



# Notes to Literature

Weekly  
reading  
booklet

#6 :  
Shakespeare's  
*King Lear*  
(1605/06)

# NL

NOTES TO LITERATURE

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Auerbach, Erich, and Willard R. Trask. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Fiftieth-anniversary edition. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Garber, Marjorie B. *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

Shakespeare, William, *King Lear*. Edited and introduced by R. A. Foakes. [New ed.]. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001.

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# 6 Shakespeare

**What, art mad? A man may see how the world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear. Change places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?**

## From *King Lear* (1606)

### EDMOND

**T**his is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's tail, and my nativity was under Ursa major, so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardising. (*Lear* I.ii.58)



### KENT

A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats, a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy worsted- stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking, whoreson glass-gazing, superserviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch, one whom I will beat into clamorous whining if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.

**OSWALD**

Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee!

**KENT**

What a brazen-faced varlet art thou to deny thou knowest me! Is it two days since I tripped up thy heels and beat thee before the king? Draw, you rogue! For though it be night, yet the moon shines. I'll make a sop o'th'moonshine of you, [Drawing his sword] you whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw!

(Lear II.ii)

**Edgar**

(Lear IV.vi)

Bear free and patient thoughts.

*Enter Lear [mad, fantastically dressed with weeds and flowers].*

But who comes here?

The safer sense will ne'er accommodate  
His master thus.

**Lear**

No, they cannot touch me for coining;  
I am the King himself.

**Edgar**

O thou side-piercing sight!

**Lear**

Nature 's above art in that respect. There's your press money. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper. Draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted cheese will do't. There's my gauntlet; I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills. O, well flown, bird! i' th' clout, i' th' clout! Hewgh! Give the word.

**Edgar**

Sweet marjoram.

**Lear**

Pass.

**Earl of Gloucester**

I know that voice.

**Lear**

Ha! Goneril with a white beard? They flatter'd me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything I said! 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words! They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie – I am not ague-proof.

**Earl of Gloucester**

The trick of that voice I do well remember.

Is't not the King?

**Lear**

Ay, every inch a king!

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?

Adultery?

Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No.

The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly

Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son

Was kinder to his father than my daughters

Got 'tween the lawful sheets.

To't, luxury, pell-mell! for I lack soldiers.

Behold yond simp'ring dame,

Whose face between her forks presageth snow,

That minces virtue, and does shake the head

To hear of pleasure's name.

The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't  
 With a more riotous appetite.  
 Down from the waist they are Centaurs,  
 Though women all above.  
 But to the girdle do the gods inherit,  
 Beneath is all the fiend's.  
 There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit;  
 burning, scalding, stench, consumption. Fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!  
 Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination.  
 There's money for thee.

**Earl of Gloucester**

O, let me kiss that hand!

**Lear**

Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

**Earl of Gloucester**

O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world  
 Shall so wear out to naught. Dost thou know me?

**Lear**

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me? No, do thy  
 worst, blind Cupid! I'll not love. Read thou this challenge; mark but the  
 penning of it.

**Earl of Gloucester**

Were all the letters suns, I could not see one.

**Edgar**

[aside] I would not take this from report. It is,  
 And my heart breaks at it.

**Lear**

Read.

**Earl of Gloucester**

What, with the case of eyes?



**Lear**

O, ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light. Yet you see how this world goes.

**Earl of Gloucester**

I see it feelingly.

**Lear**

What, art mad? A man may see how the world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear. Change places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

**Earl of Gloucester**

Ay, sir.

**Lear**

And the creature run from the cur? There thou mightst behold the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office.

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back.

Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind

For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;

Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;

Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.

None does offend, none- I say none! I'll able 'em.

Take that of me, my friend, who have the power

To seal th' accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes

And, like a scurvy politician, seem

To see the things thou dost not. Now, now, now, now!

Pull off my boots. Harder, harder! So.

**Edgar**

O, matter and impertinency mix'd!

Reason, in madness!

**Lear**

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.  
I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester.  
Thou must be patient. We came crying hither;  
Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air  
We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee. Mark.

**Earl of Gloucester**

Alack, alack the day!

