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**A Hermeneutic Ex-change with Lear in that Shakespearean  
Inn: *King Lear***

**Sohaila Javed, Ph.D.**

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To go inside in the life of the spirit is also to expand oneself in terms of consciousness, to break down the separating wall between oneself and the all. Self-realization with the medieval saints of India was not a running away from the world to what is called to save one's soul; it is being reborn egoless, so that you are able to look at the whole world in a different eye. You become a rebel because you want the relationships and arrangements of society to be determined anew.

(Chittaranjan Das (1982), *A Glimpse into Oriya Literature*, p. 80)

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep.

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(Michel Foucault (1998), *Practicing Criticism*, p. 326)

### **Creative Spots**

Pieces of poetry and literature are creative spots of insight that contextualize the understanding of human beings who create it, and present their “life expression” (Dilthey, 1985) as a foregrounding<sup>1</sup>, an illuminating mode of experience for others to enter for some form of action in the furtherance of humanness. This could be taken, like medicine<sup>2</sup>, as a standard of effectiveness against which we can measure literature, and make effective Gadamer’s (1975) knowing about hermeneutics. His real concern was and is “not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and above our doing” (p. xvi). We are taken at once on to the open field of practical experience where everything happens to us over and above our wanting and our doing.

Opening human experience and education to the experience of relationships through imaginative literature, has immense potential and palpable substance for transforming Living and Learning that promise understanding, and can increase the possibilities of human coexistence. One stretch of imagination could lead the inner-directed person to experience many other existences and areas of life beyond human reach. Limited by the reality of life, you could feel liberated even when co-existing mystically with expressions of life that are permanently fixed and available in language. Such imaginative experiences would become an inner compulsion, as it drives this person in you to dwell in the pieces, and develop understanding of them as they begin to read you through continuous interaction, and also enabling you to understand yourself. Returning to them over and again gives them a lease of undying life, and largesse of understanding to us through re-interpretation of these written life-expressions. It also rests on a special intimate connectedness that comes with repeated contact, and gifts a spiritual attitude, which opens eyes and makes them see and feel at the same time. To say then that sense aches at seeing humans

lose the title of Man<sup>3</sup> [sic] in exchange for that of Diplomat  
and Minister...all the departments of Government have

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strayed from Simplicity which is the greatest of Strength,  
and that some may be great but they are not sublime Man,

is John Keats' fine sensitive knowing of the inner person, a kind of distinctness, a personal talent and value (Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 1818).

### **The poetry of experience**

A joyful relationship with the past through wisdom that is humane as coming from Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> and Keats, and many other literary personalities and their literary creations, can be a way of re-inventing humans with the "humanness of human beings" (Madison, 1988). This is in a way more capturing and elucidating for being in imagination and beyond immediate, personal contact with strangers from an alien world existing in imagination. For this is the way minds respond to the unusual and make Learning more effective when it bears a chameleonic resemblance, as if coming from at once far off and near. It brings forth a partnership between the real and the unreal that is both magical and alive, that becomes "another Real" (de la Mare), and in a fine way, distinct. This distinctness allows a literary figure, as Keats would want, "to show against the light," an energy, which energizes those who possess it, and gives a share of this reality to persons from real life.

What it asks for is Immersing self in the literary text and its characters, and letting our understanding move outward from what we read, hear, and see to whatever contexts come up as relevant suggestions. The large context of this human life-world is material of sensation. It invites our perceptions to perceive this in light of the play and make sense of it as we see the play light it up. This is the most natural way of reading and understanding texts, without "imposed contextualizations" (Dilthey, 1985) so that our feelings are really Shakespeare's "meaning" (Bloom, 1998), and that provide a meaningful foreground to our understanding of life. This is truly, a poetic experience, most experiential and most wanted in our urbane existence. This is music meant to fill hearts with the certainty of "the holiness of the Heart's affections and truth of the Imagination" (Keats), for

compassionate relationship within us, with all peoples in our heart, our axial centre, at home.

This is a simple desire that touches our hearts with an intimacy of othering for all others, and awakens souls with understanding of human existence from literary experience. This fills our dreams like Vishnu, for diaspora, once we have experienced individuation. These have the capacity to transform our dark inwardness to a light colour that fits in with the purpose of individuation, or sends us on the royal road to individuation for an ever-increasing consciousness. These also become vibrant for the expression of experience in language, and so become the home of meaningful experience that can then, be known, shared, and enjoyed. It is experience that gives ‘something more’ and becomes the inner substance of otherwise mere texts and language. Language begins to make sense when our lived experience gets expressed, and receives a hermeneutical-existential meaning it can have. Experience is its outward existential being, and only through language, we, as humans, experience what we call reality, and language is the way in which reality as text exposes itself to us, as Ricoeur (1981) would prefer to say.

This approach to literature and understanding life through literary language spells out two significant things: a particular relationship of the text and the inner-directed reader, and of the expression to the life from which it sprang, and the understanding to which it gives rise. These particular expressions of *ideas, feelings and ideals* (Dilthey, 1985) have the active potential as contingent medium for the generic understanding to take place when self finds “something held in common by the I and the Thou” (Bloom, 1998). There is some-Thing more remarkable to take place when Thou becomes mercurial ‘you,’ and finds ‘you’ in everyone more directly, spontaneously, instantaneously. Self’s interested selfness allows total absorption in this textual relation, and finds itself lifted from depths of consciousness to experience consciousness in flow with the universal spirit. We are immediately drawn into a form of social intercourse, marvelously new and different from our usual encounters and in such a way that we believe ourselves to be continuing. Here the relation between the expression and the experience that is expressed becomes that between the multiple expressions of an Other person and the inner context behind them.

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Imagine what happens all the while to this interpreter: an intense emotive and imaginative activity spurs mind to full action, and leads inner being to take cognizance of all that is happening in that text, to the inner context of its character while it was happening. Also imagine what happens to us when moving along its happening, from individual life-expressions in the text to the whole context of a life in open texts.

