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English 320

6 December 2012

"To Ponder on Things Would Hurt Me More": Lear's and Cordelia's Rejections of Truth

Lear's death at the end of Shakespeare's *King Lear,* though tragic, seems to arise deservedly from his sins. However, it seems unjust of Shakespeare to kill Cordelia, if, as is often argued, she is but a victim of circumstance and the poor choices of others. Indeed, she seems to be the thwarted heroine of the tale--she heroically rushes to Lear's rescue despite having been banished at his hand and demonstrates a depth of love that perhaps only her youth had prevented her from expressing in words in 1.1.[1] Nevertheless, her selfless attempt to save Lear ends instead in her own death at the hands of Edmund. Why does Shakespeare both prevent her love from achieving its comedic intent of Lear's salvation and kill her in the process? Cordelia's death calls for another reading of her character. The play reveals that Cordelia, in fact, falls to the same tragic flaw as Lear: both father and daughter choose to deny the truth rather than face painful realities that are incompatible with the fulfillment of their desires.[2]

[1] Indeed, Sandra Hole argues that in Cordelia, Shakespeare has created an ideal of goodness. She bases her argument upon what she calls the "divine background" of the play (217); Cordelia, she says, stands out as the only character who responds to the decisions of the gods with quiet acceptance and who earns divine references from supporting characters. These traits identify Cordelia as an image of righteousness (220). Nevertheless, Hole follows in the footsteps of many other critics that Thomas A. Greenfield describes as failing to consider the fact that Cordelia is a character in the play, not merely a representation of a virtue (45). My essay considers Cordelia as a character just as susceptible to sin as any human, an angle which allows for a justification of her death within the tragic structure. By contrast, one who adopts Hole's position will be forced to search for reconciliation between Cordelia's death and her innocence.

[2] Interestingly, this view of tragedy as the outworking of human error is not supported by all critics. William Ferguson Tamblyn argues that the tragic outcome of *King Lear* cannot be traced to character flaws, but more accurately to circumstance, which actually shapes character (65); one cannot draw a cause and effect relationship between any error on the part of Cordelia and her tragic death (67). Nevertheless, Jeffrey Stern argues in favor of a more traditional understanding of tragedy, saying that Lear's character would have made the play a tragedy even if Cordelia had given him the answer that he desired in 1.1 (301). Stern's position accords with mine, and both our positions allow the play to instruct on human action. Tamblyn's position, by contrast, renders the play's deep discussions of human character nearly meaningless; if each character is merely the product of his circumstance, how can the play teach about human fallibility or, conversely, human virtue?

Shakespeare exposes the idea that Cordelia and Lear share a flaw by identifying the disparity between Cordelia's love and its results with a similar disparity in Lear. "We are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst," the captured Cordelia tells her likewise-prisoner father (5.3.3-4). Indeed, like Cordelia, Lear seems thwarted in his acts of love. Lear does not disguise his great love for Cordelia: "I loved her most," he tells Kent (1.1.120). Nevertheless, by the end of the first scene, he has disowned and banished Cordelia without any of the kingdom or any parting blessing. Though they will be briefly reconciled to one another in 4.7, this rift will prove to mark the end of their happy and free years together. This pattern in Lear and Cordelia of deep love and tragic outcome suggests that a shared tragic flaw renders their love ineffective and earns them Shakespeare's death sentence. The flaw may be easier to perceive in Lear, but the similarity between Lear and Cordelia leads readers to see a reflection of Lear's flaw in Cordelia.[3]

Shakespeare fittingly reveals the tragic heroes' flaw in the scene that sets the tragedy in motion, 1.1. Because Lear's desires are in tension with the truth, he has to choose between accepting the disappointment of reality and denying truth to avoid that pain. One of Lear's primary motivations for dividing the kingdom is that he "thought to set [his] rest on [Cordelia's] kind nursery," as he tells Kent (1.1.121-22). Nevertheless, Cordelia clearly does not see herself spending her future only caring for Lear; rather, she expects to marry, saying not "if I shall wed," but "when I shall wed" (1.1.98). She expects that, upon her marriage, her husband "shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty" (1.1.99-100). Though Lear desires all of her "nursery," or care, her marriage must occasion the division of her care between her husband and Lear. Lear also wants Cordelia to love him more than is fitting according to their father-daughter