**Lear**

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools. This' a good block.  
It were a delicate stratagem to shoe  
A troop of horse with felt. I'll put't in proof,  
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,  
Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

## *From Marjorie Garber, “King Lear” in Shakespeare After All (2004)*

We have seen that *King Lear* proceeds by analogy and comparison. Lear is compared to Gloucester, Edmund to Goneril and Regan, Goneril and Regan to Cordelia, Edgar to Edmund, and so on. Situations seem to fan out and become general. In the same way, the play draws dramatic strength from juxtaposition of scene to scene, phrase to phrase, to form a kind of node of meaning, a fulcrum. For example, in act 2, scene 2, the audience sees the spectacle of Kent in the stocks, demoted from his accustomed rank, concealing his real identity, and Kent speaks of the extremity of his position. “Nothing almost sees miracles / But misery,” he says. “Fortune, good night; / Smile once more; turn thy wheel.” The very next thing the audience sees and hears, in act 2, scene 3, is Edgar, newly disguised, also forced to abandon his identity and his rank, also mistreated, also at what he then imagines will be his lowest point, his “worst”—although both Edgar and Kent will learn again and again that there is worse to come. The play’s design thus presents two low points, two stripped, denuded men, two disguises and two confinements; and a dramatic effect is achieved by juxtaposition.

A similar effect develops in the structure of act 3, Lear’s remarkable confrontation with nature and with human nature. At the end of act 2 we heard dire warnings of the storm that is about to come. After Lear’s proud and pitiful boast, “No, I’ll not weep,” and the immediately ensuing “Storm and tempest,” the act closes with Cornwall’s ironically prudent advice to Gloucester, who has expressed his desire to go out to succor the distraught King. “Shut up your doors, my lord,” Cornwall says. “’Tis a wild night. / My Regan counsels well. Come out o’th storm” (2.2.472-473). Once again, with artful juxtaposition, the next exchange we hear is in a way an answer to this—an answer, this time, by contrast rather than similitude. “Who’s there, besides foul weather?” asks the disguised Kent, and a gentleman replies, “One minded like the weather, / Most unquietly” (3.1.1-3). Weather has become something that cannot be shut out. We onlookers cannot “come out of the storm,” for it is all around us, and within us, as it is all around Lear and within him. “This tempest in my mind,” he will call it. The human condition in the play is now the equivalent of “foul weather,” and is, like the loyal gentleman, “minded like the weather, / Most unquietly.”

This is a kind of dramatic point it is easy to miss when a play is divided into discrete acts for performance. In a modern production an interval or intermission might separate Kent's remarks in act 3, scene 1, from Cornwall's in act 2, scene 2. But in Shakespeare's time the plays would have been performed straight through, without a break. In the case of *King Lear*, the inexorability of deprivation and suffering increases the dramatic tension to a point where we in the audience—like Edgar, like Kent—can hardly bear what we see before our eyes. Act 3 (in the Folio) begins in the open air with a scene of generosity and charity that stands in brutal opposition to the isolated scenes that are shortly to come. Kent and the gentleman meet and speak of the King's exposure to the elements—of how he “tears his white hair, / Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage, / Catch in their fury and make nothing of” (Quarto, 8.6-8). “[E]yeless rage;” “nothing.” And we hear of how he “[s]trives in his little world of man to outstorn / The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain” (Quarto, 8.9-10). Lear is now a microcosm, a “little world of man.” What confronts us, the spectators in the theater, is the inner agony of a man's soul played out as if it were some immense and tragic metaphor writ large upon the landscape, so that we can see it and share it.

At this point the King who was the emblem of all earthly comforts is exposed to the elements. The place in which he finds himself is an articulated metaphor, the counterpart of his state of mind, on the one hand, and of his fallen status in polity and society, on the other. Since the early eighteenth century editors have situated these scenes on a heath, an open space of land. (As the critic Henry Turner notes, neither the Folio nor the Quarto specifies a “heath,”<sup>1</sup> although that designation, aligning the scene with a windswept wasteland familiar in British topography, and possibly with the also wild and eerie heath in *Macbeth*, has by now become conventional.) As if to underscore the inner nature of the storm, Lear “himself disclaims any real physical discomfort: “I am cold myself,” he admits, but

This tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else  
Save what beats there....

3.4.12-14

And:

In such a night

To shut me out? Pour on, I will endure.  
In such a night as this! ...

3.4.17-19

The play picks up a familiar Shakespearean topos, the journey from civilization to a place of wilderness and apparent unreason—a pattern often used in the comedies and also, as many critics have noted, in the genre of pastoral. Lear's heath is no Forest of Arden. It is a place of transformation and change, but the change it produces is a stripping away, not an augmentation of magical powers, love, agency, or wit. The heath is a reversal of the condition of “civilization,” a version of Hobbesian nature, the nature of a life that is “nasty, brutish, and short”—a place in which the only dynamics that count are those of will and power. This is Lear's “little world of man,” not only a philosophical microcosm but also a psychological landscape.

