

# Salvation, Perdition, and Redemption

The Genre of King Lear and His Three Daughters

Maureen Elizabeth Nalepa

Senior Honors Thesis in English

Professor Holly Pickett

April 30, 2014

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Chapter One: The Anonymous Play .....	13
Chapter Two: Shakespeare .....	34
Chapter Three: Tate .....	60
Conclusion .....	85
Bibliography .....	91

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis.  
Maureen Elizabeth Nalepa

### Acknowledgments

I simply cannot thank Holly Pickett, my advisor, enough. She was my first English professor at W&L, and over the last four years, she has been a mentor without comparison. She put up with me when I missed deadlines and when I completely switched my topic. She has, quite simply, been the best advisor ever.

Genelle Gertz graciously agreed to be my second reader, which was especially nice considering she knew what she was getting into, being my 299 professor, and still wanted the task. All of my professors have been supportive at W&L, but I would like to give shout outs to Eduardo Velasquez, Shane Lynch, and Howard Pickett, all of whom have helped me shape my identity as an adult. Chris Gaul also deserves mention because he was the first person to assign *King Lear* to me, and thus began a four year journey with the play.

My friends have seen both this thesis and me through a whole slew of issues in this past year, and none of them ever questioned why I was doing this. Becca's patience and friendship was particularly tried this year, but my roommates, Kaitlyn and Shaun, I suspect would also cast themselves as long suffering. Sydney has remained my steadfast English-major friend through all of this, and both Jannelle and Austin were vital in the last few steps to the finish line.

While I started my studies of this play in high school, the encouragement I found freshman year from Emma, Jean, Christian, and the rest of Shakespeare Society was invaluable. In my sophomore year, especially, the friends who followed me into my own production of *King Lear* taught me humility and helped me discover the different ways that this play unfolds

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, father, and grandmother for their support throughout the years that enabled me to get to and through college. My sister, Caroline, has been a pillar in my life for the past twenty years, and I cannot find the words to say thank you enough.



## Introduction

Now whenever we go to the movie theater (the most likely setting for this scenario), we praise an adaptation for its faithfulness to the source material. We conceive of a story as something Platonic, something that can be passed on from telling to telling and medium to medium. Even the word adaptation suggests this kind of legacy, where the story is modified to fit the medium, and if the new creators stray from this, we tend to view the movie as inferior. Adaptation becomes an act of interpretation and translation. Performances that stray from the standard seem sloppy and weak rather than particularly innovative. Especially when adapting Shakespeare, audiences expect a level of fidelity to the text. We always expect directors to justify why they moved the play to Japan or quasi-modern Vienna.

Shakespeare held himself to no such fidelity when he was writing his plays, and in no place is this more evident than in *King Lear*. While the first three acts of the play borrow liberally from previous versions of the tale, Shakespeare radically changes the ending of the play, reforming an ambiguous ending to make a tragedy, albeit one unsettling in its own way. While even some of Shakespeare's greatest fans could not endorse the new ending, today, *Lear* stands as one of the greatest plays in the canon.

While the ending of the earliest sources was less dramatic, it was neither illogical nor unbelievable. It also had the benefit of being "historically accurate," or at least seeming to be history. At the turn of the seventeenth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1135) was considered historical fact. Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (first published 1577) also included the story in its retelling of British history. For all that the commonly available written records told, *Lear* was part of the train of monarchs leading to the modern era. In changing the ending of the play, then, Shakespeare was

rewriting history in a bold fashion. This is not merely a question of characterization, like *Richard III*, or condensation for dramatic purposes, like *Macbeth*, but rather full revisionism on Shakespeare's part. These revisions were not met with universal acclaim by later generations of Shakespeareans, either. Rather, depending on the particular point in time, the ending is either seen as *Lear's* greatest strength or its biggest weakness, to the point where some generations have thought it impossible to perform.

First, however, we must track how King Lear made his way from the twelfth century to the seventeenth. It is only then that we can begin to see how the original plot formed.

#### *Historia Regum Britanniae*

In 1135, Geoffrey of Monmouth collected and blended history and legend. His book is the source for Merlin, but it also one of the first large histories of the British Isles. There is no source before this time period (Satin 445), and it seems that Lear is one of the fictional episodes that Monmouth weaved into his narrative rather than a piece of Welsh history. That is not to say that this pre-Christian story was completely without ties to reality, however. One theory posits that Monmouth was inspired by the life of the Empress Matilda.

At the same time that Monmouth was writing the story of Lear, Matilda, the daughter of Henry I, was attempting to gain her inheritance. The only royal child who survived her father, Matilda was her father's heir because she was the dynastic link between her father's and her mother's families (Beem 2). She had the support of her father's nobles while she was alive, and she was quite capable in her own right (Beem 3-4). Matilda's fate changed, as Beem writes, "When Henry I died rather suddenly in December 1135... Matilda was caught off guard, while a

number of circumstances came together to prevent her from gaining her inheritance” (6). Instead, the throne would pass to her cousin (Beem 7).

This tale carries a thematic relevance to the story of Lear. After all, the initial conflict in the tale is not Cordelia’s refusal to perform the love test, but rather the underlying situation and threat that causes Lear to devise the test at all. Lear, from Monmouth onwards, finds that “male issue [is] denied to him, his only children being three daughters named Gonorilla, Regan, and Cordeilla” (448). The kingdom is in a precarious situation because there is no clear male heir, and so Lear decides to settle the matter of inheritance and succession as much as he can before he dies, “that future strife/ may be prevented” (F 1.1.44-5). This is exactly the kind of political instability that Henry I was attempting to avoid, even though he refused to crown his successor while he was alive.

The initial plot device of the love test also has a feudal quality to it. When analyzing the Shakespearean play, Leon Harold Craig points out that by making his daughters publically swear allegiance to him, Lear is also ensuring that his brothers-in-law have made public vows. The nature of the love test is not exclusive to the play, however, and looking at the action here has additional implications on Lear’s character. It makes him pragmatic, as Craig holds, but it also increases the callousness of the action of holding this public trial of his daughters’ love.

After the love test, other plot elements that originate from Geoffrey include the marriages of the daughters to Albany, Cornwall, and France, who takes Cordeilla even when she is dowerless. The moralistic themes of the original source here emphasize the foreign king’s love of Cordeilla’s beauty. Geoffrey writes:

When Aganippus learned this, because he was on fire with love of the damsel, he sent again to King Leir saying that he had enough of gold and silver and other possessions, for

one-third of Gaul was his, and that he wished to marry the damsel only that he might have sons by her to inherit his hands. So at last the deal was struck... (449)

Monmouth's language here invokes both a fairy tale and a historical account. These tones, then, are the primary reasons Geoffrey's motive feels like a lesson rather than a simple tale. The moralistic fiber embedded here is fully realized in the anonymous play, but Shakespeare will not exactly take it out. Rather, Shakespeare plays with the idea of an internal moral compass, as if he is gently mocking the idea that simple platitudes can be extracted from stories.

After Cordeilla leaves, Monmouth sets out a course of action that will be familiar to any audience of the Shakespearean play. Albany and Cornwall seize all real power from Lear, but allow him a retinue of knights. Slowly, the behavior of these knights drive a wedge between Leir and his elder daughters. Leir is finally reduced to one knight, and at this point, he begins to consider Cordeilla, though he knows he scorned her greatly. Leir here is proactive, however, choosing to go to France to make amends with Cordeilla rather than simply storming out without a purpose.

Cordeilla immediately gives her father money in order to set right his appearance, and she and her husband agree to invade Britain on his behalf. Leir leads this army successfully, and the ungrateful daughters are vanquished. After some time, Leir and the French king die, leaving Cordeilla to rule. However, her nephews "[are] greatly angered that Britain should be ruled by a woman" (452), and they overthrow her. Cordeilla then kills herself in defeat.

The narrative is a study of cause and effect, something Shakespeare will meditate on in great detail. Here, however, there seems to be only one reason for everything. This is partially due to the tone of the piece, which emphasizes progression, and partially because very few



scenes are depicted in any detail. Rather, while Geoffrey does tell a complete plot, there is not a complete story. Monmouth will leave such dramatization to other pens.

*The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*

It is unknown if Shakespeare picked up Geoffrey's tome, but we do know that Holinshed's historical account, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, and specifically its 1587 edition, were sources for the history plays as well as *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline*, and so it seems reasonable to assume that Shakespeare read the story there. Holinshed was also most likely the primary source for the anonymous play as well. Holinshed's major contribution is the beginnings of language that Shakespeare will use, but he also fleshes out some of the details.

One of these new details is a specific time in history. Holinshed dates the story's events in "the year of the world 3105, at what time Joas reigned in Judea" (453). This translates roughly to "749-694 B.C." (453). Like Geoffrey, Holinshed places the action on the river Soar in the town of Caerlier/Leicester (448, 453). Aganippus, Cordelia's husband, is not a king in the Holinshed but rather "one of the twelve knights that ruled Gallia in those days" (454). These little details help to focus the story, and they contribute to a tone that at once feels more historical yet also more moralistic.

Holinshed's greater contribution, however, is in the language. He creates voices for both Gonorilla and Regan in the love test. Gonorilla says she "[loves Leir] more than her own life, which by right and reason should be most dear unto her" (453). This is echoed nicely both in the anonymous play, where Gonorill says, "I prize my love to you at such a rate,/ I think my life inferior to my love" (Leir 1.3.236-7), and in Shakespeare, where Goneril declares, "I do love you

more than words can wield the matter,/ .../ No less than life” (Lear Q 1.1.48, 51). Holinshed, then, gives us a direct reason to dislike Gonorilla and Regan from the beginning, for their protestations are so obviously over the top. It is still hard to keep the two of them straight, but at least here we can see their oiliness in its true form.

A piece of language that will become a major theme later is Holinshed’s editorial remark on the sisters’ behavior. He writes, “In the end, such was the unkindness, or (as I may say) the unnaturalness which [Leir] found in his two daughters” (454). Nature in all its forms is proudly on display in Lear. We see this in the speeches of Edmund, in the storm of Act Three, and in a central question of the play, that of nature versus nurture. Is Edmund the bastard, or natural son, doomed to be evil? How much of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia is their natures, and how much is their nurture? In this way, Shakespeare is not making a complete turnaround but rather engaging with his sources in a new arrangement. How Shakespeare takes an aside and turns it into a fully fleshed-out theme becomes emblematic of the way he introduces moral ambiguity into his play.

### *Arcadia*

Sir Phillip Sidney did not write a version of King Lear’s story in 1590, but he did write *Arcadia*, which is the source of the Gloucester subplot. The basic plot is there, including the blinding of the father. Only the ending is different because the fate of the father is left unknown. However, Shakespeare will change the names of the sons, no doubt to play off of the similarities between Edgar and Edmund. This subplot is a natural complement to the main narrative because the father-child relationship is explored in depth in both. This addition, though, will change the narrative dramatically in both Shakespeare and Tate. Ironically, the two authors will use the same story to fill out very different genres. Shakespeare will entangle the two stories so as to

create a tragedy; Tate decides to transform the relationship between the subplot and the main plot in order to make a romance and comedy. Just as the connections between the structure and events of the plots are mirrors of each other, then, the use of this subplot will reflect the overall structure of the play.

One minor source for Lear is Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* (1590) Even though Spenser does not add much to the story, he is the first writer to use the spelling Cordelia, which creates a pun on the idea of the ideal heart. Ultimately, however, almost all of the major themes are present in Geoffrey of Monmouth's and Holinshed's versions. Once these pieces are in place, it becomes the task of the anonymous writer, Shakespeare, and Tate to transform the play to the stage.

This thesis examines the relationship between a story and a genre. The relationship between the two is like a Chinese finger trap. Pulling on both ends at the same traps the fingers in position, but if the two people push the ends together, they are able to free themselves. In the same way, trying to separate a narrative from a genre is frustrating and reveals an incomplete picture of eight centuries of stories. However, by combing the ideas and examining them together, a new meta-structure evolves.

Through this mutually beneficial examination of plot and genre, I hope to illuminate the subtlety in Shakespeare's plays dynamics. I also want to examine the parent play and child play to Shakespeare's play, written by an anonymous playwright and Nahum Tate, respectively. Besides presenting their own difficulties in generic assignments, these two plays offer a good idea of the "What if" scenario where Shakespeare decided to push the play towards tragedy. The beginnings of these three plays have so much in common, the radical differences in the endings

is all the more surprising. The anonymous author will attempt to find a moral and a purpose in the play, saying that it is never too late for forgiveness and salvation. Shakespeare will abandon this almost completely in order to hold his characters of their actions, even in the case of minor mistakes. This effectively condemns the characters to perdition, at least here on Earth, if they can find peace in the afterlife. Tate, however, will take the middle road and look at how a play can offer redemption to characters while still appreciating the world that Shakespeare created with so many details. Meanwhile, none of these plays could be considered to have the Truth.

Ultimately, this thesis will enrich both understanding of the story and genre. It is my hope that the reader think critically about the genre of this and other plays in the future, examining how the pairing works or fails. In doing so, I believe the reader will gain a better understanding and vocabulary in which to discuss these phenomena.

## Chapter One: The Anonymous Play

Not much is known about the author of the anonymous play *The True Chronicle of King Leir*. This play, most likely based on Holinshed's *Chronicles* rather than *Historia Regum Britanniae*, was first performed somewhere around 1594, but its first publication date was not until 1606, after Shakespeare's version of the play had graced the stage. Shakespeare himself was busy writing like *Titus Andronicus*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet* at around the same time.

Still, Shakespeare was mostly likely aware of the play, and it very well could have been his primary source, even though he obviously had access to his own copy of Holinshed. Robert Adger Law, a scholar of the anonymous play, actually argued that a scene from the anonymous play, the scene in which Leir and his companion are confronted by a messenger sent from Gonorill to kill them, had a deep influence on Act I, scene iv of *Richard III*, or Clarence's death.<sup>1</sup> Even in the implausible scenario where Shakespeare had neither seen nor heard of the other play, it would still be significant because it represents the first attempt by a playwright to move the story from the historical chronicle to the stage.

The stage poses numerous difficulties which any self-respecting play must overcome, and which become doubly difficult when the source material for the play is a historical chronicle rather than a more dramatic work. Theater engages audiences on a different level than the written word. A successful play is performable because it engages the audience both verbally and visually. It also provides meaningful parts for actors to inhabit, an increased purpose for specific

---

<sup>1</sup> This argument, which I will not describe in detail here, does rely on *King Leir* being written before *Richard III*, which is not inconceivable, though the traditional dates have *Richard III* before *Leir*.

times and spaces, and a deeper emotional connection with the characters involved. A play is fundamentally about immediacy, a quality that a historical chronicle, being a record rather than strictly a story, often lacks. A play holds the audience in suspense, and, at the end of a tragedy, one can feel as if the world has burnt to the ground; a student of history knows better.

The more important difference between the media of chronicle and drama, however, is the driving force of the narrative. A chronicle's main mechanism is time. With its litany-like progression, a chronicle depersonalizes the action. The rise and fall of individual kings seems less important when time is measured in centuries, and so just as time itself becomes the plot, nations are the characters. D. R. Woolf sums up a popular argument as to why the chronicle declined in the sixteenth century as, "its providential mode of explanation had ceased to provide a satisfactory interpretation of the unfolding of events now perceived as having immediate, contingent causes, human or natural" (322). He then goes on to point out that while the chronicle ceased to be written in the same way as it had been, the medium "*dissolve(s)* into a variety of genres, such as... historical drama, verse, and prose fiction (entertainment)" (323). Chronicle's shortcomings in storytelling could not be resolved within its own medium, and this partially led to its abandonment.<sup>2</sup>

Where the chronicle was failing (because its narrative lacked motivations), the play was well-suited to thrive. Plays are all about motivation and understanding characters in a visceral, nearly tactile way. The actor on the stage brings to life a character, personifying abstract goals and decisions. The characters or the situations in which they find themselves are the primary

---

<sup>2</sup> Woolf's main thesis is that technological changes (such as the printing press) and social ones (like the increasing literacy rate) are the true reasons that chronicle fell apart because they provided other avenues for audiences to digest the same information. However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is more useful to talk about chronicle as a predecessor for the historical play and as a source for histories, tragedies and romances.

pushers in the story. These individuals and circumstances combine to form a plot which comes from the dramatic entanglement of opposing energies. The play moves forward, up, and down as these forces fight out their differences. Events are no longer related temporally, but rather causally. Act Five happens after Act One because the events in Act One caused those of Act Five, not simply because Act Five happened historically after Act One. This is why, in his other plays based off of chronicle sources, Shakespeare can eliminate a decade without the audience feeling like there is something missing, but if a chronicle did the same time, it would be a failure because it does not meet its basic expectations as a record.

