muir explains in his note in the Arden edition. Where Seneca's Jocasta is counselling courage, however, Shakespeare's Cordelia is claiming that she is unable to "outfrown false Fortune's frown" because she has been cast down for and with her father. Like Albany, she loses her mastery not in failing to overpower her own suffering, but by witnessing the suffering of another. Awakening in Cordelia's presence, Lear claims that he "would e'en die with pity / To see another thus" (4.7.53-54). The interesting point is that he doesn't die with pity to see himself thus. The suffering of another would be worse than his own suffering. If Edgar is to be believed, the suffering of others even blinds one to one's proper misery: "When we our betters see bearing our woes, / We scarcely think our miseries, our foes" (3.6.100-01). The suffering of another moves one's centre of concern from oneself, in pity or responsibility. In any case, acknowledging another's pain is profoundly opposed to the narcissism displayed in self-pity.

Of course, Edgar's statement remains loaded with investments in a social order. Lear's recognition of the Fool, however, inverts class sensibilities. In his rages at Goneril, Lear literally forgot the Fool, leaving him to run after, crying "tarry, take the Fool with thee" (1.4.314-15). On the heath, however, having reached what Levinas would call "a crispation through suffering, and

in relation with death" (*Time and the Other* 76), Lear recognizes the Fool. It would be wrong, I think, to consider his sudden compassion to be an act of madness, unless one were simply to declare self-interest to be the definition of sanity, though this is, perhaps, the assumption of a whole tradition of philosophy in the west. Nor should we agree with Dollimore that Lear is able to care about poverty only after having experienced it: "He has ignored [poverty] not through callous indifference but simply *because he has not experienced it*" (Dollimore 191). In fact, I would argue that Lear's first sign of any awareness of the suffering of others constitutes a sudden shift away from rantings about his own condition, prompted by a realisation that the Fool is cold (3.3.67-69). The mere chronology of Lear's famous speech (or prayer) apostrophized to the wretched of the earth shows that Lear is driven to divest himself and expose himself to the elements "to feel what wretches feel" (3.4.34), only after he recognizes the suffering of the "poor naked wretches [. . .] / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm" (3.4.28-29). He does not divest himself in order to recognize them, but because he has already recognized them. Rather than understanding others by projecting his own condition unto them (as he does again when he encounters Edgar and immediately categorizes him as a disowned father), Lear in this case recognizes his own condition by first recognizing that condition in another, touchingly: "Come on my boy, how dost my boy, art cold? / I am cold myself" (3.2.68-69). It is, moreover, after having acknowledged another person, with his suffering, that Lear is able to accept a gift, to move away from the *quid pro quo* economic view of the world in which he remained an active and powerful agent:

> Where is this straw, my fellow?
>
> The art of our necessities is strange,
>
> And can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel. (3.2.69-71)

Lear is able to acknowledge another person despite his own suffering, not because of it. "Poor

Fool and knave," he says, "I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee" (3.2.72-73). The suggestion of the line is that Lear's heart is not altogether consumed by self-pity, that he has a surplus of pity for the Fool; however, this statement also shows Lear to be moving away from his usual morbidly self-fascinated sense of injury towards an acknowledgement of another person, with *his* suffering. Lear's pity for the Fool cannot, despite his choice of terms, be entirely understood as a sort of supplement to his pity for himself: it's an inversion of that pity. The quiet words spoken to the Fool stand in contrast to the apocalyptic rhetoric, and complete indifference to interruption, shown by his earlier speeches in the storm scene, not one of which can be held up as a certain example of Lear responding to anything said to him by someone else.

After this initial acknowledgement, however, Lear is able to recognize other Others, starting by addressing Kent as his "fellow". A couple of scenes later, he insists that Kent "seek thine own ease" by entering the hovel, and that the Fool "go first" (5.4.23, 26). Later still, he insists that Poor Tom be sheltered along with him (3.4.171-74), where Gloucester, who will later claim that Poor Tom reminds him of his son, nevertheless only sends him back into the hovel (4.1.32-35). Lear's famous prayer is not a failure to acknowledge the wretched at his feet in favour of an abstraction; on the contrary, it is an extension from concern for the Fool and Kent, whom he has already asked to take shelter before him, outwards to the wretches of the earth:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
>
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
>
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
>
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
>
> From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
>
> Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;
>
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel

That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,

And show the Heavens more just. (5.4.28-36)

There are many things that one could say about this remarkable speech, not least the fact that Lear still feels himself in a sufficient position of power to "show the Heavens more just." One might, in this sense, find something horribly ironic in Lear's claim that "I'll pray" immediately before uttering this speech. His prayer, or at least its conclusion, might be dismissed as a supreme act of narcissism, presuming to be able to make the gods appear more just by his own actions, as if he were their agent. One might also argue that his sudden conversion to the equal division of goods is conveniently placed at a point when he no longer has anything left to give, except perhaps his clothes. His suggested course of action is therefore addressed to "Pomp" rather than himself. What I am most interested in, however, is not the specific social and political program that Lear may or may not be espousing in good or bad faith.

On the contrary, what I wish to draw attention to is what Levinas called in response to a more recent communism, a "prophetic cry, scarcely discourse: the cry of Marx and some Marxists, beyond Marxist science!" ("Ideology and Idealism" 238). No division of goods, not even the first scene's division of the kingdom itself, would serve to render such concern for the Other obsolete. Lear recognizes the suffering of Others; moreover, he recognizes his own responsibility for this suffering. "One has," Levinas claims, "to answer for one's right to be" to recognize that "My being-in-the-world [. . .] my being at home" represents "the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man that I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world." The fear for the Other goes beyond a conscientious scruple specific to a conqueror or to the powerful, however; it is "the fear of occupying someone else's place with the very *Da* of my *Dasein*" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 82). Lear's statement that "I have ta'en / Too little care of this" might not even be a reference to his action, or rather inaction, as a political leader.

To 'take care' might merely mean to acknowledge. Lear did not care enough. His failure to acknowledge those who suffer was, as Cavell would say, "a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (*Must We Mean* 264). Facing up to this responsibility would be an existential recognition of sinfulness, and therefore, in Luther's terms, a prayer. Lear's acknowledgement of human misery, and of his own responsibility for it, has ramifications far beyond the political specificity of what he might, or might not, do about it. Of course, Lear slips back into self-righteous rants for most of the rest of the play. The recognition of the Fool is not an apocalyptic moment; it does not give rise to a completely new order in the world, or even in Lear's mind, which returns shortly to its customary paths. This does not make it meaningless, however. Quite the contrary: it is a more radical and fundamental gesture than anything which Lear may have undertaken by way of redistributing goods or manipulating the political game, because it gives that game a stake.

