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Finding Refuge in *King Lear*: From Brexit to Shakespeare's European Value

Abstract: This article considers how Shakespeare's *King Lear* has become a Brexit play across a range of discourses and media, from theatre productions and journalism to social media. With its themes of division and disbursement, of cliff edges and tragic self-immolation, *Lear* is the Shakespearean play that has been turned to as metaphor and analogy for the UK's decision following the 23 June 2016 referendum to leave the European Union. Reading this presentist application of Shakespeare, the article attends to Shakespeare as itself a discourse through which cultural ideas, both real and imaginary, about Brexit and the EU are negotiated. It asks how can we might remap *Lear* in this present context—what other meanings and histories are to be derived from the play, especially in Lear's exile and search for refuge, or in Cordelia's departure for and return from France? Moving from a consideration of a Brexit *Lear* to an archipelagic and even European *Lear*, this article argues that Shakespeare is simultaneously a site of supranational connections and of a desire for values of empathy and refuge that reverberate with debates about migration in Europe.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Brexit; EU; Maps; Archipelago; Presentism; Refuge.

Give me the map there. (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1, line 35)[1]

This is like a Shakespearean tragedy where everyone is trying to do what is right. It is like watching *King Lear*. You wonder, how can these smart people be so deluded. (Varoufakis, interview with BBC *Newsnight,* 3 May 2017)

I'm happily reminded of that scene in King Lear, when a blind man is led to the top of cliff by a man mad and jumps off willingly. (@RobOHanrahan, Twitter post, 29 March 2018)

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[1] All quotations are from *King Lear*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (New York: Norton, 2008) and will be given within the text.

> Britain is fast becoming the King Lear of the diplomatic world: rampaging insanely around the stage and blaming everyone else for the loss of his kingdom. (Robert Saunders, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2019)

Brexit Cliff Notes

King Lear is Shakespeare's Brexit play. Or, at least, it is the Shakespearean play that most readily seems to supply a metaphor for the UK's decision following the 23 June 2016 referendum to leave the European Union, as the last three epigraphs highlight. A play in which the blinded Gloucester desires to dive off the Dover cliffs has been mapped on to talk, in the advent of a no deal Brexit, of a cliff edge, of unchartered territory, of free fall. The traditional semiotics of Dover, what Paul Gilroy calls "the nation-defining ramparts of the white cliffs" (Gilroy 14) now symbolize "an anxious, melancholic mood" and, in times of Brexit, British self-immolation. At the time of writing, *The Economist* magazine is running a GIF advertisement that features a train hurtling over a cliff edge, a visual metaphor that implies *Lear*'s Dover ("Truth About a No Deal Brexit"). Gloucester's failure to actualize his desire―"th'extreme verge" (4:6:26) he is on is an imagined precipice fashioned into vision by his son Edgar―suggests further resonances with Brexit. The cliff edge is not real, Brexiters might claim, and leaving the EU will not realize any material differences in trade, travel, and the rights of individuals. "Nothing" will come of the something that is Brexit, to echo Lear's riposte to Cordelia, and claims to the contrary, or indeed plans by the British government to stockpile foods and medicines, are dismissed as part of "Project Fear". Conversely, taking things to the absolute limit point will, like Gloucester's fake free fall, have some remedial, restorative function in the Aristotelian sense of tragedy's deeper purpose. Genre is another reason why *King Lear* is Shakespeare's Brexit play. The individualized tragic arcs of Gloucester and Lear himself become a British tragedy, a story of noble self-annihilation or "heroic failure" (O'Toole, *Heroic Failure*) that, depending on perspective, may or may not entail restoration and healing.

"Nothing will come of nothing", "Brexit means Brexit"―the self-contained logic of Lear's anaphorism can be heard in British Prime Minister Theresa May's equally tautological policy pronouncements on exiting the EU (Henley). When language itself seems inadequate, and reveals rather than conceals a void, a descent into nothingness, *Lear* once again becomes about Brexit. Policy by politicians, meaning by Shakespeare, one might suggest, echoing Terence Hawkes' playfully polemical formulation, "Shakespeare doesn't mean: *we* mean *by* Shakespeare" (Hawkes, *Meaning* 3). Shakespeare becomes both Europhile and Eurosceptic. Long before Brexit, *Lear* had crept into the zeitgeist, with Daniel Hannan MEP, one of the early architects of Brexit,

describing the European Union as "like the poor mad King, increasingly detached from reality" (Hannan, "EU as King Lear"). A Shakespeare fan, Hannan later turned to *Cymbeline*, another play set in ancient Britain, to counter emerging appropriations of Shakespeare as a Europhile. "Britain is a world by itself; and we will nothing pay | For wearing our own noses" (Hannan, "How like a God"). What Hannan neglects to mention is that Cymbeline is willing to pay tribute to Rome even though he has been victorious. To use Shakespeare for Brexit is, then, to attend to Shakespeare as a discourse, not unlike literary criticism itself, and the "process whereby, particularly in times of crisis, a society 'means by' a work of art" (Hawkes, *Meaning* 136). It is to read presently, that is to acknowledge how the present occupies the primary site of interrogation (Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* 3). And, it is to foreground, as a recent essay collection on *Brexit and Literature* argues, the potential role of art to shape and intervene in the "cultural beliefs, real or imaginary, about Europe and the UK" (Eaglestone 1-6) from which Brexit sprung, to do some hard thinking in contrast to what Lyndsey Stonebridge calls the "banality of Brexit" (Stonebridge 9).

