

Introduction to the Playtext

The Chronicle History of King Leir

¹ Critics since the eighteenth century have generally been unimpressed with *The Chronicle History of King Leir* (1594?/1605). Often read against Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the anonymous *Leir* has frequently figured as trivial fluff when compared with the grand tragedy of Shakespeare's play. As a recent scholar sympathetic to *Leir* sums up this critical tradition, "*Leir* was called 'execrable' in the eighteenth century, 'mechanical' in the nineteenth, . . . 'flawed' in the twentieth, and 'pleasant' in the twenty first, always in comparison with Shakespeare's play" (Toppolo 165). There have, of course, been a few champions of the play. John Addington Symonds, for instance, found moments of "power" and "pathos" in *Leir* (293), and Tolstoy famously preferred *Leir* to *Lear* (63). Despite this occasional recognition of *Leir's* strengths, however, H.H. Furness seems to speak on behalf of the critical majority when arguing that *Leir* is "a good specimen of the third-rate class of comedies" (378). Even the play's editors – a group of readers likely to search for silver linings – have generally cast the play in an unfavorable light. Donald Michie, for instance, argues that the play's verse is "wooden and ponderous" (39), that the play seems overly talky, and that its dramatically interesting moments were clearly improved upon when Shakespeare re-wrote them. Sir Sidney Lee, editor of a 1909 edition, generally concurs with Michie: "Apart from its Shakespearian association," he claims, "the drama only deserves attention as a specimen of the humble average fare which commanded itself to the Elizabethan playgoer" (xix). *Leir*, then, has primarily engaged critical attention as a curiosity of literary history: it has seemed interesting only because it is the "clay out of which Shakespeare fashioned the most poignant of all his triumphs in tragic art" (Lee x).

While the play may warrant some of the negative evaluations it has borne over the last few centuries, such critical readings would have seemed strange to the play's earliest audiences; when *Leir* first appeared on stage, that is, it seems to have offered something more than the "humble average fare." As Lee himself points out, the play was dramatically quite elaborate compared with contemporary plays: it features a substantial props list, including a wide variety of specific costumes and changes, and it offered a relatively complicated soundscape (xiv). *Leir's* dramaturgy, then, if not its "wooden verse," was certainly quite sophisticated. We know, too, that the play was first acted by the historically important and popular Queen's Men (or by part of the Queen's Men) in tandem with Sussex's Men.¹ While the Queen's Men were gradually falling out of favor in London as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men gained in popularity there (i.e. as Shakespearean and Marlovian drama became *de rigueur* in the city), they remained influential in 1594, as they had been for the previous decade. Such evidence suggests that *Leir* was attractive to a successful company operating under the aegis of the kingdom's most powerful patron. The probable success of the play is perhaps most clear, however, in the box office take from the Rose on the two days that it was performed in 1594, on April 6 and April 8. According to the diary and account book of Philip Henslowe – a theatre entrepreneur who owned the theatre at which *Leir* was first staged – the play took 38s on its first day and 26s on its second (Henslowe 21). These sums are certainly not exorbitant, but they are considerably above average for a first and second performance at Henslowe's Rose Theater. We might also recognize the wide popularity of *Leir* – at least outside of London – from information provided by the title page of the 1605 edition of the play: according to the title page, the play had been "diuers and sundry times lately acted." While the Queen's Men probably never took the play to London again after 1594, the title page suggests that they continued to perform *Leir* throughout the next decade of their existence, a fact that implies its general success over a fairly long span of time. In light of such evidence, it seems doubtful that early modern audiences (or theatre professionals) thought that the play was, to quote Theobald, "execrable" (5.217).

