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『リア王』に於けるオルバニーの性格と役割

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The Character and
the Role of Albany in *King Lear*

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Criticism devoted to Albany is scarce, and comments on him have usually been fragmentary. As far as I know, only two critics have explored the role of Albany and his thematic importance.¹ Although these critics have examined and thrown light on some important aspects of Albany's role and character, Albany can still be examined from a different point of view. Albany has been thought of as "a champion of the assertion of goodness and order."² Leo Kirschbaum thinks that the presence of Albany relieves the play from being a totally dark one.³ Generally speaking, these critics find a kind of recovery at the end of the play, and they regard Albany's optimistic character as the main force of the recovery. In some fundamental aspects I agree with these critics, but I believe that an examination of ironical aspects of Albany's role, which these critics tend to overlook, will reveal different aspects of Albany's character and his thematic importance in *King Lear*. My purpose in this paper, therefore, is to examine Albany's character and his role to show Shakespeare's masterful use of Albany's character to express his dramatic vision in *King Lear*.

In the opening line of the play Albany is mentioned. Although Albany's qualities seem to be implied in Kent's opening speech and Gloucester's response,⁴ Shakespeare does not go further in defining clearly the character of Albany. In Act I, scene i, the poet defines almost all the characters: Lear, the three daughters, Kent, France, Burgandy, and Gloucester. And in this scene Kent's action and the two dukes' reticence form a striking contrast. When Lear tries to strike Kent with his sword, Albany for the first time speaks, sharing a very brief speech with Cornwall: "Dear sir, forbear" (I.i.162).⁵

In Act I, scene iv, we begin to see Albany's character. Albany enters as Lear

and Goneril confront each other for the first time. He does not know what has taken place between Lear and Goneril, and is asked by Lear, “O, sir, are you come? / Is it your will? Speak sir—” (I.iv.248-49). But Albany, unable to respond to this question, only begs Lear to be patient. Lear does not listen to Albany and begins to curse Goneril. Albany is disturbed by Lear’s wild anger, and he tries to make his position clear: “My lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant / Of what hath moved you” (I.iv.264-65). But Lear seems to suspect Albany; and the audience, too, is yet uncertain as to Albany’s position. When Lear curses Goneril again, Albany again shows his ignorance of the situation. This time he begs the gods to tell him the cause of the conflict: “Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?” (I.iv.281). The piety he shows here is noteworthy, for it reveals an important aspect of Albany’s character. As Heilman points out, the words are not casual.⁶ Shakespeare later in the play fully exploits Albany’s piety. Goneril’s speech confirms Albany’s claim that he is ignorant of the cause of the conflict: “Never afflict yourself to know more of it; / But let his disposition have that scope / As dotage gives it” (L.iv.282-84). By now it is clear that Albany is isolated from the rest of his household, and his ensuing question confirms his isolation from the play’s turmoil: “What’s the matter, sir?” (I.iv.286). Even Oswald is informed of Goneril’s intention. Albany maintains his isolation in the center of the Lear-Goneril conflict, and with his confirmed isolation from the main action of the play, emerges as one who can freely comment on others, especially on Goneril.

After Lear’s departure from Albany’s house, Albany tries to comment on Goneril’s treatment of Lear: “I cannot be so partial, Goneril, / To the great love I bear you—” (I.iv.302-303). Goneril, however, overbears Albany and reveals her intention. Albany for the first time learns the cause of the conflict between Lear and Goneril when she discloses her fear of Lear and her obsession with the power she gained by flattery:

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 guard his dotage with their pow'rs

And hold our life in mercy (I.iv. 298-303).

The idea of the proper relationship between father and daughter is completely eliminated now from Goneril's mind. Obviously, "dream," "buzz," and "complaint" are too trivial to lead Lear to anger. But they expose Goneril's preoccupation with self-interest and her excessive sensitivity, which are whetted by her lust for power. And here is a distorted statement of the cause of Lear's anger. What made Lear furious is not actually his dotage; it is, rather, filial ingratitude which he mistakenly saw in Cordelia's reticence and which he now sees openly revealed in Goneril. Albany comments on Goneril's fear of Lear: "Well, you may fear too far" (I.iv.319). And, Goneril, responding to Albany's comments, reveals her practical belief:

Safer than trust too far.