Recent stage productions and social media posts provide evidence of such presentist appropriations and disruptions, as *Lear* is used as a discursive intervention into Brexit. This is a play that continually explores seeing―as the business of the Dover-cliff scene establishes―and that prompts a thought experiment on what we notice in reading. Lear's declarative instruction "Give me the map there" highlights the contingency of location: what is one to see on the map? England, or Britain or an archipelago? How is *Lear* to be remapped in the context of Brexit, or its associations with this contemporary issue? What other meanings and histories are to be derived from the play, especially in its interrelated themes of disintegration and division, Lear's exile and search for refuge, or in Cordelia's departure for and return from France? Moving from a consideration of a Brexit *Lear* to a connected, even European *Lear*, this article argues that Shakespeare is simultaneously a site of supranational connections and of a desire for values of empathy and refuge that reverberate with debates about migration in Europe.

Maps and Border Crossings

It is unsurprising that *King Lear* should emerge as the Shakespearean play most conducive and apposite to a current event such as Brexit. The play has become the quintessential Shakespearean play for the modern world, supplanting *Hamlet*. R.A. Foakes locates this shift in critical thinking to the 1960s: "the main tradition of criticism up the 1950s had interpreted the play as concerned with Lear's pilgrimage to redemption […] but in the 1960s the play became

Shakespeare's bleakest and most despairing vision of suffering, all hints of consolation undermined or denied" (Foakes 3-4). Resonating powerfully with the threat of nuclear war in the 1960s and, more recently, the age of the Anthropocene and the threat posed by climate change (Dionne 29), *Lear* has come to be regarded as acutely responsive to our present times. A number of high-profile stage productions reaffirm the play's ascendancy. These include Jonathan Munby's stage production in the West End, broadcast in cinemas through National Theatre Live, with Ian McKellen in the lead-role, and Jonathan Eyre's film for BBC / Amazon Prime starring Anthony Hopkins. As Marjorie Garber argues, contemporary productions and world events alike have shaped and changed Shakespeare—the plays "are 'Shakespearean' in their protean life, not restricted to some imagined (and unrecapturable) terrain of Shakespeare's 'intention' or control" (Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 652). So, to invoke Shakespeare in relation to Brexit, is to use Shakespeare discursively, to mean by and through Shakespeare, a process Hawkes traced in, among other texts, Lear's map. Hawkes (*Meaning* 126-27) uses the king's call for a map as a conceit to tour both temporally and spatially through critical readings of the play, disclosing the operations of literary historicism, new historicism and cultural materialism. In Hawkes' hands, Shakespeare functions like the play's Dover, which as Jonathan Goldberg (538) establishes, "names a site of desire, the hope for recovery or, at least, repose". Shakespeare becomes a conceptual space on to which we project our desires, or through which we address ideological contradictions and the dynamics of power in our own times, or indeed find a means to efface or sublimate them in the (re)turn to the historical past. In this formulation, Shakespeare as an evolving cultural entity evidences the extent to which "we are involved in the continuous 'making' rather than the discovery of cultural meanings" (Hawkes, *Meaning* 127), a distinction that recognizes our agential role—and that of the present as a site of interrogation—in the production to Shakespeare's meaning. Bringing in these actors exposes the fallacy of the universalist, transcendent Shakespeare who somehow intuits each epoch for itself.

Stage productions demonstrate how Shakespeare's cultural meanings are made rather than simply discovered latent within the text. Jonathan Munby's 2018 production, which first ran at the Chichester Festival Theatre, before transferring to the Duke of York in the West End, from where it was broadcast in cinemas in the UK and Ireland (*King Lear*, Dir. Jonathan Munby), is a case in point. The main talking point about this production was the star turn of Ian McKellen, with Susannah Clapp praising the seventy-nine year old actor's study in decay—"McKellen's Lear crumbles gradually, as if he were a Dover cliff being eroded"—and Arifa Akbar writing, "There is a sense of an actor putting the finest last touches to his majestic legacy". But in this 1930s styled production, which moved from "wood-panelled rooms and chandeliered dining

halls" to "a barer stage set and a stark white backdrop on Lear's arrival to Dover" (Akbar), Lear's proverbial division of the kingdom was also given a topical and decidedly Brexit hue. In the NT Live broadcast, the pre-production cast interviews structured audiences into making this connection. The Irish actor Sinead Cusack mentioned that the cast kept thinking Brexit during rehearsals and performances. Her Kent is all "steadfast devotion towards the King", as Paul Taylor notes in his review, in a disguise as "an abrasive Irish serving man". So, when Ian McKellen's Lear takes up a map on which featured Britain and also Ireland, current events intersect with prior histories, points of contact between islands, and future relationships. Lear, scissors in hand, disposes of Scotland first, then England, now in two halves, and Ireland, as the last and, what seemed to this audience member at least, the reluctantly or awkwardly received, territory.

