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Cataclysmic Shame: Three Views of Lear's Mortal Body in the Storm

*Shame arises each time we are unable to make others forget our
basic nudity.*

Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape* (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 2003), 64.

Shame breaks at least three paths through *King Lear*. Characters such as Kent, Goneril, Cordelia, Gloucester and the Fool map the first, the second goes right through the heart of the aging protagonist and the third, forged by the actor, leads out into the audience. Given the complexity of the affect – shame is a private feeling, shaming is a public action and the two do not necessarily neatly complement one another – precisely how shame works in the play and to what end takes the duration of this chapter to explain. The dynamics of shame, both as theorized below and as represented in the play, form the theoretical lens of the chapter.

Through the complex framework provided by the affect, the ecocritical intervention into extant scholarship on *King Lear* is quite simple. I work against the common reading of the storm as metaphor for Lear's emotions and instead characterize the storm as materially involved in the affective and political dimensions of Lear's stripping naked in the storm. Shame is put forward as one way of understanding how the conflict escalates with regard to Lear's exposed body. So although the *realpolitik* of this part of the plot is usually understood as occurring offstage, with the mobilization of competing armies and the issuing of warrants for Lear's arrest, this chapter uses shame as a way of considering the politics of Lear's spectacular emotional climax in and with the storm.

Using Lear's old, dying and becoming naked body in theatrical performance as an allegory, this chapter also aims to contribute to emerging debates in ecocriticism and environmental humanities around the question of death in the Anthropocene. While Lear is sovereign in a particularly arcane sense of the term, today sovereign subjectivity is bestowed upon wealthy people in liberal democracies with passports that enable travel for business and pleasure across national borders, castle-like shelter and ready access to exemplary health and aged care, while many are left out in the rain, both literally and metaphorically. Far from 'everyman,' Lear is a chief executive officer for a multinational corporation or the chairperson of a large bank. He's a prime minister with a multi-million-dollar house on Sydney Harbour with stock invested in offshore or tax havens, while he presides over the privatization of the health care system, the expansion of coal mining and the incarceration of refugees. He's a racist president who sexually assaults women both in person and on Twitter, while owning eponymous skyscrapers in Manhattan and firing people on television for sport. Lear is far from the everyman. Lear is the one per cent. The final section of this chapter posits the dynamics of shame in the actor playing Lear as an allegory for why it is so difficult for these kinds of people to use their power to respond to the environmental crisis. Before directly exploring the different points of view on Lear's body, I define what shame is, how it works and then locate the mortality of the body as the material fact and philosophical concept at the centre of the play's affective drama.

Shame might seem like an unlikely emotion to undergird an ecocritical reading of an old man taking off his clothes in the storm. Donna Haraway suggests that shame is an affect that thwarts the kind of curiosity required for better relations with non-human others (2008: 19–23). The example she gives is Derrida's philosophizing while naked in front of his cat. If he were unashamed of his own body and differently curious about his cat, she suggests, his work on animals might have been more productive. She argues that getting rid of his shameful introspection would be necessary for a different critical position. In contrast, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that shame cannot be simply avoided in lieu of some other, better emotional state. For real cultural transformation, shame has to be worked with and through.

In her extensive work on affect in queer identity politics, which is neither in dialogue with Haraway nor readily cited in ecocriticism, Sedgwick argues for

the need to understand the multifaceted machinations of shame in order to be able to grapple with the often-frustrating and counter-intuitive dynamics of cultural politics (1995; 2003), within which I of course include environmental politics. While Haraway contends that, for Derrida, 'shame trumped curiosity and that does not bode well for *autre-mondialisation*' (2008: 23) or the creation of alterative worlds, Sedgwick asserts that shame can never be fully eradicated:

therapeutic or political strategies aimed at getting rid of group shame, or undoing it, have something preposterous about them ... The forms taken by shame are not distinct 'toxic' parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the process by which identity itself is formed. They are available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, [and] *transfiguration*. (2003: 62–3)

In the context of queer theory and politics, Sedgwick argues that the affect has 'powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities' (63); this is because for someone who identifies as queer may want to work with and through their sense of shame in order to be who they are; their being is, in some people's eyes, shameful and yet they persist in bringing that self into the world; they create a new social world for that self in and through the torsions of what Sedgwick calls 'transformational shame'.

Sedgwick's theorization of the affect can be brought into ecocriticism by considering how shame might intersect with the desire for cultural change that motivates a lot of work in the field. If we agree that 'ecocriticism is an avowedly political mode of analysis' and that such criticism is generally tied to 'a 'green' moral and political agenda' (Garrard 2004: 3), then shame is potentially useful to think with given Sedgwick's suggestion that the affect can either stifle, enable or, at the very least, complicate projects of social and political change. Coming to be in and through transformational shame is Sedgwick's definition of queer performativity; this is a type of worlding that is potentially socially and politically metamorphic, it works to shift the status quo by a sometimes pleasurable, and other times painful and difficult, process of remaking selves and society. Reading representations of human affect in relation to storms, questions about shame can open us out onto the world in different ways. We can investigate the seemingly complex and intractable feelings we have around the human condition and ask: to what extent do those feelings exist in isolation and to what extent they are socially and ecologically

conditioned? What aspects of our selves and political systems remain ashamed of our earthly condition, our bodies or our physical weakness in relation to cataclysmic storms? What will it take within us to live differently in relation to our bodies and cataclysmic storms? I am ostensibly using this chapter to destabilize the relationship between Lear and the storm to open up to the performance history that will follow in the second section. At the same time the self-contained argument of this chapter is that working through shame – of the transformational kind – around human weakness and death has potentially radical implications for human life and, in particular, our relations with the earth, at the same time this affect has equivalent potential to thwart any chance for change. The trouble with shame is that there does not seem to be any way around it, one must go through and either transform the self into a new kind of relation or retreat in attempt to preserve what is already known.

Shame is represented in the text as multi-valenced. Cordelia infers her sisters should be ashamed of themselves for their gratuitous complicity in the love test (1.1.283); in attempting to separate Lear from his knights, Goneril argues that the ‘shame’ the men bring upon the court ‘doth speak / For instant remedy’ (1.4.237–8); Lear thinks Goneril should be ‘ashamed to look upon this beard’ (2.2.385) for treating him so callously; Kent describes the stocks as his ‘shameful lodging’ (2.2.173) and Lear describes Kent’s shackled situation as ‘shame’ (2.2.200). During the storm the Fool points out the relationship between shame and clothing by jesting that he is pleased Poor Tom ‘reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed’ (3.4.65). And, after the storm upon hearing of Lear’s exposure, Cordelia reportedly cries out in disbelief that her sisters left him to the wild night and that they should feel ashamed of themselves for doing so (4.4.28). All these invocations of shame have a moral dimension and identify a gap between how one does act and how one should. Cordelia thinks Goneril and Regan should be more caring; Kent understands the stocks as an attempt to disgrace him for his actions. Here shame aims to make someone feel bad for their transgressions, but also hopes to correct their bad behaviour because, as I will show, a shame response can function as a kind of retreat from view or a pulling in of one’s head. To shame someone is to request they assess themselves and change their relation to the social world. In these examples, however, one character attempting to shame another does not give rise to the supposedly shameful character actually feeling ashamed:

Goneril is unmoved by Lear's question, Goneril and Regan are not even privy to Cordelia's injunction, and Kent is unabashed.

Lear's journey is, in many ways, the opposite. In contrast to the directive to feel the emotion, Lear claims he is ashamed that his daughters have the capacity to make him angry and weep (1.4.288); later on Kent also suspects that 'A sovereign shame so elbows him' (4.3.43). Many scholars have also argued that Lear's cardinal emotion is shame and that from the love test onward, his journey is a protracted attempt to avoid feeling this most distressing emotion (Cavell 2002 [1958]; Zak 1984; Fernie 2002). At the same time, however, no one in the play explicitly suggests that Lear's behaviour is explicitly shameful, even though he is the only one that identifies with or is suspected to actually feel the emotion, and is the only character doing archetypally shameful things like taking off his clothes in public. In fact, many of the calls for others to feel shame, especially when directed towards Goneril and Regan, are linked to attempts to protect Lear by chastising the behaviour of others. Even Goneril, who calls the knights 'disordered' and 'debauched' (1.4.233) who bring 'shame' upon the 'graced palace' (1.4.237) is careful not to direct her criticisms towards Lear as an individual, rather she routes them through his knights and the Fool.

The actor, I will show in the third section, risks shame of a qualitatively different kind. The actor needs to perform Lear's dying in an exemplary and socially acceptable manner in order to be remembered for playing Lear. In accepting the role, the actor risks embarrassing himself deeply if he does not perform the role properly. Paradoxically in playing a dying character who failed to control the terms of his cultural legacy, the successful actor seemingly immortalizes himself in playing Lear and thereby secures his. Here the actor is given a role charged with the governance of all, but performs it in a shamelessly self-serving manner. In what ways does the theme of mortality reverberate out into the audience? In what ways does the actor's heroism in playing at such apparent wretchedness undercut any other ideas about bodies, mortality and worldly contingency that are represented in the play? To what extent can this criticism apply to our contemporary cultural kings?

At the centre of this chapter is a theatrical action and stage picture that remains ambiguous in the play's text: an old king tears off his clothes to expose himself to the weather and his followers attempt to restrain him. Upon contemplating Poor Tom's almost naked body in the storm, Lear initially

Figure 3.1 Benjamin West, *King Lear* (London, 1788, retouched by West 1806). Oil on canvas, 271.8 × 365.8cm Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Henry H. and Zoe Oliver Sherman Fund 1979.476 Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

suggests that Tom would be ‘better in a grave to answer / with they uncovered body this extremity of the skies’ (3.4.100–1). According to Lear, exposure to the weather is a fate worse than death. Less than ten lines later and in radical contrast, Lear decides that he would like to ‘answer’ the skies with his exposed body instead and exclaims ‘Off, off, you lendings: / come, unbutton here’ (3.4.107–8). The painting by Benjamin West (Fig. 3.1) and the photograph of Geoffrey Rush as Lear (Fig. 3.2) visually suspend this moment.

Given this extraordinary turnaround, it is perhaps easy to understand why Lear’s psychic state is most frequently interpreted as madness. For instance, Kent R. Lehnhof, whose lucid exploration of *King Lear* via Levinas I return to several times in this chapter, references the idea that stripping was a ‘sure sign’ of madness at Shakespeare’s time of writing and then claims that the disrobing ‘provides conclusive proof that Lear is mad’ (2014: 498–9). Lear’s inconsistency is seemingly impossible to comprehend otherwise. Except, I submit, in and as shame in relation to the body and its vulnerability to death, the terms of which I shall explore below.

