



EVERYMAN
KING LEAR
 William Shakespeare

Edited by John F. Andrews
 former editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*

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KING LEAR



THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

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KING LEAR I

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So many great minds have written about *King Lear* that one is humbled by the sheer weight of scholarship laid upon this play. Rather than add any small ounce of tonnage to the scales, I would like to remove some. I am an actor and what follows are the discoveries of one actor who has played the role of King Lear.

There are those who have said that this play is not producible, but these are mostly literary folk like Charles Lamb and I believe they are wrong. I think it is very difficult to do the play well – to make the story, relationships, and intentions clear and to soar in performance to its imperious height – and I believe this is the reason it has seemed so daunting. But Shakespeare wrote this play for actors, so it is as an actor who has tried to scale this height that I speak to you. If I confine myself mainly to the character of Lear I hope you will forgive me. I see the play through him.

An actor approaching the role of King Lear must first look past the word 'King' and search for the human being. What I have missed in most performances of *King Lear* is this human being in Lear. The man I can identify with. The person I know. Too often he has seemed a sonorous figure in a long gown growling and howling his way through the scenery; or so physically fragile at the start that a full development of the character's arc is unattainable and his ability to carry Cordelia on at the end unconvincing.

Lear is an eighty-year-old patriarch who has fought his way to the top in a sometimes brutal and primitive world, and as this play begins he is finally confronting the fact that he is going to die. I say 'finally' because I doubt he's ever considered himself vulnerable enough to die. Death is for the weak and Lear scorns weakness. He is a man bursting with the primal energy of life, even at eighty years old; a warrior and a hunter, a tribal chieftain in ancient Britain. His sword, not divine right, has made him King.

But his mind is slipping. The paranoia of age is stalking him and

he cannot fight it off. His memory has sudden blank spots in it, his flesh has fallen and his joints cry out in pain. These are real devils because they produce the humiliation that comes with age. They make Lear angry and impatient and even more arrogant as he – in his ironic phrase – 'crawl[s] toward Death'.

So in the opening scene of the play he gathers his three daughters to him in front of his entire court and makes a senile game of his confrontation with the spectre of death. He requires his daughters to state publicly 'which of you, shall we say, doth love us most'. It's a shock to them. The two older daughters play the game smoothly, telling him exactly what he wants to hear. They are interested in real estate, not truth. But Cordelia, his youngest daughter and the star of his heart, refuses to play the game. Lear is humiliated. He chokes on this bile, banishes her from his kingdom, and thus the wheel of fire begins to turn.

Goneril and Regan, having been awarded possession of the kingdom, suffer their father's presence but thinly. When Lear returns to Goneril's castle from the hunt, it becomes clear that he has no intention of giving over his powers to anyone. With his train of a hundred loud and sweaty men, 'breaking forth in rank and not-to-be-endur'd Riots', Lear is like a bull. It is important to take note of Lear's excesses because they are an integral part of the fabric of his character. He is a very, very difficult old man. Boisterous, demanding, arrogant. He expects absolute obedience.

Idle Old Man,
That still would manage those Authorities
That he hath given away.

Infuriated by his behaviour, Goneril belittles her father and threatens to restrict his freedom, enraging Lear to such a pitch that he lays a curse on her and leaves.

It is in this scene that the theme of ingratitude is sounded loudly. This is a theme to which Lear will return over and over again throughout the play. The ingratitude of his daughters is the wound which festers in Lear's heart. It bewilders him and leads him towards the brink of the madness which he fears. 'I prythee, Daughter, do not make me Mad', he begs in the next scene when both daughters face him, attacking his manhood by reminding

him that he is old, attacking his pride by scorning him. They gang up on him, jabbing verbal darts into his ancient flesh like matadors. When they cut his hundred men down to a single one, Lear's rage bursts all fetters. His fury past control, Lear hurls these words of defiance at them and roars out into the storm:

You think I'll weep,
No, I'll not weep. I have full Cause of Weeping,
But this Heart shall break into a hundred thousand Flaws
Or ere I'll weep.

By this point in the story we have been made aware of Edmund's treachery against his brother and father and of Gloucester's gullibility. Cornwall's treachery has been hinted at. We are beginning to get the picture of a kingdom that is up for grabs, one that is essentially leaderless now and where corruption and greed are going to thrive. The smell of corruption is heavy in the play. It is said that Shakespeare chose to set the story of Lear in a pagan environment where the earthy innocence of such a society could be corrupted by sophistication and cynicism, by such schemers as Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald, Goneril, and Regan.