*The True Chronicle of King Leir and his three daughters*, the anonymous play, lays a foundation for many of the devices of drama through its translation of the story into dialogue and actions to be performed by now-distinguishable characters with their own motivations, as all plays must do. However, the anonymous play becomes more relevant when considering the much more difficult task of shaping a story. In a chronicle, the author does not need to be concerned about a beginning, a middle, or an end because history is much larger than a single incident. In a play, the story must be able to stand on its own.

The anonymous author will rely on a central moral framework based on Christian morality to support the narrative. Even though Leir would predate a Christian Britain, the anonymous playwright will reward the meek and the humble while punishing those that are greedy and selfish. In short, a character in the universe of this play may be saved if she or he aligns herself or himself with Christian values.

The character most associated with saintliness in the play is Cordella. In many ways, her story resembles that of an actual saint. The most common pathway to female sainthood was a young princess-maiden who refuses to marry because she wants to remain a virgin. Typically,

this princess finds herself persecuted for her faith and killed, or she becomes a nun.<sup>3</sup> While Cordelia subverts this general trend by happily marrying, she still initially refuses her father's will on philosophical grounds. Even within her marriage, it is clear that she is the saintlier character, which resembles to some extent the story of Clotilde. As David Hugh Farmer writes, a powerful pagan war-leader married Clotilde because he was "impressed by her beauty and wisdom." In that marriage, Clotilde is instrumental in converting her new husband and therefore her kingdom. The play gives this same sense that Cordella is going to be a good queen because of her pious nature.

Cordella's saintliness is more specific than a vague resemblance between her plot and the lives of a few saints, however; she clearly demonstrates a Christian morality in the majority of her actions. She explicitly refers to a Christian god, for instance, when she says:

Now whither, poor forsaken, shall I go  
 When mine own sisters triumph in my woe?  
 But unto Him which doth protect the just,  
 In Him will poor Cordella put her trust. (1.3.324-7)

The idea of being forsaken by one's people is often a theme in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, and the language of protection is particularly striking. Cordella's appeal, while not a direct quote from a biblical text, is evocative of the Beatitudes of Matthew and the general

---

<sup>3</sup> According to David Hugh Farmer, Saint Ursula follows the death-before-marriage model, and Mildgyth, the third daughter in her royal family, became a nun rather than marrying. Christina (Theodora) of Markyate, Delphine of Provence, and Hedwig managed to keep their virginities after marriage. On the other hand, Elizabeth of Hungary was well known for her marital bliss and her charity as queen, lest it be thought that only virgins became saints. Even among the virgins, not all were adverse to love. Dwyn, in fact, is the patron saint of lovers, despite her own refusal to marry.



language of comfort that the books offers. Even though the play is set in a pre-Christian Britain, the idea of salvation is clearly in play.

The anachronisms continue, with minor oaths and references to God, but the next major religious scene is also Cordella's. Act 2, scene 6 is fully committed to showing Cordella's devotion. She thanks God for her change in fortune, and even speaks of forgiveness for her family. "Yet God forgive," she says, "both him and you [her sisters] and me,/ Even as I do in perfect charity" (2.6.1066-7). The language makes clear her religious devotion in the way that she forgives those who have wronged her, and thus her change in fortune is merited. She is rewarded for her constant faith that she would be protected with her marriage to the king of France, a greater position than her father would have her achieve, as he wanted her to marry the king of Ireland. Even so, Cordella does not think her faith has been strong enough, as she begins the soliloquy, "I have been over-negligent today,/ In going to the temple of my God,/ To render thanks for all His benefits" (2.6.1038-40). Cordella is, in many ways, an unattainable ideal that would fit right in with a morality play.

Because of her strong faith, bad things, outside of the initial premise of the play, do not happen to Cordella, and the wrongs that her father commits in the first scene are redressed tenfold. Cordella rejects her father's plan and his implied husband, Ireland, but gains in Gallia a more powerful and more devoted spouse. Gallia is a mirror who reflects Cordella's goodness. In recognizing her moral fiber, Gallia reaffirms Cordella's decisions and becomes her reward. The role of his character peaks in this play, and Gallia gains his own motivations and sidekick in order to tackle this role. He thus becomes the greatest success of the anonymous playwright.

. In earlier versions of the story, Gallia serves merely as a plot device to marry Cordella off to someone who has the capacity to raise his own army in his wife's service. Shakespeare's

France will only be present for one scene, and his absence later in the play will be hastily explained in a few lines. Tate writes the character out completely, instead creating a romantic subplot between Cordelia and Edgar, one of Shakespeare's original characters. In *Leir*, however, Gallia has multiple scenes, clear motivations, and even a serving man who is one of the best characters in the play. Gallia's function within the plot is still essentially the same, but he becomes an active character who moves the plot forward onstage. He also serves as a foil to both Leir and the husbands of Cordella's sisters.

In the play, France walks onto the stage in the first act, conversing with his nobles about how he plans to see the fabled virtue of the princesses of Britain. While doing so, however, he tells his servants to act as though he is common. Gallia, then, seeks beauty and perfection both internally and externally, and the audience can already begin to see how he would fit well with Cordella. When, in his next scene, he falls in love with Cordella, it is not for political or personal gain but rather because she has been unjustly scorned. He is, in essence, rooting endearingly for the underdog. His love also confirms Cordella's world view, that marriage ought to be something born out of mutual love rather than political reasons. Most of his actions then stem from a desire, not to gain power, but to right the wrongs that have been wrought against Cordella and Leir. He selflessly offers half his power to Leir in order to see the old man reunited with his new wife. As the only king who has not given up his power, Gallia is the most powerful character. His alignment with Cordella and then Leir shows that this is a universe where right equals might. He becomes the engine through which the plot moves towards its happy conclusion, then, because Cordella and Leir could not win without his help. Leir even cites this as one of the reasons he abdicates in favor of Gallia at the conclusion of the play (5.8.2564).

Just as Cordella and her group are morally just, Gonorill and Ragan are quite obviously corrupt. While the anonymous playwright often fails to distinguish the personalities of Gonorill and Ragan, the two of them together come across as crass, petty, and scheming women. They stand opposite their sister, Cordella, from the very moment that they enter onto the stage if for no other reason than they can. The playwright chooses to give them not greed but jealousy as their primary motivation, again echoing the narrative convention where the dark is envious of the light. When discussing their actions after the love test and Cordella's subsequent disownment, the sisters say:

Gonorill: Faith, sister, what moves you to bear her such good will?

Ragan: In truth, I think, the same that moves you;

Because she doth surpass us both in beauty.

Gonorill: Beshrew your fingers, how right you can guess:

I tell you true, it cuts me to the heart. (1.4.470-4)

As Joseph Sabin, an editor of the text says, "The motivation here is childishly simple" (471). This simplicity combined with their nearly identical nature makes it very hard for the audience to take the two seriously, even though their actions are disproportionately cruel and impactful. Their characters are more caricatures rather than fully fleshed beings, but this merely raises the fairytale-esque nature of the play.

The anonymous playwright's goal throughout all of this is to lean into the archetypal elements of the story, rather than to subvert them as Shakespeare might. The original layout of the story is already filled with such classic fairytale motifs—three daughters, wicked sisters, a kingdom, misunderstandings leading to misfortune—that it is natural to tease them out. At the same time, the Christian imagery enshrines the idea of the theater as a place for moral

instruction. The play may be better linked, then, to the morality plays than the plays that were showing contemporarily on the stage. The author clearly intends to both teach and entertain in a combination of the secular and the sacred.

The balance that the playwright is trying to find between the good lesson and the good story is what makes the fairytale feeling as the play gives true villains and protagonists to root against and for, as it were. There is a kind of pleasure in seeing a villain get her comeuppance. Gonorill and Ragan are deliciously evil in their crassness and pettiness precisely because they are over-the-top caricatures. They swear, they take very little except their evil schemes seriously, and they commit horribly outrageous acts like disowning their father and then attempting to kill him, an exact reversal of the normal roles in the parent-child relationship.

Not only do the villains play their parts well, the precise goodness of the protagonists helps the audience to feel comfortable with their victory. The audience can trust that Leir has learned his lesson because he has reaccepted Cordella and the light that she embodies. This is clear in the explicit religious references he makes when he reunites with her. Cordella kneels before her father (a sign of her devotion to a man who humiliated her, and therefore her humility), and he says,

The blessing, which the God of Abraham gave  
Unto the tribe of Judah, light on thee,  
And multiply thy days, that thou mayest see  
Thy children's children prosper after thee.  
Thy faults, which are just none that I do know,  
God pardon on high, and I forgive below. (4.5.2257-62)

Even though Leir was misled by the schemes of his elder daughters against the youngest, he comes back and gives Cordella the kind of blessing he could never give the others. It is an act of forgiveness, as he says, but also one of reconciliation. Only when he is able to see that Cordella was right is Leir truly healed.

In tying all this religious imagery together in the final scene, the play takes a clear stance for traditional morality winning over all. “Thanks be to God,” the King says, “your foes are overcome./ And you again possessed of your right” (5.8.2553-4). Again, the playwright is working in the idea of God’s will bringing about the restoration of the kingdom. Leir acknowledges that Cordella truly loved him, and that the love she had for him was evident in her original answer. Virtue, modesty, and fidelity are upheld, and therefore rewarded. So strong is this thread of order throughout the play that never does it feel quite in doubt that everything will work out fine. This Leir lives in a very just universe indeed.

This lies in stark contrast to the black versus grey morality that Shakespeare will employ. Though it is a spiritual play that explores the idea of a greater power that may or may not have influence over the characters, *Lear* offers no catechism to the audience. Nature, not the Christian God, is the background deity of Shakespeare’s play, and its methodology is opaque. Shakespeare’s world is that much bleaker because it does not offer rewards to the characters, only punishments.

Forgiveness is such a strong motive and theme in *King Lear*, with Cordella freely offering it and Leir learning to forgive both himself and his youngest daughter. No one truly apologizes in *King Lear*, however, not in a way that truly matters and alters the course of the play. Instead, characters find themselves remorseful without the ability to act on such feelings. Lear comes to realize the grave insult he dealt to Cordelia only when his older daughters have cast him out and

he is alone on the heath, but Cordelia is not with him to share in his discovery. When he is reunited with her, Lear still is unable to effectively communicate his apologies, having descended into madness and senility as he has at that point. Lear's moment of enlightenment and reuniting with Cordelia is sweet and heartbreaking, but it is not a true apology. After struggling to recognize his surroundings, Lear says to Cordelia:

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.  
I know you do not love me; for your sisters  
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:  
You have some cause, they have not. (4.6.71-74)

He is almost drowning in his regret. Cordelia hushes him to protect him. In contrast, in the anonymous play, their reunion is all apology on top of apology:

LEIR: And now I am constrained to seek relief  
Of her, to whom I have been so unkind;  
Whose censure, if it do award me death,  
I must confess she pays me but my due:  
But if she show a loving daughter's part,  
It comes of God and her, not my desert.  
CORDELLA: No doubt she will, I dare be sworn she will...  
Condemn not all, because of other's crime:  
But look, dear father, look behold and see  
Thy loving daughter speaketh unto thee.  
LEIR: O, stand thou up, it is my part to kneel,  
And ask forgiveness for my former faults.

CORDELLA: O, if you wish, I should enjoy my breath,

Dear father rise, or I receive my death. (4.4.2214-20, 2227-33)

Because they are able to have this true reconciliation, Leir is able to move forward from his sins in a way that Lear is not.

Another thwarted apology in *King Lear* is that of Gloucester. This time, at least, Gloucester does have the opportunity to fully express his remorse to his son. However, as Edgar still has not revealed his identity and Gloucester is by this point blind, Gloucester is not able to have the kind of peace that comes with being forgiven. Once again, the child in the relationship denies the father a true apology in order to focus on the more immediate concern of staying alive. Gloucester is figuratively and literally blind to Edgar's love for him, a concept highly antithetical to the Christian morality that the anonymous play creates.

The ultimate failure to repent in Shakespeare's play, however, is Edmund's apology. It is in this that we see the play is truly without salvation because theology would suggest that even a deathbed confession would be enough to save someone's soul. Yet Edmund's last minute confession that the warrant is signed on Cordelia's and Lear's lives is not enough to save Cordelia from hanging or Lear from heartbreak. This is part of what makes *King Lear* so bleak; the good cannot, despite multiple fully-felt attempts, overcome evil.

The anonymous playwright is not writing *King Lear*, though. Its full forgiveness shines a redeeming light on humanity which is in keeping with its moral construct. While this construct robs the play of many classic comedic elements, especially because the playwright enforces a very serious tone on the play, no one can deny that the play has the much happier ending.

At the same time, *Leir's* author very consciously makes the play about marriage as much as it is about morality, therefore adding another comedic framing element to the otherwise dry

history. In the historic chronicle, marriage is a duty to the daughters and an assignment to Leir. Here, however, Cordella refuses to marry simply for political gains. She makes a rather modern point instead; she will not marry unless she loves the man. In declaring so, she taps into another deep vein of narrative devices, enough though it is not fully realized—the thwarted lovers. This declaration asserts her agency which thus encourages the audience to root for her. By calculatedly tapping into the comedic structure, the anonymous playwright is again giving the audience characters that they can care for.

In the original history, the only time that love enters into the equation is when Leir asks his daughters which of them holds him in highest regard. Leir gives the same reason—the division of the kingdom—for the test in both the earlier source and the play, but the anonymous playwright explores Leir’s motivations more fully in the opening lines of the play.

They are strongly patriarchal. In the first scene, he confesses that he feels he is not able to raise his daughters adequately. He tells his counselors:

Although ourselves do dearly tender them,

Yet are we ignorant of their affairs:

For fathers best do know to govern sons;

But daughters’ steps the mother’s counsel turns. (1.1.15-18)

By his own admission, Leir feels uncomfortable with his daughters, a fact that will come to haunt him when they do not behave as he expects. As in all versions of the story, Leir does not have sons, which would ensure the peaceful transition of power, nor is his wife alive to counsel his daughters. Despite this pronouncement, Leir takes his daughters’ futures into his hands, hoping to bend them to his will. Gonorill and Ragan already have suitors, and have accepted them. Cordella, however, wishes for a husband that she loves. Leir, however, wishes to marry her off to



a homegrown prince. This is the primary motivation for the love test. He plans to ask his daughters which of them loves him most, and therefore trick Cordella into obeying him. He explains:

Then at a vantage will I take Cordella,  
 Even as she doth protest she loves me best,  
 I'll say, "Then, daughter, grant me one request,  
 To show thou lovest me as thy sisters do,  
 Accept a husband whom myself will woo." (1.1.81-85)

As a princess of the realm, Cordella's marriage is of utmost importance to Leir in order that he may establish peace for the next generation of rulers. Unlike previous versions of the tale, here the question is not of a dowry, but rather of suitor. Leir's plan is crafty but also riddled with holes. Because he intends to trick his youngest daughter into obeying him, he plays off of her loyalty and guilt in a way that seems childish. While Cordella is not in a good light because she is willfully disobeying her father, Leir's manner of forcing her hand seems extreme.

The devious nature of Gonorill and Ragan first comes out when they find a way to exploit Leir's and Cordella's stubbornness. When they find out their father's plans from Gonorill's servant, they decide to exaggerate their own feelings so that, in order to top them, Cordella will have to cross a line in her flattery that her virtues will obviously not allow her to cross.

Thus, as the play enters the scene of the love test, the audience knows the motivations of all of the major actors. While this certainly provides more material for the actors to use in their character-building at the same time that it answers any questions the audience may have about the scene, the scene is drained of dramatic tension. The audience knows what Leir is going to ask his daughters to do, and it knows what each of his daughters is going to say. Gonorill and Ragan

even go as far as to egg Leir on in his rage when Cordella has refused to play the game. They prod him as they simultaneously mock Cordella. Gonorill says, “Were you my daughter, I should scarcely brook it,” (1.3.278) while Ragan calls Cordella a “proud peacock” (1.3.279). It can be no surprise, then, that Leir blows up at his youngest daughter.

Cordella, however, gains the audience’s sympathy because her reasoning is completely fair. Leir seems Cordella’s desire for a happy marriage as secondary to his obligation and right to see her financially well-established. This becomes hypocritical because Leir himself seems to have at least enjoyed a marriage of mutual appreciation. His deliberately unequal test is actually cruel to Cordella because she is the only one who will lose if she passes it. Gonorill and Ragan know that they will marry the men that they wish to marry because their father agrees with them as to the matches. Furthermore, while they may not love their husbands, the two older sisters are happy with the bargains. Ragan even remarks on how easy her husband is to control, saying, “I rule the King of Cambria as I please” (2.4.913). Clearly, neither sister cares much for the concerns of the heart. For them, marriage is the political institution that Leir wishes them to view it as. Knowing they have nothing to lose, Gonorill and Ragan play the system in order to ensure that Cordella is left with nothing.

