

# The Geopolitics of *King Lear*: Territory, Land, Earth

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Abstract: *Shakespeare's King Lear begins with a division of Britain between the King's daughters. Lear says he wishes to divest himself of "interest of territory, cares of state." What follows is a remarkable play about the politics of space, not simply in terms of Lear's story but also in terms of the subplot concerning the legitimate and illegitimate sons of the Duke of Gloucester and the inheritance of land. Three aspects of what might be called the play's "geopolitics" are examined here: its use of the term "territory," the wider politics of land that structures the narrative, and the more figurative sense of the word "earth." Territory and land are controlled, fought over, distributed, gifted, bought, and sold. Examining the text of King Lear therefore sheds light on Shakespeare's political thought and his sense of the politics of geography. The reading here also takes into account the important differences between the Folio and Quarto editions of the text, especially as they affect the identity of the invading force led by Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia.*

Keywords: King Lear / territory / William Shakespeare / earth / land / geopolitics

## INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, is of course more than simply a dramatist and poet. His political thought has received extensive attention, too.<sup>1</sup> Several of his plays lend themselves to this kind of analysis, from those tracing a long period of English history to the tragedies of *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*.<sup>2</sup> Some of the tragedies based on historical events, such as *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, are also open to political readings. *Coriolanus* has been described as "Shakespeare's most political play," in part because of

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*Law & Literature*, Vol. 25, Issue 2, pp. 147–165. ISSN 1535-685X, electronic ISSN 1541-2601. © 2013 by The Cardozo School of Law of Yeshiva University. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/lal.2013.25.2.147.

the allusion to the 1607 corn riots in the English Midlands in the opening scene<sup>3</sup>; *Measure for Measure* is a play about political authority and its misuse<sup>4</sup>; *The Tempest* raises questions concerning colonialism. That play, and many others, equally raise a host of interesting geographical questions.<sup>5</sup> Some concern location: England is the place of the historical plays, but as Howard notes, of Shakespeare's tragedies, only *King Lear* is set in England, temporally rather than spatially distant.<sup>6</sup>

*King Lear* is, however, a remarkable play about space and in particular the politics of space. The focus of this essay is what might be called the "geopolitics" of *King Lear*, its politics of earth. The focus is on the use of the term "territory," the wider politics of land in the play, and the more figurative use of the term "earth."

## TERRITORY

In the Folio edition, *King Lear* is one of only two plays in Shakespeare's entire work that uses the word "territory." The plural "territories" is more common, appearing in six plays in eleven separate instances.<sup>7</sup> Almost all these are places where "territories" means effectively the same thing as "lands." Richard II banishes the Duke of Hereford (the future Henry IV) from his "territories . . . upon pain of life, / Till twice five summers have enriched our fields."<sup>8</sup> Banishment from territories also occurs in *Henry VI, Part II*, and is threatened in *As You Like It*—"or turn thou no more / To seek a living in our territory"—and in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.<sup>9</sup> In other places people are welcomed into the territories of a kingdom,<sup>10</sup> and there is the constant threat of conquest or conflict.<sup>11</sup>

However, in *Henry VI, Part II*, Lord Somerset reports on the situation in France: "That all your interest in those territories / Is utterly bereft you—all is lost."<sup>12</sup> Although this may appear to be another use of "territories" in a sense of lands, or as a battlefield fought over and surrendered, the relation of interest shows that it is not simply property or a strategic sense, but the political control of and stake in those places. This same phrasing is the one used regarding "territory" in *King Lear*. Lear is discussing his plans for the inheritance of his kingdom among his three daughters. The first thing that Lear says is that Gloucester should attend the "Lords of France and Burgundy,"<sup>13</sup> suitors for his youngest daughter's hand. He then begins,

Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose.  
 Give me the map there. Know we have divided  
 In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent  
 To shake all cares and business from our age,  
 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
 Unburthen'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,  
 And you, our no less loving son of Albany,  
 We have this hour a constant will to publish  
 Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife  
 May be prevented now. The Princes, France and Burgundy,  
 Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,  
 Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,  
 And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,  
 (Since now we shall divest us both of Rule,  
 Interest of territory, cares of state)  
 Which of you shall we say doth love us most?  
 That we our largest bounty may extend  
 Where nature doth with merit challenge . . . .<sup>14</sup>

At least, that is how it is in the composite text that is usually used as *King Lear*, which builds on the later Folio, *The Tragedy of King Lear* (1623), but usually incorporates material that was originally in the earlier Quarto, *The History of King Lear* (1608), that does not appear in the Folio. There were also several, though fewer, lines added to the Folio, including in this passage the parenthetical remark concerning territory. The differences between the texts has given rise to the contention that there are actually two *King Lears*, with the 1623 text representing Shakespeare's revisions.<sup>15</sup> Compare the texts of these editions for this speech.