The distinction between drama performed inside and outside London might provide one explanation for the generally negative critical response to *Leir*. Until recently, theatre historians have provided us with a London-centric story about the Queen's Men and their career: the company was successful until the early 1590s; by the middle of 1590s, they came to seem outmoded, and they were consequently compelled to leave the city and tour the provinces, performing their second-rate plays for unsophisticated rubes while sophisticated audiences attended fascinating and *avant garde* plays in the city (cf. Chambers *Elizabethan Stage* 3:184, and Pinciss 321). Such a story about the Queen's Men recognizes that they were, at their inception, an all-star company, composed of the best actors from other companies, including Leicester's Men and Sussex's Men. It also recognizes that they were the most important company in the city and at court throughout the 1580s. After the 1580s, however, we are expected to recognize that things went downhill for the Queen's Men, that they could no longer compete in London's burgeoning theatrical marketplace, and that they sold a variety of playtexts to the printers in order to remain afloat. Contrary to this often-told story, recent historians have pointed out that such a vision of the Queen's Men and their career misreads the position of the company in early modern England: this tale of the Queen's Men's dissipation erroneously presumes, for instance, that they aimed to be at the centre of London's theatrical world, that the theatrical world outside of London was an artistic wasteland, and that one can measure an early modern theatrical company's success only in relation to their reputation in London and at court. None of these assumptions stand up to scrutiny. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, for instance, have pointed out that the Queen's Men, while not thriving in London or at court after the 1580s, "were quite simply the best known and most widely travelled professional company in the kingdom . . . from the beginning of their career in 1583 to their final year, 1602-03" (67). More to the point, however, McMillin and MacLean emphasize that the Queen's Men, when travelling throughout the nation rather than competing in London, were simply fulfilling the goals for which they were initially constituted. The company was, in part, an agent of Elizabeth I's religious and political ideology, and it was formed under the auspices of the Queen, Sir Francis Walsingham, and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in order to spread this ideology throughout the nation. According to this version of the Queen's Men's biography, their tours throughout the nation into the seventeenth century are not a sign of failure, but a matter of their clearly defined goal. The plays they performed were suited to the world in which they performed: the company was expected to perform popular and entertaining plays that also espoused or endorsed ideas generally agreeable to the crown. Indeed, it was only by being popular and entertaining – something other than "execrable" – that the Queen's Men could fulfill at least some of the goals that inspired their formation.

Through this revised story of the Queen's Men, we might better understand *Leir*, and we might better recognize its strengths. Rather than reading *Leir* as a play that fails because it is different from Shakespeare's sublime tragedy, it seems more reasonable to read the play through the theatrical and professional traditions in which it originally operated. It makes sense, that is, to follow Grace Ioppolo here and to recognize the play's dramatic energy and vitality, even if the play fails to reach the philosophical or poetic heights of *Lear*. Though both plays stage the same historical matter, measuring *Leir* against *Lear* seems absurd when one considers the singularity of *Lear*, and it also seems historically inapposite when one considers the dramatic project in which the Queen's Men were engaged. While *Leir* is, perhaps, at times melodramatic, it is also dramatically effective, often quite funny, potentially moving, and filled with characters far more engaging than critics have tended to allow. When removing it from the shadow of *Lear* – a play that served vastly different theatrical ends – one can see such qualities clearly. More specifically, one is suddenly able to recognize that *Leir* is a play likely to be well received by a variety of audiences throughout the kingdom, audiences that probably saw it as solid entertainment with fairly orthodox and historically rich ideas about justice, faith, governance, and loyalty. By re-thinking *Leir* in terms of the Queen's Men, then, one is not necessarily compelled to follow Tolstoy and to argue that *Leir* is a better play than *Lear*, but one will be able to engage with *Leir* as something other than a bad version of the more famous play it influenced, thus

recognizing its real strengths by way of the tradition in which it was operating, one that was popular and often dramatically engaging.

⁵ Where earlier critics have found the play tedious in its moralism, theatrical experiments in 2006 in Toronto and Hamilton, Ontario, have allowed us to see the play differently. Rather than reading the play and finding its poetic or philosophical limits, these performances of the play by The Shakespeare and the Queen's Men Project² allowed audiences, scholars, and critics to experience the play on its feet and to witness its real dramatic strengths which might be lost on the page. Surprisingly effective, for instance, was *Leir's* still-accessible broad comedy, a comical aspect that richly complemented the otherwise wearisome didactic moralism that characterizes much of the play's dialogue. As Robert Cushman, a reviewer for *The National Post*, pointed out, the play's highpoint was its comedy (xxxCITE), a fact most likely lost to readers who had access only to the playtext, where theatrical comedy is often lost. Such an observation seems to correspond and expand upon one of Ioppolo's observations about Mumford: she points to the kneeling scene and emphasizes that his snide, funny asides trouble the scene's overdone rhetoric of familial love and obligation. What recent audiences recognized throughout *Leir* was analogous to what Ioppolo finds in this single scene: throughout the play, when staged with good clowns, is a certain comic energy that usefully punctuates the moralistic seriousness that critics have found so troubling, even if it refuses to undermine the seriousness entirely. As performance-minded critics have often pointed out, this sense of light, good-natured ironization is typical of the Queen's Men's dramatic practice (Ostovich, Syme, and Griffin 16-23), and it helps us to recognize a certain vitality in a play that audiences experience, but readers miss.