Lear recognizes the Other at the deepest point of his suffering, and as an inversion of his self-pity. Similarly Gloucester comes to recognize others in the lowest point of his suffering. Newly blinded and bound to the chair, informed that his son Edmund has betrayed him, his first thoughts are of his own responsibility for the suffering of Edgar: "O my follies! Then Edgar was abus'd. / Kind Gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!" (3.7.89-90). Chambers has pointed out that Gloucester "never utters one word of reproach against the 'unkind' son who has betrayed him to blindness, and who would betray him to death" (Chambers, 360). His actions here are the opposite of his actions at the end of act one, when he ignores the injured Edmund to order a hunt for the absent Edgar: in the earlier scene, he evades compassion by turning to self-righteousness; in this scene, concern for the wronged son eclipses self-righteous indignation at the treasonous son. Berger's claim that Edgar kills Gloucester by suddenly revealing to him his guilt (Berger 64), fails to account for the fact that Gloucester has already recognized his "follies." In his

blinding, Gloucester encounters something he cannot master through stoicism, but the abuse of Edgar is more than just a brutally immovable obstacle: it is a positive imposition of responsibility. Cavell sees this moment as one of Gloucester recognizing himself, though tying this recognition to allowing himself to be revealed to another (Cavell 45). I would argue that Gloucester must first acknowledge the abuse of Edgar before "my follies" take on an ethical meaning. This first cry can certainly be seen as a recognition of responsibility, and responsibility implies being responsible to or for an Other.

Later, thrown out of his own house, and encountering Tom, Gloucester once more recognizes an Other:

> Here, take this purse, thou whom the heav'ns' plagues
> Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched
> Makes thee the happier: Heavens, deal so still!
> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough. (4.1.63-70)

The parallels with Lear's prayer are startling. In both cases, the speaker begins with concern for a specific Other, the Fool or Poor Tom. Generosity is extended towards this Other, in the somewhat banal form of Gloucester's purse, and in Lear's insistence that the Fool and Kent enter the hovel first. This concern with a specific Other is generalized in Gloucester's "Heavens, deal so still!" praying for all of those "whom the heav'n's plagues / Have humbled to all strokes," and who have been victimized by "the superfluous and lust-dieted man." If Gloucester recognizes in himself "the superfluous and lust-dieted man," whom we met at the beginning of act one,

revelling in the memory of "good sport" with Edmund's "fair" mother, then he, like Lear, is claiming to have "ta'en / Too little care of this" (3.4.32-33). By the end of the same sentence, however, Gloucester reverts to speaking in the abstract. Although he is justifying his own suffering, it is hard to believe that he still feels himself in need of further punishment, to "feel your power quickly." Moreover, while the description of a man "who cannot see because he does not feel" might apply metaphorically to Gloucester, it would only apply literally to the old Gloucester, before the blinding, or to other powerful and callous men. Subtly, Gloucester's recognition of his own guilt becomes, within the space of a single sentence, a general condemnation of the high and mighty, and finally decays into a call for the redistribution of goods and services in the next clause. Snyder argues, in fact, that Gloucester "finds meaning in heaven's act only through his own act" of giving his purse to Edgar (Snyder 177), in which case Gloucester is still projecting his own acts unto the heavens, as indeed he will again while contemplating suicide. No doubt there is an element of such *hubris* in this speech. Nevertheless, what is really profound about the speech is that Gloucester accepts Poor Tom's (presumed) judgement.

Facing Tom and despite being blind, Gloucester recognizes and accepts his own position of guilt *vis-à-vis* the poor. "That I am wretched," he claims, "makes thee the happier." This would be merely an observation of Nietzchean *ressentiment* in the powerless, except that Gloucester actually endorses it, exclaiming "Heavens, deal so still!" His misery is not justified as a recompense for prior bad acts, but by virtue of the fact that his own position caused and causes misery for Others. Giving the purse to Edgar allows him to reverse this process, making others happy by his own wretchedness. The self-description of "the superfluous man" can be understood in more ways than one. The word 'superfluous' is glossed by Muir as "pampered, having too much" (4.1.66n). He compares the use of the term here with that in act two, scene

four, where Lear declares that "our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous" (2.4.262-63). The *OED* uses this second citation, in fact, below its fourth definition of 'superfluous': "Having, consuming, or expending more than enough; superabundantly supplied; extravagant in expenditure." The term might also be taken in its first definition, however, as "That exceeds what is sufficient; of which there is more than enough; excessively abundant or numerous" (*OED*, *a.* 1), a definition which was still active in Shakespeare's time, and in fact used in *Measure for Measure* (3.1.157-58). If we take this first adjective meaning, and assume (not outrageously) that it modifies the noun immediately following, then Gloucester is describing the man himself as 'superfluous', not his actions or his tastes. It is not only by virtue of overconsumption that Gloucester has caused the misery of the poor, but also by his mere being, occupying another's place "with the very *Da* of my *Dasein*." Of course, his own comfort has also been a usurpation of someone else "whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 82), but this is not only a matter of taking someone else's place in the social hierarchy, or at least, a place that someone else could fill. It is also a guilt for his existence as such, a guilt experienced *vis-à-vis* an Other. This broader sense of guilt and responsibility leads him to wish to find a more equitable division of goods.