This is, undoubtedly, a hermeneutic experience, but an experience that demands higher understanding for its concern with the hermeneutic order within these life-expressions. We are concerned with the individual not merely as an expression of ‘man’ [sic] in general, but as a totality in itself. S/he carries a whole universe within self, and whether noble or wicked, vulgar or foolish, has a hidden difference, a kind of distinct individuality that interests us, and lures us to it for a deeper understanding for its own sake (Bloom, 1998). In such understanding, the realm of individuals, embracing ‘men and women’ and their creation, opens up. But, what is in there that is constantly luring us to these independent individuals, and for what purposes?

The “business of understanding” (Heidegger, 1962) draws us to the inner principle of “something held in common,” by virtue of their human connection, and the differentiation of their commonality find expression in innumerable individual existences that have a distinct individuality. And yet there is something ‘more’ that makes us comprehend the individual features of this whole, compare them with others and see them as always present with us. Their presence deepens and amplifies our lived experience, and we surprise ourselves by saying their things in a way that is too intimate for them to be called quotations (Bloom, 1998). We are experiencing one bond of human companionship, and at this moment, our intuitive impulses express what are in no way literary sentiments. Then as we hear Wordsworth (in *The Old Cumberland Beggar*) say,

We  
have all  
one  
human  
heart,

and this heart is the axial centre where we exist as one human race, feeling our human bond, and singing a creative psalm of human belongingness. This is the culture our human heart connects us to, and pledges us to create, for without this sense and spirit, we are nothing. It asks for a renewal and activism of the soul in the spiritual sense, a spiritual attitude, inner transformation of the spiritual consciousness, the kind expressed very silently by the literary characters we spend our lives with. They are 'lumières' for their enormous influence upon our life and our mode of consciousness. Seeing their inner capacity regenerate through the passion of suffering and affection in the Real called Life, we see characters grow and develop rather than unfold from their particular life instances. They develop because in Bloom's (1998) words, "they reconceive themselves," and see their self as "authentically human" after their experience with pain, and because "they overhear themselves talking, whether to themselves or to others. Self-overhearing is their royal road to individuation." (p. xvii)

Added to this self-sense is self-overwatching through watching and comparing self with so many separate selves, an opportunity of re-experiencing their re-creation of personality and form of action for putting our self on the(ir) royal road to individuation. This asks for delight in action.

"There is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify--so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism. The pity is that we must wonder at it: as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish--I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard or have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two--Socrates and Jesus--their Histories evince it ... Through all this I see splendour. May there not be superior beings any graceful, though instinctive attitude my mind may fall into, as I am entertained with

the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a  
Deer?”

This is Keats<sup>4</sup> (Letter to G. and G. Keats, March, 1819).

This poetic piece illustrates two points: encounters with such beings are necessary for “human nature to purify--so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism” (Keats), and that our life must imitate and evince the symbolic patterns of human existences. The colour of spirit must be lived through such encounters with these soul mates, for however brief, they are thrusting life-force additives. These synergy meetings have the capacity for inner travel to heart’s innermost core, another Real within, where cajoling, confrontation and conflict, all modern daytime indictments and machiavellian fixes, melt away before wisdom and shafts of light from ancient and significant spots in history. These communing experiences may ask for our courage to travel on bare feet to see bare minimum existence in brown deserts.

Here we will hear and *overhear* our own voice telling us to be in a process of finding or of finding out, wanting us to work on our mercurial selves as science and scientists did with alchemy, for “realities change, indeed are change” (Bloom). Here we’ll meet perfectly ordinary--perfectly magical people, some creative beings, flexible and profound that walked into awareness midst much darkness, and traveled with their human individuality into humanity, all the while silently stoking the dying embers in our small hearts. These aspirations, hints and guesses are in-stirrings that are sown, nurtured and expressed in such encounters that silently, moist minds and warm hearts, and pledge from us a soul-stirring contribution.

### **Romancing with the Shakespearean aesthetic**

The most joyful relationship with the past is the one with Shakespeare. Nearly agreeing with Hazlit and Keats that “Shakespeare is enough for us” for the deep connection that he builds with our human relations, and that calls us to renew this association over and again, to understand human nature, and for finding with Keats that “human nature is finer.” Shakespeare’s palpitating presence deepens as his plays relate

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their deep meaning and connection with reality. What we find here is not an imitation of realities that “produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind” (Samuel Johnson, in Arnold, 1954), in fact bring life to mind for altering life. This is finding in Shakespeare the creation of new modes of consciousness, and “ways of representing human changes, alterations not only caused by flaws and by decay but effected by the will as well, and by the will’s temporal vulnerabilities.” (Bloom, 1998, p. xviii)

And by will’s vulnerability we are led to experience the Shakespearean aesthetic, which as Walter Pater observed, is an affair of perceptions and sensations. Bloom<sup>5</sup> (1998) adds: “Shakespeare teaches us how to perceive and what to perceive, and he also instructs us how and what to sense and then to experience as sensation” (p. 9). The additive it offers is to experience Shakespeare from the heart and then, bring mind to accept it. Such is this addiction that allows us to change, to transcend irritable realities within and without, and become something new and sublime. This is phenomenal experience for humans, for their perception and sensation, an experiential gateway to knowledge and truth. Through elemental beings like Shakespeare, and Chaucer, we understand the need to build all-inclusive sanctums that throb with “a certain universalism, global and multicultural” (Bloom, 1998). This is, in truth, the substance of reality. Following in Hazlit’s wake, we seek the Shakespearean difference, that which eliminates the cultural divide, is essential culture with open totalities, and allows us to perceive the pain Shakespeare affords as significantly as the pleasure, and so makes himself the most memorable writer (p. 7).