While Leir perceives Cordella to be the party in the wrong, the audience cannot help but notice the hypocrisy and imbalance that Leir employs. Perhaps he believes that Cordella will be able to love her new husband in time, but his language focuses on taming an unruly child rather than simply knowing what is best for her. He tells her, “True indeed, as some/ Who by disobedience short their fathers' days,/ And so would you” (1.3.296-8). He plays off of her guilt for disobeying, reducing her to a five year old rather than a woman preparing for marriage, and in doing so, Leir reveals his own immaturity.

In this way, Cordella is completely right to stand her ground and refuse to follow her father's wishes. She is standing up for her own principles which the audience can agree with. This, combined with the active plotting that her sisters employ from the second scene of the play onwards, makes Cordella a sympathetic character.

The audience then feels happy for Cordella when she finds Gallia because she sticks to her principles and gets what she wants in a marriage while still managing to satisfy what would have been her father's criteria (wealth and power). Before she agrees to marry the man, even when she doubts the identity of the palmer in front of her, Cordella asks, "Whatever you be, of high or low descent,/ All's one to me, I do request but this:/ That as I am, you will accept of me" (1.7.705-7). Even though he is already backing away from the disguise as the poor man, Cordella still wants to establish her marriage on the grounds of personal desire. It is the classic comedic motive, albeit in an odd place.

The ambiguity of Shakespeare's play takes away this motive. It is unclear from the text if Cordelia prefers Burgundy or France, and while she judges her sisters' marriages poor because they would place their father above their husbands, she does not advocate for love or free choice in the same way that Cordella does. This move towards ambiguity also complicates the audience's relationship with Cordelia because she seems to be overly proud. Cordelia gives no good reason to refuse her father's question besides her unwillingness to flatter him, and this makes her come across as a petulant child. While Lear's stripping of her dowry is extreme (and perhaps because of it), it is natural for the audience to ask why she will not just play the game. All of this goes back to the greyness of the good side's morality in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare is not presenting a morality play; the anonymous playwright is. By taking away the

reasoning and rationalization, Shakespeare is preparing the play for a much darker tone and stripping it of the comedic emphasis on love and marriage.

While the anonymous playwright leaps into the task of transitioning from page to stage, the mechanics are much rougher. Especially in the absence of stage directions, the dialogue is the scaffolding of the play. Besides using dialogue to tell the story, *Leir* embeds in the language of the play the relationships among characters, and thus gives the actors clues as to how the world of the play fits together. While the register is mostly uniform across the play, characters still address each other according to their moods or whims. In the test scene, for instance, Leir's disapproval of Cordella's answer is immediately evident. At the beginning of the scene, Leir addresses Cordella as "sweet Cordella" (1.3.220). However, as soon as Cordella refuses to play his game, his anger with her comes out through his language. Rather than being sweet, she is a "minion" (1.3.281) and a "proud girl" (1.3.292). This thus signals the direct shift that Geoffrey and his successors could not show, and it helps to characterize Leir as both angry and capricious.

On the flip side, Ragan's lies to her father become apparent through her duplicitous nature, in the differences between her soliloquys and her conversations with Leir. In her Act 2 scene 4 soliloquy, Ragan declares that she shall not put up with the kind of behavior that her father displayed at Gonorill's house. She says:

But if he were with me, and served me so,  
 I'd send him packing somewhere else to go.  
 I'd entertain him with such slender cost,  
 That he should quickly wish to change his host. (2.4.923-6)

Her reception of him several scenes later, however, she throws herself at him and tells him, “Father, I bid you welcome, full of grief,/ To see your Grace used thus unworthily,/ And ill-befitting for your reverend age” (2.8.1101-3). Dialogue then becomes a way to shape dramatic irony and so keep audience interest.

One way in which the play fails, though, is in its continuous use of messengers and soliloquies to relay important matters of the plot to the audience and other characters in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of a Greek tragedy. This adds a clunky feeling to the pace especially because these scenes often interrupt or halt previous actions. There is often very little at stake during these monologues, and the play suffers because of the lack of tension.

The first such instance of such a failure is also in the play’s perhaps greatest success. In Act 1, scene 2, Gonorill and Ragan assert their status as the villains of the play. They plot their sister’s demise, all while being incredibly crass (Satin 462). It is a fun beard-stroking, mustache-twirling scene, but it slows the action because it is long and it is early in the play. As later scenes will show, the anonymous play continually adds length where it is unnecessary, but the early placement of this scene is perhaps more frustrating. While Gonorill and Ragan’s accurate predictions of the love test characterize them as cunning and conniving, they do build a dramatic irony in the next scene. This suspense is less, though, than the suspense in *Lear* because there, Cordelia’s asides carry much more weight in her characterization. The characterization of Gonorill and Ragan, then, comes at the expense of the audience’s first-hand understanding of Cordella. Cordella will then need to make up this deficit later in the play, further bloating the play with her own soliloquies.

Another instance of an unnecessary speech is that of Perillus in Act 2, scene 1. Perillus, a figure similar to Kent or Gloucester in the Shakespearean play, tells the audience that Cordella

has been banished and that Leir now resides with Gonorill. He then goes on to lament the breakdown of the father-child relationship in the play. All of this might be important, if it were not a summary of the action that immediately surrounds it. There is very little new information presented in the speech, which is unfortunate because it falls between the King of France's marriage proposal to Cordella, a sweet scene that makes good use of dramatic irony, and Gonorill's rant to her servant about Leir, a scene analogous to Shakespeare's Act 1, scene 3.

While an argument could be made that Perillus's speech here somewhat resembles speeches by Kent and Gloucester, there are several major differences between the two. First, the speech here is twenty eight lines long, a length unjustified because it does not give new information. This is roughly the combined length of Gloucester's "these late eclipses of the sun" in Act 1, scene 2 and Kent's "If but as well I other accents borrow" in Act 1, scene 4. Another major difference between these speeches and Perillus's is that these speeches move the plot forward, or at least add new information. Gloucester's reflection doubles as one on Lear's situation as well as his own. Thematically, it is linked to Edmund's introductory monologue in the same scene, and Edmund again picks up this metaphor once his father has left. This tie to other speeches creates a stronger sense of purpose while also offering evidence in the trial of nature versus nurture, the old guard versus the new generation. Perillus's speech stands alone, literally because it is its own scene, and figuratively because it fails to provide a sufficient link to the plot.

In comparison to Kent's speech, Perillus's speech also fails because Perillus is a passive character. Whereas Kent is using his soliloquy to explain his plan to serve Lear in disguise, Perillus is just fretting over the course of events. Perillus says, "Well, I will counsel him the best I can: Would I were able to redress his wrong" (2.1.755-6). Perillus at this moment is better

compared to Gloucester, but Gloucester is making no such speeches at this point. Kent, meanwhile, takes matters into his own hands, and therefore offers the reader a new dimension to his character.

The next scene is also a failed translation to the stage. Act 2, scene 2 in the anonymous play is 41 lines of Gonorill's rant about her father's behavior, as well as showing Gonorill's decision to half her father's income. This could be dramatic, but Perillus has already told the audience of that decision in the preceding scene, robbing Gonorill of her chance to inform the plot. The analogous scene in Shakespeare is almost half the length, at 26 lines, and it occurs earlier in the play because Gonorill and Ragan do not scheme until after the love test in Shakespeare.

Cutting the earlier soliloquy by Perillus would improve the tension in this scheme, but as it stands, the only interesting section of the action is Skalliger's denouncement of his mistress's behavior, even though he offered her suggestions a mere ten lines earlier. Skalliger proves that even he has morals when he says, "Go viperous woman, shame to all thy sex,/ The heavens, no doubt, will punish thee for this" (2.2.796-7). The tie to the religious elements of the play as well as the admission in the successive that Skalliger is giving advice merely to curry favor add a complexity to this new character.

Overall, the play's crime in these scenes is not content. Rather, their placement in the first acts of the play slows down the action. As a whole, they clutter the play at a point where the major drive of the action must be to capture and retain the audience's attention.

These flaws in execution are not the reason that it is hard to classify the play into a particular genre. Rather, it is hard to classify the play because it moves away from the genre of history without truly committing to an alternative. The play brands itself *The True Chronicle*, but

the history genre sells the play short. The play still represents historical events accurately, but the intentional shape and new moral themes move the play away from the study of politics that the historical play often explores. Ragan's and Gonorill's motivations are equally political and personal, and Leir, Cordella, and Gallia often ignore politics altogether. Furthermore, the play is not concerned with the life and death of a king, but rather an episode within his life.

Three alternate genres for the play—morality, fairy tale, and comedy—as not satisfactory on their own though each adds a new layer of understanding to the play. The play owes much to morality plays, but it lacks allegory and the associated tropes that make it clear that the play is about the battle over Leir's soul. Instead, this play's moral teachings feel more like a contained lesson, and the characters, with the exception of Cordella, all feel acutely human. (On the other hand, Shakespeare's play will once again showcase the potential to blow Lear to epic proportions.<sup>4</sup>) Fairy tale more accurately describes the tropes of the play than it does the plot. Common storybook elements like threes and disguises abound, but the focus of the play on Leir means that Cordella, the youngest daughter who would traditionally be the protagonist in the fairy tale format, does not see real character change, even in terms of status. She enters the play the daughter and heiress of a king, and she exits as a queen. Ultimately, the similarities with these two genres have more to do with the tone rather than the structure of the play.

---

<sup>4</sup> An excellent essay of relevance to this thesis is "The summoning of King Lear" from Robert Potter's *The English Morality Play*. In it, Potter writes, "But to examine and identify these familiar devices [of morality plays] is not to convert *King Lear* into a morality play; that would be reductive vision in the extreme. The keener historical truth is to discover how *a morality play has been transformed into King Lear*" (152, emphasis mine). Potter does not address the anonymous play, even when talking about Shakespeare's sources, but many of the elements that he points out are shared between the two plays, including the trial scene and the costs of Leir/Lear's decisions. His argument also relies on the Gloucester subplot, which this thesis later explores as a vehicle for tragedy and then comedy. The entire book is a great starting point for understanding how the morality play shaped later genres of English drama, but alas that is a tangent too long for this thesis.



Comedy may be the genre that fits the best, but it is not a perfect match by any means. Cordella and Gallia do meet and fall in love in the play, but it hardly is a focal point of the plot. Indeed, there is no conflict at all in their relationship. They meet, fall in love, and agree to marry in one scene, and there is not an obstacle for them to overcome. Yet, at the same time, the play does include a happy ending that comes from the hero (Leir) moving from a state of darkness (willfully unaware of Cordella's love) to light (Cordella's love and a more generous reign), a transition that Christopher Booker rightly points out is central to the comedic structure.

In calling the play a comedy, then, some crucial nuances are lost, but we gain a focus on the ultimate form of the play. In omitting the fall of Cordella from the throne after her father's death, the playwright creates a sense of completeness and rewards those who have followed the play's guiding moral principles. The play endorses a universe that trends towards happy, complete, and just endings. If we accept the play as a comedy for this reason, we can begin to build a vocabulary to articulate the differences between this play and Shakespeare's, which, as the next chapter shows, takes a radically different outlook on the repercussions of the play's events. This justifies calling the play a comedy, then.

## Chapter Two: Shakespeare

From the first lines of *King Lear* (1605/06), it is obvious that Shakespeare is taking the play on a different course than his predecessors. Rather than starting with Lear or his daughters, Shakespeare chose to give the first lines of the play to Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund. The Gloucester subplot, of course, has no parallel in the source materials, instead being drawn from a secondary source. Their dialogue gives off an air of insider court opinion and gossip as they discuss the favor of the king and Gloucester's illegitimate son. The most notable thing that Edmund, the bastard and presumed villain, is not given an explicit stage direction to leave the stage, so the director can take artistic license. If the director makes this choice, it casts a shadow that sets the tone for the rest of the play. Even without this choice, Edmund's early introduction as a natural son surely suggests a political disunity, especially considering the contemporary attitude towards bastards.

*King Lear* comes in the middle of Shakespeare's body of work, nestled among the tragedies and the problem plays. *Hamlet* (1600/01) and *Othello* (1605) come before it; *Macbeth* (1606) follows afterwards. It is hard not to imagine this context coloring the play and the plot when Shakespeare sat down to write. Is this a sufficient reason to change the ending of what was then considered historical fact? It seems too weak an argument to merely chalk up the change from history to tragedy to the genre experimentations that were going on, and such an argument surely finds little support. After all, the original plot might as easily have settled itself towards a problem play or a romance in the style of *Cymbeline* (1609/10) or *The Winter's Tale* (1610/11), two plays that were admittedly not yet written. In both of those plays, a father makes a grave mistake that is eventually rectified resulting in a happy reunion. This is very similar in structure

to the path that the anonymous play decides to take; it could even be considered the safe option as Shakespeare or a writer makes choices.

Rather than immediately informing the audience that this play is a tragedy, however, Shakespeare plays into the audience's expectations and desire for a happy ending. The opening of the play is not dissimilar from the beginning of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, in that the first scene focuses on marriage and dowry. Later, two of the positive characters don disguises, not unlike several comedic protagonists. However, Shakespeare takes these plot elements and examines their darker sides. Cordelia, for instance, is not running away from a strict father like Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but rather banished for her act of insubordination. Edgar's and Kent's lives are at stake when they decide to change their appearances. The dramatic irony that these disguises create is not overtly comedic, particularly because they both end up running *towards* danger rather than away from it. Kent has his unwavering sense of duty to Lear, even after the king threatens him, and Edgar stays in the county and helps his father when Gloucester falls into his suicidal depression. Edgar also protects his father when Oswald attempts to murder the man. However, any dramatic irony that the disguises create is not played for laughs, especially in Edgar's case. This is not a case of mistaken identities, but rather a life-saving mechanism, more in line with *As You Like It* or *Cymbeline*. In *Lear*, frustration comes Edgar and Kent's inability to help others, even though they are disguised. Edgar's frequent asides during his scenes with Lear and with his father after the blinding particularly enforce this notion, contributing to the pity we feel for these characters in their desolate and mad states.

By the end of the play, at any rate, it is clear that Shakespeare is presenting a tragedy. Part of what makes the play so desolate is the embedded levels of tragedy. Rather than simply

focusing on the title character, the play examines the corruption and hubris on three different levels. Lear is obviously the center of the personal tragedy, but just as tragic are the stories of his family and of his country. This complexity adds to the weight of the play and makes the ending painful in a way that other tragedies cannot match. This is especially obvious in the revisions between the Quarto and the Folio, which are two distinct texts with different emphases and outcomes. The Quarto is politically riskier and a strong tragedy, offering greater senses of conclusion and catharsis, while the Folio is less resolved. It is the ambiguity of the Folio, combined with the favoritism that editors usually display, that partially explains the emotional uneasiness with the play.

First, I will discuss the levels of tragedy—individual, familial, and national—each of which is intertwined with the others. I will then note through close reading the malevolence of chaotic world that Shakespeare creates. Taking a step back, I will discuss the definition and meaning of tragedy and why it is narratively imperative for Shakespeare’s version of the tale to end in tragedy. I will then examine the differences between the Quarto and the Folio, especially as they relate to the plot and to the political narrative of the play.

What constitutes tragedy depends on the philosopher who is writing on the subject. Aristotle’s view on tragedy is very much centered on the plot rather than the characters who are embodying the scene. According to Jennifer Wallace, “The concept of hamartia is sometimes translated as ‘flaw...’ But ‘hamartia’ is less about a character defect than about an error in judgment” (118-9). While *Lear* as a play certainly examines Aristotle’s concepts, ultimately Aristotle fails to account for the nuances of the play because Shakespeare does not place the same focus on plot that Aristotle would require. Rather, *Lear* is a play of personalities. A good

portion of Acts 3 and 4 do not directly serve to advance the plot. While there is forward motion, Lear's scenes in these acts, along with Gloucester's scenes in Act 4, serve as an examination of the man. *Lear* is a psychological play as much as it is anything else, and so a formulaic approach to plot—the mistake, the reversal, and the recognition, as Aristotle would have it—does not accurately describe the play.

