

THE OUTCAST DRIVEN MAD

by
Moe Armstrong

According to the Random House College Dictionary, madness can either be experienced as rage or insanity. Does rage bring on insanity? There is a continual anger which runs through the insanity of the madman. The people from past centuries were wiser than we are today by naming insanity madness. They saw the symbiosis of insanity and rage.

Shakespeare understood this relationship of anger to insanity in *King Lear*. The events in the play cause the characters to become angrier and madder. They are cast out and rejected by their loved ones. Edgar, The Earl of Kent, The Earl of Gloucester and King Lear are all outcasts. Edgar and King Lear are driven mad. The Earl of Kent assumes a dangerous obsession with protecting King Lear. His obsession about staying with the King, no matter how severe the hardship, borders on madness. After having his eyes pulled out, Gloucester is cast out to wander with "Poor Tom."

The characters move to madness after being outcast. Their insanity is seen by their conduct and their conduct exacerbates the tragedy. At the end of the play, the transformation of the remaining characters is so deep that another fratricidal tragedy can never be repeated. As Edgar says, "The weight of this sad time we must obey, speak what we feel, not what we ought to say, the oldest hath borne the most: we that are so young shall never see so much, nor live so long" (*Lear*, V, iii, 325 - 329). At the very beginning of the play, the division of the kingdom leaves the king dependent on the whims of his daughters. With no lands, position or family, King Lear has left himself open to be thrown out of the kingdom. The king becomes so powerless that he becomes a victim. The Fool tells him:

" That Lord that counseled thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,
Do thou for him stand.
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear;
The one in motley here,
The other found out there." (*Lear*, I, iv, 143-152)

When the king asks him, " Dost thou call me fool, boy?" The Fool responds with honesty, "All other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with." (*Lear*, I, iv, 151- 154).

King Lear has become so estranged from his family that he must go mad. Through his anger, he tries to reestablish his power. Yet, he remains emasculated. The rage builds as reunification with his daughters becomes more impossible. Eric Fromm writes in *The Art of Loving*, "The awareness of human separation, without reunion by love--is the source of shame. It is at the same time the source of guilt and anxiety"(Fromm, 8). The shame, guilt and anxiety of King Lear become anger, rage and insanity. The rage of the king is the fuel added to the fire of final catastrophe.

King Lear never shows the temperance of the wise and just king. At the beginning, Cordelia is disowned in public. The king does not send out a signal of reconciliation. His alienation is partly brought on by his own conduct. Regan and Goneril might have been troublesome bitches, but the first signs of exile and retribution come from the king. Fear and panic are created by the immediate disownment of Cordelia. Kent challenges the king when he says,

"...Be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old
man?" (Lear, I, i, 145-150).

The exchange between Kent and Lear and the banishment of Kent is public. The seeds of doubt and mistrust are planted. The entire court must be thinking how can they get something before the axe falls, and they have nothing. Even with all the insecurity that King Lear has spread, the daughters seem to have some love for their father after he proclaims, " O Fool, I shall go mad" (Lear, II, iv, 285).

Regan talking to Goneril says," For his particular, I'll receive him gladly, But not one follower. And Goneril says, "So am I purposed" (Lear, II, iv, 291- 294). This last hope of reconciliation is shattered. From this point in the play, the king becomes an outcast and he goes insane in the heath. The "separation" which Eric Fromm speaks about is sealed by both sides and shame will move to retribution and retribution to tragedy.

The tragedy of families is compounded as Edgar is cast out by his father early in the play. In Act II, scene iii, Edgar is swallowed up by the character he chooses. He becomes "Poor Tom" until the end of the play. The outcast Edgar becomes transformed by his stay in the wooded heath. The "Exile in the Wilderness" is what Sylvia Brinton Perera writes about in the *Scapegoat Complex*. When Edgar becomes Tom and goes to live in the heath, a transformation takes place which Sylvia Brinton Perera describes, "when entered unwillingly as a condemned alien, like Cain or Ishmael or the

scapegoat, the desert is a curse" (Perera, 26). She goes on to say, "Psychologically for these individuals, the wilderness is analogous to their sense of paralyzed apathy, meaninglessness and abandonment panic. It mirrors the pain of their never belonging, of homelessness, of living in hiding"(Perera, 26).

This transformation can be understood by seeing another psychological precedent. Edgar or "Poor Tom" becomes the Wandering Goat, "the fragile victim will be kept safely "on ice," with a determination that ensures its living, albeit in hiding."(Perera, pp. 23) Edgar is forced out of the castle and left to wander in the wilderness. Although Edgar might think he is protecting himself, as he carries on a distorted conversation with the king in the heath, his dialogue makes me wonder how much is an act and how much of his conversation reflects real insanity.

Edgar not only can't talk coherently with the king, but Edgar has been wandering in the rainy heath covered only with a blanket. When the King asks, "What has his daughters brought him to this pass? Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou give 'em all?" The Fool points out, "Nay, he reserved a blanket(something to cover his nakedness), else we had been all shamed"(Lear, III, iv. 61 - 62). There is no way that Edgar can be outcast by his father, have his position taken over by his brother, be left without food, clothing and shelter in the natural elements on the heath, and still live through this deprivation unaffected.

