

“I will keep still with my philosopher”: A Christian
Reading of *King Lear*

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HOLLANTI, TONY: "I will keep still with my philosopher": A Christian reading of *King Lear*

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Tutkielman aiheena on Shakespearen näytelmän *King Learin* tulkinta kristillisestä näkökulmasta, ts. tutkia ensisijaisesti sitä, mitkä ovat tätä kantaa puolustavia tekijöitä. Pääaiheita, minkä puitteissa näytelmää tulkitaan, ovat keskeisten raamatullisten sekä muiden yhteyksien lisäksi kurjuus, rakkaus, oikeus.

Vaikka tutkielma puoltaakin kristillistä näkökulmaa, sen tarkoituksena ei silti ole valita ja puoltaa mitään tiettyä, vaikkapa katolista tai protestanttista näkökulmaa, vaan termi "kristillinen" tässä kontekstissa on ymmärrettävä laajasti, pois lukien oikeuden teeman käsittelyä jota lähestytään luterilaisen opin kannalta. Tutkielman kristillinen näkökulma yhdistyy myöskin kriittisyyteen filosofiaa kohtaan, tämä kriittisyys saa tutkielmassa nimityksen "anti-filosofia".

Yks keskeinen tutkielman väite on, että *King Learia* - vastoin vallalla olevaa käsitystä - ei tule nähdä pakanallisena tai maallisena versiona edeltävästä, anonymististä näytelmästä *King Lear*. Tämän väitteen tueksi tutkielmassa esitetään useita kristillisen uskonopin kohtia suhteessa itse näytelmään, sen lisäksi todistellaan väitteen yhteneväisyyksiä niin maallista kuin kristillistä näkökulmaa puolustaviin oppineisiin näkemyksiin ja teorioihin. Kristillisistä lähteistä ehkä merkittävimpiä ovat Raamatun ohella useat teokset Augustinukselta, kuten *Tunnustukset* - sekä Danten *Inferno*.

Tutkielman johtopäätöksistä tärkeimpiä ovat kristillisen lukutavan mielekkyyden todistaminen ja oikeudenmukaisuuden käsitteen punninta; ts. sen todistaminen että *King Learin* tapahtumat voivat olla ristiriidassa maallisen oikeuskäsityksen suhteen, mutta eivät kristillisen oikeuskäsityksen kanssa. Näihin käsitteisiin nivoutuu myöskin *Learin* kohtalo, hänen kohtalonsa systemaattinen ja synteettinen analyysi on niinkään eräs johtopäätöksistä. Tätä analyysiä ei silti ole tarkoitettu tyhjentäväksi, vaan se on ennemminkin ymmärrettävä ehdotuksena - mutta ehdotuksena joka kuitenkin on tehty kristilliseen uskonoppiin sitoutuen.

Avainsanat: *King Lear*, kristillinen, luterilainen, filosofia

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1. Introduction

Although I have not read the original, anonymous *King Leir*, I am aware of the nature of changes Shakespeare made to it in his version of it, *King Lear*. The changes include the removal of a divine intervention, angels; various other apparent Christian elements are either removed or then placed in the sidelines of the play as inconspicuous allusions or they are simply a part of the play's structure, as is the case, for example, with the link between on one hand Lear's madness, and on the other, that of Nebuchadnezzar in the Bible. Jonathan Bate has described the changes: "...We should recall here Shakespeare's two major alterations to his source...its happy ending was removed, Cordelia being wantonly killed, and the whole of the action was displaced from a Christian to a pagan setting" (Bate, 2008, 389). It is my firm contention, that these changes actually did not make the play pagan or secular, instead, it is now rather *more* Christian than the earlier play. This may be slightly surprising, but the surprise may be caused by an all too common, incorrect view of what Christianity is all about, and this misunderstanding may in turn be further reinforced by the existence of the naïvete in the earlier *King Leir* (supposedly a very Christian text). Of course, such misperception of the Christian dogma had to be behind the writing of it as well.

It may have been one of Shakespeare's intentions to make these changes so that he could show the world what he thought Christianity really means, but this would lead to speculation and is not an interest of my thesis, though I personally do support this point of view. Neither is it within my interests to argue whether *King Lear* supports a Catholic, Protestant, Calvinist etc. reading best. I use the term Christian/Christianity quite broadly in this thesis, unless otherwise specified. In addition to stating this, especially my use of the notion of dogma has to be explained thoroughly. Only in chapter five, titled "justice", is the term used in its usual, strict, dictionary sense¹; outside this chapter it is to be understood broadly as well.

¹ "...the term "dogma" is assigned to those theological tenets which are considered to be well demonstrated, such that their proposed disputation or revision effectively means that a person no longer accepts the given religion as his or her own, or has entered into a period of personal doubt." Source: <http://thesaurus.com/> [Internet]

By this I mean the dogma to be understood as a nexus, the sum total of all dogmatic tenets of all Christian denominations, which, despite disagreement on many issues, functions as a unifying factor of the said denominations and separates them from other religions by giving them the right to call themselves Christian. Undeniably, the concept is vast when described in this way, but I think it will suffice for the purposes of this thesis and gives a good idea of what I mean when I use the term.

I am aware of the plurality of voices and philosophies in the play and I know it can be read and is being read from points of view that are in total opposition to mine and that the text surely supports such views well. However, I agree with Beauregard and Knight when they say:

...the secular view of suffering is too simplistic, too oblivious to the theological dimension of the play. In the Enlightenment manner, its appeal lies in its negative indictment of a Christian worldview, not in any independent, positive explanation on its own terms...
(Beauregard, 2008, p.206)

...previous secular accounts of *King Lear* fail to bring adequately into interpretive play certain theological doctrines, common to sixteenth-century Catholics and Protestants alike: particularly the notions that the workings of Providence are transcendent and mysterious, that the “gods”, work by mediation through virtuous human beings, that prayers are not always answered, that suffering can be punitive and perfective and that the source of evil lies not in God but in the hardness of the human heart when it is given to passion and malice.

(Beauregard, 2008, p. 218)

What we need is a new vocabulary, or a new recognition of past usage. For some years literary exegesis has been hampered by our reluctance to use such terms as ‘soul or ‘spirit’
(Knight, 1984, pp. 3-4)

These excerpts support my view that there may very well be good reasons to examine *King Lear* from a religious point of view. I shall go on to discuss the “how” and the “why” of a Christian reading, and attempt to show that there is a lot to be gained from applying a *proper* Christian reading to *King Lear*. I am not claiming that this has never been done before, but it appears to be the case that secular readings of the play are usually favoured over the religious ones, and I find this situation somewhat hard to accept. In other words, I do not consider this thesis to be a pioneering text, instead, it is intended as an addition and support for other Christian readings of *King Lear*.

My method shall be the exploration of the Christian dogma in the context of the play, by studying how its events, main characters and themes - love, misery and justice - reflect the dogma quite well, when seen from a more accurate theological perspective than the one that seems to reign in *King Lear*. Knowing also the recurrent allusions to god(s) in Shakespeare, it is probably not an uncommon estimation that he may have been a Christian writer, or religious at least. I shall not speculate on this any further, but for me personally it would seem counter-intuitive *not* to read *any* of Shakespeare's plays with this in mind, and I shall not and can not do so with *King Lear* either.

Furthermore, there is a constant dialogue between the dogma and secular philosophy in *King Lear*, (something which lies behind the title of this thesis), and I shall go on to discuss the tension between the two. I do not claim that reason/philosophy and faith need necessarily be in opposition to each other, yet they may easily be regarded as opposing forces in the play under discussion. *King Lear* exists in two rather different versions, the Quarto of 1608, and the First Folio of 1623. Many editors have tried and still try to amalgamate these texts, but in 1988 Wells and Taylor decided to print both versions as separate plays. Between the two options, *The History of King Lear* and *The Tragedy of King Lear*, I have chosen *The History* to work with. According to the editors of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *The History of King Lear* is closest to how Shakespeare originally wrote it, before he made a revised version of it. In the introduction to *the History*, Wells and Taylor state: "But research conducted mainly during the 1970s and 1980s confirms an earlier view that the 1608 quarto represents the play as Shakespeare originally wrote it, and the 1623 Folio as he substantially revised it" (p. 909). This and only this, is the reason for my choice, not for example an argument that *The History* better suits a Christian interpretation than *The Tragedy*. Such a comparison is beyond my interests.

2. Foundations for a Christian reading

This chapter is intended as an “extended introduction” into the basics of a Christian reading of *King Lear*. It is meant to explain and illustrate several Christian aspects that have to be considered thoroughly, before we can move on to chapters 3 – 5, which are focused on only one major topic. This chapter contains four main topics, ranging from anti-philosophy to biblical parallels. Without a proper understanding of all these issues individually and in relation to each other, the following thematic parts and thereby the entire thesis, would be somewhat weaker and rootless. Though the current chapter can not be said to be all about background information behind *King Lear*, some parts of it can still be understood in that sense. This is especially true when facts about censorship and basic principles of tragic realism² are discussed.

2.1. Anti-philosophy

Theologians and religious thinkers from very early on warn people against philosophy. Among these are Dante Alighieri with his *Inferno* and St. Augustine with *Confessions*. I think it safe to say that Shakespeare was aware of their works too, and might not have been very favourable towards secular philosophy in relation to faith and the dogma. Although, as an artist he would have had to hide his personal opinions in plurality of philosophies/theology in his works to avoid preaching like a Church Father. Neither must we forget the fact that censorship in Shakespeare’s time had to be taken into consideration as well. Braunmuller explains these limitations in *The New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of Macbeth* :

Queen Elizabeth I’s first proclamation seeking to control the subject and content of drama (16 May 1559) used words that were regularly repeated and echoed in official and unofficial documents: ‘her majestie doth . . . charge [her officers] . . . that they permit none [i.e. no ‘common Interludes’] to be played wherin either matters of religion or of the governaunce of the estate of the common weale shalbe handled or treated . . .’, and thirty years later the Privy Council sought closer theatrical control because the companies had ‘handle[d] in their plaies certen matters of Divinitye and of State unfit to be suffred’ (p.2)

² This term is my own and its definition is quite straightforward. By realism I refer to the correspondence between the narrative elements of a text and reality, it is the opposite, for example, to the concepts of naïveté and pure fantasy. The full term “tragic realism” implies the existence of realism as it is defined here, within a tragic text.

But to return to and discuss the main theme of anti-philosophy in more detail, I turn next to Dante.

He places philosophers in Hell, in the first circle of nine in total, to be more exact (also known as

Limbo):

I raised my eyes a little, and there was he
Who is acknowledged Master of those who know³,
Sitting in a philosophic family

Who look to him and do him honour. I saw
Nearest him, in front, Plato and Socrates.
I saw Democritus, who strove to show

That the world is chance, Zeno, Empedocles,
Anaxagoras...

(*Inferno*, Canto IV, ll. 115-122)

Their only fault is that they have not been baptized, but nevertheless, they are in Hell and have not been taken from there during the Harrowing of Hell by Jesus. Moreover, science, philosophy and astronomy are referred to on many occasions by St. Augustine in *Confessions* - the first quote given here might be characterized with such keywords as “distraction”, or “deviation” and of the two, this is perhaps the stricter one in tone. It warns against philosophy as something that causes man to focus on himself and thus forms a block between man and God:

There are people for whom philosophy is a means of misleading others, for they misuse its great name, its attractions, and its integrity to give colour and gloss to their own errors...Cicero...makes quite clear how wholesome is the admonition which the Holy Spirit gives in the words of your good and true servant, Paul: Take care not to let anyone cheat you with his philosophizings, with empty fantasies drawn from human tradition, from worldly principles; they were never Christ's teaching.

(p. 59)

Next excerpt, in turn, could be characterized with a keyword such as “pride” and might be seen as a warning against it, rather than philosophy itself. However, my perspective on St. Augustine on this matter is the sum of both quotes as they are portrayed here; and in addition to this, I read his view in relation to other related Christian views on philosophy, for example, Dante's.

³ Aristotle

Thus, my understanding of St. Augustine's stand on philosophy is stricter than what the following quote (alone) might suggest:

I had read a great many scientific books...When I compared them with the tedious tales of the Manichees, it seemed to me that...the theories of the scientists were more likely to be true...by dint of study they have skill to number stars...to measure the tracts of constellations and trace the paths of planets. The reason and understanding by which they investigate these things are gifts they have from you [God]. By means of them they have discovered *eclipses of the sun and moon*⁴...But the astronomers are flattered and claim the credit for themselves.

(pp. 92-93)

Jonathan Bate's discussion of philosophy in Shakespeare brings out an interesting contrast to the facts regarding anti-philosophy and plurality in St. Augustine. He states: "...Shakespeare's plays are sceptical of the claims made by conventional rationalizing philosophy. They are more interested in the paradoxes of 'wise folly' " (Bate, 2008, 383). Two pages later he continues:

So who is Lear's philosopher? He is poor Tom o'Bedlam. Why does Lear call an apparent madman his philosopher? What other kinds of 'philosopher' are there in the play? To what is Tom an alternative? Gloucester blames it all on stars: 'These late *eclipses in the sun and moon*⁵ portend no good to us'. Edmund disputes this: 'An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star.' He argues that things often regarded as 'natural order' are in fact 'custom'...The position articulated here is close to that of Michel de Montaigne...But if you have nothing save custom, no divinely sanctioned hierarchy, then where does your value-system come from?...Montaigne argues instead for Christian love and humility. Perhaps this is what Edmund moves towards at the end of the play, with his last attempt to do some good and his discovery that he was beloved.

(Bate, 2008, p.385)

Though he is most likely unaware of it, Gloucester's words "eclipses in the sun and moon" echo St. Augustine on different philosophies, astrology etc. Later on, both Gloucester and Edmund move on towards virtue (a topic to be further discussed in 4.4.) and their initial outlooks thus seem to lose importance. Similar negative results from philosophy can be argued to be present for Lear as well; though Knight discusses the role of humour, his words relate to my reading as well:

⁴ Italics added.

⁵ Italics added.

“...since Lear can not hear the resolving laughter of foolery, his mind is focused only to the ‘philosopher’ mumbling of the foul fiend” (Knight, 1998, p. 168). It may be said that, for example, due to his social status and his insanity Poor Tom is not *really* a philosopher, though Lear refers to him as one. This is true, but several things need to be said on this: first, it only serves to reinforce my anti-philosophical reading - if philosophy is corporally manifested in the poor, petty Tom, this does not make philosophy very appealing. Second, would a *secular* philosopher mumble of the foul fiend, would he say “...obey thy parents; keep thy word justly; swear not, commit not with man’s sworn spouse: set not thy sweet heart on proud array” (sc.10, 71-73)? Is Poor Tom to be read as a theologian rather than a philosopher? My answer to this is yes and no, he is both at the same time. For Lear he is a philosopher, because he does not *see* Poor Tom as anything else; this is one of the reasons why I think Lear remains to the end “bound upon a wheel of fire” (sc. 21, 44-45). And finally, I do not consider Tom a madman at all.