Let me still take away the harms I fear,

Not fear still to be taken. I know his heart;

What he hath uttered I have writ my sister.

If she sustains him and his hundred knights,

When I have showed th'unfitness-- (I.iv. 305-10).

Goneril's fear of Lear is abnormal and almost paranoid, and, moreover, the last two lines even imply her distrust of Regan. The lust for power is severing a father from his daughter and one sister from another. Naturally, Goneril's distorted eyes cannot see much goodness in Albany:

No, no, my lord,

This milky gentleness and course of yours,

Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,

You are much more atasked for want of wisdom

Than praised for harmful mildness (I.iv. 317-21).

Albany, who does not share his wife's excessive fear of Lear and therefore maintains calmness, again apprehensively speaks to Goneril: "How far your eyes may perceive I cannot tell; / Striving to better, oft we mar what's well" (I.iv. 323-24). Albany's position can be a corrective to his wife's inordinate obsession with power, but when Goneril tries to deny Albany's apprehension, he interrupts her speech and evades a debate: "Well, well; th'event" (I.iv. 319). Albany excites and suspends the tension caused by the strife between Lear and Goneril, and which the exposure of Goneril's monstrous intention strengthened.

Thus, in this scene, Albany exposes the situation and Goneril's straying from the normal relationship between a father and a daughter. Furthermore, he impresses us as one to whom we can look for comments and guidance in this play.

Although Albany's position is clear by now, there is one passage in which Albany is mentioned negatively. Just before the first confrontation of Lear and Goneril, one of Lear's knights comments on the attitude of Albany's household toward Lear as follows:

My lord, I know not what the matter is; but to my judgement your Highness is not entertained with that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependents as in the duke himself also and your daughter (I.iv. 55-60).

Albany's isolation from or his uncommitted attitude toward the core of the discord between Lear and Goneril may seem negative from the knight's point of view, for the relationship between a king and his servants consists of mutual commitment, that is, protection is granted for services received. Shakespeare, however, soon corrects the negative impression of Albany by presenting him as an isolated character, who is beginning to become Goneril's opposite.

We are not allowed to see Albany again until Act IV, scene ii. After Lear's departure from Albany's house the scene moves on to the confrontation between Lear and the Goneril-Regan-Cornwall trio, then to the heath scene, and to the blinding of Gloucester. Although Albany does not appear in Acts II and III, his name is mentioned by other characters. In Act II, scene i, Curan informs Edmund of the rumor of "likely war 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany" (II.i. 10-11). And Kent confides to the Gentleman the "division" between the Dukes:

There is division,
Although as yet the face of it is covered
With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall;
Who have-- as who have not, that their great stars
Throned and set high? (III.i. 19-23).

Albany is depicted negatively here. Is he a mere social climber, like Cornwall, who tortures Lear? Although Kent says that the division is covered with "mutual cunning," we have no evidence for Albany's involvement in the "mutual cunning." As I have suggested in the comment on Goneril in Act I, scene iv, 11. 319-24, Goneril's distrust of Regan (and Cornwall) may be indicative of "division." Kent goes on to say:

Servants, who seem no less
Which are to France the spies and speculations
Intelligence of our state. What hath been seen,
Either in the snuffs and packings of the Dukes,
Or the hard rein which both of them have born
Against the old kind king (III.i. 23-28).

Kent is saying that "both of them" acted against the king. As I have suggested, Albany is isolated from the strife between Goneril and Lear. Cornwall complements Regan's ingratitude. Albany, on the other hand, does not share his

wife's fear of Lear. Moreover, he seems indifferent to his wife's distrust of Regan, which is implied in lines 319-24 of Act I, scene iv. If ever Albany is blamable, it is attributable to his aloofness from the strife, and the division exists rather between Goneril and Regan (and Cornwall).

In Act IV, scene ii, we see Albany again. During his absence in the preceding scenes, his character seems to have been developed. His positive side, which has been revealed only slightly is now fully depicted. The power of evil has become predominant in the play, and most of the evil-doing of Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund has been completed. The blinding of Gloucester is indicative of the bestial world into which the kingdom has been plunged.