The meanings of this scene are open to various readings, but Susan Bennett's theorization of theatre in terms of a production-reception contract provides a model for thinking about the relationality of Munby's production, Brexit and one's own status as audience member. As Bennett (106-118) argues, production choices are interpreted through the immediate reception context such as the theatre foyer, the programme, the performance space, the mise-en-scene, but also geographic location, wider socio-cultural structures of seeing and, one might add, current events. As an aggregate, these elements contribute to a production's range of meanings. In other words, as a spectator, I saw Brexit in the opening scene because of the local context of the production's choices and the location of my own viewing in the context of contemporary political discourses about Brexit and the EU. On the evening I saw this production broadcast live in a Dublin cinema, the sound in the theatre picked up the laughter among the live audience in the Duke of York. There was no laughter audible among the cinema audience. While there is a dual risk here of generalizing about audience reactions and simplifying the specificity of local reception contexts, it would seem that the granting or disposal of Ireland produced an unsettling affect, one bound up with a more generalized Brexit affect, and the uncertainty it has generated about the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Other production elements may be suggestive of these issues, with Lloyd Evans, in a negative review, dismissing Phil Daniels' Fool as "a banjo-playing Ulsterman who impersonates McKellen in a way that seems both hilarious and enjoyably disrespectful" (Evans).

The visual of Ireland in the production—and in Brexit debate—brings into focus Brexit's destabilizing effect on the border issue and the political stability of Northern Ireland, which voted by 55.8% to remain in the EU, slightly lower than Scotland at 62% remain (BBC). Since the triggering of Article 50, the border has emerged as a significant point of contention in the UK government's negotiations with the EU. It even has its own Twitter account, @BorderIrish,

which uses the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia to anthropomorphize a geopolitical entity. The Irish Government and EU position of avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland and protecting the Good Friday Agreement has been resolute in the form of the "backstop", which sees the UK remain in the customs union until such time as the future relationship between the UK and EU is determined (Carswell). Commitments from Theresa May's government, reliant on the support of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), have been characterized by equivocation, as well as requests for further assurances that the backstop will be temporary in nature.[2] Brexit thus poses deeper implications for identity valences and politics in Northern Ireland because the additional frame or context that EU membership provided over the past decades could be eroded, to be replaced by the "old binary choice of British and—or versus—Irish", or a "border in the mind" (Gormley-Heenan and Aughley 502). Brexit, which has been understood in the context of a resurgent English nationalism, with Europe serving as Englishness's 'other' (Henderson et al. 198) may be the causation of a return to traditional divisions of unionist and nationalist in the North. The "updated border debate" has "inevitably brought a long history aggressively back into current affairs" (Ferriter loc. 2067).

　　　The Irish border was introduced in 1920 with The Government of Ireland Act, which partitioned Ireland into six counties of Ulster and the twenty-six counties of what became, following the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922, the Irish Free State. However, "ideological partition was a long reality in Ireland before the physical border was imposed owing to the distinctive development of Ulster" as a "bastion of Protestant settlement and British influence" (Ferriter loc. 32) in Ireland. It is not too much of a leap to suggest a connection between the border and Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606). The play comes only three years after the accession of King James, which realized a political union of England, Scotland and Ireland and that would see the plantation of Scots in Ulster from 1606 on, thus sowing the seeds of religious and political divisions on the island of Ireland. Shakespeare, writing for the King's Men, had already explored the new Jacobean geopolitics in *Macbeth*, a play that might also speak to Brexit matters, especially from a Scottish perspective. *King Lear* comes at the Scottish-Anglo union perhaps more indirectly with its setting in an ancient, pre-Roman Britain, but, as John Kerrigan has shown, it too is marked by the question of Britain and the form political union might take in the future. The play literalizes these issues in the figure of the map. As Lear knows, maps are political: they submit a territory to knowledge, visualize borders, and delineate lines of dominion. But

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apart from Lear's instruction, "Give me the map", Shakespeare gives no specific indication as to what the map contains, or what the audience is to see on it. Lear's donations to Goneril and later to Regan presume a gesture to the map but do not presume or provide any detail in the description of its contents:

> Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
> With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
> With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
> We make thee lady. (1:1: 62-64)