Here is also the largeness that makes Life, the truth that is here, there, and everywhere, and emphasizes “our need to join something personal that yet was larger than ourselves” in appreciative responses to Shakespeare’s ability to create “forms more real than living men” (p. 7). So we meet Hamlet and are confounded with his superior being for “knowing the truth, truth too intolerable for us to endure.” There is King Lear, royal and divine, as pre-reflective thinking would tell him so, but the form he changes into surprises us to stop and experience the exceeding painfulness of Lear. More particularly in Act V, where Cordelia, his only loving daughter is murdered, and where



Lear dies, holding her corpse in his arms. That is the tragedy of this most tragic of all tragedies. These are not misgivings, but chances of progression that ask us to know like Keats that “Shakespeare is fine, Hamlet is fine, Lear is fine.” (Letter of 13 March, 1818, to Benjamin Bailey)

The poetry of this last dramatic piece is the poetry of human passion and affection. King Lear throbs with “the still, sad music of humanity” (Wordsworth). Of humanity, indeed, for its characters are human, their egotistical pride, vindictive motive and anger are human, their exceeding suffering is human, and their rewarding compensating wisdom is humane. This is real life experience, but the music of Shakespeare’s soul is so stirring that we are driven inside Shakespeare’s play to listen to profound music, and see human life physically in words, as we begin to feel and make sense of “what we could not find without Shakespeare” (Bloom). We are re-living matters of inner life, and find our soul grappled in conflicts, doubts, uncertainties, perplexities and intricacies of life that make ethical demand on us for ethical decisions.

This is the local habitation in King Lear. Here we find ourselves with Edmund, Lear’s three daughters, the Fool, through ‘empathy’ see King Lear’s descent from divinity to plain humanity, to suffer exceedingly with Lear on the heath and feel his human heart open for “poor Tom” and the innumerable “poor, bare, unaccommodat’d” like him in the world. This is the “vital connection,” the intimate nature of relation established between Lear and ourselves because it has the intensity which in Keats’ poetical mind, causes all disagreeables to evaporate from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth. We are instinctively carried on our impulses to feel with Lear the purity, that to Keats was “the holiness of the Heart’s affections,” see our integral and spiritual self submitting steadily, persistently and unflinchingly to life. Here in the intensest moments on the heath with Lear, we have the capacity to see and feel what life is through real privation and real pain, perceive this as our soul-substance, our central essence, and make connection. Because of this, we see Lear become the complete man, and in its piercing discovery of life and its exceeding suffering, we see him attain an actual human completeness to the utmost. Knowledge of the suffering humanity is quintessential, a perception and sensation, with a resulting benediction that comes when one submits to

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experience “the agonies, the strife of human hearts” (Keats), that are universally the great primary affections.

This is the conText here--the pain of life, which exists in our experience as existential reality always, and is “the authentic origin of human memory” (Nietzsche), making painful happenings memorable--present and ready for human life illustrates it, and thus prepares us to own human pain and sorrow as our own. Potentialities of the soul are evoked by the comprehension of “poor Tom”--just linguistic presentations, but the grappling world represented within them opens pathos for the soul in which it is receptive to the point of agony. Every nerve is tingling with awareness that comes “on the pulses” (Keats). And the condition has been created because it carries, as Stephen Crites would say, memories from the past and has leniency towards the future--a suffering made still more acute by the awareness that it will as life is what it is. This state of extreme and agonizing receptivity, this passive sensitiveness of the being is a condition essential to the nature of the beings both inside and outside the text. Both embrace each other in that quintessential moment in the pathic text as both absorb to the utmost the material of sensation that is also their inner context. Innumerable scenes of pathos get created on the inner stage as innumerable lines of thought emerge from reading both texts. As self delves deeper into this expression of sensation that becomes reading of the human soul, and part of a creative process that transforms and changes life and living beings, through a process of finding or finding out, is Shakespeare’s representation of the invented human (Bloom, 1998).

### **Response to ideas**

Here Shakespeare is Distinct in his “noble and profound application of ideas to life” (Matthew Arnold, 1954). *King Lear*, like all dramatic life-pieces, carries a powerful application of his ideas “On man, nature, and on human life” (Wordsworth, 1814), and exemplifies the “moral ideas with more energy and depth” that is to Voltaire “the great merit of the English poets.” Shakespeare’s moral enthusiasm makes him see like Arnold (1954) that

moral ideas are really so main a part of human life.  
The question, how to live, is itself moral idea; and it is  
the question which most interests every man, and with  
which, in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied.  
A large sense is of course to be given to the term moral.  
Whatever bears upon the question, "how to live," comes  
under it. When Shakespeare says that  
"We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep," he utters a moral idea. (p. 86)

It is the implicit, energetic and profound treatment of moral ideas that distinguishes Shakespeare, and draws us to Shakespeare for that great and inexhaustible word *life*, until we learn to enter into its meaning. This is what life really is factually and human life itself "in a preponderating degree moral" (Arnold, 1954). It is for this sense that we find in Shakespeare's dramatic subjects, powerful and profound places of passage, inns, fields and meadows, deserts and heaths, where we like to stay until we learn to enter into life's meaning to return home, to life for living life potentially and really well.

For such a reading of Shakespeare what we would want is "that faculty of moral interpretation which is in Shakespeare," and this is, in Arnold's (1954) words, "the architectonics of poetry, the faculty which presides at the evolution of works like the *Agamemnon* or *Lear*" (p. 72). And that is the understanding we need most for interpreting the madness of Lear on the heath, and perceiving it as a way of self-overcoming and self-transforming. His madness matters to us for at this annihilating moment, he utters the penultimate true poetry that obliterates all sense, invites attention to our essential nature, and gifts us the "*kenoma*" (Bloom, 1998), the sensible emptiness or wasteland with which the play excites our bewildering sense of knowing.