Shakespeare makes it clear to me that Lear is not a man of conscious intellect. If he were, he would see the bitter humour of his foolishness and not go mad. But the Fool is an intellectual and the relationship between them is constantly that of the teacher (Fool) trying to make the adult student (Lear) understand what is happening, what is being done to him and what he is doing to himself.

LEAR Dost thou call me Fool, Boy?
FOOL All thy other Titles thou hast given away,
that thou wast borne with.

Lear can brutalize the Fool one minute, knock him down, and then be humoured or touched by him in the next. Their relationship is very volatile. In some places it is tender, as in the scene between them after Lear has cursed Goneril. The Fool warns him:

Thou should'st not have been Old till thou
hadst been Wise.

The storm. Lear now presents himself to the gods, calling upon them to destroy everything – the earth itself – with thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. It is a duel between flesh and the universe and Lear is beaten – 'I will be the pattern of all patience. I will say nothing.'

But only for a moment. Now his focus shifts to the world at large, to mankind's enemies and his: the murderers, the perjurers, the simulators of virtue, the hypocrites, and those who conceal their guilt. He exhorts the gods to punish them and forgive him: 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning.' His pleas are drowned out by their indifference as the storm howls on.

Then, exhausted, Lear does something strange – for King Lear. For the first time he shows concern for his fellow man in the person of the Fool. 'Art cold? I am cold myself', he says, and takes him inside the shelter. This moment is the first conscious turning away of Lear's mind from his rage and, strangely, the turn is towards sympathy for another human being. Interesting. Could this mean that beneath the wintry bluster there is a soft heart? That love hides somewhere there?

In the very next scene a great moment of self-realization begins to dawn in Lear. He has clung steadfastly to the conviction that he is a loving father, despite all evidence to the contrary. He says:

O Regan, Goneril,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all –

He pauses. Note Shakespeare's dash. It means something. Then:

O, that way madness lies, let me shun that!
No more of that.

Shun what? No more of what?? For the longest time the meaning of these lines escaped me. I grew to hate them. I complained to our director, Gerald Freedman, that I didn't understand what in the hell Lear was talking about here and how stupid could he be to think he was a 'kind father'. Performances of

a tremulous, pathetic Lear full of self-pity retched in my mind and blinded me to what Shakespeare was saying. Jerry remained quiet and waited for me to see the obvious – the obvious, which is sometimes the most elusive truth of all. One night, as I cried 'your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all –', the darkness in my mind parted. I thought, 'My God, I believe this! I am trying to be kind. I think I am kind. I gave my kingdom to them, didn't I?' Then the shadow of doubt fell on me – 'Maybe I wasn't kind . . .' – and doubt begat the line:

O, that way madness lies, let me shun that!
No more of that.

The light, the light had struck my poor mind. Now stunned by uncertainty I turned to John Woodson (Kent) and said:

Prythee, go in thyself; seek thine own Ease,
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
On things would hurt me more . . .

There it was. The turning point in the play.

Lear prays. He does not acknowledge his lack of kindness, his failure as a father. Instead, he prays for the poor naked wretches who have no home. Like himself. In this moment of self-realization I believe Lear slips into madness. I think it happens here, not earlier, and is the direct result of Lear's refusal to face the awful truth that has exploded in his mind. His very next line in the scene is one of derangement. It comes upon Edgar's entrance. Lear sees this naked wretch and says:

Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And
art thou come to this?

He listens to this babbling outcast, another of the 'discarded fathers' of this world, and decides to learn from him: ' . . . let me talk with this philosopher'.

The mock trial comes next. Lear arraigns his daughters in an imaginary court, crying 'is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?' Then his tired brain stops spinning and he falls into a frantic, restless sleep.

We don't see Lear again for a long time. Meanwhile the coils of Evil spread and fester in the subplot of the play, its tentacles

ensnaring all. Gloucester is blinded. The conspirators begin to turn upon one another in a frenzy of greed and self-gratification. When Edgar escorts his sightless father to Dover, Lear wanders into the play again, leaves and flowers in his hair, mind aflame with plans to mount an army and go on the march against his enemies. He stares at Gloucester: 'Ha! Goneril, with a White Beard!' And then: 'They flatter'd me like a Dog. . . ! To say "Ay" and "No" to everything that I said . . .' (Who's he talking about? Gloucester?) 'I pardon that Man's Life. What was thy Cause? Adultery?' (Gloucester committed adultery.) ' . . . Die for Adultery! No; the Wren goes to 't . . .'

