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« Who is it that can tell me who I am? Lear's shadow » (1.4.221-22)¹
Shadow play in *King Lear*
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“What,” John Carey asks in his wonderful book on John Donne, “have angels, mummy, mandrakes, coins, maps and shadows in common, apart from the fact that they are among Donne’s favourite subjects?” The answer he feels is that they are “meeting places for opposites. The existence of each involves the proximity of two elements normally antipathetic, so its nature is simultaneously single and double.”² Though Donne’s fascination with shadows and indeed with their quality of being at one and the same time substantial and insubstantial, of being “nothing” and “not nothing,” is expressed in a number of poems with all his characteristic complexity, it seems to have been a fascination shared by other thinkers and writers at the time. This illustration³, executed a year or so before the first court performance of *King Lear*, reminds us of that *locus classicus* of shadow play: the Platonic allegory of the cavern where flickering shadows give the prisoners within, an illusory sense of reality. Several years earlier in 1591, a countryman of Saenredam’s, a certain Johan Van der Does, also known as Janus Dousa, the Younger, published a long discourse in Latin (dedicated to Justus Lipsius), on shadows – *In laudum umbrae declamatio* which concludes with a poem spoken by the shadow herself: *Prosopopoeia umbrae*.⁴ A proud and somewhat discontented figure (she was, she tells us, originally destined to be a rival divinity to the gods), she is both shade and shadow who boasts of her immense powers, of life and death but also of deception and illusion. Narcissus, among others, has loved her.

¹ All references are to the Arden edition, ed. R.A. Foakes, Walton-on-Thames, Thomas Nelson, 1997.

² John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*, London, Faber & Faber, 1981, p. 247.

³ Jan Pietersz Saenredam, after Cornelisz Van Haarlem, *Allegory of the Cave*, 1604 http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/Platon_Cave_Sanraedam_1604.jpg

⁴ *RERUM CAELESTIUM, Liber Primus. In Laudem Umbræ*, Lugduni Batavorum, 1591.

In England other writers apart from Donne, who was himself to pen “A Lecture upon the Shadow,” attest to a certain fascination with shadows and perhaps none more so than Shakespeare himself. As well as in the antithetical qualities Carey mentions, Shakespeare clearly delights in playing with the very rich polysemy of the word. Martin Spivack’s concordance records 134 references to shadows in the Shakespearean corpus.⁵ Amongst the definitions listed in the five dense pages which the OED devotes to the word are the following: “painting & drawing” (in use from 1486 onwards and for which Lyly had a particular fondness); “an image cast by a body intercepting light;” “a fleeting or ephemeral image;” “a reflected image;” “a delusive semblance or image;” “an unsubstantial object; a spectral form or phantom;” “one that constantly follows or shadows another” and of course, and Shakespeare plays endlessly on this, “shadow” as synonym for an actor in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.⁶ In one of the most extended and best-known examples of Shakespearean shadow-play, that most self-conscious histrion, Richard II, brilliantly plays upon the insubstantial substantiality of the shadows that beset him, in his witty exchange with Bolingbroke in the deposition scene. “How soon my sorrow hath destroy’d my face,” he laments, theatrically dashing the mirror to the ground. Unimpressed Bolingbroke counters: “The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy’d / The shadow of your face.” But the player-king deftly returns the quibble, extending the conceit still further:

Say that again.
 The shadow of my sorrow? ha! let’s see –
 ‘Tis very true, my grief lies all within,
 And these external manners of lament
 Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
 That swells with silence in the tortur’d soul.
 There lies the substance.
 (4.1.291-296)

No such sparring marks the dialogue of *King Lear* where the king’s self-proclaimed “shadow,” the Fool, undertakes to instruct a king whose grief will finally all but rob him of the power of speech. *King Lear*, it is a critical commonplace, is steeped in paradox. And it is the paradoxical or antipathetic nature of shadows as “meeting places for opposites,” which I propose to explore here. I shall be particularly concerned with the following meanings of the word shadow: the shadow as actor, as follower, as double, and with its curiously paradoxical ability to figure an insubstantial something. In exploring what I would like to call the Fool’s verbal art of limning I shall also refer to the use of the word ‘shadow’ as a synonym for drawing, for the limner was a painter, particularly a painter of portraits. His task was to shadow his subject’s likeness in as lively a manner as possible.⁷ Bearing in mind these senses of the word, I propose to examine two forms of shadow-play, organized respectively by the Fool and later, by Edgar. I shall argue that the grounds for a veritable *coincidentia oppositorum* are both shadowed and radically undermined in *King Lear*.

