

# Tate's Perceptive *Lear*

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Adaptations have a dual existence—as works in themselves and as commentaries on the work that they are adapting.<sup>1</sup> These are obviously different matters. An adaptation or appropriation could be a significant work in itself but not have an especially close or interesting relation to the original or, conversely, could mainly be of interest in relation to the original. This holds true regardless of the mode of the adaptation—written, or cinematic, or operatic, or whatever. An adaptation in the same mode as the original is perhaps under special pressure in relation to the original. The temptation or invitation to see it as mainly commentary is strong. Nahum Tate's *History of King Lear* (1681) is, obviously, in the same mode as the original—a play for the popular stage as well as the study.<sup>2</sup> In the rare moments since the end of the eighteenth century in which Tate's adaptation has not been despised as a horrible weakening or desecration of the original, its value has been seen in it being what Stephen Orgel calls “a critical reading of Shakespeare.”<sup>3</sup> The essay that follows develops that view but attempts something

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1. For general treatments of adaptations, see Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013); and Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

2. That Shakespeare's plays were written to be read as well as played on stage is now fairly well established. See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), and *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). Tate's play was not only staged regularly throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but also very frequently reprinted (with three editions before the end of the seventeenth century and many editions in the eighteenth—at least fourteen by my count, using Eighteenth Century Collections Online, <https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online>).

3. Stephen Orgel, “Revising *King Lear*,” in *The Invention of Shakespeare, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 125. In 1920, G. C. D. Odell remarked that Tate was probably “the most universally execrated of the daring souls” who, as Odell sardonically puts it, “violated the precious shrine of [Shakespeare's] plays” (quoted in Christopher

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further: to demonstrate that Tate's play contains material of genuine aesthetic and intellectual value.<sup>4</sup> This will be argued through a combination of internal readings and consideration of its relation to its original (or originals, since Shakespeare's play exists in distinct versions).<sup>5</sup> The fact that Tate's version displaced Shakespeare's versions on the stage for a century and a half will not be part of that argument, since consideration of that fact belongs more to the history of taste than to general aesthetics—where this essay means to intervene.<sup>6</sup>

It may come as something of a surprise that Tate's versions (he adapted *Richard 2* and *Coriolanus* as well as *Lear*) have been seen as, among the many Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, "the most reverential from a critical standpoint."<sup>7</sup> The essay that follows shows that Tate writes well, sometimes indeed brilliantly, when he is building directly on Shakespeare—as opposed, that is, to inventing on his own. The essay, consequently, brackets Tate's role as creator, as the originator of the love story between Cordelia and Edgar and the reviver of the happy ending, and concentrates on his

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Spencer, "A Word for Tate's *King Lear*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–19003*, no. 2 [Spring 1963]: 242). We have perhaps given up bardolatry, but I believe the attitude toward Tate's adaptation remains. Maynard Mack makes it clear that the "critical reading" view involves no aesthetic claims: "Tate's *King Lear* invites ridicule and deserves it, but is nonetheless illuminating" ("*King Lear*" in *Our Time* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972], 9).

4. Like Mack (see previous note), Orgel makes it clear that he is not interested in making any claims for Tate's play in itself; see "Revising," 109. I wish to make claims for the play stronger than those in Spencer's "Word," in which the strongest claim is that Tate's play is "coherent and entertaining" (242, 251). Up to this point, the only critics to have taken Tate's play truly seriously in itself are those who have seen it in its political context. See Matthew H. Wikander, "The Spitted Infant: Scenic Emblem and Exclusionist Politics in Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 340–58; Nancy K. Maguire, "Nahum Tate's *King Lear*: The King's Blest Restoration," in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, ed. Jean I. Marsden (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 29–42; and Richard Strier, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), chap. 8.

5. For the 1608 quarto (Q), *M. William Shakespeare: His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters*, and for *The Tragedie of King Lear* in the 1623 folio (F), see Michael Warren's *The Parallel "King Lear," 1608–1623* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

6. For an overview of the stage history, see, inter alia, Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear*, ed. James Black (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), xxxiv–xxxvii. Quotations from Tate's play are from this modern-spelling edition. For an edition of Tate's *Lear* that keeps the original spelling and capitalization, see *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, ed. Christopher Spencer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

7. Maximilian E. Novak, "The Politics of Shakespeare Criticism in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century," *ELH* 81, no. 1 (May 2014): 122. Tate's *Lear* is his earliest Shakespearean adaptation, followed by *Richard 2* and then *Coriolanus*. In the letter "To My Esteemed Friend Thomas Boteler, Esq." that Tate prefixed to the printed edition of the play before the verse prologue (hereafter "Letter to Boteler"), Tate speaks of his "zeal for all the remains of Shakespeare" (Black, *History*, 1).

role as adapter and extender.<sup>8</sup> Aspects of Tate's play that are rarely noted or mentioned come into focus. Here, adaptation theory helps. Julie Sanders notes that adapters often draw attention to "gaps and absences" in a source text and provide "supplements to what is available" there.<sup>9</sup> Tate, it will be shown, does both these things in his version of *Lear*. He eliminates some (not all) opacities in the originals. He develops, in what will be seen as more than competent poetry, themes and motifs hinted at but undeveloped in the originals—which has the effect of transforming our perception of those. And he recognizes and exploits dramatic opportunities untaken but fully plausible within the Shakespearean context, thereby extending, as a sequel or adaptation can, our imaginative experience of the original material. Shakespeare's versions become loci of potential rather than closed off masterpieces.

Tate recognized the strangeness of Shakespeare's play in both its versions (we know that he made use of both the Quarto and the Folio).<sup>10</sup> Some of this strangeness he retained. He kept, for instance, a large part of the rantings of the mad king and of "poor Tom," whose part in the storm scenes Tate keeps almost unchanged. In the letter prefatory to his play, Tate states that "Lear's madness and Edgar's pretended madness" are "of extravagant nature."<sup>11</sup> One would think that this is meant as a condemnation. But it is not. Tate sees the "odd and surprising" quality of these moments as a tribute to Shakespeare's "creating fancy," and, more concretely, as dramatically appropriate, as "the only things in the world that ought to be said on those occasions." This means that when Tate eliminates or alters something in Shakespeare's versions, the explanation cannot be some thin notion of decorum, either linguistic or theatrical.<sup>12</sup> With regard to this, it is important

8. In all versions prior to Shakespeare's, the *Lear* story ends happily. See Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 311–402. It should be noted that for Tate, the happy ending does not affect the designation of the play as a tragedy (although following Q, he calls it a "history"). Tate appeals to the authority of Dryden in claiming that it takes more skill to make a tragedy end happily than unhappily; see Letter to Boteler; Black, *History*, 2. Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 8–14, shows that the idea that a tragedy can have a happy ending was the presiding learned view of the genre from the early modern period through the eighteenth century.

9. Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 75.

10. See Sonia Massai, "Nahum Tate's Revision of Shakespeare's *King Lear*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 435–50, and appendix A ("Tate's Shakespearean Text") in Black's edition (see n. 6 above). The Quartos of 1608, 1619, and 1655 were available to Tate, as were the Folios of 1623, 1632, and 1664. I am not aware of any scholarship demonstrating which editions he actually used. Neither Black nor Massai address this. I believe he used a corrected Quarto (see n. 22 below).

11. Letter to Boteler, 1.

12. For a similar warning against assuming that some thin notion of decorum is at work in Restoration and eighteenth-century theories of language, especially of figurative language,

to note that Tate keeps the onstage blinding. Dr. Johnson famously could not abide “the extrusion of Gloucester’s eyes,” and one would have thought that it would be one of the first things to go.<sup>13</sup> After all, one of the things that messengers are for is to convey that such a thing (like the self-blinding of Oedipus) has happened offstage. Shakespeare knew this, and has the event narrated by a messenger—after he had put it onstage.<sup>14</sup> Tate eliminates some of the sadism from the blinding—Cornwall does not do the deed himself (with his boot), and does not proceed eye by eye (his “slaves” perform the action all at once)—but the deed does take place onstage.<sup>15</sup> So, to continue with material in Shakespeare’s act 3, we must find another reason for Tate’s elimination of the Fool (which leads us to think, helpfully, about why Shakespeare wanted this character).<sup>16</sup>

Fidelity to the original is not necessarily a value in adaptations, but in this case, and with regard to language, it might be so.<sup>17</sup> Tate clearly intended to keep some kind of faith with Shakespeare’s formulations.<sup>18</sup> Tate states

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see Barbara A. Murray, *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2001), 33.