## Stopping by King Lear

Here, while walking into the pathway of “conversational ethics and transformational morality,” we wander away from our secured homes and systems, and overhear conversations with both self and many others in a new way (Giri, 2002). Some awesome thing happens when staying in Lear’s inn along with him. We find it cooperating with “the benign tendencies in human nature and society” (Giri), and see in it, like Wordsworth (1814) something efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier. Most crucial to our learning is our transformational confrontation with the universal through literature, namely “the sorrows of generational strife,” that puts us at the height of literary experience. At this significant moment, Lear’s torments are our own, bringing us in close conformity with the calamities of mortal life and our personal distress. Lear’s pathetic text characterizes the poet’s intention on life, having Wordsworth’s blessed consolations in our distress that invites reading King Lear and keep re-reading it for its greatness of affect, particularly in Lear’s suffering, and an exclamation: But this inn is taking!

Staying at Lear-like inns then, may be a transgression from “the authentic decline of our cognitive and literate culture” (Bloom, p. 476), and a way of prosecuting our home journey as human individuals with humanity. As members of the cognitive and literate culture, equipped with that perception thing, and with our perceptive ears open to apprehend Shakespeare’s murmuring thoughts circulating in the mind, we begin to hear from Lear reminders of his origin:

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools.

(IV. vi. 180-81)

We also overhear from the Wisdom of Solomon, wisest of kings:

I Myself am also mortal and a man like all others, and am come of  
him that was made of earth.

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And in my mothers womb was I facioned to be flesh in ten mon-  
eths: I was broght together into blood of the sede of man, and by  
the pleasure that cometh with slepe.

And when I was borne, I received the common aire, and fel upon  
the earth, which is of like nature, crying and weping at the first as all  
others do.

I was nourished in swadling clothes, and with cares.

For there is no King that had anie other beginning of birth.

All men then have one entrance unto life, and a like going out.

(Geneva Bible<sup>6</sup>)

There are similar over-hearings from King Lear again:

We must endure  
Our coming hither as our going hence,  
Ripeness is all.

This is simple wisdom of the knowing heart, coming to the mind for acceptance and readiness to become the most radical site for creative reflections, and the praxis of reflective positive actions.

This is the that we know who we are, and need to be ourselves, but King Lear in the beginning knows not, and so stands forth in his own eyes as a symbol of greatness: patriarchal authority, kingly sublimity, and mortal godliness, and yet needing and wanting the most common human affection, love, and as worthy of love. In his eighties, aged Lear is every inch a king and all feeling that touches benignity in us, and inspires every benign character in the play (Bloom, 1998). Cordelia, the Fool, Albany, Kent, Gloucester, and Edgar love him utmost—just as he is hated and feared the most by the play’s lesser villains: Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Oswald. The outstandingly Machiavellian Edmund, as the play’s villainy, is ice-cold, indifferent to Lear as he is to his own father, Gloucester, his half-brother Edgar, and his lovers, Goneril and Regan (Lear’s two elder daughters). What is crucial to the play is our understanding that Lear is

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lovable, loving, and greatly loved by anyone who senses an inexplicable human quality in him that wins him our own affection and appraisal. And then, as he is loved and loving, he still augurs for more. That is what King Lear is, who is “slenderly known” to himself, an apocalypse of demand in excessive love, particularly from the child he truly loves, Cordelia.

The play opens with the kingdom-dividing Lear, and its foreground comprehends not only Lear’s strange benignity, and the natural angry resentment of Goneril and Regan for being passed over for their younger sister. Most crucial, however, is King Lear’s passionate and unceasing demand for a total love, and Cordelia’s willful disobedience and adamant refusal to fulfil it. This demand surpasses even her authentic regard for her outrageously emotional father. Her authentic love expression is, in Lear’s view, total disregard of filial love and disrespect to Lear’s overpowering affection. So Lear understands, and overriding his parental obligation, banishes her. We, as sympathetic listeners, understand Cordelia’s natural commitment to personal integrity, and find in Edgar, a parallel disobedience akin to Cordelia’s, but far in excess of hers.

Edgar is central to Lear’s dramatic consciousness, and the central agent to King Lear’s self-knowledge, and therefore, is prominent in the play. There is a central consciousness in Edgar that is overwhelmingly in charge of Edgar, and forces him to assume a variety of madness in his disguise as poor Tom. Edgar’s voluntary descent to the lowest possible social scale has no parallel in the play and intrigues the mind: why so low? Much bewildered, Harold Bloom (1998) questions: “is he punishing himself for his own credulity, and for sharing his father’s inability to see through Edmund’s brilliant deceptions?” (p. 480). What adds to his moral culpability, I contend, is his ability to see his own failure as a protective son. And in consequence, he obeys his ‘fathering’ instinct, and in time, becomes his father’s protectorate, and later performs a role that exemplifies fully “the pathos and value of filial love.”

Just as much bewildering is their excess of love, is the bewildering fact of the blinded Gloucester and Lear’s madness, and combining with Cordelia’s death is our central consciousness perforce compelling us to say with Edgar: “This is the worst.” It will be the worst only if our capacity for affect is dead and we remain, Edmund-like,

impervious to feeling and conscious only of nihilistic evil, overcome by the helplessness of evil, and progressively spilling hate and greater suffering to all.

Edgar's final wisdom is to submit to "the weight of this sad time," and he passes on the great wisdom that we go through this perennial dying-in-life experience consciously with our great capacity for affect. Unlike Edmund, if we have a pre-emptive share of Edgar's wise understanding, we would be always living and dying in a state of self-knowledge, and experiencing a deep baptism in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. Living with and intensifying consciousness always, is the Lear-consciousness that dramatically and permanently affects our way of being in the world that comes through a cogent Lear-like experience with an altered trait: self-consciousness that is alive with compassion and less judgement and negative criticism. It has transcended the idea of just 'being,' and embraced 'becoming' by letting go egoic separation and overcoming a "demeaning narcissism," and our narcissistic attachments, like Lear's to Cordelia. This kind of deep affection has comprehensive capacity, and a deeper spirituality that enables Lear to comprehend the Fool and all others as the central emblem of familial love and, after annihilating any thoughts of limitation, fear, separation, alienation, and other egoic states, finally asks for a "Family Reunion" (T.S.Eliot).