Cordelia and Lear's mutual forgiveness seems to be the strongest indication of a breach with the self-interested, political or economic motivation of most of the play. This is not, of course, to say that it escapes politics and economics altogether: Cordelia's reconciliation with her father no doubt has propaganda value for the French invasion force, and Lear perhaps wishes to be able to set his rest on Cordelia's "kind nursery" once again. The scene of their reconciliation ends with a discussion between Kent and the Gentleman, regarding the enemy's command structure and anticipating that "the arbitrement is like to be bloody" (4.7.94). No one can seriously question, in other words, whether the scene of forgiveness is related to the political

events of the play, but the question remains as to whether it is a product of politics, whether its interest is exhausted by a play of political interests, or whether, on the contrary, it provides such political interests with their interestedness. At a number of moments in the scene, the characters' words and actions seem to exceed any sort of *quid pro quo* exchange. As Snyder says, "mercy supersedes justice" when Lear offers to take any poison which Cordelia provides (Snyder 154). He recognizes that he deserves death as a recompense for Cordelia's exile. If there were no surplus beyond a set of *quid pro quo* exchanges, he would also receive death. On the contrary, while Lear's statement implies "his moral responsibility" (Snyder 173), it is brushed aside by Cordelia's "No cause, no cause" (4.7.75). This is not a moral responsibility constituted within a network of trades and trade-offs, where one is responsible only for what one has done, and can make reparations with money or blood. Nor, one might add, is it merely a metaphysical fantasy. Cavell has argued powerfully that Cordelia is one of the most worldly characters, "knowing the deafness of miracles." There is, he argues, a complete "absence in her of any unearthly experiences; she is the only good character whose attention is wholly on earth, on the person nearest her" (Cavell 73, 74). Lear, similarly, finds his actions inspired by the proximity of another person rather than an abstract principle, or a calculation of self-interest. His offer to take himself from the scene–his declaration of himself as a 'superfluous man', to borrow Gloucester's term–follows from his acknowledgement that Cordelia is crying: "I pray you, weep not: / If you have poison for me, I will drink it" (4.7.71-72). Only after his acknowledgement of Cordelia's pain, and of his responsibility to her, of the fact that he *ought* to try to comfort her, does Lear call to mind the specific wrongs he has done: "You have some cause" (4.7.75). The awareness of wrongs committed follows from–it does not precede–a more general concern with another person.

Berger has argued that Cordelia's forgiveness is a denial of wrongs committed by her as

much as by Lear: "But she *did* have a share in the cause he gave her; ignoring what he did is ignoring what she did" in leaving him to the untender mercies of her sisters. This logic only holds, however, if we see forgiveness as taking place within a network of exchanges, in which Cordelia's forgiveness of Lear is, as Berger says, reunion's "cost" (Berger 46). In this case, Lear's asking forgiveness might be an effort to win himself a position in Cordelia's concern. If, however, we see responsibility not as following from one's acts, but from one's being, as a guilt for all the violence I might have caused, rather than a set of specific responsibilities for specific wrongs committed, then Cordelia is not merely avoiding or repressing her guilt. She recognizes her responsibility when she acknowledges Lear's face:

> Was this a face
> To be oppos'd against the warring winds?
> To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
> In the most terrible and nimble stroke
> Of quick, cross lightning? (4.7.31-35)

She is responsible, not for what she might or might not have done differently, but for her father, as a person. The fact that she tends to blame her sisters, or merely circumstance, does not alter this. She still (in spite of her self-righteousness) denies that she has any cause to hate Lear, and refuses to allow him to kneel to her.

The really interesting aspect of the reconciliation has to do with its mutuality, the fact that Lear and Cordelia both consider themselves responsible for the Other person, without either being correspondingly elevated in hierarchy. In a few lines, both Lear and Cordelia place themselves below each other:

> O! look upon me, Sir,
> And hold your hand in benediction o'er me.

No, Sir, you must not kneel. (4.7.57-59)

The new relationship is not a matter of Lear's blessing reinforcing his position as *pater familias*. Nor, for that matter, is it a matter of Lear begging for "food, raiment and shelter," as when he mocked Regan's demand that he seek Goneril's forgiveness (2.4.150-53). There is something in process other than a game of power. The humility of neither character becomes her or his humiliation. The scene therefore defies description in terms of a zero-sum game. Nicholas Brooke noted some time ago that Cordelia's claim to have "no cause" "is far indeed from the truth: she had much cause [. . .]. This is not 'clear sight'; nor, if justice is a weighing of the scales, is it 'just'" (Brooke 81). Of course one can, if sufficiently determined, explicate this scene in terms of operations of power, psychology, economics, social energy and so forth. Berger, for instance, claims that Lear's admissions of weakness are a sort of passive-aggressive effort to gain pity (Berger 41). My point is not to show that such hypotheses depend on a deeply characterological analysis of hidden or even unconscious motives (though they do), but, more importantly, that such analyses avoid the relation between self and Other which is not exhausted in self-interest or in an ultimately anonymous game. An analysis which seeks out the real (which is usually to say Machiavellian, or even perverse) motives of the characters betrays the interpersonal dynamic which the scene contains into an anonymous game, and ultimately agrees with Goneril and her ilk in seeing all human relations as power relations.

One might generalize the point that to give a blessing is not always to assume a position of power, and note that several times in the play, a blessing appears as a genuine good wish to someone. Lear and Cordelia's blessing to each other implies a situation in which blessing does not take place as a ceremony of power. It does not establish or confirm a hierarchy that places he who gives the blessing above its recipient: "When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness" (5.3.10-11). They will be "poor rogues" together, and in company

with other "poor rogues":

> so we'll live
>
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales,
>
> And laugh at gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
>
> Talk of court news.[51] (5.3.11-14)

We have already looked at Gloucester's prayer to the Gods to "prosper" Edgar. This line contrasts strongly with what immediately precedes it, before Gloucester learns of Edmund's treachery: "Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature / To quit this horrid act" (3.7.84-85). Where in calling for revenge, Gloucester is drawing upon his social position as father, and naturalizing the loyalty which his son ought to bear to him, in asking the "Kind gods" to assist Edgar, he is admitting his error ("forgive me that") and surrendering initiative to the heavens. He wishes Edgar well once more, when about to commit suicide and take a last initiative which would end all initiative forever. In fact, he blesses him twice in this instance, first as Edgar, who may or may not live, then as Poor Tom, whom he acknowledges as his "fellow": "If Edgar live, O, bless him! / Now, fellow, fare thee well" (4.5.84-85). One might argue that being able to bless Edgar steels Gloucester in his identity just as he is about to require all of his power for one final act. One cannot, however, argue that Gloucester's naming of Edgar at this point is in the manner of assuming the role of *pater familias* and lord over his household, when he has no household, no wealth and quite possibly, no living family other than Edmund, who subverts rather than bolsters Gloucester's social position. In fact, Edgar twice makes blessings that reverse the social hierarchy, blessing his superiors. Encountering Gloucester at the beginning of

