Upon first reading *King Lear* I was struck by the apparent perversity of most of the main characters. Questions crowded out answers. Why did Lear set up a 'love-test' when he had already divided the kingdom? Why give up the kingdom in the first place? Why was Cordelia so resistant, then rebellious? Why did Goneril and Regan hate their father? Why did Gloucester so readily believe his illegitimate son who he had not seen for nine years? Why didn't Edgar reveal himself sooner to his blinded father? Why did France leave Cordelia alone in England?

Either Shakespeare had written a nonsensical play or I had to look deeper for meaning. I began to read some critical essays about the play. *King Lear* has been credited with many themes. Bradley in his book, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, sees two distinct groups of characters, one good – Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, the Fool; one evil – Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall, and Oswald. He sees these two groups set in conflict, Love against Hate. Says Bradley, "There is nothing more noble and beautiful in literature than Shakespeare's exposition of the effect of suffering in reviving the greatness and eliciting the sweetness of Lear's nature."

Bayley in *Shakespeare and Tragedy*, remarks that "something in the play knows about this comprehensive wrongness and accepts it as quite natural. It is part of the dolour of human fate to be wrong in that way, part of its necessity. That necessary human falsity occurs again and again in *King Lear*, as if the self-preoccupation of human beings in pain was bound to produce it."

And G. Wilson Knight in *The Wheel of Fire* says, "Mankind is, as it were, deliberately and comically tormented by the gods'. He is not even allowed to die tragically. Lear is bound upon a wheel of fire and only death will end the victim's agony." "Slowly, painfully, emergent from the Lear naturalism we see a religion born of disillusionment, suffering and sympathy: a purely spontaneous, natural growth of the human spirit, developing from nature magic to *God*" "Mankind in Lear are continually being ennobled by suffering."

After reading these and other expert opinions and interpretations I was even more confused than before and wondered whether we had read the same play. At this point I decided to fall back on my own resources and struggle to construct my own interpretation of the play, armed with my understanding of human nature.

Out of this struggle has come an explanation of the play.
that places the burden of responsibility for the tragedy on
the unconscious, - and because they remained unconscious -
destructive desires of King Lear himself. His inability to
understand himself, to control his impulses, to learn from
his mistakes, to listen to others, and his regard for little
other than the gratification of his own needs combined with
his position of power and authority provided fertile ground
for conscious and unconscious evil to flourish.

None of the characters emerge as purely good or evil,
except Edmund, who clearly is a sociopath, as pure as Evil
gets in human beings, and the Fool who always is the voice of
Truth because he speaks the language of the conscious and the
unconscious mind. It is he alone who understands something of
Lear's motivation, but he can be ignored because he is but a
fool.

As is usually true in the language of the unconscious,
everyone is disguised as something other than what they
originally appear to be. Lear is a foolish old man in the
guise of a King, a King who is, is not, and again is, a King.
The Fool is a wiseman in the clothes of a fool. Lear mistakes
goodness for evil and evil for good in his daughters.
Gloucester mistakes the same in his sons. Edmund pretends he
is a true and loyal son when he is a villain. Edgar must
disguise himself as a madman to save his life, and then
continues the disguise even when there is no longer a need.
Kent must disguise himself to be able to continue to serve
Lear. Goneril pretends to be a loyal wife while scheming her
husband's death with Edmund. Regan pretends no love for
Edmund, while betraying Goneril. Edmund pretends he loves
them both. Albany looks ineffectual and then ends up taking
charge. Oswald, accused of being villainous and killed for it
is actually true to Goneril. Cordelia pretends not to love
her father more than life itself and then loses her life for
him. Lear pretends to love his daughters but never gives
their needs a thought.

This play is about the astounding destructive force
present in man as long as his unconscious remains an unknown
and feared enemy. The gods are not actively involved in
controlling man in this play, and yet obviously these are not
the actions of rational men. The force that is active here is
the power of the unconscious mind to determine behavior and
then rationalize this behavior as something other than what
it really is. Only in some moments of madness, does Lear
demonstrate the capacity for love and compassion. As sanity
closes in on him, his capacity for loving anyone also recedes
and he is left with nothing except the crumbling walls of his
own empty and miserable self.

The story also demonstrates the power of unconscious
evil to bring out the worst in even the best people. Edmund
does not change because his evil was never unconscious and
the Fool does not alter because he represents the only integrated self in the entire play. But every other character at some point in the play deliberately or inadvertently helps the destructive forces at work to reach their ultimate end -
death.

In the remainder of this essay, I will attempt, scene by scene, to illustrate my understanding of the play from the point of view of unconscious motivation. I will discuss what goes wrong in the first scene and how this impacts on the development of the play.

Act I, Scene I introduces Kent, Gloucester and Edmund. Edmund, Gloucester's illegitimate son has been abroad for nine years and yet Gloucester introduces him as a son dear to him as his own son. Gloucester admits that he has been embarrassed to acknowledge him before, but has become hardened to it, "there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged."

The first line of Kent's with its allusion to the King's favoritism sets the tone for political strife, and Gloucester's obvious preference for his bastard son who he can barely know, over his legitimate son sets the scene for family strife.

Next comes the infamous 'love-test'. Lear has already divided the map so that it appears that the test is nothing more than a ritual, on old man's fancy. But he ascribes, almost prophetically and perhaps unconsciously a "darker purpose", and certainly Cordelia takes it seriously. Her comments indicate that her anxiety is mounting.

Goneril and Regan hive their sugary, almost prepared speeches and when he calls upon Cordelia, "What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?" "Nothing, my lord.", despite the fact that she has said to herself that her "love's more ponderous than my tongue."

She tells Lear, "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth", she can not talk about her feelings. Lear gives her another chance and a warning.