This theatrical experience of *Leir's* broad comedy also helps us to recognize a richness of character that critics often overlook or ignore. Taking the case of Cordella as exemplary, the play's staging opened up her character, emphasizing a complexity that often disappears in merely reading her potentially tedious claims about virtue and devotion. For instance, after she is disowned and set adrift from her family with nothing but the clothes on her back, Cordella complains about her "father Leir" who "wrongs" his child (TLN=607); she immediately retracts her laments, however, to insist that such suffering "is the pleasure of my God" and that she "willingly embrace[s] the rod" (TLN=610-11). Taking this speech as an example of her character, we may figure Cordella as a token of piety within a ham-handedly righteous play, but on stage she seems more complicated than this example from the text suggests. Specifically, Cordella participates in the play's broad comedy and in its occasionally witty dialogue, as we see in her asides during the love test scene. Here, Cordella seems attractively wry rather than sanctimonious. After Gonerill's declaration of love, Leir declares, rather pathetically, "Oh, how thy words revive my dying soul!" (TLN=253); Cordella mockingly and parodically replies, "Oh, how I do abhor this flattery!" (TLN=254). This declarative aside seems, in the playtext that one might read, like bald self-characterization, but when put on a stage, Cordella's repetition of Leir's language transforms her line into a charmingly understated jab at her misguided father or her callow sisters. The same effect characterizes Cordella's next aside, when Leir responds to Ragan's overwrought profession of love with a grating poeticism. "Did never Philomel sing so sweet a note?" (TLN=273), Leir asks, and Cordella replies aside, "Did never flatterer tell so false a tale?" (TLN=274). When Shakespeare's Cordelia delivers similar asides during the love-test in *Lear*, we find in them nothing so engaging: "What shall Cordelia do?" Cordelia asks aside after Goneril declares her love for Lear, "Love, and be silent" (1.1.55); similarly, after Ragan makes a love declaration, she takes solace in the fact that she is "sure my love's / More richer than my tongue" (1.1.71-72). Such platitudes are, of course, not what we find in *Leir*, a play whose Cordella is far wittier than previous critics seem willing to recognize. Such quick and sharp asides remind us, that is, that there is something more to Cordella's character than simple piety, a complexity we see again later in the play when she exchanges bawdy quips with Gallia and Mumford about Mumford's mistresses. Perhaps she remains somewhat "flat" as Michie suggests, but she is

certainly not wholly one-dimensional, and she is certainly more than a mere cipher in which devotion and daughterly virtue are embodied.

Of course, *Leir* is not straightforwardly comic, even if its comic elements contribute to its dramatic success and if they provide a sense of characterological richness. When dealing with *Leir*, we deal with a play that also negotiates issues of mourning and loss as these forces affect decidedly humane figures. The play encourages us, for instance, to read Leir as a character whose self-indulgence during the love-test is a plausible response to the recent death of his wife. Leir's irrationality in the love-test scene is, in *Leir*, not a function of his "type," but is instead an effect of inter- and intrapersonal conflicts. We can recognize this richer version of Leir when he speaks the play's first lines, lines that immediately point up the emotional turmoil which will ramify throughout the kingdom over the course of the play. Pointedly, the play begins with the end of a funeral procession, and it opens too on a scene of a husband's mourning: "Thus to our grief, the obsequies performed / Of our – too late – deceased and dearest queen." From such an opening, the play announces that it is about a set of specific human relationships rather than being – simply – about morality, say, or about flat characterological types who teach lessons in a boringly didactic mode. Also compelling about Leir's opening speech is its poetry and its dramatic effect. With a syntax that stutters and turns, often leaving thoughts unfinished, it is a strong piece of dramatic poetry, one that reminds audiences of depth and dynamism while also playing up what Tolstoy calls Leir's "simple, natural, and deeply touching character" (63).³ Indeed, in light of such verse, it seems impossible to find the play's characters uniformly or unambiguously flat, a judgment common in the critical tradition. Instead of being merely "flat," these characters are, in a certain sense, "deep" or "rich" in their individuation: they are subject to time and to biography, they respond to and change with their worlds. Ioppolo makes a similar point where she describes the opening speech as "unusually sensitive" in its concern "for gender difference and the construction of family life" (172); here, she is right to recognize the power of Leir's speech here, its sense of properly humane concern, and its significance with respect to the play as a whole.