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[51]In the folio text, these words are placed in brackets, and therefore refer to Lear and Cordelia. In the quarto text, on the other hand, they are not placed in brackets, and would indicate "wretched creatures, presumably their fellow-prisoners or jailers" (5.3.13n).

act four, he says "Bless thy sweet eyes. They bleed" (4.1.53). Gloucester's eyes still command pity, even if they no longer express power in the manner of Lear's stare. Edgar blesses Lear's senses more generally when, in the quarto's trial scene, he exclaims "Bless thy five wits!" (3.6.56), which also, as his delusions of Goneril as a joint-stool show, "bleed". Albany claims that "The judgement of the heavens, that makes us tremble, / Touches us not with pity" (5.3.230-31). The suffering of Others that makes characters extend a blessing, however, seems to be the opposite of this "judgement of the heavens": rather than making the characters tremble, as an act of power by gods that are an extension of social order, it touches the characters with pity. Edgar doesn't tremble like the subject who quakes at Lear's stare. His response is not a response to a power that might harm him. On the contrary, it is a response to the harm which might come, or which has already come, to an Other.

The greatest harm which might come to the Other, of course, is death. In chapter five, I showed that Levinas's philosophy, in sharp contrast to Heidegger's, does not allow for one to grasp one's own death as a possibility. Rather than being grasped, death is the situation "where we ourselves are seized" (*Time and the Other* 71). Instead of serving as a final object of solitude and power, "This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely Other" (*Time and the Other* 74). A few years later, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas insists that "Death [. . .] is *present* only in the Other, and only in him does it summon me urgently to my final essence, to my responsibility" (*Totality and Infinity* 179). Levinas elsewhere, and perhaps drawing on his own experience as a survivor of the Shoah, claims that this responsibility may come about "despite the innocence of [my] intentions." It may, moreover, simply take the form of "nothing more than responding 'here I am,' in the impotent confrontation with the Other's death, or in the shame of surviving, to ponder the memory of one's faults" ("Diachrony and Representation" 110). The dead face is not a face (*Totality and Infinity* 262), but the face's

call on me, my responsibility for the Other, is not absolved by his death. Likewise, responsibility is not dissolved by my own death:

> Signification comes from an authority that is significant *after and despite my death*, signifying to the finite ego, to the ego doomed to death, a meaningful order significant beyond this death.

Since Levinas understands signification as the Saying of an Other, and coming from a signifier who produces signs, then the distance of the Other, and the responsibility which it implies, would survive my own death. "There is responsibility for the other right up to dying for the other" ("Diachrony and Representation" 114).

In fact, in Edmund's case, the approach of death seems actually to prompt responsibility: "some good I mean to do / Despite of mine own nature" (5.3.242-43). Facing the limit of his own possibilities, when "I pant for breath," his world ceases, if only subtly, to be a sphere of his own actions and intentions, and he is able to recognize the Other, though tragically too late. In a discussion of the last few lines of the play, Cavell argues that Lear's guilt at Cordelia's death is indicated by the line "I might have saved her." He takes this to mean that Lear could have acknowledged her (Cavell 73). Lear does, indeed, acknowledge his daughter in the scene of his reawakening, but this does not release him from responsibility. To recognize the Other as Other is to recognize someone for and to whom I am responsible. Lear's line seems, at least at first, to express a sense of guilt, combined with an exaggerated sense of his own powers, as if he could have lifted her from the grave. The end of this scene, starting with Lear's entry bearing the dead Cordelia, is, as I have already argued in chapter five, an extended struggle between Lear's attempts to hold Cordelia in life by his own will, and his recognition of the impossibility of such an action. A distraction in his attention towards her seems like murdering her and he accuses the other characters on stage of doing just that, "A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!"

(5.3.268). This scene can certainly be read in terms of Lear arrogating to himself power over life and death, and therefore as a return to the commanding, willful Lear of the opening scene. However, his effort is not violent: he does not command Cordelia to speak, though he does try, pathetically, to hear her voice (5.3.271). Of course, no gesture can be tender enough to raise the dead, just as no effort can be violent enough to galvanize a corpse, but this does not exhaust the meaning of Lear's listening. Although it does not have power–it is helpless to force events–it nevertheless shows a concern for the Other which survives his or her death. The confrontation with the Other's death is, as Levinas says, "impotent", but it is not therefore meaningless. Death has meaning not as a possibility of the self, not even as the "ownmost possibility" of Heidegger's ontology, but as a relation to another, whose death calls one to responsibility, if only the responsibility to respond "'here I am,' in the impotent confrontation with the Other's death, or in the shame of surviving, to ponder the memory of one's faults." Where Edmund confronts the Other in death, Lear confronts death in the Other.

Samuel Johnson famously objected that the death of Cordelia "in a just cause" was "contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles," adding that the public had judged Tate's happy ending to be better, and that he, personally, found the death of Cordelia almost insufferable (Johnson 222-23). To Johnson, the play violated morality, whereas to Bradley it violated "dramatic sense" (Bradley 252). Slightly more recently, Brooke argued that Cordelia's death is completely undeserved, and closes all possibilities of redemption: "There is no regeneration in symbols of natural growth to be made out of 'She's dead as earth'. Her death kills all life" (Brooke 84). Snyder claimed that Cordelia's death is "shocking, incongruous, an affront to all our preconceptions about fiction. The author has broken the rules" (Snyder 156). Such critics are anticipated by Lear himself, who finds the death of Cordelia terribly excessive and horribly intractable:

No, no, no life!

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never! (5.3.304-07)

The importance of Cordelia's death for the play is in providing Lear with something which does not yield to his power, but the Other, and her suffering, is not only simply immovable, like a great object beyond one's strength; on the contrary, it has positive importance as a call to responsibility. Lear is not simply frustrated by Cordelia's death and silence, as he perhaps was with her silence in the first scene. Instead, he is in mourning. This scene defies a criticism which attempts to comprehend it within a general aesthetic or moral order because it is excessive, out of bounds of such limited and limiting structures. In a further argument regarding the end of the play, Brooke claims that Cordelia's death shows values to be "superfluous," lacking any "reference beyond themselves." Ironically, Brooke finds in this superfluity a grounds for hope: "without superfluity there would be no hope, only clear sight which is, at once, both necessary and impossible: 'She's dead as earth'" (Brooke 87). The superfluous (in this sense) is what stands outside the real world of historicity, power, politics and ultimately self-interest. It is outside of sight, representing what one can know and appropriate, even using the tools of a formalist or moralistic criticism: "the author has broken the rules." But at the same time, Lear's responsibility for Cordelia's death provides grounds for actions and intentions, just as, perhaps, our own responsibility as audience, readers or critics, provides us with a stake, a reason to watch, read or criticize.