Then, she stand before him, defiantly, angrily and let's her old dad have it, putting him properly in his place.

Good my Lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Happily when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

What a moment for adolescent rebellion! Surely she is her father's daughter.

Lear tries again, "But goes thy heart with this?", but Cordelia persists, claiming truth as her justification. Lear demonstrating the same angry obstinacy so apparent in his youngest offspring, then disinherits Cordelia. He tells her that the Scythian who "makes his generation messes" shall be more pitied than his daughter - and is it any wonder since they have so much in common.

Lear admits that he has loved Cordelia most and that he "thought to set my rest on her kind nursery". Perhaps that he expected her to care for him in his dotage. He gives Cordelia's portion to Cornwall and Albany with the provision that he can live with each in turn along with his hundred knights.

Kent jumps in and tries to get Lear to stop his foolishness. He tries to tell him that his other daughters were flattering him, that Cordelia does not love him less, that the others are hollow and empty-hearted. He calls Lear mad - the first reference to madness. They argue, but Kent persists angrily claiming to be for Lear "the true blank of thine eye". Lear becomes infuriated even more and banishes Kent on sentence of death should he return. Kent leaves with a comforting note to Cordelia and a nasty shot to Goneril and Regan.

Gloucester, Burgundy, and France enter. Lear, still obviously angry, humiliates Cordelia before both her suitors, challenges either to take her now that she is penniless. Burgany declines. Lear assumes that France will also "therefore I beseech you, t'avert your liking a more worthier way."

France comments that Lear's behavior is "most strange" and that he cannot believe that Cordelia has warranted this treatment. Cordelia finally come to her own defense asserting that she has lost Lear's favor not because of a "vicious blot, murder, or foulness, no unchaste action or dishonored step" but because she lacks "that gib and oily art to speak and purpose not."

Lear replies, "Better thou hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better."

Much to his credit, this exchange seems to seal France's decision. Burgandy tries to get Lear to rethink his decision, but failing this, gives her up, to Cordelia's apparent relief since he is too mercenary. But France, his respect blossoming, takes her "that art most rich being poor."

France, Cordelia, and her sisters are left on the stage. Cordelia lets her sisters know that she knows their true mettle. There is obviously no love lost between them. Goneril
chides her self-righteously and Cordelia prophesizes that their evil will be uncovered, and she and France depart.

Goneril and Regan confer. They know Lear always preferred Cordelia and not his poor judgment in casting her aside. Regan attributes it to the infirmity of age, but recognizes that he's never known himself well. Goneril agrees that he's always been rash and age can only make it worse. They recognize that if he continues to wield power he will continue to be a nuisance to them. Goneril advises that they strike while the iron is hot and the scene ends.

What goes wrong with this scene? What does not? This appears to be sheer human intransigence. But what could be the underlying, albeit unconscious, motivation for this behavior?

As the play opens, Lear has already apportioned his kingdom. What reason then for the 'love-test'? His daughters accuse him of rashness and poor judgment, not of seeking flattery. And certainly his close advisor, Kent, is not a man with a smooth and oily tongue. At some level, Lear certainly knows the true value of all three of his daughters. And as his favorite, he surely must know what would be Cordelia's reaction to such a public display. So why did he set her up?

Could it be that Lear both fears and longs for his love for Cordelia. He is aging and apparently alone. No where in the play is their mention of anyone's mother except for Edmund's, who is described as a pretty whore. He has always been closer to Cordelia than to his other children.

Lear engineers a situation sure to produce exactly the stated outcome. Why pick this moment to divide up the kingdom? The one element that is not stable in the situation is Cordelia's eventual marriage. Her two suitors, both men of wealth and power presumably, "long in our court have made their amorous sojourn." Some decision is inevitable and then she will be gone from Lear. But, he can not prevent her from leaving without publicly admitting his own need and desire for her. This is something he has not even admitted to himself, it is still at an unconscious level, but the recognition of it gives meaning to the subsequent events.

If Cordelia publicly expresses her love and longing for her father than he can justify continuing to put off her marriage as suitable to her own desire. But if she wishes to separate from him, he has the power to make her undesirable, unacceptable to both suitors by cutting off her inheritance and making her completely dependent on him.

He has reached the time in his life, when the burdens of leadership have become too heavy. He wants to give in to his own dependency needs, long unfulfilled, and be cared for himself. He can divide up the kingdom now and look like a wise and generous King and father, but he cannot afford to
let himself or anyone else see how dependent and needy he feels. Keeping Cordelia so he can "set my rest on her kind nursery" will resolve the dilemma, and he can blissfully die in the arms of his love. It is a situation from which Cordelia cannot escape.

Cordelia senses the trap, hence her growing anxiety. Surely it is not because she cannot put feelings of love into words. Once she begins to talk she appears to have no trouble in expressing herself. But it is always difficult and anxiety-provoking to express an unconscious conflict and make it conscious. To truly say what she feels she must find some way of expressing the conflict within her and she does so in her speech to him. She has read his unconscious message and answers it in kind.

She tells him she loves him, after trying to say "nothing" and thus warning him away, but then she draws a clear line between the love of father and that of husband. Lear asks her, "But goes thy heart with this?", the agonized word of a jilted and disbelieving lover, and when she remains unmoved he falls into a jealous, all-consuming rage.

Cordelia senses that a deeper drama is taking place here, a second level of meaning beneath the apparently ritualistic "love-test", spoken in a language that only she an her father understand. There is tragedy in the inevitability of her fall into the trap Lear set. If she mimicked her sisters, she would betray herself and be constrained to stay with her father, either emotionally unseparated or actually physically still with him. To keep silent or say nothing was disallowed, so the only course open was to speak the truth that her father did not want to hear and hope that he would be able to respond with integrity and love, and that within that context their relationship could grow.