If someone wants to read him as being insane it is certainly possible, but I think that if one insists on doing so, then the joke is on the reader as he fails to look deeper into one of the most central ideas of the play, deception and disguises. Edgar is forced into his disguise and only pretends to be insane in order to survive. Yes, he says “Five fiends have been in Tom at once...” (sc. 15, 56), but I think that in saying this, he is actually referring to the evil in men in general and those men who he is hiding from. In listing the demons that allegedly possess his body, he seems to be referring to his own body as an analogy of evil present in the entire mankind. Knight is certainly right in saying: “It is significant that Shakespeare continually sees the community as a ‘body’, an organism, of which the individual is a limb: whereas St. Paul, too, sees the brotherhood of man as a ‘body’, the Body of Christ” (Knight, 1967, p. 71). Furthermore, in saying that he is possessed by multiple demons, Edgar echoes the biblical story of a possessed man. In the Bible the demon possessing a man was called Legion, because the demons “were many” (Mark 5: 9). The demons are also many in Edgar’s case (demonic possession will be further discussed at 4.2).

The fact that the fiends in Tom are five and that he repeatedly says: “bless thy five wits”; for example, in scene 11, 51 and scene 13, 52, is also an interesting detail worth reflecting on. I think this invites us to see our senses and knowledge in an anti-philosophical light, as dangerous and deceiving things. This scepticism towards the senses naturally bears a connection to Lear as well, because at the beginning of the play he wants to *hear* how much his daughters love him. True, scepticism against the senses connects to a long tradition of secular philosophy as well, for example, it is present in Plato’s cave myth, to name just one example. But just like philosophy - as explained earlier - the senses also can become a block between man and faith. A good and well-known example of this is one related to Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples. He needed to see and touch the wounds on Jesus in order to believe in His resurrection:

Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.
(John 20: 27-29)

The roles of Tom, Gloucester and Lear need to be discussed further in this connection. As stated in the introduction, the Christian elements are in the sidelines, and Tom’s role is a good example of this. He is not a central character, he is poor and lowly (Christ himself was only a carpenter). Yet, as per previous discussion, understanding his role is of critical importance to understanding the play, and for Lear to understand life and his own role in it. Edgar/Tom’s role is in keeping with the disguise-theme of the play, but he seems not only to have a double role, rather, he can be said to have a *triple* role - as his beggar-self can be said to be divided between a philosopher and a theologian. Edgar/Tom serves to highlight Lear’s tragedy to an excruciating extent: Lear’s insight improves on many things, but the final block between him and mental peace remains, he does not see Tom for what he might really be, in addition to his philosophical status. All the answers are right before him, but as for him embracing faith, the play offers no evidence.

Even at the very end, he points to Cordelia's lips and refers to vision repeatedly: "Do you see this? Look on her..."(Act 5, sc. 3, l. 286). Bradbrook has said: "It is idle to ask what is 'this' he [Lear] points to at the end, on the threshold" (Bradbrook, 1978, 192). To some extent I agree, but I might also continue his words by saying that it is not, however, idle to point out that Lear refers to senses. His insistence on sense evidence regardless of the fact that senses have deceived him and others over and over, does not look promising for Lear in the Christian context.

Gloucester's story has often been deemed a sub-story to Lear, which is also my contention. Therefore it is necessary to discuss Bate's view on Gloucester's philosophical orientation, he refers to it as Stoicism and he states that it fails:

Gloucester's philosophical orientation, meanwhile, turns towards the Stoic idea of finding the right timing for death...in act five scene two, Gloucester is in 'ill thoughts again', wanting to rot. Edgar responds with Stoic advice: 'Men must endure/ Their going hence even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all.'...If the case of Edgar reveals the deficiency of Stoic comfort, that of Albany demonstrates the inadequacy of belief in divine justice. His credo is that the good shall taste the wages of their virtue and the bad drink from the poisoned 'cup of their deservings'. This scheme works for the bad, but not for the good... So the Stoic comfort fails. One aspect of Poor Tom as philosopher is to offer an alternative, extreme position. The idea is similar to that in *Timon*. The truest philosopher is the most Cynical. Timon and Tom – is there purpose in the resemblance of names? – take to an extreme the philosophical idea of rejecting worldly goods, possessions, even clothes. They are Cynics, Stoics without tunics... (Bate, 2008, p.386)

What Bate says here about Stoicism and Cynicism could have been replaced by the word Christian or Christianity (of course, this is not to suggest they are the same, but simply that they have some similarities). Though Jonathan Dollimore opposes a Christian reading, he at least points out the connection between Stoicism and Christianity: "What makes Lear the person he is...is...his authority and his family. On the heath he represents the process whereby man has been stripped of his stoic and (Christian) humanist conceptions of self" (Drakakis, 1992, p. 200). Yes, Bate's identification of Edgar/Tom and his father as Stoics and Cynics is a defensible reading, but the idea of rejecting worldly goods and possessions is also commonly known to be a recurring theme in the New Testament, a fact which Bate does not address. For example:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

(Matt. 6: 19-21, 24)

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God...And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

(Matt. 19:23-24, 29-30)

The Bible is also known for its Ten Commandments one of which is 'Thou shalt not kill'.

Therefore it also strictly condemns suicide, which means that Edgar's talk about ripeness in the context of life and death fits perfectly with the Christian dogma. If Stoicism can be, indeed, replaced by Christianity in Bate's excerpt as I suggest, it means that I must reject his notion of 'deficiency of Stoic comfort' – along with 'inadequacy of belief in divine justice' - entirely.

There are scholars who state that poetic justice is not to be found (or that it works defectively) in *King Lear*, instead there *is* divine justice there⁶. I shall return to this point in a later chapter dedicated to justice.

Thus, to do a Christian reading on *King Lear* is also to do an anti-philosophical reading side by side with it. No true alternative for this co-existence can ultimately remain, since Christianity deems philosophy as belonging to the secular side of life. I shall next turn to an examination of the alleged paganization of the play.

2.2. *King Lear*: a pagan play?

As stated in the introduction, despite the claims that events in *King Lear* make the play a pagan version, my view is in opposition to this.

⁶ Beauregard, Bradley, Knight

Scholars seem to have difficulties in deciding how to characterize the play, or the changes it contains in relation to *King Lear*. Beauregard discusses the complicated situation as follows:

...the relation of *King Lear* to its earlier presumed source *King Leir* seems problematic. According to Elton (70), “the religious references in the old play are, for the most part, explicitly Christian”, and Shakespeare makes of the story “a paganized version of a Christian play”. Unquestionably then, it is necessary to explain why Shakespeare secularizes, naturalizes, or paganizes his Christianized source... The setting in ancient Britain emphasizes the mystery and the harshness of the pagan world without the Christian God, and it may well be that Shakespeare is calling attention to the falsity of pagan gods. I would add that a more significant reason for Shakespeare’s de-Christianizing of the old play is precisely that a pagan setting heightens the mystery and the tragedy, whereas explicit Christian themes of forgiveness, redemption and a loving God would clearly weaken the tragic effect...

(Beauregard, 2008, p. 204)

Beauregard’s stand is understandable and partially I agree with him, especially on what he says about the heightened sense of mystery and tragedy – for example, the removal of a happy ending and replacing it with Cordelia’s death points towards divine justice instead of poetic and it indeed, increases the drama. As for the sense of *King Lear* being a paganized or a secularized version of the old play, I disagree. Yes, Christian features have very likely been made less obvious and fewer in number too, but it seems that this has only worked towards highlighting Christianity, instead of decreasing it. Knight was absolutely correct in saying: “Christianity is not treated as an intellectual scheme: it is brought through drama, to the bar of life... The presence of Christ is thus realized through His absence” (Knight, 1967, p. 300). Beauregard’s claim of paganization is further weakened by himself on the same page, only a few lines after the excerpt above, he states: “So Shakespeare has indeed produced a “pagan” play, but one that is not quite secularised in a modern sense, but rather naturalized in a Jacobean sense. *There are a considerable number of Christian references*⁷ to faith, reason and miracles (1.1.222-3), priests (3.2.81), hell (4.6.127)... (Beauregard, 2008, p. 204)” and the list goes on and on.

So, at the same time, Beauregard is claiming *King Lear* to be paganized, secularised or naturalized and explaining its Christian references in a lengthy list.

⁷ Italics added by me.

This contradiction is telling, and could be caused by both Knight's and my own contention of scholars' reluctance to go into the purely religious area of study. It also serves to show how widely the basics of the Christian dogma are misunderstood, as explained in the introduction. For this reason Shakespeare's changes are often misjudged. The changes were excellent indeed and they have (at least) three advantages over the old play: first, they make the play more tragic. Second, as naïve 'deus ex machina' devices are removed, the play becomes (much) more realistic. Third, Elton's "explicitly Christian" (cf. p.11) for me personally can only mean an exaggerated/false form of Christianity - the kind where prayers are always answered and goodness is always immediately/relatively soon rewarded. Stripping the play of those features does not mean de-Christianization, but Christianization, as in true Christianity prayers *do* go unanswered and the good characters die along with the bad ones etc. Though he is referring to *Measure for Measure*, I quote Knight's words: "Throughout Shakespeare the direct influence of Christianity is powerful...one play in particular...is almost a thesis on Christian ethics" (Knight, 1967, pp. 71-72).

2.3. *King Lear*: a theodicy or not?

Before moving on to a closer examination between *King Lear* and its biblical parallels, I have to establish my view on the issue of whether the play is to be read as a theodicy or not.

Of all the questions the play awoke in me, this one was for me the one that was most difficult to answer. *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* by Dennis Danielson gives a good, basic description of the most central issues related to theodicy, that is, justification of God's ways:

1. God is all powerful
2. God is wholly good
3. There is evil in the world

The question, some of whose formulations date from antiquity, is: if we assert any two of these three propositions, how can the remaining one make any sense? If God is all powerful and wholly good, how can there be evil in the world he created?...Is he able to remove evil, but unwilling? Or is he willing but unable?

(pp.113-114)

The situation begs the introduction of the concept of free will – Christianity places the source of evil to man (and Satan), free will was God given - therefore something good - but was used against God's will, consequently turning into something bad. I agree with Milton's view on free will totally, as it is explained in Danielson:

...although...free creatures have in fact disobeyed God's commands and so created an immense amount of evil, the amount of goodness that presupposes the exercise of freedom ultimately outweighs the total amount evil.

(p.117)

...free will though it is also the necessary condition of a huge amount of moral evil is worth it – and therefore, too, that God's choosing to make creatures with that potential for going wrong is consistent with his being all powerful and wholly good.

(p.118)

Therefore God's goodness and the evil men do, appear as two sides of the same coin, to depict one side, is to imply the other. With its focus on evil in men, *King Lear* may not be a *direct* theodicy, but it can be said to portray a theodicy regardless, in an indirect way – if evil is in men, then it also points towards the other side of the coin, it invites the reader to ask where the goodness then is, which, in a Christian reading naturally points towards God. It is as M. C. Bradbrook has it, when he quotes W.B. Yeats: "Those who try to create beautiful things without the battle in the soul are merely imitators, because we can only become conscious of one thing by comparing it with its opposite" (Bradbrook, 1978, 205).

This is exactly how I read *King Lear*: the presence of misery and pure evil in it highlight the absence of its opposite (though in Cordelia, Gloucester and others, it does survive to some extent). As an analogy, one might consider a painting of a face, with, for example, a mouth missing from it. It is quite obvious that such an omission would draw most or all of the attention, the discussion about the painting would clearly revolve around the missing mouth and author's intention/message behind the omission. Thus, as for theodicy, I am left in opposition to Beauregard. With the exception of what is said about paganization, I agree with his premises, but I disagree with him on the conclusion drawn from them when he states as follows:

...the play is not a theodicy, an indictment of divine justice of the sort that came in during the late seventeenth century and after, but instead an indictment of human malevolence, a theological position that was current during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. *King Lear* is indeed a naturalistic representation (as the secular critics have argued), but more precisely the postulated depiction of a pagan world placed against an implied theistic background and showing us the starkness of a world subject to human malevolence. Shakespeare inquires into the source of evil and points the finger of indictment, not at the gods whom he all but removes, but at human beings given over to passion and malice. Thus it is not the universe of gods who are indifferent to the human suffering, as the secular critics would have it, but rather sinful humanity, who “must perforce prey on itself, like monsters of the deep”(4.2.49-50).

(Beauregard, 2008, p.199)

Modern literary theories are mainly focused on what *is* in the text, which is understandable and obvious. The argument is then, that there is nothing between the lines, but empty space and that talk about author intention would be mere speculation. In most cases I would eagerly agree, but not with *King Lear*. A reading focusing only on the presence of something in a text, will miss critically important key elements of this particular play. It will notice the evil it contains, and probably the remnants of some goodness in some characters, but it will certainly miss what is implied by the ear-shattering, screaming absence (or near-absence) of the divine, the fact that this absence - especially with a careful, brilliant writer like Shakespeare - can never be an accident. It is precisely the seeming concealment, combined with our knowledge of the exaggerated Christianity of *King Lear*, which create this somewhat unique, peculiar sense of deliberateness. This sensation of an intentional, meaningful omission is further reinforced by the Christian structural elements discussed in 2.2, and the underlying parallels to some key stories found in the Bible. These parallels form an important support to my opinion and they will be my next topic.

2.4.1. The parallels to the Book of Job

The discussions under this and the next sub-chapter 2.4.2. together function as a general introduction to some major differences and similarities between *King Lear* and the Books of Job and Daniel.

These parallels are an important part of the totality of my reading and I shall return to them also in future chapters of this thesis, as they are supportive elements to my views outside these sub-chapters too.

In the context of the play, several scholars refer to the story of Job found in the Bible (Fortin, p.121; Beauregard, excerpt below). The association is understandable, as the events in both the Book of Job and in *King Lear* are tragic and miserable indeed. They raise the question ‘why’ in the reader and point towards the themes of justice and theodicy. The Book of Job, as Beauregard explains: “...emphasizes the divine origin of the problem of evil in the initial exchange between God and Satan, a cosmic conversation absent in *King Lear*” (Beauregard, 2008, p.204). While the absence of such a cosmic conversation could be used as an argument against the Christian reading, my view is that even with a Christian reading, the absence is mandatory. Earlier I gave three major reasons for the nature of the changes between *King Lear* and *King Lear* and my current argument relies on them here as well. In other words, the structure of the story needs to be realistic and its stress is mainly on the tragedy, not on theology, though I *am* applying theology on the play in the context of this thesis.