[3] Greenfield also perceives a mirroring of Lear in Cordelia, although he takes the position that though they both err and suffer, they both also grow and reach a "triumph" at the end of the play (51-52).

relationship. He asks her, “what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?” (1.1.83-84). The daughter to earn the “largest bounty” was to be the one who proclaimed the greatest love to Lear (1.1.50). Hence Lear desires Cordelia to proclaim greater love than her sisters have in their grandiose speeches. Demonstrating that he will not easily give up this desire he gives Cordelia five opportunities to change her speech and speak greater love to him. Nevertheless, as Cordelia points out, the truth is that he cannot have all her love. “Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters, / To love my father all” (1.1.101-2). By making the comparison to her sisters, she directly refutes Lear’s desire for her profession of love: instead of outdoing them in the greatness of her love for Lear, she intentionally declares less complete love than did her sisters. Her approaching marriage precludes her from loving Lear to the extent that he desires. Thus Lear will have to decide between the pain of acknowledging this truth and the self-deception of denying it.

Lear, attempting to shield his heart by creating a false world, chooses denial.[4] Shakespeare points us to this denial of truth through Lear’s own partially unwitting words: “thy truth then be thy dower” (1.1.106). Lear says this as a retort to Cordelia’s claiming truth in defense of her speech. Lear rejects her speech and decision by saying that he will give only the words that have angered him as her dowry. However, in a much deeper sense than he realizes, he gives away truth along with giving away Cordelia to her husband. When he is finally certain that Cordelia will not change her speech, he says to her that he will, “as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this forever” (1.1.113-14). By calling Cordelia a “stranger,” he is giving away, or denying, the truth that she is his daughter. He does this to protect himself from pain: he

[4] Jeffrey Stern also argues that “Lear finds love on Cordelia’s terms intolerable precisely because these terms require that he accept all he has sought to deny” (302). In Stern’s view, Lear has tried to deny the fact that Cordelia must not belong solely to him upon their marriage (302).

supposes that the refusal of a stranger to profess great love to him will not hurt him as would the refusal of his favorite daughter to do so.

Shakespeare develops this flaw in Lear not only with his relationship with Cordelia, but also through Lear's disregarding of truth in favor of his desire for happy and peaceful retirement. This desire is, first of all, unachievable. The burdens of kingship must go hand in hand with the privileges of kingship. To renounce the burdens is to renounce the power that would enable him to declare that his daughters shall care for him on his own demanding terms. Nonetheless, Lear blindly gropes after his dream of retirement, denying the nature of kingship and the consequences of transferring his power. Hence, out of this denial of truth arises his self-contradictory speech to Goneril and Regan and their husbands.

> I do invest you jointly with my power,
> Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
> That troop with majesty. Ourself by monthly course,
> With reservation of an hundred knights
> By you to be sustained, shall our abode
> Make with you by due turn; only we still retain
> The name and all the addition to a king. (1.1.128-34)

Do not the "large effects" that "troop with majesty" include the "name and all the addition to a king"? (1.1.129-34). If Lear has truly "invest[ed them] jointly with [his] power," what gives him then the authority to command that he shall stay with them with one hundred knights? Moreover, "troop with majesty," can have the simple meaning of association with majesty, but can also imply troops of soldiers, drawing attention to the command of the army as one of these "large effects." Nevertheless, Lear follows this statement with his demand for one hundred knights, refusing even to accept the truth of that which he has just decreed.