⁵ Martin Spivack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, Vol. VI, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970, pp. 2842-43.

⁶ OED, Vol. XV, prepared by J.A. Simpson & E.S.C. Weiner, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 127-32.

⁷ As Shakespeare himself notes in *Venus & Adonis* when he speaks of the Painter who “would surpass the life / In limning out a well-proportioned steed” (290).

The Fool's "Play" or Playing the Fool

Human life, says Stultitia, in Erasmus' great *Encomium*, is "naught els than a certaine great plaie of Folie."⁸ Standing at the threshold of the 16th century Folly herself was, as Walter Kaiser puts it, "to cast her shadow across the subsequent ages."⁹ At the threshold of the following century Shakespeare was to give that shadow her fullest dramatic incarnation in Lear's Fool, the Fool being of course one of his most striking additions to the old *Leir* stories. Axiomatic to Erasmus and to other subsequent visual and textual representations of Folly is man's profound ignorance of himself and his need for instruction at the hands of ... Folly. As Robert Klein observed nearly fifty years ago now in his important essay on the Fool:

L'image du fou, équivoque comme tant de grands symboles et de projections collectives, est en tout état de cause un instrument d'auto-compréhension. Tantôt elle soulève le rire, parce qu'elle présente une sorte de modèle réduit et inoffensive d'une anti-humanité exorcisée ; tantôt elle invite à la méditation socratique et s'offre aux plus lucides comme un miroir de leur vraie nature. Dans les deux cas – et dans d'autres, intermédiaires – cette figure de l'*indignitas hominis*, obsédantes pour les contemporains exacts de ceux qui avaient fait de la *dignitas hominis* la pierre angulaire de leur philosophie, illustre et résume toute une anthropologie qui fut, à la Renaissance, extrêmement actuelle.¹⁰

It is to Lear's question, "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" that the Fool replies (at least in the Folio version), "Lear's shadow."¹¹ In Quarto, somewhat improbably, Lear himself gives the response, a point I'll return to a little further on. Lear's Fool is of course licensed several times over – as an actor, or shadow, he is a theatrical fool playing a court fool offering to shadow (follow and instruct) his monarch.¹² Lear's Fool was played by Robert Armin, a rather more "intellectual" Fool who had replaced the popular and versatile comedian Will Kempe in 1600. And the foolery or entertainment Lear's jester proffers is indeed of the Socratic kind – his task, clearly indicated in his effectively brief and somewhat gnomic reply – being to lead Lear to self-knowledge. The fact that he is a man without a name (unlike say Feste or Touchstone), that he is a man who calls himself a 'shadow', links him with the figure of Nobody (No Body) that Josée Nuyts-Giornal, following Gerta Calmann, has taught us so much about.¹³ Like the Nobody in the rich iconographic tradition developed in northern Europe and particularly in the Netherlands, the task of Lear's Fool is to hold, as it were, the mirror up to the King. Of course, and it is part of Shakespeare's genius, the last thing Lear is asking for at this point in the play is the answer to an existential question. He is testily calling attention to the fact that he is not being attended to with all the alacrity and respect befitting a king. The first

⁸ See William Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 94.

⁹ Kaiser, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁰ Robert Klein, *La Forme & l'Intelligible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970 (1963), p. 433.

¹¹ 1.4.221-22.

¹² He is one of the last of the "court fools" on the English stage in a play given before James I, a monarch whose own Court Fool, Archie Armstrong, was as it happens, the last official court jester in Europe (always excepting his employer scurrilously known as "the biggest fool in Christendom").

