

Cambridge NCS₃ edition, Lois Potter, 2020

1. P. 6 "Throughout the first four acts, there has been talk of war, first between Albany and Cornwall, then between France and England [...] Act 5 finally brings the battle that everyone has been expecting."
2. P. 32 "It is possible to quote lines from *KL* to support almost any religious or philosophical outlook."
3. P. 39 "Most modern productions make very little of the discrepancy between Kent's status as Earl and the way he is treated in disguise."

NCS₂, ed. Jay L. Halio, 2005

4. St Stephen's Day: a festival "that stressed man's folly and wordliness". (*But see N^o 17*)
5. "Lear's 'all-licensed fool' enjoys a privileged status, much to Gon.'s annoyance (1.4.160), and his characteristic idiom suggests he is a 'natural' fool, not an 'artificial' one, though his perceptiveness and wit show that he is far from being an idiot or a moron, however 'touched' he may otherwise be."
6. "Shak. seems indebted to [Montaigne] not only for phrases and ideas but for the sceptical attitudes that pervade the play."
7. "Lear's failure to see is wilful in the extreme. It is not only that he lacks foresight and cannot see people clearly or assess their motives accurately; he *will* not. [...] The disasters that follow are the direct result of wilful blindness; unlike Hamlet's or even Othello's, the tragic situation is of Lear's own making. [...] In this regard Lear is also unlike Glouc., manipulated by his bastard son."
8. "Truth and rationality are violated *ad libitum*, and the result is a world turned upside down; but it is a world formed and determined by the people who inhabit it."
9. "Various forces combine to drive the king over the edge into madness: his elder daughters' ingratitude; guilt over his treatment of Cord. [...]; the Fool's relentless taunting; loss of his hundred knights and increasing awareness that his world is now drastically altered; dread of impotence and disabling illness [...]; the stubborn indifference of the elements. But the culminating event is meeting Tom o'Bedlam."
10. "Edmond errs in carrying his convictions to extremes. In a way not unlike Lear, impelled by a powerful will that lets him believe he can shape the world to his own purposes, he pursues and extends his goals to excessive lengths [...] but he seriously underestimates the counter-forces in nature and society that finally combine to confound his efforts."
11. "[Edgar's] passive submission is the reverse of Lear's refusal to tolerate anyone else's participation in the determination of events; both extremes of behaviour lead to disaster."

12. "As Lear goes mad, first the Fool and then Edgar as Tom o'Bedlam become superfluous and drop out of the picture."
13. "Act 3, Scene 7 develops vividly the irrational behaviour of Lear's enemies. From here onwards the vicious lusts underlying their cool but superficial rationalism stand revealed and control their every action."
14. "In so far as they mean to enforce their wills in order to realise their purposes and desires without regard for the interests and claims of others, Gon. and Reg. show themselves to be truly Lear's daughters."
15. "Paradoxically, his wits turned inside out, Lear sees more clearly and speaks truths more profound than ever before [in 4.5]." "In Glouc. Lear sees and recognises a reflection of himself, literal blindness reflecting the mental blindness that led him to give away his kingdom, banish Cord., and trust his two elder daughters. In the lunatic king, Glouc. recognises [...] the mirror image of his own behaviour in believing his bastard son Edm. and precipitately outlawing Edg."
16. "If one strand in the play's action is to show the need for genuine and deep feeling, especially a feeling for others, then it is at least ironic that when one of the characters most deserving and needing this feeling[, Glouc.,] at last experiences it, it kills him."

Arden 3 edition, ed. R. A. Foakes, 1997

17. "The idea that the play had a special relevance to St Stephen's Day [...] seem[s] implausible to me." (*But see № 4*)
18. "[KL] is so many-faceted that it invites multiple interpretations."
19. "It is hard now in our increasingly visual culture to imagine the excitement of listening to eloquent poetry and prose in stage dialogue, a pleasure that drew thousands to the theatres of London."
20. "It is an important aspect of Lear's tragedy that he cannot find release from his role as King [...]; the burden of authority remains, and he is always the monarch." "The interrogation of authority and power [...] is a central issue in KL."
21. "[There has been] a shift in scholarly criticism towards interpreting [KL] as 'subverting the status quo', and presenting a radical critique of political power and social injustice applicable to the present time as much as to Jacobean England."
22. "Lear was treated by a series of critics as representative of Man, capitalized and abstracted from ordinary men, and enduring tribulations beyond the capacity of the reader or audience[, with] the sense of a play of cosmic scope."
23. In 1.1 "the closeness appropriate to relations between father and daughters is disrupted by the formal distance required in a state ceremony between king and subjects." "Gon. and Reg. need not be played as mere flatterers, but rather as married women who, with their aristocratic husbands, have adapted to the court and its conventions. The more the formal nature of the scene is brought out, the more likely it is that Cord. will be seen as obstinate and self-willed in her response to her king and father."
24. "The behaviour of Cord. in the opening scene may have appeared outrageous to a Jacobean audience."
25. "[Lear's] daughters may be seen as representing a new generation, whose world is more refined, as evidenced in the 'gorgeous' clothes that scarcely keep Reg. warm [...], and in the appearance of Oswald, who seems foppish to Kent."
26. "The play has indications of a transition from a rough physicality that values manliness, represented by Lear and his knights, to a more refined and courtly society."