13. Johnson states that he could (contra Joseph Warton) excuse some “instances of cruelty” in the play—in particular, Lear’s abuse by his daughters—but that he was “not able to apologize with equal plausibility for the extrusion of Gloucester’s eyes, which seems an act too horrid to be endured in dramattick exhibition” (*The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 8, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968], 703).

14. In the second half of what (following the Folio) we know as act 4, scene 2, a Gentleman (Q) or a Messenger (F) narrates (to Albany) what we have just seen in (let’s call it) act 3, scene 7.

15. The lack of the eye-by-eye progression has the effect of eliminating some of the point of the servant’s intervention in the scene. In Shakespeare, the intervention is an attempt to save Gloucester’s second eye (3.7.68–72), “the other eye of Gloucester” (4.2: 70; 39). In Tate, Cornwall commands his “slaves” to put out both Gloucester’s eyes at once, which they do (SD 3.5.42, 46). In quoting from Shakespeare’s versions of *Lear*, when the versions differ, I first cite the Quarto and then (after a semicolon) the Folio text as they appear in modern spelling in René Weis’s *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition* (London: Longman, 1993). I prefer this to the 2010 second edition.

16. Lawrence D. Greene’s “‘Where’s My Fool?’ Some Consequences of the Omission of the Fool in Tate’s *Lear*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 12, no. 2 [Spring 1972]: 259–74, is, as its title suggests, more concerned with what Greene sees as the consequences of the omission for later productions than with Tate’s motives for the omission. For motives, Greene suggests that Tate wanted to make the play easier to comprehend and thought that his audience might have found the Fool’s language “somewhat coarse” (268). Greene argues that the major and long-lasting consequence of the omission is for the actor playing the lead to have to create a greater “internality” for Lear (269).

17. On the vexed status of “fidelity” in adaptation studies, see David T. Johnson, “Adaptation and Fidelity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 87–100.

18. Hazelton Spencer notes that in the context of Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, Tate was “less apt than either of his predecessors [D’Avenant and Dryden] to tamper”

that in his play, he employed “less quaintness of expression” than may have been expected of him, where “quaintness” must mean elegance or refinement.<sup>19</sup> Tate did this, he says, in order “to comply with my author’s style”—by which I take Tate to mean that Shakespeare’s style is strong rather than elegant. This accords with Novak’s argument that Tate had a “Whiggish” view of literature, meaning that he was more impressed by [English] genius than by [French] rules.<sup>20</sup> Tate was not trying to prettify Shakespeare. He was trying to make the language immediately intelligible, but without losing its force. When he altered Shakespeare’s words, he generally provided an intelligent and nonreductive paraphrase—sometimes an illuminating one.<sup>21</sup>

In the opening scene, when Lear proclaims the rash and ill-considered revision of the original division plan, Shakespeare’s Kent says, “whilst I can vent clamour from my throat / I’ll tell thee thou dost evil” (1.1: 153–54; 162–63). Tate’s says, “I’ll thunder in your ear my just complaint / And tell thee to thy face that thou dost ill” (1.1.160–61). Both “I’ll thunder” and “to thy face” are nice strokes, definitely intelligent and apt ones, even if they are not clearly improvements. And Kent’s complaint is “just.” Moreover, it is not clear why Shakespeare would have wanted to give Kent, at this moment, the oddly high-flown “vent clamour.” To take another case from early in the play, in Goneril’s first speech to Lear after the opening scene, Shakespeare’s character ends by warning Lear that if he persists in (as she sees it) not properly constraining his retainers, she will do him an “offence / That [F: Which] else were shame, that then necessity / Must [F: Will] call discreet proceeding” (1.4: 199–201; 185–87). Tate’s Goneril concludes, “And therefore, Sir, I take this freedom, which / Necessity makes discreet” (1.2.41–42). This keeps the meaning but also clarifies it by adding the notion of taking “freedom,” and it cleverly mirrors not only Goneril’s lordly manner with relative pronouns but her insulting use of “sir.” In the second act, where Shakespeare’s Lear speaks of the “remotion” of Cornwall and Regan in not answering the door at Gloucester’s residence as “practice only” (2.4: 90; 104), Tate’s speaks of the “retiredness” of the duke and declares it “plain contempt” (2.5.57). Again this keeps and (at least) clarifies the meaning, perhaps even focusing more sharply on the relevant issue. As a final example, let me take a more challenging case. Where, in the storm, Shakespeare’s mad Lear wants to strip off his “lendings” to become “unaccommodated

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with Shakespeare’s expressions (*Shakespeare Improved: The Restoration Versions in Quarto and on the Stage* [New York: Ungar, 1927], 249).

19. Letter to Boteler, 2. For “quaintness” in this sense, the *OED* cites a sentence from T. Mace, *Music’s Monument* (1676).

20. Novak, “Politics of Shakespeare Criticism,” 123.

21. There has been very little critical attention to Tate’s handling of particular lines of Shakespeare’s versions. There is a bit of this in Moody E. Prior’s *The Language of Tragedy* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1964), 184–85, always to Tate’s disfavor.

man" (3.4: 95; 99), Tate's wants to do so to become "my original self" (3.3.84)—a very intelligent reading, and one probably based on the Quarto (Qb) text that Tate used, where Lear wants, by stripping, to "be true."<sup>22</sup>

Turning from verbal changes to structure, Tate alters both the beginning and the ending of Shakespeare's versions. The happy ending is, of course, Tate's most famous (that is, infamous) alteration. As already noted, here Tate chose to follow everyone but Shakespeare.<sup>23</sup> Tate's ending may help us deepen our sense of the the extremity and peculiarity, even the perversity, of the antiprovidentialist ending that Shakespeare chose to give his versions.<sup>24</sup> But it is not really needed for this—Shakespeare signals it over and over (consider "Great thing of us forgot" [5.3: 229; 211] and Albany's "The Gods defend her" [249; 230]). But the case is very different with regard to the opening. Tate's alteration here is not only one that can be aesthetically admired but also, and noncoincidentally, in deep touch with Shakespeare's versions. Here we can begin to see that Tate is at his most powerful and original when he is at his most Shakespearean. Where Shakespeare's opening, in both versions, is very low key, Tate's begins with a bang, a Shakespearean bang.

Shakespeare's versions begin with a series of brief exchanges, in prose, between Kent and Gloucester and then between Gloucester, Kent, and Edmund. Some important material is given here—about the status of Lear's division and abdication plan (it is known to and approved by his inner circle), and about the Gloucester family, but nonetheless, it is very low key. Lear's entrance is the bang. The opening words of Tate's play are "Thou, Nature, art my goddess" (Tate, 1.1.1; Shakespeare, 1.2.1). This may not be an "improvement," but it is an inspired idea. Tate's opening makes us think hard about why Shakespeare's versions begin as they do (with little variation between Q and F). Tate's opening is rollicking and attention grabbing. H. A. Mason notes—without, I think, Tate's play in mind—that Edmund enters the second scene of Shakespeare's versions "so decisively that he might be speaking the opening lines of the play."<sup>25</sup> Tate loses or

22. For the corrected Quarto (Qb) reading here, see Warren, *Parallel "King Lear."* For an account of Qa and Qb, see W. W. Greg, *The Variants in the First Quarto of "King Lear"* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940). The 1655 Quarto (London: Jane Bell [see n. 10 above]) contains the Qb reading (F4v, unnumbered).

23. See n. 8 above. As Orgel says, "it was Shakespeare who had changed the ending, not Tate" ("Revising *King Lear*," 118).

24. Peter Womack, as his title suggests ("Secularizing *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Survey* 55 [2002]: 96–105), sees the large motive behind Tate's reworking of Shakespeare as "secularization." This requires a view of Shakespeare's versions as, in some sense, not secularizing ("the ecstasies and delusions which it is Shakespeare's historic mission to put to flight turn out to be *also* Shakespeare" [104]). But the more plausible view is to see Shakespeare as the one who is secularizing the normally providentialist story.

25. H. A. Mason, "King Lear (I): The Central Stream," *Cambridge Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 36.

ignores a complexity here in that Shakespeare's Edmund begins by lamenting his status as a second son ("some twelve or fourteen moonshines / Lag of a brother" [1.2.5–6]) rather than as a bastard, but Tate captures the energy and focus of Edmund's self-identification, his delight in his status as a bastard. On the verbal level, Tate clarifies Shakespeare's somewhat obscure reference to "composition and fierce quality" (1.2.12) but keeps the wonderful characterization of energetic illicit sex as "the lusty stealth of nature" (1.2.11; Tate, 1.1.8).