Gloucester has jested about his adultery in the opening scene of the play. Lear is focusing his scorn on him now. Gloucester, the good-hearted adulterer, the old friend at court who is a yes-man to Lear ('They are not men o' their words'), who has played the diplomatic game at court and been betrayed by his own bastard son; who has banished his true son, Edgar, crouching like Tom o' Bedlam nearby. Gloucester has been a blind fool. 'I remember thine eyes well enough . . . blind Cupid.'

Now, worn down by the intensity of his own scathing tirades against the hypocrisy and hatefulness of a world he at last sees clearly, Lear acknowledges Gloucester, this man who, like himself, has been blind to the corruption around him:

LEAR If thou wilt weep my Fortunes, take my Eyes.
I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester.
Thou must be Patient. We came crying hither:
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the Air
We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee. Mark.
GLOUCESTER Alack, alack the Day!

LEAR When we are borne, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.

The wheel of fire upon which Lear has spun throughout his long torture rolls to a momentary stop here. It pauses while the great truth of life comes home to these two old brokenhearted fools. I believe this is the moment of greatest philosophic penetration in the play as well as one of deep emotional catharsis for us all. Lear not only sees the truth of his utter vulnerability, he shares it with another human being in pain.

The rest of this sad story moves like a great symphony towards the final bitter coda, the unsweet taste of truth. After being found by Cordelia, the daughter Lear loves and has banished, the two of them are captured, imprisoned, and she is killed in front of him. He bears her forth, howling the primal cry of all pain-struck creatures, and lays her down upon the ground. He grieves for her and lies down by her side and dies.

This play touches me to my heart and soul and I think that even in the final scene of death there is beauty. The beauty of truth. The truth about the pain that stalks us all if we do not learn to love in time; and which may strike us even then.

From his early days with the Lincoln Center Repertory in New York through fifty-odd feature and television films, HAL HOLBROOK has become known as an actor's actor. The recipient of four Emmys, the Tony and Peabody Awards, his one-man show *Mark Twain Tonight!* has become a classic of the American theatre.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO
King Lear

Can you make no use of Nothing, Nuncle?
(I.iv.139-40)

The clown who asks what sounds like a frivolous question is a self-professed Fool. He claims no wisdom, and he possesses no authority. As the King's jester, he doesn't even pretend to syntactic coherence. But in a world that exhibits less reason than do the rhymes of an imbecile, his 'Matter and Impertinency mix'd' will prove altogether to the point.

By emphasizing a noun that reverberates from the beginning of the drama to its end, the Fool calls attention to the paradox at the core of *King Lear*. His query echoes the pivotal exchange of the opening scene, where Lear asks his youngest daughter, Cordelia, what she can say to win her father's amplest bounty, and she responds with 'Nothing'. It recalls Lear's angry rejoinder, when he warns his favourite child that 'Nothing will come of Nothing' and entreats her to 'Mend [her] Speech a little'. It evokes the domestic scene that follows the conflagration at court: a private encounter in which the Earl of Gloucester's illegitimate son Edmund pretends to conceal a letter he says was written by his half-brother Edgar, and the gullible progenitor of both sons insists that 'the Quality of Nothing hath not such need to hide it self'.

Meanwhile the Fool's words reinforce the assessment he offers his master in I.iv, where he observes that an octogenarian who has disinherited his beloved Cordelia and divided his estate between her conniving older sisters has reduced himself to a cipher, an impotent 'O without a Figure'. Like a worthless steward, Lear's 'all-licens'd' satirist implies, a King who has always been assured that he was 'every thing' is now to be discarded as 'an unnecessary Letter'. Unless he can find some 'use' for the 'Nothing' he has become, he's doomed to finish his days in frustration and ignominy.

But of course *King Lear* is not the only Shakespearean play in

which the characters – and audiences who involve themselves vicariously in those characters' destinies – are obliged to make something out of 'Nothing'. The same applies to *Much Ado About Nothing*, where the fourth word of the title plays on 'Noting' and alludes to the Elizabethan notion that a 'weaker vessel' (1 Peter 3:7), whether female in actuality or only in metaphorical terms, is deficient in part because it possesses 'no thing'.

A variation on what might be labelled 'the Nothing riddle' occurs in the Prison Scene (V.v) of *Richard II*, where a monarch who has deposed himself in IV.i with the clause 'I must nothing be' muses that

Nor I nor any Man that but Man is
With Nothing shall be pleas'd till he be eas'd
With being Nothing.