Beyond the characterologically compelling aspects of the play, *Leir* also engages with theological matters that would have seemed topical and engaging in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Among critics who point to this theological topicality, James Jones argues that the play seems decidedly Puritan when its characters declare their faith in providence and when they announce their abject submission to the authority of an overwhelming, divine force. Characters such as Cordella, Leir, and Perillus, that is, often point out that God ordains their fates, and audiences regularly witness God's implausible interventions, as when he appears in the form of thunder, for instance, in order to protect the virtuous. While historically and theologically problematic to identify such ideas as specifically Puritan – they seem broadly Protestant rather than specifically Puritan – James is right to emphasize that the play explicitly and conspicuously engages historically fraught questions about the relationship between human lives and divine law, and that the answers it gives to these questions – answers that would match what an audience heard from the pulpit – might be characterized as Protestant. Indeed, such a generally Protestant point of view suits the idea of the Queen's Men that McMillin and MacLean suggest when they argue that the Queen's Men were their patron's *de facto* theatrical ambassadors, and it also corresponds with the arguments made by Stephen Lynch, who finds in the play a broadly "Christian" sense of providential retribution, one that recognizes a divine presence in the political and social world. For Lynch, Leir suffers "only a momentary lapse from virtue" before he quickly repents and is rewarded for his return to spiritual sense (165). Such a vision of the religiously endorsed political world would no doubt suit the queen, and it would also be meaningful to the play's audience's: as Lynch compellingly points out, *Leir* ends not with a scene of enthronement, but with a scene of spiritual correction, one with which every member of the audience might identify.

While the play might be spiritually edifying, *Leir* also treats monarchical politics and just rulership as central thematic concerns. In this engagement with discussions of regal rule and court life – its concerns

with succession, say, or with the threat of flatterers – the play participates in a long tradition of humanistic drama, a tradition that attempted to edify not only a general audience, but also a "princely," or at least a politically powerful, audience. Considering that *Leir* was written under the aegis of the monarch, and that it was written with a plausible expectation of performance before the queen, this humanistic aspect of the play has gone surprisingly unglossed in the critical tradition. While critics such as Iopollo have pointed out that *Leir* deals with questions of succession at a historical moment when such questions were politically volatile (171), it seems important to recognize that such questions and such topicality are also central to a well established tradition of humanist drama that informs many of the play's intellectual problematics. An early example of this tradition in England can be found in the Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc*, potentially the first "modern" English tragedy, performed for Elizabeth in 1562. Like *Leir*, *Gorboduc* treats large political questions about succession and the integrity of kingdom, and also like *Leir* it warns princes about "false-flattery" – a topic that the genre often engages. The theatrical focus on such topics ultimately grows from a long tradition of political advice literature that circulated at the universities, including most significantly Erasmus' 1516 *Institutio principis Christiani*, or *The Education of a Christian Prince*. It is within this long tradition of advice to princes and the powerful that we might read *Leir*, and that we might make sense of Skalliger's short soliloquy in which he identifies himself as a "villain that, to curry favor, / Have given the daughter counsel 'gainst the father. / But us the world this experience give / That he that cannot flatter cannot live" (TLN813-816). Locating *Leir* in this tradition might also explain the long laments Perillus offers about court life, or the conspicuous interjections about flattery that Cordella offers during the love-test scene, or the reappearance of the word "flattery" and its cognates sixteen times. Similarly, we might recognize that the engagement with these issues is a sign of its generic obligations and didactic ends which compel the play's dialogue in certain, perhaps boring, wooden, or baffling directions. By reiterating these traditional *topoi* in admittedly hackneyed ways, *Leir*'s generic participation in a long tradition might help to explain the critical concerns with its tepid didacticism.