Tate's main alterations come later in the speech. Tate's Edmund announces that he has already succeeded in gulling his father and his brother. He has employed "information / That I last forged"—a more intriguing terminology than Shakespeare's bare "invention" (1.2.19)—and Tate has Edmund further explain that this has involved:

A tale so plausible, so boldly uttered  
And heightened by such lucky accidents,  
That now the slightest circumstance confirms him.  
(1.1.18–20)

Tate might have gotten the idea of opening with a villain's soliloquy from *Richard 3* or from *Othello*, but here Tate cleverly borrows more from *Othello*, recalling, for Edmund, Iago's boldly uttered tale of napping with Cassio, the lucky accidents that aid Iago, and Iago's talk of trifling "confirmations" (3.3.326) and of employing "circumstances" (3.3.409).<sup>26</sup>

This addition has the effect, as we will see, of eliminating an opacity. The question becomes whether Tate is removing an essential Shakespearean feature in filling in some of the lacunae and clarifying some of the opacities. Keats famously thought that "negative capability" was Shakespeare's defining feature, a willingness to rest in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts."<sup>27</sup> Many critics agree with this, and it has almost become an axiom in Shakespeare studies—see Stephen Greenblatt among others.<sup>28</sup> But does this apply to all cases? Is supplying missing motives necessarily a diminishment? It might not be the most intellectually respectable position to assume that this must be so. Perhaps, following Wittgenstein's famous adage, we should actually look at some cases.<sup>29</sup>

26. For the text of *Othello*, I have used the edition by A. J. Honigmann (1996), with an introduction by Ayanna Thompson (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

27. John Keats to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 1817, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1958), 1:193–94.

28. For Stephen Greenblatt's position, see *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004), 328.

29. "Denk nicht, sondern schau!" (Don't think, but look!) (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe [New York: Macmillan, 1953], section 66 [31<sup>c</sup>], 31).

The opacity removed by opening with Edmund explaining his trickery is the celerity with which Gloucester accepts Edmund's claims. In Shakespeare, Gloucester seems to believe the charge on hearing the forged letter and Edmund's asseveration that Edgar had "often" maintained the view that the letter presents. Already, in Gloucester's mind, Edgar is an "abominable villain" (1.2.74). Gloucester then backs off and professes uncertainty about the matter ("He cannot be such a monster" [89]) but immediately returns to the negative view when contemplating the "late eclipses of the sun and moon"—Edgar is again "this villain" (1.2: 103; 100). By the next time we see Gloucester, he has already "set guard to take" Edgar (2.1.16). That is Shakespeare. In Tate, Gloucester is a victim of villainous skill and luck rather than of his own belief in astrologically predicted human vices. The issue of belief in astrology is lost in Tate, both in the presentation of it in Gloucester's speeches and in Edmund's direct critique of it (Tate omits Edmund's "excellent foppery" speech [1.2: 106–20; 109–23]). This changes the character of Gloucester—as we shall see, Tate does throughout. But is it clear that it hurts the play?

Having Edgar condemned before the main plot begins brings to light another lacuna, one that becomes visible only through Tate's attention to it. I have already noted that Tate's addition of the love plot between Edgar and Cordelia is, along with the happy ending, his major departure from Shakespeare's versions. The sentimentality is all Tate's own, and was demanded by the literary and tragic theory of his age.<sup>30</sup> But, if we bracket that issue, Tate does raise a question that is hard to answer about Edgar and Cordelia in the Shakespeare versions. Tate notes that they never interact at all; as he says, they "never changed word."<sup>31</sup> Independently of the love plot, this is a shrewd and interesting observation. It is reminiscent of Aimé Césaire's recognition that Ariel and Caliban never directly interact in *The Tempest* (Césaire creates a scene where they do).<sup>32</sup> Why should Lear's godson (2.1.90) and Lear's favorite daughter not interact, especially since Edgar has been, presumably, educated at home, and not sent "out" to be educated,

30. On sentimentality (pathos) in Restoration tragic theory, see Eric Rothstein, *Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), chap. 1. For the intellectual context of the growth of sentimentality in the period, see R. S. Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" *ELH* 1, no. 3 (December 1934): 205–30. In Andrew S. Cunningham's defense of Crane's account ("Was Eighteenth-Century Sentimentalism Unprecedented?," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 [1998]: 381–96), Tate plays a role of the translator of an important classical source for valuing "tender Sentiments" (388), Juvenal's fifteenth satire, lines 131–33 (*Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G. G. Ramsay, rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library 91 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979], 298).

31. Letter to Boteler, 2.

32. See Aimé Césaire, *Une Tempête* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), and *A Tempest*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Ubu Repertory Theater, 1992), act 2, scene 1.

as Edmund was (1.1.31)? And why should Edgar, when banished and hunted “with unusual vigilance” in England (2.3.4) not consider fleeing to France? Gloucester seems to have the thought in ordering (on Cornwall’s authority) “all ports” barred (2.1.79). Edgar takes note of this (he knows that “no port is free” [2.3.3]), but he does not suggest that this has any practical implication for him. A wild surmise comes to mind: Could Shakespeare have anticipated the possibility of a love plot here, and wished to avoid any thought of it?<sup>33</sup>

Taking note of the Edgar-Cordelia lacuna in Shakespeare brings another into visibility: Why, in Shakespeare’s versions, is Edgar not present in the initial court scene? After all, his illegitimate bastard brother seems to have been brought home simply to witness the great moment (“and away he shall again” [1.1.31–32]). Shakespeare could easily have had Edgar be present in the court scene and could have had him join Kent in attempting to intervene in Cordelia’s favor. If that seems too much to have asked of Edgar at this point, and might have constituted an unwanted distraction from Kent’s heroism, Shakespeare could have had Edgar at least join in the intervention, posited in the Folio, that apparently prevented Lear from striking Kent (in the Folio, characters designated as “Alb” and “Cor” exclaim to Lear, “Dear sir, forbear” [F 1.1.160]).<sup>34</sup> Unless we cannot imagine Shakespeare’s versions being other than just the way they are, we have to concede that Tate has raised (by eliminating) a genuinely puzzling point here. Tate’s Edgar opens the division scene in dialogue with Cordelia, but given that his condemnation is known—Lear refers to “the rebel son of Gloucester” (1.1.120)—Edgar speaks only to her.

The love plot does not only produce sentimentality, but can be seen to serve another function as well. Tate recognized a problem that has troubled critics of Shakespeare’s versions at least from Bradley on: Why does

33. One might say that Edgar was simply not a possible love interest for Cordelia since, as merely the son of an earl, he does not have the social or political standing of the King of France or the Duke of Burgundy. But Ophelia stands in the same social relation to Hamlet that Edgar does to Cordelia, and, unlike Ophelia’s brother and father, Hamlet’s mother seems to have considered Ophelia a suitable, indeed a desirable, match for the prince. See *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 1.3.16–20 (for Laertes’s view), 2.2.141–42 (for Polonius’s), and 5.1.237–38 (for Gertrude’s).

34. Some sort of physical action on Lear’s part seems to be implied here. Most texts of the play that include this line take “Cor” in the speech heading to mean Cornwall. In “Cor’s Rescue of Kent,” in *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of “King Lear,”* ed. Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 143–51, Beth Goldring has argued that it should be Cordelia, and the Oxford editors (Oxford University Press, 1986) adopted this. The argument for Cordelia rather than Cornwall is strengthened in the Folio text, which makes Cordelia more active in the scene; it has her preempt Gloucester (sent, in Lear’s opening line, to bring in the suitors) in announcing the entrance of France and Burgundy (F 1.1.186).

Cordelia act the way she does in the opening scene?<sup>35</sup> Why, to put it more substantively, doesn't she just go along with what the old man wants? After all, she genuinely loves Lear and must know that she is (to say the least) going to embarrass him, since the context is a grand public occasion. Shakespeare signals her rhetorical difficulty and her love for Lear in her two asides (1.1: 55, 68–70; 61, 75–77), but when she is forced to say something more than “Nothing,” she speaks in a poignantly honest and highly affectionate way—“Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth: I love your Majesty” (81–82; 90–91). But instead of stopping there, as, presumably, she could have, she proceeds to a formulation that seems almost fussily technical, “According to my bond,” and then intensifies the legalism by adding a specification that is tight lipped and virtually aggressive—“no more nor less” (1.1: 82–83; 91–92). Lear is caught off guard (this is emphasized in the Folio by Lear and Cordelia repeating, “Nothing” [F 87–88]), but his appeal to a grand metaphysical principle in the Quarto—“Nothing can come of nothing” (80)—and to a practical truth in the Folio—“Nothing will come of nothing” (89)—can still be heard as genial.<sup>36</sup> He gives her a chance to “mend” her speech by, presumably, being more affectionate (“Mend your speech a little / Lest it [F: you] may mar your fortunes” [85; 94]). But Shakespeare's Cordelia insists on being “realistic” in the situation in a way that she must know will sound harsh to her father. She never acknowledges this. She seems to give no thought whatever to the effect of her words on Lear. She insists that she is being “true” rather than, as Lear—not unintelligibly—says, being “untender” (96–97; 104–5). Lear does not seem wrong to think that she takes pride in her plainness (119; 128).<sup>37</sup> All that she seems to care about is not sounding like her sisters. She is not, to advert to the final words of the play, speaking what she feels. There seems to be, again, a genuine problem here.<sup>38</sup>

As Tate presents the situation, Cordelia explicitly acknowledges that she is going to anger her “choleric” father with “cold speech” (1.1.93). Her motive for not playing the game is that she knows that professing love and obedience to her father here means accepting the suitor Lear has arranged for her. Tate eliminates the King of France from the play, but picks

35. See A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), with foreword by John Bayley (London: Penguin, 1991), 295.