Figure 3.2 Robyn Nevin, Jacek Koman, Geoffrey Rush and Mark Leonard Winter in Sydney Theatre Company's *King Lear* (Sydney, 2015). Photograph © Heidrun Löhr.

Although Lear wants to undress, the play text does not prescribe how successful he is at disrobing. The perennial uncertainty of this moment in the text is our intellectual affliction as readers of Shakespeare. In the Folio the only stage direction is '*Enter Gloucester, with a torch*', but the Arden version I use contains the directive, '*Tearing at his clothes he is restrained by Kent and the Fool*'. Whether or not the text contains the direction is a moot point, because the Fool's next line implies the action by commenting on their attempt to restrain him: 'Prithee, nuncle, be contented: 'tis a naughty night / to swim in' (3.4.109). In other words, the play text remains ambiguous on just how much of Lear's old body one actually sees. The chapter operates under the incomplete image of an old man in a storm; he is held in torsion between the naked and clothed.

That this image is ambiguous does not mean that the text and performance thereof fail to present means for interpreting it. I rehearse three different views of Lear's body in the storm and analyse the ambiguous image from three angles. View One explores the significance of the other characters' reactions and some critics', the second asks what the exposure means for Lear, and the

third perspective probes what the image of this aging, exposed, fleshy, animal body means for actors playing the role. But it also is worth considering what the image means for *you* – scholar, student, lay reader, actor, director, costume designer, producer, theatre critic – what does it make you *feel*? Do you think his desire to remain exposed is a sign of madness, do you want him to take shelter, or do you hope he exposes his naked body to the storm?

Feelings about mortal bodies are complex, let alone the body of a king. Although death itself does not discriminate – we all die – within hierarchical social systems not all deaths carry the same cultural significance. And although Derrida instructs us never to think of life and death in a symbolic register – ‘*a man’s life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol*’ (1993: xv, emphasis in original) – Lear is a fictional character and a paradigmatic symbol for many things. Thus, the historical and philosophical specificity of what death means for and signifies through *Lear*/Lear is worthy of further attention, because Lear has an especially fraught relationship with death. Moreover, because Lear is a dramatic fiction we are freed from the reverence required in relation to the deaths of real living people (politicians and kings who are valorized in death despite overseeing atrocity in their life, for instance). Thus we can think about Lear as a paradigmatic symbol for the suite problems (both human and more-than) of a political system structured on the denial of sovereign mortality and constituted, at least in part, by the requisite performance of sovereign immortality.

The foundational paradox in constitutional monarchy is that of the king’s ‘two bodies.’ Ernst B. Kantorowicz’s seminal study *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1960) explores this problem in full. His citation of early constitutional law lays bare the paradox:

the Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the members thereof are his Subjects ... this Body is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies, and his natural Death is not called in our Law ... the death of the King, but the Demise of the King. (1997: 13)

Despite the fact that the king is mortal, he symbolically cannot die. The king derives his sovereign authority from the legal and political apparatus of the

court and the territories of the kingdom, in exchange for power and authority. Quoting Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Kantorowicz defines the dilemma as follows: 'The king is twin-born' not only with greatness but also with human nature, hence 'Subject to the breath of every fool' (24). In order to circumvent the weakness the king's mortality brings to the immortal political apparatus of the kingdom, with the 'demise' of the king's 'body natural', another ruler must be waiting to take his place, thereby sustaining the immortal authority of the 'body politic'. The exclamation 'the king is dead, long live the king!' is an expression of the conceptual paradox in practice: when one king dies, the kingship and the kingdom live on through the body of another. That this phrase was chanted by the masses at a king's funeral demonstrates how a coherent feudal society is based not only upon the king's embodiment and performance of immortality but also a collective recognition of and acceptance of this paradox.¹ The role of the king, therefore, is to mask his mortality, and by extension his living body, in order to perform the immortality of the body politic not only for himself but for all those invested in its constitution.

The prohibition on the public revelation of the king's 'body natural' means that kings are liable to shame with regard to their bodies. The body itself, its fleshy fragility, is the taboo that constitutes the social. Thus exposing it as mortal either rhetorically (as Lear does in 1.1) or literally (as in 3.4) might not be met with a welcoming or warm gaze, because if the body is exposed as weak it threatens not just the individual, but also the whole social order. Taking up the different dimensions of shame – whether felt by a character or cast as an injunction – in relation to the king's mortal body natural reveals the extent to which fantasies of immortality explicitly (as in the play) or tacitly (as in the world) dominate Western society's moral imaginary. Although challenges to human exceptionalism have been developing in environmental humanities for a while, death itself, whether animal or human, is emerging as an important subject in the field (van Dooren 2014; Scranton 2015; Povinelli 2016). The Western individualized view of death is figured as especially problematic. Simon C. Estok frames death as the 'most horrifying intrusion

¹ In more general terms, Giorgio Agamben suggests that sovereign law paradoxically governs life by abandoning it (1998: 29). Sovereign law is founded upon a denial of life. The law cannot adequately account for the organic changes and mutations that take place over the course of a human life and as such, necessarily refuses to account for such changes and excludes death.

of nature into human affairs – affairs that are mistakenly perceived to be separate from nature’ (2011: 112). Death is only horrifying, however, when it is seen as the factor that readily thwarts fantasies of transcendence and individual mastery; death is only horrifying when the earthiness of our bodies is something we would rather avoid. The human cadaver is, for Julia Kristeva, exemplary of the powers of horror within the Western psyche. The fear and shock of encountering a corpse ‘*show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live’ (1982: 3). In other words, Western subjectivities are founded on the attempt to forget death. Walter Benjamin suggests that death nonetheless defines life stories: ‘death is the sanction of everything a storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death’ (1999: 93). The stories we tell about human life and death, and the way they are interpreted and culturally valued, can reveal a lot about the kind of authority life attempts to borrow from death. This is especially true in a story as guided by the quest for and question of an unburdened death as *King Lear*.

Ultimately, human corporeal finitude evidences human animality, earthiness and vulnerability but, as Estok’s formulation of death as horrifying implies, the category ‘human’ – Western, white, male – likes to feign distance from such matters. Death is thus a useful site for ecocritique because the question of how death is represented and read directly corresponds with how human life is imagined in relation to our earthly condition. Human death is also a difficult space for criticism because it is so painful, so serious and, within a secular worldview, so final for an individual or sovereign subject. Using *Lear*, *Lear*’s feelings about himself, other characters’ points of view on *Lear*, the actor’s embodiment of the character and the audience or scholar’s reception of the play opens up a way into a much larger and more difficult cultural conversation about death, about how we ‘do’ death badly and how cultural values around the mortal body themselves need to change.

As illustrated in earlier chapters, *King Lear* is being taken up as a key canonical text for the ecological turn because of its more-than-human features and this book is no exception. But in focusing on what *Lear* and the actor’s body might symbolize, this chapter suggests that *King Lear* has potentially more to offer ecocriticism as an allegory for the problems of the sovereign human’s aversion to a lack of control, over the world and the body. Walter Benjamin argues that allegory is a way of communicating ‘meaning that,

for whatever reason, cannot (or will not) be stated directly' (Wilkens 2006: 292). It is difficult to mount an argument that Westerners should learn how to die, and therefore learn how to live, differently, let alone pinpoint certain individuals and suggest that they in particular need to figure out how to die better in order to govern in and for the earth. It is likewise difficult to prove that shame – or its less intense cousin, embarrassment – are involved in our feelings about the finitude of our bodies. But responses to Lear's body and the enduring cultural power and value invested in this text can reveal dominant cultural sensibilities around mortality and the body.

Shame is complex² but there are two primary dimensions to shame as it is felt in an individual human body. First there are the sensations of shame within the self and the bodily twitches of a shame response, which are an indivisible part of the affect. The general feeling is variously described as painful, hot, distressing, a desire to flee or escape. The meaning attributed to these sensations are that it is 'an experience of the self by the self' (Tomkins, in Sedgwick and Frank: 136); for Levinas '[w]hat shame discovers is the being that discovers itself' (Levinas, in Hutcheon: 61); for Agamben, shame is 'the fundamental sentiment of being a subject' (Agamben, in Hutcheon: 61). There is something irreducibly personal

² Contemporary psychologist Paul Gilbert provides a good description of the various dimensions of shame. According to Gilbert, shame can 'be explained in terms of *emotion* (e.g., as a primary affect in its own right, as an auxiliary emotion, or as a composite of other emotions such as fear, anger or self-disgust); *cognitions and beliefs* about the self (e.g., that one is and/or is seen by others to be inferior, flawed, inadequate, etc); *behaviours and actions* (e.g., such as running away, hiding and concealing, or attacking others to cover one's shame); *evolved mechanisms* (e.g., the expression of shame seems to use similar biobehavioural systems to those of animals expressing submissive behaviour); and *interpersonal dynamic interrelationships* (shamed and shamer). Shame can also be used to describe phenomena at many different levels, including internal self-experiences, relational episodes, and cultural practices'. P. Gilbert, 'What is Shame? Some Core Issues and Controversies' in P. Gilbert and B. Andrews (eds) *Shame: Interpersonal Behaviour, Psychopathology, and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p.4. For work on different historical understandings of shame see D. Konstan, 'Shame' in *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2006; B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008; V. Burrus, *Saving Shame: Saints, Martyrs and Other Abject Subjects*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008; Ruth Benedict's famous study of Japan gave rise to the distinction between 'shame culture' and 'guilt culture' that is pervasive in modern anthropological thought: see R. Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1989. For an exploration of shame in Renaissance drama see G. Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, Cornell University Press, Cornell, 1993. For a book of essays on shame in the work of philosophers Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, as well as novelists Hawthorne, Eliot, Lawrence, Faulkner and Morrison see J. Adamson and H. Clark, *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame and Writing*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999. For a collection of essays on shame in art see C. Pajaczkowska, and I. Ward (eds), *Shame and Sexuality: Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 2008.

about a feeling of shame. Shame is often differentiated from guilt in this regard too. 'Shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one *is*, whereas guilt attaches to what one *does*' (Sedgwick 2003: 37; emphasis added). Shame, as a brutal experience of self-consciousness, is often accompanied by a suite of other kinds of actions or bodily responses that correspond directly with the social dimensions of shame. In an attempt to alleviate the painful and distressing sensations of shame, the body reacts by blushing, looking downward, refusing eye contact and, in more extreme cases, running away (Tomkins: 136). In sum, the feeling of shame corresponds with a series of seemingly, but potentially unavoidable counterintuitive behaviours that in many cases can demonstrate that one is ashamed. So unfortunately, rather than hide shame or soothe its sensations, these bodily reactions exacerbate the pain of shame.