**Quarto**

Meantime, we will express our darker purposes.  
 The map there. Know we have divided  
 In three our kingdom; and 'tis our first intent  
 To shake all cares and business of our state,  
 Confirming them on younger years,

The two great Princes, *France* and *Burgundy*,  
 Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,

**Folio**

Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose.  
 Give me the map there. Know that we have divided  
 In three our Kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent  
 To shake all cares and business from our age,  
 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
 Unburthen'd crawl toward death. Our son of  
     Cornwall,  
 And you, our no less loving son of Albany,  
 We have this hour a constant will to publish  
 Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife  
 May be prevented now.

The Princes, *France* and *Burgundy*,  
 Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,

Long in our Court have made their amorous  
sojourn,  
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my  
daughters,

Which of you shall we say doth love us most?  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where merit doth most challenge it . . .

Long in our court have made their amorous  
sojourn,  
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my  
daughters,

(Since now we shall divest us both of Rule,  
Interest of Territory, Cares of State)  
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where Nature doth with merit challenge . . .<sup>16</sup>

The Folio certainly appears to be a more polished text, with several differences in the first few lines: the diffuse “darker purposes” becomes the particular and comparative “darker purpose”; there is the telling replacement of “of our state” with “from our age,” presumably because of amplifications to come; and that of “years,” already implied by “younger,” with “strengths,” indicating force and political power. It is difficult to see how the Quarto could simply be corrupt. In both texts Lear proclaims that the division has already been made, and that the map he asks for presumably shows this.<sup>17</sup> The Folio has lines that include the indication of Lear’s wish to live out his remaining time free of concerns, ones that more clearly indicate the relations to Cornwall and Albany and the establishment of the plural dowers, and the attempt to head off future conflict. He wants to hand over the burdens—“cares and business”—to a younger generation, to his sons-in-law and the daughters married to them, and his third as yet unmarried daughter. Goneril is married to the Duke of Albany, and Regan to the Duke of Cornwall, and in the Folio at least it appears in large part that Lear is aiming this redistribution at them more directly than the daughters themselves. A few lines later there is the explicit, parenthetical, noting of what exactly is at stake: rule, territory, state. Finally, in the last line of this passage, the meaning is subtly different: instead of this being simply to do with merit, there is now a reference to the conflict between merit and nature, worth and familial ties.

This supposed test of filial obedience provokes strong reactions. The elder daughters Goneril and Regan both obsequiously profess their love, the first declaring that hers is “Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty”; the second seeks that Lear “prize me at her worth . . . Only she comes too short . . . the most precious square of sense possess.”<sup>18</sup> The languages of geometry, calculation, and economy map onto the geographies they seek, and they receive lands in return.<sup>19</sup> Somewhat unusually, it appears that they

receive their dowries some time after their marriages. Goneril is rewarded by Lear in the following terms:

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: to thine and Albany's issues  
Be this perpetual . . .<sup>20</sup>

The speech compresses a division of land within a wider realm, of bounds and lines, sets out its characteristics, and establishes a lineage for its inheritance. The way that Lear turns to Cordelia shows this too, describing her as “to whose young love / The vines of France and milk of Burgundy / Strive to be interest'd.”<sup>21</sup> Yet Cordelia refuses to play along, and her first response when asked to profess her love is “Nothing, my lord,” to which Lear replies, “nothing will come of nothing.” Nothing is, of course, as the void, a spatial category, and one that much exercised the seventeenth-century imagination.<sup>22</sup> She goes on to state that she loves her father “according to my bond; no more nor less.”<sup>23</sup> Lear fails to realize that Cordelia has no wish to join her sisters in their cheap flattery and that she alone probably loves him most. But being honest is no reward: Lear tells her, “Thy truth, then, be thy dower.” The repercussions of these events quickly lead to developments that can seem unconnected, especially concerning the King's madness, but *King Lear* is a play that is fundamentally structured by this division of land.

Lear's reaction to Cordelia is misjudged, as is his belief in his older daughters' love. But Lear is not a foolish king in initially proposing such a division. Rather, as Harry Jaffa has convincingly argued, Lear is struggling with the question of succession and the unity of the kingdom he has created.<sup>24</sup> Albany and Cornwall were the extremities of the kingdom: Albany being the north and the old name for Scotland; Cornwall being an expanse much bigger than the modern county, but a formerly separate kingdom including the southwest and much of Wales. At the time of writing, King James's son was Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall.<sup>25</sup> Lear has clearly decided what lands these couples should receive, because they are given their gifts immediately after the speeches of the first two daughters, but before Cordelia's.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Lear is not really comparing the speeches in order to distribute the lands, but using this as a pretence to buy off the two Dukes. Indeed in the Folio his opening speech

had expressly indicated an intention to do this “that future strife / May be prevented now.”<sup>27</sup> Division into three does not necessarily mean each share is equal, and Lear continues to suggest that this is open to question. He rewards Regan’s speech with “this ample third of our fair kingdom / No less in space, validity, and pleasure, / Than that conferr’d on Goneril”; but then immediately indicates to Cordelia that she could gain “A third more opulent than your sisters.”<sup>28</sup> Cordelia throws the whole procedure off balance, and it is then that Lear acts rashly.