36. The shift from “can” to “will” here makes a major difference, though this seems to have attracted little critical or editorial commentary. *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: “King Lear,”* ed. Richard Knowles, 2 vols. [New York: MLA, 2020], cites George Ian Duthie in his 1949 edition as preferring “will” in the dramatic context (1:65). When the line is repeated (1.4: 123; 125), “can” is again used.

37. See Coleridge's *Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 98; Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 295.

38. Compare Orgel, “Revising *King Lear*,” 123.

up on Shakespeare making the Duke of Burgundy the preferred suitor (Lear gives Burgundy right of first refusal after his revised plan [1.1: 177–78; 187–88]).

Even more than in Shakespeare, in Tate's play Cordelia's marriage to Burgundy is a virtual *fait accompli* (Edgar's first lines speak of "successful Burgundy" [1.1.57]). The issue for Tate's Cordelia (as in the anonymous Elizabethan *King Lear*) is not love for Lear but obedience to him.<sup>39</sup> Since, in Tate, Cordelia is in love with Edgar, she cannot be obedient to her father in this crucial case. Tate cleverly employs some Shakespearean language for erotic refusal by having Cordelia speak of wishing to avoid "loathed embraces" (1.1.95), borrowing the adjective that Goneril uses in wishing to be freed from the "loathed warmth" of Albany's bed (4.6.255; 4.5.260).

This focus also helps with another puzzle, though it does not wholly eliminate this one: the extent of Lear's anger. In Tate's version, Lear understands the basis for Cordelia's resistance. Lear thinks his anger perfectly justified; he is not acting because he is (as he knows he is reputed to be) "choleric" but with "cause" (1.1.117–18). Cordelia is in love not only with someone Lear has not chosen for her but with someone whom, as we have seen, Lear believes to have betrayed a member of his inner circle. Tate says that his treatment renders both "Cordelia's indifference" and "her father's passion" more "probable"—by which he means, psychologically intelligible.<sup>40</sup> We may not approve of the particular motive that Tate gives Cordelia—in the anonymous *King Lear*, she simply does not wish to marry someone not of her own choosing—but most critics in this case do not rest in happy uncertainty. They provide their own accounts, normally psychological, for the behavior of Lear and Cordelia here.<sup>41</sup> The Shakespearean presentation seems to require some filling in. It is hard to leave it as an *aporia*.

Tate sees the love plot as useful in yet another way. With regard to Edgar becoming "Tom," Tate provides not a missing motive but a substitute one. He is unhappy with the motive that Shakespeare gives Edgar for adopting the persona ("While[s] I may 'scape / I will preserve myself" [2.3.5–6]).

39. In the anonymous *King Lear* (1594, 1605), a major part of Lear's "stratagem" of the love test is to manipulate Cordelia into accepting the husband he has chosen for her (*King Lear*, ed. Tiffany Stern [New York: Routledge, 2002]): "Even as she doth protest she loves me best, / I'll say . . . Accept a husband whom myself will woo" (1.1.82–86). Tate could have had access to this play. It was printed in quarto in 1605, and listed (as by John Lilly [*sic*]) in Nicholas Cox, *An Exact Catalogue of Comedies, Tragedies, Tragicomedies, Operas, Masks, Pastorals, and Interludes, That were ever yet Printed and Published till this present year 1680* (Oxford, 1680), 8 (I owe this reference to Eric Rasmussen).

40. Letter to Boteler, 2.

41. See, *inter alia*, Jeffrey Stern, "King Lear: The Transference of the Kingdom," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 299–308.

Tate calls this “a poor shift to save his life.” Whereas in the way Tate presents it, the disguise becomes “a generous design.”<sup>42</sup> For Tate’s Edgar, suicide is the obvious step (“how easy now [to] . . . leave my griefs on my sword’s reeking point” [2.4.5–6]), but he refrains from this in the hope that at some time he could “do service” to Cordelia (still in England). This is the “generous design.” We may or may not agree with Tate’s contempt for self-preservation, but again Tate makes us think about something: Why doesn’t Edgar, in his sea of troubles, contemplate suicide? His situation, after all—with regard to his personal safety—is worse than Hamlet’s. Moreover, Tate has Edgar reflect on how humiliating it is for him to become “poor Tom.” Tate borrows for Edgar Lear’s contemptuous reference to what is needed to “keep base life afoot” (2.4: 185; 204), having Edgar speak of staying alive as involving being willing to “submit / To the humblest shifts to keep that life afoot” (2.4.15–16). Shakespeare’s Edgar knows exactly what he is doing (adopting “the basest and most poorest shape” [2.3.7]), and he understands perfectly well why Kent “shunned his abhorred society” (Q 5.3.204). But Shakespeare’s Edgar never—we now see oddly—expresses shame at the persona he adopts. In quite good poetry, Tate’s Edgar expresses the shame of an aristocrat who chose “To feed on offals, and to drink with herds / . . . [to] be the sport / Of clowns, or what’s more wretched yet, their pity” (3.4.69–71). This can serve to make us think harder about the weirdness of Edgar’s decision to become Tom, and it adds a psychological element that we had not recognized as missing. In a small but real way, it extends the Shakespearean terrain.

As Tate’s revision of the play’s opening suggests, his most critically perceptive and poetically successful changes have to do with the Gloucester family. With regard to Edmund’s role in the play, Tate recognized a lacuna that amounts to a structural weakness. In both of Shakespeare’s versions, the elder sisters’ lust for Edmund—manifested first by Goneril and then by Regan—is unprepared for. It comes out of nowhere. At the beginning of the blinding scene, Goneril is sent off to her husband with the “dangerous” letter of which Gloucester has spoken to Edmund (3.3.9) and that Edmund (who has somehow gotten hold of it) has “loyally” passed on to Cornwall (3.5). Cornwall, with surprising delicacy—perhaps seeking to manifest the paternal love that he claims Edmund will find in him (3.5.21–22)—protects Edmund from having to witness the punishment of his biological father for the treason that Edmund has revealed. So Edmund is sent off with Goneril. The next time we see Goneril, Edmund is “My most dear Gloucester,” to whom she gives a kiss that, she is sure, will “stretch [his] spirits up into the air,” and to whom she hopes to dedicate, as she says, her sexual “services” (4.2.23–27). Apparently, all of this developed

42. Letter to Boteler, 2.

on the trip. Goneril speaks of “our wishes on the way” (4.2.14)—none of which we saw.

When we encounter Regan after the blinding scene (which we know has resulted in her husband’s death), we hear that “Edmund and [she] have talked” (4.5.31; 4.4.31)—we don’t know where or how. Regan is now violently suspicious of Goneril’s relation to Edmund, and is attempting to suborn Oswald into allowing her to read the letter from Goneril to Edmund that Oswald is carrying. Regan is concerned about the “strange ocellades” (4.5.26; 4.4.26)—covert love-glances—that Goneril, at some point, gave to Edmund, whom Regan is now, apparently, determined to marry (4.5.32; 4.4.32).<sup>43</sup> In both Shakespearean versions, act 5 begins by continuing this theme, with Regan quizzing Edmund about his relation to Goneril, and worrying that Edmund has “found” her brother’s (brother-in-law’s) “way / To the forfended place” (5.1.11). In the Quarto, Regan reiterates this fear, worrying that Edmund has been “conjunct / And bosomed with her [Goneril], as far as we call hers” (5.1.12–13).