But Lear cannot abide her renunciation of his love and strips her of all, demonstrating a narcissism of outrageous proportion and an enormous abuse of power. She has spoken out loud of his unconscious desires and he can not bear to know what lurks behind his "darker purpose". And he can afford the rage because he is confident that ultimately, her debasement will just bind her more closely to him.

Kent clearly has no understanding of the unconscious forces at work here, and attempts to deal honestly and openly with his King, a logical approach that by its directness implies frequent past dialogues between the two. But this time, Lear cannot hear Kent, just as he cannot bear to hear the voice of reason within himself. If her were to look at his behavior he would have to question why Cordelia's statements of obvious truth had so inflamed him and as we look from Regan, "he hath ever but slenderly known himself."

To banish reason, he must banish Kent, his final act as King.
It is at this point that things go all wrong for Lear. He brings in Cordelia's suitors, fully expecting that neither will now want this "little seeming substance." He has read Burgundy correctly and once can almost see him inwardly grin when the Duke declines his offer.

But Lear had not counted on France. He assumed that this king would reject her too. With both suitors out of the way he would have Cordelia once more securely to himself, penniless and therefore totally dependent, with the remainder of his life to patch up the quarrel.

From here out, all hinges on France's behavior. He begins by expressing bewilderment at this turn of events. Cordelia senses rescue at hand and comes to her own defense in challenging her father to agree that it is only her unwillingness to flatter that has cost her his favor. This is all the explanation France needs to rescue the fair damsels in distress.

Lear's defeat can be heard in his final speech, the rage temporarily burned out, the lurking sense of melancholy in "Thou hast her France, let her by thine, for we have no such daughter, nor shall ever see that fact of hers again." Lear could never freely give her to another man. He played out his last card and lost. Now he has lost his love, his kingdom, his wealth and is forced into dependency on his remaining two daughters for whom he has little love or care.

These tensions in a family are experienced by all who live within it, and there can be no doubt that Goneril and Regan know from the start, that their father's connection with them has little to do with love. They have always known that Cordelia was his favorite, and we know already that there is a split between Cordelia and her other two sisters. Unconscious forces within a family have power beyond time and place, and Cordelia's freedom from her father's control will only be temporary. His pathology will draw her back and ultimately bring her to her death, as it will first corrupt and then kill her sisters, and Lear himself, thus tragically ending their entire family.

In Scene II, the second scenario between Gloucester and his sons emerges and amplifies the theme of unnatural feeling between fathers and children, in this case, sons. We have been told that Edmund has been away for nine years. And despite this and his protestations of love for Edgar, Gloucester virtually leaps at the opportunity to believe Edmund's slander against his brother.

Being another man of little insight, Gloucester blames this turn of events on the stars and willingly consents to participating in some eavesdropping arranged by Edmund. His willingness to believe is too eager and his unwillingness to give his legitimate son even a fair hearing points to
unconscious and devious motives at hand. Edmund, like any intelligent sociopath, knows how to manipulate those forces for his own ends.

Surely it is no coincidence that Shakespeare chooses not two legitimate brothers, but a legitimate son and a bastard for the protagonists of these scenes. If only Goneril and Regan had had a different mother from Cordelia, the symmetry would be perfect. Like Lear, Gloucester is aging, each faced with giving over his place to the next generation in the natural order of things.

But these are fathers who do not age gracefully. Lear has an unnatural and unhealthy love for Cordelia and Gloucester is so willing to take advantage of the opportunity that Edmund provides because it is the only justifiable reason for legitimately eliminating his true rival, his rightful heir, Edgar. It is of great interest, and consistent with recent findings in the understanding of child abuse, that many critics have spoken of the obvious antipathy of children to fathers so exemplified in this play, but few have focused on the malignant and unnatural hatred of the fathers for their children and the children's reactivity to it.

Edmund, like Goneril and Regan, are much more honest and direct about their antagonism for their respective fathers. From the little we know, there is little to suggest that any of these children have received much love from their parent. They are evil and cruel, but not really hypocritical or self-deceptive. Even in Goneril's and Regan's opening avowals of love, one does not get the sense that they actually believe what they are saying, it is just a ritualistic means to an end. For his part, Edmund knows he is an evil bastard, not because of "planetary influence". He knows man, knows his father, "an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star."

For his part, Edgar, like Cordelia, does not seem terribly surprised by this turn of events. He apparently sees no great inconsistency between his father's professed love for him and his current behavior, so we must assume that he has sensed his father's underlying motivations before this. He believes immediately in Edmund's account of his father's fury and shortly will flee for his life.

In Scene III the course becomes more set. We see that Goneril has inherited her father's ire, although she has acquired her own subtlety. And we learn more of Lear's narcissism and lack of grace from Goneril:

By day and night, he wrongs me; every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other,
That sets us all at odds: I'll not endure it:
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us

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On every trifle.

Lear is not an innocent party here. On several occasions we hear that he has been producing chaos and discord in Goneril's household. He is venting his anger for the poor outcome of his desires on his other daughter and never takes any responsibility for having done so. Never does he admit that he may have given her cause for worry and rage. It was his decision to become a dependent, but now he wants to be released of all responsibility while still having the privileges and rights of a King. Goneril does not start out as a cruel and evil woman. But she has much resentment long repressed within her, and now Lear is providing a climate in which that rage will grow and overtake her better nature. She does not love him, but she is also not permitted to separate from him. This conflict explains much of her subsequent escalating cruelty.

Scene IV opens with Kent in disguise. It taxes belief that Lear does not recognize his loyal friend. No disguise can conceal voice and mannerism. We must assume that Lear recognizes his foolishness in banishing Kent and decides to play along with the charade since he cannot save face and revoke the banishing, without also focusing on what Kent was trying to tell him when he sent Cordelia away. Reason reasserts its presence but still has little power.