Hegel's definition, too, falls short of *Lear*'s motivation and purpose. "Hegel maintained that both individuals in the conflict are right" (Wallace 122). In *Lear*, our villains do not have any redeeming moral qualities, and the play does not want us to adopt their philosophies. Even though their plights may seem sympathetic in the earlier scenes of the play, when Lear and Gloucester complicate the lives of their children, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund quickly lose any and all political capital when it becomes clear that they act purely in self-interest. These three join Cornwall in a blatant lack of respect for other human beings, even when the humans in questions are family members. Hegel's theory of tragedy also fails because it emphasizes the return to harmony after the conflict is over (Wallace 123). *Lear*'s ending is utterly bereft of this kind of hope. There are very few survivors left in the play, and no one wins in the conflict of personalities. The play does not end with the sense of being "morally at peace" (Wallace 124), but rather immediately runs in the opposite direction.

Nietzsche, however, aligns nicely with the concepts *Lear* is trying to wrestle. He argues for the tension between Apollo and Dionysus, rationality and reflection versus desire and danger (Wallace 124-5). In his sense of tragedy, the desire and wild danger erupt like a volcano from the thin layer of rationality that society imposes. In *Lear*, this eruption is captured many times over. Not only does Lear go mad, but his daughters are taken over by lust. Cornwall falls to his rashness and sadistic tendencies. Even the environment itself refuses to create and sort of

stability and sense. The moon, the stars, and the weather all mimic Lear's own sense of tragedy. Here in this definition we can finally find a model that accurately reflects what is going on in the play. When the principals of the play give into the more basic urges, they are ultimately consumed by the fire. *Lear* indeed is a play about people and their actions.

In the tragedy of the individual man, Lear makes a mistake due to pride, and he suffers the consequences of his actions. Indeed, Lear's downfall is that he is evaluated by the standards of his own love test. In the beginning of the play, Lear explicitly states the rules of the contest by saying, "we our largest bounty may extend/ Where merit doth most challenge it" (Q 1.44-45)<sup>5</sup>. In Lear's mind, there is a direct correlation between emotional and monetary worth, and the daughter with the most love ought to also be the richest. Interestingly, Shakespeare gives Lear no other motive to test his daughters than the arrangement of his retirement. Rather than leaning on the marriage story from the anonymous *Leir*, Shakespeare's *Lear* uses his age as his biggest rationale for his actions.

As a man who is clearly not accustomed to people refusing him, Lear turns violent when Cordelia and then Kent disagree. What is more interesting in these scenes, however, is the direct way in which Lear links words with worth. He tells Cordelia, "Mend your speech a little/ lest it may mar your fortunes" (Q 1.83-84), and he later accuses her of pride (Q 1.118). In doing so, he suggests that Cordelia's refusal to take the test masks any feeling that might cause her to appease

---

<sup>5</sup> This chapter discusses the difference between the Quarto and the Folio versions of the text. Rather than using a conflated version of the texts for quotes that do not significantly vary between the two sources, within this chapter I choose to cite those references from the Quarto. This is because the Quarto is longer and has the additional scene that the Folio does not. Unless noted, it can be assumed that the text of the Folio contains a similar line.

him. Much like a king who has only taken advice from friendly advisors, he equates flattery with genuine feeling.

This line of thinking is then what causes his downfall, however, because when he retains none of his former power, his daughters offer him little respect. Lear commits Cordelia's crime. He relies on familial bond for financial support and housing, but his daughters show little interest in entertaining his whims now that he has no real power. Regan and Goneril rationalize this behavior by claiming that Lear can live the life that he is accustomed to with their own staffs, and by saying that he would be more than welcome if he were alone. "What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five," Goneril asks, "to follow in a house where twice so many/ have a command to tend you?" (Q 2.4.238-40). Regan takes this one step further with her question, "What needs one?" (Q 2.4.240). After Lear leaves, both of them absolve themselves of the guilt. Goneril says, referring to him as if he were a two year old, "'Tis his own blame hath put himself from rest,/ and must needs taste his folly" (Q 2.3.268). In her phrasing, Goneril implies that Lear is being foolish by even believing he is in a position to reason with them. Regan, on the other hand, says, "For his particular I'll receive him gladly,/ but not one follower" (Q 2.4.269). Regan can respect him as a man, and perhaps even as her father, but she cannot see him as the former head of state. All of their words and misdeeds twist their father's own logic that equates love and power. Here, love is an emotion to be indulged rather than a bond to which a daughter can be held.

Lear's tragic flaw in this version of the play is that he was testing the wrong thing. Rather than seeing who would love him if he were poor, he sought to show who would love him while he still had power. The pride and the overconfidence he displays in the opening scene plague Lear's actions for the next two acts and are directly responsible for his fall. When Goneril kicks him off of her estate, he foolishly believes that Regan shall treat him differently, even when the

Fool attempts to warn him otherwise. When he sees the same kind of success with his second daughter, he decides to sever all ties with his daughters and curse them.

While this is behavior not dissimilar to the actions of previous versions of Leir, what makes Shakespeare's version particularly tragic is the way that Lear never fully recovers from the storm. During and immediately after the fight with Goneril and Regan, Lear's rage propels him into the storm. His mind is a tempest when he shouts, "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks!" (Q 3.2.1). He then indicts Goneril and Regan, yelling:

Nor rain, wind, thunder, or fire are my daughters.

I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness.

I never gave you kingdom, called you children,

You owe me no subscription. (Q 3.2.15-18)

He here is specifically calling out the familial bonds which he had hoped to rely on, the ones that are not there partially because of his misleading example. In earlier versions of the play, Lear would harness this momentum that Shakespeare is building in the short phrases to find Cordelia, lead the French armies, and take back the kingdom. Here, however, Lear sputters out, as if all that energy were wasted in the shouting match with the storm. "My wit begins to turn," Lear pauses to say (Q 3.2.69). This scene on the moor is Lear's greatest denouncement of his daughters, and the only people around to witness it are the Fool and Kent. The later mock trial scene (omitted from the Folio) is much more incoherent, and when Lear is finally given the chance to see his daughters again, he refuses. In the final scene, Cordelia and Lear have been captured. Cordelia wishes for a confrontation with her sisters. Lear, meanwhile, has escaped the confines of reality and is not ready for a fight. "No, no," he corrects her, and he adds, "come, let's us away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage" (Q 24.8-9). This adds to the



sorrow and the unsettling nature of the play. Lear dies not in combat, vainly defending his tragic empire like Macbeth or Brutus, but dies of heart failure, both metaphorically and literally.

Part of this is related to the second level of tragedy in the play, the tragedy of Lear's family. Again, Lear's downfall is of his own making. This time, however, it is the values he has instilled in his daughters and the traits he has valued them for that have created the entanglement that will snare the family. Each daughter represents an extreme version of a flaw Lear himself demonstrates. Cordelia is the proud one, Goneril the cunning, and Regan the reckless. These flaws make Lear's decisions even worse than they already are, and the additional moves of the three daughters ultimately further the destruction of the country.

The ambitions and lusts of Regan and Goneril are the obvious culprits in the destruction of their family, but Cordelia's virtue, her best quality in the anonymous version that immediately precedes the Shakespeare, is ultimately powerless to stop them. Cordelia's mistake is rather easy to diagnosis, for it remains the same from the earlier versions. In sticking to her convictions and refusing to play along with her father's game, Cordelia bets that her father will see the error of his ways and not punish her according to his word. This proves to be the wrong wager, and she loses everything. However, Shakespeare does not make her out to be a martyr like his predecessor did. Cordelia does not cry or pray; rather, she is openly defiant and wants the world to know what her father has done after he disowns her. In her own words, she has lost her father's favor because she lacks "that glib and oily art" (F 1.1.222) and "a still-soliciting eye" (F 1.1.229). She wears her bluntness as a badge of honor, and she even takes a parting shot at her sisters as she leaves Britain for the first time. Quite simply, Cordelia loses some sympathy because, even though she is right, she comes across as self-righteous in the initial scene. While

she lacks her father's flawed reasoning, she still inherits the pride that will make him march out in the storm in protest.

Still, out of the daughters of this family, Cordelia is the most likable, for neither Goneril nor Regan can offer a suitable alternative to Lear's temper tantrums. Goneril is too manipulative and cunning, and Regan is ruled by passion. Consider Goneril's actions immediately after she receives her dowry. She takes the initiative in the scheme against Lear by telling Regan, "let's hit together" (1.1.288). Goneril plays not to disable her opponents, but to destroy them. She initiates the plot against Lear 188 lines after Lear disowns Cordelia, and she lays the foundations for the plot the second everyone else is out of the room. In Goneril's world view, power is a zero sum game, and any power she lets her father have directly diminishes her capacity. "If our father carry authority with such dispositions as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us" (Q 1.1.291-3). She reiterates this sense of urgency in the last line of the scene as she says, "We must do something, and i' th' heat" (Q 1.1.295). It is clear she believes that power must be centralized and solid, and that the sovereign cannot broker dissent. This idea was no doubt reinforced by her father's actions, for he does not allow any dissent from neither Cordelia nor Kent in the first scene of the play.

Regan, on the other hand, acts in the spur of the moment. She encourages her husband's mutilation of Gloucester, and she kills the servant who stabs her husband. Later, she proposes to Edmund on the battlefield to spite both her brother-in-law and her sister. Her rash actions when under pressure reflect yet another part of Lear's personality. As mirrors of Lear, the daughters ultimately come apart because they are too busy fighting each other. Goneril, the manipulative one, triumphs in a hollow victory when she poisons Regan and orders the death of Cordelia, but she cannot escape her actions and kills herself when they come to light.

The third layer of tragedy is a country is subject to the whims of these larger-than-life royal forces, and it is thrown into a war that directly and indirectly leads to the deaths of most of the major political players in the country. There is a ripple effect, from the royals to the nobles to the common people, as the entire country falls under Dionysus's spell. It is no wonder, then, that fate and superstition are strong themes in the play because of the trickle down nature of tragedy within the play. As Taunton and Hart put it, "injustice is seen to emanate from the hierarchy, from the king himself" (708).

While the play presents an ecosystem that mirrors the tragedy, the characters often question the existence of a supernatural power in a way that illuminates the landscape of the country. The older generation is more given to superstition than their sons. Gloucester, for example, asserts, "These late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us" (Q 1.2.102-103), and Kent laments, "It is the stars,/ the stars above us govern our conditions" (Q 4.3.33-34). Edmund, on the other hand, the more natural son, mocks this false devotion. "This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune," he says, "we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains by necessity" (Q 1.2.112, 114-115). Questioning the existence of the gods is missing the point here. In the reality of the play, the royals and the nobles *are* the gods to the people, and their actions affect the course of the nation. Gloucester's flies (F 4.1.35-36) are as much the unseen masses as they are the named characters.

The play comes from a place of national uncertainty. It is not an accident that the play most concerned with inheritances and succession comes not too long after James I's reign begins. Even though his predecessor, Elizabeth I, was monarch for a great many years, she was a

childless woman who had in her infancy been bastardized by a king who would leave only one heir. Under the later Tudors, the throne was constantly in question, partially because of the number of women who could lay claim to it. Mary I, Elizabeth's half-sister, confined her to the Tower for several years, and Elizabeth would eventually condone the death of James I's mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. No wonder, then, Lear rounds up his daughters in order to ward off any "future strife" (F 1.1.42-44). In doing so, Lear takes the opposite stance as Elizabeth, as she refused to name an heir while still living. The question of succession would appeal to a seventeenth century audience that was already primed to think in that manner.

Both Lear's fictitious Britain and James's England also share geography problems. Lear's kingdom is being divided. Goneril's portion is presumed to the north, in keeping with her husband's title, as Regan's dowry is the south. This leaves the center to Cordelia for a total of three parts. This division of the nation is the exact opposite of what James was attempting to achieve. He was coming in as the King of Scotland from the north to rule the south and create one throne. Physical location matters greatly in both instances. In dividing up the country, Lear weakens the British state and incentivizes war between the factions. This kind of dissent would be mirrored in the real world for over a hundred years after the play's writing, until the last of the Jacobites were defeated, and Scotland was brought completely under the rule of the English crown once and for all.

Further influencing political uncertainty of the period were the mixed messages that James I was signaling in his views towards Catholics. While James's accession to the throne meant the publication of his thoughts on the role of the king, he was not giving presenting a clear cut policy on religion. James even had a Catholic mother and wife (Taunton and Hart 700). His correspondence suggests that he wished for Catholicism to die out naturally rather than through

public round ups and executions (Taunton and Hart 700-1). This ambivalence, however, would prove to be insufficient in the light of the Gunpowder plot, which was thwarted in the same year that *Lear* was written.<sup>6</sup> The deception of Edmund through the letter and the mock trial could both be ripped from the headlines, as it were, because of the hype surrounding the acts of the terrorist cell. England was facing a brave new world at the turn of the seventeenth century, a world where all semblance of government could be irradiated, just as in *Lear* all sense of command is lost.

All of this tragedy is layered on top of a world that is sinisterly chaotic. The characters find themselves in a world that has forsaken the rational world of Apollo that Nietzsche is interested in and has instead turned itself over to baser desires. If there is a logic to the characters' universe, it is not apparent to the audience. As the setting accumulates around the characters, the audience suspends its disbelief over some pretty incredible leaps in logic, and the first scene's love test is but the first of these.

By surprising both the daughters and the audience with the love test, Shakespeare is immediately trusting the play into this dark chaos. The daughters are made to believe that the size and quality of their dowries is dependent on their answers (Q 1.1.45-46). While it is clear that Cordelia is the favorite, none of the daughters has a sure fate. Though Albany did have favor over Cornwall, it is now uncertain as to which of the older daughters' husbands has Lear's favor

---

<sup>6</sup> Like most dates ascribed to early modern plays, the date that *Lear* was written is contested. One possible theory places it in 1603/04 because of allusions to a poem from that year, but the first recorded performance was December 26, 1606, at court. I find it unconvincing that there would be such a discrepancy of three years between the court performance and the original writing, though it is not completely out of the question. Along with several scholars, however, I believe that the play is in fact dated from 1605 or 1606, especially because of the argument, as presented by Taunton and Hart and expanded in this chapter, that the Gunpowder Plot influenced the political landscape of *Lear*. I also believe that the play shows enough influence from James I's politics to support a later date.

(1.1.1-6). Meanwhile, Cordelia will learn who will be her husband, though we do not know her personal attitudes towards marriage as we do in *Leir*. Each daughter has a vested interest, as always, in the outcome of this exhibition. It is a gamble to introduce this far-flung scenario on the stage without expectation, but when Goneril and Regan perform for Lear without much prompting, the audience accepts that, while the test may be wrong, this kind of demonstration and lunacy may not be out of the ordinary in these final days of the king.

This is why it is once again surprising when Cordelia refuses to play Lear's game, she is rejecting Lear on all three levels that he embodies. As a man, she hurts his pride. In his mind, she rejects the love he freely gave her, for he "loved her most" (Q 1.1.111). The personal way that he takes Cordelia's words is shown in his rage towards both Cordelia and Kent, one of his closest advisors. He becomes a dragon (Q 1.1.110) and wounded in his pride.

As in earlier versions, Cordelia is also disobeying Lear, her father, disrupting the familial bonds. Family can usually be counted on as an anchor in a play, as a natural alliance, but it is Cordelia who first breaks down these relationships. Her refusal further unscrews the universe and severs it from our own. This is a main focus of the original versions, and so it is not surprising to see it here. It is more explicit here, however, that her father is also the king. Cordelia is committing treason, at least in Lear's mind. It is important to remember that there is a political reason to wish for the declarations of love. Kent, who commits the same crime for defending her, is banished with a death threat. Their disobedience threatens the authority that Lear has, even as he is ready to pass it on to his heirs. Lear calls Kent out on this, "On, thy allegiance, hear me!/ Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow" (Q 1.1.155-6), emphasizing Kent's role as a vassal to the king. For a man trying to establish a smooth transition, it is dangerous to be treated in such a manner. Lear's anger heightens the stakes as well.

Even the language of the scene notes the dark chaos. Lear calls upon “Hecate and the night,/... all the operation of the orbs” (Q 1.1.99-100) to witness his disowning of his daughter. He demonstrates the level of superstition that we will see later in the play in Gloucester and Kent, but here he invokes the god of underworld instead of the more legitimate and mainstream gods. He pronounces Cordelia a stranger (Q 1.1.104).

France, too, remarks on the strangeness of the scene when he learns of Cordelia’s dismissal. As an outsider but also as a king in his own right, France is able to comment more freely on the situation of the court. He calls the whole situation strange (Q 1.1.201), and before he knows what Cordelia has done, he suggests that her crime must be “monstrous” (Q 1.1.205) and “unnatural” (Q 1.1.207). When he does learn what Cordelia had done, he takes her in spite of her poverty, making her a dowerless queen. In this story world, even the foreigner is subject to an inverted sense of priority. The scene and the country seem infected, whether by nature, some malevolent force, or Lear himself.