Thus it is important to note that Lear’s pronouncement of this test for division was initially intended only for ceremony. Lear’s plans are already known, since in the opening lines of the play the Dukes of Kent and Gloucester are discussing them. Kent tells Gloucester that he had thought that the King had preferred, or “affected[,] the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.” Gloucester agrees this was the case in the past:

It did always seem so to us; but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities are so weigh’d that curiosity in neither can make choice of either’s moiety.<sup>29</sup>

“Moiety” means a share or portion, and Kent and Gloucester seem to think there could be no complaint from either for their allotment. This further seems to indicate that the apportioning of lands to Cornwall and Albany is the key issue, rather than to the daughters who happen to be married to them. Thus Lear gives Goneril and Albany some lands close to their existing ones, and the same to Regan and Cornwall, reserving the central portion for Cordelia. Cordelia is being courted by the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France. It may be that the principal purpose of Lear’s test is to decide who Cordelia gets to marry: if she loves her father most of all, she will surely follow his wishes in this. Jaffa thus claims that Lear is being very strategic in terms of division: “it was an action predestined by the very means required to bring unity to the kingdom. Lear, it appears, delayed the division as long as possible, but he could not put it off indefinitely, any more than he could put off indefinitely his own demise.”<sup>30</sup> The intention, he suggests, is that of “living on as king with Cordelia, with Albany and Cornwall acting as his deputies in regions which he could not control without their loyalty anyway.” In sum, he asks, “does it seem that Lear was giving up anything that he could in any case have kept to himself much longer?”<sup>31</sup>

Yet in not going with his plan, Cordelia receives nothing from Lear. Kent's attempts to mediate are swiftly prevented, and Lear apportioned Cordelia's share between the first two sisters: "With my two daughters' dowers digest the third."<sup>32</sup> Kent's injunction to "Reserve thy state," which Dodd interprets as the only place where he "draws attention to the division of the kingdom or abdication as a *political* error" rather than a personal one, is unheeded.<sup>33</sup> Being without a dowry immediately makes Cordelia a less attractive proposition for Burgundy, who pleads with Lear to "Give but that portion which yourself propos'd, / And here I take Cordelia by the hand, / Duchess of Burgundy." Because Lear refuses to change his mind, Burgundy tells Cordelia, "I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father / That you must lose a husband."<sup>34</sup> The King of France appears not to be so concerned. He had earlier told Burgundy, "She is herself a dowry," and now declares, "Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance, / Is Queen of us, of ours, and our fair France."<sup>35</sup> Lear grants her to France, with lines that are stinging in their rebuke: the dismissal applying as much to Cordelia as France himself, and welcoming to Burgundy who, unlike France, has shown himself interested in bounty alone:

Thou hast her France; let her be thine, for we  
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see  
That face of hers again; therefore be gone  
Without our grace, our love, our benison.  
Come noble Burgundy.<sup>36</sup>

Cordelia leaves, with France, only to return later in the play at the head of the invasion force.

## LAND

The use of the word "land" in the play is worth more attention. As Francis Barker notes, "in one sense, *Lear* is about nothing but land. . . . Yet at best it comes into focus and disappears again."<sup>37</sup> Other writers have pushed the case further: there is a literature on the relation between Shakespeare, land politics, and apartheid South Africa, for example.<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Visser has underscored that all the principal male characters, with one major exception, are named after places: Gloucester, Kent, Cornwall, Albany, Burgundy, and

France.<sup>39</sup> The major exception, of course, is Lear, who is never called Britain, but of course surrenders his relation to land at the very beginning of the play.

There are three groupings of the use of the word “land” in the play. One concerns the subplot concerning Gloucester and the inheritance of his bastard son Edmund or his legitimate child Edgar.<sup>40</sup> Edgar and Edmund are of course the other exceptions to the point made about names above, but they are yet to inherit, and the subplot is precisely about this point. As Edmund says, “Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land”; and “Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit.”<sup>41</sup> As foolish as Lear in falling for Edmund’s trickery, Gloucester declares that Edgar will not get away: “Not in this land shall he remain uncaught.”<sup>42</sup> He listens as Edmund falsely claims that Edgar had described him as “Thou unpossessing bastard,” and then declares:

Hark, the Duke’s trumpets! I know not why he comes.  
All ports I’ll bar; the villain shall not ’scape;  
The Duke must grant me that: besides, his picture  
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom  
May have due note of him; and of my land,  
Loyal and natural boy, I’ll work the means  
To make thee capable.<sup>43</sup>

The land politics is here even when the word is not used: “unpossessing” means unable to inherit or own property; Gloucester now describes Edmund as his “natural boy,” and thus legitimate, and promises to find a way to make him “capable”—that is, able to inherit.<sup>44</sup>

The second use of the word “land” concerns the Fool’s mocking of the King for giving away his possessions. Recall the first scene where Cordelia’s response when asked to profess her love is “Nothing, my lord,” to which Lear replies, “nothing will come of nothing.” Now Lear suggests “nothing can be made out of nothing,” recalling this reply. The Fool responds by asking Kent, “Prithee, tell him, so much the rent of his / land comes to.”<sup>45</sup> As Kahn notes, “Lear had hoped to give away his land to his daughters and to live off, or with, them. But what he receives from them is nothing.”<sup>46</sup> The Fool then asks Lear who was the “lord that counselled thee / To give away thy land,” and describes him as “The sweet and bitter fool.” Lear asks if “thou call me fool, boy?” to which the Fool replies, “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that / thou wast



born with.”<sup>47</sup> (This last exchange does not appear in the Folio.) The Fool talks of an egg with the middle removed to show the two crowns that remain—the middle that Lear planned for Cordelia and then swiftly gave away to her sisters.<sup>48</sup>