Albany in Act IV, scene ii, emerges as a man in whom traditional value is embodied. Bewildered by Albany's reaction to his report of what happened in Gloucester's house, Oswald speaks to Goneril, who asks him of the whereabouts of Albany:

Madam, whithin, but never a man so changed.
I told him of the army that was landed:
He smiled at it. I told him you were coming:
His answer was "The worse." Of Gloucester's treachery
And of the loyal service of his son
When I informed him, then he called me sot
And told me I had turned the wrong side out.
What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;
What like, offensive (IV.ii. 3-11).

Oswald, who "had turned the wrong side out" shares the evil of the other characters. The ironical words "treachery" and "loyal service" reveal the reversal of values. The confrontation of values is revealed here, and Albany is right in calling Oswald a "sot."

"Service" as conceived by Oswald is the very opposite of Kent's conception

of it. Kent, in attempting to keep Lear from banishing Cordelia in Act I, demonstrates good service: "To plainness honor's bound / When majesty falls to folly" (I.i. 148-49). And he adds: "My life I never held but as a pawn / To wage against thy enemies; ne'er fear to lose it / Thy safety being motive" (I.i. 155-57). As Traversi points out, good service consists in "honest independence of judgement."⁷ The good service of Kent upholds the order of the kingdom. The service of Oswald, "a serviceable villain" (IV.vi. 248), on the other hand, is the opposite of Kent's. Although Oswald's blind obedience at first glance seems to preserve order, in reality it only cuts "the holy cords atwain / Which are too intrince t'unloose" (II.ii. 69-70). In short, Oswald's service ultimately "promotes division and disunity rather than solidarity."⁸ Gloucester, understanding the allegiance to Cornwall is incompatible with loyalty to Lear, is finally driven to an act of rebellion which, like Kent's is at the same time "an act of mastery and an act of true service."⁹ Albany, then, no doubt, shares the values held by Kent and Gloucester, and perceiving Oswald's reversal, calls him a "sot." At this point it should be noted that Albany's moral position ceases to be ambiguous. Oswald's observation that "What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him; / What like, offensive," confirms Albany's moral code. Although Albany's moral code was slightly revealed in a brief but important speech in Act I, scene iv, when he says, "Now, gods that we adore. . . ," he did not there convincingly demonstrate his moral code. Taking the Elizabethan concept of the world¹⁰ into consideration, however, we may analyze Albany's statement and conclude that he shares the same moral code held by Kent, Cordelia, Edgar, and Gloucester— they all uphold order.

Goneril, who cannot detect the positive elements hidden in Albany's mildness and coolness, ironically ignores Oswald's report: "I must change names at home, and give the distuff / Into my husband's hands" And she (IV.ii. 17-18). adds: "My fool usurps my body" (IV.ii. 28). The word "fool" is ironic here.

“Fools” in *King Lear* support and observe the hierarchy of society; Kent, for example, is called “fool” (II.iv. 83). Lear also calls Cordelia “my poor fool” (V.iii. 306). Goneril confirmed Albany’s position in Act I, scene ii, and again here by calling him a fool she implies Albany’s position, the opposite of hers. In his next speech Albany shows that he is now morally superior to Goneril. Moreover, he now emerges as the guardian of order.

It is probably necessary to survey very briefly the Renaissance concept of order at this point. Tillyard has shown that the best example of the Renaissance concept of order appears in Ulysses’ speech on degree in *Troilus and Cressida*.¹¹ After a long explanation of the concept of order Ulysses describes disorder in the world as follows:

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark, what discord follows. Each thing meets
Is mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility.
And the rude son should strike his father dead;
Force should be right, or rather right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too;
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite.
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And lest eat up himself.
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking.

Order in Man’s world as well as in the macrocosm is maintained by observing degree. But when degree is “untuned,” “the rude son should strike his father

dead.” This image of disorder underlies Albany’s speech:

O Goneril
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition:
That nature which condemns its origin
Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
She that herself will silver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither
And come to deadly use (IV.ii. 29-36).

