

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



King Leir within the Thicket: Gender, Place, and Power

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Volume 35, numéro 1, hiver 2012

Gendering Time and Space in Early Modern England

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105887ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i1.19075>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Kermode, L. (2012). *King Leir* within the Thicket: Gender, Place, and Power. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 35(1), 65–84.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i1.19075>

Résumé de l'article

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Leir/Lear and the reality of space and time

*K*ing Leir was a Queen's Men's play, probably written between 1588 and 1595. It is a "chronicle history" play that ends without the deaths of Leir and Cordella. The loyal courtier character Perillus is mostly a Kent-type figure, but includes elements of what Shakespeare would extract to create Gloucester, the Fool, and Edgar. At first, the elder sisters, Gonoril and Ragan, seem far more concerned with the extraordinary beauty of the young sister (which puts them in the shade) and their competitive sartorial fashion sense than with politics. All the sisters are unmarried until after the love test, then Gonoril marries Cornwall and Ragan marries Cambria (Wales). Cordella is rejected after refusing to play the game of flattering her father or allowing him to get her married off to the King of Hibernia (Ireland). She wanders alone until found by the disguised King of France and his trusty courtier Mumford, who have come to England to seek out good-looking women (the play is a bizarre comedy as well

as a melodramatic thriller). They return to France, where eventually Leir and Perillus, having survived an assassination attempt by Ragan, turn up, though on the edge of starvation. The reconciliation scene happens on a French beach, an invasion of Britain follows very quickly, and the evil sisters and their husbands are not killed, but chased back into the edges of Britain. The play uses history (as do other Queen's Men's plays) to show the victory of godliness and loyalty to kin and country. It also suggests the benefit of leagues with foreign friends, and, interestingly for a study of space and place, it therefore takes us outside the bounds of the British mainland.

There are several significant differences between this anonymous *Leir* play and Shakespeare's *King Lear* (ca. 1605) that bear on an examination of the gendered and generational battle to create and control the places and moments of historical action.¹ A first cluster of differences is that there is no map in the early *Leir* play, the daughters are all unmarried, and Leir does not come to the play with the love test planned; it is the brainchild of his wicked courtier, Scalliger, who adds the notion of giving the biggest portion of the kingdom to the daughter who proves the best rhetorician. Another difference is that the earlier *King Leir* does not go mad; he does, however, reach the edges of despair with extreme fatigue and hunger, and these were easy indicators for Shakespeare to push into madness. A third important difference to the way in which characters use, perceive, and move through the space of the plays is in the contrasting use of disguise. I will not be pursuing this aspect in the space of the current essay, but it is interesting to note that the Kent figure, Perillus, is not disguised, and there is no separate Gloucester and Edgar subplot (thus no blinding, no Gloucester/Lear interaction, and no cliff scene with Edgar); however, the King of France finds Cordella when he is disguised (not during the love test, but later); Cordella and the French court group are all disguised when they meet the desperate Leir and Perillus in France (the old men, too, are wearing the coats of the sailors who brought them across the channel). There are plenty of other contrasts, and a longer study would want to examine the changes or extensions that Shakespeare made from what I believe to have been a very detailed knowledge of this version of the play.²

I argue in this essay that King Leir's daughter Ragan invents a new alternate or parallel world to the one experienced in the remainder of the space of the play. She does this by producing a place called the thicket, where she intends to have her father and Perillus murdered; this production marks her

as extraordinary, for her attempt to alter and control space and time is akin to Lear's invention of a new set of British relations by producing and dividing the map. Unlike Lady Macbeth or Joan de Pucelle, this woman does not have to be labelled mad or a witch to enact such wonders, although I will shortly elaborate on the notion of insanity and human/natural relations; nor does she commit suicide or take revenge on a spiteful sister. These familiar suppressions of women's will are more apparent in Shakespeare's plays.

Both *Leir's* Ragan with her thicket and Shakespeare's Lear with his map attempt to place perceived subordinates within boundaries that they expect to be able to control; the virtual worlds they thus produce on paper and on stage have the potential to alter the perception of space, place, and time. But their very absence from those places (King Lear from one daughter's house/kingdom or the other, Ragan from the thicket to which she sends a surrogate) allows spatial process (i.e. what happens in any place) to create independent, unpredictable, and uncontrollable relationships between subjects. Such realities (the journey of *Leir* and Perillus or the exchange of letters between daughters) produce new plot elements that are beyond the purview of the place-makers themselves. King Lear cannot foresee the complex and bitter relational lines ahead of him, and the God of the anonymous *King Lear* will not allow human corruption of his own narrative — patriarchally inclined divine power overrules the unruly woman. In each case, *Lear's* contract scene and *Leir's* thicket scene, the creator of the place works to affect time as well as space. Indeed, to locate and fix relations within a place is also to (pretend to) slow or stop time, to freeze what Michel de Certeau calls "the vectors of direction, velocities and time variables" that make up the dynamism of lived space.³ (While I am interested in the geographer's distinction between place and space and will have to touch on such distinction here, I will for the purposes of the present discussion assume that space is the lived and ongoing process achieved through the perception and interaction of multiple objects in proximity.)