The other dimension of shame is that while it is a deeply personal emotion, it is also fundamentally social. Shame is first felt in the presence of a stranger; it is brought about by strangeness and the uncertainty about the self that is stirred in this unfamiliar terrain. Recalling Levinas from the beginning of the chapter, 'Shame arises each time we are unable to make *others* forget our basic nudity' (63, emphasis added). Here Levinas refers to an experience of metaphorical nudity, of a sense that arises in shame that others are seeing us for who we 'really' are (criminal, perverse, mean, poor, stupid, weak, unworthy, inauthentic, mortal). The colloquial advice to one who fears failure to 'imagine the class/auditorium/job search committee in their undies' flips the logic of shame on its head: to avoid being undone by the threat of embarrassment, imagine everyone who is watching you at their most embarrassing. Shame emerges when one suspects that the worst side or the necessarily hidden side of the true self is suddenly exposed for *others* to see. But in *King Lear* shame around the body is no metaphor; in *Lear* it is directly linked to his sense that, after the abdication, which he does in order to 'Unburdened crawl toward death' (1.1.40), others now see him as weak, mortal and naked. His shame is sustained for much of the play by a series of failed attempts to hide his body once more.

Clothing, or lack thereof, has long been linked to the dynamics of shame. Silvan Tomkins argues, that clothing may have 'originated in the generalisation of shame to the whole body, and the consequent need to cover it from the stare of the other' (1995: 134). Whether or not there is an evolutionary reason for the embodied shame response, shame and clothing have been paired in the

Western cultural imaginary for a long time. Adam and Eve move to cover their naked bodies only after God notices the original transgression and shames them for it. Before the expulsion from the garden, their punishment for original sin is self-consciousness about their bodies. Wandering carefree beforehand, the first transgression against God makes them feel ashamed about their bodies and causes them to cover up, to hide. But Lear is not only affectively impelled to cover his body because of the general cultural taboo on nakedness within the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, but *obliged* to cover the body from the stare of the other because he is constitutionally and culturally charged with the performance of a body larger than his own. Lear's move to undress, then, is a highly transgressive act that links the generalized taboo on nakedness in the Western world, to the specific legal and moral taboo on the exposure of the king's 'body natural' in British feudal law.

In the theatre, a director or actor-manager determines the degree of Lear's exposure to the storm or the quality of his embodied response to the skies and, by extension, the extent of everyone else's exposure to Lear's nakedness. Some Lears have bared their genitals: Ian Holm in 1997, John Bell in 1998, and Ian McKellen in 2008, for example. In 2016 Geoffrey Rush did too, darting around the stage with his penis exposed and pants around his ankles (though I was not provided with such an image for publication). Full nudity is, unsurprisingly, a mostly contemporary phenomenon. In 1845 Edwin Forrest represented Lear in heroic garb, triumphantly crowned with weeds,³ though we need not go back as far as the nineteenth century to see a much more well-dressed Lear in the storm: in the 2010 Donmar Warehouse production Derek Jacobi looked similar to Forrest. But in the same year the Royal Shakespeare Company production, featuring Greg Hicks, allowed Lear to almost strip naked, with his torso exposed and soiled underclothes on. In other words, the representations of the stripped-down Lear move along a spectrum from slightly less extravagantly clad to full-frontal nudity. When reflecting on theatre history one is compelled to consider the meaning of these particular theatrical decisions case by case and context by context because just as the significance of the storm changes over time, so does the meaning of Lear's naked body. Reading, on the other hand, allows a sustained investigation into the significance of this

³ See also R. A. Foakes, 'Introduction', in *King Lear* (London: Arden, 1997), p. 20.

ambivalent moment in the play text; it permits us to hover over the tension between Lear's impulse to disrobe and the others' attempts to keep him clothed.

Before proceeding further, I need to foreshadow the polarized reaction I have consistently received in relation to my exploration of shame in the play. The articulation of this argument has been inordinately difficult. When I first attempted this argument as part of my doctoral dissertation, this chapter divided my examiners between those who agreed with the line of inquiry and one who rejected it wholesale; I have delivered versions at conferences when colleagues have either hotly contested the basic tenets of argument or felt it explained the play in a new light; it also split my readers at the book draft and peer review stages, with one margin note suggesting 'this is my favourite chapter', while another gently introduced the possibility that it be cut altogether. I decided to include the chapter here and instead expose the usually hidden challenges of the writing process. In this case, while early criticisms may have been linked to the quality of the writing, the divided readership is relevant to the argument because it also points to the instability of shame as an emotion. In other words, what is shameful for one person may not be so for another. Sedgwick suggests that 'shame differs strongly between cultures, between periods ... between different forms of politics ... [and] it also differs simply from one person to another' (2003: 63). Thus, when I assert that Lear is ashamed of his mortal body because of the weakness it symbolizes to others, someone might disagree simply because they do not find nakedness shameful or, more often than not, they think something else, like Goneril's and Regan's speaking back, to be more properly shameful.

In spite of the divided responses I have received to this chapter, I am by no means the first to posit shame as the affective epicentre of *King Lear's* conflict and the primary emotional affliction of the eponymous character. In 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*' (c. 1966) Cavell claims that 'in *King Lear* shame comes first, and brings rage and folly in its train' (2002: 287). Cavell is an early proponent of literal reading too. For him, Shakespeare was neither trading in symbols, nor was he writing allegories or fairy tales. For Cavell, Lear is neither senile nor puerile. Rather, Lear is trying to feel his way through the world. By following the plot as a dramatic case study of a character afflicted with a particular kind of emotional problem (just as we see Hamlet in thrall to doubt and Othello to jealousy):

shame is the right kind of candidate to serve as a motive [for Lear], because it is the emotion whose effect is most precipitate and out of proportion with its cause, which is just the rhythm of the *King Lear* plot as a whole. (286)

William Zak's book-length study *Sovereign Shame: A Study of King Lear* (1984) investigates how shame is generative of the conflict within the play and traces the pattern throughout. Both Cavell and Zak also suggest that the failed abdication stimulates the emotional response. Building on Zak, Ewan Fernie's *Shame in Shakespeare* (2002) is the most extensive study of the thematic and dramatic function of shame across Shakespeare's body of work. Fernie claims that shame is a 'constant preoccupation, even obsession, in the work of William Shakespeare' (1), but that *King Lear* is the play in which 'Shakespeare's vision of shame is most lucidly and completely revealed ... (and) is Shakespeare's most insistently significant play of shame' (173–4). Crucially, for all these scholars, shame is not contained within one character, or even a single scene, but shapes the action across the play.

Despite agreeing on the basic pattern of shame in the play, Cavell, Zak and Fernie offer slightly different interpretations of the quality of Lear's shame. Cavell argues that what sustains the dramatic action from before the play to beyond the end is Lear's shame that he needs love. Lear's 'avoidance of love' is the evading of shamefully revealing himself as needing real care and love, as opposed to unconditional, obligational and sycophantic adoration. Taking a different course, Zak argues that 'if, from the abdication onward, Lear flees the sense of disgrace in his acts there, he is also fleeing a deeper and more significant sense of personal worthlessness that make it difficult for him to stop to consider, let alone admit, his specific sins in the opening scene' (1984: 60). Zak understands Lear as fleeing his erroneous abdication. Building on Zak, Fernie specifies that, 'Lear's shame originates from his fear of waning power and his own mortality' (2002: 184). Of the three, Fernie gets closest to the bodily shame that I suggest is at work in the play.

That said, while it is possible to perform Lear as fearful in the first scene, I am unaware of an instance where Lear is performed in this way. Moreover, the tone of the abdication Lear neither implies an explicitly personal worthlessness nor does he seem especially *afraid* of mortality:

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
 Unburdened crawl toward death. (1.1.36–40)

The tone of this passage is forthright and decisive. Beginning with ‘Know’, Shakespeare’s use of the intransitive verb combined with the past tense ‘divided’ is a direct command to the court: the speech act implores the court to comprehend that a division has already taken place and the rationale is so the king can, for lack of a better word, shun responsibility in his final years. His framing suggests that there will be no debate about the division and his reasoning; this meeting in court is merely designed to figure out some of the seemingly minor details of that division like what comes next. Although I disagree on the point of his fear, there is something about his desire for unconditional love, something erroneous about his abdication and something to do with his mortality that produces Lear’s subsequent responses. This ambiguous ‘something’ I posit as shame of what the mortal body symbolizes culturally and the potential implications of that symbolism politically. This shame climaxes when he disrobes in the storm, when he undresses *for* the storm.

The rest of the chapter is structured in order to draw out how this works and how it climaxes as the ambiguous image of Lear trapped between the naked and the clothed. I do so by assessing the image and its surrounding narrative context from three different perspectives: from Gloucester, Kent, Cordelia and the Fool’s perspective, and that of some other critics, then from Lear’s point of view, then the actor playing Lear. In terms of opening out onto the performance history that follows, this chapter is interested in exploring how it is possible to have such heroic portrayals of Lear on one hand and such wretched ones on the other. But, as the rest of the chapter shows, there are different sides to the story. In terms of the ecocritical argument, my focus is on looking at how Lear’s emotional body offers up a critique of fantasies of transcendence and ideas of sovereign immortality, but also how such fantasies are sustained by shame. In this regard, *King Lear* can act as a cautionary tale about the more oblique difficulties of moving into a different relationship with the lively earth via a new understanding of our own embodied mortality, not only because this task presents a range of individualized questions and challenges, but that it also requires a new social contract able to be accepting of a mortal, bodily and responsive mode of being in the world.