As Elton points out, Albany shows that he is committed to the “bond of humanity.”¹² Albany’s firm belief in order even exposes the serious error of Lear and Gloucester. Rosenberg finds “an ironic echo of what Lear and Gloucester have done—disbranched children.”¹³ Lear, incapable of seeing true love in Cordelia, who loves Lear according to her “bond; no more nor less” (I.i. 93), disclaims all his paternal care. And Gloucester, also blind and gullible, declares that he “never got him [Edgar] (II.i. 78).

The reversal of values and the disorder caused by Lear’s breaking of the “human bond” are exposed by Albany’s next speech. Goneril tries to overbear Albany by saying, “no more; the text is foolish” (IV.ii.37). “Foolish” for Goneril, since she thinks Albany lacks worldly wisdom. However, now resolute, Albany emerges as the man in whom Renaissance goodness and true wisdom are embodied:

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;
Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers not daughters, what have you performed?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you madded.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefited! (IV.ii. 38-45),

What Albany is revealing here is one version of disorder, the fundamental situation of which is found in Ulysses' speech quoted by Tillyard. Implicitly expressed in this speech is the concept of degree, supporting the hierarchy in man's world, a concept completely ignored by the evil characters in the play. In *King Lear* are not the rude daughters and sons striking their fathers almost dead? Gloucester has "o'erheard a plot of death upon him [Lear]" (III.vi.87). And Edmund, to usurp his father's dukedom, traps his elder brother and sells his father without scruples. Cornwall's ingratitude is incredible to Albany. A human being ceases to be human when he ignores the human bond, and Albany, therefore, as the moral norm of human conduct contrasted against evil characters, calls Goneril and Regan "Tigers," "Most degenerate," and "Most barbarous." In disorder, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall rely on their power and disregard all other values. Cornwall, for instance, slights justice in torturing Gloucester:

Though well we may not pass upon his life
Without the form of justice, yet our power
Shall do a court'sy to our wrath, which men
May blame, but not control (III.vii. 23-26).

This self-assumed excuse reminds one of the disorder depicted by Ulysses: "Strength should be lord imbecility."

Albany, after bitterly criticizing Goneril, goes on to prophesy the outcome of this disorder:

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep (IV.ii. 46-50).

Albany again echoes Ulysses here, and his vision of mankind preying on itself

foreshadows the last scene of the play. The if-clause in which Albany's firm belief in divine justice is shown takes on a significant implication later in the play.

Despite Albany's prophecy, Goneril is unaffected. She cannot see the change in Albany, and she calls him "Milk-livered man." Goneril's total callousness to Albany's goodness exposes the degree of her degeneration. From her point of view, Albany lacks "an eye discerning," and the disordered kingdom is "noiseless." Albany's struggle to repress his passion, to control his animality in himself, contrasts with the animality of the evil characters shown, for example, in the plucking out of Gloucester's eyes. Although Albany almost explodes with accumulated indignation, he never loses his self-control:

Thou changèd and self-covered thing, for shame
Bemonster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones; howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee (IV.ii 62-67).

Passion in *King Lear* as well as in other Shakespearean plays is depicted as a destructive element. Lear, in Act I, scene i, gives himself over to wrath and banishes Cordelia, and thereby fails to observe the human bond, which is indispensable to maintaining social unity in the kingdom. Cornwall is said to have a "fiery quality" (II.iv. 88), and his animality invites his own death. The unchecked appetite of Goneril and Regan results in murder and suicide. Albany's self-control in this scene, then, is indicative of his sanity, and points up his role in this play as the moral norm against which all errors and vice are set off.

When the messenger from Regan enters, Albany acts as a choral character.

The short questions he asks are rather repetitious, however, for the audience already knows the answers. But by asking questions and drawing answers from the messenger, he again exposes and summarizes the appalling events that had taken place in Gloucester's house. When the messenger informs Albany of Cornwall's death, Albany exclaims:

This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge. But, O poor Gloucester,
Lost he his other eye? (IV.ii. 79-81).