Lear's stabilization of space is lost in a flash of nothing. If we can only live in the present, then processable meaning seems to exist on each side of our present moment, in the production of the space *before* us (temporally *prior*), in the interpretation of what is *before* us (spatially *in front*, but already cognitively behind, in the past), and in the imminent breaking out of the fecund space that is happening at every moment by our very presence in any place. In his analysis of the human experience of time, George Kubler finds that time, like mind,

is unknowable as such. We know time only indirectly from what happens in it: by observing change and permanence; by marking the succession of events among stable settings; and by noting the contrast of varying rates of change.⁴ Kubler seems to be promoting the arguable but attractive theory of immanent existence, of living in an ongoing present tense. Such a view does seem to align with Lear's inability to cope with the situation at the beginning of the play, as we shall see. Like any performance experience, actuality as a stable knowledge is impossible, as life is in motion, always a fleeting instantaneous present between all the pastness and potentiality that envelops it. In Kubler's words,

Actuality is when the lighthouse is dark between flashes; it is the instant between the ticks of the watch; it is a void interval slipping forever through time; the rupture between past and future; the gap at the poles of the revolving magnetic field, infinitesimally small but ultimately real. It is the interchronic pause when nothing is happening. It is the void between events. Yet the instant of actuality is all we ever can know directly.⁵

Shakespeare's Lear has a terrifying moment of *unreality* when Cordelia says "nothing" (1.1.85, 87). Lear thinks he has occupied and delineated the place of the love test, but Cordelia's word does not register; it is not the flash of light that Lear expects, and he can only wait in dark actuality for another moment to bring reality back to the void he is experiencing. Cordelia, meanwhile, we should understand, is occupying her own independent place in which her sense of "right" is keeping her world stable. Stuck in the darkness of understanding, Lear pleads for reality: "Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again" (1.1.88).⁶ The iteration of "nothing" holds off Lear's reality. As if she has just presented him with two identical frames in a film strip, he has experienced the infinitesimal moment between them and then witnessed the impossibility of non-movement. In a psychoanalytic reading, the nothing confirms Cordelia's retention of the phallus; she will give no thing back to Lear for him to wield. Time seems momentarily to stand still when his conviction of the emotive, dynamic, and masterful power of patriarchy is simply stymied by repetition. And a repetition, moreover, of denial and emptiness — those elements that will come to define the horror of the feminine that crush Lear (the womb, the open ground, and the vacancy of Goneril's final line, "Ask me not what I know" [5.3.150]). He can only bring time into motion again by accepting an altered

reality, the one in which the map is redrawn and he comes to occupy a new place as father of two daughters only.⁷

The gendered body in space

In *Humoring the Body*, Gail Kern Paster argues that the psychology of emotions does not exist in a binary relationship with the physicality of the humours; the post-enlightenment understanding of immaterial forces (e.g. “spirit”) was placed by the early moderns within the physical workings of bodily circulations and transactions. Moreover, the emotional/humoural identities of the body as microcosm were not strictly analogical with the macro-cosmos, but were continuous with it, exchanged, of the same stuff. Paster quotes *The Jew of Malta*: “What wind drives you thus into Malta road? / The wind that bloweth all the world besides, / Desire of gold” (3.5.2–4).⁸ Desire is a wind both within and without the body, and it is the *same*, if adapted, wind. Humoural study is therefore an ecological criticism, one that understands the character in environmental terms and vice versa. Paster goes on to admonish, “we fail to recognize how the porous and volatile humoral body, with its faulty borders and penetrable stuff, interacts differently with the world than the ‘static, solid’ modern bodily container.”⁹

Shakespeare has Lear impose his map upon the kingdom(s) for both the reasons mentioned above — power and safety — but the sense of this behaviour is instantly in question. To be sane is of course to be healthy (*sanus*), and it appears that only the *insane* Lear communes with the stormy dynamics of nature while all the healthy characters attempt to control it or lock it out (the liminal Fool is anti-storm [3.2.10–12] and makes perfect sense in his argument, and “mad Tom” is horribly “a-cold” [3.4 & 4.1] in nature because he’s *not* mad). But such thinking is only partly appropriate, because while it certainly seems to accommodate some of the thrust of the play, it is also modern thinking to the point of being drained of multiple early modern notions of health and human/natural relations.