¹⁰ If *Leir* is something more than a straightforwardly facile romance, the play is also clearly structured as a romance, and stages a variety of decidedly romantic conventions as well. At the end of *Leir* we find that the world is put right, that evil has been eliminated from the world or the kingdom, and that the rightful king has returned home: typical of romance, then, "banishment, exile, and separation are followed by reunion, restoration, and the avenging of all wrongs" (Michie 35). Such a conclusion is fitting to a play in which audiences find characteristically romantic moments, as when the virtuous Cordella accidentally stumbles across a disguised and equally regal lover, or when a long lost king might be discovered and rescued, at the verge of starvation, by his disguised, estranged, and overwhelmingly virtuous daughter. While the complete implausibility of such scenarios might be troubling to modern audiences more sympathetic to the values of realism in their plots, this romantic conventionality seems fairly sophisticated where it corresponds with the play's theological and ideological program, the sort of program that Lynch and Jones discuss. In this sense, the play's moments of "simple" or even "simplistic" romantic pleasure – where its disguised figures stumble across one another at the crucial moment, say – support, and are intellectually supported by, the historically specific providential logics that the play wrestles with in theological terms. If we find a romance here, we find not only a facile and trivial romance, but also a romance that embodies a set of explicitly conceived philosophical coordinates. This is the sort of world in which a reigning queen might find herself happily ensconced, the sort of world in which audiences know that monarchs are monarchs not only in this situation is dramatically enjoyable, but also because God has intervened to put each monarch on his or her throne.

That the play ends happily – in a romantic mode – might also be a function of its historiographical integrity rather than a function of its generic and theological investments. Against the *Leir* story that the play's writer or writers inherited – a history discussed more thoroughly below – the plot of *Leir* is an embellished (and felicitously foreshortened) version of what passed as the truth at the end of the

sixteenth century. According to the historiographers and poets whose texts have been included with this edition – Holinshed, Spenser, Grafton, Higgins, and Warner– the story that *Leir* stages is fairly accurate, even if it has been fleshed out with conventional romance matter. At the end of the inherited Leir story, Leir reclaims the throne from his usurpers. The record suggests that his daughters may have been given the kingdoms that they reigned, or they may have overtaken the king who planned to pass them on at his death, but in all versions prior to Shakespeare's, Leir happily reclaims his throne with the help of Cordella and her Gallian or French husband.⁴ It is only after the play's conclusion that the historical record disagrees in considerable ways with the story that *Leir* offers. As one finds in accounts of Higgins, say, or Spenser, or Holinshed, Leir returns to the throne for three years before his death, after which time Cordella takes control of the kingdom. The ideal romantic ending is ultimately scuttled by historical records, however, when Cordella subsequently commits suicide after her nephews (Cundah and Morgan, according to Spenser) lay claim to the territory that their parents – Gonorill, Ragan, Cornwall and Albany (or Cambria, depending on the writer) – had ruled during the interruption of Leir's reign. Such an intervention may seem ideologically convenient – it serves to support the play's conspicuously thematized theological arguments, say – but it seems also like the sort of intervention that one might reasonably make when attempting to stage a compelling play, one that operates as a coherent narrative with a clear beginning, crisis, and end. In this sense, *Leir* is best read, as McMillin and MacLean suggest, as "the sort of entertainment English people could be drawn to see in crowds without abjuring the combination of God, queen, Protestant church, and nation which the government depended on" (166). The play might make a fairly strong claim to historical accuracy – at least considering the requirements of the theatre and according to the tradition that it inherited – but historical truth seems to be a secondary consideration.

When engaging with the history of the Leir story in England, it's necessary to start with Geoffrey of Monmouth's 1135 *Historia Regum Britannia* which contains the earliest extant version of the story of Leir and his three daughters. As Wilfrid Perrett's still seminal 1904 study of the Leir story argues, it was Geoffrey's version of the story that spawned all subsequent English versions. Even though Geoffrey serves as the earliest extant source, however, it is doubtful that one could ever pin down the ultimate source of the Leir, even if Geoffrey's missing chronicles came to light. As Perrett and other scholars have clearly shown, the "history" of Leir bears a surprising similarity various folktales, suggesting that even the original version of the story is founded on a tale somewhat less than historically precise. As Lee points out, "the fable of an aged father who divides his property among his three daughters in reward for their profession of love, and then suffers a cruel disillusionment from a misinterpretation of their assurances, is a folk-story of great antiquity and wide distribution" (xxiii).⁵ Working more systematically to parse the ambiguous folktale origins of the Leir story, Alan R. Young has used the Aarne-Thompson classification system to identify folktales 510A and 923 as the potential folk source of Geoffrey's history: the first is the Cinderella story, where a princess is persecuted by female family members, and the second is the Leir story at its most general, where a father misunderstands his daughter's declaration of love. More provocatively, Young suggests that *Leir* was more closely related to this folk tradition than critics have previously recognized. Young points out that Gallia's courtship of Cordella in *Leir* is undertaken while Gallia is disguised; from this observation, he points out that disguised courtship is absent from any historical records of the Leir story, and that it is central to folktale type 510. From this evidence, he suggests that the roots of *Leir* are closely bound to a folk tradition as well as to literary and historiographical versions of the story. Though provocative and potentially accurate, the argument seems beyond provability, primarily because there are more likely sources for the disguised courtship plot that Young points out. Indeed, one could simply look to the early modern English theatre and find the popular disguised-duke tradition in which a ruler often determines the virtue of a future bride while in disguise, though *Leir* seems to antedate the heyday of this tradition by several years.⁶ Regardless, Young is correct to suggest folktales 510 and 923 are