Yet another argument against using Job as a part of a Christian reading could be that the endings are quite different. Job is rewarded by God, Lear dies of a broken heart, tormented to the very end. The differences are undeniable, yet the fact that *King Lear* activates the story of Job in the minds of several scholars is worth further consideration. Perhaps it is Gloucester’s immortal line after he has been blinded by Cornwall, “as flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods; they kill us for their sport (sc. 15, ll. 35-36)”, that guides the reader towards the God - man -relationship and makes the association to Job understandable. Furthermore, the differences are once again mandatory. In addition to reasons related to realism and tragic sense, the differences also have theological reasons.

Eventually Job humbles himself before God and rejects his stand that he has been wrongly punished.

It was certainly true that before his affliction he lived a decent, God-fearing life, but to claim that one's judgement should be better than God's, or that one's share in life can be earned without God having any part in it, would be simply blasphemous:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

(Job, 38:1-4)

As Lear manifests no clear rejection of his secular stand, his fate is theologically plausible. If he were to survive, if the ending was happy, the parallels to the Bible and Job in particular would be considerably weakened. Perhaps this realization was one of Shakespeare's most important ones in *King Lear*. In subsequent centuries, the play, especially its ending, has often been modified due to its overwhelmingly tragic ending – its devastating bleakness seems to offer no catharsis, no hope, only misery for the sake of misery. Such modifications, however, do great injustice to the theological aspect of the play, especially if we assert the parallel to the Book of Job as a valid choice and a good background for reading the play. If we do so, then, in a theologically sound Christian context, Lear's fate is the only logical one, even if his insight improves during the course of the play. This is a point I shall examine further under the chapter titled "justice".

As final, minor notes to this sub-chapter, I shall next briefly discuss two interesting similarities. In the excerpt above, God addresses Job, reminding him of his position as a created being. In chapter 39 of Job, God talks about animals, using them as examples of how complicated the order of nature as something He created is:

Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when he hinds do calve? Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth?... Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow?... Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?

(Job 39: 1-13)

On many occasions *King Lear* has been pointed out to be a play where animal imagery is abundant.

A quite famous example is to be found in Edgar's words: "...hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (sc.11, 83-85). And of course, equally well known are Lear's words as he continues: "Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume...man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (sc. 11, 94-98).

Interestingly enough, the play has a king who gives his power and land to three daughters, not sons. Knowing how patriarchal, male-dominated our past is, this particular detail seems somewhat odd. The Book of Job offers a possible reason for such a choice. In the end, Job was rewarded in many ways. He got three daughters, along with seven sons. The Bible mentions the names of the daughters, but not the names of the sons. It also explains what the names mean, along with the facts that all the daughters were beautiful and that they gained a part of the inheritance on their father's death:

He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.

(Job 42: 13-17)

Agreed, we can not be totally sure whether the similarity is intentional, as one could also claim that Shakespeare merely copied this feature of the story from *King Lear*, nothing more. Yet, two arguments seem to outweigh such a view: First, we know the immense number of changes he made to the play and still chose to leave this part intact. This, in turn, again points towards author intention – the sensation of deliberateness is strong. Second, a contention of Shakespeare copying some parts of a text without knowledge of the text's biblical parallels seems simply absurd – practically all the scholars, playwrights, philosophers etc. knew the Bible well indeed, regardless of their own attitudes towards it.

2.4.2. The parallels to The Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel contains the stories of Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar, who were both kings of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind due to arrogance before God. In a similar manner to Job, he claimed that his position was the result of his own doing and merit:

The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation.

(Daniel 4: 30-34)

The connection to Lear's madness is obvious. Furthermore, the fact that Lear remains tormented to the end, while Nebuchadnezzar regains his understanding, can be seen to reflect the fact that Nebuchadnezzar "blesses the most High", while Lear does not.

The principle of tragic realism dictates that in *King Lear*, the loss of the king's power can not take place through a direct act of God, but it is not to be forgotten that Belshazzar does not lose power directly through God either, instead, His will is realized through a mortal man. Daniel, (alias Belteshazzar, so named by the king) the wisest man in the kingdom, warns the king of this by deciphering the words God writes on the wall:

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

(Daniel 5: 24-28)

And sure enough, the following night Belshazzar is killed: "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom..."(Daniel, 5:30 – 31).

Therefore, as acts of God are sometimes indirect even in the Bible, the removal of direct acts of God from *King Lear* does certainly not invalidate a Christian reading either, it could just as well serve to validate it.

As I mentioned above, Daniel's other name bears resemblance to that of the king's name. The closeness of the names may be considered to symbolize the closeness Daniel had in relation to the king as a powerful, wise man. If we then look at *King Lear*, perhaps the closest resemblance to this is found in the relationship between the king and the Fool. The Fool and Kent make note of the closeness of the relationship:

Fool	Dost know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?	
Lear	No, lad. Teach me.	(sc. 4, 132-134)
Lear	Dost thou call me fool, boy?	
Fool	All thy other titles thou hast given away. That thou wast born with.	
Kent (<i>to Lear</i>)	This is not altogether fool, my lord.	(sc. 4, 144-146)

Daniel also becomes deceived by other intellectuals beneath him. They persuade the king to pass a law according to which no man is allowed to pray to anything or anyone else but the king himself:

All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

(Daniel 6: 7)

Daniel is, however, saved by his faith, while the conspirators are, in turn, killed by the lions. My argument is that these events easily can be said to have their counterparts in the play. They are in the actions of Goneril and Regan, how they turn against their father, and in Gloucester's attempted suicide as he jumps off a cliff.

Even though in *King Lear*, the conspiracy is not against the king's closest man, this does not matter because of the closeness between the king and the wise man, as suggested above. Like Gloucester's jump off the cliff, Daniel being thrown down to a cave of lions includes a downward movement. Both Daniel's and Gloucester's falls are followed by a miraculous survival.

In the Book of Daniel, after the incident it is the king who gains a better insight about Daniel, while in *King Lear* Gloucester's insight also improves after the jump, though it is stated on a more general level, "I stumbled when I saw" (sc. 15, 16-17). Thus, a spiritual progression is present in both stories.

3. Love

In this chapter I shall examine the theme of love in *King Lear*, how it connects with Christian values and the dogma. In a Christian context, a person's object of love defines the essence of a person - St. Augustine states: "In asking if a person is good, one does not ask what the person believes and hopes for, but what the object of his love is. He who loves correctly, of necessity also believes and hopes correctly"⁸ (St. Augustine, 2004, p.138). More of Saint Augustine's thinking on love is also found in John Freccero's foreword to *Inferno*:

A city, according to St. Augustine, is a group of people joined together by their love of the same object. Ultimately, however, there can be only two objects of human love: God or the self. All other loves are masks for these. It follows that there are only two cities: the City of God, where all love Him to the exclusion of self, and the City of Man, where self-interest makes every sinner an enemy to the other... The bonds of charity form a community of the faithful, while sin disperses them and leaves only a crowd.

(Foreword, p.xi)

Viewing this in relation to Bradley's words on characters in Shakespeare, it is easy to see why the examination of love in the play is required: "...with Shakespeare 'character is destiny' is no doubt an exaggeration...but it is the exaggeration of a vital truth" (Bradley, 1991, pp. 29-30). Though I may briefly touch on other characters too, my treatment of the theme is primarily based on the examination of the characters of Cordelia, The Fool and Edgar, for two major reasons: they belong to the group usually described as good characters (discussion below, in 3.1.) in the play and they seem to be closest to the core of a Christian way of thinking and behaving. Beauregard states: "The overall theological principle, then, is that providential governance manifests itself through the mediation of virtuous human beings like Cornwall's servant, Edgar, Cordelia..." (2008, p. 211).

In 3.2, I discuss Bate's claim that The Fool is Cordelia's double. While I do not fully agree, I also tend to see a strong resemblance between the two. The Fool's role seems to be - along with the love-theme - connected to the idea of anti-philosophy, discussed in 2.1.

⁸ The excerpt is a translation of mine from a Finnish copy.

This makes The Fool seem an opposing force against conventional rationalizing, which in turn, can be interpreted as a defence of the mystery of faith. I read The Fool as an arena for voicing the general principles of divine love as something central in the dogma. He *speaks* the dogma, while I read Cordelia as a corporeal manifestation of divine love, a Christ-figure. She *is* the dogma. I do not deny that there may be some overlap, but for the sake of clarity I make the division in this manner between the two here.

For these reasons, a thorough examination of these two characters in connection to the love-theme in a Christian context appears to be vitally important. The starting point of the chapter is, however, an analysis of why Lear is at the centre of our focus, what is it about him that draws our attention to him and how this positioning then connects to the general theme of love.

3.1. Lear's positioning. Love as source of hope.

It seems that love, or its absence, has a dual purpose in the play – on one hand it creates a sense of hope for Lear, something positive to look and wish for, something that might restore his sanity. On the other hand, this hope is also one of the things that torments Lear; if there was no hope, he would not have to spend thoughts or energy pining for a change for the better. The next quote from Bradley not only illuminates what I say about the nature of the hero, but also supports this current point - the sense of tragedy is heightened by the presence of potential, of all that could be. In the case of certainty of hopelessness the tragedy he is facing would be considerably reduced, because Lear's condition would be simpler. Thus, it can be said that love, or the hope that it brings, has a positive and negative side to it at the same time.

Many scholars, upon dividing and classifying the characters of the play - usually to the good and bad ones – make their divisions much in the same manner as Beauregard and Bradley below:

Albeit the existence of mystery is acknowledged, the play clearly divides the characters into those who are hard of heart (Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Cornwall) and those who are compassionate and charitably virtuous (Edgar, Cordelia and Albany).

(Beauregard, 2008, p. 217)

If Lear, Gloster and Albany are set apart, the rest fall into two distinct groups, which are strongly, even violently contrasted: Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, The Fool on one side, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald on the other.

(Bradley, 1991, p. 242)

The treatment of Lear is noteworthy in both cases: Beauregard does not mention him at all, and Bradley ‘sets him apart’ from the rest. This seems curious, as the play is after all, named after him and he clearly is at the centre of all action. Perhaps he resists an easy, quick categorization into the good or bad characters. I agree with Bradley when he states on the nature of the tragic hero in Shakespeare as follows:

The tragic hero with Shakespeare, then, need not be ‘good’, though generally he is ‘good’ and therefore at once wins sympathy in his error. But it is necessary that he should have so much of greatness that in his error and fall we may be vividly conscious of the possibilities of human nature.

(Bradley, 1991, p. 38)

Lear himself says he is “a man more sinned against than sinning”(sc. 9, 60). In a Christian context his words do seem arrogant, echoing the thinking of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

However, his words also serve to show how his position is different from the rest of the characters in the play. As a natural consequence from his resignation of power, he does seem to be in a position more passive than others. The feeling of him being the receiver of actions and misery rather than being an active agent, dominates. *We observe what happens to him*. This is not to claim that he is the only one in the play who could be said to be a victim. In fact, Lear probably deserved at least some of the things happening to him and, for example, Cordelia and Edgar are forced to either leave or wear disguises, and this is not to even mention the fact of Cordelia’s eventual death. Yet, Lear’s position does differ from the rest; the fact that everything in the play points towards what goes on inside him, in his mind and in his heart, distinguishes him and places his *soul* in the centre. *We observe what happens in him*. True, it was not until the 1800’s and the arrival of Romanticism that psychological narration started to become more popular, but I think that it could be claimed that *King Lear* is a quite advanced text in this sense, ahead of its time.

The fact that the focus in Lear's case is on what goes on inside him, fits perfectly with the concepts of both love and its dogmatic connection to faith as internal states of the soul. The play's beginning with the love theme and the later insanity theme both guide the reader towards thinking about Lear's internal state, to contemplating on all of the turmoil going on inside. Secular readings may - either voluntarily or involuntarily - set this fact aside or they may not stress it enough. An example of such a dismissal of Lear's positioning and of all that goes with it, is displayed in Nahum Tate. Tate was a playwright and a poet - he succeeded Thomas Shadwell as poet laureate in 1692 and possessed this title for 22 years⁹. In her study *Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism*, Millicent Bell discusses Tate's changes to the play (1681), explaining them by increased coherence:

He provided a string of coherence – motivation for Lear's intemperate rejection of Cordelia at the beginning, for her stubborn resistance to his demand for avowals of love, for Edgar's cruel withholding of his identity from his own father – by inventing a love between Cordelia and Edgar which arises at the beginning and triumphs at the end.

(Bell, 2002, pp. 139-140)

Along with the tragic aspects, such a change would also severely undermine the Christian aspects of the play. The insertion of a flourishing, happy love story into what is supposed to be a tragedy would, at least to some extent, shift the focus away from Lear's internal state and so decrease the reader's attention to his soul. In addition, introducing the element of earthly love between two people would also distance us from thinking about the concept of God's love for the people He created, and in turn, people's love (or absence of it) for Him. St. Augustine discusses a Christian's relationship to other people and God in the context of love as follows: "If the things of this world delight you, praise God for them but turn your love away from them and give it to their Maker...if your delight is in souls, love them in God, because they too are frail and stand firm only when they cling to him" (St. Augustine, 1961, p. 82).

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, my reading of the love theme in the play is - along with the Fool - heavily centred around Cordelia.

⁹ Information on Tate is from an internet source: Corman, Brian. "Nahum Tate". *The Literary Encyclopedia*. Available from: <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4317>

A change of the sort of Tate's making would make Cordelia look very different from her role as Shakespeare wrote it. It is both her relationship to Lear and to the dogma, that will be my next point of discussion.

3.2. Cordelia as a Christ-figure

The character of Cordelia is often read as a Christ-figure and I agree with the contention readily.

Though he is less explicit on the matter, I understand Knight's words as supportive of my own reading and along with him, I refer here to quotes from Bell and Beauregard to illustrate this point: "She tells her father that it is his business she goes about – echoing Christ himself – and denies that any blown ambition incites her (Bell, 2002, p. 145).

When Cordelia returns from France to rescue her father, she is twice described as a Christ figure...Moreover, as several critics have pointed out, the final scene seems designed as a secular imitation of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, when Lear enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms in place of the crucified Christ.