Another vein running through this scene is the way in which Lear acts as a judge. Normally a judge would be one of the supreme authorities on the law of the land, and the actions of a judge are often associated with justice. Here, however, the judge can be overtaken by rage and his rulings rendered ineffective and useless. Though it is often called a test, the challenge to declare the most love is highly subjective. Lear firmly exists in the role of king throughout the scene. He is *not* an impartial judge, and he hands out all the wrong sentences. Even though she is somewhat haughty in her delivery, Cordelia is right. Goneril and Regan should not be rewarded, nor should she or Kent be punished. Rather than being a just ruler, Lear lets his wrath take over his common sense. Because he still holds the power of the kingdom in this scene, this creates the mess from which the rest of the play will never quite recover.

Parodying this scene and Lear's abuse of power in it is the mock trial, found only in the Quarto's version of Act III, scene vi. This scene pathetically reinforces the complete loss of power that Lear has suffered. Lear rails, "Stop her there! Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place. False justice, why hast thou let her scape?" (Q 3.6.50-51). Even though Lear calls for judgment to be rained down upon his daughter, he has lost the army and the power to enact this bit of vengeance. Whereas in the earlier versions of the play, Lear has at this point allied with Cordelia and her husband, Shakespeare's Lear is literally left out in the cold by his pride and diminished capacity. It is a testament to Lear's fallen state that Edgar's reaction to this is "Bless thy five wits" (Q 3.6.52). Lear has fallen so far, in fact, that it is madness to suggest that he might have a hand in condemning his daughters.

There is a sort of frantic energy to Lear's lines, punctuated by the incomplete and short phrases. While the primary source of Lear's ire in this scene is his daughters' action, some of this anger is directed inward. Lear has assigned the role of the justice to "Tom" (Q 3.6.32), an act befitting the barely contained chaos of the scene, the mad man as the leader of the court. Much of Lear's anger, however, is directed inward because he identifies with the role of the justice. Lear asks, "Why has thou let her scape?" (Q 3.6.51), but he himself is the one who made the decisions that led to his daughters taking power, not Tom/Edgar, the madman. The corruption that Lear wishes to condemn stems from his own actions.

It is hard not to see the political charge that this part of 3.6 carries because it represents the failure of the power of the king. For royalty such as James I, who believed in the divine right of kings, this could be considered blasphemous or even treasonous. It certainly bears a connection to the trial of the conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot. Lear in this scene plays the part of the lawyer, every bit as showy as Portia or Atticus Finch. The Fool and Edgar add to the



circus by singing immediately before and during this trial. It is Lear, however, who again displays the highest level of blindness. He decides to call a joint stool Goneril (Q 3.6.45-47). This decision does two things. It highlights the madness of Lear, and it exposes the incomplete justice that Lear is able to enact. Lear is impotent in this scene, and, even in a former king, that is a very controversial thing to suggest. The scene's inclusion in the Quarto increases the feeling within the play of a downward, echoing spiral.

In many ways, *King Lear* is the most destructive of Shakespeare's plays, and the ending is the bleakest. At the crux of the play is the question as to whether or not Lear commits an irredeemable sin when he divides the kingdom. Lear displays not only pride but also genre blindness of massive proportions when he decides to create a test for his daughters to pass before they may gain their inheritances. While the earlier versions of the story clearly believe that remorse or repentance is enough to overcome this mistake, Shakespeare quite clearly damns the story world for this decision. However, the destruction of the British political system is not just the fault of one man, but of many. Most of the named characters have their own parts to play by either acting in their self-interest or acting irrationally, and some of them, most noticeably Edmund, could even be considered tragic protagonists in their own right.

Cornwall's blinding of Gloucester crashes the play straight into tragedy. After this heinous act, there can be no recovery. Torture and mutilation are both serious crimes, especially in the realm of tragedy. Cornwall is last seen limping off stage, and from this point forward, Regan has a karmic target on her back, a kind of cosmic justice. This leads to significant moral implications towards the other characters.

In fact, it is this crime of Regan's that triggers the tragic ending of the play. But to discuss properly why her actions here are so monumental, we must first address Shakespeare's

second largest contribution to the play: the Gloucester family subplot, which was lifted from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, from the 1580s (Orgel xxxvii). This subplot mirrors the main plot in many ways, but at the same time, Edmund's influence on the play does distort the main plot as well. Edmund introduces and encourages jealousy between the two sisters, which drives their actions to be more and more irrational. He is also the one who arranges for the downfall of his half-brother and his own father, carrying as little for his family as Lear believes Cordelia does for hers.

Another major, and highly relevant, plot innovation by Shakespeare is the separation of Goneril's and Regan's characters. Even though Shakespeare's contemporaries had already begun to individualize the characters, Shakespeare takes this customization to a level that clearly distinguishes the two characters. Goneril is portrayed as the manipulative, volatile mastermind while Regan is much less conniving, but also more vicious and unpredictable.

Goneril, for one, has multiple scenes that mainly revolve around her. For instance, in the third scene of the first act, we hear about Lear's debauchery from her, through her rather biased opinion, rather than seeing it for ourselves. Goneril is the more assertive personality of the sisters, and she is the first to expel Lear. When she kicks Lear out of her home, she manipulates the events that follow so that Regan (who admittedly needs very little encouragement) will shun their father as well. Much of Lear's vitriol in these early scenes is then focused on Goneril, and it is he she curses in 2.2. Indeed, Regan's embracing of her when Goneril arrives at the house that turns the tide in Lear's fight with Regan (2.2.358-362).

In the second half of the play, Goneril's behavior devolves further. She starts an affair with Edmund and has a vicious fight with her husband, going as far as to refer to Albany as her foot/fool (Q 16.28, F 4.2.28, respectively) and a "milk-livered man" (Q 16.49). In the same room

as her husband. She worries that Edmund's affections will turn to Regan now that her sister is a widow, obviously expressing none of the pity or compassion that Albany displays for Gloucester. This jealousy of her sister builds until Goneril poisons Regan (Q 24.94) and then takes her own life after she realizes that Edmund is about to die and that her affair has been discovered by Albany (Q 24.149-156, 217-221). Overall, Goneril displays the behaviors of a schemer, behaviors which are often seen in the earlier manifestations of the play when Goneril and Regan are similar characters. However, she seems to come into her position as the eldest daughter and assert her individuality. Part of this, naturally, is through the extended stage time that Shakespeare gives her, with most of her scenes with her personal servant and her (hilariously) uninformed husband.

It is Regan, though, who breaks away from the more traditional role of the sisters. Early in the play, she is less assertive than her sister, preferring to follow Goneril's lead in many of her actions, but she quickly catches up when she participates in the blinding of Lear and kills the servant who stabs her husband (a wound that will eventually prove to be fatal). From this point forward, Regan is wildly controlled by her passions. She turns her sister's servant into a spy for her own cause and insinuates that Oswald should kill Gloucester if he happens across the blinded man in his travels (F 4.4). She practically is hanging off of Edmund in the last scene, and in her final substantive act in the play, she proposes to Edmund *in the middle of a battlefield* in order to assert her claim over her sister's and to protect Edmund's interest in the discussion.

Edmund is as much to blame for the tragedy as either Goneril or Regan, however. For one, Edmund left his father to be tortured, as Regan says ("Thou call'st on him who hates thee" (3.7.91)). Furthermore, by aligning himself with the recent widow and using her, Edmund becomes guilty by association. Combined with his earlier crimes against his brother, it is clear

that Edmund is not facing a bright future. There is also a certain justice in Edmund's death at the hands of the brother he so completely wronged. It is a courtly death from a duel, as befits Edgar's character. Rather than resorting to trickery to take back his brother's ill-gotten gains, Edgar meets Edmund on a legitimate level. In a play that wrestles with the question of agency, Edmund is the character with the most. This becomes the sword he falls on when his bad decisions catch up to him.

Goneril is just as selfish as Regan, but not as violent. Her most grievous sin is the way in which she comports herself. Her actions subvert social order as she takes control of her own dowry and leaves her husband out of the loop. At the same time, when she takes a lover steeped in as much blood as she, Goneril's traitorous deeds reach their height. Goneril, just as Edmund, builds her own world. When Albany exposes the vast machinery in the final scene, compelling her to "read [her] own evil" (Q 5.3.151), Goneril becomes "desperate" (Q 5.3.157). Having already taken out her sister, Goneril kills herself, the play's only successful suicide.

The only surprising death might be that of Cordelia. To the original audience, Lear carrying her body on stage must have been an immense shock, considering that, in the historical accounts, Cordelia lived to regain the throne. Certainly in the anonymous *Leir*, she survives. Indeed, in that play, her life is never really in danger. Cordelia's fate could be linked to her pride. After all, she is very stubborn, particularly in her decision not to follow her father's game, and her treatment of her sisters before she leaves for France. But these are not necessarily capital crimes, especially because Cordelia shows great compassion for her father, a trait that is just as admirable in her as it is in Edgar. However, Edgar lives, and Cordelia does not.

No, Cordelia dies because it is her death that most affects and hurts Lear. Lear's own death means little in the wake of the loss of his favorite daughter. Cordelia is still his symbol of

light in this version of the story. However, it is the emotional connection that Lear regains with Cordelia that she must die. Lear, in some ways, expects death or retirement. He has certainly anticipated both from his first moment on the stage when he says the following:

'Tis our fast intent

To shake all cares and business from our age,  
 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
 Unburdened crawl towards death (F 1.1.37-40).

These lines from the first scene emphasize the sense of mortality surrounding Lear. He is an old man, even if an abnormally strong one, and so his own death is less of a consequence, and Lear must be reprimanded by the story because he is the poison that must be sucked out of the wound.

Lear makes a hasty and rash decision that destabilizes a fragile political situation. He teaches each of his three daughters their worst traits—Goneril's lack of familial bonds, Regan's intense emotions, and Cordelia's pride. The natural world itself seems to mirror the country's state and then Lear's madness. More than any of his predecessors, Shakespeare explores the consequences of Lear's actions in detail. By contextualizing Lear, Shakespeare cannot give him immunity once he is personally redeemed. Lear creates the mess, and Lear must still be punished.

Cordelia, as the symbol of the hope of the nation, is the new generation who could lead the country in healing itself. She is relatively guiltless in the events that precede her death, even if it is her actions that set off the main plot. She is the only royal in which the audience can place any trust, but she is still tainted by association. In a rotting world such as *King Lear* presents, the

establishment must be burned to the ground. It is only then that the country can be rebuilt with new royals, either from Albany's or Edgar's line.

Edgar and Albany emerge as the most likely candidates for kingship because of the way that they consort themselves throughout the play, but also because they are the only people left alive. Albany, in the Quarto at least, plays an active role in Goneril and Edmund's destruction once he realizes what they have done. He stands up to his wife, and he ultimately takes control in the chaos of the final scene of the Quarto. Even though it is implied that he has less power than Goneril when she says, "The laws are mine, not yours," (Q 5.3.153), he clearly possesses the dukedom of Albany (modern Scotland and northern England) and has a royal dignity of his own.

Edgar's qualifications are less based on his pedigree and more on his unblemished character. Despite the accusations levied against him, Edgar stays in the country and helps those in need as he can while still maintaining his disguise. He most often expresses the pity that the audience feels towards Lear and Gloucester. He also is the character who displays the most positive growth. Lear's ability to govern waxes and wanes, and Gloucester falls into decay after his blinding. Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Cordelia, Kent, the Fool, and Edmund all remain rather static. Albany, too, could be lopped into this group when considering that he does not show a great shift in character in either the Quarto or the Folio. In the Quarto, he becomes a more active character when he is well-informed of the situation, and in the Folio, he remains weak and ineffective. Edgar, on the other hand, goes from the bewildered son unjustly accused to a man able to defend both himself and his father. Edgar's truest transformation happens in the Folio, when he speaks the lines the Quarto gives to Albany, deliberately taking control of the chaos in the wake of the incredible death toll.

Yet there are different implications for the future of the nation, depending on whether Albany or Edgar is in control. Warren sums it up neatly when he writes:

The part of Albany is more developed in Q than F, and in Q he elses the play a mature and victorious duke assuming responsibility for the kingdom; in F he is a weaker character, avoiding responsibility. The part of Edgar is shorter in F than in Q; however, whereas in Q he ends the play a young man overwhelmed by his experience, in F he is a young man who has learned a great deal, and who is emerging as the new leader of the ravaged society. (99)

Albany is clearly reluctant to take the throne in both versions. He is less powerful both in the narrative and in the country than his wife, though the Quarto version of him is more assertive. In 4.2, for instance, the fight between Goneril and Albany extends for another thirty lines. Most of these lines go to Albany, who more thoroughly condemns his wife's actions, particularly as they relate to her slight of her father. Albany says in part what the audience has been thinking when he calls Goneril and Regan "tigers, not daughters" (Q 4.2.41). This increases the empathy that the audience feels for Albany by characterizing him as the last sane man. In the same extended version of the scene, however, Goneril accuses Albany of being weak in the face of the threat from France (Q 4.2.56-60). Thus, while Albany is a better judge of character than Lear has been, he needs the catalyst of Cornwall's death and Gloucester's blinding to move into true action. Albany's greatest strengths as the future leader are his maturity and his previous experience. Of the members of the old status quo, he is the only character who remains largely uncorrupted. When Albany assumes the throne, the country is secure at least in its transition.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> I also find it interesting to note that in the earlier version of the play, Albany, the most northern duke whose land includes Scotland, takes the lead, especially when considering James's homeland.

Edgar is unblemished for not having a part in the old regime, but this comes at a price. He is woefully unexperienced in the manners of running a country, and he has spent most of the play pretending to be a mad man. On the other side, he contains a stronger will than Albany, stepping up to challenge Edmund's usurped power rather than continuing the passive aggressive fight that Albany seems to prefer. When Edgar takes the throne, it signals a more complete rebirth of the country, but also a more fragile stability. Though he has certainly matured over the course of the play, Edgar's true leadership skills are yet to be seen in the Folio. This then dampens the sense of closure that the Folio provides.

The difference in leaders between the Folio and the Quarto is one of several small but systematic changes that alter the perception of the play. However, before I discuss the differences between the Quarto and the Folio versions of *King Lear*, it is important to discuss the question of whether or not the two plays are actually separate entities. There is not a clear consensus of the matter though some recent editors have begun to implicitly endorse the idea of significant revision by including both texts.

The prevailing school of thought for centuries is that the Quarto and the Folio are two versions of a lost master text. This theory is most common especially among editors, even to this day, who will offer a conflated text that contains the most if not all of the lines that the manuscripts do not have in common. These conflated texts do not necessarily privilege one text over the other, but view them both as insufficient and incomplete.

A different theory holds that the Folio is clearly the better text. Several theories have been offered as to why the Folio is of higher quality. Bolton argues that the text itself was corrupted by wear and tear (427-8), while Alice Walker suggests that the Quarto was an



unauthorized printing (Wells 12). This argument, too, may produce a conflated text that will nonetheless systematically choose the word choices of the Folio while simultaneously including scenes like the mock trial that are Quarto-only.

A third argument, however, that arises mostly in the last century, says that the two texts are distinct versions of the story with intentional revision by Shakespeare between the two. Supporters propose that it is actually easier to accept this argument, despite its relatively young roots, and that the burden of proof is on those that support a conflated text, not those that believe in two separate versions (Wells 21). There are several subtheories wrapped into this argument as well. For instance, there have been proposals that the Folio is the practical version of the play. It is more streamlined and perhaps easier to perform.

However, I subscribe to a different spin on the two different versions. While the Quarto does have its weaknesses, I believe that it is the stronger tragedy, makes the stronger political statement, and produces stronger closure. The Folio focuses more on Lear as the central character, and it ultimately creates a bleaker world. I furthermore believe that the favoring of the Folio is part of the reason that audiences have such a hard time with the play. The additional focus on Lear distracts from what otherwise could be seen as the total surrender to the Dionysian urges of Britain in the story. The Folio's sense of "almost, but not quite," however, does not sit well because it is a greater violation of Hegel. Both editions fail to offer a complete sense of closure, but at least there are more experienced hands manning the ship in the Quarto.