View #1: Other characters and some critics

In *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation* (1810) Charles Lamb considers the possibility of restoring Shakespeare's *King Lear* to the stage. The tragic plot had been more or less abandoned since it was supplanted in 1681 by Nahum Tate's adaptation; in the meantime Shakespeare's star had risen and there was renewed interest in his plays again.⁴ Lamb's 'consideration' focuses on the differences between reading and watching, and on whether or not watching would be at all pleasurable. His famous remark, that *King Lear* is 'essentially impossible to be represented on stage' (1980 [1810]: 575) is generally taken out of context and used either to illustrate Lamb's poor insight, highlight the specificity of nineteenth-century stagecraft, or point to the timeless difficulty of staging Shakespeare's poetically complex work.⁵ But, on closer inspection, something else guided his conclusion:

So to see Lear acted, – to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want him to take shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted ... The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom of that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. (574)

He primarily wanted to turn away from the shameful spectacle of Lear's aging body and towards Lear's glorious transcendent mind. When watching Lear in the storm on stage, Lamb speculates that he could not retreat from the horrible entanglement between the mind and the body. When reading, however, one can forget the body even exists.

⁴ The story is, of course, not that simple. I go into the ways in which Tate and Shakespeare were consistently in dialogue with one another in the intervening years in Chapter 6.

⁵ For example, R. A. Foakes reiterates: 'Hazlitt would have preferred to say nothing about a play that seemed, as Lamb said, "essentially impossible to be represented on a stage"' (*Hamlet Versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], p. 69.). J. J. Joughin states: 'Charles Lamb, *Lear* approximates to a type of disaster "painful and disgusting", "beyond all art" and "essentially impossible to be represented on a stage"' (*Lear's Afterlife* in Peter Holland [ed.], *Shakespeare Survey 55: King Lear and its Afterlife* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], p. 68.). And Valerie Traub affirms: 'Charles Lamb ... concluded that "Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on stage"' ('The Nature of Norms in Early Modern England: Anatomy, Cartography and *King Lear*', *South Central Review*, 26 [1–2] [2009]: 42–81, 81).

Lamb's feelings are strong, but also curiously equivocal. Lear's exposure is 'painful and disgusting' and at the same time 'we want him to take shelter and relieve him'. This is the double movement some people can have in response to embarrassing and unsavoury behaviour, or toward antics that are shameful.⁶ On one hand Lear's behaviour is simply repellent or disgraceful, but on the other, in the wish that he were acting differently, Lamb finds a place of sympathy or reverence towards him. Within this ambivalence is the sense that if Lear were more properly ashamed Lamb would not have to confront his nakedness. But who is Lamb protecting here? Is he concerned for Lear, or is he really protecting himself from contemplating the material reality that Lear's exposure represents?

As defender of Christian and patriarchal norms, Lamb decided he preferred to *read* Shakespeare's tragedy, thereby avoiding the sight of Lear's distractingly vile old body on the stage altogether:

On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear but we are Lear – we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms. (1980: 575).

Although Lamb identifies something weak and infirm in Lear, when reading the play he can forget about the storm's fury and altogether ignore the implied physical complexities of his physical situation. He can transcend the body and focus on mind. I use Lamb to introduce the perspectives of Gloucester, Kent and Cordelia with regard to Lear's exposure to the storm, because their concern and reverence for Lear similarly avoids contending with the significance of Lear's exposed body. Although it is generally taken as a given that Lear needs both sympathy and shelter, the question as to whether they are interested in protecting Lear or more interested in conserving themselves and the kingdom similarly needs to be asked of these characters.

⁶ This is something that Sedgwick explores in her work on shame. When teaching shame she would ask listeners to visualise an 'unwashed, half-insane man' wandering 'into the lecture hall mumbling loudly, his speech increasingly accusatory and disjointed'. He would 'publicly urinate in the front of the room, then wander out again'. She then would ask the participants to imagine the 'excruciation of everyone else in the room: each looking down, wishing to be anywhere else yet conscious of the inexorable fate of being exactly there, inside the individual skin of which each was burningly aware.' Although all the people engaged in this thought experiment were ostensibly not like this figure, 'at the same time' Sedgwick suggests those in the room are 'unable to staunch the haemorrhage of painful identification with the misbehaving man'. That, she insists, is 'the double movement shame makes: towards painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality' (2003: 37).

For example, Kent and Gloucester actively try to get Lear to take shelter. Their suggestions to Lear are couched in terms of the dangers of his exposure to the storm and how he will be better off in the hovel. When they converse with others about the situation, however, their concern for Lear is more complex. This from Kent to Lear:

Alack, bareheaded?

Gracious my lord, hard by here is a hovel:

Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest. (3.2.60–2).

His pleas to Lear are entirely about how taking shelter is for his welfare. Earlier in 3.1 when Kent is searching for Lear, the urgency of his quest is exclusively related to the political situation: 'There is division, / Although as yet the face of it is covered / With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall'; he reports espionage related to some unknown agenda which appears on the surface at least as a 'hard rein ... / Against the old kind King' (3.1.19–28). This perfect pun – 'rein' against the body that will become literal 'rain' on the skin moments later – figures the storm as conduit between individual bodies and political structures. At the same time, however, it reveals how it is easy to consider 'rein' as political, but then slide into an exclusively individualistic mode of thought out in the 'rain'. Similarly, when Gloucester and Kent discuss Lear, they dart between the two. Kent pleads to Gloucester: 'Importune him once more to go, my lord; / His wits begin t'unsettle.' Gloucester replies, 'Canst thou blame him? / His daughters seek his death' (3.4.157–9). Their desire for Lear to take shelter is at once concern for Lear's private exposure and also an attempted response to the increasingly tumultuous political situation. At the centre of these actions, however, is Lear's exposed body, drained of all political significance by Gloucester's and Kent's sympathies. His body is the conduit of their concern for his exposure, on the one hand, and what gave rise to evil espionage and subterfuge, on the other. But between Lear and evil daughters there is nothing; nothing is said about the cardinal transgression of Lear's exposure in and of itself and the only time when Kent physically tries to stop Lear from doing something is when he moves to take off his clothes.

Cordelia's position is similar. After her departure to France in 1.1, we first see Cordelia again in 4.4 as she compassionately laments Lear's crown of weeds:

Alack, 'tis he. Why, he was met even now
 As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud,
 Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,
 With burdocks, hemlock, nettles and cuckoo flowers,
 Darnel and all the idle weeds that grow
 In our sustaining corn ... Seek, seek for him,
 Lest his ungoverned rage dissolve the life
 That wants the means to lead it. (4.4.1–6; ... 17–20)

The tone belies the sentiment; she is compassionate despite the fact that she also clearly thinks Lear makes a mockery of the crown and sovereign authority by reconstructing out of useless ephemeral plant life in the kingdom what should be gold and jewelled.⁷ Although she is dismayed by his state, she recognizes in him a will to lead. At the same time, however, unwavering in her tone, she suggests he needs to be found in order to be 'governed'. This is very different in tone to Albany's line about Goneril – 'Go after her; she's desperate, govern her' (5.3.159) – but with a very similar inference. There is a desire to bring Lear around, ostensibly for his own well-being, but ultimately the inference is that he needs to be kept in check for broader political reasons. His 'ungoverned rage' would not in itself dissolve his life, but he would be victim to the wider politicking going on as a result of his rogue behaviour. None of this is said explicitly. The wider political implications of Lear's private disarray are not clearly articulated; which is to say, his exposed and, at least partly, disrobed body is not noted as politically important.

When it comes to the specific question of Lear's exposure to the storm, Cordelia pushes responsibility squarely back onto Goneril and Regan by claiming that they should be ashamed of themselves for letting him out in the night. Reporting on Cordelia's receipt of Kent's letter, a messenger suggests that she was focused solely on maintaining order both within herself and the kingdom. Her passions, that 'most rebel-like, / Sought to be king o'er her' (4.3.14), are nonetheless trained towards disbelief that her sisters would let Lear out in the night: 'Sisters, sisters, shame of ladies, sisters! / Kent, father, sisters! What, i'the storm, i'the night? Let pity not be believed!' (4.4.28–30).

⁷ For a wonderful exegesis of botanical metaphors in the play see Elizabeth Jayne Archer, Richard Marggraf Turley and Howard Thomas, 'The Autumn King: Remembering the Land in King Lear' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, 2012, 518–43.

Lear is not shameful for taking his pants off and running around adorned with a crown of weeds, but Goneril and Regan are shameful for throwing him out into the storm in the first place. This is, as Anna Kamaralli points out in *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice*, an incorrect way of describing what happens (2012: 130–1). Technically, they do not throw him out into the storm, rather they fight about the necessity of the entourage of knights, and he defiantly refuses the terms of the discussion and turns toward the storm. So, as with Kent and Gloucester, Cordelia also refuses to comment directly on the role of Lear's mortal body in this chaos; she only goes so far as to suggest he should never have been let outdoors.

All the sympathy that Lear receives avoids contending with the significance of his body. His body is the thing to be hidden for both his own good and the good of the kingdom. These characters cover or support the covering up of Lear when he tries to disrobe, and deflect all relevant criticisms of his exposure towards Goneril and Regan. Although Kent, Gloucester and Cordelia are evidently sympathetic towards Lear, in the context of the play they are trying to protect themselves from Lear, as much as they are trying to cover and shelter Lear himself. They are trying, to use contemporary parlance, to micro-manage his public image.

A similar avoidance of Lear's body also tacitly marks other responses to Lear's disrobing. For example, Lehnhof's essay, 'Relation and Responsibility: A Levinasian Reading of *King Lear*', specifically explores the way in which intersubjectivity is presented as an ethical ideal in the play. More generally, the essay theorizes how art itself can model ethics: the best authors 'wrestle with core philosophical questions, such as the meaning of life and the meaning of the human' and good art can 'imitate a form of ethical discourse by continually interrupting itself and calling itself into question' (507). *King Lear*, he suggests, does this 'in spades' (508), perhaps better than any other work of dramatic literature (509). Conversely he argues that such art, of which *Lear* is exemplary, gives rise to a certain critical and scholarly responsibility to open up the discussion by 'upsetting our apprehension in such a way as to reaffirm the richness of the text'. Such criticism, he continues, 'would not be defined by dogmatism ... [but] would strive to keep our responsiveness from rigidifying into a stultifying totality' (509). His claim could be understood as expediently and beautiful describing the constant disruption to our apprehension

during the storm scenes that I characterised as ambiguities in chapter one. So I critique Lehnhof here in the spirit of his own provocation, because although his wonderful essay takes up questions of relationality and responsibility, it forecloses on the ethical and political ideas opened up or modelled by King Lear's stripping naked in response to Poor Tom.