27. "Gon. and Reg. are two of the strongest women characters Shak. created. They rarely receive their critical dues. They are often treated merely as wicked sisters, embodiments of lust in opposition to the virtue of Cord.; such accents hardly do them justice."
28. "In a play that has few soliloquies of the kind that establish a bond between character and audience, Edm. has three in his first scene, and by his energy, humour and self-command at once engages our interest."
29. "Edg. may be played in a variety of ways, and it can be difficult to reconcile his 'goodness' with what on stage has often been presented as a vindictive revenge on Osw. or on Edm." "It is also possible to play Edg.'s duel with Edm. as that of a champion of good emerging out of anonymity to destroy evil."
30. "[Edg.] always remains in control of himself, detached, avoiding emotional commitment, and ready with a formula that justifies or makes bearable suffering; perhaps this coolness, as in the way he tricks his father, is especially disturbing."
31. "Shak. may have had this image of a natural fool in mind in making Lear address [the Fool] as 'boy' so frequently, and the Fool call Lear 'nuncle', as if he were an elderly relative. At the same time, the dialogue of this professional 'all-licensed fool' [...] show him to be shrewd, witty and very much a conscious entertainer." (*Cp. No 5 & 71*)
32. "[It] could be that Shak. wished us to see that Lear's behaviour was not abnormal, but rather the ingrained habit of one whose authority had long been taken from granted in a patriarchal society. The old aristocrat Glouc. behaves in a similar way, expecting unquestioning obedience from his children, as if this were a guarantee of their love for him."
33. "In staging the play it is possible to make the violence prominent, or to minimize it, according to whether the emphasis is on the rehabilitation of Lear or on the chaos he brings about."
34. "It is interesting that in a play staged before James I four characters are prominent for their disobedience, Kent in the opening scene, Glouc. in aiding Lear[,] the servant in resisting Corn.[, and Cord.]." "The play does unsettle the concept of obedience, just as it raises disturbing questions about the idea of loyalty."
35. "The last line remains enigmatic, since saying what one feels (Lear in his rages? Gon. and Reg. expressing their lust for Edm.?) may be just as damaging as saying what one ought to say (Gon. and Reg. speaking by the rules in the opening scene?)."
36. "There is no evidence that Shak. knew of [...] the story of Cordell Annesley."
37. About Harsnett: *KL* is "a recuperation of the power of theatre to embody profound truths in its shows and rituals, and make audiences feel what kings and wretches feel."
38. "The play's ironic reversals and paradoxes seem to recuperate something of the spirit of Erasmus and Montaigne."

Norton edition, ed. S. Greenblatt, 1997

39. "Shak.'s culture continually staged public rituals of deference to authority. These rituals [...] enacted respect for wealth, caste, power, and, at virtually every level of society, age. [...] Shak.'s culture continually told itself at the same time that without the control of property and the threat of punishment, any claim to authority was chillingly vulnerable to the ruthless ambitions of the young, the restless, and the discontented."
40. "When through illness or extreme old age it became unavoidable, retirement put a severe strain on the politics and psychology of deference by driving a wedge between status [...] and power."