Lear's clear preference for Kent's honesty and directness and the fact that Kent mentions one of his strengths as being unable to speak like an affected courtier - "I can... mar a curious tale in telling it", implies again that Lear is not a man who has valued empty flattery in the past and that therefore the 'love-test' had some meaning other than the obvious.

As the story continues Lear begins to discover that the servants are not obeying him as they had and we discover the King's Fool, who is pining for Cordelia.

The Fool is the character that gives voice to the unconscious through symbol, rhyme, and humor. With a Fool there is always the option available of attributing what he says to foolishness so he can be allowed to express the truth, no matter how insulting or revealing.

The Fool observes that Lear "has banish'd two on's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will." Here is a recognition that Cordelia is better away. He asks Lear, "Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?", referring back perhaps, to Cordelia's initial response to the 'love-test' which was in fact filled with meaning, not empty. But Lear responds "Why no boy, nothing can be made out of nothing". Lear does not want to read the language of the unconscious. There is too much threat there.
The Fool could not be clearer in pointing out Lear's folly in his speeches and even goes so far as to say "e'er since thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gav'st then the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches,
    Then they for sudden joy did weep,
    And I for sorrow sung,
    That such a king should play bo-peep,
    And go the fools among"
The King has blinded himself to his own foolishness and has become a fool, but an unconscious one, himself.

Goneril enters the scene and severely chastises Lear for the behavior of his retinue. It is not difficult to imagine that Goneril's description of their behavior might be accurate. We know that Lear wants to regress, that he wants to play at King with all its attendant power and prerogatives without having any responsibility. He wants to be dependent and taken care of — why else go from one daughter to the next instead of staying in his own home. But he does not want to pay the price that dependency inevitably exacts — compromise and obedience.

One gets the sense that Lear has never had to consider the wants or needs of anyone else and he is not even going to consider that Goneril might have some legitimate complaints. Goneril has done the unthinkable — she has crossed him and he begins to rant, "Does any here know me? This is not Lear: Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes..."

Goneril grows increasingly angry and frustrated and threatens to actually reduce his retinue. He is in her house, has struck out at her servants, has disobeyed rules of courtesy. But can Lear listen, or even try to understand? Instead he begins to rave, hurling down upon Goneril venomous curses on her and her unborn children, his own grandchildren.

Hear, Nature, hear! dear Goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disinatur'd torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!

All this just because she told him he had to act his age and
behave himself. How could Goneril love him? We have no
evidence to suggest that he has ever been other than cruel to
her. For her part, Goneril attributes it to his aging.
Whatever it is, his behavior in this scene is infantile and
histrionic. He resolves to go try his luck with Regan.

Albany's character takes shape in this scene. He tries,
effectively to bring some calm to the situation. Goneril
knows and fears her father and has good reason to want to
reduce his train:

A hundred knights!
Tis politic and safe to let him keep
At point a hundred knights; yes that on every
dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers,
And hold our lives in mercy

Albany warns "Well, you may fear too far." "Safer than trust
too far", Goneril replies, "Let me still take away the harms
I fear, not fear still to be taken: I know his heart." Albany
again tries to warn her "How far your eyes may pierce I
cannot tell: Striving to better, oft we mar what's well."
Goneril has never known Lear's love, but she has known his
wrath. Unprovoked she would just have kept her distance, but
he has forced himself upon her and she fears him and the harm
he might do her and she goes on the offense, warning her
sister of what to expect.

Kent, Lear, and the Fool are ready to depart to see
Regan, but Kent is going ahead with letters to Gloucester.
Lear persists in his belief that he is a kind father, but we
have yet to see any kindness. For him, his goodness to his
children rests on his division of the kingdom, but this was
done to meet his own needs, not their's. The Fool wishes that
"Thou shouldst not have been old til thou hast been wise."
Lear begins to feel anxiety, starting his slip into his own
unconscious that he calls madness:

O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven;
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!

In act II, Scene I, we become more familiar with
Edmund's evil genius. He knows that Gloucester unconsciously
fears and loathes his own son because Edgar is a reminder of
his own mortality. It will be Edgar who will gain the title
and the wealth — but only upon his father's death. To fuel
this fire, Edmund speaks of parricide, thus justifying
Gloucester's plans of murdering Edgar. Edmund is clearly a
sociopath with no conscience, nor moral percepts other than
those that further self-preservation or self-gratification.
Edmund does not actively hate his brother. Edgar is simply an object who stands in the way of his ability to satisfy his own lust for power and wealth and therefore he must be eliminated. His father is the tool he can use to accomplish this. Sociopaths have an uncanny ability to perceive the unconscious desires of others and here he recognizes that Gloucester is threatened by his own aging and the inevitable competitive threat that his legitimate son poses.

Edgar, too, is easily manipulated. He does fear his father and falls easily into Edmund's trap. He has his own unconscious desires and his father's death will mean that he has assumed his rightful place. Edmund simply knows how to take advantage of that common tension between father and son and to pervert it to his own ends. Edmund is so bold that he even reveals his own motivation cloaked in Edgar's supposed words:

Thou unpossessing bastard! dost thou think,
If I would stand against thee, would the reposal
Of any trust, virtue, or worth in thee
Make thy words faith'd? No; what I should deny-
As this I would; ay, though thou didst produce
My very character - I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damned practice:
And thou must make a dullard of the world,
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant and potential spirits
To make thee seek it.

Regan and Cornwall enter the scene and readily believe in Edgar's guilt, associating him with Lear as "my father's godson... He whom my father nam'd" and attribute his corruption to the influence of Lear's knights. How readily they both support Edmund's accusations and further divide father from son is evidence of Regan's unconscious desires too. She can easily envision parricide, because hatred of her father is breeding within her.