A similar perspective on the conundrum informs the final act of *Timon of Athens*, where the disillusioned, misanthropic Timon expresses relief that

My long Sickness
Of Health and Living now begins to mend,
And Nothing brings me All Things.

Yet another exploration of the enigma occupies *Coriolanus*, where an even more vengeful exile is depicted as 'a kind of Nothing, Titleless', until he has 'forg'd himself a Name a'th' Fire / Of burning Rome'. Here a warrior who has been described earlier as a 'Thing of Blood', as a 'Noble Thing', and as a 'thing / Made by some other Deity than Nature', is at least provisionally defined, not by what he is, but by what he is not. Something will emerge from the 'kind of Nothing' for which he stands; what it will be, however, and what the metamorphosis will signify, is left for the tragedy's interpreters to ponder.

The ambiguity associated with negation is one of the most salient features of *King Lear*. In the 'trial' that commences the action Goneril says that she honours her father with 'A Love that makes Breath poor, and Speech unable'. The meaning the King's eldest daughter expects the old man to derive is that her devotion

to him is too boundless, too rich, to be conveyed verbally. But her subsequent treatment of Lear shows Goneril's 'Breath' to be 'poor' in a more elemental sense: like the counterfeit 'Love' it puts into circulation, and 'like the Breath of an unfeed Lawyer', its value is less than meets the ear of an unwary auditor.

Meanwhile Goneril's 'Love' renders Cordelia's 'Breath poor' too, first because corrupt 'Speech' leaves the youngest of Lear's offspring momentarily speechless, second because Cordelia knows that Goneril's 'glib and oily Art / To speak and purpose not' will make any plain and honest profession of love seem 'poor' by comparison, and third because the end product of Goneril's foul 'Breath' will be a Cordelia whose capacity for 'Speech' is terminally disabled as she lies limp in her grieving father's arms.

In the culminating moments of *King Lear* the enfeebled monarch asks his silent daughter 'Ha: / What is't thou sayst?' Hearing no reply, he rationalizes that 'Her Voice was ever Soft, / Gentle, and Low, an excellent thing in Woman.' A brief interval later, having resigned himself to the knowledge that she'll 'come no more', he cries, 'Why should a Dog, a Horse, a Rat have Life, / And thou no Breath at all?' For the King who had resolved to set his rest on Cordelia's 'kind Nursery', this interrogation of the cosmos is devastating, so much so that within seconds he too will be struggling for his final gasps of air. Five times he moans 'Never'. And as he cradles the heir his own miscalculations have reduced to nought, the old man's bowed composure reminds us of the stumbling that has brought him to this pass.

We remember the outrage with which Lear discounted his daughter's 'little seeming Substance'. We remember 'thy Truth then be thy Dow'r'. We remember Kent's prayer that 'the Gods to their dear Shelter' take the maiden a crazed King has exposed to 'Disasters of the World'. We remember France's portrait of this 'unpriz'd precious' bride as a treasure 'Most Choice Forsaken, and most Lov'd Despis'd'. And we remember the play's reiteration of such biblical passages as 2 Corinthians 6:10, where the Apostle Paul refers to the lot of the faithful in this life 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things'.

As the drama draws to a close, Cordelia's lifeless form is an

image of the horrifying nothing that has come of the 'Nothing' she has spoken. But a tableau that has been likened to Michelangelo's *Pietà* can also be construed positively, and in that light Cordelia's corpse can be viewed as the ultimate embodiment of Lear's eventual realization that

The Art of our Necessities is strange,
And can make vild things precious.

Though the King has cast her aside like a piece of refuse, 'Unfriended, new adopted to our Hate', Cordelia alone of Lear's progeny has remained true to her 'Bond'. She alone has returned those 'Duties back as are right Fit'. She alone has gone about her father's 'Business' with 'no blown Ambition' to advance any selfish designs. And even though she alone has had cause to condemn a parent who has treated her vilely, as Lear himself confesses, she has instead cherished and forgiven him with a devotion that 'redeems Nature from the general Curse' her two sisters have brought it to. Small wonder, then, that when a spent King awakens to Cordelia's beatific countenance after his traumatic night in the storm, his initial inference is that the daughter he rejected is now 'a Soul in Bliss'.