¹³ Josée Nuyts-Giornal, 'King Lear's Reflection in the Mirror of Nobody: An Iconographical Question' in *Cahiers Elisabéthains*, N°54, Montpellier, 1998, pp. 55-73. Gerta Calmann, "The Picture of Nobody" in *The Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*, vol. XXIII, London, 1960.

task of Lear's "shadow" is thus to show that very King how he has, as Shakespeare's Richard II would put it, "undone himself." In emptying his title of all substance, in wrenching the relationships that it imposed from their moorings he has become a mere shadow of his former self as his ungrateful daughters hasten to make clear. Thus begins one of Shakespeare's most powerful and elegant shadow-plays in which the paradoxes of "nothing" and "not nothing" are articulated in the bitter-sweet foolery of Lear's self-appointed tutor.

The Fool's seemingly quirky instruction is pieced together, much like his traditional motley, from snatches of folk wisdom, rhymes, riddles and song, a patchwork which belies the carefully crafted nature of the instruction he offers. Patterned on a question and answer model, each exchange is rounded off or interspersed with a song or rhyme whose deceptively off-hand air is curiously arresting. There can be no question here of retracing *in extensio* the wonderfully delicate and oblique indirections by which the Fool finds directions out. Responding to the letter rather than the spirit of Lear's question – "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" – the Fool's over-riding task is first to alert his erring master to the fact that in parcelling out his kingdom and dividing his crown, he has effectively changed places with the Fool. For now he is nothing or Nobody: "Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away" (1.4.155-156). He goes on to clinch matters with the mathematical conceit to which Shakespeare often returns and which so fascinated Renaissance minds: "Now thou art an O without a figure; I am better than thou art now. I am a fool, thou art nothing" (1.4.185-187). Compared to O or nought, the Fool becomes that insubstantial something – a shadow.

As the exchanges between the Fool and Lear proceed apace Lear's own mathematical illusions are gradually stripped from him and with them his illusory substance. Woefully oblivious to what Richard Halpern has called the "zero sum economy"¹⁴ he has instituted, Lear clings to the illusion that he has both given "all" (2.2.439) and yet retained the right to a hefty "remainder:" "The name, and all th'addition to a king" (1.1.137). When matters come to a head concerning the number of knights the daughters will allow him to retain, he rather comically haggles over the reductions imposed and is dumbfounded when Regan finally decrees: "What need one?" To which Lear replies: "O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous" (2.2.452-454). Neither he nor those beggars, of whom he is as yet so ignorant, may lay claim to that "superfluity." This will become one of the key elements of the knowledge Lear will acquire. The Fool's instruction in the art of the supplement, declined in a proverbial litany of "mores" or "lesses" – "Have more than thou showest, / Speak less than thou knowest [...]" (1.4.116-117), obliquely addresses Lear's illusory retention of "name" and "addition." The Fool's wisdom is woven around the various aspects and consequences of Lear's original act of folly and his hasty rejection of Cordelia's "Nothing:" "Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again" (1.1.90). The bitter-sweet foolery in which he engages the king will insistently turn upon the paradoxes of "nothing" and "not nothing" hidden in the classical maxim *ex nihil, nihil fit*.¹⁵ It is he who patiently draws (limns) the king's shrunken substance for him: the question as to why the snail has a house, the bawdy ditty about the codpiece prematurely

¹⁴ Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture & the Genealogy of Capital*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1991. See particularly pp. 251 sq.

¹⁵ See Howard Caygill, "Shakespeare's Monster of Nothing" in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John J. Joughin, London, Routledge, 2000. See also David Willbern, "Shakespeare's Nothing" in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn, Baltimore & London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, pp. 244-263.

“housing” itself, shadowing that “houseless poverty” of which Lear will eventually acknowledge he has “ta’en / Too little care.” Braving the storm with all his customary hyperbole Lear’s central insight – the essentially “unaccommodated” nature of (Every) man – prompts the desire to “show the heavens more just.” It is a significant moment for, for all its rhetorical bombast, it effectively reverses his earlier misprision as to that “hefty remainder” due to him: here he desires to “shake the superfluous” to the “poor naked wretches, whosoever (they) are / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm” (3.4.36; 35; 28-29).