The third instance largely pertains only to the Quarto. In this version of the text the King of France and Cordelia invade Britain, and Shakespeare exploits two senses of the word “land.” On the one hand it applies to Britain itself: “France spreads his banners in our noiseless land,”<sup>49</sup> and “France invades our land”<sup>50</sup>; and on the other the means of invasion itself: “the army of France is landed.”<sup>51</sup> The invasion lands on the land it seeks to control. The invasion is a crucial point in both texts, but for different reasons. The Folio is much more ambiguous than the Quarto, because it does not explicitly state who is making the invasion, though it is clearly led by Cordelia. The invasion appears to be a response to the ill-use of Lear by his elder daughters, but the time span means the invasion must have been planned before any news would have reached France. Was it then an invasion to take Cordelia’s share by force?<sup>52</sup> Cordelia herself claims that the invasion was only in her father’s interest, that France had supported her, and that it was not concerned with any failure to profit herself:

O dear father,  
It is thy business that I go about;  
Therefore great France  
My mourning and important tears hath pitied.  
No blown ambition doth our arms incite,  
But love, dear love, and our aged father’s right:  
Soon may I hear and see him!<sup>53</sup>

Muir has convincingly argued that Shakespeare keeps this ambiguous as “the result of cunning rather than carelessness,” because resolving the ambiguity could have been avoided only by “slowing up the action.”<sup>54</sup> He notes that only two or three days have elapsed from the initial division of the kingdom in any case, far too little for an invasion to have been planned for either reason.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, W. W. Greg’s interpretation, which suggests that there are effectively two parallel time scales running in the play, is more compelling<sup>56</sup>: there is the day-to-day of dramatic action and the background events that shape the overall contours of the plot. Where Greg is less convincing is in saying that because of the timeframe,

the invasion preparations must have begun immediately after France and Cordelia left Lear at the end of the opening scene.<sup>57</sup> Even though the action of the invasion does not take place until the fourth act, various Dukes receive letters alerting them to the news in the third.<sup>58</sup> Greg concludes that “there can be no doubt, therefore, that the French army had actually landed before Lear had any quarrel with his [elder] daughters.”<sup>59</sup> To account for this, and Cordelia’s speech on her motives, Greg concocts a complicated narrative where France fell out with Lear in an unscripted meeting, planned the invasion to avenge this wrong and the loss of Cordelia’s portion, and then, learning of the ill treatment of Lear by her sisters, Cordelia is able to effect the invasion with “a change in its purpose,”<sup>60</sup> which is then used to explain why France returns home, leaving Cordelia as the head of the invasion force.<sup>61</sup> Yet if we follow Greg’s own indication of the parallel time scales, and Muir’s suggestion of a deliberate ambiguity, no such problems arise. Cordelia, in truth, remains a much more sympathetic character if the more literal interpretation is followed. Indeed, in the reconciliation scene Lear asks Cordelia, “Am I in France?,” to which she replies, “In your own kingdom, Sir,” showing respect and indicating that the kingdom is preserved, rather than incorporated.<sup>62</sup>

The Folio seems more carefully considered, as Shakespeare largely strips out the conflict between France and Britain in order to emphasize the civil dissent. There may have been important reasons for this; at the time of writing and presentation, the idea of a French invasion, even if defeated, was politically very suspect. Internal strife would have resonated much more effectively with his audience, and indeed it was at the core of his history plays. There are some quite substantive changes. In Act IV, an entire scene from the Quarto is missing from the Folio version.<sup>63</sup> In Act V, scene ii, the Quarto’s stage direction is for the “powers of France” to enter, which becomes “drum and colours . . . and soldiers” in the Folio, and most of the references to France noted above are lost. In one key scene Kent informs on what is happening, but gives radically different speeches in the two versions. In the Quarto he suggests,

... There is division,  
 Although as yet the face of it is cover’d  
 With mutual cunning, ’twixt Albany and Cornwall;  
 But, true it is, from France there comes a power  
 Into this scatter’d kingdom; who already,

Wise in our negligence, have secret feet  
 In some of our best ports and are to point  
 To show their open banner.