Albany constantly shows his piety, and this piety, we should note, is becoming ironical. Immediately after Albany praises the "Justicers," he asks the fate of Gloucester's "other eye." John Rosenberg notes the absurdity of this question, and he thinks that Shakespeare "subverts the facile assertion of cosmic justice at the very moment it is made."¹⁴ Albany's next speech reminds the audience of Edmund's unnaturalness and his secret communication with Goneril. Summarizing and exposing the evil-doing of the preceding scene, Albany declares:

Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou show'st the King,
And to revenge thine eyes. Come hither, friend.
Tell me what more thou know'st (IV.ii. 94-97).

What is noteworthy here is the hope he excites. As the moral norm of human conduct he gains the audience's trust as the one through whose comments one views the other characters and the events in the play.

Before Albany appears in Act V, scene i, he is mentioned by four characters. First, when Regan asks Oswald about Albany's preparation for the impending war, he says: "Madam, with much ado / Your sister is the better soldier" (IV.v. 2-3). Secondly, Lear in his madness: "And when I have stol'n

upon these sons-in-law / Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!" (IV.vi. 183-84). Lear has seen Cornwall's ingratitude in Gloucester's house, and he does not see Albany again after Act I, scene ii. The images of the two dukes may be mixed in Lear's madness. Albany, however, as I have suggested earlier, reveals a moral code incompatible with that of Cornwall. Thirdly, Edgar calls Albany "virtuous husband" (IV.vi. 267). Finally, Edmund notes Albany's character: "He's full of alteration / And self-reproving" (V.i. 3-4). All these comments, except that of Lear, assures Albany's goodness, and when mentioned by the evil characters, Albany's quality throws their bad qualities into relief.

Albany knows that to take action against Lear is morally wrong, but, as the highest-ranking man in the English army, he is now an ally of the Goneril-Regan-Edmund trio. Exposing the present dramatic situation his reasoning is painful:

Our very loving sister, well bemet.
Sir, this I heard: the King is come to his daughter,
With others whom the rigor of our state
Forced to cry out. Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant. For this business,
It touches us as France invades our land,
Not bolds the King with others, whom I fear
Most just and heavy causes make oppose (V.i. 20-27).

The lines are full of ambiguities. The first line, "Our loving sister, well bemet," is incredible. Is this a customary way to greet a high-ranking woman, i.e., Regan? If one remembers Albany's declaration that he will revenge the loss of Gloucester's eyes, the greeting seems excessive. Or is he merely sarcastic here? "With others whom the rigor of our state / Forced to cry out" is more ambiguous. Who are "others" whom "the rigor of our state forced to cry out"? Are they good or bad? These ambiguities show that Albany is suspending his moral judgement here. Moreover, it may be safe to say that Albany, though well-meaning, tend to be blind. Although the painful reasoning of Albany gives

an impression that he is a neutral character as Bradley suggests,¹⁵ his moral code, i.e., his allegiance to order revealed in line 281 of Act I, scene iv, and his present position are incompatible. From the political point of view, the characters in *King Lear* are categorized into two groups: those who show allegiance to order, i.e., Kent, Cordelia, Gloucester, Edgar, Albany, and Fool, and those who ignore and try to destroy the hierarchy, i.e., Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Edmund, and Oswald. To perceive the depth of evil in the play, Albany has to wait until he reads Goneril's letter. Albany's speech here, nevertheless, explicates the complexity of the present situation, and his moral dilemma is set off against the evil characters' single-minded pursuit of self-interest: "Why is this reasoned" (V.i. 28).

Albany carries out his promise: he revenges the loss of Gloucester's eyes by defeating Edmund and revealing Goneril's conspiracy against his life, although he fulfills his promise through Edgar's aid. In the earlier part of Act V, Albany's role mainly consists in exposing the dramatic situation. He exposes Goneril's mental state: "Go after her. She's desperate; govern her" (V.iii. 162). When Edgar talks chorally about what happened to him and Gloucester, Albany's short questions and brief comments are expository.

But one of the most important roles of Albany in the play is seen in the last lines. The dramatic vision Shakespeare conveyed in Act IV, scene ii, 11. 46-50, materializes in the last lines of the play, and the poet fully exploits Albany's character. Albany's firm belief in divine justice and the hope he has excited in the preceding scenes are magnificently and bitterly reversed.