Following Levinas, Lehnhof circumscribes Lear's relationship with Poor Tom as a form of 'egology' or 'an approach that reduces the other to an analogue of the self' (498). Lear's relation with Poor Tom, a wildly strange and largely incomprehensible moment in the play's text, is reduced to a 'tiresome play of the same' (498). In other words, Lear remains unchanged or unaltered by his encounter with Poor Tom. Lear's empathy, according to Lehnhof, is entirely self-serving; Lear does not open out to Poor Tom's difference but only his similarity. I agree with the terms of Lehnhof's argument on its own terms, but it does not correspond with my thinking about the storm. With regard to the notion of the 'king's two bodies', what is 'tiresome' and the 'same' about a king stripping naked in a storm in identification with a bedlam beggar? Although I agree that Lear remains thoroughly egotistical throughout, what Lear's 'I' symbolizes as king (or his now fraught and fractured version of the royal 'we') makes this moment of identification about much more than just his self. As king, an important part of his 'I' is how it signifies and what that means to *others*; less important in this moment is his relation with Poor Tom and more so his vexing of everyone else. His power as king is vested – literally meaning both established by law and wearing vestments, stemming from Old French *vestu* or clothed – by the gaze of others; a gaze that falls upon his cloaked body as a symbol of the immortal body politic. And so why I suggest that Lehnhof's analysis is similar to Gloucester, Kent and Cordelia is because just at the point of thinking through relationality between different dimensions of the drama, Lear's exposure itself is drained of all that brilliant significance, Lear is interpreted as an ego without a body, an exclusively selfish psychological force. But Lear's trouble throughout the whole play is his body and his sense that others are viewing him as naked and powerless. And Lear is quite right, Goneril and Regan think he is old and weak, as do Cordelia, Gloucester and Kent; the latter just couch the same sentiment in different terms. On meeting Poor Tom, then, Lear is confronted for the first time with someone living in and as his body, he relates selfishly because it is the first time he has encountered a figure as grotesquely mortal as himself.

The only figure that directly addresses the politics of Lear's nudity is the Fool, whose early jesting directly prods at Lear's misunderstanding of his status as king. Although Lear retains the title 'king' and the entourage in the first scene, the Fool suggests that this is not enough to ensure his security. 'Dost thou call me fool, boy?' (1.4.141) says Lear. The Fool replies: 'All thy other titles thou has given away' (142). The Fool recognizes that the privileges of the title 'king' are tied more specifically to territory and crown than bare body of the king. So too with rights to the castle:

Fool I can tell why a snail has a house.

Lear Why?

Fool Why, to put his head in, not to give it away to his daughters and leave his horns without a case. (1.5.27–30)

Foreshadowing Lear's exposure in Act 3, the Fool points out how thoroughly disempowered the king is without castle, crown and territory.

The Fool also directly draws attention to Poor Tom's body and the affective dimensions of another's nudity. When Lear seeks to find out if Poor Tom is just like Lear, he asks if he also gave his daughters everything. The Fool points to Tom's only possession, the loincloth, as evidence that he is different from Lear because he hasn't given everything away: 'Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed' (3.4.64–5). As if foreshadowing Lear's turn towards nudity and his attempt to give away literally everything only lines later, it is the Fool who directly addresses the scale of embarrassment that has come to occupy the scene. Where Kent and Gloucester try to pull Lear away, and while Lamb literally turns away and Lehnhof skates around the complexity by diminishing it as banal, the Fool, tethered as he is to Lear, is the only voice that conjures up the broader social and political implications of the affective dimensions of the scene as they circulate through and around Lear's body.

The first point of view on Lear's body in the storm is ashamed by the nudity. The critics and characters covered here look away from Lear's body and address it indirectly via other themes such as disgust, horror, ingratitude, egotism; whether or not the characters are feeling shame, there is a sense that the body cannot be a theme in and of itself, that it is improper and unclean. Lear's mortal body is not looked upon for what it is. Care and concern in the

context of this section looks very much like self-preservation. Even the Fool, who is able to directly describe the dynamics, suggests as much. He infers that no one in the world will read Lear's antics as he wants them to be read because he is exposed, outside and in a hopeless situation.

View #2: Lear

For all the aspects of dramatic irony that are understood to pattern *King Lear*,⁸ its most obvious manifestation is that Lear is the one who does not know what is going on and we do. We might feel sorry for him, but ultimately he is the character that is either completely mad or knows the least about his situation. I want to suspend this position for a moment and suggest that Lear knows quite a lot about what it means to have to pretend to be immortal, and that throughout the whole play he is moved primarily by the desire to get people to bestow upon him respect and authority despite having declared himself mortal in the first scene. This section attempts to read with and through Lear's point of view in this regard.

Reading Lear's body by way of Levinas's description of shame alongside the idea of the king's two bodies complicates our view of his maddening self-absorption. Without doubt, Shakespeare drew a painfully egotistical character in Lear. But an investigation of the textures of that masculine self-involvement reveals the detailed way in which he constructed the old king's fraught relationship with his body. Given Lear's persistent association of his daughters with bodies, we are also able to consider how power sustained by the performance of immortality corresponds with the misogynistic aggression. Insane or otherwise, what follows is my reading of Lear's motivations when he comes to disrobe in the storm.

While in the epigraph for this chapter I quoted Levinas on shame and how it is stirred by a sense of how others view one's self, Levinas also theorizes the affect as it works within an individual:

⁸ See William F. Martin, *The Indissoluble Knot: 'King Lear' as Ironic Drama* (Lanham, New York and London: University of America Press, 1987).

[W]hat is the meaning of shameful nakedness? It is that one seeks to hide from others, but also from oneself ... The necessity of fleeing, in order to hide oneself, is put in check by the impossibility of fleeing oneself. What appears in shame is thus precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself ... Nakedness is shameful when it is the sheer visibility of our being, of its ultimate intimacy. (2003: 64).

The body is the cardinal metaphor for theorizing shame as an emotional state. Shame as desire to flee the self is also how Zak characterizes Lear's actions too: 'from the abdication onward, Lear flees the sense of disgrace in his acts there' (1984: 60). For both Levinas and Zak, the body is a metaphor for the experience of shame. But for Lear the body is literally an affective hazard; Lear's body is his shame. As it is the king's responsibility to cloak his 'body natural' to maintain the constitution of the 'body politic', then in revealing his mortal body he risks both shame that he is not fulfilling his duties and the shame of actual and political weakness. Thus, it is possible to consider all of Lear's actions from the banishment of Cordelia, his curse upon Goneril's womb, his refusal to relinquish the knights, his dialogue with the weather, up to the meeting with Poor Tom and retreat into the hovel as an attempt to literally flee himself. If it were not for his body, he could potentially keep on ruling *ad infinitum* but the body itself, the same body that has always represented immortal rule, is thwarted by its own mortality. As an affect that underlines the fact of being 'riveted to one's self', shame also evidences the fantasy of mind/body dualism; just as shame is self-defeating, in shame the self discovers it cannot flee because it is part of the body.

The inability to escape his bodily condition is Lear's cardinal problem in the first scene: he could not escape his body to fulfil his duties as king, and tried to devise another way out. Lear stops fleeing in front of Poor Tom; he pauses for the one whose body is not hidden. Indeed, Lear stops and asks questions about this figure who seems to be living with his body. Quite unlike Derrida, whose curiosity was killed in front of his cat, the ashamed Lear becomes deeply curious about Poor Tom. 'What hast thou been?' (3.4.83) and 'Is man no more than this?' (3.4.101) are two of Lear's several questions. Lear's questions suggest interest in understanding a permissible kind of nakedness and in living in and with a body that is 'no more than this'. While

his nakedness remains shameful to others – Kent and the Fool try to stop him from undressing – his own sense of self begins to change at this point. For Lear, Poor Tom's body does not have to symbolize anything more than a body and this seems ideal. As a king long charged with the task of masking his mortal body, Lear desires to return to his body *as* his body. In attempting to foreground his body natural while holding onto the title 'king' however, Lear figures a challenge to the constitution of a political order based on the requisite performance of immortality.

The reason Lear's questions are political is because he does not want to relinquish the privileges of power – he wants the privilege without the responsibility. So although the questions seem deeply personal and self-absorbed, they ultimately relate to his status as sovereign rather than subject. It is on this point that Sedgwick's notion of 'transformational shame' is useful for thinking through the politics of Lear's move to disrobe. Lear is mortal; Lear wants to live as mortal. He is ashamed that *others* will not forget his nakedness and that their gaze will ultimately be disempowering because his authority requires widespread agreement on what his body symbolizes.

As I showed in the last section, Cordelia, Gloucester and Kent all view Lear as weakened or at risk because of his exposure. At this point, rather than trying to continue to evade mortality in order to cling to power, Lear works with and through the shame his mortality brings upon him to attempt to construct a new political order that allows for the sovereign to also be mortal. Lear stays out in the rain because it gives him space to consider what it would mean to be differently accommodated by the world. As with most readings of *King Lear*, this interpretation hinges on a particular reading of the ambivalent love test in the first scene. I interpret it like this: although Lear does not want to relinquish the privileges of power, he ultimately risks exposing his mortality and weakness in the abdication. He takes this risk because he assumes his daughters will comply with his wishes. In fact, he assumes Cordelia will be the most compliant. When Cordelia does not participate properly, he is left in court exposed as weak and mortal. This is an embarrassing moment for Lear, to say the least. His immediate response is to retreat from the abdication by banishing Cordelia and reclaiming the 'The name, and all th'addition to a king' (1.1.137) and a 'reservation of an hundred knights' (1.1.134). I shall return to these details presently.

Although Lear is evidently not ashamed when Goneril and Regan accept his abdication plan, something radically changes after Cordelia responds, 'Nothing, my lord' (1.1.87), to his request for her to speak. In the first half of the scene, Lear can be interpreted as shamelessly trying to produce an impossible fantasy: to carve out a place for the king to die with all respect and no responsibility. Cordelia calls his bluff. In this regard Cordelia can be, as she is, a divisive figure. On one hand she epitomizes goodness and love in excess of greed. In this figuration Cordelia is so pure and loving she cannot speak falsely of love, hence her recalcitrance. Cavell argues, 'Cordelia is alarming precisely because he *knows* she is offering the real thing, offering something a more opulent third of his kingdom cannot, must not, repay' (290). On the other hand, she can similarly be read as cold, cruel and obsessed with the rules. In Jane Smiley's feminist adaptation *A Thousand Acres* (1988), for example, Caroline (Cordelia) is not a perfect younger daughter or symbol of goodness, but an urbane lawyer trying hard to support her father while doing things by the book. When Cordelia mends her speech she is restrained and precise: 'I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less' (1.1.92-3). Whether you read this as Cordelia holding the official line for either perfect filial love or unbreakable sovereign law, in both instances she unwittingly refuses the terms of Lear's transgressive abdication.