(Beauregard, 2008, p. 205)

He humbles himself, not to Cordelia, but love now royally enthroned in his heart erstwhile usurped:

Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish.

(iv. vii. 84)

His purgatory is almost complete...He and Cordelia are now prisoners, Cordelia in adversity is a true daughter of this *stoic*¹⁰ world:

We are not the first
Who, with the best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed King, am I cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false fortune's frown.

(v. iii. 3)

(Knight, 1998, p.199)

Bell and Beauregard are clear on the Christ-issue, but also Knight without directly saying it, "moves in the neighbourhood" of the idea. Especially when we keep in mind what was said in chapter 2.1. about Cynics and Stoics, Knight's words in the excerpt above point towards Christ and Christianity:

¹⁰ Italics added.

According to the Bible, Jesus came (down) to this world for (yes, ultimately for everyone), but especially for the poor, the weak, and the oppressed¹¹. “For thee, oppressed King, am I cast down” (sc. 24, 5) greatly resembles this. As a minor, preliminary note, Knight’s reference to the concept of purgatory connects to Christianity on a general level, but more importantly, in connection to the particular theme of love at hand, he states a few lines later: “Love is the last reality but one in Lear’s story: love and God” (Knight, 1998, p.199).

Reading Cordelia as a Christ-figure, also sets some misperceptions straight. My aim is not here to do only this, but by doing so also to point out exactly how crucial it is to bear in mind the dogma at all times, while at the same time doing a close and meticulous reading of the play. Furthermore, setting these misperceptions straight serves as further evidence of how Cordelia can be understood as a Christ-figure. I want to remind the reader of this, because even those scholars who seem to submit to a Christian reading, sometimes seem to miss some of the biblical connections. And whenever that happens, it serves to reinforce secular readings of the play. Simply: the more connections to the dogma we recognize, the more a Christian reading will seem a justified choice in comparison to any secular alternative. Bell states:

Cordelia, after all, who, unlike her sisters, upholds the principle of filial deference, begins everything by resisting her father’s – as well as her sovereign’s – will in denying him the flattery he demands. She is coldly legalistic when she says, “I love your majesty/According to my bond, no more, no less.” She is inflexible in her refusal to yield to Lear’s unstated appeal to her to indulge an old man’s foolish craving for sentimental declarations. She shoves at him the truth that a daughter must grow into a woman who loves the father’s ultimate rival, her husband, as much more than she loved her parent: “I shall never marry Like my sisters/To love my father all.”

(Bell, 2002, 144-145)

Bell makes it sound like Cordelia is cold, maybe even proud. I disagree; we must not forget the words found in the Bible:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

¹¹ Matt. 11:28, Mark 2:17, Luke 19:10

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

(Matthew 10:34-38)

Cordelia's words, both on her sisters and father, are perfectly in line with the biblical excerpt above, they could easily be interpreted to signify that she has the Christian view of love, both in its earthly and divine senses, crystal-clear in her mind; her negative attitude towards earthly connections, though they be family ties, need not point towards simple coldness. Although she does not directly state anything about loving God more than her family, her words and her general attitude could be interpreted as hints, indirect signs of this. Another misperception, which I simply can not leave unaddressed, is in Bate:

Lying is destructive in the mouths of Goneril, Regan and Edmund at the beginning of the play, but Cordelia – the fool's double – has to learn to lie. At the beginning, she can only tell the truth (hence her banishment), but later she lies beautifully when Lear says that she has cause to do him wrong, and she replies 'No cause, no cause'.

(Bate, 2008, 392-393)

Cordelia's words, again, need to be understood in connection to the dogma. Her words may be taken to prove that she is exercising the principle of forgiveness, one of the most central ones of The New Testament: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6: 14-15). This goes logically also with the warning against revenge:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also...But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

(Matt. 5: 38-39, 44-45)

With the discussion above, I hope to have provided enough reasons why I read Cordelia as a Christ-figure. A Christian reading does not necessarily have to be based on her being read as such, that is not my point.

Instead, I have only wanted to provide the reader with an alternative, to show that it is possible; the resemblance to Christ in the things she says and does is notable. My next step after this discussion, will then be to ask what she means for the most central character of the play, her father, Lear himself.

3.3. Cordelia and Lear

A reading based on Cordelia as a Christ-figure naturally has important consequences for Lear's role. His banishment of her in the beginning must be, then, interpreted as nothing less than rejection of faith. In a Christian reading, then, Lear's fate boils down to primarily his relationship with Cordelia. For sure, his insistence on keeping with his philosopher and depending on sight and hearing for proof also figure into his fate, but nevertheless, it is Cordelia's love for her father and his for her, which ultimately are at the very core of the play. In the beginning, Lear is proud and cares only for earthly love, he has a "foolish craving for sentimental declarations", as Bell put it. He begins from misperception of love, he begins from pride; and like Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind.

To fully understand the Christian perception of love in *King Lear*, it is crucial to keep in mind the disguise-motif of the play. Bell points out: "*King Lear* is the only one of Shakespeare's tragedies to use the motif of disguise – usually a device of comedy..." (p.148). What exactly I mean by the disguise-motif, can be clarified with the help of two well-known biblical quotes:

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us*¹², and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1. John 4: 8-10)

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up... Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

(1. Cor. 13: 4, 7)

¹² Italics added

Though Lear abandons love in the beginning, love does not abandon him. It is forced into disguises and banished from sight, but it endures all, returns and so remains. This persistence I see in the light of the biblical excerpts above, as a manifestation of God's love towards people, despite their own hostility towards God and His love, present in, for example, in Lear's actions towards Cordelia (if she is, as suggested, understood as a Christ-figure). Eventually, in the form of Cordelia and her husband France, love comes to the rescue. The facts that Cordelia is captured and dies, do not weaken the concept of (divine) love in any way, after all it was the capture and death of Christ that functioned as the ultimate manifestations of God's love and mercy for men. Rather, Cordelia's death can be deemed as proof of the persistence of God's love in its apparent similarity to Christ in The Bible. On a side note, even the humiliation element between the ways of execution is present in both deaths: both crucifixion in Christ's case and hanging in Cordelia's were/are deemed quite shameful ways of dying and suffering the ultimate punishment.

The matter of understanding Cordelia's death and its connection to divine love is one of the most important ones in creating differences between a Christian and secular readings. The apparent bleakness of the ending naturally "casts a shadow" on the earlier events as well, i.e. the ending is crucial to our interpretation of the entirety of *King Lear*, or any text, for that matter. If the ending can be read in a more positive way, it will also shape our view of the whole play, as it will make "the shadow" lighter.

Bell also discusses the concept of the (royal) self, Lear's identity in her study. Though in the context of this thesis it is not necessary to expand on this issue to a great length, I shall briefly address her view of the king's "two bodies", because it bears great similarity to the Christian contention of man's existence, its division into the mortal body and the immortal soul. She states:

A legal formulation of the king's "two bodies" – one political, one personal or "natural" – had emerged in English common law... On the one hand, the idea that the royal personality had two parts, one immortal and one mortal, could be used to justify the theory of royal divine right that superseded the errors of the man, making the king an analogue of Christ in possessing both the attributes of deity and a mortal body.

(Bell, 2002, p. 159)

Although the formulation does not directly relate to the Christian body/soul understanding of man, in a somewhat modified form it could still be used in a Christian reading, should one want to do so. In *King Lear*, this could mean that upon rejecting the Christ-figure of the play, it is his very soul, his salvation that Lear jeopardizes and the subsequent story can then be seen as soul-seeking, purgatorial events, as Knight suggested in the excerpt on page 25. He also states:

My treatment of Gloucester's leap goes beyond my normal practice of direct interpretation...a possible support to my reading comes in Lear's reunion with Cordelia where, though the event is earthly, the tonings 'Thou art a soul in bliss'...suggest the transcendental. Adrian Abbotts has suggested to me that Cordelia may be equated with Lear's soul.

(Knight, 1984, 63)

In other words, Cordelia could be interpreted as a representation of Lear's immortal soul and/or as the destiny of that soul. I shall further analyze Lear's destiny and salvation at the end of this thesis, as it is perhaps more connected to the theme of justice than love. I shall now turn to examining the Fool's role.

3.4. The Fool and Edgar

One of the most central and interesting characters and - like Daniel in The Bible - very close to the king, is The Fool. The Fool stays with the king and remains his valuable friend amidst all the suffering. Indeed, at the very end of the play, he is the last person Lear mentions and whom he misses dearly: "And my poor fool is hanged. No, no life" (sc. 24, 300). He is also one of the few characters whose identity is not mistaken by anyone else around him. Even Cordelia, despite all her virtue, is the victim of her father's misperception and, as discussed at 3.2, her words can, indeed, be easily mistaken for pride, lies or coldness. The Fool's role is more straight-forward. This does not mean that his words are always easily understood, but he is not forced into disguises, banished and his identity remains unchanged throughout the play.

Maybe here someone might want to remark that it is customary for a jester to wear make-up and bright clothes that make him draw others attention to himself, i.e. the jester could be said to wear some sort of a disguise at all times.

I do not disagree with such a view, but these features can also be argued to be a part of what he is, a part of his commonly recognized status. The Fool has a permission to speak to the king in a manner, which could be dangerous, even fatal to others if they go too far. This privilege and status of The Fool is the part of his person that I am addressing here, not his clothes. It is his “wise folly” as Bate expressed it, his wit and observations, which seem to provide the play with an unchanging constant, resembling God Himself. This is the reason for me associating The Fool with the idea of love, perhaps both in its earthly and in its divine forms; I read him as the totality of all the laws and principles that love includes. For example, his quotes below show how accurately he distinguishes between true altruism/love and mere greed/ambition:

Let go of thy hold when great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following it; but the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw thee after.

(sc.7, 238-241)

The first quote supports a calculating, ambition-based, rational view of devotion and seems to portray a mock-image of love, one in total opposition to the biblical view as explained earlier - it is very far from the idea of “suffering and enduring all things”. The Fool’s next words are ambiguous and I understand them in connection to the first one, as criticism of it. The basic idea in the second quote is that true love does not end at the arrival of misfortune and misery, or at the fear of getting “one’s neck broken”, thus it is also in line with the Bible. I take the quote to represent The Fool’s true contention of what love really should be like:

That sir that serves for gain
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begin 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, pardie.

(sc. 7, 244-251)

The Fool's words could be seen to be simply directed at Kent, who is in stocks and yes, they are admittedly ironic but the irony also, very importantly, includes what he says about the wise/ "wise" man, a corporeal manifestation of the mock-image of love. Furthermore, I think he is rather singing his opinion for everyone to hear, not only to Kent. I do not read his words here in the sense that he is suggesting Kent should have abandoned the king when things seemed to be going wrong. Quite the opposite, I think his intention is clearest present in the words: "I will tarry, the fool will stay...the fool no knave". He is criticizing love that is mixed with cold calculation and I agree with the fool on that totally. Love is radically irrational, once it becomes less irrational, more calculating in kind, true altruism also decreases and one can then be accused to be "in love" rather than in love.

When Kent asks him: "Where learnt you this, fool?" (sc. 7, 252), The Fool's reply in this case is naturally only meant for him "Not in the stocks" (sc. 7, 253) and it does seem stern and cold. But then again, though his intention was to defend the king, Kent was also guilty of wrath (one of the Seven Deadly Sins) - he tried to take justice into his own hands and was ready to kill Oswald. My view of this is perhaps best explained by two old, admittedly even slightly clichéd sayings: "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions" and: "The end does not always justify the means". In sum, I do not think that the Fool's tone at Kent is criticism of Kent's devotion for the king at all, but of Kent's wrath and its lethal potential. The Fool's reply is a comment, which reflects the fact that The Fool himself does not become guilty of wrath/violence in the course of the play, he does not end up in the stocks.

Bate is correct in pointing out the connection between Christianity and folly in the play:

”But in Shakespeare’s strand of wise ‘fooling’, a kind of divinity is smuggled back into the raw natural world of Lear” (Bate, 2008, 390). He also compares Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* to *King Lear* and states:

The closing section of Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* undertakes a serious praise of Christian ‘madness’. Christ says that the mystery of salvation is hidden from the wise and given to the simple. He delighted in the common people...He chose to ride an ass when he could have mounted a lion. The language of his parables is steeped in simple, natural things – lilies, mustardseed, sparrows. We might compare Lear’s language of wren, dog and garden waterpots in act four of the play. The fundamental folly of Christianity is its demand that you throw away your possessions. Lear pretends to do this in act one...
(Bate, 2008, 393)

The idea of throwing away possessions is in line with St. Augustine’s words already mentioned before: “In asking if a person is good, one does not ask what the person believes and hopes for, but what the object of his love is”, one can not serve/love two masters - abandoning love for wealth equals to leaving the door open for loving God. But the similarities do not end at wealth and possessions. It can be said that love itself is a sort of folly, it is not, after all based on reason, but on emotions. Love is often compared to blindness: despite the flaws of one’s character, love enables people to see the object of their love as good and desirable, to ignore the flaws. Bate says: “Philosophers say that it is miserable to be deceived. Folly replies that it is most miserable ‘not to be deceived’, for nothing could be further from the truth than the notion that man’s happiness resides in things as they actually are” (Bate, 2008, p. 392).

It is no surprise, then, that Bate connects The Fool and Edgar/Tom; they both think of what is best for the king, do whatever it takes to stay close to him and they speak against reason, on behalf of emotions, the realities of human, lived experience. The only difference is that Edgar is forced to wear a disguise: “Fool and Tom teach us to split apart the idea of *philo-sophy*. The word is derived from Greek *philos*, love, and *sophos*, wisdom” (Bate, 2008, p. 395). This is also in line with the discussion in 2.1. regarding Edgar’s split role as a philosopher and a theologian.

In sum for this (sub-) chapter, perhaps it could be said that the characters of Lear, Edgar, Cordelia and The Fool, form a continuum of faith and love, tightly interwoven.

In this continuum, Lear would represent one far end, a soul in his purgatorial journey of doubt. In the sense that The Fool's role is very clear and unchanging and he accurately lays down "the rules of love", The Fool would be found at the other far end, he could be taken to represent faith/God's absolute love for men. His disappearance towards the end of the play does not have to jeopardize this reading, it could rather, reinforce it and reflect my understanding of Lear's salvation, the very final point of this thesis. If Lear's salvation does not look probable, as I shall later argue, then The Fool's disappearance would be in line with this fact, in the sense that Lear does not gain connection to the divine (love), which The Fool could symbolize.