Lear's cartographic information is, as critics have noted, generalizing and impressionistic—as John Gillies (46) notes the imagery used here does not presume a map upon which the topographical features Lear mentions "are notionally depicted"—but his cartographic imagination is richly symbolic and ideological. Lear imagines his kingdom as a pastoral space (Klein 95) that is now being subjected to a pragmatic disbursement. The vagueness as to what the map actually contains contributes to its potential significations—it can be localized and also national, or indeed both, since "the very movement of Lear's thought from direct cartographic reference to a rich (almost iconic) imagination of the cartographic content, suggests a national map of monumental or iconic force" (Gillies 46). Productions have, therefore, choices to make about the map, from its contents to questions of size, who carries it on stage and whether or not it is torn (Fitzpatrick 105). In Gregory Doran's 2016 production at the RSC, starring Anthony Sher, the map was laid out across the front of the stage. It featured Britain alone (*King Lear*, Dir. Gregory Doran). The 2012 production at the Almeida, with Jonathan Pryce as Lear, displayed what appeared to be a detail of counties, implying a more localized, internal division of the kingdom (*King Lear*, Dir. Michael Attenborough). Peter Holland (qtd. in Fitzpatrick 105) describes Adrian Noble's 1993 production at the RSC, which was "played out over a map of England which papered the stage floor". This suggests "The Ditchley portrait" of Elizabeth by Marcus Gheeraerts that depicts the queen standing on a portion of a graphically reproduced Oxfordshire, the county serving as a synecdoche for her kingdom (National Portrait Gallery). In Noble's production, the paper England is ripped with Edgar's entry as Poor Tom in Act 3, scene 4, a move that demystifies the map as royal iconography. Whereas in these earlier productions the map is of one island, with England and Britain functioning as synonyms, Munby's includes Ireland, a production choice that, I would argue, brings the invisible border into visibility, as Brexit itself may yet do, and puts present geopolitical challenges into historical context. The visual of the map foregrounds how the Lear story is encrusted with prior histories that are at once English, archipelagic and European. Its sundering on stage suggests Britain's separation from the EU.

In the early modern period, cartography marched in step with English colonialization especially in Ireland. More than graphic renderings of terrains and places, English maps of Ireland were richly symbolic and ideological (see Klein; Smith). John Speed's inclusion of Ireland in his *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain and Ireland* (1611) "pictorially creates the impression of inner union" (Klein 105) that earlier Elizabethan maps, such as Laurence Nowell's *Generall Description of England and Ireland* (1564/5) lacked. Fully incorporated into James' union, "Ireland no longer presents an obstacle to the cartographic effect of spatial cohesion" (Klein 104). Shakespeare's *Lear* arguably responds to this Jacobean myth-making not least in its location in ancient Britain but also through Ireland's occlusion, its relegation to an unseen place signifying its incorporation into James's new kingdom. In the earlier play *Leir*, Cordelia marries the King of Hibernia, not France as in Shakespeare, where that decision enhances Cordelia's exile—she is literally off the map; even upon her return to the apportioned and divided kingdom, she occupies an enclave, the "French camp" on English soil. To mention Ireland, effaced in *Lear*, briefly referenced in *Leir*, alongside France, is to highlight the contingency of Englishness and Britishness in both the play and in history.

This goes some way to explaining Munby's production choices. The appearance and then disbursement of Ireland as part of the cutting of the map decentres England and Britain. Islands rather than a singular island are figured, a move that puts the production into conversation with the turn in Shakespeare and early modern studies to archipelagic histories, an approach that takes on a new significance in the context of Brexit. This approach recognizes the interactions between English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh peoples, languages and cultures in the period. Taking their cue from the work of historian John Pocock, who broadened early modern English history into an islands history, scholars have interrogated the historiography and literature of the period, in the process attending closely to the formations of Englishness and, from 1603, Britishness. As David Baker (6) explains, "Britain" is understood less as discrete formation than an ongoing problem that is "imbricated at every point with the histories of the other nations […] that co-existed with it on the British Isles". Exponents of the British or archipelagic approach have shown how literary texts are themselves ripe historiographic ground for disclosing the formation of England's imagined insularity as less "the inevitable effect of geography" than "the product of an ideological narrative that mystifies centuries of violent struggle and cultural negotiation" (Chedgzoy 41). *Lear* is one such text where Shakespeare turns to "British and archipelagic subject matter" (Kerrigan 14), a realization James Joyce has young Stephen Daedalus make in *Ulysses* when he asks, "Why is the underplot of *King Lear* in which Edmund figures lifted out of Sidney's *Arcadia* and spatchcocked on to a Celtic legend older than history?" (Joyce 271). Such diverse markings or intertexts that contribute to Shakespeare's *Lear* find

their way on to the map in Munby's production, which simultaneously points *back* to prior histories of contact and *presently* with its inclusion of Ireland.