Yet in the Folio, he declares,

. . . There is division,  
 (Although as yet the face of it is cover'd  
 With mutual cunning) 'twixt Albany and Cornwall;  
 Who have—as who have not, that their great Stars  
 Thron'd and set high?—Servants, who seem no less,  
 Which are to France the Spies and Speculations  
 Intelligent of our state . . .<sup>64</sup>

These give quite opposite stories. The first is a report of an invasion from France; the second is a report of civil dissension, of which France is aware.<sup>65</sup> Muir speaks for the older textual position when he says in general terms that “the modern editor will, of course, restore these omitted lines, whether his text is based mainly on the Quarto or on the Folio.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, he does just that here in his edition, gluing the two different speeches together as if they are part of a whole. Although Gary Taylor is overstating the case in claiming that “the Quarto and Folio treat the nationality of Cordelia’s army in consistently different ways,” he is on stronger ground when he suggests that “any conflation of the two [texts] produces incoherence.”<sup>67</sup>

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The story of Lear also appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *The History of the Kings of Britain*,<sup>68</sup> but there the King simply says his intent is to divide the kingdom.<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare used a range of other sources in the composition of his own version.<sup>70</sup> In 1565, two politicians in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, published a play entitled *Gorboduc*, or, *Ferrex and Porrex*.<sup>71</sup> It had first been performed three years earlier, perhaps to an audience including the Queen. Norton apparently wrote the first three acts; Sackville the last two. It has been described as “the work that initiates English tragedy,”<sup>72</sup> and it has been suggested that “half a century later . . . Shakespeare rewrites *Gorboduc* and calls it *King Lear*.”<sup>73</sup> The stories certainly have some similarity. The King abdicates and divides his kingdom between two sons, Ferrex and Porrex. Porrex kills

Ferrex and takes the kingdom but is killed by his mother, Queen Videna, in revenge. Then the people murder the king and queen in rebellion. The nobles put down the rebellion, but there is no legitimate heir and the Duke of Albany seeks to control things himself.

Fergus, the mighty duke of Albany,  
Is now in arms and lodgeth in the field  
With twenty thousand men. Hither he bends  
His speedy march and minds to invade the crown.  
Daily he gathereth strength and spreads abroad  
That to his realm no certain heir remains,  
That Britain land is left without a guide,  
That he the sceptre seeks for nothing else  
But to preserve the people and the land,  
Which now remain as ship without a stern.<sup>74</sup>

The play ends with a sense of the disorder to come, with the plot synopsis declaring “the land for a long time almost desolate and miserably wasted.”<sup>75</sup> This too is a play about division of land, yet it is important to note that this was not an uncommon issue and that *Gorboduc* is based on the story of Gorbodugo in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Histories of the Kings of Britain*, rather than his account of Leir.<sup>76</sup> The influence is more in its import as a literary text, rather than its content.

In his evaluation of the competing virtues of *King Lear* and *Hamlet* as Shakespeare’s finest moment, R. A. Foakes suggested, “I suspect that for the immediate future *King Lear* will continue to be regarded as the central achievement of Shakespeare, if only because it speaks more largely than the other tragedies to the anxieties and problems of the modern world.”<sup>77</sup> Yet, like *Gorboduc*, it is also a text that comes from a particular context. The political resonances from Shakespeare’s own time are important: Queen Elizabeth had died in March 1603, succeeded by James VI of Scotland as England’s James I. *King Lear* has been dated to between March 1603 and 1606.<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth’s reign had been characterized by familial relations, among them her role as mother to the people.<sup>79</sup> Dodd has convincingly argued that the opening line of the play—“I thought that the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall”—shows the “personalized politics of Elizabethan absolutism,” as does the “love test” moments later.<sup>80</sup> James saw himself as father of the kingdom but was equally concerned with

the unification of England and Scotland: Lear functions as both his parallel and his contrast.<sup>81</sup> Martin Orkin has suggested that some of the passages cut from the Folio version were a result of censorship of passages that too closely paralleled issues at the court of James, particularly the exchange between the Fool and Lear on the giving away of land and titles, especially given the reference a moment later to “monopoly.”<sup>82</sup> Orkin equally suggests that the challenge against enclosures and the dispossession from the land this occasioned also frames the context, with the disinherited Edgar, in the guise of Poor Tom, as the key figure representing the landless in the play.<sup>83</sup>

## EARTH

In closing this essay I want to make a few comments about the use of the word “earth.” Apart from Gloucester’s throwaway exclamation of “Heaven and earth!” when deceived by Edmund concerning Edgar (which only appears in the Quarto),<sup>84</sup> the first instance of the word in the play appears when Lear threatens Goneril and Regan early in their betrayal:

No, you unnatural hags,  
I will have such revenge on you both  
That all the world shall—I will do such things,  
What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be  
the terrors of the earth . . .<sup>85</sup>

It then appears four more times at important moments. First, the Gentleman describes Lear’s descent into madness in elemental terms:

Contending with the fretful element:  
Bids the winds blow the earth into the sea,  
Or swell the curled water ’bove the main,  
That things might change or cease . . .<sup>86</sup>

The second use of the word also relates to Lear’s madness, when Edgar as Poor Tom describes how “the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet . . . hurts the poor creature of earth,”<sup>87</sup> thus tying himself to this element in opposition to the demons taunting him. But it is the third and fourth that are perhaps the most interesting. They both concern Cordelia. She first declares her own good intentions, speaking of her search for Lear and his redemption, and

calling for “All blest secrets, / All you unpublish’d virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears!”<sup>88</sup> Her antidote to Lear’s madness, provoked by the “terrors of the earth” he had wished on her sisters, is her love, proven and redeemed at the end of the play. But it has a tragic ending: Cordelia dies, with Lear declaring that “she’s dead as earth.”<sup>89</sup> Earth, then, is a more figurative term in *King Lear* than the concreteness of land politics.