With the earlier discussion of Edgar's split role (as well as what is later in 5.3 said about his role in connection to the mock trial) as a theologian and a philosopher, in the middle we would have a mixture of reason and love/faith manifested in him. He could be read as a symbol of salvation present for all, despite their ability to see it, or as disguised Providence (a point to be later further discussed). Cordelia, in turn could be read as a simpler symbol of purity, a Christ-figure, something one can move towards if one is able to see through disguises like conventional philosophy and reason, half-present in Edgar.

4. Misery

With the concept of love, I discussed some of the positive sides of *King Lear* in the previous chapter, even if they too, may have their downsides in the sense that by providing hope, they make Lear's agony more complicated. In this chapter I shall focus on misery and its connection to evil in the whole play more thoroughly. This means that along with Lear, the characters of Goneril and Regan, as widely recognized as the most evil ones, will be at the centre of attention. However, the progress that seems to take place in Edmund and Gloucester, their movement towards good, seems to be important in this context too. Some of the issues related to misery I have already touched upon, for example, possessions and how Lear's rejection of love has figured into his situation, but I shall continue on the discussion on these issues even further here.

At the core of the concept of misery is the question of how it should be viewed. Is it misery for the sake of misery, or does it have meaning? If so, why does it have that and what is it, exactly? Along with other issues, such as Lear's salvation intertwined with the character of Cordelia, our understanding of the entire play depends on how we view (Lear's) misery. If it has no meaning, then the play can be argued to lend itself well to a secular reading, but if it does have meaning, then that could point towards a justification of a religious reading. Misery in *King Lear* has several dimensions: loss of wealth, power, status, love, mental health and of course, there are the deaths of many people. Both Bradley and Freccero in his foreword to Dante's *Inferno* put neatly into words what my view of all the misery in *King Lear* points towards:

Tragedy is the typical form of this mystery because that greatness of soul which it exhibits oppressed, conflicting and destroyed, is the highest existence in our view. It forces the mystery upon us, and it makes us realize so vividly the worth of that which is wasted that we can't possibly seek comfort in the reflection that all is vanity.

(Bradley, 1991, 38)

...the sins recounted by Augustine seem retrospectively to have been both regrettable and necessary for the structure of the *Confessions*. The paradox was familiar to Christians, who thought of the sin of Adam and Eve precisely as a "fortunate fall" (*felix culpa*), inasmuch as it prepared the way for the coming of Christ.

(Foreword, p. xv)

As Job and Nebuchadnezzar suffered for a reason, so does Lear. This must be the point of view of all Christian readings, despite all other differences there may be. Pointless suffering would imply a sadistic God, an idea perhaps more fitting for an atheist than a Christian. Therefore I - and I think all Christian readings - must reject such an idea. Like his biblical counterparts, Lear, too, gains insight from his misery. The most important question then is, whether this insight is enough or not in the Christian context, whether it could be argued to lead towards salvation or not. I shall deal with salvation in the next chapter, after discussing some of the manifold aspects of misery in this one, including Lear's improved insight – what it entails, what the results of it are for Lear and others and so on. The starting point will be a topic I have already addressed at some length, but is still one that needs more attention. I shall examine the concept of possessions, with whose help I shall later move on to address the concept of evil.

4.1. Possessions as a part of misery

In 2.1, I discussed wealth and possessions in connection to Bate on Cynicism and Stoicism, how the matter can also relate to Christianity. That point was further explained in chapter three, the dogma is clear on the fact that man can only serve one master; what man loves, defines him. But this is not all. I have not yet addressed what Shakespeare says on wealth, exactly. Some of his treatment of the topic is metaphoric, which ambiguates the issue, but it is quite clear that Shakespeare does question the idea of great possessions. For example, it is Lear himself who ponders on the ideas of both what and how much it is proper for man to have and then, of sharing the excess wealth, giving some of it to the poor:

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous. Allow not nature more than nature needs.

(sc. 7, 423-425)

“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”

(sc. 11, 29-33)

Though earlier I did mention The Bible's negative attitude towards wealth, there are parts in The Bible that are slightly less negative and resemble Lear's words above greatly:

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

(Prov. 30: 7-9)

Thus the danger of possessions is not only the fact that one might serve and love the wrong master, but excess possessions are also connected to vanity and lies, i.e. deceitful, false things which, if you get involved with them, would deliver one into an displeasing disposition in God's eyes. On top of this, it is often said that what you possess may end up possessing you, meaning that if you get too fond of property, you will only worry about losing it or how to increase it, which would in a way, put possessions in a position of power over man. Yet another problem has to be addressed: someone pleased with vanity, false ideas (and possessions, though Jesus in the quote below does not explicitly state so) may also draw other people to the wrong path, should they become attracted by this person's lies and/or his wealth. This was also Jesus's concern: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23: 15).

The excerpt above from Proverbs also shows that the dogma is fully aware of man's vulnerability and weakness, if he becomes tempted and faces adversity and misery, he may, indeed, fall from the right path, it is only human. Having what is necessary and needed generally serves to ease one's existence and so make it perhaps a bit less probable that one should think of God as mean, which was, of course what Satan had in his mind when he asked for God's permission to make Job's life miserable.

There are also other instances in *King Lear*, where the "glitter of the surface", golden, false things are mentioned. I shall next illustrate this point by discussing Shakespeare's reference to "gilded animals".

These instances are also the ones I referred to earlier, when I said that a part of Shakespeare's treatment of the topic is metaphoric. Shakespeare mentions gilded animals at least three times in the play, and refers to jewels, pearls and precious stones too. The gilded animal-metaphor seems strictly negative in tone and can be seen to be connected to the idea of vanity, lies and a general negative attitude towards wealth, also present in the quote from The Proverbs. I shall start from a treatment of the animals and move on to deal with the more positive, emotion-related jewel metaphors in sub-chapter 4.4. Two of the instances where gilded animals are referred to come from Lear, one from Albany. In the first instance Lear says: "Adultery? Thou shalt not die for adultery. No, the wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly does lecher in my sight. Let copulation thrive..." (sc. 20, 108-111).

A few points need to be made regarding the first remark by Lear: first, the metaphor seems quite clearly analogous to man – he may appear to be the ordinary, decent, even a good man on the street (the "gold" on the fly), yet all of mankind also carries desires, impulses and instincts inside, such as the desire to have sex, often referred to as impure or forbidden (the lechery of the fly). In this sense man does bear resemblance to animals, though animals do not sin, men do. What is impure and sinful to man, is not that to animals, including sex. Though the Seventh Commandment is "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Deut. 5:18), it is also true that Jesus saved the life of a woman guilty of adultery:

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her... When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

(John 8: 1-7, 10-11)

The gilded fly, then, can be said to represent man as sinful, yet as someone whom God loves dearly, enough to forgive him and give a new opportunity to live, have sex as man and wife and sin no more: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...” (Gen. 1:28), “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife” (Mark 10: 6-7).

And so we arrive to my second point of the gilded fly-metaphor: it is not the impulses and desires that The Bible condemns, after all, the sexual drive is, too, God given. Instead, it is the way man acts upon this desire, how he uses his will in contrast to that of God’s, (the topic of the next sub-chapter) is what The Bible is concerned with. Somewhat surprisingly, then, Lear’s “let copulation thrive” - as lewd as it may sound - can also be seen to be consistent with The Bible. Perhaps Shakespeare, by making us think of the fly, indeed, is referring to man and his situation, his responsibility as the crown of all creation. He has a special status, which if doing things like animals, makes him a sinner, whereas the rest of the creation is not similarly “burdened”. As discussed in 2.4.2, Nebuchadnezzar in addition to being punished for his sin by insanity, was also otherwise lowered - he was brought down to the level of animals; “thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen”. It is this “burden”- aspect of the metaphor, that dominates in Lear’s next use of it. It is famous and appears at the end of the play:

No, no. Come, let’s away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i’th’ cage. When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness; so we’ll live, and pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh at gilded butterflies...

(sc. 24, 8-13)

Man’s special status, if misunderstood, can be seen as a limiting factor, in the sense that man is faced with more expectations than animals - what is natural to animals, might be sinful in the case of men. One alternative for reading the quote is that this limiting, burden-aspect could be present in Lear’s words both when he compares himself and his daughter to caged birds, and when he uses the gilded butterfly-metaphor.

For sure, he has evolved and uses vocabulary that is very central to Christianity, “blessing” and “forgiveness”. But his use of these words seems to go hand in hand with the sceptical side of his personality.

If we take the idea of the butterfly literally, the inevitable conclusion would be that it certainly ends up dead of suffocation if gilded. Additionally, it would also lose its ability to fly. Thus, the difficulty related to the idea the of butterfly’s ascension if gilded, in addition to a general sensation of heaviness, serve to hint at the possibility that Lear’s thoughts and heart have not, at least yet, moved over to the religious side. A second, more straight-forward alternative is also present: Lear could be genuinely manifesting a Christian attitude similar to the earlier discussion referring to glitter, vanity and lies. He has truly come to understand the role of wealth in relation to human nature better, he might be genuinely sceptical, not of religion, but of possessions. As for which of the alternatives might be more probable, I do not wish to speculate. I merely wish to point out the existence of these interpretations, the choice of possible conclusions I leave for the reader.

4.2. Possessed men and evil - Original Sin. *Ran* as a parallel reading.

The third reference to a gilded animal is also in the scene 24, where Albany wants to arrest Edmund. This should be seen together with another snake-related quote appearing much earlier, in scene four, where Lear talks of Goneril. With these references to (gilded) serpents I also move on to discuss the concept of evil in *King Lear*: “...How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child...” (sc. 4, 282-283). “Stay yet, hear reason, Edmund, I arrest thee on capital treason, and in thine attaint this gilded serpent” (sc. 24, 80-82). Snake is a symbol often used in both religious and secular contexts, perhaps one of its best-known meanings relates to the fact that in Genesis, it is actually the Devil himself who takes the form of a snake and tempts Eve to pick a fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge.¹³

¹³ Gen. 3: 1-5

This means that the snake usually represents evil and sin. Another biblical parallel that could be relevant is in Matthew, where Jesus discusses people's appearances in relation to their true nature:

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the *gold* of the temple, he is a debtor! Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers*¹⁴, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?
(Matt. 23: 16, 27, 33)

The parallels, especially the former one related to Eve, feel even more relevant, if seen together with the exchange that takes place between Goneril and Albany:

Goneril: ...thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries 'Alack, why does he so?'

Albany: See thyself, devil.
Proper deformity shows itself not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman
(sc. 16, 57-59)

This seems to point to the idea that evil (or the Devil) is present in all of mankind, or - should one insist on a misogynist reading - in women only. Logical options are that evil is present either always, or only from time to time, owing perhaps to a demonic possession of the body (I shall address this more thoroughly later on). However, in my opinion, a misogynist reading does not seem entirely plausible. The possibility of demonic possession is also stated in the case of a male character, Edgar¹⁵.

I say this, though I am aware of a brilliant film-version of the play, *Ran* by Akira Kurosawa. The tension between men and women in the film is, indeed, greatly emphasized and Kurosawa's choice is good and functions well. For example, at 1h 45min, a central female figure, Kaede, is humiliated by Jiro's (Kaede's husband) friend, Kurogane. Kaede is the equivalent of Goneril/Regan in the film, and Kurogane - upon Kaede's request to have a foe's head brought to her as proof of the foe's death - only brings her the head of a stony statue of a fox.

¹⁴ Both instances of italicised words in this excerpt are added

¹⁵ sc. 15, 56-61

Kurogane is making a clear point to Jiro, who is also present. He is implying that Jiro should be wary of the “fox” (Kaede) who has been rumoured to have been taking the form of a woman in many countries, bringing misery to all around her.

Eventually at 2h 31min, Kurogane, after accusations of deceit and “womanly vanity”, beheads Kaede. This bears the echo of the Christian view on possessions and false appearances in relation to men’s souls. In saying these things of *Ran*, I do not claim that the film should be read from a Christian point of view, I am only referring to it to point out some similarities.

Though I am to some extent sceptical towards a misogynist interpretation of the play, it can not be totally excluded, as per the previous discussion related to Adam and Eve and their fall. This biblical story has been a well-known reason for misogyny in Western history, and if it is to be deemed a valid background story for *King Lear*, then the misogyny element could, indeed, be argued to persist. Neither do I want to completely discard the idea of demonic possession as a source of evil, though I view it only as a part of a bigger issue, Original Sin as depicted in Genesis¹⁶. It was only the idea of women as the only gender possessed, that I wanted to question. After all, we do have Jesus in The Bible, forcing demons out of a possessed man into a herd of pigs¹⁷. This means that with demonic possession we do not end up in a situation, where man could be only temporarily evil and be completely without evil at other times. The Christian view of the intertwined nature of good and evil in man is described well by St. Augustine:

...even those things which are subject to decay are good. If they were of the supreme order of goodness, they could not become corrupt; but neither could they become corrupt unless they were in some way good. For if they were supremely good, it would not be possible for them to be corrupted. On the other hand, if they were entirely without good, there would be nothing in them that could become corrupt...So we must conclude that if things are deprived of all good, they cease altogether to be; and this means that as long as they are, they are good.
(St. Augustine, 1961, p. 148)

Thus, sin is a part of man he can never be without, much like disease can not exist without a body to attach itself to.

¹⁶ Gen. 3: 1-24

¹⁷ Mark 5: 2-13, Matt. 8: 30-32

Diseases and death are very often linked to sin in The Bible, for example, when Jesus cures a man sick with palsy, He says: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2: 5). Also, Deuteronomy makes this clear:

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field...The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it... The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.

(Deut. 28: 15-16, 20-21, 28)

In the play, Lear goes on to compare evil to disease when speaking of Goneril, and the connection to both excerpts above seems strong: “But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter – or rather a disease that lies within my flesh...Thou art a boil, a plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle in my corrupted blood.” (sc. 7, 379-383).

With these things said, it is the case that I must view demonic possession as an extra element on top of the fallen nature and Original Sin inherent in mankind; it can be seen as just another one of Satan’s endless ways of tormenting men, like he tormented Job, for example. And from the story of Job we can also infer that things which appear to us as evil, may not always be all that evil because it bears meaning; Job’s misery served to improve his insight and to remind him of humility before God. He was also greatly rewarded in the end. Even Judas may be said to have had his part in the divine plan, his evil deed, his deception was needed, so the Romans could capture Jesus and people could have hope of salvation through His death on the cross. Both Beauregard and Fortin address this: “...suffering can have value – it can be punishment for sin, it can be perfective, it can be expiatory, it can be redemptive, and it can lead to illumination (Beauregard, 2008, 207). “The suffering of Lear may be construed as the activity of a loving, albeit stern, God” (Fortin, 1979, 120).