### **Romancing with love**

Here Edgarian Self is the centre, and conscientious commitment to this self is our royal road to individuation. Here if our will is conscious that Relation, as Eckhart says, is everything, we will be living with the serving love of Edgar, preserving our personal integrity like Cordelia, and overcoming negativity by avenging against all Edmunds of this world, and directly experiencing Positivity as ourSelf. This is a living truth in the Lear experience. The returning thought to the end of the play is that Love is no healer, but that should not stop us from loving. The one valid form of love that comes naturally, and exists as a natural impulse and outlasts even death is the love at the end, between Lear and Cordelia, Gloucester and Edgar. That is the only kind that makes "ripeness is all" meaningful at the end, makes love intense with pain and positive sublimity, and

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transforms Love into being the greatest aesthetic value. This is what that tragedy Lear does to humans: deeply drives them to a deeper love, unavoidable and painful, an experience of our central consciousness in Self. This is the worship Harold Bloom denotes to Shakespeare's invention of the human, and drives the frenzied poet in me to see it as a spiritual remedy, instead of what Bloom sees as "medication" for us to be re/invented as wholly human.

Knowing ourSelves through Love, that is without condition and without compromise (Kierkegaard), with the supreme courage to love as extremists of love, is the kind of Romantic obsession that is the most desirable alternative, a deep human need that rises as revelation from the play's extreme hopelessness and despairing vision. Submitting gladly to this initiation that "cognitive and literate culture" affords, is a way of experiencing a renewal or rebirth, a kind of individuation that continues throughout life that is the reward of such an attitude. Life process presents such "periodic initiations" to self that is itself a living, evolving entity, and letting self be borne to life's adventure in Shakespeare's literary creation, is the initiation that is a genuinely positive transformative learning experience. Shakespeare still is, even the next transforming potential of humanities and humanity at large.

So Self, in a self-conscious act, is borne to experience a storm in Lear's scenes upon the heath where Lear's tragedy mirrors to us that we are all "fools" in the Shakespearean sense (Bloom, 1998), except for those among us who are outright villains (p. 493). And so we are driven to persistent folly, in word and action, from our great unknowing, and from our passion for persistent ignorance, we never rise out of our great folly when we are come "To this great stage of fools."

The play is stormed with Shakespeare's fools as "dupes," "beloved ones," "madmen," or mostly "victims," and never successfully storms the 'I' out of these "fools" because it is their most demanding character. We see this 'I' in Lear, stormed at by his own speaking authority that overwhelms all in the text and outside, in a strangely startling way. His first words: "Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose," and his last: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!" are an outstanding display of human affect. His outraging and outraged sense prompts Cordelia



to be mute and disobedient: “Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth.” She quite ironically provokes Goneril and Regan to voice spontaneously their hollow, fictitious claims, as we see in Goneril’s: “A love that makes breath poor and speech unable” and Regan’s: “I am alone facilitate / In your dear highness’ love.”

Shakespeare’s Fool stands as *media res* for Lear as a human figure. His uncanny presence though incommensurate with Lear is necessary, for forming with Cordelia and Lear, “the play’s true family, its community of love,” and bewilderingly, gives true voice to our feelings. We love him for loving Lear and Cordelia, as they truly love him, and love him more for humanizing Lear for us. Otherwise, his presence is the strangest, overwhelming us with his uncanny “blend of bitter wisdom and witty terror,” and challenging us to reflect upon their meanings, as he drives us mad for our little knowing even as he provokes Lear further into madness for his great folly. From the start he had a foreboding of Lear’s tragedy arising from division and despair, and follows Lear feeling terrified that Lear’s cosmos itself is perishing with the king.

Strangely, like Lear, humans need to hear and overhear the Fool’s voice over and again, and identify ourselves with the “bungler” he evokes before we reduce ourselves to nothing. Bloom understands that Shakespeare uses the Fool to remind humans of their preference for folly over true knowing, and that, if we were a little wise, we would not blunder in our preferences. Otherwise, like Blake (1970), we may think of ourselves as of Lear’s Fool in the Proverb of Hell: “If the Fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise.” But for such folly, we would have to be like the great Fool, like Shakespeare’s in King Lear.

### **Walking toward reality: on poor bare feet**

Lear’s presence and experience of the heath pulls the human psyche out of “the quagmire of self-deception” (Bloom), and egotistical sublimation toward reality. What this implicates, and familiarizes us with is the pedagogy that follows from perception and feeling, an inverted metaphysics, a being-in-truth, a way toward reality. It is a therapy toward self-discovery (*Jungian Analysis Today*, 1974) but irresistibly subjective in its anti-Jungian self-findings. The world is its interpretation as the self-seekers feel their way

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to reality on “percepts”...a form of interior energy that becomes their vehicle of a new welcoming to the whole world. Feeling their way to reality on immediate flow of impulses, endows intimacy and nearness...interior conviction...a primordial Love that ignites sparks of humanity and increases its want as a deep spiritual need.

This is Lear’s primary want: excessive love, an intense initial want, limitless for himself, and limited in its response to all others. This is the first obstacle on Lear’s journey toward self-realization, and for Lear to awaken to its divinity within himself, he must see what the heart sees and reports, and if properly interpreted, is never false (The Quran<sup>7</sup>). But Lear drowns himself in his own image as Narcissus, and rises like a Pharaoh<sup>8</sup> in his kingly wrappings till the elements rage, and return him to his natural and original state: of nothingness. This is the first step on Lear’s quest toward self-knowing. The word is not the thing or the habit. It is the experience, feel, taste, immaterial perceptible some-thing. For long, Lear had flown on dry neural impulse and known only his partial self, and only now, on the heath, he recognizes his limitations as mortal, and awakens to the potential Life force without and within. He remembers his own nothingness passionately concentrated in all beings, with a faint lingering memory of the Wisdom of Solomon, wisest of kings:

“For there is no King that had anie other beginning of birth.”