41. "Early seventeenth-century audiences had reason to fear the dissolution of the realm into competing fragments. But the focus of Shak.'s tragedy seems to lie elsewhere: Lear's folly is not that he retires or that he divides his kingdom [...] but rather that he rashly disinherits the only child who truly loves him."
42. "Edmond seethes with murderous resentment at the disadvantage entirely customary for someone in his position. [...] For Edm., the social order and the language used to articulate it are merely arbitrary constraints, obstacles to the triumph of his will."
43. "Unwilling to lose his identity as an absolute authority both in the state and in the family, [Lear] arranges a public ritual [...] whose aim seems to be to allay his own anxiety by arousing it in his children."
44. "Mental anguish in *KL* is closely intertwined with physical anguish; the terrifying forces that are released by Lear's folly crash down upon both body and soul, just as the storm that rages on the heath seems at once an objective event and a symbolic representation of Lear's innermost being."
45. "It is possible to detect in *KL* one of the great structural rhythms of Christianity: a passage through suffering, humiliation, and pain to a transcendent wisdom and love. [...] Yet *KL*, set in a pagan world, resists the redemptive optimism that underlies the Christian vision."
46. "The tragedy is not only that the intervals of moral resolution, mental lucidity, and spiritual calm are so brief, continually giving way to feverish grief and rage, but also that the modest human understandings, moving in their simplicity, cost such an enormous amount of pain."
47. "An apocalyptic dream of last judgment and redemption hovers over the entire tragedy, but it is a dream forever deferred. [...] Shak.'s tragedy asks us not to turn away from evil, folly, and unbearable human pain but, seeing them face-to-face, to strengthen our capacity to endure and to love."

Fintan O'Toole, *Shakespeare is Hard, but So is Life*, 2002

48. "The only one of the four protagonists [= *Lear*, *Oth.*, *Ham.*, *Macb.*] who can be said to unleash large-scale violence by his own actions is Lear — but even then, the speed with which his kingdom falls apart after his abdication makes us wonder whether it would not have descended into chaos anyway if he had merely died of old age." "[The four protagonists] are distinguished in these dramas by the illusion that they can determine events by their own actions. They have, they believe, the power to say what will happen next. But no amount of power can ever be great enough in an irrational world. The universe does not follow orders."
49. "To talk about Shak.'s characters in isolation from the action, to discuss their psychology and motivation, is to treat Shakespearian tragedies as if they were nineteenth-century naturalistic plays. It is to miss their uniqueness and their power. It is also, all too often, to build up a set of stereotypes which take the place of the complex and often deliberately contradictory people that Shak. gives us."
50. "The most obvious thing about Shak.'s time is that it is a period of rapid change, of the transition between one world view and another. [...] Shak.'s time is anything but stable, and his tragedies are plays which dramatize traumatic change and the way it affects our whole way of looking at the world."
51. About John Donne's 1611 "The First Anniversary": "Donne saw a world in which all order and coherence had fallen apart, in which the hierarchy of relations both within the state and within the family was breaking down, in which men were getting the idea that they were uniquely their own invention rather than the product of their place and status within a highly stratified society."

52. "In the tragedies there is an overwhelming feeling that all of the most basic values of society have become relative." "Shak. [...] gives us a relative world, a world in which causes don't have their effects, in which almost nothing is predictable, never mind inevitable. [...] Shak. is not concerned with a logical universe but with an irrational one, made irrational by the fact that it contains two different sets of values, two separate logics, which refuse to hold their places."
53. "In Shak.'s time there is a transition in the whole way in which one's identity is defined. In feudal, medieval society, your identity is your role, and your role is determined by your birth and position, so long as that birth is legitimate. [...] If you want to know who you are, you examine your position in society. You are your status. In the kind of commercial, capitalist world which is emerging in Shak.'s time, you are your power. Your identity is the sum of your achievements. It is something you make for yourself. You are what you do. The tragedy of Lear [*et al.*] is that they think they operate according to both of these principles, that they can base themselves both on a world of status and a world of power, even though these two worlds are contradictory and in active conflict."
54. "Shak., particularly in the last act of the play, goes through all the right forms of the conventional tragic ending, in which good is finally victorious, but only to mock them, only to expose their insufficiency."
55. "The traditional morality of loyalty, of knowing one's place and keeping it, is no longer of much use." "KL is a struggle between traditional bonds and duties and the question 'how much?'."
56. "There are already hints of discord before Lear's division of the kingdom. [...] These are times of instability. And not just political instability. [...] There is also social instability. [...] Social distinctions have become slippery and unsure. The world of the play, in other words, is the world of Shak.'s England."
57. "Many of the characters in the opening scene are identified by what they own — their very names are the names of tracts of land." "Flesh and blood men disappear in the way Lear talks and are replaced by the tradeable goods that their lands produce." "Lear, far from being a man from the mists of time, is not even a feudal lord — he is an archetype of the new middle-class man. He confuses having something and being something."
58. "The fact is that Cord. cannot join in this game of inflated language, for the very terms of that language, the whole notion of a comparison of things, is outside her way of thinking."
59. "Lear thought that power was limitless. What he and Edg. learn is that the only thing that is limitless is suffering. In it, as Cord. said of her love at the beginning, there is no more or less."
60. "There is [a] sexual confusion that runs through the play. It is in the strange way that the Fool and Cord., a man and a woman, act largely as one character in the play. [...] The two play precisely the same role in relation to Lear — that of telling him the uncomfortable truth." "Shak. is giving us a world in which the borders of identity, including sexual identity, are collapsing under the strain of traumatic social change."
61. "What Shak. is showing us is exactly the break-down of the idea of cause and effect."
62. "Kent, in disguise, presents himself in his interview for a job as Lear's servant as if he were a professional jester. [...] There is an appropriateness about this usurpation of the Fool's privileges by Kent, for Kent is where he is precisely for having usurped the Fool's role of telling the truth to Lear."
63. "A major concern of the play as a whole is the freedom to speak that the guise of foolery or madness allows. In the heath scene, under the mask of mad, apparently disordered language, Shak. himself takes that freedom."
64. "Lear and Glouc.[.] having broken their own families, must find for themselves the family of mankind."