Responsibility, certainly within Levinas's work and also, I argue, within the play, provides a new and different basis for selfhood, quite different from the anxious ego described in the introduction, which attempts to hold itself against the night of anonymous Being by its own

powers. Cavell has argued that Lear's insanity is "first broken through" in the scene with Gloucester and Edgar near Dover. While I have already argued that it is also "broken through", albeit briefly, in acknowledging the Fool, Cavell is quite right to point out that Lear's newly sane identity depends upon "*recognizing* someone" (Cavell 50). The centrality of recognition to sanity indicates a new relationship to the Other. Levinas claims that responsibility individuates: "In the saying of responsibility, which is an exposure to an obligation for which no one could replace me, I am unique" (Levinas *Otherwise* 97). Subjectivity is therefore established not as subjectivity *per se*, but in the accusative. Levinas's responsibility to say "here I am" to the Other is rendered "*me voici*" in French. Krzysztof Ziarek summarizes this argument by saying that the self is "Not strictly speaking an ego set up in the nominative in its identity, ... it is set up as it were in the accusative form, from the first responsible and not being able to slip away" (Ziarek 97).

Reflection, Levinas insists, depends upon a prior calling into question of the self (*Totality and Infinity* 80), without which the self would be unconsciously spontaneous. Specifically, to call into question my own freedom is to welcome the Other (*Totality and Infinity* 85), which Levinas associates with standing under the judgement of the Other, with shame. The face, the "eyes that look at me," subvert me by calling into question the freedom of the self. This calling into question of the self, of "my arbitrary freedom," is not simply an encounter with an absolutely immovable object. It does not, in other words, "offend [. . .] as a limit" on my powers (*Totality and Infinity* 86). It therefore moves beyond the view of the world in which the Other is an enemy, to be destroyed or thrown aside. While, of course, the Other can resist me physically,

> he can also–and here is where he presents me with his face–oppose himself to me beyond all measure, with the total uncoveredness and nakedness of his defenseless eyes, the straightforwardness, the absolute frankness of his gaze. ("Philosophy and the Idea of the

Infinite" 109-10)

The face is understood by Levinas as an appeal. In fact, the existence of the Other "is effectuated in the non-postponable urgency with which he requires a response" (*Totality and Infinity* 212). To recognize the Other is to recognize a responsibility, even a guilt. This responsibility does not cancel the self, because only a self can answer a responsibility with "all the personal work of my moral initiative" (*Totality and Infinity* 300). Hence, the I subsists in spite of, or rather because of, relation with the Other.

Eyes, in the play, are not only the challenge which Cornwall effaces violently, they are also a positive call to responsibility. The servant who defends Gloucester dies in his sight: "my Lord, you have one eye left / To see some mischief on him" (3.7.79-80). One might add that the servant's actions take place despite both the structures of power–since he rebels against them–and also before he is individuated as a character. Even in dramatic terms, his individuation proceeds from his responsibility to the half-blinded Gloucester, not vice-versa. Even put out, Gloucester's eyes lay a claim on whoever faces or even hears about them, by virtue of their very absence. "It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out," Regan correctly observes, "To let him live; where he arrives he moves / All hearts against us" (4.5.9-11). We see an early example of this appeal in Edgar's greeting of Gloucester: "Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed" (4.1.53). At more length, we also see Albany's response to the blinding. Told that Cornwall has been "Slain by his servant, going to put out / The other eye of Gloucester," Albany repeats, in horror, the phrase "Gloucester's eyes!" After hearing of how the servant killed Cornwall, and praising the gods who "can venge" such crimes, he returns once more to Gloucester's eyes: "But, O poor Gloucester! / Lost he his other eye?" (4.1.79-80). After an interval where Goneril, aside, plots how to obtain Edmund, Albany returns discussion to the earlier subject–"Where was his

son, when they did take his eyes?"–and ends the scene by vowing "to avenge thine eyes" (4.1.88, 96). Richard Strier describes the "theatrical radicalism" of Gloucester's blinding as reinforcing the "political radicalism" of Cornwall's servant, a peasant standing against authority (Strier 120). But the "political radicalism" depends first on the ethical radicalism of the scene, how it goes to the root of ethics as first philosophy. An attack on eyes serves as an appeal not only to the on-stage characters like Albany and enlistees to the army gathering against Regan and Goneril, but also to the audience. Albany answers it with "all the personal work of [his] moral initiative" (*Totality and Infinity* 300), and the audience might answer only with what we call, somewhat weakly in this case, "audience response." The scene goes to the root of an ethical injunction, meditating on the gaze which commands, even while staging this gaze.

The response to Gloucester's blinding is not a response to power. It might be a response to an act of power, or to its product, the blind man, but that is not quite the same thing. Both the actions of power and its product would be ethically indifferent were there no concern for Gloucester, if his face did not compel our response. It goes almost without saying that if his face compels, it is not because he is powerful, as in Lear's case ("see how the subject quakes"; 4.6.108). The compulsion to pay attention, to care, played out in the determination of Albany, the rebellion of the English population encountered between Gloucester and Dover, and the audience's horror, is not forced upon the characters or upon the audience as some sort of indoctrination. It is Gloucester's weakness, his defencelessness, which elicits a response.