Now, Lear through self-release from ‘I’ and ‘my’ concepts, dispels the illusion separating the three aspects of knowledge (knower, known and unknown), and sees poor Tom as one and the same reality in these three different concepts. He now understands what the words *Tat Twam Asi* mean: As Thou art, so am I (Ancient Vedandists). In Sufi Inayat Khan’s<sup>9</sup> (Witteveen, 1997) words:

When seeing from this point of view, the inner sight becomes clear. For a saintly person there are no barriers distancing one from others. ... and the idea of duality is no longer in the way. Thus, the seer is aware of the light of the soul, which radiates in all that is seen. (p. 63)

Lear is not a saintly person in the sense the Sufi mystic characterizes the mystical experience, but he does have the necessary potential for “transforming one’s gross ego into a humble attitude of respect toward the knower, the known and the knowing” (Sufi Hidayat Khan, 1996, p. 63). If there is a difference in Lear, it has to be in practice and in practice alone. Intellectual understanding without feeling and its feelingly practice is not worth much. As if for the first time, he realizes the inadequacies of his being, and that his state of self-knowledge had consisted of nothing but words, and unfeelingly and ungodly action. This is knowledge, and it becomes practice for Lear’s self in a spiritual trial “through critical and engaged double reflection” (Bloom) in his ex-change project of learning with the Fool and poor Tom. It mirrors constantly his compulsive activity as king, and the decline of his soul.

This is the moment when Lear surrenders to the given actuality, and surrendering self-consciousness in Other-consciousness becomes self-conscious, and is reborn to the world with a contradiction. His transformation from externality to a hermeneutic perspective of existence is that without which Lear would not be the lovable Lear, and we would not be the selves we fortunately are, human with innate fellowship and other-consciousness. “Only through others,” Gadamer says, “do we gain true knowledge of ourselves.” (in Madison, 1988, p. 176)

This being-in-truth steps Lear outward towards others as a low-brow in their oeuvre. It begins with conscious awareness of his nothingness, and awakens Lear to recognize the necessity of poor Tom’s existence. Nothingness brings Lear to experience dying-in-life, and now recognize ‘nothing’ as the shared human origination and condition. Realization of the *not i* state of Lear’s ‘I’ makes him distraught and distracted:

Lear. Does anyone here know me? This is not Lear:  
Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?  
Either his notion weakens, his discernings  
Are lethargied-Ha! Waking? ‘tis not so.

Fool. Lear’s shadow.

Falling from authoritarian Self to nothing, Lear enters madness, egged on to it by the Fool's continuous stigmatizing:

Lear. O me! My rising heart! but, down!

Fool. Cry to it, Nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put  
'em i'th' paste alive, she knapped 'em o' th' coxcombs with a stick,  
and cried 'Down, wantons, down!' 'Twas her brother that, in pure  
kindness to his horse, buttered his hay.

The Fool remains a critic of Lear, accepting his sublimity and his foolishness, and yet, never ceasing to love Lear. His bitter sarcasm sees Lear become a learner in the pedagogy of nothingness, away from the self-concerted, transcendent Lear that brought his world to nothing with him, moving him to compassionate being with poor Tom. This compassionate communication emanates from their essential being, and is their potential, but it needs "something outside itself," to feel the femininity in him, a spirit of Compassion to become something more. The presence of such initiation as the Fool and poor Tom was necessity in Lear's life as in ours that comes in the inter-relationality of heart and mind, body and soul, self and other. It becomes an exciting signifier that asks us to remain in the spiritual trial that has potential for changing us, and exposing us to our vulnerabilities.

Seeing Lear with this pregnancy of suffering and benediction that emerges in his inner being as its natural consequence, and urges him to dramatize its happenings on his inner stage, can make us the wind, and wise when/if we overhear what we ourselves have said, and therefore, change. It is in reading our own lives as text, and re-reading and experiencing other texts like Shakespeare's characters that we see ourselves "engaged in critical and double reflection." It is in this ex-change of serious reflection that change abides and becomes wind. This experience, its feel, taste and touch is the thing and habit in representing reality in us and by ourselves, making us anti-Jungian Self-Seekers in our self-discovery. Rising from our own lethargies in which we see all personal experiences of our past immersed, we also see into the truth of things, the ordinariness and limits of

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human existence, the pain and agony of suffering, and the lingering human sorrow. This is our world, and our belonging to this reality, through a pathetic sense of affection and suffering, and thinking well, is perpetual insight that re-enters consciousness when we see our own vulnerabilities and our realities as responsibility, and simultaneously vow to get up to action.

Such thought takes us, through Lear's experience to the essence of human self, to the Source in heart's core, and cry with loving Cordelia:

Can man's wisdom

In the restoring his bereaved sense?

And with Cordelia, as loving humans, look for "simples operative,"

All bless'd secrets,

All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,

Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate

In the good man's distress! -Seek, seek for him;

So dear Cordelia cries:

It is your business that I go about.

My mourning and important tears hath pitied.

No blown ambition doth our arms incite,

But love, dear love.

That is the natural state to which Lear arrives through repentance for his inauthenticity, for being in untruth. This is the sight that begins with in-sightful perception, of heart and soul, and confers what he does not doubt in his heart:

Thou art a soul in bliss,

but I am bound

Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears

Do scald like molten lead.