analogues for the story in *Leir*, and that they might have served as seeds for the story that would become the play.

While *Leiris* somehow related to an amorphous folktale tradition that is difficult to parse and excavate, the play's roots in early modern historiography and literature are far clearer. As Perrett's exhaustive study proves, the *Leir* story had been written and rewritten at least fifty times between Geoffrey's *Historia* and *Leir*, and it had been written at least eight times in the three decades before 1594 when *Leir* was first staged. Despite this enormous field of historical scholarship from which *Leir* might be drawn, however, critics agree that the play is most clearly indebted to three specific sources: Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, William Warner's *Albion's England*, and John Higgins' 1587 edition of *The Mirror for Magistrates*. (Relevant excerpts of these texts are included here: xxxLINK.) To determine this literary-historical indebtedness and provenance, critics have generally followed a straightforward method: they have outlined the general shape of the *Leir* story, they have found various exceptions to this story throughout the tradition, and they have found which singular aberrations *Leir* includes. If *Leir* includes a detail or plot point that is found in only a single text within the preceding history of writing on *Leir*, then that text is generally considered a source for the play. Such a method is imperfect because it suggests that the writer or writers of *Leir* could not have made the same innovation (or mistake) that a previous writer had also made. This method also ignores the possibility of a lost source that both *Leir* and the presumed source might have shared. Regardless of such potential methodological problems, the general conclusions that have been made by appeal to this method seem compelling. *The Faerie Queene*, for instance, is a likely source for *Leir* because Spenser's *Leir* is the first king in the tradition to abdicate peacefully as soon as the love-test is completed. In earlier versions of the story, because the love-test helps *Leir* determine how he will distribute his kingdom after his death, *The Faerie Queene* seems like a probable source for the play. From *Albion's England*, *Leir* seems to draw the idea that Gonorill and Regan, "sick of father's health," attempted to kill him. Earlier editions suggest that the sisters maintain their father's life after winning a battle during which they usurped his kingdom. Finally, it seems that the Higgins' 1574 edition of *Mirror for Magistrates* introduced to the story both the jealousy that the sisters feel when faced with Cordella's "virtue and grace" and the assistance offered to *Leir* by his former subjects when he returns from Gaul to re-claim his crown.

Though critics tend to agree that *The Faerie Queene*, *Albion's England*, and the 1587 *Mirror for Magistrates* were sources for *Leir*, Holinshed's influence on *Leir* has often been debated. It seems probable to us, however, that the *Chronicles* served as a source for the play. Considering the popularity of Holinshed's book and the relative prestige of his *Chronicles* in the early 1590s, it would be curious for anyone working on the *Leir* story to ignore Holinshed's history completely. Refusing to make a similar assumption based on the popularity and availability of the *Chronicles*, Michie follows Perrett, and he argues that "if the playwright used Holinshed at all he borrowed only the bare outline of the plot from that source" (19). Michie's argument here seems, perhaps, to rely on exceedingly stringent criteria: it assumes, first, that borrowing the plot is a small borrowing, and, second, that all of *Leir's* borrowing from Holinshed would be readily visible. If the playwright used Holinshed as a source, and if he only borrowed from Holinshed details that Holinshed shared with other writers of the *Leir* story, then the borrowing would be invisible, or at least impossible to trace. Indeed, as Lee points out, whenever the playwright is "at variance" with Geoffrey, he "echoes the notes of Holinshed or one of the three Elizabethan poets [Spenser, Warner, or Higgins]" (xxx-THIS IS THE ACTUAL PAGE CITE: it's page 30 in the intro). Such an observation reminds us that Holinshed could be reasonably considered as a source for *Leir*, especially when there are few conditions besides post-dating the play that would rule-out a source. More provocatively, Lee points out that *Leir* does, in fact, follow Holinshed on a detail unique to the *Chronicles*: in both *Leir* and the *Chronicles*, the "old dramatist adopts Holinshed's suggestion as far as Goneril is concerned, and bestows her hand in marriage on the King of Cornwall" rather than the king of Albany (xxx—THIS IS THE ACTUAL PAGE CITE). In light of this evidence, it

