

King Lear Part IIb

So, you get this, guy goes on television, "I got three daughters, and I'm saving for when they get married." He's going to spend, you know. He has a special account at Citibank, or some such thing. And he's going to do this, and do that, and boar's head and this, and wine, and tomorrow morning, they're all broke, you know.

All marriage meant, was that there is a legal recognition that that man and that woman belong to each other, *inter pertinent*.. I wonder if the infants love their infancy, and adults, their adultery?

Anyway he [Edmund] is a bastard. Custom is to treat bastards badly. Is custom the true basis of Law? In English law it is. In French law it is. German law it is. Should it be, Shakespeare says? Now who's saying custom should be? In England [].. Sir Henry Maine. Henry Maine is the man who said that progressive societies move from status to contract. The woman in 1100 BC or AD, the woman in your kitchen was cooking for you because of status, she's a serf, or an *esne*, (servant, slave) E-S-N-E. That's why she's cooking there. In 1986, she's cooking there because you're going to pay her, it's a contract. The woman's status [is contractor.]

But the key fellow for your purposes is Savigny. S-A-V-I-G-N-Y. Now it's a French name, but he's German. And he believed in what is called *Volksgeist*. You heard of that? Custom brings out the spirit of a people, *Volksgeist*. And therefore, custom should be the basis of all law because it expresses the people's innate feelings. So law is customary, says Savigny. And German Law should be customary, so should English law be customary. French law, whatever law you want. Don't laugh at it. Why do you think they drive in Britain on the left side of the road, and in America the right side? Custom. Why do you think you wore the veil when you're getting married? There's no law saying that, or wear white? Custom. Don't, I don't agree with them, I'm saying, but don't laugh at them, see where they're coming from. Because they're going to do what Edmund Burke did. Edmund Burke is one of the most despicable, contemptible intellectuals you could ever meet. He said: "If something still exists, it must have had something good about it, that it still exists." He's a conservative, you see, that's the origin of conservatism. "Let what will be, be." You know that stupid song by Rogers & Hammerstein? "Somewhere in my deepest childhood, I must have done something good?" (*The Sound of Music*) Some guy going to the gallows, robbed this bank, killed this one there - but somewhere in his deepest childhood, must have done something good. Burke believed that, leave institutions alone. Don't interfere with them. The fact that they exist so long means that custom has approved of them. And there must be something germane, good about them. No change, don't change.

So, I say to you all this and make this excursion into jurisprudence, to get you that Shakespeare's arguing heavily against custom here. It isn't as Coleridge, and Charles Lamb, and Hazlitt would have you believe, That he [Shakespeare's] saying "Look, bastardy is a bad thing, this chap is a bastard, so he is an evil man, like Richard the Third." And he was, he is a villain in the play. That's not what Shakespeare is saying. He's highlighting the fact that, he could have made him the younger son, and have him behave badly, but bastards have

played an important part in succession battles. There's the Duke of Monmouth [James], who led a rebellion [1685], you know. Later on, 50 years later [than?] they get to the throne, Charles and those guys[], and bastards still trying to get through. In fact the Duke of Paris is still trying to prove he's not a bastard. As far as I understand. [] It was alleged he was a bastard, I don't know...

So, here is Edmund, and he's shrewd. What he does, he does what Iago does in *Othello*. The lawful son is Edgar, the father is Gloucester. So he works to make Gloucester fallout with Edgar. How'd he do it? A letter. Same old technique. "This letter says, when old men get old, you should let them become wards of the sons. Let the sons run their estate." [using the letter Edmund says to Gloucester] "This is the handwriting of your son Edgar." He arranged a conversation. Gloucester overhears a conversation between himself and Edgar. Same technique as used in *Othello*. You hear him speak. He says, "Run, run!" cuts himself, pretending wounds, the whole malarkey. He [Edmund] ends up getting the two sisters, Goneril and Regan, both to love him. And he don't love either, you know. And in the end Goneril poisons Regan, and kills herself, for him, and he don't love either.

Have you seen a fish, a bowl of goldfish or some kind of fish? They have three fish and two are fighting. One is leaning on the side, while they fight, 'cause when they finish, A's gonna kill B, but A's tired, then he will kill A, you see?

He organized the event. In the end, Goneril kills Regan, she kills herself, he organizes that Cordelia is hanged in prison, yes, and Lear ends up dying, to encompass it, it's a beautiful thing to see acted. Cordelia in his hands, and his whole world is shattered, you know? One man organizes all this evil. One man. What you should, when you read the play study the techniques Edmund uses to cause all these events to flow, and ask yourself, "Why were they successful?" And ask yourself further: "Are there any contemporary counterparts?" And they are. And look around you, too. Who is all this, interpreting, who is all this carrying the news? How is the battle going, how is it this happened? Edmund!

Who is the common factor? So he is, to my mind, he [Edmund] and Iago are two of the best, far more better, far better manipulators than Cassius, Cassius in Julius Caesar....He's Bush Leagues, man, these guys are Major League! This is Major League here. Major League! When he is finished the whole damn kingdom is in uproar. Whole damn kingdom...
End. Part II