A simple and rudimentary shock like King Lear's can dissemble us of the basic proud assumptions "I know" and "I am some-Thing," bringing realization of our

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unknowing and nothing state, and so set us rolling in the pursuit of truth. So Ladson (in *Aesthetics Today*, 1980), the psychologist confirms: “Through symbolic death and rebirth, a new self is created.” Vulnerability to such an extreme experience is a daring feat, and prepares the athlete of the imagination and spirit in tests of courage and strength. ‘I’ then takes “full responsibility for self and others through its ability to respond to the deepest needs and possibilities of the situation” (Ricoeur, 1981). So, as nobody in the wilderness, Lear recovered his sanity and salvaged his humanness from being destroyed in vestiges of pride and godliness. He had to wander away from home to begin living spiritually, and remain there to deepen his spiritual life. And what does ‘deepening’ require?

It calls for stepping inwards, and being open to new understandings and a new human community through the experience of individuation. The breathless drive for individuation is itself a profoundly realistic model of human (de)liberation, the result of an intense self-examination and ultimately, the passion and humility of a spiritual rebirth. Such in-seeing opens the doors closed by logicians, and provides a feelingly response to Carl G. Jung’s (1970) observation:

The breathless drive for power and aggrandizement ... gnawing at the soul of the Westerner with apparently insatiable greed, is spreading irresistibly in the East and threatens to have incalculable consequences.

Our authenticity lies in a process of human growth and liberation that Carl Jung (1968, p. 163) calls Individuation, by which “the inborn but hidden totality of the psyche (i.e., the Self) is fully realized and lived.” The resolve is for fearless action, a continuous striving of the spirit toward self-perfection. Self-empowerment through ruthless competitiveness, ambition, greed, hypocrisy, and dishonesty are manifestations of the ego, and are responsible for timidity and weakness of the soul. These negate and deny individuation and are therefore evil, and as the imperative of responsibility, must be avoided.

This process has its own unique course within every person, and realizing it wills us to an on-going self-actualization to which, every willing action is a responsible act, and is the course of a greater and higher self within us. This Self, ascertained by Love,

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overcomes delusions, faces facts, and lives realities. The process is thus nourished and strengthened, and inspires us to continue our progression with the will-affirming mood to become what Keats imagined the poet, in “The Fall of Hyperion”

a sage,

A humanist, *physician to all men* (emphasis added).

So Lear delves into the Promethean fire of transformation, and emerges with doubt and faith, darkness and light as the recurring opposites in his inner being, and as he sees beyond opposites, he gets connected and goes his own way. Living closely to his warm soul, and in touch with the inner vitality and pure innocence of his true being, brings simple truths to lips inadvertently, that is, poetry:

“Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!”

We listen to his poetic soul, and are touched by his childhood simplicity, as our soul opens for more participation and spontaneous submission to our soul mates. We are alive with the power of the Word that is essentially spiritual, and being (w)holistic thought, is poetry. The more deeply we participate and get connected with the more spiritual part of ourselves, the more deeply we enter into the mysteries of life, until we arrive at the given absolute, universal reality in the deepest core of our participation. Thus we arrive at Keats’ deep knowing: Beauty is Truth and Truth Beauty.

Here configurations shift and meanings resonate and reverberate with perceptive being, and like the wise wind call us forth to reflexive definite action. This is a deepening experience of human phenomenon that brings all together in the bond of human experience to perennially experience conscious dying and conscious living, whereby self is born anew like Lear on the heath, and then, sees itself on the royal road to individuation and never looks back. This is Kraemer’s (2000) delving into the deep of one’s origins for a change. So he finds:

It is not a mere change in identity, but a foundational, qualitative shift in the process of how we construct our identities. This means we need to deconstruct ourselves as the beings we are so that there be

renewal from the creative source of our origins. (p. 117)

Poet Browning says somewhere that out of three sounds, the poet makes not a fourth thing but a star (Giri, 2002). This star, content in its ambient illumination, tells us many things from its axis of selection, and silently asks us to look forward, saying ‘Prospice.’

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## Endnotes

i. Shakespeare. The unique and royal artist of literary creativeness, of the sixteenth century, has overwhelming influence on literature and literate culture and largely on life as he exists largely today, modifying life, human character and personality, and finally human relationships. His understanding of the human phenomenon, and its manifestation in human action that is at variance with human words, is an example of Shakespeare’s hermeneutics. He knows, and therefore, asks us to observe that in the real we act very unlike our words, which have therefore, lost their meaning and authenticity. So we find ourselves in the midst of skepticism that is the central problem of human nature, and the central principle of Shakespearean representation, since through Hamlet we know that we cannot trust our language and consequently, ourselves (Bloom, 1998). We are like dead matter, and the worst is that we could find words only for what was already dead in our hearts. The worst has been carried into our human relations and the resulting misunderstandings and deep distrust that belie human relationships today. It is in this interest that Shakespeare be re-read, and “read aright” (I. A. Richards) so that we can see through the human indifference, and taking a skeptic distance from the worst in ourselves, learn ‘more’ about ourselves that is not different from our natural human selves. Being human and understanding humans is the core matter with us, and needs to be taken up with sincerity and spoken with simple articulateness from the realm of affection. That which comes from the heart will have affect, and will incline us to believe all things of “natural” value. Interestingly, it is Shakespeare’s representation of this pragmatic skepticism through Hamlet, Iago and Edmund that we come to surmise the importance of nature’s largeness (Bloom, 1998), and testify to our becoming human. This is what returns us to the great poetic pen that gave reality to “truest poetry is the most feigning,” and that abides in dramatic versions of Shakespearean reality as King Lear, one of the long series of about 36 poetic dramas, written in 1606-07. For a Shakespearean reading of the character of his plays, we need to go to the text itself, and read one character to interpret another, and be mindful of Charles Lamb: “Read him, therefore, and again and again.” Re-reading Lear brings other experiences to mind, and leads to experience border crossing and mystical ex-change in the ethos of Shakespeare with Shakespeare-consciousness.

1. Foreground: Reference (in Bloom, 1998) is to Emerson’s use of the term meaning a temporal foreground of another sort with a field of poetic, not constitutional history. It is different from context, whether of intellectual, social, or political history, within which Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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works of literature are framed. Foregrounding, the verb, means to make prominent, or draw attention to particular features in a literary work.