Besides the mock trial and the characterization of Albany and Edgar, one of the major changes between the two versions is an additional scene in the fourth act that is found only in the Quarto. This omitted scene, the Quarto's 4.3, certainly highlights the heightened political sense that the Folio does not quite capture. The scene is a 57-line exchange between Kent and a

Gentleman. It falls between the Albany's fight and Cordelia's return to England. A good section of the scene is spent detailing Cordelia's grief, and these cuts may have been made because they render the next scene redundant. The scene starts off, though, with a question. "Why the King of France is so suddenly gone back know you no reason?" (Q 4.3.1-2). Cordelia did not come alone with the troops that she directs to retake her sisters' lands. Rather, her much more powerful husband came along with her, and has only now just left. Narratively, this lends a political tone to what could otherwise seem to be just Cordelia's concern for her father. By calling attention to France's departure, Shakespeare also calls attention to the way that Cordelia is able to come back to her homeland. As in previous versions, she comes back not to make peace but to conquer her sisters. Yet Cordelia is not the general of the forces (Q 4.3.8), and the sudden absence of her husband to attend to matters back in France reinforces the foreignness of Cordelia's return.

When looking at the whole picture, the Quarto criticizes England itself, focusing on the rottenness of the state and the third level of tragedy in a way that the Folio and most other versions of the Lear story do not. It is a nation that requires a foreign threat to stand up for itself. In contrast, the Folio presents a bleaker definition of man. By cutting the lines of characters who are not Lear, the Folio emphasizes the suffering of Lear and his descent into madness. When even a great king cannot win a fight with his demons, it is hard to feel good about the odds of the rest of us.

What Shakespeare accomplishes by the time he is finished with the story is a formidable feat. Unlike his predecessor who wrote the anonymous play, he not only retold the story but created a universe so specific to his play that one cannot talk about the play without talking about the setting. It is bleak, pagan, malevolent, consuming, fearful, awe-inspiring universe that thrives

on chaos, doubling, and absolute nothing. It is not hell that Shakespeare chooses to set his play in, but rather the realm takes on almost a human persona as well as any of the characters. It gives a little but takes a great deal more, like the vast majority of the characters, and so the universe sees itself destroyed as well.

At the same time that Shakespeare is building this physical context, he is creating a narrative context as well. While it may be easy to dismiss a subplot as less important or poorly-developed, in this play, the subplot creates the hinge on which the main plot folds. The Gloucester family's story is a tragedy (of the father) and a coming of age story (of Edgar) at the same time, and it is able to stand alone. By combining the two, however, Shakespeare creates a feedback loop of negativity and an increased casualty count. Once again, the level of immersion here is a large part of the way that we now see the play as dark and fascinating.

Shakespeare's story of King Lear, then, is a play as well as a world, and in order to successfully adapt that, a director must recognize this relationship. Reworking the play after such a dramatic set of decisions will prove to be a difficult, if not impossible, task.

## Chapter Three: Tate

In 1681, a curious thing happened. Nahum Tate, an Irish poet, decided to rewrite Shakespeare's *King Lear*. He was concerned about his fidelity to the original source and Shakespeare's characters (as evidenced by his letter to Thomas Boteler (1-2)). The language he uses is often directly from Shakespeare's version of the play. He even keeps the subplot of the Gloucester family that Shakespeare grafted onto the play. Really, Tate only made a couple of minor revisions. In his play, Cordelia and Edgar are in love. Lear, Gloucester, and Cordelia survive through the end of the play. Actors need not apply for the Fool, either, because Tate took him out. In short, he changed the entire tone of the play. And audiences loved it. They really, really loved it, and a full restoration of Shakespeare's text would take over a century to make it back to the stage.

In a way, Tate's play is the ultimate director's cut of Shakespeare of *King Lear*. Like a director, he is reinterpreting the play, making decisions about Shakespeare's characters and their motivations. Ultimately, Tate finds the subplot of Shakespeare's play as important as, if not more important than, the main plot. Rather than eliminating the element of the play that Shakespeare added to mold a tragedy, Tate reinvents that element in order to revert the play to a happier ending. Tate imposes his vision on the play, signaling a clear direction for future productions to take. Tate specifically takes very specific interpretations of Edgar and Cordelia. The latter gains textual motivations that she so often lacks in order to make her more sympathetic with the audience, and the former finds his own motivations and goals which explains some of his irrational behavior at the same time that it gives the audience someone to cheer for in the chaos that is the play otherwise.

This chapter examines Tate's major revisions, which include the elimination of the Fool, the addition of a love subplot between Cordelia and Edgar, and several shifts in the political situation of the characters. His ultimate goal is to change the play to a comedy in the classical sense. As such, Tate will take apart the tragic scaffolding that Shakespeare creates and reassemble it to his own liking. He is pandering to his audience and to the general wish for happy resolutions, but he only partially meets this expectation. There are still instances of deep tragedy in the play, even with Tate's changes, and Tate's additions also come with the side effect of values dissonance in several places of the play. Still, it would be a mistake to call Tate's changes unsuccessful because, even though the logic of the play is sometimes lost, Tate was so dominate on the stage for so long.

Tate's first and last changes to the play are a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue seeks to justify Tate's changes. The actor tells the audience:

But he that did this evening's treat prepare  
 Bluntly resolved beforehand to declare  
 Your entertainment should be most old fare,  
 Yet hopes, since in rich Shakespeare's soil it grew,  
 'Twill relish yet with those whose tastes are true,  
 And his ambition is to please a few. (5-9)

Tate is frank and honest here, seeking a receptive audience that forgives him his revisions. His use of the metaphor of growth implies that Tate is thinking of the way that stories change over time. This particular version, he suggests, ought to be richer because it has a great source. The tone is intentionally humble, contrasting with the massive undertaking to rewrite a

hugely complex play according to Tate's preferences. The tone also offsets an otherwise somber tone that Tate cannot otherwise rid from the first interludes of the play. The action of the first act, after all, in both versions includes the love test and its aftermath as well as the rumblings of the conflict among the Gloucesters. The addition of a prologue means that the show does not begin with this level of discomfort. In a way, having a prologue both helps and hinders the audience's suspension of disbelief. By drawing attention to the artifice, the author reminds the audience that this is entertainment, not a lesson. Yet this concept was still rather young, especially in light of the centuries that the English morality and mystery plays dominated.

Tate, then, counters the frivolous idea that the prologue embodies with an appeal to the moral education of the audience. "Morals were always proper for the stage,/ But are ev'n necessary in this age" (19-20). Shakespeare's *Lear*, like many tragedies, has a weak moral poorly defined. Because of the play's complexity, almost every character commits some sin, but at the same time, many of the good deeds are completely selfless. The result of this mess is an ambiguity in who is at fault for the drama as it unfolds on the stage. Lear might fire the gun when he treats Cordelia so atrociously, but other characters assert their agency to enable or take advantage of the fallout of Lear's decisions. By restoring a triumphant, unambiguous ending to the play, Tate can recreate the line between good and evil. As this chapter will later show, Cordelia and Edgar are absolved of their sins, and the villainy of the older sisters and Edmund becomes a caricature of its former self. Tate here is promising that the changes will make sense of a complicated play. Tate will tie up the play in a nice package and put a bow on it.

In contrast, the epilogue brings the audience back to the artifice of the stage to comment on the nature of acting, rather than that of the performance. It is playful in its discussion about the nature of actresses off of the stage, the dichotomy of the sinner versus the saint. The last

three lines are the most interesting. They recall but do not echo the endings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. The epilogue says, "That in great Shakespeare's right, he's bold to say/ If you like nothing you have seen today/ The play your judgment damns, not you the play" (24-26). Rather than asking for forgiveness, Tate is suggesting that the audience should accept the faults of the play rather than questioning them. The invocation of Shakespeare is fun because it lends an authority to the claims of a man who has spent most of the play remixing Shakespeare's words.

The prologue and the epilogue combine their powers to set a lighter tone. By calling attention to the fourth wall, Tate is slipping, if not into the land of happy endings, at least into a more self-aware state upon which the comedy can build. Neither of these speeches is a reflection on the plot, like the Chorus's speeches in *Romeo and Juliet*. The play does not take itself seriously, and in some ways recognizes its flaws. Even though none of the characters will break the fourth wall within the play, this prologue and the epilogue set a conversational tone between the playwright and the audience. This decision builds the expectation that the play is meant to be lighthearted entertainment.

Tate also makes some changes that align the play more closely with his contemporary audience, particularly when it comes to roles for female actors. Cordelia's part is significantly expanded. Rather than going to France for almost three acts, she never leaves the country and instead becomes a central character. In Shakespeare, her influence on the play is best described by the fact that she is not there to help contain the insanity that is unfolding in her family and in her father's mind. Because Tate keeps her on the island, he has the ability to use Cordelia in much the same way. However, Tate never quite takes advantage of this situation. Cordelia will influence minor characters only in small ways; Tate is too loyal to the original structure to

actually use Cordelia as a full counter for her sisters, at least not until Shakespeare has deemed it safe for her to return.

Meanwhile, Goneril and Regan both see cuts to their lines, but this statistic is misleading and masks the improvements that Tate makes, at least from the standpoint of an actor. Tate's version in general is 25% shorter. The older daughters still receive plenty of development, and Regan even gains a scene. Tate also gives Cordelia a female servant who will travel with her. Even though *King Lear* offers some of the best female roles in all of Shakespeare, and certainly has more central female characters than any other play in his canon, these changes still fit a movement to the modern stage where it is legal for women to perform. Another factor in this change is Tate's new romantic subplots, which comes up later in this chapter.

The first big omission of the play is the Fool. At first it seems counterintuitive. Why would someone restructuring a play to brighten the ending want to eliminate a fool? Surely such a character would be helpful in lightening the tone. Conceivably, the role could even be expanded. Yet Tate does the complete opposite. The Fool is gone, his few important lines given to other people.

It is easy to explain why the role of the Fool is not expanded, at least. Tate largely leaves the tone of the piece intact for the first half, and even after that point, there is never slapstick humor or big laughs. The reason Tate takes out the Fool is harder to unravel. Perhaps the largest culprit is that Tate needs Lear to be sympathetic, but the Fool's presence calls that into question. Indeed, a large part of the Fool's role in Shakespeare is to call attention to the monarch's hand in his own destruction. The Fool constantly reminds Lear, and the audience, that Lear was the person who created an unnatural power dynamic. Then, when Lear ignores or shrugs off the



Fool's comments, the audience sees how Lear is not yet sorry for his actions or even able to see how they are wrong.

Immediately upon his entrance into the play, the Fool tells Lear that he is "taking one's part that's out of favour" (1.4.98). This is the third frank appraisal that Lear will hear of his actions in the play, and the Fool is the only one of those three (the other two being Cordelia and Kent) who will not suffer for this display. The Fool goes on to call Lear himself a fool, saying that "All thy other titles thou hast given away; that [fool] thou wast born with" (1.4.142-3). The Fool enforces his words by using "thou" rather than a more formal "you," and thus blurring the line between their respective statuses further. This fits in with the traditional liberties that a Fool may take with his masters. The Fool has the ability to say what the audience is thinking and get away with such treason, and so the audience has a natural attachment to him.

While all this fooling makes for good entertainment, it does not create a great deal of pity for Lear's condition. Tate needs to lay the groundwork for a purer sympathy for Lear than Shakespeare's tragic ending requires. While Shakespeare needs the decision to be a flaw, Tate must only show the results of the love test as a mistake. By eliminating the Fool, Tate eliminates a constant reminder of Lear's hand in his own circumstances.

Perhaps a more practical reason to cut the Fool is that he is not a particularly happy character. Tate is not writing a particularly bright play, and there is not necessarily a great amount of hope in the play's beginning. The machinations of the bad guys are all working, and power is slipping from both Lear's and Gloucester's hands. Tate even keeps the blinding of Gloucester. Yet the Fool is still a special brand of nihilistic that can only belong to the malevolent world of the tragedy. He is not only pointing out Lear's flaws but commenting on the flaws of society in general. Upon meeting Edgar, he pronounces that, "This cold night will turn us all to fools and

madmen” (Q 3.4.71-72). Later, in one of the lines cut from the Folio, the Fool says, “He’s mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse’s health, a boy’s love, or a whore’s oath” (3.6.14-15). The Fool is preoccupied with madness. He is also consumed by mistrust, which is only natural because Shakespeare is writing a play where even the people you hold most intimately to your heart are going to betray you. That is not the play that Tate is writing. Assertions that madness is an inevitable and irreversible state would be unsupported in Tate’s world, and trust is still some redeemed, even though the main characters must learn their lessons.

Because of this rejection of the dismal world that Shakespeare creates, the Fool’s prophecy of the Folio’s Act 3, scene 2 would seem far too harsh. The Fool continues to see a chaotic future of the world that makes no sense. He describes a world of justice—“No heretics burned by wenches’ suitors,/ When every case in law is right,/ No squire in debt, nor no poor night” (F 3.2.85-7)—the resolution of the policy is bitter. After all this order, his pronouncement is bleak:

Then shall the realm of Albion  
 Come to great confusion;  
 Then comes the time, who lives to see’t,  
 That going shall be used with feet. (F 3.2.92-5)

Apparently, according to the Fool, the entropic force that runs the play’s world is so great that if there were to be order, the country would fall apart anyway, and take humanity along with it. This kind of pronouncement from the Fool is justified once the country has burned itself to the ground in Act V, but once Tate removes that ending, the Fool is no longer the voice of reason that a good Fool is meant to be. In that way, the Fool would be more ill-suited to the play than

Jacques in *As You Like It*. The Fool would lose his rightful role as an audience surrogate and as a commentator on the action.

Tate's decision also reveals that he feels, as a critic and editor of the play, the Fool is not critical to the plot. Whatever lines that Tate thought needed to be kept in the play were simply passed off to a different character based on the circumstances. This could be seen as a half-truth. The Fool is, strictly speaking, ineffective. No one is amused, no one is taught, and no one is saved. His constant interjections in the second act can feel tedious, if only because the majority of the people on stage are ignoring him. But in his ineffectiveness, the Fool is revealing more about the characters around him than his absence can compensate for. The Fool clearly shows Lear's stubbornness and reluctance to see another's point of view in his first appearance, but he also demonstrates how Lear, in his growing insanity, becomes more receptive. Lear's attitude towards the Fool is a sign of his character development. When he cares more about the shelter of the Fool than his own security, Lear has truly come a long way from the man who turns from his favorite daughter in the first scene. Tate loses the way that Shakespeare slowly builds Lear's redemption, placing more pressure on the storm scenes to show how Lear has changed.

Tate does not just cut the Fool; he also eliminates France, both the country and Cordelia's husband, from the play entirely. The omission is not as notable because the Fool is a much larger part than France in Shakespeare. What was a rich and defined part in the anonymous play and an integral part of what makes that play a comedy becomes a one-scene-wonder in Shakespeare, so Tate did not have much source material. Still, France's elimination creates two voids in the play—the troops that fight against Goneril and Regan, and Cordelia's love interest.

Because Cordelia is no longer France's queen, she does not have access to the troops she leads in her husband's stead to take back the country from her sisters. Still, Tate needs a physical opposition to Goneril's and Regan's rules in order for there to be a true regime change. Tate then decides to make the play much more democratic. Whereas *Lear* is a play focused on the actions of individuals, Tate takes a more populist tone. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rebellion which Kent will eventually direct. Kent's impact on the plot is marginal at best in Shakespeare, but Tate gives him power with the people (who are offstage, of course). The following discussion comes from Act 4, scene 2:

GLOSTER: There's business for thee and of noblest weight.

Our injured country is at length in arms,

Urged by the king's inhuman wrongs and mine,

And only want a chief to lead 'em on.

That task be thine.

EDGAR: (aside) Brave Britons, then there's life in't yet.

KENT: Then have we one cast for our fortune yet...

GLOSTER: And be your cause as prosperous as 'tis just. (4.2.100-106, 110)

First, Kent is rewarded for being the only member of the older generation of nobles who does not commit an "inhuman wrong" by his new leadership role in the rebellion. This is in stark contrast to Shakespeare, where Lear banishes Kent for his honesty. Second, Edgar praises the character of the Britons. It is both optimistic and nationalistic, two things that Shakespeare neglects in Cordelia's analogous return from France. This is not a French force asserting a dubious claim to the English throne. Rather, it is the people themselves who are rebelling against the evil of the society. The commoners are no longer bystanders but rather the means through

which Lear and Cordelia will be restored. In a country where the people found themselves with more power than ever before, the seeds of nationalism were starting to grow. The movement also suggests forces that push the universe of the play towards equilibrium. Even if the main characters are not able to remedy their situation, it seems that the country itself will be able to rise up and greet this new challenge. This further strips away the bleakness of Shakespeare and replaces it with a much more organic environment.