Lear's misery has its basis in selfishness, manifested among other things, in his will to hear how much his daughters love him and it can also be argued that his vengeful, wrathful nature never truly changes; in the end he kills one of the persons who hanged Cordelia (sc. 24, 270). Indeed, it is as Knight says: "Lear is concerned with the more primitive thought of vengeance, and invokes the heavens and nature to aid him" (Knight, 1998, 191). So, there are good reasons why Lear's misery seems justified in the Christian context, and it can also be said to have made a difference, to have improved his nature (more of the theme of character improvement in sub-chapter 4.4). In reference to Beauregard's understanding of the functions of misery, I would say that Lear's misery has at least the punishing, expiatory and illuminative elements to it.

4.3. St. Augustine's categorization of sinners. Free will.

In addition to sin, misery can be understood by the help of the concept of free will, too. In 2.3, I already touched upon the subject and further examination of it might help to further clarify the notion of misery. In *Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love*, St. Augustine divides people into four groups according to their compliance to God's law and their consequent willingness to turn away from sin because of awareness of the law. The function of the law is to magnify sin, make it unbearable and turn man away from it, so he would be forced to move towards God's grace. These groups are: those living without law (*sine lege*), those living under the law (*sub lege*), those living under grace (*sub gratia*) and those in Heaven (*in pace*). With his words "I will keep still with my philosopher" (sc. 12, 162) and his desire for vengeance, it can be said that Lear can be placed in the group "sub lege". He can not be said to be "under grace", but his improved insight, with, for example, "I have taken too little care of this" (sc. 11, 29) shows that he is at least aware of the law, of what is right and wrong. Again, I refer to Freccero:

For Christians, however, intellectual enlightenment is not the same as virtue. Virtue requires an act of the *will*, so that one may *do* what the reason tells us is the good.

(Foreword, xviii)

...Ulysses and the metaphoric near shipwreck of the first canto represent the disaster that awaits the proud self-reliance of a philosophy unaided by faith. Ulysses was a traditional emblem in antiquity of the soul's journey, without a guide, to its celestial home. *Nostos* was the word in Greek that described the circular course of the soul...

(Foreword, xvi)

Lear's own words to Cordelia: "Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound upon a wheel of fire" (sc. 21, 44-45) could be taken to symbolize his insistence on philosophy and support the ancient view of man's circular journey of existence. In contrast, the Christian view of the soul's journey is usually one related to ascension or descent, a linear movement, either in the sense of moving away from sin and vices up towards God, or in the case of a person's staying in sin, damnation down to Hell. According to this view, man does not end up at the same place where he started his journey from.

Should critics here want to point out that if this is true about the wheel metaphor, does it not then, rather support a secular reading of *King Lear*; then my answer is that I can not and do not want to omit such an alternative, but that the situation lends itself to a Christian reading just as well. It is a fact that a ring is a familiar Christian symbol, for example, it is used in all weddings to symbolize eternity – it has no beginning and no end, so implies both the nature of God and His presence in the institution of marriage. Lear's words may be also be taken to imply the failure of reason and philosophy - the fire of the wheel as a consequence of this failure might refer to Purgatory or even Hell, both familiar Christian concepts.

Furthermore, Lear's words "As flies are to wanton boys are we to th' gods; they kill us for their sport" (sc.15, 35-36) also gain on new meaning. They could be seen in the light of Martin Luther's contention of the free will, to suggest that man is placed between two powers. He states:

Thus the human will is, as it were, a beast between the two. If God sit thereon, it wills and goes where God will: as the Psalm saith, "I am become as it were a beast before thee, and I am continually with thee." (Ps. lxxiii. 22-23.) If Satan sit thereon, it wills and goes as Satan will. Nor is it in the power of its own will to choose, to which rider it will run, nor which it will seek; but the riders themselves contend, which shall have and hold it.

(Luther, 1952, 54)

Thus, we are left with the conclusion that whatever man's choices may be, they take place *within* God's will, though they may be *against* His will.

The available options are slavery to God or slavery to Satan, i.e. this world. From man's point of view, free will appears to exist, but I take Luther's stand on this: A will that is either bound to sin or to God's will does not seem free, though the Christian view is that the only available type of freedom is to have a will that is in concordance to God's will.

4.4. Jewels as metaphors of character improvement and virtue. Hope as counter-force for misery

The fact that suffering may have meaning also adds another element of hope to *King Lear* and as hope is closely related to misery as its opposite, I shall deal with this the idea here, though it is relevant and important for the concept of justice too, and could therefore be placed in the next chapter just as well. I wish to stress that no conclusions should be made as for the placement of this sub-chapter here, its position should not be considered to change the general meaning of this thesis in any way, though naturally the structure is affected by the choice.

Hope was also one of my points in sub-chapter 3.3, where love and Cordelia were discussed. The discussion there has a shared element with the current one, in the sense that Shakespeare seems to be pointing towards emotions in both instances. Before moving on, I want to point out one aspect of hope in the context of character improvement - in comparison to love, hope in this case seems much simpler, as it does not serve to complicate Lear's or anyone else's misery. This is interesting, as it would be easy to think that love, for secular and religious scholars alike, might mean the ultimate manifestation of positive things. However, the complicated nature of love does not have to make it look bad. Rather, I take it as an indication of the fact that love is the one true challenge for men; it is easy to love people who behave well, speak and act truthfully, but it is hard to love one's enemies. As said before, in the Christian context man is defined by the object of his love.

Regardless of how it may sound, the dogmatic command of loving one's enemies¹⁸ is therefore logical for Christians; it will serve to show the true character of the person obeying the command, it will serve to show the power of the dogma and thereby God. Furthermore, it will also take away fuel from the vicious cycle of revenge.

It is the case that many characters show signs of improvement in *King Lear*, perhaps the most marked improvement is apparent in the characters of Edmund, Gloucester and Lear himself. In the final scene, Edmund changes his mind and tries to save Lear and Cordelia. Gloucester gains insight from his deeply symbolic loss of eyes and equally, or even more symbolic fall from a cliff. The loss of eyes is easily comparable on a symbolic level to the concept of loss of trust in reason and senses, a familiar notion in religious thinking. And later this is to become supported by Gloucester's own words "I stumbled when I saw" (sc. 15, 17). In turn, the fall bears a connection to the concept of 'felix culpa'. Along with the parallel to the story of Daniel and his fall to the den of lions, both of these facts place me in direct opposition to Bell as she states: "And yet there is little sense that Gloucester's illumination has any real religious import" (Bell, 2002, 148). Gloucester survives miraculously and gains insight into the value of life, how ripeness is all – like that of Daniel's, his plunge down is literally a fortunate fall.

As for Lear, he starts to think of the poor, how he and others should take more care of them, and he comes to see who his one, good daughter really is. He also makes the remark of laughing at the gilded butterflies of the world, thus implying an interest in people's true intentions, their thoughts and emotions as opposed to their words and appearances, which bears the echo of Christ's words on Pharisees and hypocrites discussed in 4.2. It is as Bradley puts it: "The old king...comes in affliction to think of others first, and to seek, in tender solicitude for his poor boy, the shelter he scorns for his own bare head; who learns to feel and to pray for the miserable and houseless poor, to discern the falseness of flattery..."(Bradley, 1991, 262).

¹⁸ Romans 12: 17-21

At the heart of character improvement in *King Lear* we find quite logically evil in general, vices, virtues, emotions - in sum, the human heart. In line with the earlier theme of evil, sin and gilded animals, it is the case that Shakespeare sometimes refers to positive emotions and virtue with the metaphor of (precious) stones and pearls etc.

By positive emotions I mean compassion, pity and empathy, emotions that seem to be only present in the good characters and after some progress towards good, to some extent in the generally accepted bad characters. At the end of the play, Albany asks for the bodies of Goneril and Regan to be brought to display and says: "Produce their bodies, be they alive or dead. This justice of the heavens, that makes us tremble, touches us not with pity" (sc. 24, 225-227). Indeed, Edmund takes a step towards good only after seeing the dead bodies and then reveals the location of Lear and Cordelia. He has not been "touched with pity" or compassion before, emotions which seem to move and motivate the good characters. Instead, it is only when he is faced with the grim consequences of his own, Goneril's and Regan's heinous actions, that he is forced to take a step away from evil. Softer means do not seem to get through the stony surface of the hearts of the bad characters. They are only affected by things truly tragic, disturbing and violent, which also functions as further justification for the presence of misery.

Then of course, we have Lear's words, first on Regan: "Then let them anatomise Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes this hardness?" (sc. 12, 70-72), and later, only moments before he dies: "O, you are men of stones..." (sc. 24, 252). His words resemble an excerpt found in the Bible: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2Cor: 3, 3). For sure, Lear's "nature" could simply point towards what Knight talks about: "In *King Lear* the religion, too, is naturalistic..." (Knight, 1998, 186), but it could just as easily be taken to refer to human nature, the concepts of evil and sin that we can find in the Christian context.

In contrast to this hardness of the heart, we have among other ones, the depiction of Cordelia. Upon Kent asking a gentleman what effect a letter that she received had on her, he receives this reply from him:

Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
Were like, a better way. Those happy smilets
That played on her ripe lip seemed not to know
What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropped. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved
If all could so become it.

(sc. 17, 20-25)

In Cordelia's case the metaphor of precious stones is straight-forward and refers to the ability to feel, to sympathize. Jewels are also mentioned in the case of Edgar and his father Gloucester, but owing to its ambiguous nature, this case requires some explaining. Gloucester promises to reward his son (whom he does not recognize) for taking him to a cliff: "...I'll repair the misery thou dost bear with some thing rich about me" (sc. 15, 74-75). He keeps his promise and says: "Here, friend, another purse; in it a jewel well worth a poor man's taking" (sc. 20, 28-30). In the final scene Edgar explains his father's death to Edmund and Albany using jewel-related imagery:

In this habit I met I my father with his bleeding rings, the precious stones new-lost; became his guide, led him, begged for him, saved him from despair...his flawed heart – alack, too weak the conflict to support ...burst smilingly.

(sc. 24, 185-188, 193-196)

Gloucester, prior to his improvement, seems to be thinking that a jewel could remove someone's misery. My view of this is best explained by the fact that one of the meanings of the word "rich" above is "absurd" or "ridiculous". Even if the word did not have this meaning/connotation back in Shakespeare's time, removing someone's misery simply by giving them a valuable object does seem naïve. However, Gloucester's character improvement is hinted at by the contrast between the expressions "flawed heart" (also bearing the connotation of a flawed jewel) and "burst smilingly". He seems to have improved from a naïve, erroneous stand towards peace.

It is also the case that critics have pointed out that Edgar is cold towards his father for having withheld his identity from him for too long. As for why I do not agree on Edgar being cold though it certainly may look like it, I ask this: knowing his consequent improvement, would Gloucester have been better off without his (fortunate) fall? Bells states: “It is exactly in this way that Montaigne goes from the argument of man’s weakness, the unreliability of his perceptions, to a reliance upon faith, maintaining that our weakness itself, when we acknowledge it, prepares us for a perception transcending ordinary human powers” (Bell, 2002, 147-148). Perhaps Edgar’s decision to assume “the basest and most poorest shape” (sc. 7, 173) as well as his words: “Edgar I nothing am” (sc. 7, 187), could be taken as an acknowledgement of his own weakness.

Seen together with Bell’s statement above, it might be plausible to think Edgar could have somehow anticipated that his father was on the verge of a healthy change and that if he was to interfere, this improvement might never come to take place. If so, then Edgar’s role, as I pointed out in 2.1, as a half-philosopher and a half-theologian seems even more plausible; his choices and actions regarding his father could imply some sort of (divine) wisdom, “perception transcending ordinary human powers” unavailable to ordinary men.

This also would make Lear’s later act of positioning Edgar as a “justicer” (discussed further in 5.3) an idea, which could be interpreted in the sense that Lear, without knowing it, temporarily places himself under disguised Providence. This is not to say that Providence is not present all the time anyway, but this direct placement without its full, true recognition serves brilliantly to highlight the blindness theme and therefore the misery of the play. Furthermore, Edgar’s actions could function analogously, they could point towards how God acts in relation to us - He does not always remove all obstacles from our path in order to prevent even greater ones from befalling it and to improve us as persons.

Although this guidance towards virtue may seem hard (like a diamond), we should bear in mind that we do have a great number of callous Edmunds, Gonerils and Regans among us, and if this kind of love should seem objectionable, I can only ask what the remaining options to get through to people like them might be then?

With these things said, the jewel metaphor seems to be pregnant with symbolism and it should not be ignored or discarded as simple, ornamental language. It seems very suitable to represent many things, there could easily be more than the ones I suggest here: Among the alternatives are - at the very least - the God-man-relationship (as it appears, for example, in Job) and the parent-child-relationship and the issue of wealth and its effect on men. To me personally it seems quite clear, that if Shakespeare wants to draw our attention to these relationships and issues and with the observations he seems to be making about them, he could easily be seen as a religious/Christian writer, or at least not to be hostile towards Christian views on God, man or wealth etc.

5. Justice

This chapter is, to some extent, intended as a summary and a synthesis of earlier chapters and will focus on the concept of justice in *King Lear*. Though this is the nature of this chapter, new concepts will also be introduced and discussed, such as predestination and (Lear's) salvation, both extremely essential and central concepts in the context of justice in a Christian reading. It could be the case that my view of the nature of justice in *King Lear* has already partially been made clear in the course of this thesis, but the issue needs even more focus and examination than what the previous discussion has provided. For example, it is necessary to address the question of why many of the good characters end up dying in the play along with the bad ones, and how this does not ruin the idea of divine justice. As the play is named after and focused on Lear, his fate also needs to be dealt with. My treatment of the topic is intended purely as suggestive, as it is very likely true that no definite and absolute answer can be given as for Lear's fate; in other words, I am not trying to prove absolutely and beyond all doubt that only one understanding of what happens to him is correct, but I shall try to show what could seem most probable. Indeed, I would not be at all surprised that even among Christian readers there might be some dissent in this matter.

However, these things should not be taken to imply that if one wants to apply a Christian reading in understanding Lear's fate (or the play), it could be done in any way one happens to choose. No, the dogma must be considered at all times, which has been my method throughout the thesis up to this point and will be in doing this synthesis as well. Even though I do accept the idea that the play supports the concept of divine justice, meaning that ultimately God decides on the fate of everyone, the principles behind His decisions are made known to men in The Bible, and it is possible to make an educated conclusion as for Lear's fate based on this. Along with other related topics, this shall be one of my main objectives in this chapter.