“[...] [T]ake the fool with thee” the Fool cries to “nuncle Lear” following Goneril’s rejection of her father, adding a moment later: “If my cap would buy a halter / So the fool follows after” (1.4.309; 13-14). Like Kent, who also chooses to ignore “the way the wind sits,” Lear’s Fool faithfully shadows or follows his master into the storm where the erstwhile king will eventually be brought face to face with that emblematic figure of “unaccommodated” man: Poor Tom. Tom offers a stark counterpoint to Lear’s confident affirmation that “our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous.” The social reality of a life out on the margins of society is indeed “as cheap as beasts.” As the storm without and the storm within begin to engulf Lear, the Fool’s play draws near to an ending that has intrigued and puzzled. But not before the Fool has touchingly revealed *his* common humanity. His character develops from witty instructor, shadowing Lear’s “portrait” to include that of concerned “boy” shadowing or following his master into the storm, where his prosaic reference to “rain-water” (3.2.11) finely places the histrionic hyperbole of Lear’s exalted invocation to the winds to “blow” and “crack their cheeks.” His shadowy existence takes on an additional, more individual nature as he shivers in the storm. The fortunes of sweet and bitter fool seemingly coalesce in his haunting song about the wind and the rain (with only a minor alteration that sung by Feste in *Twelfth Night*):

He that has and a little tiny wit,
With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
Though the rain it raineth every day.
(3.2.74-77)

The king has amply shown himself to be of “tiny wit” and his wits are soon to desert him altogether as he slips temporarily into madness. As the storm rages the Fool who has chosen to accompany him and who is, as he has been at pains to point out, a fool in the eyes of the world, comes face to face with another “madman:” Edgar in the guise of Poor Tom. Together they obligingly play their roles as “most learned justicer” and “sapient sir” in the mock trial the crazed Lear stages. Before his much discussed exit from the play, the Fool poses a last conundrum: “Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?” (3.6.9-10). To which Lear unhesitatingly and lucidly replies: “A king, a king” (3.6.11). The Fool’s work is largely done; Lear’s shadow has, like the Nobody figures in 15th century engravings, shown Lear his true face in the glass. As Lear asks for the curtains to be drawn the Fool’s play ends on the gnomic line: “And I’ll go to bed at noon” (3.6.80, 82). It does of course cap Lear’s “So, so, so; we’ll go to supper in the morning [...]” (81), and emphasize the topsy-turvy or inverted world into which he and the king whose shadow he offered to be, have been cast. But I’d like to suggest that Lear’s Fool, like his shadow, disappears at noon because it is at the midpoint of the day, when the sun is immediately overhead, that a figure casts no shadows. And here, at the dramatic midpoint of the play, Lear’s shadow now lies all within. Thus Q and F coalesce? The conceit is one elaborated by John Donne in

his “Lecture upon the Shadow” where he speaks of two lovers walking together for three hours before midday:

[...] Walking here, Two shadowes went
 Along with us, which we ourselves produc'd;
 But, now the Sunne is just above our head,
 We doe those shadows tread:
 And to brave clearnesse all things are reduc'd.¹⁶

The brief moment of Lear’s “brave clearnesse,” when sun and shadows intersect, will dissolve as swiftly as that of the lovers Donne describes. For unless their loves “at this noon stay” his lovers will he says, “new shadowes make the other way.” Love is “either a growing, or full constant light; / And his first minute after noone is night” (25-26). As Lear sleeps and the Fool departs the gathering shadows deepen and the play plunges into the darkness of an endless night, to be swiftly and symbolically figured in the following scene by Gloucester’s enucleation. The double plot, which is also a Shakespearean addition to the old *Leir* stories, shadows that of the major protagonist, Lear himself. It is to the blind Gloucester’s suicide bid and his son’s intervention that I shall now turn.