In the Quarto, Goneril had rebuked Albany for being insufficiently concerned about the French invasion—“Where’s thy drum / France spreads his banners in our noiseless land” (4.2.53–54)—yet her first words in the fifth act, again in the Quarto, are to state, astonishingly, that she would rather lose the battle than lose Edmund (5.1.18–19).<sup>44</sup> When the British forces have triumphed, and Albany is asserting his leadership and minimizing Edmund’s role, Regan points out that Edmund partakes of her authority and then, in a formal gesture (“Witness the world”), “creates” Edmund her “lord and master,” essentially betrothing him (5.3: 75–76; 70–71).<sup>45</sup> Goneril’s response to this is surprisingly specific and sexual—“Mean you to enjoy him [Q then]?” (77; 73). This suggests that Goneril believes that Regan has not yet done so, and also perhaps that she herself has not either. In both Shakespearean texts, when Regan accuses Edmund of having found the way, with Goneril, to “the forfended place,” Edmund assures Regan that he has not done so. I am inclined to think that we are to take this as (in the relevant sense) true. It seems that, in Shakespeare, neither of the sisters has consummated her relationship with Edmund.

This is plausible because, in Shakespeare, Edmund never suggests that he is actually sexually or romantically interested in either sister. When, before the battle, Edmund contemplates his erotic situation—“To both these

43. I am not sure why she presents Edmund as merely “more convenient” (4.5.32; 4.4.32) for her than for Goneril (since she, unlike Goneril, is no longer married). Perhaps she thinks that Oswald will somehow see the “logic” of the situation, or perhaps she does not wish to make a personal claim to Goneril’s faithful servant.

44. It might be said that the Folio downplays the lust theme a bit.

45. For a parallel moment, see Portia’s creation of Bassanio as “her lord, her governor, her king” (*The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis [London: Methuen, 2010], 3.2.165).

sisters have I sworn my love" (5.1: 55; 44)—he seems to view it primarily as a strategic problem. He considers the whole range of his options—including opting out of the whole thing: "Which of them shall I take? / Both, one, or neither?" (5.1: 57–58; 46–47). He is quite cool and indifferent about the matter, and this speech suggests (again) that he has not yet "taken" either. In the denouement, when Edmund is dying and the corpses of the two sisters are displayed, Shakespeare's Edmund takes pride not in having erotically conquered the sisters but in having been "beloved" by them both and having led them both to die for their love of him (5.3: 233–35; 214–16). It is an oddly touching moment, and perhaps leads the way to the change of heart (in his next speech) about Lear and Cordelia. But it has nothing to do with sexuality. The whole lust plot in Shakespeare's play seems merely pasted in, stipulated rather than dramatized. Its purpose seems to be to add to the wickedness of (especially) Goneril (since she is married when the flirtation begins, and plans to have her husband murdered), and, thematically, to give some further support within the play for Lear's terrible revulsion at female sexuality—though, within the diegesis, Lear cannot actually know about the lust swirling around Edmund.

Tate, on the other hand, builds the erotic theme and Edmund's relation to the elder sisters very firmly into the play. Early on, after Cornwall and Regan are told by Gloucester of Edgar's supposed "practice" and of Edmund's supposed valor in attempting to apprehend him, Tate gives the lines authorizing a death sentence on Edgar to Regan rather than to Cornwall (Tate, 2.3.8–9; compare Shakespeare, 2.1.109–11). The line about Edmund's trustworthiness is given to Regan, and Tate has her then add in an aside, "A charming youth and worth my further thought" (2.3.13). Possibly a production of Shakespeare's *Lear* could suggest this, but there is no textual warrant for it. The language of erotic connoisseurship is part of Tate's presentation of the reigning sisters. And, correlative to this, Tate makes them luxury loving. Shakespeare suggests this in Lear's reference to the "gorgeous" clothing that Regan wears that "scarcely keeps [her] warm" (2.4: 240; 259). This is definitely a hint for staging, but the theme is never developed (no particular clothing is attributed to the "simpling dame" in Lear's misogynistic rant [4.6.114; 4.5.114]; "robes and furred gowns" are attributed to corrupt office holders, not to the female rulers [4.6.158; 4.5.158]). Luxuriousness of an explicitly and consciously aristocratic and extravagant sort is unique to the villains in Tate's presentation. At Gloucester's residence, Cornwall commands that "This night be spent in revels" (2.3.15). It is therefore no surprise that when Lear is there, trying to gain access to Cornwall and Regan, Lear is told they are "at a masque" (2.5.35). Early in the storm scenes, Tate gives Edmund a soliloquy that begins, quite wonderfully, "The storm is in our louder revelings drowned" (3.2.1).

Tate provides a picture of the elder sisters as not only lecherous and luxury loving but also as enjoying and exploiting their powers as rulers. Eric Rothstein has suggested that in general, in Restoration tragedies (which would include Tate's *Lear*), "the energies of the lustful woman" derive "less from unscrupulous passion than from regal position."<sup>46</sup> Productions of Shakespeare's versions might do well to try to recognize something of this. Tate establishes this, and does something further with it. Very interestingly, he builds an awareness of the sisters' pleasure in ruling into Edmund's dramatized inner life. The sisters provide a model for how Edmund would like to live. "Thus would I reign," he says, "could I but mount a throne" (3.2.2). He too is luxury loving, anticipating that, after he has betrayed his father, Gloucester's "vast Revenues" will fall to him.<sup>47</sup> This will serve "to glut my pleasure" (3.2.59–60), a lovely Marlovian touch.<sup>48</sup> Tate's Edmund admires "The Riots of these proud imperial Sisters" (3.2.3) and the ruthless and exploitative assertion of class privilege needed to sustain their luxury. Tate's poetry is strong here (as it always is in regard to class relations). The "imperial" riots of the sisters:

Already have imposed the galling yoke  
Of taxes, and hard impositions on  
The drudging peasants neck, who bellow out  
Their loud complaints in vain.

(3.2.4–7)

The mention of "taxes" here points to the immediate political context of Tate's play.<sup>49</sup> But the more general point is that in Tate's conception of Edmund, social climbing and lust go together. Exploitation and hauteur are part of the attraction. After admiringly noting "With what assurance" the sisters "tread the crowd," Tate's Edmund exclaims: "O for a taste of such majestic beauty" (3.2.8–9). He knows, moreover, that his wish for such a "tast[e]" is not "desperate" since, at their "revels," he saw each of the queens shoot glances at him (perhaps Shakespeare's "strange ocellades") and stealthily cast an "inviting smile" his way (3.2.14). Immediately, two servants hand him love notes from Goneril and from Regan (SD). So it all coheres.

In Tate's play, Cordelia is present on the "desert heath" (SD 3.1.0) in the storm.<sup>50</sup> She knows of Lear's plight and is seeking to aid him. Her tears

46. Rothstein, *Restoration Tragedy*, 140. For happy endings as compatible with tragedy as a genre, see n. 8 above.

47. In Shakespeare's versions, there is a brief mention (by Regan) of Gloucester's "revenues" (2.1.99), but no further reference is made to this.

48. Compare Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester University Press, 1993), 1.1.80 (A-text), 1.1.77 (B-text).

49. See Strier, *Resistant Structures*, 221–23.

50. Tate introduced the "heath" as the location for the storm scenes in the play. Henry S. Turner assigns this to a stage direction in Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition; see "King Lear Without: The Heath," *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 28 (1997): 164.

for Lear—so philosophically and lyrically evoked in the Quarto version of Shakespeare's play (Q 4.3.17–22)—serve in Tate's to inspire lust in Edmund ("O charming sorrow," he says [3.2.70]).<sup>51</sup> Edmund is initially frustrated by the knowledge that "she is virtuous," but (and here Tate borrows nicely from *Volpone*),<sup>52</sup> Edmund then fantasizes a rape in mythological terms: "like the vigorous Jove I will enjoy / This Semele in a storm," which, conveniently, "will deaf her cries" (3.2.121–22). But he never even gets to attempt this. Cordelia is saved by Edgar from the "ruffians" Edmund has suborned to capture her (3.4.19).<sup>53</sup> Edmund's erotic energies are turned to Regan when Tate has her flirt with Edmund at the beginning of the blinding scene (from which, in Tate, Goneril is absent). Tate clearly thought the character of Regan underdeveloped in Shakespeare.<sup>54</sup> Tate remedies this—with the necessary consequence of making Goneril less dominant.<sup>55</sup> Tate's Regan invites Edmund to a highly fashionable and luxurious piece of Restoration architecture, "the grotto" (3.5.25).<sup>56</sup> Following the blinding, Edmund and Regan are at said grotto "*amorously seated, listening to music*" (SD 4.1.0). It is at this point that Tate focuses on the sexual competition between the sisters. Having noted and already built on the prominence of letters in the play, Tate adds yet another discovered letter,

51. In Tate's vocabulary, to characterize someone as "charming" has a stronger erotic edge than it does in our current vocabulary (compare Regan's "A charming Youth").