Before I can start discussing why I think that the existence of divine justice in *King Lear* is a plausible idea, I must deal with the doctrine of predestination first.

5.1. Predestination and foreknowledge (praescientia)

In addition to the previous themes of Original Sin, free will etc, also the concepts of predestination and foreknowledge play a major role in the discussion of justice in *King Lear*. The Lutheran dogma that I am applying both in the contexts of justice and later on, also (Lear's) salvation, lists several major points to the doctrine of predestination and foreknowledge. The list¹⁹ contains both affirmative and negative sides, that is, it informs the reader what the doctrine contains and what it denies as false doctrine and heresy. In this connection I can only give some of the major affirmative points of the doctrine and must omit the *negativa*, as examination of the entire doctrine as it appears in *Evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon Tunnustuskirjat*, would lead to a discussion too lengthy and detailed for the purposes of this thesis:

Affirmativa

Pure, true doctrine

1. First, we must pay strict attention to the fact, that God's foreknowledge (praescientia) and His eternal choosing (praedestinatio) are two different things.
2. Foreknowledge simply means that God knows everything before things happen. It is written: "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;" (Dan. 2:28)
3. God has foreknowledge of both the virtuous and the evil men. This is, however, not the origin of evil, nor is it the cause for doing evil and sinful things, such actions have their origins in Satan and man's own, evil and corrupted will. Neither is foreknowledge the reason for the depravity in evil men, only men themselves are the guilty ones. Foreknowledge, that is, Providence maintains order when evil things take place and sets a limit to evil up to which point it can go on and gives it meaning by prescribing that everything, even evil things must work towards the salvation of God's chosen ones.
4. Predestination, that is, God's eternal selection, is only applied on God's righteous, beloved children. It is the reason for their salvation, it brings forth salvation and everything related to it...
7. Christ calls all sinners to Him, (Matt. 11:28) and promises rest and rejuvenation. He truly means this; he wants everyone to come to Him, He wants people to allow themselves to be helped...

¹⁹ The list, as it appears here, is my translation from a Finnish copy of the book *Evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon Tunnustuskirjat*.

8. Therefore we must not think that we have been selected for eternal life by means of human reasoning and not by God's law... By their own devices, by the help of their own reason, men can not protect themselves against harmful thoughts...they contemplate thus: "If God has chosen me for salvation, I can by no means end up in damnation, whatever I may do. On the other hand, if I am not selected for eternal life, then there is no point in my doing anything good, as it will only be futile in every way".

11. It is not to be denied what is written: (Matt. 20:16) "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen". This, however, does not imply that God does not want everyone to be saved. The reason for the small numbers of those chosen is the fact that so many choose not to pay heed to God's word, instead they voluntarily belittle it, shut their ears and harden their hearts from it.

(Kansanaho et al, 1990, 452-455)

Before moving on, I want to point out how close Knight's view of this issue is to the third point stated above: "...our use of the word 'spiritualizes' in respect to Shakespeare need not submit us to a wishy-washy and sentimental morality...but introduces us to the stronghold of satanic power, regarded as part of God's plan or play" (Knight, 1984, 14). In addition to the concept of predestination, Knight's view also relates to and supports what was said about understanding *King Lear* as a theodicy, and about the meaningful nature of misery.

According to Bell, it is Edmund in *King Lear*, who can be said to refer to predestination.

Though her view contradicts mine, dealing with Bell's discussion on him perhaps serves to illustrate the issue best. She states:

Edmund's contempt for Gloucester's credulity may be also a putting-down of the religious idea of divine predestination when he observes, with intelligent scorn, "I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardising." Shakespeare may have shared Edmund's skeptic rejection of Gloucester's fear that eclipses were an ominous portent. A modern voice – and not a negligible one – is Edmund's when he says, "This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion..."

(Bell, 2002, 187)

In my opinion, talking about the sun, the moon and stars does not point so much towards the idea of predestination, but perhaps more so towards fatalism. As stated in 2.1, Gloucester's words echo St. Augustine's negative attitude towards astrology and philosophy.

If Edmund is sceptical of Gloucester's view, it could mean that he is then actually sharing St. Augustine's scepticism. In other words, Edmund would *not* be putting down the idea of predestination. While I do not wish to go as far as saying that he is subscribing to it, I think it safe to say that he might only be questioning a false form of it, fatalism, as it was denied in points three and eight of the Lutheran dogma: "Neither is foreknowledge the reason for the depravity in evil men, only men themselves are the guilty ones... "If God has chosen me for salvation, I can by no means end up in damnation, whatever I may do. On the other hand, if I am not selected for eternal life, then there is no point in my doing anything good, as it will only be futile in every way" (Kansanaho et al, 1990, 452-455). Blaming it all on stars also totally ignores man's own will, his own responsibility, which would clearly be against the dogma. Thus, Edmund's rejection of such a notion supports a Christian reading in the context of free will too.

In addition to these things, Bate's words, as they were quoted in 2.1, serve to solidify my view of Edmund: "Montaigne argues instead for Christian love and humility. Perhaps this is what Edmund moves towards at the end of the play, with his last attempt to do some good and his discovery that he was beloved" (Bate, 2008, p.385). Yes, I think that Edmund moves towards Christianity in the end, he does not start from it, as his actions certainly speak loudly against this. Even with what I said about the potential parallels to St. Augustine in his thinking, I do not think he is aware of how close to the Christian dogma he may actually be, just like Gloucester probably was unaware of the echo of St. Augustine in his own words. From this perspective it is then hardly a surprise that we get the act of Gloucester's blinding in the play, as it serves to remind us of not only the deceptive nature of senses, but of how easily Providence can go unseen despite its constant presence and closeness.

5.2. Divine justice vs. poetic justice

...*Lear* is a play which continually emphasizes 'justice'; and here the thunder, the tempest, the conflicting wrath of winds and rain, all are as divine summoners calling man to a dreaded acknowledgement of crime...All the sufferings of mortality, their pain and redemption; all the enigmatic purposes of God, His justice, His mercy and His wrath; all are concentrated in this titanic tempest.

(Knight, 1953, 196-197)

But not all the good persons suffer whereas all the bad meet their end swiftly. This is the natural justice of *King Lear*...Lear is 'the natural fool of fortune' (IV. vi. 196). To men the natural justice seems often inconsiderate, blind, mechanic.

(Knight, 1998, 195)

Though my view of justice in the play extends beyond the Shakespearean tempest that Knight discusses, his words have some similarity to my understanding of the topic too. Upon examining the first quote; yes, the storm is definitely a good symbol of divine wrath and justice, but Providence is present in many other ways in addition to this. It is close and present as the meaning that misery in *King Lear* bears, it is in the virtue of some characters, in the love and caring they show to those who banish them from sight. And though they are unaware of it, it is in the biblical/dogmatic echoes in the words of the apparent non-believers and villains. It is in character improvement and in the hope that these things represent individually and together.

By these means Shakespeare inserts God and divine justice into *King Lear*; and he does it so that they are not only present, but omnipresent. And in doing this, he also manages to preserve the principle of tragic realism intact. As for the second quote, it is greatly similar to Freccero's words on divine justice in *Inferno* - though Knight talked about natural justice, he might as well have been describing divine justice:

...as we learn from the inscription on the gates [to Hell], all have received the same sentence, with no hope for appeal, and none has been framed. Justice in Hell is meant to be objective, measured out by a bureaucratic monster in proportion to the specific gravity of the sin. Such a mechanical administration of punishment leaves no room for judicial error or caprice.

(Foreword, xii)

The discussion on divine justice so far, however, does not suffice for the purposes of this thesis. For one, the failure of poetic justice remains unaddressed.

Bradley describes justice in Shakespeare as follows: "...an order which does not indeed award 'poetic justice', but which reacts through the necessity of its own 'moral' nature both against attacks made upon it, and against failure to conform to it" (Bradley, 1991, 49). While he does not directly admit to the presence of divine justice, he does question the concept of poetic justice and his view, as it is represented in the previous and next quote, could be seen to support the idea of divine justice as well. I agree with both quotes. Furthermore, I wish to add that with the next quote Bradley might as well be describing Luther's view on free will: "...order which shows itself omnipotent against individuals is, in the sense explained, moral. Still – at any rate for the eye of sight – the evil against which it asserts itself, and the persons whom this evil inhabits are not really something outside the order, so that they can attack it or fail to conform it; they are within it and a part of it" (Bradley, 1991, 49-50). As we remember from 4.3, according to Luther, the only options for men are slavery to either God or Satan and things can be done against God's will, but are, nevertheless, still done within it.

Beauregard and Fortin also state that there is only partial poetic justice in *King Lear*: "Thus the ending of the play leaves us with an undoubted sense of mystery, but with some sense of rational order as well, indeed of partial poetic justice apparent in the survival of Edgar, Kent and Albany" (Beauregard, 2008, 217). "Though we do see some measure of what could be taken for "rough justice" in the deaths of Cornwall, Oswald, Edmund, Goneril and Regan, there is in the death of Cordelia no poetic justice..." (Fortin, 1979, 117). As suggested before, God and divine justice could be understood to be (omni)present in *King Lear*. This view, however, depends on seeing the presence of Providence as a part of justice. Indeed, I can not agree with the idea that upon thinking of justice in the play, we should only think of the deaths and survivals of the characters, or the ways in which they die, as Bradbrook suggests: "Not that they die, but how they die, matters" (Bradbrook, 1978, 189). Nevertheless, the conclusions Beauregard and Fortin draw seem correct. There *is* partial poetic justice, when we do look at the deaths and survivals.

In combination with the totality of all of the preceding discussion in this thesis, it is this co-existence of partial poetic justice with divine justice in *King Lear*, that has brought me to the following analysis of the nature of justice in it. The principles stated are not in any kind of order, i.e. it should not be concluded, for example, that the principle stated first is more important than the next etc:

1. Poetic justice does not need divine justice to exist in a text, though they can and do co-exist, for example, in *King Lear*.
2. Divine justice requires poetic justice to exist in a text, but the poetic justice in such a case must be partial. Full poetic justice and divine justice are mutually exclusive. However, if no poetic justice exists at all, the end result is one of divine arbitrariness or even sadism.
3. Divine justice in any given text must be based on a commonly accepted religious dogma and/or a sacred text/texts, for example, The Bible. If not, then the divine justice becomes “divine justice” and is only the result of fantasy and imagination.
4. Even with principle no.3, divine justice is partially based on mystery. Just like reason must exist for anyone to understand the dogma and faith, though they are not based on and do not entirely rely on reason, partial poetic justice must exist for us to somehow understand divine justice. The totality of divine justice is analogous to the nature of God Himself, it remains partially hidden, even though His will and law are given to us in His word.
5. While poetic justice is, divine justice is neither bound by man’s perception of time, nor his conception of suitable manners of awarding or punishing. If divine justice in a text is to reflect this, in the context of time the principle no. 2 dictates that the effect is best achieved by a removal of the time-related elements typical of full poetic justice, without removing all of these elements as they exist in partial poetic justice. In the context of manner, the principle no. 2 dictates that considerable modifications to conventional manners of awarding and punishing have to be made, while all awards and punishments must not be removed.
6. In order for the reader to gain a sensation of the presence of divine justice, there must be a noticeable contrast between that sensation and the reader’s concept of poetic justice. In spite of some overlap as stated in principle no. 2, principles 3-5 show that divine justice functions in a manner extremely dissimilar to poetic justice. From this it follows that in the case of divine justice, the sensation of injustice is inevitable from a strictly secular point of view. In sum, from a strictly secular point of view, the sensation of injustice is *possible* in the case of poetic justice, but with the occurrence of divine justice in a text, it is *mandatory*.
7. Principle 6 leads to the conclusion, that except for one particular situation, a secular reader can not end up in a place where he/she agrees with divine justice as it is represented in a text. The situation I refer to in this context - provided that the reader’s agreement is full and entirely honest – is one of religious conversion and nothing less.

8. Principle 7 leads to the conclusion, that any text portraying divine justice could be claimed to have the aim of spiritual conversion as one of the author intentions, which, in turn means that the role of author intention in texts containing divine justice must be considered with much more attention than what is customary for modern literary theories.

9. When viewed together with the Lutheran dogma and the doctrine of predestination, these principles as they appear here, do not lead to the conclusion that God is unjust. Instead, the conclusion can be drawn that the sensation of injustice is caused by one of the two following things: a) It is the result of the reader's secular point of view, b) the reader may subscribe to a religious point of view, but his/her perception of the dogma or sacred writings and thereby his/her view of divine justice (in *King Lear's* case The Bible), is considerably different than the divine justice the reader encounters in the text.

By this list I do not mean to suggest that I have said all there is to say on the matter of poetic justice vs. divine justice. By no means is this the case, I am sure other principles could be discovered and the list extended further, my only aim in explaining these things has been to give some sort of tool for the reader to help him/her gain a grasp of my rationale in relation to *King Lear* and the structure of justice it contains. Neither do I think that it is an absolute necessity for the reader to agree with all of the points in the list for the reader to be able to subscribe to a Christian reading, although I do think a strong correlation between the list and such a reading has to exist. It would be somewhat difficult to imagine, for example, a Christian reading to exist in the case of a rejection of all of the principles stated above.

5.3. The mock trial

Probably the most central justice-related scene in *King Lear* is that of the mock trial. In my opinion, this scene could be taken as a "nutshell representation" of first, Shakespeare's scepticism towards earthly/poetic justice also present in Lear's words later: "...handy-dandy, which is the thief, which is the justice?...A dog's obeyed in office...The usurer hangs the cozener." (sc. 20, 148, 152, 157). And second, it could be understood to relate to the fact that Providence is present, though often unseen, as I shall show with the discussion on Edgar's song. From this point of view, the trial would not be a mock trial at all, or then it could be called so with all the more reason.

In lack of a better one, I shall use a term familiar in the game of poker and compare my view of the mock trial as equal to a “double bluff”, which refers to a game move meant to be understood as a bluff, but is, however, not a bluff.