The Earl of Kent is another outcast, not only driven into the wilderness, but driven in his obsession to serve King Lear. His obsession is just as clearly defined in the Scapegoat Complex., "The possibility of being inflated with the role of savior, the one who carries away the sins as suffering caretaker, is another way the scapegoat-identified individuals may feel fraudulently Christlike" (Perera, 74). The way that the Earl of Kent survives is to bury any feelings and speak nothing against King Lear. He will remain in the stocks all night and not complain as King Lear rushes past him to greet Regan. The Earl of Kent is so busy loyally serving King Lear that he doesn't see how he contributes the tragedy by enabling the king to continue with his thrashing anguish toward the destruction of two whole families. The result of Kent's servitude is that he loses himself to the king. He can no longer be Kent. He only serves the king. This loss of self is insanity. As Sylvia Brinton Perera points out, "At the extreme end of the spectrum of repression is anesthesia of needs. In such cases one identifies with the accuser's demonic imperatives against need satisfaction, and dissociates to prevent body messages from reaching consciousness" (Perera, 58).

King Lear is the grandest outcast. His being cast out causes an entire kingdom to be destroyed. "Human scapegoats (were) chosen because they were ugly or deformed or "given to fits," while others were chosen because they were unusually strong" (Perera, 13). The death of the grand scapegoat can cleanse the entire community. The sacrifice of King Lear by Regan and Goneril is the only way the daughters can have total control of the kingdom. Even though, the daughters were given the kingdom by their father. Regan and Goneril only try to speed up the acquisition of total power by making their father "the Black Sheep." Sylvia Perera explains, "The rejection is experienced by the individual as a punishment for being. Guilt, inferiority feelings, and a core of ever-present existential anxiety-from the lack of connection to the greater whole--are the individual's burden" (Perera, 16). As with most burdens, a large weight can break a person. He is cast out and shamed. King Lear is broken by the weight of guilt and anger or alienation. His anger becomes rage. He wanders the heath insane. His encounter with Edgar is the meeting of two outcasts in the wilderness. Even though the stage directions say that "Enter Edgar, disguised as a madman" (Lear, III, iv, 46), the time in the wilderness and wandering in the storm and wilderness will have an effect on Edgar. Both Edgar and the king have grown insane in their journey through the wilderness.

The play King Lear had a deep impact on me. During the Vietnam war, I was segregated from my unit and put into a psychiatric hospital. I was an outcast to the soldiers in my unit and to the people from my home town. I could neither return home or return to the military. As I became a vagrant on the streets of America, I lost my past identity and became a real street person. I saw myself as the picture of Midwest purity. My parents, my hometown and those who I would meet in my travels saw me as a drifter. One day after being an outcast for ten years, I looked in the mirror and saw I was that disoriented vagrant. I was no longer a person who lived with other vagabonds. I was a vagabond. There was no acting out a part of the street person. I was a street person. My experiences had changed me. I went to live in the urban wilderness rejected by those I loved and knew. My anger turned to rage, and my rage kept me an outcast. My rage kept marking me with experiences of the wilderness in the world's urban areas. I was no longer the young fresh kid from the Midwest. I was a disoriented wanderer.

King Lear touched me because I knew the anguish of the outcast characters, and I understood the anger of being outcast. I understood the prolonged anger and the emotional disequilibrium which being cast out causes. I understood how that imbalance aggravated me to insanity. I chose to work at evolving out of my insanity. Through learning, I tried to, not only

discover who I was, but change where I was going. The Earl of Kent chose personal evolution. This evolution comes through not only learning but service, also. Through helping others, we can help ourselves. Personal transformation through service is the first aspect of personality redemption.

A second aspect of personality redemption is the idea of kill or be killed. Edgar is the example of this. Through the death of Edmund, Edgar is transformed as an equal in the conversation with Kent at the end of the play. Edgar delivers the final lines of the play with clarity and eloquence. He is no longer "Poor Tom." His redemption is complete after the death of Edmund. He has righted a wrong and has gained redemption.

King Lear and the Earl of Gloucester are following a third choice. They make the situation worse through their choices. The Earl of Gloucester does not a physical death but he will never regain control of his family or territory. Gloucester never defends Edgar, and yet, is thought to be wise and understanding. He is loyal to the king but will make no public stand in support of the king. He slips off the warn the king and never publicly challenges the quest for power going on in the kingdom. He is psychologically and morally dead.

King Lear will die a physical death at the end of the play. The loss of family and kingdom has caused him a slow death throughout the entire play. The king giving his lands to his daughters is an act self-castration. King Lear has no place where he is welcome. He can never regain control of his family or kingdom, either. The king never intercedes to help Gloucester. Instead, King Lear goes mad at Gloucester's castle. He lives Gloucester open to be victimized. The Duke of Cornwall and Regan take over Gloucester's castle, pluck out his eyes and throw him out. He can no longer insure the well being of his knights. Where do they go and what do they do while he thrashes in madness around the heath? The king is angry but never regains his power.

The outcasts have been driven mad. Edgar and Kent are redeemed. They are the returned outcasts. The prodigals come home, and the play is brought to resolution.

REFERENCES

- The Art of Loving, Eric Fromm, Bantam Books, 1960.
The Scapegoat Complex, Sylvia Brinton Perera, Inner City Books, 1932.