When the Gentleman tells Albany of the death of Goneril and Regan, he is unaffected and shows a firm faith in divine justice:

Produce the bodies, be they alive or dead;
This judgement of the heavens that makes us tremble,
Touches us not with pity (V iii. 231-33).

At this moment Albany reminds the audience of his prophecy in Act IV, scene ii:

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself
Like monsters of the deep.

Albany here takes it for granted that the death of Goneril and Regan was caused by a “judgement of the heavens.” Is Albany’s expectation, shown in the if-clause, fulfilled, then? The bloody knife is taken out from Goneril’s heart and “her sister / By her is poisoned” (V.iii. 228-29). When Edmund confesses his plot against the lives of Lear and Cordelia, Albany again shows “The unshaken faith in the just workings of divine order.”¹⁶:

The gods defend her! (V. iii. 257).

After this momentary suspension, he invites “the cruelest of irony.”¹⁷ (The ironical pattern persists from Act IV. Even Albany’s indifference to the death of Goneril and Regan may be ironic, for the death foreshadows the last scene. Also, Edgar’s optimistic remark, “The gods are just,” may ironically converge in Albany’s invocation). His invocation is unanswered, and his piety and the hope he has excited are all shattered when Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. Lear’s desperate speech also adds a blow to Albany’s faith in divine justice: “Had I your tongues and eyes, I’d use them so / That heavens vault should crack” (V.iii. 259-60). These two characters form a bitter contrast here, and Lear despite Albany’s faith in divine order seems to have somehow felt out the indifferent gods in this world. The moving (and terribly ironical) prison scene and this cruel scene seem to form a strikingly ironical contrast, and the gods give the impression that they are mocking Lear.

Now the implication of the if-clause in Albany’s vision is made clear: divine

intervention in human action may not be expected in this world of evil. Albany's "unshaken faith" in gods ironically explicates the reality of this world—a godless, bleak world. The death of Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan are the materialization of Albany's prophecy: "Humanity must perforce prey on itself / Like monsters of the deep." John Rosenberg points out that "the cosmos of *King Lear* destroys all that is most noble along with all that is base."¹⁸ Although Albany's piety and the hope he has excited are all shattered by Cordelia's death, he yet expects to restore order in the kingdom by restoring Lear to the throne. When the messenger tells Albany of Edmund's death, he disregards it and says:

That's but a trifle here.
You lords and noble friends know our intent.
What comfort to this great decay may come
Shall be applied. For us, we will resign,
During the life of this old Majesty,
To him our absolute power; you to your rights,
With boot and such addition as your honors
Have more than merited. All friends shall taste
The wages of their virtue, and all foes
The cup of their deservings; O, see, see! (V.iii. 296-305).

But Albany's optimistic expectation is again bitterly reversed by Lear's speech. Lear has said if Cordelia is alive, "It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows / That ever I have felt" (V.iii. 267-68). Now when Cordelia is gone forever, there is no "comfort to this great decay." What Albany cannot see here is the depth of Lear's agony. John Shaw, comparing Albany's speech with that of Malcolm at the end of *Macbeth*, points out that Albany's assertion of order is premature.¹⁹ And Shaw adds that Shakespeare has written Albany's speech "in order to throw a fresh and shocking emphasis upon the last confused words of the play."²⁰ Albany's premature assertion of order and justice, and his rather superficial view of this "tough" world is exposed by Kent, who speaks chorally

on Lear's death: "Vex not his ghost. O, let him pass! He hates him / That would upon the rack of this tough world / Stretch him out longer" (V.iii. 314-16). Kent, who told Edgar "the most piteous tale of Lear and him / That ever ears received" (V.iii. 215-16), is the proper man to comment on Lear's death. The silence of Albany after Lear's death may reveal his shock.

The confident man who emerges as the guardian of order at the end of Act IV is shattered here. His next speech shows the impact of Lear's death:

Our present business
Is general woe.
Friends of my soul, you twain
Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain (V.iii. 319-22).