Indeed, *Lear* undertakes nation-exploration or, more precisely, nation-disclosure, as a quick pan over events reveals. Not only is there the business with the map, but also Lear's diminished and disorientated sovereignty that follows quick on the division of the kingdom, travel across the sea to and from France, which contributes to the play's geographic and spatial contraction and expansion, of neighbours at once invisible and proximate, as well as "whispers, rumours, reports and letters [which] filter into the play's action—with accompanying hints of a world of observers and interpreters" that observe the main political actors (O'Connor 117). These disorienting effects are compounded rather than resolved by the play's conclusion: with the multiple deaths, there is an uncertain future: "The weight of this sad time we must obey, | Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. | The oldest have borne most; we that are young | Shall never see so much, nor live so long" (5:3:325-28). Idiomatic language may offer some assurance here, but the fact that these lines are assigned in the quarto text to the Duke of Albany, a title King James himself held, but to Edgar in the folio, suggest deeper uncertainties in the Jacobean *Lear* about the union's future (Kerrigan 17; O'Connor 116-17). Combined these moments simultaneously suggest the play's own time and resonate with our own. There is in *Lear* the peculiarly fragmented iteration of what G. Wilson Knight (qtd. in Fitzpatrick 99) calls "island patriotism" that occurs elsewhere in Shakespeare, and that survives in the isolationism that underpins Brexit, but also an implicit sense of what is nearby, and of the impossibility of Lear's kingdom separating itself from geography and history because it forms part of an archipelago, what Pocock (qtd. in Baker 8) describes as an "island group lying off the north-western coasts of geographic Europe", a reality that, from a presentist perspective, speaks to the connectedness that underpins EU membership.

Pocock's relation of his archipelagic historiography to Europe is especially interesting from the present context for its dual sense of distinction (islands) and connection (to Europe). In *Archipelagic Identities*, John Kerrigan (21) helpfully historicizes Pocock's approach, noting that "as a New Zealander, Pocock felt moved to reassess British history at a time when the United Kingdom was turning its back on the Commonwealth and joining the European Economic Community. It was as though Britain deserved one last look as it put its empire behind it". Kerrigan connects the subsequent interest among historians and literary critics in the early modern formation of Britain to devolution in the 1990s—its own division of the kingdom or union—which saw the establishment of parliaments and devolved government in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. "Devolution matters", Kerrigan (2) notes, "because it has encouraged the

peoples of the islands to imagine different relationships with one another, and with the peoples of Europe—the future of the European Union providing one horizon". In these instances, the European dimension brings an opportunity but equally a dramatic reorienting of what was previously central, or regarded itself as such, so that a formerly dominant England is unsettled. Devolution still matters now. It speaks to a sentiment that England itself has not only been left behind—"Who will speak for England?", ran a *Daily Mail* headline ahead of the Brexit referendum—but has also been supplanted by "a sclerotic Europe that tries to achieve the impossible by uniting countries as diverse as Germany and Greece" (quoted in Henderson et al. 187).

Scholarship has a role to play in examining the depth of links and contiguities between British and European history. As writers on the British question have noted, the European dimension has been overlooked. In a dialogue, Baker and Maley reflect on how an archipelagic perspective foreclosed a continental view. Baker notes that "British history requires border crossing investigations, but recently has run up against a border of its own" (Baker and Maley 19) in its inattention to continental Europe. "British history is a history of forgetting", Maley suggests, "It often excludes Europe, and excludes too the nations and nationalities of which it—the British state—is composed" (Baker and Maley 21). This culture of forgetting has important implications, not least in helping to historicize and explain the logic of isolationism and restored sovereignty that underpins Brexit, as evidenced by the Leave campaign slogan, "Take Back Control" (see Howorth and Schmidt 7). As Brian Cheyette (68) writes, "Brexit means that our national straightjacket—Englishness, not even Britishness—becomes much tighter" and, with that, a devaluing of multicultural and also migrant perspectives.

Work on early modern Ireland has been important in conveying the wider European dimension (see O'Connor and Lyons), not simply in terms of the Reformation, but also comparative work on English colonialism in Ireland with that of Spanish colonialism in the Americas (see Palmer). There is too a long tradition of European Shakespeares, detailed in an excellent survey (Semple and Vyroubalova 80-96). Recent studies of English Renaissance drama have also expanded our understanding of the geography and transnational fabric of the plays. For example, Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*, which includes an exuberant encomium celebrating the inviolability of Elizabeth's island kingdom from foreign intervention, provides a diversity of busy scenes that convey that island's relation to European and indeed world geopolitics (see Griffin 95-116; Roby 25-42). This helps to contextualize *Lear*, which is certainly not alone or unique in producing a geography and history that exceeds the island nation rather than adheres to its boundaries. More generally, then, a term like "English Renaissance drama" might belie border crossings, continental European

locations, and the representation of European languages to be found in plays of the period. These critical appraisals are not just significant to our understandings of early modern drama and theatre, but signal for our own times prior histories of cultural contact, of imagining other worlds and peoples, that can provide some corrective to a resurgent white nationalism that Europe has been experiencing in the last decade.