Like the Gloucester who serves as Lear's minister of state, the ruler to whom we're introduced at the outset of the tragedy is a 'Lust-dieted Man', a sovereign so accustomed to 'Pomp', so used to having all his needs met and all his whims pampered, that he has never even conceived of the hardships of ordinary mortals. To his astonishment Lear finds himself afflicted by the 'Injuries' his own vices have procured. At first he has only curses for the 'Pelican Daughters' who seem hell bent on devouring the 'Flesh' that 'begot' them. And he maintains, quite rightly, that he is 'a Man / More sinn'd against than sinning'. Before long, however, Lear's 'Manhood' becomes shaken in a way he would once have found shameful. He sheds the tears that accompany 'Noble Anger'; but what is more important, he goes on to weep tears of compassion. In the tempest that objectifies his inner turmoil, he takes pity on 'Poor Tom', the naked madman who becomes, for the King, a symbol of 'Unaccommodated Man'. Scrutinizing this 'Bare Forked Animal', this emaciated manifestation of essential

humanity, Lear suddenly discovers that it is a disadvantage to be 'Sophisticated'. He recognizes, as Gloucester will phrase it later, that all too frequently 'Our Means secure us, and our mere Defects / Prove our Commodities'. Like the Earl whose downfall mirrors his own, Lear learns that what we think of as good fortunes are often bad for us, because they insulate us from reality and foster a complacency that can be our undoing; on the other hand our bad fortunes, our severest handicaps and our heaviest losses, can be our shrewdest counsellors and our most priceless assets.

Once he has registered this lesson, Lear begins stripping off the 'Lendings' that differentiate a proud potentate from his humblest subjects. He hurls scorn at the 'Robes and Furr'd Gowns' that shield the wealthy from the sword of Justice; he upbraids the 'Excess' that permits an idle aristocrat to indulge himself in luxury while a lowly peasant scrapes the floor for crumbs from the rich man's feast. Lear acts on a statement he'd earlier emitted in sarcasm, that 'Our basest Beggars / Are in the Poorest Thing Superfluous.' And by exposing himself 'to feel what Wretches feel', he finds a way to profit from 'Nothing' and 'shew the Heavens more Just'.

In the process, like the Gloucester who must be deprived of his sight before he can perceive things 'feelingly', the King is forced to the awareness that 'A Man may see how this World goes with no Eyes.' Once he reaches this juncture, Lear is 'cut to the Brains'. But he remains 'every Inch a King', and now in a sense that could never have been applied to the tyrant who strutted onto 'this great Stage of Fools' for the explosion that propelled him into contention with 'the fretful Elements'.

By the time his excruciating pilgrimage approaches its destination, Lear has discerned some of the 'Uses of Adversity' (*As You Like It*, II.i.12). Like Gloucester, like Edgar, and like Kent, he has come to 'within a Foot / Of th' extreme Verge'. He has been cured of 'the great Rage' that earlier made him lash out at anyone or anything that crossed him. He has surrendered any aspiration to command 'the Cause of Thunder'. So Job-like has his patience become, indeed, that he envisages Cordelia and himself as

'Sacrifices', submissive instruments of heaven, who will reverently take upon themselves 'the Mystery of Things'.

But what are we to make of the King we witness at the end of Act V? Is the old man who re-enters with exclamations of 'Howl, howl, howl' a reversion to the earlier, heaven-defying Lear? Is the invalid who pleads for help to 'undo this Button' removing his last 'Lendings' in contempt of a world that has proven too 'tough' to be tolerated any longer? To put the inquiry in the starkest theological terms, does Lear die persuaded that his agonies add up to no more than 'A Tale / Told by an idiot, full of Sound and Fury, / Signifying nothing' (*Macbeth*, V.iii.26-28)? Or do his dying words about Cordelia's lips hint that, in some sense not disclosed to anyone else, he is granted 'a Chance which does redeem all Sorrows'?

Most of us would like to believe that, like Gloucester's, the old King's 'flaw'd Heart' bursts 'smilingly', with at least a shred of faith and hope intact. We'd prefer to think he achieves what T. S. Eliot was later to call 'A condition of complete simplicity / (Costing not less than everything)'. In the final reckoning, however, the only thing we can affirm with certainty is that Lear's legacy is a 'gor'd State' whose shattered survivors are left to assume the burdens of 'this Sad Time' with few, if any, signs of support from above.