52. See Ben Jonson, *Volpone* 3.7.221–25, in *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

53. Orgel asserts that "the most spectacular scene in Tate's revision is the attempted rape of Cordelia by Edmund" ("Revising *King Lear*," 123), but this is not in the script.

54. J. H. Wilson's suggestion that Tate's expansion of the parts of Regan and Cordelia was partly motivated by the availability of actresses is highly plausible; see *All the King's Ladies: Actresses of the Restoration* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 104.

55. The diminution of Goneril is also coordinated with a diminution of Albany. In doing the latter, Tate is following F. Where in Q, Albany reproves Goneril eloquently and at length for her treatment of Lear (4.2.29–35, 36–48, 57–59) and is tempted to punish her physically (60–65), F truncates this sharply, retaining only the first two and the last two lines of it (4.2.30–31, 57b–59a) and eliminating the physical threat. Tate drops the scene entirely. On Albany in Q and F, see Michael J. Warren, "Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar," in *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), 95–107. Hazelton Spencer, thinking of the Quarto or (more probably) of a conflated version, observes that Albany is "a much less interesting character in Tate than in Shakespeare" (*Shakespeare Improved*, 248).

56. Apparently, the Dorset Garden theater was able to accommodate this. See James Black, "An Augustan Stage-History: Nahum Tate's *King Lear*," *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* 6, no. 1 (May 1967): 39; Sandra Clark, introduction to *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, ed. Sandra Clark (London: Everyman Dent, 1997), xlix. On actual grottoes in eighteenth-century England, see Hazelle Jackson, *Shell Houses and Grottoes* (Oxford: Shire, 2001).

having Regan find one from Goneril (perhaps that mentioned in SD 3.2.15) that Edmund has dropped.<sup>57</sup>

This means that in Tate's play: (1) there is nothing sudden in the lust of the sisters; and (2) Edmund is highly interested in sex. Not only has he "sworn [his] love" to both sisters, but, he informs us at the beginning of act 5, he has already "enjoyed" Regan, and, because of that, is now contemplating the "equal charms" of Goneril, the sexual conquest of whom will bring "dear variety" (5.2.6–8).<sup>58</sup> The idea of taking "neither" is gone. Building on "Thou Nature art my Goddess," Tate's Edmund dismisses Conscience as only appropriate to "dull Legitimate Slaves"—not to himself, a born and dedicated "libertine" (5.5.18–20). Tate is here shrewdly and effectively using a figure from his own theatrical milieu to provide a different but utterly coherent spin on Shakespeare's character. Tate's Edmund is a full-scale Restoration rake.<sup>59</sup> He is comparable to the "heroes" of George Etherege's *Man of Mode* and Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine* (both 1676). Shakespeare could not, of course, have drawn on these figures, but he could well have made Edmund "a puffed and reckless libertine."<sup>60</sup> When Shakespeare's Edmund is mocking astrological determinism, he says that the superstitious would claim that if Edmund's father had "compounded" with his mother (a very high way of putting it) "under the Dragon's tail," and Edmund's "nativity was under Ursa Major," he (Edmund), the result of

57. On the prominence of letters in the play, see Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford University Press, 2008), chap. 5. No one, including Stewart, has provided a strong critical account of this prominence.

58. That variety was a "libertine" theme; see the elegy on the topic ascribed to Donne. Helen Gardner (who disputed this ascription) noted that the poem, though printed in 1650 and certainly composed earlier, sounds remarkably like a Restoration one; see John Donne, *The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), xlii.

59. If James Black is right, Tate is also drawing on the most important philosopher of the period—either understood or misunderstood; see "The Influence of Hobbes on Nahum Tate's *King Lear*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 377–85. Tate can also be seen as making another of Shakespeare's characters into a Restoration figure. Shakespeare's Oswald is nameless in Tate, but instead of being a steward, Tate's Oswald is denominated in the cast list (4), and in the stage direction at 4.4.181, as Goneril's "Gentleman-Usher," surely a more ornamental position than that of steward. Oswald is characterized by Kent/Caius as "glass-gazing" and (in the Quarto) "superfincial" (Q 2.2.16), and by Lear as living on "borrowed pride" (2.4: 155; 174). Tate (2.2.13–14) keeps "glass-gazing" and Q's "fincial" (as well as F's "superserviceable" [F 2.2.16]) and he keeps the "borrowed pride" lines (2.4.155; 174), but he makes the character a Restoration "fashion-fop who spends the day in dressing" (2.5.111). Building on Shakespeare, in Tate the character is a "dapper slave" (2.2.28), and is continually referred to in olfactory terms, as perfumed—a "vile civet-box" (1.2.30), an "essence bottle" (2.3.29)—continuing the decadence theme.

60. The phrase is Ophelia's (*Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, 1.3.49). It occurs in both the Second Quarto (1605) and the Folio. The First Quarto (1603) has "a careless libertine" (*Hamlet*, *the Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor [London: Thomas Learning, 2006], scene 3, line 18).

this, would be “rough and lecherous” (1.2: 115–18; 118–21). Whether or not we are to imagine that he was conceived and born under these astrological circumstances, Shakespeare’s Edmund is not “rough and lecherous.” Rather, he is smooth and cold (recall “or neither”). Maybe we would (again) want to say that Shakespeare’s is a good or even better choice. I am not sure. But again it is Tate’s play that leads us to recognize that there was such a choice, and to ponder the sexual nonchalance of Shakespeare’s Edmund. Tate both gives us a completely plausible, indeed compelling alternative version of Shakespeare’s character and helps us to see the character that Shakespeare does give us more clearly. Tate’s “hot” Edmund reveals Shakespeare’s cool Edmund to us.

Turning to the other brother, critics since at least Bradley have been disturbed by Edgar as “Tom” not revealing his true identity to the newly blinded Gloucester, who has been forced to recognize how mistaken he has been about his two sons. Stanley Cavell, to take a prominent instance, turns Bradley’s puzzlement into strong moral disapproval. Cavell sees Edgar’s non-self-revelation as blinding Gloucester again, displaying, Cavell says, “the *same* cruelty as that of the evil characters” (with italics on “same,” lest we miss the point).<sup>61</sup> What is interesting with regard to Tate is that, again, long before there was any critic to flag it, Tate recognized that there was an issue here.

The key moment is when Gloucester says that if he could “see” Edgar “in [his] touch” Gloucester would say that he had “eyes again” (4.1: 19–22; 21–24). Tate keeps these lines but follows them with an aside in which Edgar states that he knows that his father is now “sensible that I was wronged” (4.2.24). This awareness of Gloucester’s awareness is what leads Tate’s Edgar not to reveal his identity. Tate has Edgar realize, at this point, what Shakespeare has Edgar learn only later and through sad experience. Tate cleverly borrows the language that Shakespeare gives to Edgar in describing Gloucester’s death (5.3: 190–93; 188–91), crediting Edgar here with thinking “should I own my self, his tender heart / Would break betwixt th’ extremes of grief and joy” (4.2.25–26). So the (supposed) problem of Edgar’s non-self-revelation goes away. As Peter Womack puts it, “an *opaque event* is recontextualized as a *transparent motive*.”<sup>62</sup> This may well be an

61. See Stanley Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*,” which first appeared in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (New York: Scribner’s, 1969), 269–353 (quotation on 283), and then in *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 39–124 (quotation on 55), and then (with identical pagination) in *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For commentary on Cavell’s view, see Richard Strier, *Shakespearean Issues: Agency, Skepticism, and Other Puzzles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), chap. 3.

62. Womack, “Secularizing *King Lear*,” 99.

improvement; I am not sure that we are indeed better off, aesthetically, with doubts and mysteries here.