This is a world in which a man like Albany, a traditionalist, is forced to find himself cosmically bankrupt. Why does he propose to abdicate for the second time? Kirschbaum thinks that it is indicative of Albany's humility.²¹ Bradley suggests that "Shakespeare's intention is certainly to mark the feebleness of a well-meaning but weak man."²² Albany's sensitivity is marked when, listening to Edgar's story, he says, "If there be more, more woeful, hold it in, / For I am almost ready to dissolve, / Hearing of this" (V.iii. 203-05). But to stress Albany's humility or weakness does not seem very close to the point. The first proposal of abdication shows Albany's allegiance to order, and he also expects to comfort Lear. In this sense his first proposal of abdication is positive. The hope of restoration, though Cordelia is gone, the hope of recovery from the total decay, and his belief in justice and order are all expressed in Albany's first proposal of abdication. But what does the second proposal of abdication signify? Shakespeare here emphasizes the weight of the reality of Lear's world by having Albany abdicate for the second time—the drastic change in the tone of Albany's speech, from the resolute tones of the preceding scenes to the feeble one of last

words, may emphasize the impact of Lear's death on him and the weight of reality. When he sees the bodies of Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and Lear scattered around him, he may perceive that his vision has materialized: 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself / Like monsters of the deep.' Indeed, Albany is almost always marked by irony, and his last irony is marked by Kent's refusal of his proposal. The audience is left with an impression that, to quote Ulysses once again, "an universal wolf" has wildly run through this world and wiped out the noble as well as the base.

The last scene of *King Lear* is rather "pessimistic." The presence of Albany does not free the play from being pessimistic, and the observation that Albany is a champion of the assertion of goodness and order does not adequately explain the role of Albany when we take the bitter ironies that mark him into consideration. The role of explicating Lear's cosmos is given to Albany, and the presence of Albany, a shattered man, adds another darkening element to the ending of *King Lear*.

In *King Lear* Shakespeare depicts disorder and love in the human world with consummate skill. While describing the bestial chaos of society, through the creation of Albany Shakespeare exposes and defines other characters, especially the evil ones, the events in the play, and the reality of Lear's cosmos-- Albany ironically emphasizes the bleakness of Lear's world. As the embodiment of traditional values, Albany is a touchstone of this play. And Shakespeare, to convey his dramatic vision with bitter irony and heavy impact, exploits Albany's character fully. His use of Albany is masterful, and, although Albany has been conventionally neglected, I believe that he is not of little importance.

Notes

1 Leo Kirschbaum, "Albany," *Shakespeare Survey*, 13 (1960), 20-29. Peter

- Mortenson, "The Role of Albany," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 16 (1965), 217-225.
- 2 Mortenson, p.224.
- 3 Kirschbaum, p.29.
- 4 "The first lines tell us that Lear's mind is beginning to fail with age. Formerly he had perceived how different were the characters of Albany and Cornwall, but now he seems either to have lost this perception or to be unwisely ignoring it." A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed., (London:Macmillan & Co., 1914), P281.
- 5 Quotations are all taken from Alfred Harbage, ed. *William Shakespeare The Complete Works* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969).
- 6 Robert B. Heilman, *This Great Stage* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), p.258.
- 7 D.A.Traversi, *An Approach To Shakespeare*, rev. 3rd ed. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1969), P.145.
- 8 J.A.Barrish & M. Waingorw, " 'Service' in *King Lear*," *SQ*, 9 (1958), p.350.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.352.
- 10 See E.M.W.Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956).
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.7.
- 12 William M. Elton, *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1968), p.229.
- 13 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of King Lear* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p.233.
- 14 John D. Rosenberg, "King Lear and His Comforters" *Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), p.138.
- 15 "Gloster and Albany are the two neutral characters of the tragedy." Bradley, p.293.

- 16 Heilman, p.259.
- 17 Paul N. Siegel, "Adversity and the Miracle of Love in *King Lear*," *SQ*, 6 (1955), p.332.
- 18 John Rosenberg, p.144.
- 19 John Shaw, "*King Lear*: The final Lines," *Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), p.265.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p.266.
- 21 Kirschbaum, p.29.
- 22 Bradley, p.247.

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