There are several examples in the play of characters choosing to stand under judgement, apart from Cornwall's servant and other examples already mentioned. Kent, disguised as Caius, describes himself as one who wishes "to fear judgement" (1.4.16). Lear, awakened from a sleep which he takes to be death, describes Cordelia as "a soul in bliss" and "a spirit" (4.7.46, 49). Berger takes this to be a calculated appeal to Cordelia's pity (Berger 41), though it also seems

perfectly reasonable that Lear really is quite confused, and, as I argued in chapter five, frustrated by his inability to die. In any case, besides the fact that such "darker purposes" can only be hypothesized, their presentation serves to evade but not to annul the interpersonal. Lear is making Cordelia higher than himself in this instance, like the judge who will call him to responsibility, and before whom he tries to make excuses: "I am a very foolish fond old man" (4.7.60). Kent goes further in recognizing responsibility, making himself a hostage for Lear's well-being:

> My life I never held but as a pawn
>
> To wage against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,
>
> Thy safety being the motive. (1.1.154-56)

One will note that Kent's commitment to Lear runs counter to his self-interest, and to the duties imposed upon him by feudalism. "On thy allegiance, here me" shouts Lear, as he orders Kent's banishment on pain of death. In both objecting to Cordelia's banishment and returning despite his own, Kent's loyalty goes beyond death, since he is willing to risk his own life, and beyond the duties of feudalism, since he is overtly defying Lear in both instances. Moreover, Kent's acts of loyalty are excessive, as even the characters in the play recognize. He did not content himself with serving Lear as a vassal might, but also performed "service / Improper for a slave" (5.3.219-20).[52] Were his loyalty a matter of simple economic exchange, it could not be expected to last beyond the ability of Lear to return the favour, just as Gloucester has no self-interested reason to relieve "my old master" (3.3.18). A play of power explains why the knights serve Lear, and also, as the Fool observes, why they leave him (2.4.69-72), but it does not explain why the

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[52]In deference to those who might wish to omit this line, which occurs only in the quarto text, or to suspect it as a product of Edgar's narrative frame of mind, it is worth noting that we never actually see Kent perform any particularly humiliating services.

really faithful characters continue to serve him even after he has lost power.

If we accept that love involves the Other, and is therefore an escape from the self-interest of the ego, then we can examine the deaths of Kent, Gloucester and Lear in a new light. In chapter five, I showed also that more than one of the characters is frustrated by his inability to die, that suicide fails within the play and is a contradictory notion in Levinas. The self, he argues at some length in *Existence and Existents* and by reference to Shakespearean tragedy, cannot escape itself and therefore finds no true escape from being (*Existence and Existents* 87). On the contrary, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that true self-renunciation is love, not suicide (*Totality and Infinity* 273). Kent certainly seems to envision death as an escape in the last lines of the play when he commands Edgar to "vex not [Lear's] ghost: [. . .] he hates him / That would upon the rack of this tough world / Stretch him out longer" (5.3.312-14). Death becomes an escape in the case of all three old men, where it was earlier a frustrated effort at self-mastery, because it is now experienced in relation to an Other. The first indication of Kent's impending death comes in Edgar's narrative of his father's demise, where Kent

> threw him on my father;
> Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
> That ever ear receiv'd; which in recounting
> His grief grew puissant, and the strings of life
> Began to crack. (5.3.212-16)

In speaking to another, in Saying as Levinas might put it, and in contact with Edgar and the dead Gloucester, Kent begins to die, to escape what Levinas would call the night of inescapable Being or what he himself later calls "the rack of this tough world." His final move towards death in the last lines of the play are described as a response to another, an answer to a summons: "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; / My master calls me, I must not say no" (5.3.320-21). Kent's journey

is radically one-way, to the Other. To borrow Levinas's terms, it is not a "journey of Odyssey" returning back to the place from whence it came.[53]

> We know little of Gloucester's death, only Edgar's report that
>
> his flaw'd heart,
>
> Alack, too weak the conflict to support!
>
> 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief
>
> Burst smilingly. (5.3.195-98)

This brief description has been subjected to a great deal of criticism, ranging from Chambers's claim that he "dies from a love too great to sustain" (361) to Berger's argument that "the conflict, the grief, that killed Gloucester must have been the searing guilt caused by the joy of recognition" (Berger 64). There is not, I think, enough internal evidence to show whether Gloucester dies mainly of grief at his guilt or joy at his love, but in either case, a relationship to another person is implied. While his effort to die alone, operating entirely under his own powers and co-opting the gods to stand witness, is frustrated, he is nevertheless able to escape selfhood in contact with an Other. Lear's own death is not a matter of trying to escape human contact, but of trying to regain it. Where earlier he wished to remain in "the grave", not having any contact with Cordelia or anyone else, he now dies looking to an Other, and urging others to do likewise: "Look there, look there" (5.3.310). Lear's final speeches are filled with anguish at Cordelia's death, an anguish not cancelled by his occasional lapses into boasting about his fencing skills or fumbling with somebody's button. He is able to escape "the rack of this tough world" not by an act of will, but by an acknowledgement of the Other. True renunciation is not suicide, but love.

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[53]Levinas uses this metaphor several times, for instance in *Totality and Infinity* (102, 176-177). The metaphor is described by Richard Cohen in his introduction to *Time and the Other* (24).

In a series of answers to questions posed after the presentation of *Ideology and Idealism* in Jerusalem, Levinas argued that it was vital to determine "whether the state, society, law, and power are required because man is a beast to his neighbour [. . .] or because I am responsible to my fellow" ("Ideology and Idealism" 247). Does the state exist to limit our barbarity, as Hobbes felt, or to limit our responsibility? While recognizing elsewhere that "Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté" (*Totality and Infinity* 21), and that even the Talmudists justified the oppressive state of Rome on Hobbesian grounds ("Zionisms" 273), Levinas nevertheless holds out the possibility of a politics built starting not from depravity, but from responsibility. The problem, as he made clear in the same response offered at the end of *Ideology and Idealism*, is that one is never responsible for only one Other:

> Indeed, if there were only two of us in the world, I and one other, there would be no problem. The other would be completely my responsibility. But in the real world there are many others. When others enter, each of them external to myself, problems arise. Who is closest to me? Who is the Other? [. . .] Legal Justice is required. There is need for a state. ("Ideology and Idealism" 247)

One will note that such a state organizes responsibilities, rather than providing a forum for the rational pursuit of self-interest. Of course, such a state can itself become unjust and must therefore always be checked against the ethical imperative that gives it rise:

> The State, institutions, and even the courts that they support, reveal themselves essentially to an eventually inhuman but characteristic determinism–politics. Hence it is important to be able to check this determinism in going back to its motivation in justice and a foundational inter-humanity. ("Diachrony and Representation" 105)

The political issue is not abandoned by Levinas, who recognizes in the formation of states and the defense of one's neighbours "an old ethical idea" ("Ethics and Politics" 292). On the

contrary, it is grounded in and justified by a more fundamental ethical imperative.