seems prudent to read the *Chronicles* as a source for *Leir*, and so Holinshed's version of the story is also appended to this edition for readers' reference.

¹⁵ Considering the large number of writers who dealt with the story of *Leir* in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, it is also quite possible that *Leir* is somehow drawn from sources that are invisible to modern readers, at least according to the methods that we have at our disposal for detecting influence. With this fairly catholic sense of possibility in mind, we have also included as appendices to this edition a variety of potential sources, even if there is no certain intratextual or extratextual evidence to support an argument for their inclusion. We have included, for instance, an excerpt from Robert Fabyan's *Chronicle* where Fabyan offers the *Leir* story. It seems reasonable to suggest that *Leir* might be influenced by Fabyan because Fabyan's chronicle was quite popular throughout the sixteenth century, reprinted in 1533, 1542, and 1559. Fabyan's popularity among early modern dramatists also encourages the assumption that his *Chronicle* was a source for *Leir*: the *Chronicle* was a likely source for Shakespeare (see Kastan in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* 169), and it was also a likely source for another Queen's Men's play, *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (see Oberer 173). Though critics have yet to demonstrate that Fabyan was a source for *Leir*, and though we are also unable to prove the point, we have included Fabyan's treatment of *Leir* as an appendix to this edition because such an assumption is plausible considering the intellectual-historical world in which the play was written. For the same reason, we have included here an excerpt from Grafton's *Chronicle* where he treats the story of *Leir*. Again, it seems impossible to demonstrate an immediate indebtedness, but Grafton was widely read in early modern England, and was widely read by dramatists, so his inclusion here seems prudent, even if a link between the two texts remains obscure.

Among the possible sources that we have chosen not to include as a potential source for *Leir* is a source that Samuel Johnson might have suggested, "The Ballad of King Lear and his Three Daughters." In his *Plays of Shakespeare* (1771), Johnson argues that the ballad probably antedated Shakespeare's play, and, thus, that it might have antedated *Leir* as well. According to Johnson, the "story of" *Lear*,

except the episode of Edmund, which is derived, I think, from Sidney, is taken originally from Geoffrey of Monmouth, whom Hollingshead generally copied; but perhaps immediately from an old historical ballad. . . . My reason for believing that the play was posterior to the ballad rather than the ballad to the play, is, that the ballad has nothing of Shakespeare's nocturnal tempest, which is too striking to have been omitted, and that it follows the chronicle; it has the rudiments of the play, but none of its amplifications: it first hinted Lear's madness, but did not array it in circumstances. The writer of the ballad added something to the history, which is a proof that he would have added more, if more had occurred to his mind, and more must have occurred if he had seen Shakespeare. (5:107)

Johnson's speculations here are as beautifully impressionistic as they are untenable. The rationale behind his dating of the ballad is based on the heroically bardolatrous assumption that the ballad's writer, having seen Shakespeare's play, would simply be unable to write a ballad that refused to steal all of the play's best parts. If the ballad excludes all of the play's best parts, then it must antedate the play, or it must have been written by someone who had never heard of the play. This rationale also means that if Lear's madness was novel to the *Leir* tradition (which it wasn't), then Shakespeare must have borrowed from the ballad. While Johnson's argument is hardly rigorous, the possibility of the play's "posteriority" to *Lear*, and possibly to *Leir*, was debated into the 19th century, as Stanley Wells has pointed out in his edition of *Lear* (278). Such suggestions were ultimately dismissed by editors and critics later in the nineteenth century, including H.H. Furness and James Halliwell-Phillips, and they were convincingly put to rest by Perrett, who concludes that the ballad writer only saw Shakespeare's play performed before consulting with another text, possibly Holinshed or Warner (139). Perrett helpfully published the entire ballad in *The Story of King Lear* (129-34), which is available in its full text through Google Books (books.google.com).

internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Leir_Genintro/
index.html