Dover Crossings

In a play world that can seem marked by insularity, and an increasing focus on Lear's regression into the self, there is nonetheless movement across the English Channel to France and back. Indeed, if Brexit is predicated on an appeal to the sovereignty of the land, and to the protection of borders—as in Theresa May's claim that "Brexit must mean control of the number of people who come to Britain from Europe" (quoted in Docherty 182)—*Lear* figures land as "route rather than a root" (Aldea 151); significantly, the word "root" does not occur in the play. Dover, the site of the play's tragic pathos, is also an index of travel and contact, suggesting routes in and out of Lear's kingdom. It names "a site of desire" (Goldberg 538), where Gloucester seeks to end his life, and where Lear will be reunited with Cordelia and find repose or recovery, a "place of illusion" (Goldberg 539) because neither of these desires is entirely satisfied. Yet Dover is also the location of the French camp following Cordelia's arrival fresh from France in Act 4, scene 4. The play makes dramatic capital of geographic realities, with English proximity to France meaning that Cordelia is never that far away from Lear.

Some appropriations of Dover and *Lear* have attempted to sidestep these proximities, choosing instead to appeal to images of Dover as a wall, the white cliffs literalizing fortress Britain in ways that reactivate the one-island fixation of Elizabethan discourse. The right-wing *Daily Express* newspaper ran a front page on 29 March 2018, a year ahead of the UK withdrawal date of 29 March 2019 with a quote from Boris Johnson, "Our national journey out of the EU is almost over and a glorious view awaits" with the Dover cliffs in the background. Responses on Twitter suggested that the newspaper had photoshopped the cliffs to make them whiter. Others suggested analogy with *Lear*. Comedian Rob O'Hanrahan retweeted the *Express*'s front page with the comment: "I'm happily reminded of that scene in King Lear, when a blind man is led to the top of a cliff by a mad man and jumps off willingly".

From a search within Twitter it is possible to quickly see how *Lear* and Dover are used as metaphors for Brexit discourse, frequently as an critical intervention and from a Remain or pro-EU position, as this brief sample reveals:

#**Brexit** Britain is a **King Lear** of nations, old & foolish, taking advice from charlatans **and** liars who flatter its conceit of greatness. (@nickreeves9876, 7 October 2017)

Did Brits forget their Shakespeare? How **King Lear** brought division, war **and** chaos? #**Brexit** #Britain #TheresaMay (**Rosa** @ros1a, 13 Dec 2017)

The longer the Brexit Dementia goes on, the more I think about King Lear, giving away every last vestige of influence in the expectation of freedom ... expecting to hang onto his powers and privileges. Didn't end well. (@PeterArnottGlas, 2 May 2018)

In "King Lear", Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, takes his blinded father, Gloucester, to what he believes is a cliff edge. It's not. Gloucester, distraught, jumps to his death but (surprise!) survives. A lesson is learned. That's not like Brexit though. It's actually a big cliff. (@BorderIrish, 12 February 2019)

This grouping of tweets gives a sense of the frequency of the Brexit-*Lear* analogy that highlights some phenomena common to the quotation and also remediation of Shakespeare in modern and especially digital culture. Shakespeare functions as the return of the expressed (Garber, *Shakespeare and Quotation* 69), a cultural touchstone through which, to loop back to Hawkes, we produce meaning. Twitter, as a social media platform, foregrounds the "we" in this transaction. As Anna Blackwell argues (79), studying it provides a "framework through which to view instances of everyday engagement with Shakespeare's creative legacy, as well as his broader cultural capital". In the above tweets, Shakespeare is a catalyst, a recognizable, agential thing that provides a vocabulary for the user to intervene in a discourse such as Brexit, and the conduit for that intervention. The tweet quotations themselves represent "a distinct, micro-adaptive creative mode" (Blackwell 79) in that they are small, often localized, iterations of Shakespeare that still appeal to and reactivate Shakespeare's cultural cachet.

Evident too is the participatory nature of social media and digital cultures as a collective of individuals who desire to and also make meaning through Shakespeare on Twitter, that it through the combination of the legacy technology of expression that is Shakespeare and the comparatively new technology of expression that is the tweet (see Calbi; O'Neill). But the latter, as a platform where other and older media are remediated (Bolter and Grusin), renews and hybridizes the former, older medium. Shakespeare thus becomes new media in the process and *Lear* becomes associated with Brexit. In turn too, individual tweeters self-brand, perform political commentary, and generate followers and community. In this way, Shakespearean quotation, or meaning by

Shakespeare on Twitter, constitutes more networked "affective publics" that, as Zizi Papacharissi (318) argues, provide "a way for citizens to feel their way into a story", through posting, commenting and sharing. Shakespeare is one among a range of cultural reference points or technologies of expression that are available to users as they habituate themselves to the platform's participatory affordances—tweeting, retweeting, commenting—and enact vernacular forms of media engagement that contribute to the flow of the Brexit story.