Moreover, it might be said that in providing this motive, Tate was developing something that was implicit in the Shakespeare versions, though only implicit. In the Quarto, we are told in the next scene that a “sovereign shame” keeps Lear from being willing to see Cordelia (4.3.42). In both Shakespearean versions, when Lear does have to confront Cordelia, he feels this shame intensely—“mine own tears / Do scald like molten lead” (4.7.45–46; 4.6.41–42). He would rather die than face, in person, the compassion of his former victim: “If you have poison for me, I will drink it” (4.7.69; 4.6.66). It turns out to be immensely painful and complex for a father to face a forgiving child he has severely misjudged and mistreated. It seems more plausible, as well as more in line with the character of Edgar that Shakespeare gives us (in both versions), to credit Edgar with this insight than to have him simply ignore Gloucester’s prayer here—which Shakespeare’s versions seem to have him do. To have Edgar deeply understand the psychology of his father seems true to Shakespeare’s picture—not in any way a betrayal of it.<sup>63</sup>

Staying within the Gloucester family, but turning from the brothers to the father, one of the things that has been insufficiently noticed about Tate’s play is how much of Tate’s effort went into the alteration and expansion of the figure and role in the play of Gloucester himself. Tate develops the father even more than he does the bastard son. Tate reimagines the figure. Tate’s treatment of Gloucester provides an excellent example of what Gerard Genette calls “secondary revaluation” of a character, when “by way of pragmatic or psychological transformation” a character is invested with “a more significant and/or more attractive role in the value system of the hypertext than was the case in the hypotext.”<sup>64</sup> This is formally as well as substantively signaled in the play. In Tate, as never in Shakespeare, Gloucester gets to soliloquize at length—twice.<sup>65</sup>

In the first case, the speech allows Tate to fill another lacuna: Shakespeare’s Gloucester has very little to say about his blindness. After losing his second eye, he proclaims himself “All dark and comfortless” (3.7.82); later, he asserts his insensitivity to light—“Were all the [F: thy] letters suns,

63. Another way of dealing with the difficulty of Edgar’s apparent nonresponse here is the suggestion that Edgar/Tom simply does not hear Gloucester’s remark. See Strier, *Shakespearean Issues*, 77–78.

64. Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 343.

65. The lines about wishing to “see” Edgar in his touch may be viewed as a kind of soliloquy, since they have no relation to Gloucester’s immediate interlocutor (an “Old Man”); Gloucester’s address to the gods before the attempted suicide is something like a soliloquy (4.6.35–41; 4.5.35–41), but neither of these are formally so.

I could not see" (4.6.134; 4.5.134)—and states, in response to Lear's claim that one can see how the world goes without eyes, "I see it feelingly" (4.6.143; 4.5.143). That is the extent of commentary on his physical condition that Shakespeare gives the blinded Gloucester. Tate gives Gloucester a major soliloquy following the blinding, and here again, as with Edmund as rake, Tate shows his resourcefulness in using material from his own literary world to supplement Shakespeare's texts.

As in Tate's relation to Shakespeare, Tate recognizes literary genius. He draws on the recently deceased and politically disfavored Milton—a bold thing to do in 1680—for a moving speech on the experience of blindness, adapting lines from *Paradise Lost* (1667) and from *Samson Agonistes* (1671) as well as expanding on the physical dimension of "I see it feelingly."<sup>66</sup> Tate retains "All dark and comfortless" as a line by itself, and follows it with:

Where are those various objects that but now  
Employed my busy eyes? where those eyes?  
Dead are their piercing rays that lately shot  
O'er flowery vales to distant sunny hills,  
And drew with joy the vast horizon in.  
These groping hands are now my only guides,  
And feeling all my sight.  
O misery! what words can sound my grief?  
Shut from the living while among the living;  
No more to see the beauty of the spring,  
Nor see the face of kindred, or of friend.  
(3.5.68–80)

Compare (from *Paradise Lost*):

Thus with the Year  
Seasons return, but not to me, returns  
Day, or sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer's Rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;  
But clouds instead, and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men,  
Cut off.  
(3.40–48)

66. In *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice*, Murray finds this passage "the most interesting of Tate's new speeches," and recognizes the care with which "Tate had read his Milton" (165; see also 262 n. 80), but she is, I think, mistaken in thinking this an obvious move on Tate's part (165). For the complexities of the reception of *Paradise Lost* in the Restoration, see Nicholas von Maltzahn, "The First Reception of *Paradise Lost*," *Review of English Studies* 47, no. 188 (November 1996): 479–99.

And, from *Samson Agonistes*:

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!  
 .....  
 Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,  
 And all her various objects of delight  
 Annulled . . .  
 To live a life half dead, a living death . . .  
 Myself my Sepulcher.

(70–102)<sup>67</sup>

Tate's adaptation and paraphrase of the Milton passages is skillful. He picks up the progression from "vernal bloom" to human faces in *Paradise Lost*, and the phrase "various objects" and the idea of "a living death" from *Samson Agonistes*. Shakespeare did not have Milton to draw on, but, had Shakespeare wished to do so, he could surely have imagined his way more fully than he does into the phenomenology of blindness. Mason does not expand on or particularize the point, but he notes that, in reading *King Lear*, he finds himself, with regard to Gloucester, "wishing that Shakespeare had given the character more flashes of inner life."<sup>68</sup>

In rethinking Gloucester, Tate does more than fill in lacunae. He does something that is almost as major an "alteration" as the happy ending, but that has received little critical recognition: Tate's Gloucester leads a popular revolution.<sup>69</sup> Probably it is the general assumption of Tate as a consistently Tory figure that has kept scholars from seeing and commenting on this (when it is noticed) very striking addition.<sup>70</sup> In developing this plot element, even more than in the development of the luxury theme, Tate was building on a hint in Shakespeare. The Folio version of Shakespeare's play has been seen as downplaying the French invasion, so that the war in the play is more like a popular uprising.<sup>71</sup> The Folio drops Albany's assertion that he is in arms because "France invades our land" (Q 5.1.25), but retains his mention of those "whom the rigour of our state / Forced to cry out"

67. Quotations of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* from John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Meritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1937).

68. H. A. Mason, "King Lear (III): Radical Incoherence?," *Cambridge Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 212–35.

69. Sandra Clark briefly notes this "unlikely" development in her introduction to *Shakespeare Made Fit*, lxvi.

70. Jean I. Marsden's assumption that the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare are politically conservative leads her to see Shadwell's *Timon of Athens* (1678) as unique in lauding "the benefits of rebellion against corrupt authority" (*The Re-imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* [Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995], 44). Marsden overlooks this element in Tate's *Lear*.

71. On the war in F presented more as a rebellion and less as an invasion, see Michael Warren, "The War in *Lear*," *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980): 27–34 (esp. 31a).

(5.1.22–23; 5.1.17–18). If the Folio version is indeed a revision of the play by Shakespeare, then Tate develops a direction in which Shakespeare himself was moving.<sup>72</sup> Since in Tate, there is no France in the cast, there is no French invasion. There is only a popular rebellion. This was a phenomenon to which Tate may actually have been favorable—in reality—at the moment of composing his version of *Lear* in the early part of the Exclusion Crisis (the summer or fall of 1680).<sup>73</sup>

In Shakespeare, after Lear has been denied shelter by Cornwall and the “imperial sisters,” Gloucester assures Edmund, “These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home,” and to substantiate this, Gloucester speaks of “part of a power already landed [F: footed]” (3.3.10–12). In the equivalent moment in Tate’s version, Gloucester notes that “The commons repine aloud at their female tyrants” (3.2.34–36), and he dedicates himself to the cause of “the commons”: “[They] court me / To lead ’em on,” and, he says ominously, “whilst this head is mine / I am theirs” (3.2.32–33, 39–41). As in Shakespeare, Tate’s Gloucester’s “duty cannot suffer” him to obey the two daughters’ “hard commands” and he provides “fire and food” to Lear (3.4: 132–37; 136–41; Tate, 3.3.141–46), and then sends him to where Lear will find “Both welcome and protection” (3.6: 85; 47; Tate, 3.3.163–64).<sup>74</sup> Shakespeare’s Gloucester specifies that he is doing these things even though he may die—that is, be executed—for doing them (3.3.16). But, in Shakespeare, that is the end of Gloucester’s heroic resistance. His blinding, as one would expect, puts an end to it—although not quite. Regan comments, in Shakespeare’s versions, that, after the blinding, it was foolish to let Gloucester live and wander about, since “where he arrives he moves / All hearts against us” (4.5.9–11; 4.4.9–11). Nothing further is made of that, and the implication seems to be that this happens spontaneously (compare Macbeth on the cosmic power

72. This fits in with Massai’s demonstration in “Nahum Tate’s Revision of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*,” that “from the end of Act II, Tate tends to rely on the Folio more” (442), and also with her conviction that Tate’s use of the two versions is consonant with the authorial revision theory of the Folio text (446–48). For the view that the Folio is a revision, by Shakespeare, of the Quarto, see Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare’s Revision of “King Lear”* (Princeton University Press, 1980); Taylor and Warren, *Division of the Kingdoms*; and Grace Ioppolo, *Revising Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chap. 6. For a dissent from both the “two-text” and the revision view, see Brian Vickers, *The One “King Lear”* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). I should state that I accept the two-text and the revision view.