Edgar’s Shadow-Play

The shadow play staged by Edgar is one of the strangest, most audacious and most problematic in the Shakespearean corpus. Gloucester’s son has already shown himself to be an actor *hors pair* – he has traversed the play as a hunted ‘player’ and his colourfully, artfully crazed discourse will deceive the father who has so cruelly made him into human prey. He organizes an improbable *mise-en-scène* which stretches our credulity in a way no other theatrical conceit in the corpus does: Edgar successfully dupes his father into thinking he is poised on the edge of the cliffs at Dover and then that his suicide leap has been real. He does so by means of the rhetorical trope of *ekphrasis*: – Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* – by vividly shadowing or drawing a landscape picture for the eye of the imagination. So accomplished is his portrayal of the “cliffs of Dover” that both we and Gloucester “see” them and indeed all but hear the “murmuring surge” of the sea. Shakespeare literalizes the trope. Gloucester’s “suicide” is burlesqued, the scene is, as a number of critics have noted, grotesque.¹⁷ Some of Shakespeare’s most dazzling dramatic effects are produced by this out-tropeing the trope, as it were, but none disconcerts and disorients in quite the way this does. Though Edgar’s description is both powerful and persuasive, as Jonathan Goldberg has pointed out, we have no idea where the scene takes place.¹⁸ It is, in every sense of the word, a nowhere place. Gloucester has asked to be taken to Dover where he clearly intends to throw himself off the cliff and Shakespeare’s original audience, used to a fairly bare stage, might well have imagined that that is where they were meant to think he is. Gloucester himself is understandably doubtful:

¹⁶ *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Herbert Grierson, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, pp. 63-64.

¹⁷ See G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, London, Methuen, 1964 (Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 160-176.

¹⁸ Jonathan Goldberg, “Dover Cliff & the Conditions of Representation” in *King Lear*, New Casebooks, ed. Kiernan Ryan, Basingstoke & London, The Macmillan Press, 1993, pp. 145-157.

GLOUCESTER

When shall I come to the top of that same hill?

EDGAR

You do climb up it now. Look how we labour.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR

Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, truly.

(4.6.1-4)

A moment later Edgar announces that they have arrived and deictically bids his father “stand still” while he describes ‘the place’. His description, heightened by the various expressions of fear that Edgar feigns, is oddly (sublimely?) enchanting. At least to this reader/spectator. After the unrelenting darkness of the preceding scenes it is as if we emerge into the open air of a natural place in which people external to the play’s drama pursue their ordinary occupations.

EDGAR

The crows and choughs that wing the midway air

Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down

Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade;

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that walk upon the beach

Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque

Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy

Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge

That on th’unnumbered idle pebble chafes,

Cannot be heard so high.

(4.6.13-22)

Gloucester “jumps” and falls flat on his face. Congratulated on his miraculous escape, he asks “But have I fallen, or no?” (4.6.56), inevitably drawing the audience’s astounded and perhaps uneasy laughter at this parodic version of the Fortunate Fall. Having bidden a rather heroic farewell to the world and those ‘mighty gods’ who so delight in killing us “for their sport,” Gloucester has planned a “spectacular end for himself”¹⁹ but merely bumps his nose. It’s an uncanny moment: the spectator is at one and the same moment positioned within and stationed without the dramatic action in a manner that deliberately calls attention to the nature of theatrical illusion and its potential power to articulate “truth.” Does the extraordinary *ekphrasis* which the blind Gloucester is deceived into “seeing,” enable or disable the world of art? Shakespeare delights in making us “see double,” in having our minds slide as it were between contrary realities, opposing truths, between shadow and substance. Huston Diehl asks whether Edgar’s deception can be justified. Can a lie have a salutary effect?²⁰ It’s an ancient question: Erasmus’s Folly reminds us of Horace’s story of the Greek who would sit all day long in an empty theatre laughing and applauding the plays he thought were being enacted on the bare stage. When his family and physicians cured him of these delusions he protested that they had killed rather than cured him, destroying

¹⁹ Wilson Knight, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

²⁰ Huston Diehl, “Religion and Shakespearean Tragedy” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 98 sq.

his pleasure along with his illusions.²¹ To those who say that to be deceived is miserable, Folly replies that on the contrary “not to be deceived is most miserable of all.”²² However temporarily, Gloucester, it seems, has acceded to that happy band of those who Swift was later to call “the well-deceived.” “Surely you do not believe that there is any difference between those who sit in Plato’s cave gazing in wonder at the images and likenesses of various things – as long as they desire nothing more and are no less pleased – and that wise man who left the cave and sees things as they really are?” Folly asks. And she adds “their happiness costs them so little – nothing more than a touch of persuasion”²³ Gloucester, we know, is particularly open to persuasion. Walking further along that aesthetic “tight-rope” of which Wilson Knight speaks in his seminal article on the grotesque, Shakespeare multiplies the ambiguities of Edgar’s shadow-play. His invention of the fiend with eyes like two full moons, a thousand noses and “horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea” is a colourful figure who might well have stepped straight out of Harsnett’s polemical *Declaration*. Ironically, but quite in keeping with his superstitious nature, it shores up Gloucester’s conviction of his miraculous preservation. His pious stoicism however is to be short-lived. He is soon once more prey to “ill thoughts”, and he dies shortly after “[t]wixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief” (5.3.197).