## CONCLUSION

Much more could of course be said of *King Lear*, one of Shakespeare’s most geographically interesting plays.<sup>90</sup> As Henry S. Turner has suggested, despite the lack of explicit references to the staging, “the sheer scope of its action, with its wanderings, displacements, and geopolitical subplot, ensures that the stage’s spatial potential remains fully felt throughout.”<sup>91</sup> Frederick Flahiff additionally suggests that “a genealogical table is a kind of map which locates its subject in time rather than space,”<sup>92</sup> which, given the importance of lineage and inheritance, underlines the cartography of the play. The economy of words generally, and concerning space and geography specifically, is an important element of Shakespeare’s work. The word “earth” appears only in these five or six instances; “land” appears limited times in the three (Quarto) or two (Folio) closely linked senses; “territory” appears but once, and only in the Folio. It seems significant that the word “territory” is not frequently found in Shakespeare’s plays, even as late as the early seventeenth century. The word remained uncommon: it does not appear, for example, in the King James Bible, itself based on the earlier work of William Tyndale. We forget the comparatively recent intrusion of the word into our conceptual vocabulary, thinking that the word and the concept can be found throughout history.<sup>93</sup> Yet *territorium* is a very rare word in classical Latin and until the late Middle Ages did not have the sense we might think that it carries. As Leider notes, it may well be that the use of “territory” and other nouns in the opening speeches suggests a majesty of foreign influence later replaced by words of “native origin.”<sup>94</sup> In distinction, “land” and “earth” can both be traced to Anglo-Saxon roots and feature strongly in the text of another classic work of English literature, *Beowulf*.<sup>95</sup>

Several things in terms of Shakespeare's understanding of territory can nonetheless be gleaned from this instance of the word and the wider spatial and land politics of the play. Territory implies a range of political issues: it is controlled, fought over, distributed, divided, gifted, and bought and sold. It is economically important, strategically crucial, and legally significant. King Lear divides Britain into three, just as King James was trying to unite it. The theme of struggle over land runs throughout both the main and subplots, and the play has been read as a collapse of the feudal social order, and the birth of private property.<sup>96</sup> Yet it is perhaps more compelling to see the play as actually showing a collapse, or a fall back into feudalism, where a unified state fragments into feuding aristocracy, absolutism into fractured power.<sup>97</sup> Hobbes would explore such themes only a few decades later. Perhaps this is what was meant when Lear threatens Goneril and Regan with "the terrors of the earth."<sup>98</sup>

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1. For a sampling, see Jonathan Dollimore & Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); and David Armitage, Conal Condren, & Andrew Fitzmaurice, eds., *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
  2. For a reading of some of these, see Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
  3. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Politics: A Contextual Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2009), 58; see also Stuart Elden, "The Political Bodies of *Coriolanus*", in Jenny Edkins and Adrian Kear eds., *International Politics and Performance: Critical Aesthetics and Creative Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013).
  4. For political readings of *Measure for Measure*, see Leonard Tennenhouse, "Representing Power: *Measure for Measure* in its Time," in *The Powers of Forms in the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Norman OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 139–56; Kiernan Ryan, "Measure for Measure: Marxism before Marx," in *Marxist Shakespeares*, eds. Jean E. Howard & Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2001), 227–44; Conal Condren, "Unfolding 'the Properties of Government': The Case of *Measure for Measure* and the History of Political Thought," in Armitage, Condren, & Fitzmaurice, *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, *supra* note 1, at 157–75.
  5. On geography and Shakespeare generally, see John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Walter Cohen, "The Undiscovered Country: Shakespeare and Mercantile Geography," in *Marxist Shakespeares*, *supra* note 4, at 128–58; Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Dan Brayton, "Angling in the Lake of Darkness: Possession, Dispossession, and the Politics of Discovery in *King Lear*," 70.2 *English Literary History* 399–426 (2003); and François Laroque, "Shakespeare's Imaginary Geography," in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe*, eds. Andrew Hadfield & Paul Hammond (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2005), 193–219.