The phenomenon being briefly traced here is not unique to Twitter, but occurs in other media too, including TV and newspapers, which are increasingly experienced as part of media convergence (see Jenkins), as well as academic scholarship. Nor is the phenomenon surprising when one considers that Shakespeare is "the most quoted English author of all time" (Maxwell and Rumbold 1), and that quoted Shakespeares "are imbued with the significance not just of their original source in Shakespeare, but of several centuries, and many layers, of subsequent borrowing" (Maxwell and Rumbold 22). There is a build-up of sentiment within a Shakespearean quotation. So, when Yanis Varoufakis, former Greek Finance Minister, asserts in an interview with BBC *Newsnight* that the EU Brexit negotiations "is like a Shakespearean tragedy where everyone is trying to do what is right. It is like watching *King Lear*. You wonder, how can these smart people be so deluded", we are in familiar territory. Shakespeare is used as recognizably English and also global cultural touchstone to express criticism that attributes blame not simply to the UK government but Europe's political leaders too. Later the same year, Fintan O'Toole (*In Humiliating May*) makes the analogy:

> It has never seemed more apt that perhaps the greatest work of English literature, William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, is about the consequences of a capricious loss of authority. Lear gives up his kingdom for no good reason and everything falls horribly apart. In his madness and despair he utters the most scathing lines every written about political power: "Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar? . . . There thou mightst behold the great image of authority."

Academics turn to Shakespeare in times of Brexit too: in an article on the Northern Ireland border, Cathy Gormley-Heenan and Arthur Aughey (508) conclude with a reference to *Julius Caesar*: "To paraphrase the Bard, Northern Ireland—like the rest of the United Kingdom—is afloat on a full sea and where the present tide of affairs takes it, we fear we cannot tell". What is noteworthy about these quotations is the positioning of Shakespeare as himself without politics, or as a site of common-sense liberal values, that risks producing a complacency about the politics of quoting him.

Survival / Bare Life

It will be clear by now that *Lear* as Brexit story has become proverbial or idiomatic, a symptom of Shakespeare's cultural currency, the search for a language to reflect on what Brexit is, and a desire to intervene, to have one's say. There is casual, repetitive and memetic quality to the forms of quotation here, as Lear is synecdochally reduced to a series of meme-like parts: blindness, foolishness, division, cliff edge. If the limits of analogy and even language itself are evident—a case perhaps of nothing coming from nothing—this is to encounter a very *Lear*-like state. This is a play that famously strives to examine human life at its extremity and that, as Craig Dionne (22) argues, turns to proverbs and idioms as a poetics of survival: "Men must endure | Their going hence even as their coming hither: | Ripeness is all" (5:3:9-11), Edgar reminds his suicidal father. Here, and in its final lines, the play reveals survival instincts; it is a lesson in how to go on (Dionne 35). In this regard, the social media uses, which signal a turn to Shakespeare, sometimes self-reflexively, sometimes ironically, sometimes with a call to the force of the Shakespearean quotation, ignite the play's own machine like generation of proverbs. Its characters go on— somehow—despite the weight of times.

To extend the analogy, *Lear* might become, in pro-Leave hands, an articulation of a defiant British hegemony and isolationism, as witnessed in the pronouncements of Daniel Hannan and, in pro-remain hands, an articulation of futurity, and the survival of the EU. However, such imagined uses of the play may ultimately be different sides of the same coin, each using it to reify an identity that risks being essentialized as either British or European. Instead, perhaps *Lear* can be used more productively as a disturbance, one that draws critical attention to the contemporary refugee crisis and EU migration policies responses?

Lear finds himself wandering his own kingdom. Before Dover, the play uses the heath as Lear's new found sense of place. In the company of Kent and the Fool, and feeling the "contentious storm" that "Invades us to the skin", they seek shelter. Lear demonstrates consideration for others, urging his companions to go in first. Alone on stage, and kneeling as if in prayer, Lear says:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the heavens more just (3:4:28-36).