73. This is the argument of Strier, *Resistant Structures*, chap. 8.

74. Because there is no French invasion, Tate’s Gloucester has to be vague about where he is sending Lear since Dover is not part of the military situation. This means that Tate’s Cornwall (unlike Shakespeare’s) really might not actually know where Gloucester has “sent the King” (3.5.34). Gloucester’s choice of Dover as his ultimate postblindness destination is entirely motivated, in Tate, by the suicide plan.

of “Pity”).<sup>75</sup> There is no suggestion, in Shakespeare, that Gloucester intends this. Tate has Gloucester fully and systematically intend the effect. “He moves . . . hearts” shifts from an accidental, if powerful, effect in Shakespeare to a conscious plan in Tate.

In the postblinding soliloquy, Tate’s Gloucester does more than descend lyrically on the pathos of his situation. The speech turns when he asks, “Must I then tamely die, and unrevenged?” (3.5.83). Tate’s character has, all along, been more passionate and Lear-like than Shakespeare’s. In Tate’s opening, Gloucester anticipates Lear in stating of the formerly “best beloved” child, “I discard him here from my possessions, / Divorce him from my heart, my blood and name” (1.1.33–34). For a child to attempt to murder a father—what Edmund, in all the versions, has convinced Gloucester that Edgar intends—was, legally, a form of treason.<sup>76</sup> John Bellamy explains that, under Tudor-Stuart law, traitors were to be disemboweled, and then, when the convicted traitor’s “entrails had been removed, the executioner cut out his heart.”<sup>77</sup> Tate’s Gloucester fantasizes about being, in effect, the executioner who is to disembowel Edgar; his hope is “That I might bite the traitor’s heart, and fold / His bleeding entrails on my vengeful arm” (1.1.283–84). Shakespeare’s Gloucester can only imagine something like this as a metaphor for extreme cruelty (“thy fierce sister / In his anointed flesh rash boarish fangs” [3.7.54–55]). This may have given Tate the idea for the biting, but Tate’s Gloucester revels in using this image to enhance the fantasy of performing the traditional disemboweling (to which the biting is Tate’s addition). In the soliloquy, Gloucester continues his penchant for grisly anatomical imagining. Starting with a phrase borrowed from Edgar’s “brief tale” of his relationship, as Tom, to his father (5.3: 175–87; 173–85), Tate has Gloucester resolve “with these bleeding rings / I will present me to the pitying crowd / And with the rhetoric of these dropping veins / Enflame ‘em” (3.5.85–88).

This “rhetoric” is successful. A messenger tells Regan that because of blind Gloucester’s physical presence and actual speeches, the “mutiny” of “the yeomen” that “long had crept / Takes wing, and threatens your best powers” (4.1.43–44). That Tate has this occurring “At last day’s public festival” (4.1.37) may have had an immediate political relevance in 1681.<sup>78</sup> It may also be another link to *Samson Agonistes*, where Samson’s final act, which could provide an “occasion” for the people of Israel to revolt

75. See *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1.7.21–25 (the famous “naked babe” passage).

76. On “petty treason,” see Michael Dalton, *The Country Justice* (London, 1618), 323–24.

77. John Bellamy, *The Tudor Law of Treason: An Introduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 205.

78. See Strier, *Resistant Structures*, 229.

(SA 1715–16), takes place at “a solemn feast” (SA 1311).<sup>79</sup> In downplaying or eliminating the characterological differences between Lear and Gloucester, Tate may have lost something important. He has not, however—contra Sandra Clarke and Peter Womack—made the character of Gloucester less coherent.<sup>80</sup> Gloucester’s continuing revolutionary ardor does not conflict with his plan to commit suicide. The blindness soliloquy makes the relation between the political and the personal in Gloucester’s thinking clear. There is a temporal sequence. Tate’s character says that he will first “en-flame” the crowd, and then, after the “glorious mischief” of a popular rebellion is “on wing,” he will dispose of himself—“This lumber from some precipice I’ll throw” (3.5.88–89). Tate then gives Gloucester an amazing Platonic fantasy of postmortem existence. The blind man imagines that his “freed soul” will become “all one glorious eye” (3.5.91–93). Whatever Tate has lost, he has given the blind Gloucester a more developed phenomenology and a role that may tap into and dramatize the deepest politics of Shakespeare’s play, especially in its revised form.

The second soliloquy that Tate gives Gloucester quite literally fills a lacuna. In this case, it is truly possible to think of the addition as, in construction and conception, an improvement. In the middle of Shakespeare’s fifth act, Edgar places Gloucester under the shadow of a tree (or bush [in Q]) and goes off to join Cordelia’s army. If he returns, says Edgar, it will be with good tidings (“comfort”). Gloucester blesses him, and Edgar exits (5.2.5; Tate, 5.3.5). Immediately following the stage direction in which Edgar’s exit is marked, both Q and F have a stage direction saying “*alar[u]m and retreat*,” immediately after which, Edgar returns.<sup>81</sup> In Shakespeare, Gloucester does not say a word between Edgar’s exit and reentrance. This is surely not meant to be a comic sequence (think Marx brothers), so there has to be at least some temporal interval between Edgar’s two actions, an interval in which we are to imagine that Edgar is away at the battle. So, in Shakespeare’s versions, the blind old man simply stands (or probably sits) in silence, listening, with the audience, to the “*alarum*.” This is either a piece of theatrical daring or a directorial nightmare (much easier for a film version to deal with).<sup>82</sup>

79. On the radical dimension of the politics of *Samson Agonistes*, see David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), chap. 9. H. F. Scott-Thomas pointed out that after the Glorious Revolution (1688), Tate drew on “Lycidas”—“which up to this time had made scarcely any impression on English literature”—and on Milton’s antiprelatical tracts in attacking the high churchmen who would not support the Revolution (“Nahum Tate and the Seventeenth-Century,” *ELH* 1, no. 3 [December 1934]: 263–64).

80. See Clark, introduction to *Shakespeare Made Fit*, lxix; Womack, “Secularizing *King Lear*,” 101.

81. See Warren, *Parallel “King Lear,”* 131–32.

82. Both Peter Brook and Grigori Kozintsev in their film versions (both 1971) fill up this moment with images of war and devastation.

Tate's stage direction keeps the "*Alarum*," but adds "*after which Gloucester speaks*" (SD 5.3.6)—his second soliloquy. Gloucester describes the sounds he hears, and Tate continues the characterization that he has established. His Gloucester does not want to be passive. Drawing on the military past with which Tate credits him (he "used to head the fray" [5.3.9]), Gloucester presents a striking analogy to his own situation, one perhaps drawn, as Maynard Mack suggested, from God's portrait of the frenzied warhorse in the book of Job:

the disabled courser, maimed and blind,  
When to his stall he hears the rattling war,  
Foaming with rage tears up the battered ground,  
And tugs for liberty.<sup>83</sup>

(5.3.13–16)

This may not be Shakespearean poetry, but it is surely not contemptible. And it fills a hole. Could Shakespeare have written lines for Gloucester here? Certainly. Would they have been better than Tate's lines? Very probably. But he did not do so. Tate makes us wish that Shakespeare had.

Michael Warren defends this absence. He sees the virtual absurdity of "*Exit [Edgar]. Alarum and retreat within. Enter Edgar*" (F) as intended. But even Warren is not certain of this. He says of this moment, "it must work, if it is to work at all, as an aggressive disappointment: the author's defiant and conscious refusal to give us what we want."<sup>84</sup> "If it is to work at all"—this is an admission that perhaps it does not. Since this is, apparently, unthinkable, a justification, however close to sophistry, must be found. But why? Maybe Shakespeare did have a reason for Gloucester's silence here. Or—is it possible?—he missed a trick. Could even Shakespeare nod?

Tate's play raises the issue here, and it is one worth thinking about. In other places, as we have seen, Tate powerfully develops strands in the play(s)—the luxury theme; the "rhetorical" potential in Gloucester's visible victimhood; the war as a popular rebellion—that Shakespeare could have developed, or could have developed further, but, again, did not. And, as we have seen, Tate builds the lust theme much more firmly into the play. We should be grateful to Tate, as we are to other adapters (Césaire, etc.), for providing a good deal of food for critical thought. But, as I have argued here, we should credit Tate—when he truly builds on Shakespeare—with aesthetic as well as critical achievements. His play may well, given the sentimental frame, be less than the sum of its parts. But a number of those

83. Mack, "*King Lear*" in *Our Time*, 11. The reference is to Job 39:19–25.

84. Warren, "War in *Lear*," 28a.

parts are worth our respect and, even further, our appreciation. He helps us ask some good questions, and he has moments—Shakespeare-inspired moments—of brilliance. His *Lear* has more to offer than sentimentality and resonant providentialism. As I said earlier, Tate extends and shows hidden possibilities within the Shakespearean world.