If the human body is indeed a microcosm with continuities and penetrations from flesh, breath, and bone to water, air, and rock, then the process of cutting off the working of the outside world, of suppressing it with a *separation* of the human, ruling body (through a power of the will as well as physical

boundaries such as walls, roofs, fences, and windows) from the non-human environment, is in fact a sign of unhealthy isolation from life, an *insanity*. We recognize a version of this problem easily enough in a character such as Lady Macbeth, for whom water can no longer do its “natural” cleansing work on her isolated body (only self-witnessed through an insane mind); we are reminded of her “unnaturalness” through her powerfully non-feminine will to “unsex me here” (1.5.39).¹⁰ The overt gendering of the will to power in tragic plays reminds us not that there is a fundamental difference between men’s and women’s human/environmental relationship (which there clearly *is*), but instead that the organized, independent, and therefore insane human will to govern space by making its dynamism static is a dangerous and unsustainable condition tending to the death of the self-isolated human subject. But such “insane” behaviour is also everyday behaviour. Humoural and environmental *insanity*, then, is a fundamental human trait in constant tension with the recognition of the necessary continuity between the human body and the natural world.

The delineation of space

It is important that Lear’s spatial decision-making is not just altered, but changed so that we do not learn the outcome — *how* is Cordelia’s third “digest[ed]” (1.1.126) among the others? The spaces are won and lost by the women’s words, but they are given to the husbands; Cordelia is expected to marry either France or Burgundy when she accepts her portion of land. Given the two factors made plain here — the difficulty of understanding the spaces represented in the play and the ownership or stewardship of those vague spaces by the men in the play — it seems it would be revealing to ask where the women stand in relation to the staged space of the Lear Britain.

In my experience of the play, there seems no doubt that a sort of compensatory desire to achieve material place and to thrust the men out into blank and wandering space drives the two elder daughters. After all, they have been ambiguously, confusingly (and, to them, belatedly) given vast spaces of land only to have their possession curtailed by the continued presence of the king and of inadequate husbands (one “Milk-livered” [4.2.32] and the other fatally penetrated by a menial’s sword). Things are different in the *Leir* moment, because none of the daughters is married. They will still receive their land on

the condition that they marry, but the scene plays out — from Lear's personal uncertainty to the catty relations among the women — as a familial one more than as a political court affair. The lack of a map in the anonymous *Lear* permits no demonstrative “from this line to this,” and no description of “champaigns riched” (1.1.61–62) to insist on the *possession* of the land that marks *Lear*. The division should therefore be an easier thing in *Lear*, Britain a known place stretching easily from Lear's court to those of Cornwall, Wales, and, if Lear could have swung it, Ireland. It is all the more shocking for the *Lear* play characters, then, if not as deeply painful for the audience, to find that the landscape of Lear's Britain is vast and uncouth, rife for a powerful female will to create dangerous and previously unknown places.

De Certeau talks of the shift from itineraries (tour guides) to maps as political, static representations:

The map, a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a ‘state’ of geographical knowledge, pushes away into its prehistory or into its posterity, as if into the wings, the operations of which it is the result or necessary condition. It remains alone on the stage. The tour describers have disappeared.¹¹

In Shakespeare's play, King Lear attempts to surprise with the presentation of an unequivocal map, but the urges, “operations,” fears, and journeys that have accumulated to produce this document cannot “disappear”; they remain in the wings “within,” offstage but in the space of the play's consciousness. To create a fixed place that is self-serving and autonomous, that cannot be necessarily linked to its founding forces (human, environmental, political), is to wield extraordinary power over the space of nature. It enables authority to keep subjects *in their place* and force them to recognize that place as *theirs* in a hegemonic context. Ragan similarly maps the place of the thicket onto the great external space, subordinating her father by sending him to an isolated place that she would like to see become his tomb. What Lear manages to do to escape is bring the lines of itinerary back into the picture, to find a way *out* of the place of the thicket and back into the wilderness, which, for all its fearfulness, is still the space of potential recovery.

John Gillies has written that the language of the map scene “was invested in creating a virtual landscape,” although there are only a few moments in

which the Shakespeare play indicates and/or invents feature-filled space in the opening scene.¹² Experience of place seems to occur through the trope of synecdoche and what I shall simply call “occupation.” The indication of vastness, depth, expanse is made by presenting the part for the whole (a hovel to signify protection, a shelled peas-cod for a man of nothing). The intimation of space’s knowability, which is belied time and again in the play, is got at when the space in question is, is about to be, or can be conceived to be, occupied by a human body. Drama, of course, puts a body in those spaces, even if they are only virtual, potential, synecdochal. Anamorphic space comes into focus as a defined place when *occupied* by a perceiving human body, or a projected sense of that body.