2. Medicine: Reference is to Keats' chosen medical profession, and then, in a moment of "self-will" declaring his intention to be a poet and to live by it. With Apollo, god of healing as well as poetry as his tutelary deity, Keats conceived of the poet as a medicine Man, and of art which in some way could be a "friend to man." He also thought of "universal liberty" as an activating principle, and eulogized Milton in this active role. He also talks of "hearts completely disinterested"-- "Socrates and Jesus having it--their histories evince it." And I am reminded of

Miskawayh's desirability (b. 325/926 in Isfahan) to teach children about love and harmony, hence a revival of humanistic education that is connected with "true paidea" (*al-adab al-haqq*), guiding them in sound habits and salutary actions, in line with prophets, who are physicians of souls.

3. "title of Man": This appears in Keats' journal-letter to his brother and sister-in-law of October 1818, where he looks at the politicians of the day, both in England and America, and finds them "puny" as compared to "those our countrymen Milton and Sidney, and in Letter of 13 Mar. 1818 to Benjamin Bailey where he writes, "Scenery is fine--but human nature is finer.....Homer is fine, Achilles is fine, Diomed is fine, Shakespeare is fine, Hamlet is fine, Lear is fine, but dwindled englishmen are not fine."

4. Keats' letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Dec. 1818, Jan. 1819.

5. Harold Bloom (1998) affirms: "This was the procedure from the times of Dr. Johnson and David Garrick, of William Hazlit and Edmund Kean, through the eras of A. C. Bradley and Henry Irving, of C. Wilson knight and John Gielgud." He resents "it is now out of fashion, and has been replaced by arbitrary and ideologically imposed contextualization, the staple of our bad time." (pp. 8-9).

6. Geneva Bible: Reference is from the passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, 7: 1-6, which Shakespeare had read in his maturity, and in King Lear, makes Lear allude to this passage.

7. The Quran: The holy text of Muslims in the Islamic faith.

8. Pharoah: Reference is to the story of Moses, Prophet of Egypt and purveyor of Godknowledge as read in the Quran, and his pleadings to his arrogant half-brother, Pharoah, prince of Egypt, to clarify his mind and see for Signs as evidence. This story has parallel reference to that of Lear... who Pharoah-like sees himself as godhead, wants full submission, and in the attitude of Pharoah, acts irresponsibly. His actions show the imperfect potential of his soul, and the unused "inner agencies" which make him impatient and miss understanding. He deeply misunderstands the events, and their enigmatic substance for which the Fool's presence becomes necessity. Lear's quest on the heath resembles Moses' being on an expedition in search of learning to be a "man

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[sic] of learning.” Moses was led through real experience in real life but only in company of his strange Teacher (*Khidhr*), with his learning attitude and that particular moral specific “patience” and “faith” that furthered his learning and interpreting activity till it became a part of him. Then, he could take his course alone. Such an insightful discourse awaits Lear on the heath and for us to re-read many parallel stories, and enter experiences and other-consciousness for facilitating the flow and development of consciousness and interdependent existence.

9. Hazrat Inayat Khan: The great Indian mystic and musician (born in India in 1882). Reference is from his work: *The Inner School, Esoteric Sufi Teachings* that is reflection of his Sufi message, and an inspiration to maintain balance between the inner and outer life. It is representative of Sufism, of inner wisdom, to the world, harmonizing East and West. *Universal Sufism*, an exploration of the teachings and writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan by Dr. H. J. Witteveen (1997) is essential reading for those seeking inner and outer peace.

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## Glossary

**Othering.** A transformative concept that introduces us to enjoy ‘othering’ in a humanistic way, quite contrary to the way this term is used in multicultural/antiracist literature (*my interpretation*; Javed, 2004). It adds meaning to Self, invites attention to what is beyond, within, and above as higher, and opens us to “the new, the different, the true” (Gadamer, 1994) through being with others. As an alternate mode of thinking to exclusive self-thinking with supremacy, ‘othering’ comes in deep reflective practices, as in self-reflection, when devoid of self, we are capable of alterity and alternative modes of human existence. That is by transcending ‘I’, we open self to the concept that ‘I am nought without the Other’, transfiguring our sense of self to understanding ‘self and others’ as “participant integrals” (Lex Hixon, 1988) of the widening universe within and without. Othering then, comes as a natural emotional accompaniment of Self, and with this feeling imperative, we find ourselves in a culturally diverse world whose “Content is otherness” (Huebner, 1999), and self becomes empathetically open, available, and vulnerable to not only difference and the different, but to something “higher” as well. With this spiritual attitude, we will look to accepting others to confirm our humanity and our human individuality, and also become sensitive and sympathetic to all the otherness of the world, namely, of the human and natural world, of the past, present and future, and also silently awaken to and be with the Transcendent Other (Huebner, 1999). ‘Othering’ then, is a first step that can help us realize such an embodied solidarity can dissolve the distinction between the self and the other, and transform our outlook and way of being-in-the-world by returning us to our “human, historic commonality” (Giri, 2002). It will give a depth and expansion to Self when self finds itself in colours and sounds, intensities and becomings, and the possibility to function self-transformatively (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). By making ‘othering’ as the central practice in education, every educating act will be an act of mutual influence, reciprocal partnership, and holistic development of each other.

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This is a way to enlighten the understanding of knowing and being in diverse modes, and “hence inform and enlighten the understanding of education” (Huebner, 1999).

**Prospice.** In Latin means ‘looking forward.’ Appears in Robert Browning’s poem by this name.

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=====  
Sohaila Javed, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
National University of Modern Languages  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
[jsohaila@hotmail.com](mailto:jsohaila@hotmail.com)

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Sohaila Javed, Ph.D.

A Hermeneutic Ex-change with Lear in that Shakespearean Inn: *King Lear*