A number of characters in the play run up against the ethical problem of deciding between Others. Albany recognizes those "others, whom the rigor of our state / Forced to cry out" (5.1.22-23), but still intends to defend the country. The solution to Albany's crisis between what he owes to the oppressed, and what he owes to his allies and the state, is, in Goneril's words, to put aside "these domestic and particular broils" which "Are not the question here" (5.1.30-31). The domestic, in other words, becomes the horizon of responsibility, at least when a foreign enemy approaches. The only Others who need to be recognized are those within the political state, whose formation implicitly leaves aside further others. The fact that Goneril defends the state should not be taken to indicate that it is simply an evil notion, endorsed only by evil characters. Even Lear and Cordelia, in the touching scene of mutual acknowledgement when they are taken off to prison, form a society of two, from which all others, especially the sisters, are excluded. Cordelia asks if they should "see these daughters and these sisters." "No, no, no, no!" Lear replies, "Come, let's away to prison / We two alone shall sing like birds i'th'cage" (5.3.8-9). Lear's charming description of the two characters asking responsibility of one another, existing, as I have argued, without hierarchy, is also an image of removal from the world of politics and money. The "ebb and flow" of the powerful becomes merely a spectacle, as if the characters were "God's spies," and the moon, threateningly in eclipse in act one, becomes a symbol of rhythm and order. Political intelligence, "Talk of court news," becomes on a par with "old tales," repeated for their narrative or literary interest. Gold, the image of wealth, becomes only the colour of butterflies, appreciated aesthetically. At some level, the relationship between Lear and Cordelia takes place outside politics, but what interests me is how their relationship is so exclusive. It is founded upon their not seeing the sisters. Lear sketches an ideal society, without hierarchy, and founded upon responsibility, and the need for forgiveness and blessing,

but "We two alone" make up the whole society, other than whatever poor rogues they may talk to. My goal is not to show that all polities are founded upon exclusion, though this might be arguable, or even that the apolitical takes place within a political setting, which goes without saying and in any case, does not detract from the exceptional nature of the ethical responsibility of the characters to each other. It is merely to show that the society of Lear and Cordelia does not extend outwards.

In fact, the society of Cordelia and Lear seems to exclude others as an incidental product of a fixation with each other, rather than as a stigmatizing of an Other, in the postcolonial sense of the term. In the final scene, Lear's love for Cordelia blinds him to Kent. When Kent is trying to present himself, Lear is busy trying to revive Cordelia, and has no time for Kent: "Prithee away!" (5.3.267). Later, when Kent tries to reveal that he is identical with Caius, Lear is incapable of paying attention to him. Albany excuses him on the grounds that "He knows not what he says, and vain it is / That we present us to him" (5.3.292-93). Chambers noted some time ago that Kent enters "begging, like a dog, for one moment's recognition of [his] faithfulness." He doesn't get it. Instead, "Kent's pleading rouses no recollection in Lear's mind, for Lear has no thought save for Cordelia" (374). Similarly, Lear apparently does not even apprehend the deaths of Edmund, Goneril and Regan. Cordelia's life becomes literally all important to Lear:

> This feather stirs; she lives! If it be so,
>
> It is a chance that does redeem all sorrows
>
> That ever I have felt. (5.3.264-66)

Insofar as Lear's love for Cordelia seems to exclude all others, it falls under Levinas's critique of erotic love as not constituting a true society, since it hides itself away, and takes place between two persons. "It excludes the third party, it remains intimacy, dual solitude, closed

society, the supremely non-public" (*Totality and Infinity* 265). Interestingly, Cavell's analysis of the beginning of act five, scene three, where the two are led off to prison, largely agrees. Lear's love, Cavell argues, "now is in the open–that much circumstance has done for him; but it remains imperative that it be confined, out of sight" (Cavell 68). In this scene, as in the opening of the play, love dares not speak its own name in public. According to Levinas, love can even become impersonal altogether, implying only a shared sensation, in contrast with friendship, which moves towards the Other (*Totality and Infinity* 265-66). In this sense, it is capable of being "divested of all transcendence, seek but a connatural being, a sister soul, present itself as incest" (*Totality and Infinity* 254). Critics such as Lynda E. Boose, who finds an "incestuous proximity" between Lear and Cordelia (Boose 66), are not entirely wrong. I am not, of course, suggesting that their relationship is literally incestuous, but that, like incest, it remains shut up between two persons. Nevertheless, while their society in prison fails to constitute itself as a true society, developing rules by which responsibility between persons can be regulated, and realizing the "legal justice" which Levinas claims "is required" ("Ideology and Idealism" 247), it never quite forgets "its motivation in justice and a foundational inter-humanity" ("Diachrony and Representation" 105). Society is not reconstituted at the end of the play, but this does not mean that the play does not explore the foundations of the social. By leaving questions of political organization unresolved, the play avoids an overhasty move to political questions. Insteads, it maintains its focus on the ethical basis for any such political arrangement.

Lear's exclusion of other Others is not inevitable. According to Levinas, the third party is, as it were, inseparable from the experience of the Other; she "looks at me in the eyes of the Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 213). I am joined to the Other in service, "in referring to the *third party*, [. . .] whom in the midst of his destitution the Other already serves" (*Totality and Infinity* 213). It strikes me that calling others to respond to the Other is precisely what Lear does when

he enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms:

> Howl, howl, howl! O! you are men of stones:
>
> Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so,
>
> That heavens vault should crack. (5.3.256-58)

Lear's order to the characters on stage is an absolute imperative. They are to use their "tongues and eyes," to 'face up' to Cordelia and call upon others to do likewise. Lear has got at least this far in his move towards the social and political. Moreover, his call is not limited to the characters on stage, but reaches out to the audience, who are constituted as audience by their obligation to look on the dead Cordelia. Being placed under a responsibility, Levinas has argued, is the basis of fraternity, a relation that takes place before a face. I am equal to the Other who calls me, insofar as we both stand before an other Other (*Totality and Infinity* 213). Political society begins with alterity, though, we might add, so does the society of the audience at a play, standing outside the action, watching it, and bearing a certain responsibility towards it, and a responsibility borne with all the other audience members.

Our responsibility to the stage is not entirely negated by our distance from the stage. Nor, I think, does this responsibility simply evade the political. Instead, it is the basis of the political, a return to the fundamental orientation of oneself for another to organize which "Legal justice is required. There is need for a state" ("Ideology and Idealism" 247). If this thesis has been overtly critical of political criticism, it is not because I think that some retreat from the political sphere is to be sought, or is even possible, but because such a move towards politics must return ceaselessly to its motivation in a foundational inter-humanity if it is not to lose itself in an ultimately inhuman determinism. To promulgate a politics without ethics, would be, in a word, irresponsible.

