

of the good and the wicked, it seems as if it is the supernatural powers that are warring and the human characters their mere instruments. By monstrosities of hate, jealousy, filial impiety, by the rapidity and enormity of crime, the author seeks to make us feel with what a fearful energy evil inspires its agents, and how much more strong and active hate is than love.

Lear, King of Britain, had three daughters; Goneril, wife to the Duke of Albany; Regan, wife to the Duke of Cornwall; and Cordelia, unmarried. The old king, laden with years of care, resolved to abdicate the throne and with that intent called his three daughters to him to know from their own lips which of them loved him best, that he might divide his kingdom among them according to their affection for him. Goneril, the eldest, declared she loved him better than words could wield the matter, and so well counterfeited affection that the simple king bestowed upon her a third of his kingdom; Regan declared that all other joys were dead compared with the love she bore him, and was rewarded with another third. But Cordelia, disgusted with the hollow flattery of her sisters, although she really loved her father, which they did not, replied simply that she loved him as a daughter should, no more, no less. At this the king became exasperated, renounced this seemingly proud daughter, and divided her portion between the other two, reserving only that he should be maintained by them with attendance of a hundred knights and the state of a king. The King of France accepted Cordelia all penniless as she was, dowered only with her father's curse. Only one courtier, Kent, raised his voice against such a preposterous disposal of the kingdom, and for his thanks was banished on pain of death. No sooner was Cordelia gone than the two wily sisters began to show their true colours. Before Lear had spent the first month with Goneril she cut off fifty of his followers and became so tyrannical toward him that he flew into a rage and went with his train to Regan. Here matters were no better, and he soon discovered they were in secret compact to persecute him. Each sought to be more cruel than the other in stinting and insulting him, and they finally shut their doors

in his face and left him to the cruel mercy of a raging storm. In this extremity, overwhelmed with grief and anger, reason itself gave way. The faithful Kent, who in disguise had attached himself to the king as a servant, sheltered him in a hovel and in the morning transported him to Dover, hastening thence into France to get the assistance of Cordelia. Goneril and Regan, too wicked to remain true to their husbands, fixed their loves on another, and as it chanced, the same one, Edmund, son of Gloster. This bold adventurer, who courted both, was their equal in crime. The natural son of Gloster, he had disinherited his brother Edgar by misrepresentations to his father, and afterwards dispossessed the father. On the death of Cornwall, Regan espoused Edmund, thus arousing the jealousy of Goneril, who, when Edmund was slain, and her own treachery discovered, made away with Regan by poison, and herself with the knife. In the battle in which Cordelia sought to reinstate Lear both were taken. Cordelia was put to death and Lear died of grief embracing her.

Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are the three evil geniuses of the action, and lest the depravity of the two sisters seem too great to be real, let us prepare for it by first contemplating that of Edmund.

If it is true that God is fond of taking the weak things of earth to do his work, it is equally true that the devil is more covetous of the strong as his ministers, and in Edmund it proved a happy choice. The energy of evil found in him a very mobile subject, one in whom it would be rather accelerated than checked. To a commanding person, a mind strong, active, of consummate courage and great energy, he added the consideration of noble blood. Naturally enough for one so gifted, his besetting sin is pride, and it is this vice that is the root of all evil in him. Shakespeare has nicely managed the development of Edmund's criminality to show us the energy with which evil, beginning in this single vice so forces itself through his whole nature that at last he is its slave and is driven to ever greater crime until he is hurled headlong to his own perdition. His pride of blood is poisoned and turned into guilt by the shame of his birth and its consequent dis-