6. Jean Howard, "Shakespeare, Geography, and the Work of Genre on the Early Modern Stage", 64-3 *Modern Language Quarterly* 299 (2003).
7. Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare-Lexicon: A Complete Dictionary of all the English Words, Phrases and Constructions in the Works of the Poet*, 3rd ed., rev. by Gregor Sarrazin (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1902), II:1193. For a general discussion, see Alfred Hart, "Vocabularies of Shakespeare's Plays," 19-74 *The Review of English Studies* 128-40 (1943).
8. *Richard II*, Act I, scene iii. For all works by Shakespeare other than *King Lear*, I have used *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).
9. *Henry VI, Part II*, Act III, scene ii; *As You Like It*, Act III, scene i; and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act III, scene i.
10. *Henry VI, Part I*, Act V, scene iv.
11. *King John*, Act I, scene I; Act V, scene ii; *Coriolanus*, Act IV, scene v; Act IV, scene vi; Act IV, vi; *Henry VI, Part I*, Act V, scene v.
12. *Henry VI, Part II*, Act III, scene i.
13. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i, William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Routledge, 1972). All citations to *King Lear* are to this edition, unless otherwise noted.
14. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
15. See Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Gary Taylor & Michael Warren, eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of "King Lear"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Mark Jay Mirsky, *The Absent Shakespeare* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), Chs. 2 & 3; and R. A. Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Poetics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Chs. 4 & 7. For a critique, see Sidney Thomas, "The Integrity of *King Lear*," 90-3 *The Modern Language Review* 572-84 (1995). *The Norton Shakespeare* provides parallel texts, along with a "conflated" version.
16. I have used the parallel text in *The Complete King Lear 1608-1623*, ed. Michael Warren (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), but have modernized the spelling.
17. On this generally, see Frederick T. Flahiff, "Lear's Map," *Cahiers Élisabéthain: Études sur la pré-renaissance et la renaissance anglaises*, No. 30, 17-33 (1986); Terence Hawkes, "Lear's Maps," in *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), Ch. 6; Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, *supra* note 5, at Ch. 2, and his "The Scene of Cartography in *King Lear*," in *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Andrew Gordon & Bernhard Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109-37; Philip Armstrong, "Spheres of Influence: Cartography and the Gaze in Shakespearean Tragedy and History," 23 *Shakespeare Studies* 39-70 (1997); and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., *The Drama of Landscape* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), Ch. 3.
18. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i. A variant noted by Muir substitutes "spacious" for "precious."
19. Henry S. Turner, "*King Lear* Without: The Heath," *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997), 158.
20. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i. The phrases "with champains rich'd, / With plenteous rivers and" are not in the Quarto.
21. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i. These lines are not in the Quarto.
22. Turner, "*King Lear* Without," *supra* note 19, at 178. See Edward Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
23. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
24. Harry V. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics: *King Lear*, Act I, Scene I," in *Shakespeare's Politics*, eds. Allan Bloom & Harry V. Jaffa (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 113.
25. Gillies, "The Scene of Cartography," *supra* note 17, at 116.



26. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics," *supra* note 24, at 127.
27. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
28. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i. Emily W. Leider, in "Plainness of Style in *King Lear*," 21.1 *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45–53 (1970), suggests that "space, validity, and pleasure" is, like "rule, / Interest of territory, cares of state", a grouping of "three abstractions," which she interprets as related to the "three requests . . . responses . . . bequests, a triple division of land" (46).
29. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
30. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics," *supra* note 24, at 122. There is a similar division into three proposed by the forces aligned against the King in *Henry IV*, Part I, Act III, scene i. For a reading of this, see Sullivan, *The Drama of Landscape*, *supra* note 17, Ch. 3.
31. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics," *supra* note 24, at 123–24.
32. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
33. William Dodd, "Impossible Worlds: What Happens in *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1?," 50.4 *Shakespeare Quarterly* 477–507, 504 (1999). In note 105, he underlines that the Quarto has "reuerse thy doome" instead, which he suggests is more appropriate in this context. That line is repeated in the Quarto some fifteen lines later, whereas the Folio has "revoke thy gift."
34. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
35. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
36. *King Lear*, Act I, scene i.
37. Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Tragedy and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 5, see generally 3–7.
38. Martin Orkin, *Shakespeare Against Apartheid* (Craighall: Ad. Donker, 1987), Ch. 4; Nicholas Visser, "Shakespeare and Hanekom, *King Lear* and Land," 11.1 *Textual Practice* 25–37 (1997).
39. Visser, "Shakespeare and Hanekom," *supra* note 38, at 29.
40. Flahiff, "Lear's Map," *supra* note 17, at 21, suggests that the very name Gloucester, deriving from the Saxon, meant "to cut or separate—division." Flahiff's source is Samuel D. Rudder, *A New History of Gloucestershire* (Cirencester: Samuel Rudder, 1779), 19, but this makes it clear that "Gloucester" means "a handsome city," and it is "shire" that is a division. On "Gloucester," see pp. 82–83. It has equally been suggested that the names Ed-gar and Ed-mund point to God and the world, respectively. See Zdravko Plannic, "' . . . this scattered kingdom': A Study of *King Lear*," 29.2 *Interpretation* 173 (2001–2002).
41. *King Lear*, Act I, scene ii. This reading is indebted to Visser, "Shakespeare and Hanekom," *supra* note 38, at 29–30.
42. *King Lear*, Act II, scene i.
43. *King Lear*, Act II, scene i.
44. It is worth noting that "space" appears only four times in the play: once each by Goneril and Lear in the opening scene in passages quoted above; and once each from the mouths of Edgar (Act IV, scene vi) and Edmund (Act V, scene iii). On Lear and Gloucester's failures to read their relations, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Ch. 5.
45. *King Lear*, Act I, scene iv.
46. Paul W. Kahn, *Law and Love: The Trials of King Lear* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 35.
47. *King Lear*, Act I, scene iv.
48. *King Lear*, Act I, scene iv.
49. *King Lear*, Act IV, scene ii. Muir's note is that "noiseless" means that the drum has not yet sounded, as the previous line "Where's thy drum?" suggests, war has not been engaged.
50. *King Lear*, Act V, scene i.
51. *King Lear*, Act III, scene vii. In Act III, scene iii, the Folio has "There is part of a power already footed" in place of the Quarto's "already landed." See Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear*,