It is not just the effect of maps, but the effect of drama as a whole, to present a *virtual* representation of the spaces it means to convey. Even a performance in real time of a player speaking a monologue or improvisation in the present, of the present, directly addressing the audience about the relative situations of actor and theatre-goer, is a *performance*. Therefore, it is not the same as the “real” places we feel we experience before and after a dramatic *interlude* — that medieval word suggesting an awareness of performance as a time span experienced as different from activities of personhood and place on either side of it. An “interlude” is a playing between “real” experience, but also a space between the playing out of our “real” lives — a space of real experience, reflecting on human spaces, occupation, and interaction. In the interlude, the “real” is either side; on either side, the “real” rests in between, in the imminent and the just-occurred. “Actual” experience is in the present effect and in future potential. Brian Walsh has examined how history plays tell stories about the telling of stories and therefore always give us a removed sense of the past, even as we feel we are witnessing something in actuality and in the present. And Philip Schwyzer has suggested the provocative power of historical drama to invent retrospectively a present and future sense of nationhood.¹³ These scholars and others have recognized the relationship between controlling space and influencing our perception of time.

The difference between play time and real time comes down to the will of the subject to populate, or occupy, the space on her or his own terms by making places that try to answer questions: Who am I? What is my country? What do I love? and so on. Dramatic performance always presents the “reality” of experience in a space that is not its own, one that is virtual. But in doing so,

it suggests that all experience works similarly. The “nowness” of performance, its fleeting activity, aggravates the truth that “play” and “real” are two sides of the same coin. Akin to the pseudo-philosophical problem of whether a tree falling in the forest makes a noise if nobody is there to hear it is the very real proposition that the thicket scene will raise — that the “real” experience of one set of characters who are present and occupy a place within the space of the play may be a non-existence for others who are absent. Without being present, a subject cannot know a place, control its process, or remember it. They can, however, still *imagine* it, and make use of it to alter conditions where they are.

Virtual representations are generally assumed to be *virtually* the real thing, as close as a representation can be without *being* the real thing. Thus a map pretends authority and stability but is quickly redrawn by human presence, narrative, and time. However, we’ve just seen that such a distinction between the real and the virtual is a matter of subjective placement (occupation of space) and point of view (will to produce through that occupation a place of intended activity). Virtual representations are possessed of *virtue*, “natural” character, admirable goodness (or at least disinterest in tragic contexts); hence the ubiquitous recourse to (appeals to, laments for the loss of) “nature” in the *Leir/Lear* plays, especially Shakespeare’s, and its frequent setting in opposition to “will” as an unnatural destabilizing force procured or wielded by unruly, “unreal,” unpredictable daughters. The natural (neutral) goodness in such plays is of course a patriarchal one, and hence virtual reality is sustained with a masculine identity, a vigour and *virtù* of the man (*vir*). Contraventions of this tripartite identity — assuredness of their near-accuracy of representation, the worthiness contained within the space being represented or experienced (the mirror to nature), and the vigorous determination of the space’s use and meaning *by men* — constitute the destructive force in Shakespeare’s four major non-Roman seventeenth-century tragedies. Each play presents the titular man (Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Lear) who should command the places of experience from the start, based on strong, “natural” male will and virtuous relations between men (orders of rank, understanding of one’s position, etc.). In each case, the places are penetrated by the “unnatural,” unvirtuous, and monstrous unrecognizable (female) alternatives to necessary *virility*. As a history rather than a tragedy, the anonymous *Leir*’s dangerous women can only temporarily penetrate and redefine experiential space. The place that Ragan makes her own in the thicket scene relies on male surrogacy to carry out her

actions and, as we shall see, the woman in absentia cannot finally compete with the attendant, physical occupation of the space — and therefore the virtual and moral point of view given to an audience — by the old men.

A place called “the thicket”

The anonymous *Leir* already lays out a hostile landscape that Shakespeare would later rip the insides out of to leave a characterless expanse for human misery. When Cornwall and Cambria meet on their way to see Leir’s daughters, they hint that they are in a foreign land only twenty miles west of London. “It seemeth to me twenty thousand miles” (2.2.3) declares Cornwall, at once voicing a common lover’s complaint about time and space’s distortion, but also suggesting the blankness of the space between his court and Leir’s at “Troynovant.”¹⁴ Cambria exclaims, “I thought as much to have met with the sultan of Persia, / As to have met you in this place, my lord” (2.2.22–23). No one in the Elizabethan audience is supposed to believe at face value that provincial England is so foreign, of course, especially those audiences paying to see this play performed by the Queen’s Men as they toured extensively around the country. So what might be the ludic and extra-dramatic purposes of and motivations behind such representation? One clear advantage of such a setup would seem to be the sharp contrast that can subsequently be made between such open and openly unknowable space(s) and well-defined *places* in which the specific moments of historical change (plot elements) occur. The open space of ancient Britain is wild, dangerous, and “uncouth” (4.2.9) only a few miles from civilized houses. The court and household hospitality together represent a major contrast with the “natural” world, which constitutes a “space” between the places of proper occupation and human activity.