Gloucester’s death, “in the midst,” is characteristic of a play which goes to some lengths to problematize any sense of an ending. The consolations of some kind of coherent pattern, the “promised end” – be it that of folk-tale, or enlightenment, or of recognition and reconciliation – are constantly disabled. As Frank Kermode observes, “[m]en in the midst make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the middle.”²⁴ Notoriously *King Lear*’s ending has been deemed unsatisfactory – so unsatisfactory that it was, following Dr Johnson’s dismay, simply banished for several centuries. An apocalyptic note is sounded at several points in the play registering a sense of exhaustion in the way various characters ponder the end: Gloucester describes Lear as “a ruined piece of nature”, adding that “this great world / Shall so wear out to naught” (4.6.130-131). Urged to endure by a son who has tricked him into life, Gloucester will shortly speak of his wish to be allowed to “rot even here” (5.2.8). At the sight of Lear carrying the dead Cordelia in his arms – an entry that, as Foakes observes “extends the play beyond the pattern of completion.”²⁵ – Kent exclaims: “Is this the promised end?” To which Edgar adds: “Or image of that horror?” The restoration to which the previous scene seemed to have been pointing and which most other versions of the story give, is shockingly withdrawn. The end in question seems to refer both to the formal structure of the play and to the end of the world. So absolutely stark is Shakespeare’s ending, that Kent prays that Lear’s heart will break: “Vex not his ghost; O let him pass. He hates him that would upon the rack of this rough world / Stretch him out longer” (5.3.312-314). Edgar’s concluding couplet, riven with hopelessness, is probably the most deliberately bathetic as any in Shakespeare. Endurance, further endurance, is all the survivors in *King Lear* may look forward to. It is a truly tragic ending for it is in the nature of apocalyptic

²¹ Horace, *Epistolæ*, 2.2i.128-140. See Desiderius Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, tr. Clarence H. Miller, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2003 (1979), pp. 58-59.

²² Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

²³ Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

²⁴ Frank Kermode, *A Sense of an Ending*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 17.

²⁵ See Introduction to Arden edition, p. 73.

paradigms that they be, as Frank Kermode puts it, “disconfirmed.” Tragedy, he suggests, may be thought of as the successor of the apocalyptic visions which haunted the medieval imagination. “In *King Lear* everything tends towards a conclusion that does not occur; even personal death for Lear, is terribly delayed. Beyond the apparent worst there is worse suffering, and when the end comes it is not only more appalling than anybody expected, but a mere image [i.e. “shadow”] of that horror, not the thing itself. The end is now a matter of immanence; tragedy assumes the figurations of apocalypse, of death and judgement, heaven and hell; but the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors. [...] This is the tragedy of sempiternity; apocalypse is translated out of time into the *ævum*.”²⁶ In the wintry pastoral of *King Lear* man dwells ever in the shadow of death where the consolations of art, and it is not the least of *King Lear*'s paradoxes, are glimpsed or artfully shadowed, only to be finally radically undermined. The figure of Folly in Erasmus's great *Encomium* achieves that *coincidentia oppositorum*, that equipoise and concord that is the hallmark of the ironic mode, and that also marks the wisdom of Lear's shadow, the Fool, until his disappearance at the noontide of the play. Though I have suggested that Edgar's shadow-play somewhat jokily out-tropes the trope of *ekphrasis*, the comedy is grotesque and the predominant tone of both Edgar's and his father's commentary relentlessly earnest. Once the Fool's delicate, witty shadow-play can no longer illuminate the folly of the great, the play itself “new shadowes make the other way” and, as with Donne's dramatic image of wounded love, “that first minute after noon is night.”

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²⁶ Kermode, op.cit., p. 82.