The identification of this flaw in Lear may make it easier to perceive in Cordelia. A conflict between the truth of her relationship with Lear and her desire for that relationship force

her to choose between reality and avoidance of pain. She desires a deep enough love from Lear that he understand her love: she wants him to see her love without her having to proclaim it in speech. When debating how to respond to Lear's contest, she says to herself, "I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.75-76). Her comparison between her "love" and her "tongue" reveals that she sees a distinction between acted love and spoken love. One meaning of "ponderous" is "weighty," as the notes point out, which can imply significance. Taken this way, the sentence implies that Cordelia is certain that her actions carry more significance than her words in Lear's estimation of her love. Her decision, then, to speak "nothing" demonstrates her desire that Lear evaluate her love based on her actions, not her words (1.1.85). To the contrary, however, Lear in truth places great weight upon words: he bases the division of the kingdom upon the words of his daughters. Furthermore, she speaks very critically of speech that action does not support. "Glib and oily art" is her term for speech that is not backed up by "purpose," or intention to act in accordance with that speech (1.1.223-24). "Glib" and "oily" both have connotations of dishonesty or slipperiness, and "art" used with "glib and oily" takes on an idea of scheming or guile. Such dishonest and empty speech, however, is what Lear demands from his daughters.

Not willing to accept that reality does not fulfill her desire, Cordelia creates her own world in rejection of reality: wanting and expecting Lear to see the difference between spoken and acted love, she demands that Lear recognize her acts of love by speaking a lie. Perhaps a lie, she thinks, will show him the mistake of his emphasis on speech.[5] When Lear asks her what she

[5] Stern also argues that Lear's basing the kingdom division on words instead of actions is the cause of Cordelia's dissatisfaction in the scene. However, he interprets her subsequent refusal to speak as her attempt to actually avoid lying by making her love seem equal to that of her sisters (301). In one regard, this argument seems convincing; Cordelia herself claims truth in defense of her words. Nevertheless, the argument depends upon the assumption that her sisters' words have the power to render her own words devoid of their meaning. Cordelia's words ought to be able to stand on their own; her denial of love for Lear is still a denial of love for Lear regardless of what her sisters say.

can say to win the best part of the kingdom, her first response is, “Nothing, my lord” (1.1.85). The question posed to her had been how much she loved Lear; to suggest that she had nothing to say was to suggest that she did not love Lear any more than her sisters did—in fact, even less than they did. Nonetheless, clearly this is not true: the truthful Kent admonishes Lear, “Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,” presumably pointing to prior evidence of Cordelia’s love for Lear (1.1.150). Cordelia continues to deny the truth of her love for Lear. “I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more, nor less” (1.1.90-91). The idea of constraint implied by “bond” suggests love based on obligation rather than freely given. However, Cordelia had no obligation to risk her life to rescue her father from the results of his own foolishness. Neither does she have a duty to offer “all [her] outward worth” to “he that helps him” (4.4.10). Indeed, her willingness to be “cast down” for the “oppressèd king” (5.3.5) is the result of love, not obligation. Hence, to call her love “no more” than her “bond” is a falsehood predicated upon a desire to avoid suffering.

Despite the fact that both Lear and Cordelia sacrifice truth for the sake of avoiding pain, both characters suffer greatly from the conflict in 1.1, giving the reader hope that their pain might raise them beyond their tragic flaw. Shakespeare teases the reader in 4.7 with that very hope for Lear. With his line, “I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia,” Lear reaccepts Cordelia, seeming therefore to accept also the truth that he had previously denied (4.7.71-72). Even his admission, “I am old and foolish” gives hope that he recognizes the folly of his previous view of life (4.7.86). Similarly, Cordelia’s words of love for Lear in 4.4—“No blown ambition doth our arms incite / But love, dear love, and our aged father’s right” (4.4.27-28)—give the reader hope that the suffering brought about in 1.1 has taught her to

overcome her tragic flaw.[6] Nevertheless, the final scenes reveal that neither Cordelia nor Lear overcomes that fatal propensity to choose falsehood over a painful truth.