Date and Sources

Shakespeare seems to have completed *King Lear* in 1605 or 1606. He adapted, and gave a tragic ending to, an anonymous *True Chronicle History of King Leir*, which was probably written around 1590 and in which he himself may have acted when the play was being performed at the Rose playhouse in April 1594. Whether the poet reread the *True Chronicle* when he began working on his own *King Lear* in 1604 or 1605 is uncertain. The old *Leir* was printed in a 1605 quarto, but its appearance at that time may have been prompted by the popularity of Shakespeare's new version of the Lear story.

The tale that inspired the playwright's profoundest tragedy had roots in Celtic lore. It had been connected with the history of

Britain since the twelfth century, when Geoffrey of Monmouth depicted Lear as one of the kings who descended from the kingdom's titular founder, Brutus, whose lineage was said to go back to the Trojan hero Aeneas. We don't know whether Shakespeare was familiar with Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, but there is no reason to doubt that he knew, and drew upon, several other redactions of the Lear legend, among them the accounts to be found in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577, 1588), in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), and in John Higgins's portion of the multi-author *Mirror for Magistrates* (1574, 1587).

In the old play, and in all the narratives that preceded it, the French invasion to restore Lear to the throne he has abdicated turns out successfully. The King enjoys a blessed reconciliation with the daughter he has scorned, and he rules peacefully for two more years before dying quietly of natural causes. Unfortunately, according to Holinshed, Higgins, and Spenser, Cordelia's fate is less happy. Five years after she succeeds her father, she is captured, imprisoned, and driven to suicide by the sons of Goneril and Regan, who rebel against their aunt and seize her throne. Unlike the author of the *True Chronicle History of King Leir*, Shakespeare decided to incorporate Cordelia's death into his drama. His Cordelia doesn't survive her father, of course, and she doesn't take her own life; but she does die by the hangman's rope (a detail Shakespeare took from Spenser's version of the story), as ordered by an Edmund who plans 'To lay the Blame upon her own Despair, / That she for-did her self'.

For the parallel plot that focuses on Gloucester and his sons Shakespeare went to Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (a prose narrative that had been written in the 1580s and published in 1590), which included an episode about the tribulations of a blind King of Paphlagonia. For details about witchcraft and demonic possession, and for the names of many of the devils Edgar enumerates in his persona as Tom o' Bedlam, the playwright ransacked Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostors* (1603). For his depiction of the amoral 'Nature' invoked by the atheistic Bastard, Shakespeare appropriated philosophical reflections from John Florio's 1603 translation of Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*. Shakespeare appears to have been fascinated by the wry 'Apology

for Raymond Sebonde', and particularly by Montaigne's withering scepticism about the intelligence and dignity that supposedly made human beings superior to the rest of Earth's creatures.

For his presentation of the unworldly 'foolishness' of Christian behaviour, as exemplified by such characters as Cordelia, Kent, the Fool, Edgar, and Albany, Shakespeare drew inspiration from the Gospels and from the Epistles of Paul, especially 1 Corinthians 1-2. No doubt he also derived some of his insights from Desiderius Erasmus's meditations on the topic in *The Praise of Folly*, which had been translated into English in 1549 by Sir Thomas Chaloner.

John F. Andrews, 1993

THE TEXT OF THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

Background

THE EARLY PRINTINGS OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

Many of us enjoy our first encounter with Shakespeare when we're introduced to *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* at school. It may therefore surprise us that neither of these tragedies could ever have been read, let alone studied, by most of the playwright's contemporaries. They began as scripts for performance and, along with seventeen other titles that never saw print during Shakespeare's lifetime, they made their inaugural appearance as 'literary' works seven years after his death, in the 1623 collection we know today as the First Folio.

The Folio contained thirty-six titles in all. Of these, half had been issued previously in the small paperbacks we now refer to as quartos.* Like several of the plays first published in the Folio, the most trustworthy of the quarto printings appear to have been set either from Shakespeare's own manuscripts or from faithful copies of them. It's not impossible that the poet himself prepared some of these works for the press, and it's intriguing to imagine him reviewing proof-pages as the words he'd written for actors to speak and embody were being transposed into the type that readers would filter through their eyes, minds, and imaginations. But, alas, there's no indisputable evidence that Shakespeare had any direct involvement with the publication of these early editions of his plays.

What about the scripts that achieved print for the first time in the Folio? Had the dramatist taken any steps to give the permanency of book form to those texts? We don't know. All we

* Quartos derived their name from the four-leaf units of which these small books were comprised: large sheets of paper that had been folded twice after printing to yield four leaves, or eight pages. Folios, volumes with twice the page-size of quartos, were put together from two-leaf units: sheets that had been folded once after printing to yield four pages.