Regardless, Lear's reaction is the same: he banishes Cordelia, or deflects attention from his exposed body and makes her the shameful figure, the outcast, the recreant. The typical shame response is to try to hide shameful aspects of the self from the gaze of others. For Tomkins, the shame response is an innate bodily routine that leads to a reduction of facial or all forms of communication with others by turning away of the eyes and the turning down of the head. As Tomkins describes:

when one hangs one's head or drops one's eyelids or averts one's gaze, one has communicated one's shame and both the face and the self unwittingly become more visible to the self and others. The very act whose aim it is to reduce facial communication is in some measure self-defeating. Particularly when the face blushes, shame is compounded. And so it happens that one is as ashamed of being ashamed as of anything else. (1995: 137)

Ironically, the impulse to hide or keep hidden those shameful aspects of ourselves reveals, often in a more painful way than before, that we have

something to hide in the first place. With shame, then, one can get caught in a feedback loop.

The 'sovereign shame' that Lear experiences, however, operates on a much larger scale, for which the bodily shame outlined above response is only metonymy. Bigger than the blushing body of Tomkins's example, Lear's shame response reverberates throughout the body politic. This is where the idea of the king's two bodies, and Lear's claim on the title king complicates shame. In shame, King Lear automatic response is banishment rather than blushing; the projection of shame onto another is a response enabled by power.⁹ Thus, instead of hiding his own body by running offstage, Lear initially attempts to amputate the part of the body politic that brought shame upon him. Banishment is removing from an individual field of view the offensive subject; it is removing a part of his own body. In his last moments of courtly authority, he summons the forces of the cosmos to cast Cordelia out of the kingdom:

For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. (1.1.110–17).

This is what shamefully averting the eyes looks like for a king: an attempt to reduce communication between different parts of the body politic by refusing to recognize a recalcitrant subject.¹⁰ But, as with individual shame, the action is sometimes self-defeating and the shame is likely compounded. It is especially so in this case because it actively reshaped the entire body politic. A blush of this sovereign order meant that Lear could not go back to how it was before. The banishment came with a redrawing the borders of the kingdom; his shame parted the coronet between Albany and Cornwall.

⁹ For a contemporary analysis of shame within the context of contemporary environmental politics see Charlotte Epstein, 'Shaming', in Jean-Frédéric Morin and Amandine Orsini (eds), *Essential Concepts of Global Environmental Governance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 193–5.

¹⁰ This particular reading of the love test was informed by Judith Butler's interpretation of Antigone in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Between 1.1 and 2.2 Lear is trapped in the same emotional feedback loop with regard to his mortal body natural and waning power as he is after the major conflict of the first scene. The pattern is as follows: Lear reacts strongly every time someone, especially Goneril, suggests he is old and tries to govern his actions. At his most vitriolic, Lear's responses to his daughters, especially to Goneril, focus on the body as giver of life or material evidence of family obligation. For instance, when Goneril encourages Lear to reduce his entourage, he no longer has the authority to banish her but he attempts to curse her body so it can no longer make life – 'Into her womb convey sterility, / Dry up her organs of increase' (1.4.270–1) – it is here that we start to see the irreducible association between mortal weakness, female bodies and sexuality for Lear.

The association is especially strong for Lear in relation to females that exhibit some kind of claim on authority or sway over sovereign power. Anna Kamaralli observes a neat distinction between Goneril and Regan, which might explain why Lear reserves his most vitriolic words for his eldest daughter:

Goneril is a shrew in that she is outspoken in her criticisms of men, speaks disparagingly of her husband, with whom she comes into conflict, and is censured by her husband and father for her transgressive voice ... Regan, with whom she is so ubiquitously identified ... experiences no marital conflict and her words to her father are all conciliatory persuasiveness. When Lear and Goneril are in the same room the two cannot stop bickering. (128)

Goneril, like Cordelia, criticizes Lear and resists his authority in clear and direct terms. Goneril requests that Lear bring 'disordered rabble' of knights into line (1.4.247). Lear's response is to call upon 'Nature' (1.4.267) to 'stamp wrinkles into her brow of youth' (1.4.276). This is evidently not a direct response to her query about the knights, but more about what her newfound authority, embodied and female, means for his desire to mask his mortality to reclaim that which he has given away.

Beginning with the banishment of Cordelia, at each turn Lear's sovereign shame response manifests as a projection onto his daughters' bodies, accompanied by various attempts to stop the shame about his own from taking over. When Regan requests he return to Goneril with a smaller entourage, he refuses and instead characterizes Goneril as a disease that is eating away at his blood:

thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter,
 Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
 Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
 A plague sore, or embossed carbuncle
 In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee:
 Let shame come when it will; (2.2.413–18).

As part of an attempt to regain control of the body politic by masking his shameful body natural, the aggression directed towards Goneril's female body is a perfectly and irreducibly abject response to 'the baleful power of women to bestow mortal life' (Kristeva 158). For Lear, Goneril represents 'the mother' that gives 'life but without infinity' (159).¹¹ That he equates her with the body, and she exhibits power over his, only makes him feel more ashamed of the weakness his own body symbolizes. In attempting to regain control of the authority he held under the auspices of immortality, Goneril's newfound power (bestowed upon her by Lear, let us not forget) serves to underline the relationship between mortality and disenfranchisement. By 2.2 he is having trouble pushing all his emotions neatly back onto his daughters; by this time Goneril is getting under his skin, and he figures the hot flushes of shame as a 'disease of [the] flesh'.

As a king formerly charged with the rule of the body politic, his sense of self is expansive; if he seems monomaniacal it is because his body once symbolized everything in the kingdom except its own liveliness. In framing Lear's behaviour as a sovereign shame response that continues at least until he strips in the storm, identifies, to use a Shakespearean cliché, method in his madness; Lear becomes predictable, he follows a fairly familiar pattern. Moreover, although Lear's emotional cosmos expands to include the world beyond the human during the storm, this can be brought within this same affective logic. While his dialogue with the weather seems like the height of his insanity, when looked at carefully, Lear's emotional path grapples with the same kind of shame that he was fleeing in the first scene. When exposed to the storm Lear repeats a similar emotional

¹¹ Although further discussion on the politics of abjection in *King Lear* is beyond the scope of this chapter, two essays that have contributed to my understanding of how abjection works politically (i.e. not only in the formation of individual subjectivity) are Kate Livett's 'Thieves and Fascists: the Politics of Abjection in Radiohead's *Hail to the Thief* (*The Gloaming*)', *Australian Humanities Review* 41 (February 2007) and Sarah Anne Moore's 'The Politics of Garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico', *Society and Natural Resources* 21 (7) (2008): 597–610.

journey as the one that plays out between 1.1 and 2.2, except at a much faster pace and with a very different outcome. In 3.2 he moves from trying to hide the shame of self-exposure by feigning control over the heavens, to thinking the heavens are in cahoots with his daughters. In 3.4 things begin to shift and the storm comes to be seen as something separate, not representative of his prior rule, not collaborating with his daughters, but as a brut material force through which he might come to a new understanding of his body, emotions and life. By the end of the scene he experiences a transformative self-revelation as mere mortal with Poor Tom in the storm and by 4.6 he starts imagining a wretched form of sovereign authority that permits kings to be mortal.

To illustrate by example, Lear begins by commanding the elements in the same way he commanded the court in the first scene, calling upon the authority of the heavens to flatten the world in order to banish all those who do not show gratitude:

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers and oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That make ingrateful man. (3.2.1–9)

As he banished Cordelia in the first scene by the heavenly orbs, Lear instructs the heavens to destroy the world, with a barrage of powerful and violent verbs: blow, crack, rage, drench, drown, singe, strike, spill. He wants wild wind, hurricane and flood to destroy those who are not responsive to his demands. To those unaware of Renaissance meteorological beliefs, the king's engagement in an active dialogue with the heavens might seem mad. Although Lear's desperate dialogue with the storm is an extreme manifestation of a cosmologically inclined ego, to be sure, it is nevertheless in keeping with his character's worldview. Lear's hubris expressed in cosmic terms throughout the play. Here he extends himself into the skies in an attempt to regain control.

If the storm's indifference to Lear has any straightforward poetic function here, it is metonymic: Lear's lack of control over the storm is the part that

represents his lack of control over the entire kingdom. Nevertheless, the storm's material indifference to Lear is not just symbolic of his lack of control over the kingdom; it is an indifference to which Lear immediately responds. From his point of view, since before the banishment of Cordelia up to this point in the drama, the heavens have always undergirded his authority as king. Here, they seem to take a position akin to his ungrateful daughters.

So in his next speech to the storm he comes to be suspicious of the weather's motives. Again, seemingly mad, but also strictly in keeping with everything we know about Lear to this point, Lear's speech pleads with the storm not to join forces with his daughters:

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit fire, spout rain!
 Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters:
 I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness.
 I never gave you kingdom, called you children;
 You owe me no subscription. Why then, let fall
 Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave,
 A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man.
 But yet I call you servile ministers,
 That will with two pernicious daughters join
 Your high-engendered battle 'gainst a head
 So old and white as this. O ho! 'tis foul. (3.2.14–24)

In this second speech, Lear repeatedly uses the pronouns 'I' and 'you' to set up a distinction between himself and the storm and to place himself in dialogue with the weather. When the storm does not respond, Lear becomes suspicious that it must be conspiring with his daughters. Lear's talking to the storm is an attempt to figure out the relationship between his authority and the weather. Most of the characters in the play have tried to keep Lear from ending up in the storm: Cordelia tried to explain why she could only say 'Nothing' to his request, Kent tried to defend her, the Fool tried reverse psychology and Goneril and Regan tried to reason with him with regards to the knights. Nothing worked. But once he figures out that the heavens are against him too, he finally realizes he has run out of options and has nowhere to hide his mortal body. The non-responsive storm is the thing that finally provokes Lear to respond. In other words, Lear respects the authority of the heavens and seeks to turn it into his own.

It is around this sensational point – sensational in both the spectacular and the bodily meaning of the term – that Lear begins to reconnect with and rethink his body. The storm continues and Kent and the Fool encourage him to take shelter. Lear accepts the offer in terms that suggest he is working through shame rather than against it:

My wits begin to turn.

[*to the Fool*] Come on, my boy. How dost my boy?