Nationalism surely plays a part in why Cordelia now goes onto marry a good old Englishman, but Cordelia and Edgar make more sense as a couple than just a superficial reason or as a plot device. The two of them have fundamental similarities—strong moral compasses, deep devotion to their fathers, plenty of reasons to distrust people yet still optimistic, parallel circumstances. Combined with their similar temperaments, it is not unreasonable to think that the two of them would at least be friends if they had been met. Tate is in one sense exploring the possibilities if two characters who otherwise might never had met had a significant relationship with each other. Given that we know little to nothing of France in Shakespeare's version, whereas Edgar has nearly 100 lines, additions to Edgar's part could be less clunky than trying to fit in the French king. After all, while the king was a magnificent character in the anonymous play, that author had to write flimsy excuses to get the king to Britain and to keep him there. The natural links between Edgar and Cordelia then become all the more appealing. The audience, after its initial questioning reaction, can understand easily why the pair is feasible in universe.

Yet there are important plot implications to the decision to pair the two that cannot be ignored and indeed alter the structure of the play. First and foremost, Tate takes his largest step towards a comedy when he decides to play matchmaker. Shakespeare, in his treatment of France, pulled the focus of the play away from marriage and thus from the concept of unity. His couples

function more as individual people who sometimes share goals, like Cornwall and Regan do, and sometimes are completely at each other's throats, like Albany and Goneril are. Shakespeare's play is focused on disharmony, which makes it an inhospitable ground to functioning marriages.

The subplot between Edgar and Cordelia injects love into a play that is otherwise startlingly absent of true love and affection—except between Cordelia or Edgar and their respective parents. It is natural, then, that these two are the characters to fall in love with each other, and by giving the play a functioning romantic relationship again, Tate is investing in a happy future in a way that none of Shakespeare's characters ever do. Still, while they may seem compatible on the paper, Tate needs to prove that they are a good couple on the stage.

The love story, which is introduced before the daughters' test, realigns the motives and tensions in the first scene, but it does not necessarily increase the drama of Shakespeare's first act. In his restructuring of the first act, immediately before the love test comes a discussion between Edgar and Cordelia. Edgar implores Cordelia to love him, but she laments that her father wants her to marry Burgundy, and that she is bound by her duty. This short dialogue shows Cordelia's obedience to her father, even when it pains her personally. Therefore, even though her reasons for refusing to play Lear's game are the same as they usually are (her unwillingness to flatter), the audience gives her more sympathy because it is clearer that such actions do pain her. More importantly, however, the relationship with Edgar gives Lear more room to misinterpret Cordelia's refusal. He immediately turns on her refusal and believes it to be Edgar's fault, saying, "Now, minion, I perceive/ Thy fondness for the rebel son of Gloster,/ False to his father, as thou art to my hopes" (1.1.118-120). Ironically, this Cordelia does not make the decision based on the desire for love in her marriage (unlike her counterpart in the anonymous play). She even recognizes that she will lose her dowry if she does not play the game (1.1.94).

However, at the end of the scene, Cordelia does not fall into Edgar's arms, despite now being free to marry whomever she chooses. Rather, she finds herself concerned that Edgar will leave her as Burgundy did, and she tells Edgar that she cannot be with a man upon whose income she will be totally dependent. She tells him:

When, Edgar, I permitted your addresses,  
 I was the darling daughter of a king;  
 Nor can I now forget my royal birth,  
 And live dependent on my lover's fortune.  
 I cannot to so low a fate submit;  
 And therefore study to forget your passion,  
 And trouble me upon this theme no more. (1.1.214-221)

The conflict keeping the two apart is internal therefore. It is also entirely in character for Cordelia. Her greatest sin is pride, and her greatest virtue is honor and duty. Whereas initially she was willing to give up her love to please her father, she also finds herself unwilling or unable to flatter her father. After she has been disowned, she does not immediately fall into Edgar's arms. Rather, she questions his love and establishes that her pride would not allow her to be a trophy wife (1.1.226-234). The barrier between Cordelia and her father is the same as the barrier between Cordelia and Edgar.

As the play progresses, Edgar's passion for Cordelia does prove constant despite their separation. Just as Cordelia's pride is in character, so is Edgar's constancy. Just as he remains loyal to his father after he is outcast, he maintains his love for Cordelia. Edgar recognizes the otherwise foolishness of his devotion but cannot turn away even though it is in his best self-interest to do so:

But love detains me from death's peaceful cell,

Still whispering me Cordeia's in distress.

Unkind as she is I cannot see her wretched,

But must be near to wait upon her fortune (2.4.8-11)

Cordelia is his reason for living, and so he stays in the country even though his name is taboo. It is exactly the kind of dogged devotion that Edgar is known for in Shakespeare's play. This commitment to Cordelia pays off when he is able to rescue Cordelia and her servant from two ruffians sent by Edmund to capture them, even though he does not recognize them initially. When he realizes that the woman he has saved is also the woman he loves, he attempts for thirty lines to keep up the Poor Tom disguise. Cordelia sees through it, however, and the two are reunited, at least for a brief period of time.

The two lovers are separated again because of the clunky reality that carries over from Shakespeare. Because Cordelia and Edgar do not cross paths in the original play, they each have their own separate story lines in Act 4, and Tate must keep these arcs because they are so central to the plot. Lear must be nursed back to health, and Edgar must save his father from suicide. Therefore, their true reunion is delayed until the final scene, mostly by only physical distance. While this teases more tension in the race to save Cordelia's life, because she and Edgar have not been fully reunited, the scene is already sufficiently tense, especially in light of the Shakespeare's ending. The drama of the love plot, then, falls apart upon closer scrutiny because its conflicts are done away with too easily.

In the end, when Cordelia and Edgar secure the throne, Tate is reassuring the audience that the status quo has changed for the better. Their youth and vitality signal a new beginning, and their love creates hope. By being this positive influence on the play's universe, the two of



them are able to bring stability and calm. They follow the classic pattern of the lovers together, then separated, then together again, and this builds a romantic and comedic pulse in the play.

Tate's additions are some of the most noticeable changes in the play, but the sum of the many smaller changes carry more weight when moving the play from tragedy to comedy. These changes are necessary because Shakespeare built such a dark play and, because he is taking much of the language, Tate must actively fight against the darker undertones. Tate has a complicated relationship with his sources that is not as reverent as his own words would suggest, but he is also not disrespectful to them, either. He describes his reverence towards Shakespeare thusly: "Nothing but the power of your persuasion, and my zeal for all the remains of Shakespeare, could have wrought me to so bold an undertaking" (1). Yet the decisions that Tate makes do not always show the most reverence for Shakespeare that he claims to have.

Tate draws from both the Quarto and the Folio, as Sonia Massai points out in her article. Because this was a pre-conflation text, she argues, Tate was able to draw from each source as he wanted to, and therefore was also a literary and dramatic critic of the play. However, while it is clear that he did draw from Shakespeare, Tate's relationship with the anonymous play is less certain. Ultimately, I find the evidence linking the earliest play with Tate circumstantial at best.

My doubts about Tate using the anonymous play as a source stem from the characterizations of the later play. Though thematically that play is moving closer to the earliest version of the story performed on stage, key characters like Cordelia and Lear do not revert to their earlier portrayals. The simpler goodness that radiates from Cordella in the anonymous play may have been useful in a play that seeks to defend her actions. However, Tate decides instead to redesign Cordelia based on Shakespeare's model, whose pride is an important and strong thread

throughout the play. Cordelia's reimagined love plot also stays clear of similarities with the anonymous play. While both Gallia and Edgar clearly love Cordella/Cordelia for her virtue, Edgar is a much more active and relentless suitor. He also pursues goals separate from Cordelia's wishes, which is of course a carryover from Shakespeare. In these two relationships, Cordelia's affections towards the man are also very different. Gallia seems to be a love at first sight, gratitude-based relationship. In contrast, Cordelia is much more active in her relationship with Edgar. While some of this could be attributed to the changes that Cordelia undergoes in the intermediate play, I still believe the relationships are dissimilar enough to preclude a common idea.

Lear, meanwhile, maintains much of Shakespeare's fire and passion that the anonymous play largely forgoes. It would be easy to soften Lear in the vein of the anonymous play in order to make the resolution less complicated. In the anonymous play, after all, Leir is reinvigorated by the reunion with Cordella and therefore learns how to be a good ruler again. However, Tate holds to Shakespeare's portrayal of an old man defeated by his daughters and the madness, unable to rule again. Cordelia and Edgar become the true victors in the play and the old guard retires.

There are the language similarities to consider between the two plays, but ultimately, like James Black, I am left unconvinced by a tie directly between the two. It cannot be ruled out, especially because of Tate's proclivity to borrow what he needs from wherever to fit the story. Either way, he still discards much of the anonymous play, and thus it is hard to take the anonymous play seriously as a source for Tate to draw on.

The bulk of the language comes from Shakespeare; Tate will comfortably transpose a hundred lines without changing a word. He prefers to make structural changes to build his point rather than changes in the language. Some scenes are reordered, some are combined, and others

are eliminated, whether they are replaced or not. Because Tate is taking much of the language, this restructuring performs the heavy lifting.

For instance, first scene of the play starts off with the opening monologue from Shakespeare's Act 1, scene 2. By making this Edmund's introduction to the audience, the conversation between Albany and Gloucester shifts. Edmund has already declared his intentions to take his father's power, and so when his father introduces him to Kent, the audience knows that Edmund is going to betray Gloucester's fatherly affection. From that point, the scene then proceeds along the same lines as Shakespeare's Act 1, scene 1 (though it is alluded to that Edgar has already been accused of some crimes against his father in speeches by Gloucester and by Lear). After the end of the scene, however, the action goes back to Act 1, scene 2. Because this reordering, coupled with the new lines and subplots, places more emphasis on the Gloucester family. This is important because Tate wants to show more characters in conflict with each other rather than characters in conflict with each other. The obvious manipulation of the evil son grabs the audience's attention even before the main plot is unveiled, and so Gloucester's worrying about the astrological signs and his treatment of Edmund are less important. Gloucester's morality and questionable decisions are less important when his bastard son is so obviously a villain who would prey on anyone for power.

The second act remains mostly intact, and the third act mainly sees additions in order to flesh out the Cordelia and Edgar romance. Act 4, however, is similar to the first in that it creates a large revolving scene out of several smaller ones. All of the scenes in that act that deal with either Goneril or Regan are pushed before the large scene, so that the action is also more continuous, but also less emphatic on the royal family. That scene, Act 4 scene 4, reframes itself around the Gloucester family, with Lear as the interrupting action. Gloucester's attempt at suicide,

Lear's truth in the madness, and the attempt on Gloster's life fall in that order. The big difference, then, besides the conflation, is the narrative switch of the last two scenes of the act. This leaves Edgar and his revelation of the adultery hanging in order for Cordelia to tend to Lear, which in turn means that the fourth act ends quietly in the touching way Lear apologizes to Cordelia. Once again, that idea of redemption shines through because it is forgiveness, not vengeance, which closes the act. This kind of restructuring requires no additional lines at all to reframe the play.

Tate's other addition is his recasting of the characters. It is a conscious move from the grey world of Shakespeare's play and into an easier morality. Though he keeps the moral complexity of *Lear*, he upgrades Edgar to a second protagonist. With this promotion of Edgar comes the further vilification of Edmund, whose immorality grows in order to establish a clear antagonist for the audience to root against. The heightened contrast between the two brothers exaggerates the plot and makes it more comic because of the larger-than-life antagonist. Edmund's presence reminds the audience of the obstacle to Edgar's happiness that he must overcome in his heroic story.

As previously noted, Lear is a complex character, and Tate tries his hardest to shoehorn this vision of him into the new play. He does not find true success, however, because Tate is simply not the dramatist that Shakespeare is. Tate fails to erase the tragedy because in his version, the king cannot return to the throne triumphantly. Instead, the older generation must abdicate its rule in favor of Cordelia and Edgar.<sup>8</sup> The sense that Lear has been defeated by the

---

<sup>8</sup> This act of passing the torch resembles in many ways the retirement of Prospero in *The Tempest*. The ways in which this plot resembles the story of Cymbeline and *The Winter's Tale* after the changes to the ending have been made is also notable, if only because these similarities line up those later plays as successors of *King Lear* as the ethos of Shakespeare's worlds evolves.

older sisters still pulses in the last scene, something that is best seen in his deep distrust of Albany when the younger man comes to free him and his companions. “Go to, we are too well/ Acquainted with misfortune to be gulled/ With lying hope. No, we will hope no more” (5.4.65-7). Lear has changed, and for the better, but the scars on his heart and mind are still there. He is no longer the commanding but also naïve character he was in the opening scene.

Part of this defeat is mitigated by the elevation of Edgar. Edgar’s prominence in the play derives from his additions to the play. While most characters find their scenes cut, Edgar actually has new ones with new lines. The new love plot with Cordelia also helps matters. In Edgar’s ascension, the play finds a less ambiguous protagonist, especially because Edgar’s scenes of fake insanity are downplayed. While Shakespeare had used the Gloucester subplot as a way to mirror and amplify the tragedy, Tate takes its hollow ending and fills it so at least two of the characters in the play can find true happiness.

With the rise of Edgar to protagonist comes a parallel promotion of Edmund to chief villain. Tate raises the profile of Edmund at the expense of Goneril and Regan, both figuratively and literally. Perhaps the most notable aspect of this is the development of Edmund’s lecherous side. While in Shakespeare, the impression is always that Edmund is playing Goneril and Regan against each other in order to gain the most power possible, Tate dramatically increases his sexual appetite. The audience learns that he lusts after Cordelia even when she is appealing for Gloucester’s help. “O charming sorrow!,” he says, “how her tears adorn her/ Like dew on flowers. But she is virtuous,/ And I must quench this hopeless fire i’ th’ kindling” (3.2.70-2). The implication here is that he finds her appealing in her sorrow, but still he does not help her appeal. He later says, “I’ll gaze no more—and yet my eyes are charmed” (3.2.79). Instead of Edgar’s

---

At the same time, the resemblances are also strong evidence for the consideration of Tate’s play as a romance.

more genuine love for Cordelia, Edmund takes stock in her physical features rather than her kindness.

Later in that same scene, Edmund sends ruffians after Cordelia and plots to rape her, in a rare instance of Tate's version of the play being darker than Shakespeare's. His exact words are:

Then to th' field,  
Where like the vig'rous Jove I will enjoy  
This Semele in a storm. 'Twill deaf her cries  
Like drums in battle, lest her groans should pierce  
My pitying ear, and make the amorous fight less fierce. (3.2.120-124)

The imagery is disturbing and violent. It is also more explicit than most of the play, save for perhaps Gloster's blinding which is actually performed on the stage. With the use of words like "enjoy" and "amorous," Edmund comes off as particularly disgusting and depraved.

With Cordelia's sister Regan, Edmund takes his role as seducer seriously after the death of Cornwall. Tate adds a scene between the two at the beginning of Act Four (which falls immediately after the blinding of Gloster). The initial stage direction is "A grotto. Edmund and Regan amorously seated, listening to music" (4.1). It is important to take note that, even considering a probable intermission between the acts, Cornwall was alive 27 lines ago, and has not even been pronounced dead on stage yet. In his initial lines, he acknowledges the adulterous aspect. "Why were those beauties made another's right,/ Which none can prize like me?" (4.1.1-2). Later in the scene, he acknowledges in an aside that he must indulge Goneril in the same flattery. He tells the audience:

And yet I must forthwith go meet her sister,  
To whom I must protest as much.

Suppose it be the same, why, best of all,

And I have then my lesson ready conned. (4.1.14-17)

Just as in the Shakespeare, Edmund is courting the favor of the two sisters even as he pulls them apart, hoping to find the better side and gain power in that way. This scene could easily have been in the Shakespeare, but it is more powerful than the scene in which it replaces (Shakespeare's Act 4, scene 2) because the action is more dynamic and Edmund's motives are clearer.

Shakespeare's Act 4, scene 2 begins with a conversation between Goneril and Edmund and then ends with the martial feud between Goneril and Albany. Edmund only has one line in the scene, however. He says, "Yours in the ranks of death" (4.2) after Goneril has given him political instructions, a kiss, and details about how their affair should be conducted. In this way, Edmund is allowing Goneril to take the reins in their love affair, and leading Goneril on passively by letting her set the pace and tone.

In contrast, Tate gives Edmund the more active scene where we see him in Regan's embrace and see him lying to her. The scene is more dynamic, therefore, and it reveals the darker nature of Edmund's character and plan in a way that the exposition scenes cannot. It also gives him a chance to directly influence the sisterly dynamic by dropping a letter from Goneril where Regan will find it. Once again by giving Edmund more things to do, abstract themes like sibling rivalry are being simplified into a villainous plot.