In 5.3, the reality of prison renders Lear's desire for a happy life in prison utterly unachievable, but Lear again chooses to believe falsehood rather than be hurt by accepting the painful truth. He fantasizes about the prison:

> . . .so we'll live
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too—
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out—
> And take upon 's the mystery of things,
> As if we were God's spies . . . (5.3.11-17)

By comparing themselves to spies working for God who "take upon [them] the mystery of things," he acts as if their removal to prison shall make them privy to the secrets of heaven. Yet upon what truth can he found this assertion? What about captivity shall make them the favorites of God, or what about prison will enable them to carry on the secret correspondence with the divine that would belong to a spy of God's? Moreover, Lear denies the gravity of the situation by expecting to laugh at the ridiculous "gilded butterflies" and with his discussion of court news, which he regards as mere entertainment for himself and Cordelia. Even the sing-song metric quality of "Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out" highlights his trivializing that flies in the face of proper seriousness. For Lear, the goings-on in the world can be reduced to a game of entertainment for Lear and Cordelia. Even the idea that Lear and Cordelia will be able to observe

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[6] In fact, Greenfield takes the position that Cordelia's suffering brought about by Act I does in fact cause her to become "a 'new,' matured Cordelia in Act IV" (49-50). He establishes his position based upon the allusions in the text to her suffering as well as the change in the manner in which she expresses love for her father. Greenfield's argument merits consideration, but as my essay will demonstrate, what may be a change in her words does not represent a change in her response to truth; her flaw was not that she did not speak love to Lear, per se, but that in not speaking love to Lear she was lying. Therefore, her expression of love later does not mean she has overcome her propensity to deny the truth, but only that she has chosen not to deny that particular truth any longer. Furthermore, the fact that she does suffer implies nothing about whether that suffering changes her or not. Finally, if Cordelia did learn to overcome much of her fault between 1.1 and 4.7, why does she not admit any prior error in 4.7? Whatever her mistake in 1.1, she offers no repentance in 4.7.

the court from prison is ridiculous, a fact that Lear conveniently ignores. Moreover, Edmund immediately follows Lear's dream with, "Take them away," a blunt and cold reminder that whatever is Lear's vision of prison, prison is still prison, and that at the hands of a wicked man (5.3.19). Lear also tells Cordelia, "Wipe thine eyes" (5.3.23). Though Lear cannot be expected to know that he and Cordelia will soon die, even a sentence to prison ought to bring tears to his eyes and Cordelia's. For though they may be able to sing together, they will sing "like birds i'th'cage" (5.3.9). They shall be unable to fly away, as birds ought, by nature, to be able to do. Prison will stifle and constrain them. Yet Lear rejects Cordelia's tears as inappropriate to the situation, as if he can alter the nature of prison by denying the sorrow that it fittingly brings.

Similarly, Cordelia's unwillingness to part with her hopes for a happy life with Lear leads her to deny the truth that she and Lear both teeter on the edge of destruction in 4.7. From her longing to be with Lear— "Soon may I hear and see him" (4.4.29)—and her own expressions of sorrow— "All you unpublished virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears" (4.4.16-17)—it is easy to ascertain that Cordelia does not like to see her father suffering, and neither does she herself like the suffering that has resulted from her estrangement from Lear. Nevertheless, Cordelia's flaw manifests itself when she simply acts as if the tragedy were over, instead of recognizing the truth that the situation needs drastic reversal in order for her and Lear not to die. When she sees Kent in his disguise as Caius, she tells him, "Be better suited: / These weeds are memories of those worser hours. / I prithee, put them off" (4.7.6-8). The contrast that the phrase "worser hours" establishes between the past and the present reveals her attempt to believe that the recent calamities pose no threat to the future. Her assertion that "better" clothing would be more appropriate for the present situation than his current "weeds" demonstrates that she acts as if the calamities have past. Already seeing the recent adversities as mere "memories," she refuses

to admit that those adversities stand poised to wreak more havoc upon the characters, their relationships, and their countries.