Art cold?

I am cold myself.

[*To Kent*] Where is this straw, my fellow?

The art of our necessities is strange,

And can make vile things precious. Come; your hovel. (3.2.67–71)

There is a significant difference in what Lear claimed was necessary in 2.2 and now, hence its strangeness. In the earlier scene, he rails about the necessity of a large entourage of knights to mask his wretchedness. When Lear laments, ‘O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous; / Allow not nature more than nature needs’ (2.2.456–8), he effectively classifies himself as ‘not nature’ or as human, and suggests he is allowed to have an entourage of an hundred knights because of his exceptional status. In this new context a hovel comes to be as valuable as the entourage. Necessity is a strange art indeed! Through the storm, Lear shows a renewed awareness of his body, and a new sensitivity to its materiality and attention to its basic needs. The might and power of the violent meteors dwarf him. The stubborn and irascible force has finally thwarted his capacity to hide his shame. Lear has no choice but to submit to this meteorological violence and reveal himself fully to himself and the cosmos.

Although at the end of 3.2 Lear moves towards taking shelter, he refuses multiple times. In fact, an often-overlooked aspect of the plot in readings that blame his daughters for his exposure is that he could have taken shelter in numerous ways at numerous times. In 3.4, Lear refuses shelter one last time in order to pray for those who are similarly exposed to the storm – those wretched and mortal individuals who are just like him. He could just take shelter but he is deeply curious about the significance of his exposure. By virtue of its extended representation, we are forced to be curious too. This prayer is infused with curiosity. Rather than being disgusted by the wretches’ cheap and beastly lives, he wonders how these people endure such exposure without love:

I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.
[Kneels] Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
 Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayest shake the superflux to them
 And show the heavens more just. (3.4.27–36)

In agreement with Lehnhof, who suggests that we need to 'think twice about ... applauding Lear's desire to identify with others' (498), his prayer which is sometimes read as an indicator of his Christ-like qualities is actually more about self-realization. His prayer is a 'tiresome play of the same' (498). Lear's prayer to those wretches exposed to the storm breeds self-reflection and self-revelation with regard to his own physical condition and material situation. While it is entirely selfish at an interpersonal level, the relationship it responds to in less tiresome manner is the sociopolitical one, the one that posits the sovereign self as immortal or transcendent, the one that needs the sovereign to take shelter in order to ensure the coherence of the kingdom. In this regard, his prayer implies that 'more just' heavens (heavens that allow mortals to be kings) require a different model of governance; a model not based on hierarchy, transcendence and exclusion.

In reading Lear's attempt to disrobe from his point of view, the impulse toward nudity in the storm can thus be interpreted as an image of a man now mostly unashamed of his mortal body, who recognizes – at least momentarily – that his trouble is not his body itself but the way it is socially and legally framed. At this point Lear's shame does not trump his curiosity, instead his shame shifts into a transformational and curious mode by virtue of his body's exposure: 'Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, / bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings / come, unbutton here' (3.4.106–8). He wants to be in his body. He has worked through some of the shame and revealed his nudity to others.

Lear's one success, then, might be understood as coming into his own body. That said, Lear does not manage to construct a successful kingdom wherein he is allowed to be both sovereign and mortal, he does not come to find solidarity

with his daughters whose bodies weathered his vitriol. But his wretched attempt to come into his body provides a cautionary tale for us. His failure shows the *social* barriers to living differently with our bodies in a society that circumscribes them in a particular way. That said, even Lear returns to the body in a fraught manner, it is still stifled by his misogyny and remains deeply resentful of having to go through that process at all. In the oftentimes closed world of the tragedy, however, Lear's taking off his clothes is – at least momentarily – an opening out onto another possibility.

View #3: The actor

When thinking about the politics of the mortal body in the environmental humanities, Lear's revelation as mortal has extraordinary potential. It functions, in isolation, as a criticism of Western modes of selfhood and fantasies of exceptionalism and transcendence. It also denounces modes of governance that require the performance of immortality, if not for the false consciousness it breeds, then for the pain and suffering of the individual required to uphold this impossible ideal. In working towards the conclusion of this long chapter and opening out onto Part 2, however, the question remains as to whether or not this perspective is ever apprehended by an audience in performance. Is Lear's point of view received as part of the wild spectacle of Lear in the storm? The short answer is 'most likely not', but I will spend the last few pages of this chapter explaining why and how.

Either despite or because of the extraordinary extent of Lear's failure and the burden of his death – ending up homeless, stripped down to undergarments, enduring the full force of a massive storm, sheltering in a hovel with an entourage of fools, crowning himself with weeds, celebrating his mortality and, soon after, dying of grief under the weight of his youngest daughter's dead body – the task of playing Lear is generally understood in heroic terms. Scholars, directors and actors repeatedly deploy metaphors involving mountains and mountaineering to describe both the play and the task of the actor playing Lear. Jan Kott claimed that *King Lear* was a mountain that everyone 'admires yet no one particularly wishes to climb' (1967: 101), while Peter Brook claimed that *King Lear* was a mountain whose summit had

never been reached (Brook in Marowitz 1963: 23). Paul Scofield suggested that Lear's heights might best be reached from above by a parachute rather than from below by climbing. Benedict Andrews, citing Brook's mountain metaphor, described his role as director as, 'helping a great actor to ... climb this mountain' (Andrews, in Blake 2011). Laurence Olivier claimed that the great Shakespearean actors Richard Burbage, David Garrick, Edmund Kean and Henry Irving, all of whom were known for their rendition of Lear, were themselves like great volcanoes (1986: 59), and John Bell reflected on the volcanic quality to the character itself in his programme notes to Kosky's *Lear*. The dominant idea is that the play is a mountain and either the actor or the director is a mountain climber. Just as Edmund Hillary was knighted for being the first westerner to summit Mount Everest, many of the actors mentioned above were knighted for their services to the arts.

Alexander Leggatt observed the discrepancy between the fixity of mountain metaphor and the fluidity of the character in the play's performance history. While also citing a range of other people who deploy the trope, he claimed that the task of his book on *Lear* in performance was to undermine and repeal the mountain metaphor:

It is striking how often the business of interpreting *King Lear* has been compared to mountain-climbing ... Yet, this metaphor though it speaks eloquently of the plays challenges, misleads us by presenting it as a fixed solid entity, massive and inhuman. *King Lear* has never been fixed ... *King Lear* [is not] a forbidding mountain that has to be scaled but [is] a living organism whose vitality lies in its capacity for constant growth and change. (Leggatt 2004: 14–15)

I agree with Leggatt: the mountain metaphor misses the point. The second part of the book is, like Leggatt's earlier study of the play in performance, geared towards repealing the storm metaphor too. However, that the metaphor endures and is so ubiquitously deployed, despite its seeming erroneousness, calls for it to be taken seriously. There is no earthly metaphor that implies anything more timeless and enduring than a mountain. Despite volcanic eruptions, landslides and erosions, mountains outlive castles, crowns, kingdoms and definitely the reigns of individual kings. Given it is a play about death, how can we read this enduring cultural valorization of *King Lear* as mountain, and the actor playing Lear as mountain climber?

I here account for the enduring mountain metaphor by way of looking at the dynamics of shame from yet another angle. During Lear's exposure to the elements the actor and the character have contradictory experiences with regard to shame. Which is to say, at the precise moment Lear comes to understand, accept and expose himself as mortal, the actor playing Lear, if doing so successfully, simultaneously and ironically immortalizes himself. For the audience, then, when Lear is at his most shameful, the actor is at his most triumphant. The actor's experience is only a triumph akin to climbing a mountain if the culture within which the actor is trying to operate posits mortal weakness as shameful. It only works if Lear's emotional journey from king to mortal is horrifying for the spectator or performer.

While this argument specifically relates to *King Lear's* cultural reception, it has a broader, allegorical function. It is an indirect way of speaking what I feel, not what I ought to say. It is a way into talking about the luxury life that is afforded to contemporary politicians and business persons – heroes that climb the two big mountains of neoliberal democracies, the state and the corporation – and ecocritiquing the self-serving dimensions of those lives. These people will all die and yet their hubris as expressed in their life's work suggests an aversion to that earthly and bodily reality. It is really hard to know what motivates people to refuse to respond to this massive earthy crisis, but shame of weakness and shamelessness around the privileges of power seems a useful candidate for, at the very least, exploring the dynamics of this major historical impasse.¹²

So, a lot has already been said about shame in *King Lear*, comparatively little has been made of shame as a precondition of many theatrical performances, and nothing on how that intersects so neatly with the pattern of shame in this particular play. Similar to a king, shame is the dramatic actor's primary professional hazard, but for different reasons. Self-shattering shame is what an actor risks if the performance is unsuccessful or audience does not react positively to the performance. Indeed, Sedgwick argued that because of the potential double movement of shame, shame is actually synonymous with theatrical performance: 'Shame ... transformational shame, *is performance*. I

¹² Given that allegory is a tentative expression of something that later will be expressed in full, it is important to note that I continue to pursue this line of thought in my postdoctoral work, currently under the umbrella title 'Weathering the City'.

mean theatrical performance' (2003: 38). To unpack this claim a bit further, Sedgwick argues that:

whenever the actor ... proffers the spectacle of his or her [self] to a spectating eye, the stage is set (so to speak) for either a newly dramatized flooding of the subject by the shame of refused return, or a successful pulsation of the mirroring regard through a narcissistic circuit. (2003 38)

What she means here, to use Shakespearean performance as an example, is that an actor puts forward himself *as* Lear, as many actors have done from Burbage to Rush. Further, the actor playing Lear wants to be seen or recognized *as* Lear. The 'spectating eye', or the audience, can refuse to return the desired gaze; the audience can see the actor or, worse still, a bad actor *instead* of Lear, and thereby institute great shame within the actor for being looked upon 'strangely' by an audience. Alternatively, the audience can feed the actor's narcissistic desire by watching the actor as he wants to be seen, by seeing either Lear or, better yet, a great actor successfully playing this famous character. *King Lear* troubles this formulation of shame *as* theatrical performance by the fact that the character is also experiencing a moment of transformational shame at the same time.