Both Regan and her husband must revel in this split as they have benefitted in the split behavior between the King and Cordelia. They have come to Gloucester to avoid Lear and now must fuel a fire between Lear and their host. Gloucester is as vulnerable to their manipulation as he is to Edmund's, because he knows so little about his own unconscious conflicts.

In Scene II, Kent and Oswald meet and argue. Kent, echoing Lear's awful curses, hurls at Oswald a string of expletives possible unrivaled in the English language:

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

In a previous scene Oswald, Goneril's trusted servant has been hit by the King and tripped by Kent in Goneril's own house for following the orders of his mistress. Oswald at least, holds his temper and does not draw on the belligerent Kent. Kent is clearly out of control. He provokes and insults Oswald, then Edmund, then jointly Cornwall, Regan, and Gloucester:

Sir, tis my occupation to be plain:
I have seen better faces in my time
than stands on any shoulder I see
before me at this instant."

Cornwall is legitimately angered by this:

This is some fellow;
Who, having been prais'd for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature: he cannot flatter, he
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth:
And they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly-ducking observants,
That stretch their duties nicely.

Kent then turns to sarcasm and mockery and Cornwall orders him to the stocks. Only then does Kent calm down and establish some equanimity. But what purpose can he have in furthering the antagonism between all parties as he has been doing since his return? It may not just have been for Cordelia's sake that he questioned Lear's earlier judgment. When Lear gave up his kingdom, Kent lost his position too, even had he not been banished. And perhaps, he had felt more strongly about Cordelia than we can ever know, perhaps he
wanted her for himself. Now, if he can cause dissension, if he can be instrumental in bringing about a war, with Cordelia armed on her father's side, he may yet win at least a kingdom back, create a rapprochement between Lear and Cordelia, and then... who knows? Regan in this scene is stony and hard. Her husband suggests that Kent sit in the stocks until noon, but Regan instructs that he remain there until night and then all night too. Regan likes to see men suffer.

In a brief third scene we are introduced to Edgar disguised as a madman. Parallels can be drawn between the disguised Kent, Lear's surrogate son, in disguise so that he can be with Lear, and Edgar, Gloucester's real son, disguised to evade his father. "Edgar I nothing am", echoes Cordelia's "Nothing" and Lear's "Nothing can be made out of nothing". In this play nothing is never nothing.

In Scene IV, Lear and the Fool find Kent in the stocks. Interestingly, the honest Kent denies any guilt for having in any way provoked or offended Cornwall. The second reference to 'mother' in the entire play is in Lear's lines "O! how this mother swells up toward my heart; Hysterica passio! down, thou climbing sorrow! They elements below." First 'mother' was a whore, now she is hysteria dwelling in the realm of the unconscious.

The Fool's character is developed further as he warns Kent to "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following", while making it clear that he does not intend to follow his own advice and hopes Kent will not either.

In this scene, Kent does nothing to quell the King's increasing rage. He does in fact fuel it with his own slanted account of what has occurred. Lear ignored his advice before but perhaps would have heeded it this time, but there was no evidence of a rational Kent. He appears set on increasing the dissension between father and daughters. For him, Regan and Goneril have no redeeming qualities and he changes reality to fit this belief just as others in the play. This would explain his disproportionate rage at Oswald who in his loyalty to Goneril is not totally different than Kent in his loyalty to Cordelia. It can only be for her sake that he incites further divisiveness. We know that he has received a letter from her that implies that she will be taking some action in the not distant future.

Lear tries briefly to hold onto his temper, but then, while speaking to Regan, begins to insult Goneril. Regan of course realizes that his wrath could easily be directed at her: "O the blest Gods! so will you wish on me, when the rash mood is on." But Lear asserts that he will never curse her, not because of love, but because, "Tis not
in thee to grudge my pleasures."

He has of course read Regan wrongly. When Goneril joins her they present a united front to his demands and begin provoking him. His narcissism and their own hatred, fear, and rage bring out the cruelty in both daughters and they escalate the situation, humiliating him and driving him into a helpless, tearful rage. "O Fool! I shall go mad."

Regan and Goneril begin to discuss what has occurred and seem to soften a bit until Gloucester enters and tells them that "The King is in high rage." They harden again and imply that being out in the storm means he gets what he deserves. They also fear what he and his retinue will do if they are let in. The storm closes in.

Regan and Goneril both fear their father. Presumably he has given them cause even before they saw what he did to Cordelia and Kent. Old age just tends to worsen already existing personality traits. Their fear causes them to react in a paranoid way, anticipating and expecting the worse. This can of course, generate a self-fulfilling prophecy. Lear's narcissism and cruelty is coming home to roost.

Act III, Scene I opens out on the heath in the storm. Kent encounters a gentleman of the King's retinue while looking for Lear in the storm who tells Kent that Lear is out storming with the storm.

Kent confides in him that conflict is brewing between Albany and Cornwall and that the King of France with Cordelia are planning "to show their open banner". He urges the man on to Dover to tell interested parties there about the plight of the King and to give a ring for identification to Cordelia.

In Scene II, Lear is out in the storm on the heath with his Fool raging at the forces of nature, calling upon the "all shaking thunder" to "strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world! Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once that makes ingrateful man!" The Fool in all his practicality urges him to make peace with his daughters and find shelter. but Lear raves on to the elements

Here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul.

Kent enters and talks of the horror of the night. And then Lear begins a very important speech.

Let the great Gods,
That keep this dreadful pudding o'er our heads,  
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou  
  wretch,  
That hast within thee undivulged crimes,  
Unwhipp'd of Justice; hide thee, thou bloody  
hand,  
Thou perjur'd and thou simular of virtue  
That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,  
That under covert and convenient seeming  
Has practis'd on man's life; close pent-up  
guils,  
Rive your concealing continents, and cry  
These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man  
More sinn'd against than sinning.