Because Lear's offenses toward Cordelia preclude the realization of her desires for his companionship and blessing, Cordelia must choose between the truth and the false maintenance of her hopes. When declaring her intentions to seek Lear, she speaks of her "mourning...tears" (4.4.26), suggesting that she grieves for Lear and desires to be separated from him no longer. Her concluding statement of the scene is, "Soon may I hear and see him," emphasizing that her purpose in searching for Lear stems from a sense of personal loss from his absence (4.4.29). In 4.7 she tells Lear, "hold your hand in benediction o'er me," expressing her desire that he bless instead of banish her (4.7.59). Nevertheless, Cordelia expresses all of these desires before Lear attempts any sort of reconciliation with her; their rift in 1.1 left Cordelia disowned by Lear. Hence, while her desires are not evil, they cannot be realized without reconciliation with Lear. Cordelia has no means by which to restore her relationship with Lear unless she denies the wrong Lear has done her.

Cordelia chooses to deny the truth of the wrongs Lear has done her in order to restore their relationship and avoid the pain of knowing that her father disowned her. In 4.4, she refers to Lear as a "good man," suggesting that righteousness has characterized his actions, ignoring his recent treatment of her (4.4.18). Furthermore, she says that she is sending the army for love and "our aged father's right," implying that Lear deserves for her to risk her life to rescue him (4.4.28). This represents a faulty idea of justice, predicated fundamentally upon a denial of the crimes that Lear has committed. Even when Lear does suggest that he has done wrong, Cordelia does not acknowledge it, as if by her denial she might make the banishment to have never happened. The closest Lear comes to repentance is to say that Cordelia "ha[s] some cause" not to

love him (4.7.77). Cordelia's response is telling: "No cause, no cause" (4.7.78). While it may be tempting to read this as the depth of forgiveness—the canceling of any cause for a broken relationship—in order to cancel an offense, one must first admit that there was an offense to cancel. Otherwise, the act is not forgiveness but merely an excuse for the wrongdoing. Cordelia has not admitted and does not admit that Lear has done anything that would require forgiveness. Further, by regarding Lear as an innocent victim, she is able --albeit falsely--to avoid the pain of acknowledging that her own father treated her so harshly. Cordelia laments Lear's plight, saying, "Was this a face / To be opposed against the warring winds?" (4.7.31-32), presenting Lear as an undeserving victim of the violence of the storm. Similarly, she says to Lear, "And wast thou fain, poor father, / to hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn?" (4.7.38-39). "Fain" here means "necessitated" or "obliged," taking away any sense of Lear's own responsibility for his ending up in the low position of "swine and rogues." In reality, while Goneril and Regan did refuse to take him in, his actions played a role in provoking them to such cruelty. By calling him "poor father," (4.7.38) and "oppressèd king" (5.3.5), Cordelia again demonstrates pity as if she were addressing a victim rather than one suffering from self-inflicted wounds. When Cordelia declares twice in 4.7 that Lear's condition is a result of his poor treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan, she refuses to acknowledge the truth that some of the fault lies with Lear. She calls Lear, "this child-changèd father," suggesting that his trials have come from his daughters (4.7.17). Furthermore, she discusses "those violent harms that my two sisters have in thy reverence made" (4.7.28-29). This phrasing portrays Goneril and Regan as aggressors against one who deserves veneration, and ignores the reality that Lear is also culpable.

Perhaps the most salient rejection of truth in the entire play is Lear's madness. The intentionality of Lear's and Cordelia's repeated denials of truth invites readers to ask whether

Lear's madness is the natural consequence of such denials, and further, whether Cordelia, as a reflection of Lear, also takes on an element of madness in the play. Could madness best explain Cordelia's return to Lear? Could Lear have avoided madness if he had not become so practiced in denying the truth? Moreover, if Shakespeare demonstrates through Lear's and Cordelia's deaths that love without truth is ineffective, is it madness on the part of the reader to believe otherwise? Perhaps Shakespeare suggests that to think that love is all is to deny truth and risk madness, just as do the tragic heroes of the play (4.7.26-29).