- supra* note 15, at 106–7; Mirsky, *The Absent Shakespeare*, *supra* note 15, at 19–20; and above all Gary Taylor, “The War in ‘King Lear,’” in *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespearean Study and Production*, No. 33, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
52. These questions are posed by Kenneth Muir, “Introduction,” *supra* note 13, at xlvi.
  53. *King Lear*, Act IV, scene iv.
  54. Muir, “Introduction,” *supra* note 13, at xlvi.
  55. *Id.* at xxx.
  56. W. W. Greg, “Time, Place, and Politics in ‘King Lear,’” 35.4 *The Modern Language Review* 439–40 (1940).
  57. *Id.* at 441.
  58. *King Lear*, Act III, scene iii; scene v; scene vii.
  59. Greg, “Time, Place, and Politics in ‘King Lear,’” *supra* note 56, at 443 n.1.
  60. *Id.* at 444.
  61. *Id.* at 445.
  62. *King Lear*, Act IV, scene vii.
  63. The Quarto has no scene divisions, but it would come between scenes ii and iii of the Folio and appears as scene iii in most composite editions.
  64. *King Lear*, Act III, scene i.
  65. Taylor, “The War in ‘King Lear,’” *supra* note 51, at 32.
  66. Muir, “Introduction,” *supra* note 13, at xiv.
  67. Taylor, “The War in ‘King Lear,’” *supra* note 51, at 31.
  68. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), II:11.
  69. On the links and differences between the two texts, see Mark Allen McDonald, *Shakespeare’s King Lear with The Tempest: The Discovery of Nature and the Recovery of Classical Natural Right* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2004), 221.
  70. There are several appendices to the Muir edition, for instance, providing relevant passages.
  71. Thomas Norton & Thomas Sackville, *Gorboduc*, or, *Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Irby B. Cauthen Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970 [1562]) [hereinafter, *Gorboduc*]. For a comprehensive sampling, see Russell A. Fraser & Norman Rabkin, eds., *Drama of the English Renaissance I: The Tudor Period and II: The Stuart Period* (New York: Macmillan, 1976).
  72. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, & David Miller (London: Verso, 1983), 43; see Irby B. Cauthen Jr., “Introduction,” in *Gorboduc*, *supra* note 71, at xiii.
  73. Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, *supra* note 72, at 50.
  74. *Gorboduc*, Act V, scene ii.
  75. *Gorboduc*, “The Argument of the Tragedy.”
  76. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, *supra* note 68, at II:xvi; see Cauthen, “Introduction,” *supra* note 72, at xiv.
  77. Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear*, *supra* note 15, at 224.
  78. Muir, “Introduction,” *supra* note 13, at xviii.
  79. Dodd, “Impossible Worlds,” *supra* note 33, at 481; see Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 2000), 24–26, 111, 160–61.
  80. Dodd, “Impossible Worlds,” *supra* note 33, at 482.
  81. Dodd, “Impossible Worlds,” *supra* note 33, at 484–86. This provides a detailed and extensively referenced discussion of the relations, similarities, and differences.
  82. Orkin, *Shakespeare Against Apartheid*, *supra* note 38, at 147. The passage, discussed above, is in *King Lear*, Act I, scene iii. On this generally, see Gary Taylor, “Monopolies, Show Trials,

- Disaster, and Invasion: *King Lear* and Censorship,” in *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of King Lear*, eds. Gary Taylor & Michael Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 75–119.
83. Orkin, *Shakespeare Against Apartheid*, *supra* note 38, at 165–66.
  84. *King Lear*, Act I, scene ii.
  85. *King Lear*, Act II, scene iv.
  86. *King Lear*, Act III, scene i.
  87. *King Lear*, Act III, scene iv.
  88. *King Lear*, Act IV, scene iv.
  89. *King Lear*, Act V, scene iii.
  90. Some other aspects, particularly concerning the spaces of Britain, are discussed in Plannic, “. . . this scattered kingdom,” *supra* note 40.
  91. Turner, “*King Lear* Without,” *supra* note 19, at 165.
  92. Flahiff, “Lear’s Map,” *supra* note 17, at 24.
  93. See Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
  94. Leider, “Plainness of Style,” *supra* note 28, at 46.
  95. See Stuart Elden, “Place Symbolism and Land Politics in *Beowulf*,” 16.4 *Cultural Geographies* 447–63 (2009).
  96. Paul Delany, “King Lear and the Decline of Feudalism,” 92.3 *PMLA* 429–40 (May 1977); Visser, “Shakespeare and Hanekom,” *supra* note 38.
  97. This is suggested by Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), Ch. 6; and see Dodd, “Impossible Worlds,” *supra* note 33.
  98. *King Lear*, Act II, scene iv.