Indeed, these open spaces between places of domesticity and hospitality were hard to “know” for the audience as well as the characters. Travel routes were improving at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but methods of movement by foot, horse, and cart were subject to unpredictable and extreme weather patterns and limited hours of light. Travel outside of immediate market spheres or family residences, moreover, seemed unnecessary for those with no business (or leisure) in larger towns or the city of London. The play compresses and expands time and space unclearly, alienating stage Britain from its audience. Old Leir and Perillus, for example, seem to walk from

Cornwall to Wales faster than Gonoril's messenger (presumably riding a horse) covers the same distance, and they are, predictably, exhausted by this journey. The strangeness of the country, the distances covered, and the difficulty of assessing a consistent chronology in the spaces draws the characters themselves and the audience attention *toward* constructed and knowable locations, either buildings or arranged meeting points, and emphasizes the fear of, and need quickly to traverse, the space between. *Leir's* Gonoril, for one, hopefully proposes the scenario wherein "by travelling unknown ways" in this hostile land, her father may "Fall sick, and as a common passenger, / Be dead and buried" (3.5.30–32) on his way from her residence to Ragan's.

In his essay "*King Lear* Without: The Heath," Henry S. Turner evokes an undelineated *space* of potential action, a "seemingly limitless dimension that would contain" a *place* of activity.¹⁵ In *Lear*, that space has come to be known as "the heath" — Rowe's editorial interpolation taken on ever since by anxious generations needing, literally, a *ground* for the figurative, allusive, and elusive action that takes place somewhere out there in the "storm and tempest" (2.2.449 SD). Gloucester provides a temporary safe house for the group in the storm. This is Shakespeare's adaptation of something unique to the early *Leir* text: a real, external place. It is created by Ragan, where she plans to have old Leir and Perillus murdered. She tells her messenger:

Tomorrow morning, ere the break of day,
I, by a wile, will send them to the thicket
That is about some two miles from the court,
And promise them to meet them there myself,
Because I must have private conference
About some news I have receiv'd from Cornwall.
This is enough: I know they will not fail.

(4.5.37–43)

This is, for Ragan, a "natural" place of death, "fitted by kind" for villainy, like the "unfrequented plots" and pit in *Titus Andronicus* (2.2.116–17). Unlike the unreal outdoor location of potential death that is Gloucester's "cliff," *Leir* marks the environment with a place that has a name, "the thicket," and a habitation, "some two miles from the court" of Cambria and Ragan. Moreover, a few memorable topographical and affective features provide a contrast with Gloucester's

assessment of the *Lear* environment — “For many miles about / There’s scarce a bush” (2.2.465–66).

Ragan’s place of the thicket lies in the centre of the play. Leir and Perillus arrive at the thicket in 4.7 to meet Ragan, who they hope will succour him after his poor treatment at the hands of Gonoril. She sends a Messenger to murder them, but a combination of conflicting and powerful texts (spoken and written), the wavering of consciousness (between sleep, waking, prayer, and contemplation of death), and a few shocks of well-timed, really bad weather scuppers his task. Upon entering the thicket the old men force a determined iteration of the fact that we are somewhere distinct from the wild surroundings. Perillus fears a highwayman may come out from behind “a hedge” (4.7.11), obviously “recognizing” this new place from memories of narratives of danger or personal experience of the past. The Messenger, who will hide “aside” (4.7.37) (perhaps behind a hedge), fears a fellow “goodfellow” throwing him “in a ditch” (4.7.21–22): he understands and depicts the place from his own presence in it and recalls that his role is to make the place an eternal resting place for the old men. He imagines letting his victims escape and hanging himself on “the next tree” (26). Leir and Perillus, furthermore, overdetermine the specificity of where they are as a “place” (lines 40, 41, 108, 125), as “here” (lines 113, 168, 260 [“hither”] 265), and from where they must finally go “hence” (lines 311, 313), though they “know not whither” (4.7.313), other than to be sure that “It were not good to return from whence we came” (4.7.316). Such overdetermination brings home the deictic tendency of human presentation of space as egotistical and anthropomorphic. The sorrow and self-pity of the old men circulate around constant iterations of the place *here* in this thicket and how the environment relates to their own assumptions and fears. The expanse of the immediate environment is also sized up against the human body; but more than this familiar linguistic observation, the men’s age and weakness are factors as they cast the natural world around them as something large and potentially in conflict with them.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the young, determined servant enjoys his titillating fear of the thicket as a potentially dangerous place to which he has come to do his dangerous job; and the absence of Ragan leaves a space filled with the old men’s fears and suppositions.