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Stern, Jeffrey. "The Transference of the Kingdom." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.3 (1990):299-308. *JSTOR.* Web. 25 November 2012.

Jeffrey Stern argues that "The plan [to divide the kingdom]...is not only public and political but personal and psychological, not only (indeed, I think, not crucially) about the division of the state and the loss of his lands but rather about this division of the self and the loss of his heart--of Cordelia" (299). Stern explains Lear's division of the kingdom as a plan to retain the undivided love of his favorite daughter, whose marriage would take her from him (300). Though he argues persuasively that Lear's desire for Cordelia's undivided love motivates not only his division of the kingdom, but also much of his action in the play, his explanation of Lear's love as incestuous seems to exceed the evidence that the play offers (305). Stern goes on to analyze Lear's desire for maternal care from Cordelia and to suggest that Cordelia fulfills a need for maternal care that Lear was perhaps missing from his childhood or even from his wife (306). He connects this desire for a woman's care to the narcissistic tendency that he considers to be Lear's tragic flaw (307). Stern makes this connection with too little textual evidence to be convincing; it also seems to be unnecessary to call Lear narcissistic in order to explain his desire for Cordelia's care. Stern's argument is useful as a thorough analysis of the motivations behind Lear's division of the kingdom, and it provides some helpful insight into Lear's love and desire for Cordelia's care.

Hole, Sandra. "The Background of Divine Action in King Lear." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 8.2 (1968): 217-233. *JSTOR.* Web. 30 November 2012.

Sandra Hole contends that "the actions of all the characters stem from the influence of, or are to be judged in relation to, a background of supernatural, or divine, activity" (218). Her essay explores the relationship between the characters' attitudes toward the divine, the righteousness of their actions, and the way the play grants them life or death. She argues that those who accept the decrees of heaven without objection are the ones who stand out for their goodness (233). She argues that the connections other characters make between Cordelia and the gods as well as their prayers for her point to her as "the utterly good, the standard of goodness" and that Cordelia is prominent as the only character closely in harmony with the gods (220). By presenting Cordelia as good, she seems to ignore some of the flaws of character that actually make Cordelia a tragic heroine despite her seeming virtue. She also argues that Lear and Gloucester grow in their spiritual understanding through their trials as they learn humility in the context of accepting the divine (224). Though her discussion of the divine background of *King Lear* opens a level of meaning that lies beneath the surface of the actions of the characters, it cannot be viewed as a comprehensive analysis of the characters. The essay presents an interesting way to evaluate the characters that can provide helpful, if not complete, insight into Shakespeare's character development.

Greenfield, Thomas A. "Excellent Things in Women: The Emergence of Cordelia." *South Atlantic Bulletin* 42.1 (1977): 44-52. *JSTOR.* Web. 26 November 2012.

Thomas A. Greenfield takes the position that "in Act I Cordelia reveals herself to be an immensely flawed young woman who attempts to confront a genuine family crisis with the most artificial of responses...[and] in her absence from the stage in Acts II, III, and part of IV, her grief over her father's situation has burdened her, tortured her, and *changed* her" (47). He begins by pointing to what he sees as a flaw in the tradition of literary criticism regarding Cordelia, namely, that critics always consider her both flawless and unchanging and ignore the complexity of her character and the role she plays in shaping the direction of the play (45-46). He explains Cordelia's behavior in 1.1 as her attempt to "mold herself into a conventional framework of womanly perfection" (48). Greenfield goes on to provide an analysis of what he perceives as a change in Cordelia between Act I and Act IV and argue that the play implies that she suffers greatly offstage (50). This suffering, he claims, teaches her to overcome her flaws of 1.1 and to become the "protector, defender, and loving daughter of Lear" (51). He concludes by suggesting that the character development of Cordelia reflects that of Lear as they both err, suffer, and develop (52). However, Greenfield seems to commit his own error of over-simplification, for Cordelia's behavior in 4.7 is not perfect, and she continues to make errors that help precipitate the tragic ending. Greenfield's essay provides valuable insight into the flaws and growth of Lear and Cordelia, especially in relationship to one another.