In the BBC Amazon co-production for TV, Anthony Hopkins' Lear appeared as if living on the street—he pushed a shopping trolley loaded with boxes and old clothes in modern day London. Munby's production also suggested structural parallels between Lear's state of kingdom reflection and contemporary homelessness as a group of people in urban dress gathered behind McKellen to form a tableau that then functioned as a visual frame for the lines. While these production choices might be interpreted as a clunky literalization of Lear's language, I would rather see them as a disturbance or present interruption into the play. The attention to localized social inequities is continuous with the Brexit theme—highlighting how the economic consequences of the Leave vote will affect the already vulnerable. But to me as an audience member, it also invited an association with the contemporary refugee crisis that in turn prompts a re-reading of the status of Lear, Kent, the Fool and Poor Tom as themselves in search of refuge. This is not to say that the play maps neatly on to current issues, but that it may be made to speak to them in significant ways. The empathetic strain of Lear's thought continues when he sees Poor Tom: "Is man no more than this?" (3:4:97-97) he wonders, "thou art the thing itself. | Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (3:4:99-102). In Munby's production, McKellen's Lear piled coats on Poor Tom and, as one reviewer noted, absurdly proffered his sodden hanky as shelter against the elements (Taylor). Tom is not, of course, the genuine article, but rather the performance of a Bedlam vagrant by an exiled aristocrat Edgar, who himself is performed by an actor. Much too has been made of the spotlight that falls here on human exceptionalism and on Lear's emerging realization that such anthropocentrism is at the root of how he ended up where he is (see Shannon; Dionne).

Yet, in a present context, Lear's reflections might powerfully speak to the plight of those seeking refuge in Europe, and the figure of Poor Tom with the concept of bare life that, as Hannah Arendt (119) and, after her Giorgio Agamben, argued, exposes the limits of Europe as a collective or union. "The comity of European peoples went to pieces," Arendt argued in "We Refugees" (1943), "when and because it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted". As a Jewish person who escaped Nazi Germany, Arendt understood the fragility of human rights. and argued that the figure of the refugee was symbolically central and necessary to the European model of the nation state, a way to define its sovereign and exclusionary bounds, a form of discrimination that enables a definition and demarcation of the citizen. Agamben (117) presses this distinction further in his essay "We Refugees" (1995), where he argues that "the refugee should be considered for what he is, that is, nothing less than a border concept that radically calls into question the principles of the nation-state".

Agamben's (117) claim that "the refugee unhinges the old trinity of state/nation/territory" provocatively addresses itself to the humanitarian crisis of refuge to which the EU has being trying to respond for the last decade. That crisis highlights the contradiction between exclusionary national sovereignty and universal human rights that Agamben's work unpacks, as EU member states seek to restrict immigration, in part as a response to the rise of nationalist sentiment, in part because the problem is seen as external. This returns us to Dover, both in *Lear*'s sense of it as a site of desire and in as the impregnable bulwark against the sea and the boats containing those seeking refuge, who make the crossing in tiny vessels. In some media coverage they become people, to quote Stuart Hall (58), himself echoing C.L.R James, deemed "in but not of Europe", a distinction that, as Hall (69) argues, the "idea of Europe has always depended", feeds into discourse of fortress Britain and to Brexit as the necessary, logical move to control the free movement of people. Agamben (118) offers an alternative to this binary of us / them: "We could look to Europe […] as an aterritorial or extraterritorial space in which all the residents of the European states (citizens and noncitizens) would be in a position of exodus or refuge, and the status of European would mean the citizen's being-in-exodus". Might *Lear* suggest such a state in its topographical and geographic disruptions and divisions, in its motif of wandering and survival too? This might be to make too great a claim for Shakespeare, or to project on to the play European desires, a desire for a better Europe. But the question is worth the thinking and asking—to do so is, as Thomas Docherty (194) argues, echoing *Hamlet*, to counter the thoughtlessness of Brexit, because "the intellect—thinking—is what takes us beyond our own body, our own physical self. It is the intellect that opens us to foreignness, to things undreamt of in our philosophies".

To Horatio's Brexit, we can be Hamlet-like and pursue thinking, which is also, if in a more fragile iteration, to be Lear-like. One of the reasons Lear is so struck by the poor wretches and by Poor Tom is because he fears that this could become his own state, or that it has happened already, so that his fear of the other is fear for one's self. Lear's humanity—a phrase that seems like an embarrassing, recondite term from an older Shakespeare criticism—may have something for our present times: it can be reframed to an apprehension of human rights and their fragility, to fear for the other, fear that is, for a world in which another human being is unaccommodated, stateless, a refugee. Rather than a general analogy for Brexit, *Lear* could be used more progressively through its exploration of "unaccommodated" humans as a reminder of human rights in Europe. Future productions and critical readings have an important role here in imagining a *Lear* that is responsive to the humans behind generalized crises or history itself, whose very rights are put in danger through the demarcation of borders and political red lines. Productions might variously recover, amplify and introduce moments of disturbance into the experience of the play. Criticism

might orient itself toward figures of vulnerability or bare life rather than to the putative wholeness or sovereignty of the island nation. Such a *Lear* would be an anathema to Brexit. It would speak instead to a potential European value, taking us outside of national borders. It would tear up the map of exclusionary lines to *recognize*, not discriminate between, human life.

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