Tate then takes this characterization of Edmund as divorced from feeling yet motivated by desire further when he reveals that Edmund has fully taken advantage of relationships he is already politically exploiting. When Edmund attempts to choose between the elder daughters, one of the factors he contemplates is the nature of the relationships so far. He muses to himself:

Cornwall is dead, and Regan's empty bed  
 Seems cast by Fortune for me, but already  
 I have enjoyed her, and bright Gonerill  
 With equal charms brings dear variety,  
 And yet untasted beauty. I will use  
 Her husband's countenance for the battle, then  
 Usurp at once his bed and throne (5.2.5-11)

Edmund is making his decision based on his sexual appetite as much as his political one. This callous decision for power is then flavored with lecherous undertones. The overall effect is then more repulsive because Tate once again makes Edmund's acts more explicit. It is clear that he values neither of his lovers as human beings, but rather as bodies and means to power. Edmund then loses the audience's sympathy which yet again restores a clearer morality to the play.

By showing the sick nature of Edmund's relationships with Regan and Gonerill, Tate is playing off of a comedy's tendency to end in happy marriages. Obviously, Cordelia and Edgar live happily ever after, and their love story is one of the main story lines, but Tate also takes the time to demonstrate relationships that are not working in order to contrast the different pairs. When Shakespeare gives the audience the marital spats of Goneril and Albany, the failure of the marriage serves to reinforce the malevolent universe. Tate adds context and shows that a successful and healthy relationship is possible if the people involved are also good people. This then plays into the justice of the ending. The sinners do not repent in Tate's vision, and so they do not see the rewards of a comedy.



Still, the play is only a comedy on a technicality. It is neither funny nor lighthearted. There is still torture, adultery, madness, and backstabbing, and Tate does not shy away from depicting these key pillars of the play. It would then perhaps be more accurate to describe the play as a romance or a more mature comedy. The end of this play is not the beginning only better, like most comedies present, but rather a new world, one that bears the scars of the old while still offering plenty of hope for the future. In that way, the play's plot feels like it could fit in alongside the last plays that Shakespeare wrote, especially with its resemblance to *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*.

What Tate is really doing, and what all of the previous versions of the play are doing, is writing a play about consequences. These endings reflect on what ought to be the results of the actions as they unfold on the stage. The anonymous play frames this in terms of salvation, and Shakespeare will focus on perdition. Tate takes a middle path between the two—redemption. Characters still suffer for the bad decisions that they make, but they are able to see a happy ending all the same if they truly repent.

Out of the entire cast, Gloster pays the most for his crimes. He still is blinded by Cornwall and Regan, after all. Yet he does not die for trusting the wrong son and banishing the right one. Rather, his actions to help Lear, as well as Edgar's dogged persistence to foil his father's suicide, are enough to redeem him. After he reunites properly with Edgar, he still seems to despair and even asks for death (5.6.145). Because Edgar is so important to the play, the audience cannot ignore this depression of its lead's father. It seems especially unfair that Gloster should suffer more than Lear for an arguably lesser crime; after all, Gloster trusts his bastard son far too much but also defends the mad king lost in the storm.

Because of Gloster's great suffering, there is a hollow comfort when Lear offers Gloster a new future, saying, "Thou, Kent and I, retired to some cool cell,/ will gently pass our short serves of time/ in calm reflections on our fortunes past" (5.6.147-9). Gloster will find peace with his friends, but he will still be dependent on others. Still, this ending is a fitting peace for the older generation. Lear, Gloster, and Kent will no longer have rule of the country, but they will enter into retirement together to live peacefully for the rest of their days under the rule of Edgar and Cordelia. In a play that is so often about the barriers and broken bonds between people, the older generation can at last find comfort in each other's arms.

This restored unity is the real reason the play can be called a comedy in the classic sense, a comedy where the misunderstandings of the beginning come to light and are righted. Tate ends the play in a jail, of all places. The scene is a revision of one that happens offstage in the Shakespeare version. As before, the guards come to execute Lear and Cordelia, but this time, the messengers—none other than Edgar and Albany—stop the guards in time. Cordelia lives, and so the play moves towards resolution. Tate's choice to set the final scene in a jail seems odd upon first examination. Yet, if the audience can suspend disbelief as the jail fills with all the remaining main characters, the scene is very dynamic. It starts off strongly as the audience sits on the edge of its seat, hopeful that Edgar and Albany will arrive on time. A good director and cast can then propel this energy forward into the rest of the scene, even if much of it is the necessary exposition describing the ways in which peace and order are being restored in the kingdom.

Besides the saving of Cordelia and Lear's lives, Gloster and Edgar can now meet each other in joy even though the sorrow of Gloster's blinding is still present. The two families are bonded not just by friendship and trials, but now also by marriage, the ultimate goal of any comedy.

The biggest question about the change to a satisfactory ending must be whether the characters earn it. In the previous chapter of this thesis, I discussed how the chain of events Shakespeare crafts implicates many people in the most heinous crimes of the play, and Tate leaves that chain intact in many places. Tate simply fails to address the way in which Lear totally upended the country for a significant amount of time because he was simply mad at his youngest daughter. Lear suffers very little lasting consequences, unless one considers the death of the elder daughters, and so, while he is no longer fit to rule, happiness is not excluded from his future. He comes out scarred but stronger, but his actions are not different enough to excuse his faults almost entirely.

Tate's ending holds up best if the audience believes in redemption, in the idea that no human being's mistakes can hold so much sway over the universe. The reason Shakespeare's play is so bleak is that he leads the audience on, and there is a feeble flicker of hope even down to the last minutes of the play that something will turn out all right. When Shakespeare refuses the audience the resolution that it wants, the tragedy becomes all the more poignant. Tate merely delivers the ending that audiences want—an intact England with capable rulers.

In some ways, Tate is playing to the audience's tastes, and the preference for his version reveals quite a bit about the psychological expectations and preferences of the public. Sometimes what we want is that warm fuzzy feeling from a happy ending, not a bleak landscape where something great has been reduced to ashes. And sometimes it is more rewarding to see that happy ending after having been dragged from the depths of despair.

Yet Tate also reveals a much more sophisticated truth in his largely successful version of the play. While it is easy to classify plays into classical tragedies and comedies—does everyone die, or get married?—the line between the two is often blurry. That Tate is able to capture the

essence of many of Shakespeare's characters and the words themselves only proves this point. Tragedy, then, is as much about circumstances as it is about the actors. Tate's play has to be plausible; otherwise, it would not have lingered in the collective consciousness as long as it did. A modern audience may prefer Shakespeare's bleaker ending, but this preference may in fact be more arbitrary than we would like to think.

## Conclusion

Because of the Shakespearean play, we as modern audiences tend to associate the story of King Lear so strongly with tragedy. It stands as one of the great tragedies in the canon, either Shakespearean or English, and this is a spot well-earned. The play is exceptionally bleak in its outlook because of the lack of salvation, or even a complete redemption. So many characters fail to make successful personal relationships, instead dissolving their bonds into fighting, vengeance-seeking, and miscommunicating. This iteration has thus steeped modern interaction with the story in a dark universe. But that does not have to be the case, and is in fact counterintuitive to the story and the majority of interpretations of the narrative. In eight hundred years, the impulse of most writers has been to draw a happy conclusion from the events of the narrative.

Studying the narrative through the lens of genre, then, offers several new insights. First, a story does not have a predetermined genre or ending. For the writers, the story can be a blueprint. Like the relationship between Geoffrey of Monmouth and Holinshed, but a playwright can just as easily decide to use a story as a prompt and then explore and extrapolate a different chain of events. Much like real life, one building can facilitate different riddles, and even more radically different ends.

It follows, then, that Shakespeare was aware of this story's tendency towards clear, neat closures. He is in fact playing what the audience wants to happen—the vanquishing of the older sisters and Edmund and the restoration of Lear and Cordelia—and what the audience intellectually knows will happen against each other. Even as the play becomes increasingly more tragic with a mounting body count, Shakespeare continues to give little moments of hope and missed connections. Edgar is given the power to stop Edmund when he acquires the letter, but

his challenge to Edmund comes too late, after the order for Cordelia and Lear's deaths has gone out. Even when Edmund tells everyone of the order, it is too late to save Cordelia from the hanging, but Lear (and the audience to some degree) holds out hope that she is alive. Even in the last lines of the play, these flickers of hope persist. Lear speaks for the audience when he hopes that the feather in front of Cordelia's face moves.

These false hopes are a large contribution to the darkness of the play. By the time that Act Five comes, no one expects Hamlet to make it out alive, especially when he almost explicitly states his suicidal mission. Desdemona's fate always seems precarious, and the witches even tell Macbeth the circumstances of his downfall and death. In all of these plays, the question is never if the protagonist will survive. Rather, the question is how the final moments of the play will happen. *King Lear*, subverts these trends by leaving the question of the battle unresolved as the characters enter the final act and allowing Edgar to come up with a play to usurp his brother. Even though the play is very dark, as previously discussed, the audience's hopes cannot be ignored.

*King Lear* could be nothing but a tragedy because of this dark tone, but it still bears generic similarities with the "problem plays" that Shakespeare was writing at the same time that he was working on *Lear* and *Macbeth*. These plays—*Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Merchant of Venice*—fit poorly into the classical definitions of comedy and so bear a striking resemblance to tragedy at times. *Measure for Measure* is perhaps the most uneasy of the plays. In it, a young woman preparing to be a nun finds herself in very precarious positions in her quest to save her brother's life. For Isabella, the play is very nearly a tragedy because, while the audience knows that the friar helping her is the duke, all Isabella knows is the public story. In

this way, the dramatic irony both seems to feed and tame the tragic elements. The audience knows that Claudio is alive, true, but at the same time, Isabella continually puts herself and Marianna at risk. The ending of the play cannot be called anything but problematic because the quick attempts to create marriages for everyone ends up feeling just like that—artificial and contrived. In this way, as well through their internally inconsistent (but more realistic) characters, the play rejects a classical definition.

*Measure for Measure* shares quite a few elements with *King Lear*, in fact, and these similarities create a framework for a darker comedy that eventually become a tragedy. For instance, Isabella carries a strong moral code that would sacrifice her brother's life over her chastity. Cordelia's decision to fail the love test represents her moral code, something which cannot be quantified, or even qualified. Both of these women take great risks in order to push the story towards a happy ending, even if that vision of a better future does not necessarily include themselves. At the same time, there are gross abuses of power by Angelo and Edmund in the plays, proving in these universes the idea that power corrupts absolutely, and both plays deal with the loss of a close family member to unjust forces.

The similarities between these two plays allows a constructive critical examination of *Lear* through the lens of the problem plays. In a most similar case study, the parallels form a context that bridges two different genres. In the first act of both plays, the ruling character decides to abdicate his power, which quickly proves to be a mistake when the person now in power abuses it in the second act. Our heroines are both strong willed but slightly grating in their firmly set principles, even when their beliefs are obviously wrong. In the fourth act of *Measure*, however, the Duke starts to weave a complicated plan while his work unravels as quickly as he

can weave it. Lear, meanwhile, is imprisoned in his madness even when he partially reconciles with his youngest daughter.

The biggest difference that leads to a happy ending in one and a tragedy ending in the other is the role of the authority figure (which is also something Tate taps into). While the Duke trusts the wrong person in the beginning of the story, he actively works to right the wrongs of his right hand man. He is a mostly benevolent, though also Machiavellian, ruler of his people, and at the end of the play, he is able to restore the order of things via both his position in society and the knowledge he has gained from spending time living among his subjects. Lear, meanwhile, is not in a position past the third act where he can take back the kingdom. While the fight may be to restore him to the throne, it is obvious that his madness would be just as detrimental to the kingdom as the harsh reality that Goneril and Regan assert over the kingdom. Lear's madness, then, must be considered another reason that the play cannot end successfully.

Another similarity that must be discussed between the two plays is the audience reaction to the ending. *Measure for Measure* gains plenty of attention for its final scene, including Isabella's plea for Angelo's life and two unanswered proposals to her from the Duke, and *King Lear* was not performed in its original form for over a century. With *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Merchant of Venice* rounding out the group, they are plays that sometimes feel unsatisfactory, like something is wrong or missing. In the case of the two problem plays, that gut feeling prevents the audience (especially the modern one) from truly enjoying what might be considered a "happy" ending otherwise. With *Lear*, the tragedy swings so far into despair that it is unable to be presented on the stage. In writing these kinds of plays, Shakespeare, intentionally or unintentionally, is setting the audience up for the question, "What is genre?" This may not have been the primary concern of the original audience, but in the past century, critics have



started a long-standing debate in order to properly classify all of Shakespeare's plays. This impulse, while human, defeats the purpose of genre.

Genre is supposed to define guidelines for a play or a book or a poem to follow. Genre helps us compare the plots or characters between different stories, and genre makes the critics happy because it is an easy way to sort. Trudier Harris defines it as "an umbrella concept that allows many disparate, and often related, concepts to be conveniently divided and subdivided" (509). The relationship between a play and the genre that it espouses may not line up, and such a match is not necessary for a play to be satisfying. Genre is more like a set of boundaries rather than actual rules. In fact, in the act of breaking these rules, Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a predecessor to the postmodern plays that also flirt and cross the lines.

Another lesson that *King Lear* teaches is that satisfaction and closure have very little to do with the actual ending of a play, and everything to do with how a play builds to that point. Human beings construct narratives from the events they see, transforming these events into scenes, and acts, and plays. Part of this shaping comes from our expectations for the end and the way that we constantly revise our predictions. We take our clues from the theme and the earlier action in the play to create our own personal idea of an ending. James W. Halporn says in this reception theory, "the text suggests certain expectations to the reader, and the reader comes to the text with certain expectations. And these expectations... are first and foremost directed to genre. In both directions, there can be frustrations and satisfactions" (630). While he is talking about Greek literature, this is just as true for the stage, if not more applicable because of the personal bond created between an audience and the characters. A good ending, therefore, surprises us within these boundaries we erect or falls within new boundaries when we reexamine the play on a later date. We can expect *Lear* to be a comedy until Gloucester is blinded, at which

point the horrors of the play start and the audiences' mental framing of the story radically changes.

Thus, Shakespeare's *King Lear* is not just a tragedy because it ends in death. It is a tragedy because people fail to learn from their mistakes, take responsibility for their actions, fully apologize for their crimes, or create and sustain meaningful and mutual bonds with each other. The sheer number and severity of the micro-tragedies is what makes the play so bleak, even if that darkness is not fully realized until the final scene. We spend most of the play hoping that one of these failings will turn around, that something will stop the madness, so that, when everyone dies, our hopes are truly crushed. *King Lear* is truly a play about perdition, and this is what sometimes makes the play intolerable.

I think Shakespeare fell back into vogue in the 1960s for two reasons. One, he is the superior writer to Tate. Two, and more important considering Tate never pretended to be a better author, Shakespeare's play appeals to us in a world with mass casualties and huge natural disasters. It appeals to us at the same time as we are exploring a postmodern stage. It appeals to us in an era where we as a culture increasingly no longer find answers in organized religion. The play's incomprehensibility, while unsettling, gives us a voice through which to vent all our postmodern frustrations, and, in doing so, it has become the classic Shakespeare play of our age.

## Bibliography

- Booker, Christopher. *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006. Print.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Christina (Theodora) of Markyate." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-329>>.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Clotilde." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-350>>.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Delphine of Provence." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-443>>.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Dwyn." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-488>>.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Elizabeth of Hungary." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-542>>.

- Farmer, David Hugh. "Hedwig." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-791>>.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Mildgyth." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. : Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr. 2014  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1154>>.
- Farmer, David Hugh. "Ursula and companions." *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*.: University Press, 2011. *Oxford Reference*. 2011. Date Accessed 3 Apr 2014.  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1572>>.
- Halporn, James W. "Genre, Expectation, and Dramatic Criticism." *The American Journal of Philology*. 110. 4 (Winter 1989): 628-634. JSTOR.
- Hammond, Paul. "James I's Homosexuality And The Revision Of The Folio Text Of King Lear." *Notes & Queries* 44.1 (1997): 62-64. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 17 Oct 2013. JSTOR.
- Harris, Trudier. "Genre." *The Journal of American Folklore*. 108.430 (Autumn 1980): 509-527.
- Law, Robert Adger. "Richard The Third, Act I, Scene 4". *PMLA*, 27.2 (1912): 117-141. Web. 3 April 2014.
- Massai, S. (1996). Tate's critical 'editing' of his source-text(s) for the history of king lear. *Textus: English Studies in Italy*, 9(2), 501-522. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/53814183?accountid=14882>

Potter, Robert. *The English Morality Play: Origins, History, and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1975. Print.

Satin, Joseph. *Shakespeare and his Sources*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1966. Print.

Tillyard, E. M. W. *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1949. Print.

Wallace, Jennifer. *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

Woolf, D. R. "Genre into Artifact: The Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. 19.3 (Autumn 1988): 321-354. Web. 10 April 2014. JSTOR.