Tamblyn, William Ferguson. "Tragedy in 'King Lear.'" *The Sewanee Review* 30.1 (1922): 63-77. *JSTOR.* Web. 30 November 2012.

Tamblyn's essay directly challenges a traditional view of tragedy, arguing that "it is not true that Shakespeare either minimizes the real evil of misfortune of circumstance, or generally represents his heroes' calamities as due solely or principally or even initially to their faults of action or character" (65). He contends that instead of character shaping circumstances, circumstances shape character (65), and he supports this somewhat unconvincingly with characters' words that Tamblyn too easily conflates with Shakespeare's own position (66). Arguing for a reading of the characters according to what their surrounding characters say about them, he makes a case for the innocence of Cordelia which requires him to disconnect her tragic death from any tragic flaw of hers (68). Furthermore, Tamblyn connects much of Lear's fault to his age and hence absolves Lear of any action that directly precipitates his tragic death (71). He seems both overly eager to force the evidence to absolve Shakespeare's characters of tragic flaws and unwilling to let Shakespeare's profound character development mean more than a mysterious stroke of fate (72). Tamblyn also makes the noteworthy observation that sometimes the most virtuous characters sustain the greatest suffering, a pattern that is seemingly inconsistent with a conventional view of tragedy (73). He concludes by trying to draw some morality back out of Shakespeare through his argument that "there is the soul of good in things evil," and that somehow a universal "Love" is sustained in Shakespeare's tragic works despite the horrible retribution for virtue (77). The essay is helpful as a non-conventional view of tragedy that therefore explores the actions of Cordelia and Lear less as developments of character than as the workings of a cruel but not hopeless fate.

Knowles, Richard. "Cordelia's Return." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50.1 (1999): 33-50. *JSTOR.* Web. 25 November 2012.

Richard Knowles argues that, regarding the motivation of Cordelia's return to rescue Lear, "Instead of definite clarification, we get a variety of hints, mostly mysterious, possibly even intentionally confusing and contradictory, that Cordelia's instinctive concern, or France's anger, or the golden opportunity of a divisive civil war in Britain, or 'something deeper, / Whereof (perchance) these are but furnishing' lies behind the invasion" (48). He begins by pointing out the problem that Cordelia's offstage decision poses: she must have some strong motivation to return, otherwise it seems unwarranted for her to leave her new husband and kingdom for the sake of, presumably, re-exposing herself to Lear's anger (33). Knowles' essay traces many of possible explanations that critics have given for Cordelia's decision to return to England with an army. He points out that some have said she could have returned because she is worried about what Goneril and Regan are doing (34) or will do (41) to Lear, because France wanted revenge on Lear (37), or because the division in England provided a good opportunity for France to enlarge his kingdom (40). Nevertheless, Knowles is convinced by none of these arguments; he traces in detail the plot structures and texts that make some of the options impossible and others possible but not strongly suggested. He concludes with his own insightful view that the ambiguity surrounding Cordelia's choice is intentional on the part of Shakespeare and that it enables Shakepeare to simultaneously suggest altruistic motives behind Cordelia's return and keep the play moving quickly enough—by having her return quite soon after her departure—that Lear's madness does not last too long to be realistic. The ambiguity is necessary, he argues, because otherwise such a quick return, not allowing time for Cordelia to hear of Lear's suffering, implies "entirely selfish motives" on the part of Cordelia and France (48). Knowles' essay provides interesting and valuable insight into the motivations behind Cordelia's return, primarily from the angle of the necessities of timing and plot details. This analysis of Shakespeare's art, more technical than some criticism, opens the door to a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's formation of Cordelia. If Shakespeare really did sacrifice an element of clarity of plot for the sake of preserving the innocence of Cordelia's motivations, this may tell us much about the character he desired to create in Cordelia.