In a moment of deep emotion Lear touches upon the guilt that lies within him and hints at murder, perjury, hypocrisy, and incest. The storm is raining justice down upon him and he cries for mercy that he is still "a man more sinn'd against than sinning." The sense of this speech is that it is directed at himself, not at his companions because this confession brings about the first evidence of true compassion yet seen in Lear's character. "Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart that's sorry yet for thee." Lear senses that his "wits begin to turn" but only in beginning to understand his unconscious motivation can he have any hope for salvation.

In Scene III, Gloucester confides foolishly in Edmund as he goes to help the King and this confidence in his treacherous son will be his undoing. Edmund recognizes that betraying his father to Cornwall will bring him great reward and reward in Edmund's only love.

Edgar, as a madman and Lear, hovering on the edge of madness himself meet in Scene IV after Lear has raved further about filial ingratitude, assuming no responsibility for his own behavior "O Regan, Goneril! Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all - O! that way madness lies; let me shun that" Touch deeper and he will find his own guilt that he alludes to earlier. But again, out of this growing understanding comes Lear's famous speech of pity for the poor and homeless. He can at least allow himself some generalized guilt for not having taken care of these.

It is the encounter with Edgar that finally unnerves him. He keeps insisting that Edgar must have had daughters that brought him to such a low state:

Death, traitor! nothing could have subd'd nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! twas this flesh begot
These pelican daughters.

But in these lines he begins to recognize that he is responsible for these "pelican daughters". He recognized the lowly position of man and tries to bare his body to bare his soul.

It must be remembered that Edgar is Lear's godson and might Lear not recognize him in his disguise too? The author's irony is obvious in the meeting of the angry father and banished son, for Gloucester and Lear have each banished their beloved children because of their own unconscious and unresolved conflicts. Gloucester enters the scene to rescue the King and parallels Lear's complaints about his daughters:

Canst thou blame him?
His daughters seek his death. Ah! that good Kent;
He said it would be thus, poor banish'd man!
Thou say'st the king grows mad; I'll tell thee,
friend,
I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
Now outlaw'd from my blood; he sought my life
but lately, very late; I lov'd him, friend,
Not father has son dearer; true to tell thee,
The grief hath craz'd my wits

Gloucester, though able to see, is blind. He has seen Lear's foolishness in banishing Cordelia and Kent, but does not examine for a single moment, his own motivation in banishing his son. Gloucester, like Lear, confuses narcissistic need with love. Their love is only given as long as the loved object lives up to their idea of what he or she should be, and gratifies the father's needs. Never is there a thought given to the needs or wishes of the alleged beloved.

Lear insists that he has much to learn from Edgar his "noble philosopher" and of course he does, since Edgar is the male counterpart of Cordelia, both unjustly accused, and banished children, both targets for the unconscious projections of their fathers.

When in shelter, Lear convenes a court with the Fool and Edgar as justices, to try Goneril and Regan. But Goneril, the joint stool escapes and he falls asleep before fully anatomizing an imaginary Regan. His pain is very real but trying to "anatomize" their hearts will never reveal to him the true cause of his pain - his own inability to love. Through his own selfishness, willfulness, and self-deception
he has brought himself to this and he cannot face this truth. Gloucester meanwhile says he has overheard a plot to kill Lear and he sends Lear, Kent, and the Fool on to Dover. We have heard no plot to kill Lear so it is unclear whether this is true or whether Gloucester wants him out of the house.

Meanwhile Edmund has revealed to Cornwall the news of the advance of France and Cornwall now judges Gloucester a traitor and makes Edmund the new Earl of Gloucester. Edmund departs with Goneril, leaving his father at Cornwall's mercy.

In the infamous Scene VII, the raw cruelty of Regan and Cornwall reach a climax in the awful blinding of Gloucester, followed by the revelation of the truth of Edmund's perfidy and Gloucester's abuse of Edgar. Regan is a woman turned monster, more eager to be cruel than Goneril.

This scene is shocking, an unexpected outrage more expected in this century, than in Shakespeare. Nothing prepares us for this cursed event. We know that Gloucester is a fool, that he is sorely abusing his son, and that he is easily conned by his sociopathic Edmund. To Cornwall's point of view, Gloucester may be acting the part of a traitor, but the action has still been taking place at the level of a family squabble. Getting France involved certainly ups the ante, but again, France is a family member now too. There must be some other purpose in such a stunning device.

This sudden and enormous cruelty is always lurking behind the scenes of man's existence. It erupts when the brakes on its expression are released and then evil has license. Only the Fool, cannot be held responsible for playing a part in Gloucester's blinding, Gloucester included. Each character, has in their own way, shunned the active pursuit of good, thus enabling evil to have its way.

Act IV opens with Edgar meeting his blinded father on the health led by an old retainer. Gloucester bemoans his folly in having abused Edgar and sends the old man home so he can be led to Dover by Edgar, still disguised as a madman. He aims for Dover Cliff for the purpose of suicide. Interestingly Edgar maintains his charade and there seems little motivation to do so, especially since the father is so in need of reconciliation with his son. The continued deception seems quite cruel.

The plot takes an interesting little twist in Scene II when we discover that Goneril has fallen in love with Edmund and would like to cast aside Albany who has clearly come out on the side of Lear and Gloucester.

Albany comes to meet her and immediately beings to deride her, not waiting for any explanation from her. She
hurls insults back and remind him that France is about to invade their country. A messenger enters and informs Albany of Gloucester's blinding and Edmund's betrayal. In an aside Goneril begins the theme of sibling rivalry among the sisters for Edmund's love, a theme already explored between the brothers.