Leir and Perillus’s determined insistence on present comprehension, on the insistent *now* of experience and the insistent elsewhere of reality, is not just a dramatic phenomenon, but one of epistemological and ontological existence,

and certainly one of Protestant theology. As in part a tool of Queen Elizabeth's religio-political program of reform and stabilization, the Queen's Men's portrayed the conviction that life, like drama, consists of constant present actions, guided by faith in one's personal life and by a Protestant, forward-looking drive in contrast to any inscribed memory of past good deeds that weigh upon the living spirit and that provide judgment after death.¹⁷

Dorothy Nameri parallels the *Leir* thicket scene with the *Lear* storm scene(s), because these are passages where Leir and Lear are pushed to make statements about who they are and who or what they hold responsible for who they are (or have become), and these determinations decide the trajectory for both kings thereafter in their respective stories. She writes of Leir in the thicket scene, "He accepts his fate as the will of God and can only lament and pray. It is merely pathetic. There is no drama except for the stage-direction '(Thunder and lightning).'"¹⁸ She emphasizes Leir's passive acceptance of events versus the dramatic play of Shakespeare's Lear, who cries to the environment, and Kent, who appeals to the king to take shelter, noting the moment where Shakespeare seems to give his critique of the earlier author's scene: it is where Lear tries to "be the pattern of all patience. I will say nothing" (3.2.37–38). That would be admirable, but not as dramatically effective as forgetting his patience twelve lines later to rail on the "wretch[es]" of the world. I think we have to look for the places within the larger space of the storm, however. In *Lear*, Shakespeare does not allow his old men to enter dangerous places made within the outdoor environment — the indoor ones are bad enough. As I noted above, Edgar's cliff is not a "real" place for Gloucester to jump off; the hovel, moreover, is where the Fool enters only to exit pursued by mad Tom before the whole group finds shelter in Gloucester's prepared place of food and fire. The attraction of such a place as the hovel and then the warning of its danger is played out with relentless deictic markers — as if the play is prenatally remembering the earlier dramatic manifestation in the thicket: Kent's "*Here* is the *place*, my lord" (3.4.1) and "enter *here*" (lines 4, 22) and Lear's "go in thyself," "I'll go in," "In, boy," "get thee in" (23–27), which precedes the Fool's sudden "Come not in *here*, nuncle" (39), and Kent's "Who's *there*?" (40, my emphases).¹⁹

Recalling place and space

In the last scene of the play, Leir and Perillus, accompanied by the French forces and Cordella, confront Ragan about their earlier experience in the thicket:

Perillus.

You are our debtor of more patience;
We were more patient when we stay'd for you
Within the thicket two long hours and more.

Ragan.

What hours? What thicket?

Perillus.

There where you sent your servant with your letters,
Seal'd with your hand, to send us both to heaven,
Where, as I think, you never mean to come.

Ragan.

Alas, you are grown a child again with age,
Or else your senses dote for want of sleep.

Perillus.

Indeed you made us rise betimes, you know,
Yet had a care we should sleep where you bade us stay,
But never wake more till the latter day.

Gonoril.

Peace, peace, old fellow; thou are sleepy still.

(5.10.82–94)

This passage relentlessly *places* (locates, fixes) time and *times* the *space* within which characters attempt to understand their own *place* (location, fixity). Perillus begins his attack on Ragan by insisting that she owes him and Leir some pain and suffering (“patience”: pati-, patiate, to suffer or be in pain). He

represents this equivalent placement of character position (of “feeling” the same, of sympathy) through the temporal thrust of “patience,” of enduring over a period of time — thus his insistence that “we stay’d ... two long hours and more.” Leir’s patience (his pathetic lack of drama, to recall Nameri’s critique) gives his complaint a simple moral weight that Shakespeare’s Lear arguably lacks. Shakespeare continually complicates characters by avoiding consistency in their behaviour and by removing definitive *place* in the action. He is certainly drawn by the possibility of locating physical *places* of revelation within the greater *space* of potentiality: the stocking of Kent, the blinding of Gloucester, the hovelling of Mad Tom and Lear, and the “jumping” of Gloucester are all attempts to take the disorienting “without” of *Lear* — a space in which we perhaps wander *with* Lear, a no-man’s land, and thus sympathize — and provide *places within* time and physical phenomena that can convince characters (and the audience) that answers are graspable, if only fleetingly and incompletely. Shakespeare is less confident than the *Leir* author, however, that a subject can understand, and voice a description of, their place in space(s) of the world.