Though my focus here is on the mock trial, I shall, however, start my discussion from Edgar’s comment right before it: “Child Roland to the dark tower come, His word was still ‘Fie, fo, and fum; I smell the blood of a British man’ “ (sc. 11, 168-170). Undeniably, *Childe Roland* is a very old fairy tale, but even as such, it could lend itself to a Christian reading for two reasons: First, it further reinforces my view of Edgar and second, the fairy tale, as well as the mock trial itself, could be argued to have shared elements with Dante’s *Inferno*. A good, succinct account of the basic plot of the fairy tale is found, for example, on the internet; the following excerpt is an abbreviation of the full version found in Wikipedia²⁰:

The story tells of how the four children of the Queen...Childe Rowland, his two older brothers, and his sister, Burd Ellen, were playing ball near a church. Rowland kicked the ball over the church and Burd Ellen went to retrieve it, inadvertently circling the church "widdershins", or opposite the way of the sun, and disappeared. Rowland went to Merlin to ask what became of his sister and was told that she was taken to the Dark Tower by the King of Elfland, and only the boldest knight in Christendom could retrieve her...Childe Rowland went forth...fought with the King, and with the aid of his father's sword beat him into submission. The King begged for mercy, and Rowland granted it, provided his siblings were released. They returned home together, and Burd Ellen never circled the church widdershins again.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childe_Rowland

Bearing in mind both the previous discussion of Edgar’s split role as a philosopher and a theologian in connection to Ro(w)land as “the boldest knight of Christendom” - perhaps a synonym for a theologian - and the depiction of him as someone who ends up gaining a position of power over a king, the connection to *King Lear* emerges. Perhaps something of this sort was in Shakespeare’s mind, when he assigned Edgar/Tom as one of the judges.

²⁰ The story of Childe Ro(w)land can also be found in JSTOR: Joseph Jacobs, "Childe Rowland" *Folklore* 2 (1891) 182-197. However, for its conciseness, I prefer to give the Wikipedia version of the fairy tale here. Upon comparison with the JSTOR article, its content is precise and true.

And to dwell on Edgar/Tom's split role a little longer, I do not consider it a co-incidence that Lear refers to him in this quality as a "robed man of justice" (sc. 13, 32). After all, it is a fact that both the judges in courts and the clergy wear robes.

As for the parallels to *Inferno*, a tower is also a part of the landscape of Hell. A tower is located near the River Styx, at the borderline between the fourth and the fifth circles of Hell, these circles being the places of punishment for those of wrathful or sullen nature. This is relevant if we think of Lear's nature present, on one hand in his more energetic, rage-filled times within his madness and, on the other hand, melancholic sadness within it. And as we remember, he was described by Knight in 4.2 with these words: "Lear is concerned with the more primitive thought of vengeance". But leaving Lear's nature aside and to return to the tower-theme itself - Dante depicts the tower, crossing the river on a boat and an encounter with a soul in its muddy waters as follows:

we reached the lofty tower's base
Our eyes were following two points of flame
Visible at the top

In the dead channel one rose abeam
Coated with mud
He started gripping
With both hands at the boat. My master²¹ stood
And thrust him off, saying, "Back to safekeeping
Among the other dogs"

In the world above, how many a self-deceiver
Now counting himself a mighty king will sprawl
Swinelike amid the mire when life is over²²

(Canto VIII, 1-48)

In addition to the obvious connection between the last stanza and Lear, dogs are also referred to by both Lear and Edgar:

Lear: The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart – see, they bark at me.

Edgar: Tom will throw his head at them. – Avaunt, you curs!

²¹ Virgil

²² cf. "Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished" (Eccles. 4:13).

Be thy mouth black or white
Tooth that poisons if it bite,
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,
Hound or a spaniel...

(sc. 12, 57-63)

Perhaps, then, it could be claimed that Edgar, in relation to Lear, might have a role to some extent similar to that which Virgil has in relation to Dante in *Inferno*, with the exception that Lear does not fully recognize him in the sense I have been referring to in the course of this thesis. From this perspective, Edgar's song in the mock trial could serve a dual purpose: it might both make this theory on Edgar as a spiritual guide more plausible and also hint at the presence of Providence amidst man's tarnished earthly justice/existence. Edgar's song appears only a moment before the reference to the dogs:

Sleepest thou or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?
Thy sheep be in the corn,
And for one blast of thy minikin mouth
Thy sheep shall take no harm.

(sc. 12, 37-40)

The symbolism in Edgar's words is perhaps, a bit more obvious than the symbolism in various preceding instances in this thesis. The relationship between Jesus and men is commonly understood and remembered with the help of the Biblical analogy of a shepherd and his sheep - Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10: 14).

5.4. Language and the concept of "nothing". Lear's salvation.

"I suspect that we have not yet gotten rid of God, since we still have faith in grammar" – Friedrich Nietzsche. In the contexts of Christianity and salvation, this quote from Nietzsche may sound somewhat odd, but it is relevant here in the sense that his thought connects to first, Dollimore's view of language (as he infers it from Hobbes) in general and second, Bell's view of language in *King Lear* in particular. And these views, in turn I see in the light of the relationship between God and language as stated in the Bible:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1: 1-5). Of these views on language, Bell's is a complicated one and intertwined with the notion of "nothing", and according to her, "nothing" in Shakespeare can have more meanings than the one it usually has.

It is this side of her discussion that forms my main interest of this sub-chapter, because it relates to Lear's salvation. I shall move from simple to complicated and from a minor to a major point, which means that before Lear's salvation I shall discuss Dollimore's and Bell's perspectives to language and Cordelia in relation to these. Dollimore states: "When epistemological and ethical truth was recognised to be relative to custom and social practice, then ideological considerations were inevitably foregrounded... Truth and falsity, says Hobbes in *Leviathan*, are 'attributes of speech, not of things'. And where speech is not, there is neither truth or falsehood" (Dollimore, 1984, 11).

Perhaps an extension of this idea to the concepts of good and evil could be behind the nonsense of one of the giants in *Inferno*. Near the end, right before the encounter with Lucifer, Virgil and Dante meet giants. One of them is called Nimrod and his "words" make absolutely no sense at all. Instead of plain stupidity, the giant's state could also be translated as the ultimate (conscious) refusal and resistance of God's power: if one places himself outside of language, by doing that he could also be making a very radical statement of God too, as per the relationship between language and God stated in John 1:1-5 (and implied by Nietzsche). Furthermore, it could be possible to think that if one is outside of language, then one can not be blamed for anything and thereby one would have no responsibility of one's own actions whatsoever. Dante depicts the encounter with the giant as follows:

...and then my guide
Addressed him: "Soul, in your stupidity

Keep to your horn²³, and when you have the need

²³ cf. Edgar during the mock trial: "Poor Tom, thy horn is dry" (sc. 13, 69).

Use that to vent your rage or other passion;
Search at your neck the strap where it is tied...
Having said that,
He told me, “This is Nimrod²⁴. His accusation

He himself makes; for through his evil thought
There is no common language the world can use...

For every language to him as his
Is to all others: no one fathoms it.”

(Canto XXXI, 65-77)

To explain the relation of the discussion above to Cordelia, I shall now turn to Bell’s perspective.

She states:

Cordelia has nothing to offer in the place of her sisters’ empty conventional avowals without resorting to language they have debased. Her “nothing” is a despairing renunciation of *all* language as inadequate to express truth.

(Bell, 2002, 165)

The collapse of language that she represents may suggest the surrender of all trust in the terms that express love or any other ideal conception...

(Bell, 2002, 166)

If I accepted Bell’s first quote, it would lead to a situation similar to the Nimrod-excerpt and breach the biblical view of language in relation to God. Therefore I must reject it, but her next idea as stated, sits well with my perspective, because it is related to my earlier list of divine justice. I am referring here to principle no. 3: “Just like reason must exist for anyone to understand the dogma and faith, though they are not based on and do not entirely rely on reason, partial poetic justice must exist for us to somehow understand divine justice”. Analogously to the mismatch (and a mandatory overlap) between reason and faith and between divine and poetic justice, there is a mismatch (and yet, a mandatory overlap) between language and emotions, as well as other ideas – language is not the thing itself, but a representation of it.

However, this does not render language bad or inadequate, but as explained, this feature is both necessary and similar to other aspects of the dogma.

²⁴ Nimrod appears also in The Bible (Gen. 10:8) He was the king of Babel and started the construction of a tower that was supposed to reach all the way to Heaven. God prevented this by making the builders speak different languages, thus making communication difficult (Gen. 11: 4-9).

When seen together with my earlier proposition that Cordelia could be understood as a Christ-figure or as a representation of Lear's soul, the discussion at hand points towards the fact that I must read Cordelia's "nothing" in the way Knight proposes: " 'Nothing' in Shakespeare is often equivalent to a spiritual or soul reality..." (Knight, 1984, 12). As was argued in 3.2, Cordelia is not cold and I do not think her words – including "nothing" - should ever be considered as cold anywhere in the course of the play; rather, her words and attitude reflect very well the Christian ideals and dogma. This is present especially in what she says in the situation, where she should try to defend her share of the kingdom and everything that goes with it:

Lear: What can you say to draw a third more opulent
 Than your sisters?

Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.

(sc. 1, 79-81)

With this quote I also arrive at my major point and Lear himself.

Lear's reply to Cordelia is telling and relates to my view on him in the context of salvation.

He replies: "How? Nothing can come of nothing. Speak again" (sc. 1, 82). I am in full agreement with Bell, when she explains Lear's "nothing" as follows:

...Lear's "ex nihilo nihil fit" hints at the materialism of that Renaissance skepticism which denied even the miracle of God's creation of the world out of nothing. Lear's "Nothing will come of nothing" is a statement that occurs twice in the play...It resonates with the religious and philosophical controversies of Shakespeare's day.

(Bell, 2002, 164)

So, has this initial scepticism as it appears to be present in Lear, dissipated in the course of the play?

Has he manifested a clear move away from reliance in senses and philosophy? As *King Lear* is a very deep and versatile play, and as stated in the introduction to this chapter: no simple and straightforward answer which could remove all doubts, exists. However, based on the main themes of all of the preceding chapters and their respective conclusions, as a synthesis, I shall here offer my view of Lear's scepticism, faith and ultimately – salvation.

Not only is this synthetic view actualised through my own ideas, but it is also inspired by an interesting salvation-related idea suggested by Knight. He states: “In Shakespeare salvation appears, most undocrinally, to come about not through repentance but by recognition and acceptance; and in these there lies a spiritual achievement” (Knight, 1967, 296). As for repentance in Lear’s case, it could definitely be argued that he feels remorse, but I am not convinced that it has any religious connection in his case. Leaving aside speculation on actions that could be taken to portray repentance, his words “I have taken too little care of this...” (sc. 11, 29) are perhaps the closest match to remorse, but I do not think they can be understood as “repentance” in a religious sense. Yes, I have suggested Cordelia to be understood as a Christ-figure and yes, there is the scene where Lear says: “When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness” (sc. 24, 10-11), which could be taken as a religious gesture from Lear. But as it was discussed in 4.1, this scene is ambiguous and it is also true that Lear *says* he would do these things, but does not actually *do* them.

Of Knight’s concepts, “recognition” is probably the easiest one to deal with. I think that with all the disguises, the mock-trial and the blindness-theme of the play (which as a part of Gloucester’s misery, causes him to “burst smilingly”, thus creating a contrast to Lear’s manner of death), it is very probable that Lear never gains full and true recognition of God or faith, even though his insight does improve as a result of his Job-like misery. He does not “burst smilingly” and there is no proof in the final scene that we should translate his view of Cordelia’s death to have some sort of similarity to the death of Christ, in the sense that it should have anything hopeful to it (thus he, at least in this case, fails to show “acceptance” as suggested by Knight). No, instead Lear questions her death by asking “Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, and thou no breath at all” (sc. 24, 301-302). On a side note, *The Tragedy of King Lear* has Lear saying the additional lines: “Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips. Look there, look there” (Act 5, Sc. 3, 286-287).

This strongly supports my reading of *The History*; still, at the point of his own death, Lear clings to senses (also implying reliance on philosophy as well). Perhaps it is not a co-incidence either, that vision is referred to five times, the same number of demons Edgar/Tom alleged were possessing him, the same number of senses men have. All of this combined with Lear's own ominous "Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound upon a wheel of fire" (sc. 21, 44-45), strongly speak against Lear's salvation.

But all of these things are only suggestive. As a conclusion on the matter and this chapter, I shall state two more things, one of them in the form of a principle, as a final addition to the list I give in 5.2:

10. If divine justice is to conform to 1) the idea that God is ultimately the only one who decides on anyone's fate and 2) the idea of (tragic) realism in a text, then the notion of salvation must be portrayed without human involvement. This is to say: it must be *implied*, not stated directly by the author, a narrator or any of the characters (including angels or God). A breach of this rule will violate idea(s) 1) and 2) at the same time. The only exception to this principle is a case where the text is one commonly recognized as sacred, which is the case with, for example, The Bible.

This and all of the other principles stated before are actualised in *King Lear*. And the final point on salvation: in my opinion, what seems to be most essential on the matter is not so much my, or anyone else's answer/theory on it, but the fact that *King Lear* has been carefully so constructed as to make the reader pay attention and actively think about it, regardless of his/her conclusion. This feature is also connected to the principle related to religious conversion as it was stated in my list, in the sense that it reinforces my view on the significance of author intention in *King Lear*.

6. Conclusion

I do not believe I would get much opposition in saying that *King Lear* is one of the greatest plays and tragedies ever conceived by man. As such, I find the word “conclusion” to be ironic – I do not think that anything final or truly conclusive of the totality of the play can be said. Yet, a conclusion is necessary and required. With this thesis I have examined among others, parallels between *King Lear* and The Bible and a very famous Christian poem, *Inferno* by Dante. Based on these parallels and analyses drawn from them and other facts as well, I have provided evidence and food for thought as to how and why *King Lear* can be plausibly read within the Christian context. However, some aspects of this thesis, for example, parallels between *King Lear* and *Inferno* seem even more interesting and stronger than what this thesis was able to show within the limits set for theses. This matter certainly would deserve more attention. Other related themes might be, for example, those of a comparison between a Catholic and a Protestant reading, or a comparison between *The History* and *The Tragedy of King Lear*, as carried out perhaps with the intention to investigate which alternative supports a Christian reading better and for what reasons etc.

As for the suggestive nature of many of the conclusions I have drawn in the course of this thesis, I quote Fortin (the latter part of this quote also relates to and supports my conclusion of the previous chapter and its statement on author intention as well): “To assert that *King Lear* admits both secular and religious interpretations is not, however, to argue for critical relativism...the play, despite its apparent multivalence, creates its unique frame of discourse, channelling inquiry into specific areas of speculation and compelling attention to clearly-defined overwhelming questions” (Fortin, 1979, 123). Indeed, it seems to me that, in relation to its readers, *King Lear* leaves no one without an opinion, cold or indifferent - and I assume that, at least to some extent, my thesis may reflect this – so seeming to stand as God is in relation men: “He that is not with me is against me...”(Matt. 12:30).

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