Scene III informs us through Kent that the King of France has returned, leaving a Marshal of France and Cordelia, an odd touch were it not for the subsequent events. Clearly, it is important to the play that France leave. He has served his purpose and to serve the needs of tragedy, he has no further use. He was the way out for Cordelia and since she has been drawn back into the family feud, he can serve no purpose but must retire from the field. Cordelia has been informed of her father's fate, but of course not informed of her sisters' experience with their father, and has shed tears of anguish for him. And Lear refuses to see her because he is finally ashamed, in his moments of lucidity, of his treatment of her.

Scene IV belongs to Cordelia who has seen her father mad, walking the fields covered with weeds. She confides to the messenger that France has pitied her mourning and her tears and has sent his soldiers not to conquer but to regain "our ag'd father's right". It can not have been too happy a marriage with the bride grieving for the father who had betrayed her. But her love for him is stronger that her love for her husband despite her initial response to the love-test and she returns to England to relieve her father and rescue him from her sisters.

Cordelia had never truly separated from Lear. Her departure was rebellious and precipitous. His dependency on her and hers on him could not allow appropriate growth and differentiation. She is caught in a parental web of incestuous need that she cannot escape without overwhelming guilt and loss. Her return was inevitable.

Scene V shows Regan talking to Oswald. Edmund is on his way to kill Gloucester and Regan is trying hard to steal Edmund from her sister, "Edmund and I have talk'd and more convenient is he for my hand than for your Lady's". She tries to bribe Oswald with her favors, but he remains loyal to Goneril. She gives him a letter to give to Edmund, but at his death only Goneril's letter to Edmund is found on him. It is interesting how many critics have numbered Oswald among the evil-doers. Yet throughout the play he is polite, reasonable, and most definitely, extremely loyal.

Scene VI contains the famous cliff scene. Edgar says he
employs this subterfuge to cure his father: "Why I do trifle thus with his despair is done to cure it". Not a bad strategy if Edgar was a stranger. But he is not, and therefore the justification for this continued obfuscation sounds like rationalization. Now he is the source of Gloucester's despair. His father holds little hope that he will see his son again and be able to right the wrong he has done. For Gloucester, suicide appears the only alternative to continued anguish and a just punishment for his perfidy.

So why does Edgar go through this elaborate charade when all he need do is let his father know that he is with him, alive and well? Edgar is rationalizing his own unconscious hostility and must be secretly enjoying his father's debasement so reminiscent of his own. Revenge is a subtle theme rarely explored regarding this play.

Lear enters the scene, raving in madness, all nonsense at first but then he sees Gloucester. Here we are confronted with the blind Gloucester, his eyes the price of refusing to see the truth about Edmund and mad Lear, his sanity the price of never resolving deep conflict and anxiety - of never facing his own internal truth.

Lear says to Gloucester, "Goneril with a white beard!", perhaps implying a similarity between Goneril's treatment of her father and Gloucester's treatment of his son. And then "I pardon that man's life. What was they cause? Adultery? Thou shalt not die: die for adultery!... Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to his father than my daughters got e'ween the lawful sheets." Critics have talked about Lear's evolution through suffering, his development of humanness and compassion. Have they ever read the play? Is this a compassionate dialogue for someone who stand before Lear still seeping from his empty eye sockets?

At this point Lear launches into his famous misogynist speech which reveals his underlying fear, rage, and hatred of women and sexuality, strongly implying powerful sexual guilt, that has caused him to behave so abominably towards his daughters from the beginning:

Behold yond simpering dame,  
Whose face between her forks presages snow; 
That minces virtue, and does shake the head 
To hear of pleasure's name;  
The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't 
With a more riotous appetite. 
Down from the waist they are Centaurs, 
Though women all above:  
But to the girdle to the Gods inherit, 
Beneath is all the fiend's" there's hell, ther's 
darkness, 
There is the sulphurous pit - burning, scalding,
Stench, consumption

Lear goes on, with Gloucester and Edgar listening, ranting about the faults in man, the cruelty and hypocrisy of the world, but never demonstrating insight into his own cruelty and hypocrisy. It is still projected onto the environment, he still blames everyone else:

And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,  
Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill

Cordelia's men come to take him to her, but in his madness, he runs off leaving Edgar and Gloucester alone again. Edgar continues to carry on the deceit with the despairing Gloucester when Oswald enters, ready to kill Gloucester, the "publish'd traitor", following the orders of his mistress. Gloucester expresses his desire still to die: "Now let thy friendly hand put strength enough to't", when Edgar begins speaking in a country dialect and slays Oswald. Oswald, loyal to Goneril to the last, urges Edgar to deliver the letters he is carrying to Edmund.

Edgar reads Goneril's letter urging Edmund to kill her husband and vows to get it into Albany's hands. Gloucester meantime wishes her were mad rather than having to sustain his sorrow. Still Edgar does not reveal his identity to poor Gloucester.

In the final scene of this act, Cordelia and Lear are reunited, Cordelia filled with love and pity, Lear finally remorseful for something:

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.  
I know you do not love me; for your sisters  
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:  
You have some cause, they have not.

Cordelia forgives him instantly. Lear cannot conceive of being wronged and still being capable of love. He still has no real concept of forgiveness.

Act V opens with Regan questioning Edmund about his involvement with Goneril which he, true to his dishonest nature, denies. Now Edmund has them both jealously fighting for him. Goneril and Albany enter the scene to prepare for battle. At the end Edmund reveals Goneril's letter for Edmund to Albany. In a soliloquy, Edmund plots to have one or the other woman after one kills Albany and kills the other. He also plans to eliminate Cordelia and Lear so they pose no threat to his usurpation of the kingdom. He is truly a merciless villain.
The second scene of the final act opens with the battle and defeat of Lear and Cordelia. Edgar returns to get Gloucester who would just as soon die right there but Edgar chides him with:

"What! in ill thoughts again? Men must endure Their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all. Come on."