Ragan seems for her last moments in *Leir* to try to shift into a “Shakespearean” world of indirection or non-belief, and her response to the autonomy of her accuser is to eliminate time and place: “What hours? What thicket?” She needs to locate Perillus’s narrative and body in the space *without*; if it is a space within which exists a thicket where Perillus and Leir can experience real suffering (as does Lear in the space of the storm and the place of Gloucester’s shelter), she needs it also to be a space from which her own present moment and place in the space of the play’s story cannot be directly affected. Perillus bridges that gap between spaces by noting Ragan’s hand that breaks the boundaries “to send us both to heaven.” Perillus takes this latter place of incomprehensibility, and by bringing place, space, and time together with heaven as a *place* (“where”) located in *time* (“you never mean to come”), he shows that Ragan’s dismissal is a false trick. Ragan attempts, but marginally fails, to script a type of representation that becomes familiar to a close reader and observer of Queen’s Men’s plays. In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, for example, place is set up to be “real” and meaningful in its moment, but any subsequent scene/location might do more than add a place to the play’s memory of places within its play-space: it might in fact *erase* earlier place either by correction of earlier understanding (one magic trick outdoes the previous one in *Friar Bacon*) or by overlaying, palimpsesting,

re-educating character and rhetoric (as in *The Famous Victories*' Henry V's cloak of needles, which is interpreted once by Henry and Jockey and then re-interpreted a scene later by the dying Henry IV, such that the prince must discard it as part of his identity — he abjures and forgets it).²⁰ Ragan almost manages to have the thicket scene disappear when it is brought up again late in the play, but she has no *alternative* experience or reinterpretation to replace it (as was provided in the examples rather briefly cited from *Friar Bacon* and *Famous Victories*); she only has denial. As ghostly, uncertain, and faded as it is, then, the weird "real" place of the thicket still haunts the play at the end. The daughter's own extraordinary ability to create a new place of her own (not a borrowed, adapted, pre-existing male space such as Gloucester's house, for example) backfires, as she cannot now get rid of that space's role in developing the play's own history of character relations.

In her last two lines of the play, Ragan expands on the proverbial "you are grown a child again with age" with a contradictory temporal trope. To become childish again is to move in the opposite direction to time's aging progress; but Ragan also suggests "Or else your senses dote for want of sleep." To dote is to be silly, foolish, especially as a result of old age (in opposition to childishness), and Ragan is attempting to push Perillus over the cliff of oblivion. "Indeed you made us rise betimes," complains Perillus, "ere the break of day" (4.6.38) in darkness and sent him with Leir, doting in the thicket, where they themselves fall asleep, and where Perillus claims Ragan would have them "never wake more till the latter day." Ragan wants to evaporate their physical experience in the set place of the thicket by relating it as a dream narrative, but Perillus turns this back against her by showing that the suspension of death through this sleepy movement of time means that his story of that other place, and her involvement in it in spite of claims of ignorance and attempts to separate herself from it, are tied together in a single thread of experiential time and *space* that holds them both equally in an earthly limbo "till the latter day."

Ragan's denial might bear some weight with an audience that has observed a long narrative of doddering old men and a scene of supernatural intervention. There is something questionable about Ragan's powers, then, as she eerily ventriloquizes through the murderer/Messenger, and her forced appointment before the break of day puts the old men in a hypnotic or spell-like state of semi-consciousness throughout the scene. There is no doubt the author wants us to take notice of this place *as place*, in stark opposition to the "un-

couth” “ways” between places. Upon waking from sleep in “*the place*,” Perillus indeed declares, “I fear we did mistake the place, my lord,” and Leir replies “God grant we do not miscarry in the place” (4.7.40–41, my emphasis). But there is only one place; they cannot be wrong. To be in the wrong place at the wrong time in *King Lear* is to face and join — whether immediately or soon afterwards — death. But *King Leir* suspends death, lets it in continually, drop by drop, from the very beginning of the play; in such small doses, it is always painful but not quite complete, always a warning but never Death with a capital “D,” the “part” the Messenger is ordered to “play” by Ragan (4.5.45) finally failing to “proceed to execution” (4.5.51). Survival rather than death is what keeps this play from tragedy, but that does not mean that death is not a real possibility in the fiction of *Leir*.