During the storm scenes, the actor playing Lear ends up in a curious double bind whereby the actor and the character experience opposing dimensions of transformational shame. In the play's first scene the character experiences 'a newly dramatized flooding of the subject by the shame of refused return' (Sedgwick 2003: 38), or the shame that Cordelia causes within the Lear by refusing to express her love during the division of the kingdom scene. But, if the actor playing Lear is doing his job successfully, that is, he is plausibly communicating the drama to the audience, then the actor, at precisely the same time the character is experiencing the 'shame of refused return', will necessarily experience 'a successful pulsation of the mirroring regard through a narcissistic circuit' (Sedgwick 2003: 38). In other words, if the actor is performing well throughout, the actor will be seen precisely as he wants to be seen, at the same time enduring the shameful experience of the character of Lear, who is not being seen as he wants to be seen. Shame thus provides us with a curious hermeneutic problem in *King Lear*. What aspect of the play are we actually watching? Do we focus on the meaning of Lear's shameful failure or merely marvel at the actor's success?

Come the storm, when Lear undergoes a shameful transformation and opens himself up to the storm and into a new mode of being, dwelling, living as mortal in and with the storm, the actor is experiencing a conservative triumph and succeeding in performing the role and, in many instances, immortalizing himself as a great Shakespearean actor. I suspect that at least part of the reason for the mountain metaphor is because the actor can courageously engage in the performance of such ostensibly shameful acts as exposing one's self to a storm and identifying with a madman, which makes the successful performances of Lear so memorable. At the same time, any political ideas about sovereignty, mortality and governance become further buried in the play.

I will now illustrate by example how this particular shame dynamic works in practice. The examples I draw upon are from different centuries and have very different interpretations of their professional dilemma: William Charles Macready was particularly bothered by the potential risks involved in playing Lear, while Laurence Olivier was entirely energized by it. Macready lost sleep and turned to alcohol when approaching the character of Lear because he was so worried about his posthumous cultural legacy, while Olivier modelled his career on the desire to be remembered retrospectively as the best actor of all time, with Lear as the crowning challenge. For both actors, their ultimate success at playing Lear was the key to establishing their posthumous legacy.

Macready reflects extensively upon his concerns about playing Lear in his diary:

This is the last attempt of the great characters of Shakespeare that I have left unattempted, and the tone which the press takes up on it will materially influence my after life. I can put no reliance on the partial feelings of friends, – I do not feel that I have yet succeeded, but it is consoling to me to believe that I have not failed. Persons think that we carry the applause of the audience to our pillows, and that the sound still rings as a delightful lullaby in our ears. I have no such pleasure. I wish the night over that I may make up my mind to the impression diffused through the public mind. (1875: 420)

Macready seeks to successfully portray Lear, and he will not be satisfied until he sees the applause translated into language and published for posterity in the newspaper, so his success in the role will be impressed upon 'the public

mind' and remembered beyond his time. He repeats this anxiety before each performance until he is convinced he will be remembered as successfully performing Lear. He even reports on taking wine before a performance of *King Lear* on 23 May 1834:

Went to the theatre; dressed; became excessively nervous; took wine; went on the stage – as nervous as the first night I acted in London, without the overbearing ardour that could free me from the thralldom of my fears. (1875: 419)

We can see in Macready fear of not being recognized as he wants to be recognized. In other words, Macready fears the shame that he will have to endure by failing to be recognized as Lear. Which is, in this context, a double shaming, metaphorically exposing himself as a bad actor and literally exposing himself to the audience at the same time.

Quite unlike Macready, Olivier is completely unashamed of the dilemma Lear presents for the actor. Instead, he is comfortable with the narcissistic bind a between the character and the actor, he sees no problem in approaching the role of Lear. Indeed he sees little distinction between Lear and himself:

Frankly Lear is an easy part, one of the easiest parts in Shakespeare ... We can all play it. It is simply bang straightforward ... He's like all of us really, he's just a stupid old fart. He's got this frightful temper. He's completely selfish and utterly inconsiderate. (1986: 93)

He tacitly associates this character trait within Lear to the desires of the actor himself for recognition and praise from the audience:

There is nothing more tempting than to hang on to the curtain at the end of a long evening and let the audience know that you have given your all for them. This was the night and the only night when you sweated blood to give them the definitive performance. This performance was for their grandchildren. (1986: 92)

On one hand, Olivier parodies other actors who, like Macready, play the role in order to be drowned in applause and praise; on the other, there is also a degree of self-deprecation, because he too, in spite of finding the role incredibly simple, knows well the desire to absorb the praise from the audience. When Olivier claims that the actor has given his 'all' to deliver the performance, this is both humourously self-indulgent and totally accurate; on one hand, his colloquial tone suggests a degree of self-parody regarding his own hubris

and hyperbole, but on the other he is quite seriously saying he risked the very constitution of his *self* for the audience in order to deliver that performance.

In this, Olivier suggests that he does not see the role of Lear as a huge test for himself, but rather a competition between his version of Lear and others actors' versions of Lear. This is the foundation of Olivier's approach to the role:

One of the first productions I saw of *Lear* ... was given by an actor called Randle Ayrton, who was then a famous British star ... I went to see it with my mother-in-law who knew him ... We went backstage afterwards to bandy the compliments and exchange the usual pleasantries. My mother-in-law gushed all over him. 'You were just like the Old Man,' she said. 'Just like the Old Man.' [Henry] Irving even then, so long after his death, was still referred to as the Old Man. Of course he was; he'd based it on himself, hadn't he? Listening to all the compliments flying, I came to a decision. I vowed to eradicate all knowledge of the Old Man from the public's memory forever. I was determined to become the Old Man myself. Let them impersonate me fifty years after my death. My will was granite. I was determined to become the greatest actor of all time. (1986: 96)

Curiously, Olivier's mother-in-law does not suggest that Ayrton was just like 'the Old Man' meaning Lear, but rather the 'Old Man', a previous actor who played Lear. The competition is who can be the most convincing version of himself *as* Lear and, importantly, remembered *as* the greatest version of himself *as* Lear for the longest time after his death. He wants his interpretation of Lear to linger in the minds of the public. This serves not only as a good example of the problematic relationship between Lear and the actor, but as an example of how certain performances of Lear enter the cultural imagination and impact upon the meaning of the character.

Olivier and Macready perform the affective feedback loop that is mediated by the risk of shame. The best and most memorable actor successfully makes himself in exchange for performing shame on Lear's behalf. In bearing himself to the storm, in performing transformational shame in and for the storm, the actor only affirms his self in the real world. In other words the actor's self is fortified at exactly the same time as Lear's is totally undone and remade.

Fortunately both Macready and Olivier believed they succeeded in the task of playing Lear. Regardless of how contingent their success was on all aspects of the production, and also on the audience, both actors locate their success in their own portrayal of Lear in the storm. Macready's own reflection upon

one of his performances (26 May 1834) as Lear confidently celebrates his own success:

I threw nothing away; took time, and yet gave force to all that I had to do; above all, my tears were not those of a woman or a driveller, they really stained a 'man's cheeks.' In the storm, as indeed throughout, I was greatly improved upon the preceding night. I was frantic with passion, and brought up expectation to the dreadful issue of such conflict. (1875: 420)

Of course, these comments are taken from Macready's diary, but they are entirely about himself – the tears were Macready's tears, not Lear's. Although we might argue that the point of Lear's tears is to challenge his masculinity and sense of self, Macready so entangled himself in Lear's undoing that it seems his intention was not to undo Lear at all but to secure his legacy. They were tears of joy at his success, rather than tears of sorrow at Lear's failure.

Likewise, in Olivier's reflection on his acting, he quotes a reviewer's praising himself and his unique talents during the storm:

I was able to get tremendous power vocally, so that during the storm scene the thunder and lightning were in the King himself as well as in the elements ... Audrey Williams said '... the sheer torrential sound of (the storm) swept across the senses like Niagara, but in all this raving music one could still hear the tortured cry of a drowning man. ... the scene wrung the heart as no other Lear at this moment has succeeded in doing.' (1986: 89–90)

In both instances demonstrated here, and arguably in all successful performances of Lear, the moment of Lear's transformational shame is the precise moment of the actor's personal triumph. And herein lies a problem in distinguishing the storm from Lear. Although the triumph of the actor relies on an intimate understanding of Lear's affective struggle in the storm, the triumph of the actor is what is heralded as the success. On top of this, as I covered in the first 'view', the spectacle of Lear's exposure is shameful to almost everyone else except Lear. Thus the more nuanced details of Lear's embodied struggle and self-revelation as mortal are all but forgotten.

Any attempt to communicate the idea of the mortal body is buried by the performance. *Contra* Lamb, who seemed unable to want to watch the horrible body in performance, Lear's is ironically more of a heroic tale for his wretchedness. In this regard the catharsis of Lear's exposure to the storm

allows an audience to confront all that is painful and disgusting in life and celebrate on behalf of an actor who was able to go through all that trauma and triumph. If anything, due to the dynamics of shame in the storm, *King Lear* in performance serves to validate fantasies of immortality rather than contravene them with a powerful representation of death. That said, in Part 2 I will explore productions that attempt to grapple with those more painful and disgusting dimensions of human existence without simply celebrating the actor's triumph.

Conclusion

Shame takes many paths through *King Lear*; it forms the foundations of moral injunctions, temporary imprisonment, political actions, erratic behaviour, misogynistic vitriol, family conflict, actors' anxieties and bodily behaviours. In all but one case, however, the act of shaming is largely corrective and conservative. It aims to shape behaviours and preserve a status quo. The example of Lear stripping in the storm, *for the storm*, provides a single moment of transformational shame, or a risky bodily poetics, that signifies some kind of other earthly relation. The performance history that follows in Part 2 demonstrates in slightly different terms how productions have dealt with the question of Lear's exposure, how they make the storm signify differently across the ages in relation to Lear and for the audience. These performances do not always attempt to open Lear out onto the storm literally, but in many cases use the storm as a metaphor for the confused self thereby closing off any real confrontation with the significance of Lear's body. In more recent productions, however, the body is starting to emerge as a site of significance and symbolic power, and the storm is returning to its literal, material form.

With regard to the broader ecocritical concerns of this book, Lear's struggle with shame and his partial transformation in the storm represent the kind of dangerous and difficult affectively charged political struggle that might be required by some to move beyond Western individualist hubris and out into another relation with earth others. The cultural phenomenon of *King Lear* represents the tragedy that there is no easy way forward; the shift into a different relationship with the weather, with the social, requires a thorough

remaking of the Western self. In this context, rather than encouraging Lear to take shelter, all we can do is to establish circumstances that encourage those that still place faith in individual transcendence or in an immortal body politic to orient themselves towards their bodies and the storm, like Lear. All we can do is assure them that beneath our clothes we are all naked and mortal too.