Arrogant little speech for the young and healthy, vindicated of crime, to give his suffering, blinded father who does not even know yet that this stranger accompanying him is his son.

Scene III opens with Cordelia and Lear as Edmund's prisoners. Lear's speeches to Cordelia are beautiful and touching, until the reader remembers the relationship of the two characters:

Cor. We are not the first
Who, with best meaning, have incur'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down;
Myself could else out-frown Furse Fortune's frown
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

Lear. No, no, no, no! Come let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i'the 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, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon 's the mystery of things,
As if we were Gods' spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by th' moon.

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia
The Gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;
The good years shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep; we'll see 'em starv'd first.

Lear is reunited with his love. It is the speech of a lover to his beloved, not the language of elderly father to married daughter. One senses in his words utter joy at the prospect...
of being imprisoned with her. This is his unconscious fantasy come true. He has wanted her for himself from the very start. His unwillingness to allow her to separate, to marry, to start her own family, has created this tragedy, has led to Gloucester's blinding, has brought out the worst in his other daughters, has caused many men to lose their lives, has forced a country to choose sides and do battle to settle a personal score.

And how he has what he wants. Narcissism triumphs. Nowhere is there sign of remorse for involving his child in this imprisonment, for costing her youth and marriage and family. He remains a selfish tyrant, pleased with this horrific outcome with no thought for anything except the satisfaction of his own unconscious desires. Now he will kneel and beg her forgiveness. If he had done that in the first place, there would not have been so many deaths.

He and Edmund are not so different at all. Edmund is simply the conscious mirror of Lear's unconscious narcissism. Lear would have Cordelia imprisoned with him, dying a spiritual and emotional death, if not a physical death. Edmund overtly plans to kill her. The goodness in her is killed either way.

In the next part of the scene Albany confronts Edmund with his traitorous behavior. He first finds out that Edmund has taken away Cordelia and Lear. Despite the fact that Albany knows that Edmund is without scruples, he gives no further thought to the safety of either of the prisoners, but just accepts Edmund's word. Thus does good help meet the ends of evil.

Meantime, Goneril has already poisoned Regan. Edgar fatally wounds Edmund, but he dies slowly leaving plenty of time for him to listen to Edgar's story while encouraging him to talk even more. This strategy allows sufficient time for Cordelia's murder to be accomplished. Some critics have felt that Edmund was redeemed at last when he warned Albany about his order for Cordelia's hanging. But Edmund never speaks the truth except to himself and he obviously delayed long enough so that murder could be done. His final coup was in making all believe that he had tried to do something good in the end.

While Edmund is dying, Cordelia is being hung, Regan is dying of the poison administered by Goneril, and Goneril is killing herself, we all listen attentively as Edgar pours out his story about his own sufferings and his father's death after he finally told him that the man accompanying him was really his beloved son, Edgar. Small comfort that "his flaw'd heart, alack, too weak the conflict to support! 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, burst smilingly." At least there is some suggestion in "Never - O fault! - reveal'd myself unto him, until some half-hour past", that
Edgar regretted waiting so long to relieve his father's suffering. He wastes more time in revealing Kent's true identity and is interrupted when a messenger brings notice of Regan and Goneril's death.

Finally Edmund confesses to his plan to kill Cordelia, watches everyone scurry to attempt a rescue, and shortly thereafter, dies.

Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms, howling. He still shows no guilt, remorse, or insight:

A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!
I might have sav'd her; now she's gone for ever!

Here again is his projection of guilt upon anyone except himself. None of those left in the scene have in fact, been traitors. He might have saved her? It is he and he alone who is responsible for this outcome. He dies as he lived, as unchanged, remorseless, narcissistic. His suffering has not ennobled him; he has not grown in wisdom. He dies ranting and delusional, unredeemed.

At the end the only lesson learned as spoken by Edgar is: "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say."

King Lear is a ghastly story, but a tale entirely pertinent to our century. Shakespeare has wittingly or unwittingly revealed to us the power of the unconscious in all its destructive horror. We see the perverted desires of one developmentally disturbed old man influence the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, in his role as leader, while profoundly influencing the lives of all his children in his role of father.

We see children, enmeshed, unable to separate, played off against each other, triangulated into the family drama, with no hope of escape, having never received the unselfish love of a parent.

We see a deliberate and conscious villain given license to act out all of his destructive schemes because he is able to easily manipulate the unconscious evil in those who represent and believe in the good.

We see over and over, in character after character, how good aids and abets evil by ignoring and refusing to see the powerful negative side of even the most moral character. We see denial, displacement, rationalization, dissociation, repression all used in the service of unconscious alliance with active villainy and narcissism.

And what ever happened to the Fool? The Fool, as the healthy voice of integrated consciousness, of self-knowledge, disappears after Gloucester's blinding. Up until that time,
events were moving towards destruction but were not yet irrevocable. Once such violence had occurred, evil was given free reign and tragedy was inevitable. Never has Shakespeare had a more relevant lesson to teach our times.

Well, of course, this is excellent stuff. At times I think you allow your own views about human nature to give the plot more coherence than in fact it has. I can't, for example, agree with you about Kent—yet I don't have a better theory to explain his violent disrepute. Nor do I give any credence with you not here. I don't think he wishes to be a hero—I think he desires to revert to childhood for his fantasy is that his daughter is appalled (to my mind) at the more significant common variety of child abuse.

Nor can I quite see Coriolanus return as paradoxical—stages here I would have to peruse again in the quality of his language or tone of the scenes of reconciliation between himself and Leon.