65. "When Lear divided up his kingdom at the start of the play, it didn't even occur to him that there were people in it. [...] Now, those ordinary people start to become a presence in the drama as the nothing from which any hope that there is in the play must spring."
66. "When [Lear] stops thinking in terms of money and quantity and recognizes that wealth and power have no real meaning, then he is able to find Cord. again."
67. "One excess, the excessive wealth of the rich and powerful, is linked to the other — the excessive suffering of Lear and Cord. So long as there is no justice in humanity, there can be no justice for individual humans. [...] If there is a hope in *KL* it is not that the world might suddenly prove to be just after all, but that, before it is too late, the world might be changed."

The true blank of thine eyes : Approches critiques de KL, dir. P. Drouet & P. Iselin, 2009

68. **Préface, Pierre Iselin**
« La place de l'homme dans l'univers est l'une des questions posées dans et par *KL*, en particulier dans la scène centrale de la tempête. »
69. **"Shak.'s Anatomy of Madness in Context", Jean Du Verger**
"[In Renaissance medical treatises] the body is compared to a kingdom and the brain is viewed as its sovereign."
"They describe the body as a hierarchical pyramid in the same way as political treatises depicted the body politic."
70. "The belief that Lear's mental illness is potentially contagious seems to be a recurrent motif throughout most of the play. Indeed, Lear is viewed by his daughters as potentially subversive, and as a source of disruption and disorder."
71. "The Fool who[is,] according to Robert Armin's taxonomy [1600], a 'foole artificiall', [...] acts rather more like the revealer of Lear's madness than as the impersonation of some mentally alienated character." (Cp. N° 5 & 31)
72. **« Savoir et ignorance dans *KL* », Mickael Popelard**
« En utilisant conjointement les verbes "thought" et "affected" dès le premier vers de la pièce, Shak. réunit deux thèmes cruciaux de l'œuvre et suggère l'imbrication des dimensions affective et intellectuelle dans *KL*. »
73. « Le paysage moral que dessine la première scène ressemble à une forêt obscure où des personnages à demi aveugles tentent de se frayer un chemin vers une vérité qui leur échappe sans cesse. »
74. « Puissance et connaissance s'avèrent liées entre elles [cf. Bacon's *scientia potestas est*]. On ne s'étonnera pas, par conséquent, que la défaite d'Edm. coïncide avec le seul moment dans la pièce où le bâtard en sait moins long que son adversaire. »
75. « Comme Socrate ou comme Montaigne, [Lear à la fin] sait surtout qu'il ne sait rien. Les fausses certitudes et les erreurs de jugement de la première scène n'ont donc pas cédé la place à un savoir philosophique ferme et assuré, qui permettrait au roi de disserter doctement sur le cours du monde. L'ignorance obtuse s'est au contraire effacée devant une forme d'ignorance philosophique et d'humilité intellectuelle qui tient peut-être moins du savoir en tant que tel que de la véritable sagesse. »
76. **« *KL* : fabrique du corps humain et anatomie du monde », Muriel Cunin**
« Au calme classicisme de Cord. (cœur ouvert, corps fermé) s'opposent la violence, la sexualité dévorante et l'hystérie de ses deux sœurs (cœur fermé, corps ouvert). »
77. « Le corps et l'être sont constamment associés à l'image de la maison. [...] Chasser Lear de la maison revient donc à le faire sortir de lui-même. »