Conclusion — Ethics and Criticism

As I mentioned in the introduction, this thesis began with the aim of sketching a few of the religious concerns of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It soon became clear, however, that if these concerns were not to be re-appropriated into a political criticism, it was necessary to find an approach to religious issues capable of resisting the all but universal tendency to treat them as social issues. The tendency to avoid questions of alterity, to try to understand the Other as part of the Same, is not only found among critics, however, but extends to the characters of the play. As I have attempted to show, the characters in *King Lear* confront existential issues of anxiety in the face of Being. This anxiety inspires efforts to avoid anything impinging upon them from without, from the Other. Like New Historicist critics, the characters of the play attempt to treat human relations as relations of power. Although Goneril is the clearest example of this approach, all characters participate in it, treating their children as potential competitors, for instance. In order not to have to face anything absolutely given, which they cannot repay, they attempt to treat each other as participants in an economy characterized by the reciprocal nature of its exchanges.

Various routes of evasion from the burden of being are proposed by the play, only to be rejected. The folly of the Fool not only collapses in the liar's paradox, but also blocks access to the Other, by which alone escape from the burden of selfhood becomes possible. Similarly, suicide, an effort to construct oneself as a tragic hero choosing one's own fate, only serves to remove one from relation with the Other. It fails therefore as an escape, and characters find their efforts at suicide confounded. Finally, characters create idols as substitutes for transcendence, effectively worshipping themselves in their gods. Idolatry constitutes an effort to substitute an object for an Other. Conversely, the destruction of idols, which is itself a religious act, opens the

possibility of a true acknowledgement of the Other. The characters, situated as they are in a pagan setting, do not have access to revelation, but the play can nevertheless dramatize the moment when idols are overthrown. It is in the twilight of these idols that characters are able to acknowledge one another.

Acknowledgement, as well as its avoidance, is most vividly portrayed in the figure of Lear, as the title character. The acknowledgement takes place in moments, however; it is not the climax of a process of character development. For Gloucester, similarly, there are several moments in which he recognizes Edgar, if not as his son, then at least as an Other. In one version of the final scene, Lear dies while concentrating all his energies on Cordelia. It is out of such moments of acknowledgement that a politics can be constructed, as in Gloucester's and Lear's prayers and hopes for a more equitable distribution of goods and services. The play nevertheless avoids all but the most cursory move towards the political future in its conclusion, resting in the question of ethical acknowledgement and therefore drawing attention to its importance. Unlike in *Cymbeline* or *Macbeth*, both of which end by promising a political future of unity and concord, in *Lear* such efforts at determining a new political settlement are rent asunder by the entry of Lear bearing the dead Cordelia in his arms. In this play, issues of suffering and acknowledgement, of responsibility and love, are excessive to efforts to contain them in discussions of politics.

This play does not merely represent characters struggling with issues of responsibility; it also imposes responsibility on the audience. Lear's final cry to "Look there, look there" is not only directed at the characters on stage. The audience is also compelled to bear witness, as at the blinding of Gloucester, and might even be constituted as audience by our shared responsibility towards the events on stage. Such responsibility is distinct from a romantic self-indulgence in sentiment, or the irresponsibility of aesthetic pleasure. Like the characters on stage, we do not

acknowledge once and for all, nor are we swept up into some sort of communion with the events on stage, losing our own historical specificity in a mystical union. We are not possessed by the stage, but summoned to respond to it. Levinas insists that criticism has more than "a parasitic existence." Instead of finding its origin in the artist's inspiration, it

> has its source in the mind of the listener, spectator or reader; criticism exists as the public's mode of comportment. Not content with being absorbed in aesthetic enjoyment, the public feels an irresistible need to speak. ("Reality and its Shadow" 130)

Audience response is not a loss of identity; on the contrary, we respond out of our identities.

If this is true of *King Lear*, then this play is not adequately described in the terms which we generally use to describe tragedy. Our pleasure at the play is not a matter of witnessing a heroic individual maintaining his individuality in the face of suffering, or even being individuated by choosing his death as his ownmost possibility, as Heidegger would say. What the play portrays, instead, are characters who, despite their heroism, can not free themselves from being by their own efforts, not even if these efforts take the form of suicide, madness or the construction of idols. Efforts to escape the self through its own powers fail, because such efforts only tie the self back to itself more forcefully. Our response is not ultimately a process of coming to a psychological recognition about ourselves through the process of watching and hearing the play. On the contrary, to view this play is to be called upon to respond, if only impotently, or if only by becoming guilty for the irresponsibility of our aesthetic enjoyment. Cavell argues that normally tragedy seems to free us from the need to acknowledge others, presenting us with others to whom we do not need to respond. He takes this as disarming us, and therefore making us better able to offer acknowledgement outside the theatre (Cavell 103-04). Nevertheless, the fact remains that we *do* respond, if only by denouncing the stage as unreal, or by evading response. Our reaction to drama is not one of ceasing to be ourselves. On the

contrary, the ethical relation between self and Other requires the separation of its terms. We answer the other with "generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands" (*Totality and Infinity* 50). Specifically, we answer a theatrical or literary work with criticism, with an effort to draw it into dialogue. We are not content (or at least, we should not be content) to surrender our responsibility to sentimentality.

New historicism follows Foucault in believing that the "history which bears and determines us has the form of a war" (Foucault 56). A move to politics, and any move within a purely political criticism, does not break with this dictum. To reverse Karl von Clauswitz's famous definition of war, politics is merely the continuation of war by other means. As I noted in the introduction, historicism attempts to become totalizing, excluding from consideration anything that would stand outside a play of social forces, and attempting to demystify moral imperatives, freeing itself from all ethical demands. It nevertheless serves ethical ends, such as McLuskie's reading of feminism as a "project for fundamental social change" or Greenblatt's "desire to speak with the dead." It betrays these original motives, however, in excluding the ethics which gave it birth. Even more fundamentally, it excludes the ethical imperative, the need of an audience to respond, which gives life to criticism. There is something at stake in the critical project, but it will never be found without looking outside a game that seeks to become all-encompassing, forbidding any reference beyond itself.

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