Grace Ioppolo is clearly drawn in by this sense of the supernatural (or psychonatural) when she writes that “the Messenger appears to have been conjured up by the fears of the exhausted and depressed men, rather than simply hired by Gonoril and Ragan,” and “His hasty exit from the stage leaves the audience wondering if he was real or a projection of Leir’s psychological need to reestablish his own identity.”²¹ But while the storm in *King Lear*’s “heath” might plausibly be read as either a projection or internalization of King Lear’s increasingly narcissistic and self-destructive drives, the *Leir* author pushes the envelope of psychological manifestation only so far.²² The gods are radically absent from those who call on them in *Lear*, but it is surely God’s hand in 4.7 of *Leir* that sends down heaven’s fire and shakes the daggers from the Messenger’s hands. Leir does not want or need the Messenger to appear in order to justify himself or his post-Cordella life of borrowed time. Ragan has unequivocally sent a physical being to kill her father, and any supernaturalism runs in the direction from her through the Messenger. Ragan’s apparent devilishness is countered by the perfectly timed thunder and lightning that petrifies the Messenger “even to the very heart,” and leads him to suppose that Leir “is some strong magician” (4.7.193–94). Thus he himself feels in the grip of ungodly power. But he is wrong. His fear of the ungodly comes from the other direction, from the willful daughter. God delivers the old men from evil (4.7.68) and forces them to live beyond their time. Leir’s appeal to God, “Dispatch, I pray thee; I have lived too long” (4.7.227) is not answered. Leir survives past the end of the play (not a “tragical” text [Stationers’ Register], after all, but a source-based history). And the play lasts beyond the end of the Queen’s Men’s company for which it was

penned; the belated quarto was published in 1605, two years after the Queen's death, and coincident with Shakespeare's staging of a new vision of gender and space.

Notes

1. The mode of presentation that the Queen's Men employed is very different from the "mature" Shakespearean strategies that we find so engaging and convincing. The Queen's Men's technique to teach their audience political and personal morality through symbolic and over-determined representation rather than a "Shakespearean" psychological realism and allusiveness makes the kind of direct comparison I am forced into here rather less nuanced than I would like. It is a problem I will be working through in later work on space, memory, provincial playing, and the Queen's Men. The foundational critical history about the company is Scott McMillin and Sally Beth MacLean's *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
2. Between them, W. W. Greg, Kenneth Muir, Robert Law, and Dorothy Nameri have listed over 60 verbal parallels or echoes, which suggest strongly that "Shakespeare must have read the earlier play carefully before he wrote his *King Lear*," as opposed to just seeing it performed and memorizing it. See Dorothy Nameri, "Three Versions of the Story of King Lear," *Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies* 50 & 51 (1976), esp. 50, pp. 26–99, 92–93. More interesting than the parallels or echoes themselves are the ways in which Shakespeare re-employs them, splitting single declarations or concepts among several characters, or having notions appear at a strategically different moment in the trajectory of the plot. These alterations suggest to me an intensive study, or memory, of the earlier play by Shakespeare and a very careful redistribution of its elements. I think we can learn many new things about Shakespeare's play by analyzing the differences between related elements in his *Lear* and the anonymous *Leir*. Perhaps more importantly for theatre history, we can learn to appreciate a pre-Shakespearean set of expectations and responses to performance by seriously studying these differences.
3. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.
4. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 13.

5. De Certeau, p. 17.
6. References to *King Lear* are taken from the Folio text in Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, eds., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008). Subsequent references to other Shakespeare plays are also from *The Norton Shakespeare*.
7. I am working on a longer study that will take the scientific concepts of comprehending reality through parallel universes and hologramic surfaces to black holes as significant methods of understanding space-time in early drama.
8. Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. James R. Siemon (New Mermaids) (London: A&C Black, 1994).
9. Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 23, and *passim*.
10. To my ears, this is a radical echo of Ragan's outburst in *Leir* against her sex entrapping her will; when she realizes that the thicket project has failed because of "white-liver'd slaves," Ragan laments, "O God, that I had been but made a man, / Or that my strength were equal with my will!" (5.5.13, 15–16).
11. De Certeau, pp. 118–19, 121.
12. John Gillies, "The Scene of Cartography in *King Lear*," *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Andrew Gordon and Bernard Klein (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 109–37 (p. 118).
13. Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
14. References to the anonymous *King Leir* are taken from Tiffany Stern, ed., *King Leir* (Globe Quartos) (New York: Routledge, 2002).
15. Henry S. Turner, "King Lear Without: The Heath," *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 28 (1997), pp. 161–93 (p. 165).
16. See John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 636–724.
17. For the argument of the Queen's Men as a mouthpiece for the Elizabethan regime, see Scott McMillin and Sally Beth MacLean's *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*.
18. Nameri, p. 88.
19. Henry Turner recognized this cluster of deictic markers, although his concern is for the way in which they "re-localize the scene and draw it back firmly into either the world of the fiction or onto the space of the stage" (p. 176).

20. In the longer study, I will be debating the types of memory and new experience that seem respectively lost and found, or simply erased and covered over as in the palimpsest that interests Jonathan Gil Harris in *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Harris does not discuss the Queen's Men's plays.
21. Grace Ioppolo, "A Jointure more or less': Re-Measuring *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 17 (2005), pp. 165–79 (pp. 174–75).
22. I am thinking of Janet Adelman's chapter on *Lear* in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992).