78. **"'Handy-dandy': Indifferent Identity in *KL*", David Levin**
 "The question of identity [...] is clearly one of the major themes of the play: characters often redefine themselves and each other, and the question 'Who am I?' (1.4.[67]) takes a great dramatic significance."
79. "Lear can be and has been played convincingly as several fundamentally different 'people': stately lord, grizzled warrior, cruel tyrant, dithering dotard, innocent victim, hapless buffoon and even mere personification of Man's Destiny."
80. "The realization that '[I] nothing am' (2.[3.21]) is the lesson that several characters learn through loss and suffering."
81. **"'Her breath will mist or stain the stone': Confusing Visions in *KL*", Nathalie Rivère de Carles**
 "Shak. portrays characters whose vision is perpetually misted or stained by their own intellect or by others, and plunges the spectators in a visual environment reflecting this sense of confusion."
82. **« Douvres, du théâtre au cinéma : l'illusion de la falaise dans *KL* ou l'ironie de la chute », Sarah Hatchuel**
 « Sur la scène élisabéthaine, un épisode qui se déroulerait véritablement au bord des falaises de Douvres ne montrerait, de toute façon, qu'une scène plate et nue. Que l'endroit soit réel ou imaginaire, la technique pour le créer dans l'esprit des spectateurs resterait la même, c'est-à-dire uniquement verbale.[...] Par conséquent, les spectateurs sont obligés de décider par eux-mêmes si la falaise est vraie ou non. »
83. « L'épisode de la falaise semble donc mettre en concurrence deux types de spectateurs — ceux qui se contentent des mots pour construire la fiction, et ceux qui appellent de leurs vœux une représentation réaliste et tangible des choses pour pouvoir y croire. »
84. **« "Mend your speech" : *KL* et le drame de la langue », P. Iselin**
 « *KL* se présente comme un véritable pot-pourri d'idiomes, de styles et de registres, un mélange presque carnavalesque de prose et de vers, de style élevé et de langue démotique, de langage parlé et de chansons, l'aspect le plus singulier de la pièce étant cependant d'avoir pour moteur de l'action le langage lui-même. »
85. « [Le drame] est d'ordre linguistique, et plus précisément d'ordre verbal dans la tragédie de Lear. Dans celle de Glouc., c'est principalement sous sa forme écrite, et plus précisément épistolaire, que la langue apparaît comme moteur du drame. »
86. « Ce sont des événements linguistiques qui sont à l'origine de l'action, et qui en font la complication et le dénouement. [...] Le parcours discursif de *KL* va de l'éloquence la plus artificielle et la plus fleurie au cri, puis au silence, après avoir transité par toutes les folies du carnaval linguistique. [...] Tragédie de la *copia* et du commentaire, *KL* est paradoxalement aussi celle du refus de l'explication. »

**"*Hysterica Passio*: Early Modern Medicine, *KL*, and Editorial Practice", Kaara L. Peterson,
 2006**

87. Harsnett "tells the story of Richard Mainy's *hysterica passio*". Mainy said he had "a spice [= a kind] of the Mother". It shows "a distinction between those who are knowledgeable about medical theories of illnesses and lay people, like Mainy."
88. "Like Mainy's, Lear's *hysterica passio* or 'mother' is not so much absent as it is misdiagnosed. The original misdiagnosis is Mainy's, and Harsnett clearly derides Mainy for it."
89. "Lear's *hysterica passio* pointedly suggests how much he is already deluded, drifting towards mental incompetence under the great strain of his essentially self-created disenfranchisement." "Lear's misdiagnosis [...] is Shak.'s method of sending an intelligible message to his audience about the king's errant mind, not his errant womb."

Miscellaneous

90. **Robert B. Heilman, *The Sewanee Review* № 67, 1948:** "Both fathers[, Lear and Glouc.,] are muddled; even while, ironically, they feel astute, they reason wrongly from the evidence."
91. **King James I & VI:** "Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner of resemblance of Divine power upon earth."
92. **Montaigne II, 17, « De la præsumption » :** « Il y a une autre sorte de gloire, qui est une trop bonne opinion que nous concevons de nostre valeur. [...] Il y a deux parties en cette gloire : sçavoir est, de s'estimer trop, et n'estimer pas assez autrui. » « La mere nourrisse de plus fauces opinions et publiques et particulieres, c'est la trop bonne opinion que l'homme a de soy. ». (*Florio's translation of the Essays was published in 1603.*)
93. « Nous avons appris aux Dames de rougir oyant seulement nommer ce qu'elles ne craignent aucunement à faire » (cf. 4.5.114ff).
94. **Introduction to the Arden *Othello*:** "Readers may stumble here and there, as Shakespeare's actors no doubt did, yet at the same time they will learn an important lesson — that there is no single correct way of speaking Shakespeare's verse."



Nebuchadnezzar in a 14th-c. Anglo-Norman Bible