It is important to bear in mind, though, that at the beginning of act 3 Lear himself does not see this larger and more “transcendent” picture. He is still the King—stripped though he may be of daughters, knights, land, and power. As he enters his own “landscape of the mind,” the one thought in his mind is that he can control it. He will try to invoke and direct Nature (“Hear, nature ...”). Nature, with a small or a large N, is for him not yet a metaphor of his condition, but rather an instrument of his wrath, something he can use:

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

3.2.1-9

Lear is here demanding—commanding—the destruction of the world. “Germens” are seeds (compare “germination”); to spill the germens that make up the interior of the earth, to crack the molds, is to destroy life and all its possibilities. “Rumble thy bellyful; spit, fire; spout, rain,” Lear continues.

Here I stand your slave,

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A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man,  
 But yet I call you servile ministers,  
 That will with two pernicious daughters join  
 “... 'gainst a head  
 So old and white as this.  
 O, ho, 'tis foul!

3.2.14,18-23

We may notice how Lear seems to age, onstage, in his own self-description. The rain and wind are false flatterers, who have deserted and weakened him to flock to the side of Goneril and Regan. And yet he feels himself still the King, bereft of power that should rightly still be his. Lear is now victim rather than victor; acted upon, not actor or director; no longer the center of the court, the kingdom, or the world. In a way this is the consummate Shakespearean metaphor, an individual confronting his own radical limitations—or, to use Lear's word, his own “necessities.” That resonant word “need” has echoed throughout the play (“What need you five and twenty?;” “What need one?;” “O, reason not the need!;” “But for true need— / You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need”). Now, in extremis, he finds necessity suddenly not in a roster of one hundred knights, not in power or rich clothing, but in a bale of straw:

Where is this straw, my fellow?  
 The art of our necessities is strange,  
 And can make vile things precious...

3.2.68-70

Among the “vile things” he will come to value and to cherish are people as well as straw.

The storm scene is a learning experience for Lear and for his audiences, as it was for his time. The optimism of the sixteenth-century humanists, as expressed in Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, placing man so confidently just below the angels, is frayed or lost here, at the beginning of a new, perhaps more skeptical, century. Human beings are vile things that necessity—need, not luxury—makes precious. The “heath” and the storm, then, are effectively understood—and performed—as projections of Lear's mental situation upon a larger screen, at once nature and theater.

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Edgar now begins to assume a necessary mediating role in the play, a role he will retain as the tragedy deepens, as events become even more unbearable, even more unspeakable. Edgar as onlooker, as onstage audience and as our confidant, “”, offers a point of perspective from which the audience in the theater can watch and share the appalling proceedings before us. For with the arrival of Gloucester, the storm's transformation is almost over, and Lear is mad.

Over and over again we heard him cry out against the onset of madness: “O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!” (1.5.41); “Keep me in temper. I would not be mad” (42); “I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad” (2.2.383); “O Fool, I shall go mad!” (451). In the very first scene of the play we heard Kent say, “Be Kent unmannerly / When Lear is mad,” and now Gloucester says to the disguised Kent, “Thou sayst the King grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend, / I am almost mad” “myself” (3.4.148-149). So is Edgar. So are we. In fact, Lear's madness now becomes itself an emblem, a touchstone, for the madness that afflicts so many others in the play. And this madness is a condition we have seen before in Shakespeare. Hamlet feigned madness (or was it feigned?). And what of Othello? And Ophelia? And (shortly) Lady Macbeth? What is this disease of madness, and what is its function in drama?

Most evidently, and perhaps most importantly, madness permits the maddened victim to speak the truth, like a licensed fool, and be *disbelieved*. A madman or madwoman is a sublime version of a fool—in the confines of theater. He or she can echo the prevailing madness of the world, speaking through the onstage audience to an audience in the theater, asserting, proclaiming, or establishing contestatory and unwelcome “truths” about the human condition:

Lear  
They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie,  
I am not ague-proof. (4.5.102)

Gloucester  
O, let me kiss that hand!

Lear  
Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality. (4.5.125-126)

Lear

When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools. (4.5.172-173)

As Edgar, ever the audience's eyes and ears onstage, remarks,  
[aside] O, matter and impertinency mixed— Reason in madness!  
(4.5.164-165)

Edgar is the spokesman for (as he says in the play's last lines in the Folio text) “[w]e that are young.” For the survivors, for those who must go on. And Edgar cannot believe, or bear, what he sees.

The King's madness is also a forum for social criticism, a final indictment of a handy-dandy world. In the latter part of act 3 the mad King stages a trial (this trial scene appears only in the *Quarto*, as scene 13). The scene is part ironic truth, part social satire, and part the final unmasking of “justice,” as always limited and inadequate. From this moment the play will move deliberately toward the hope for mercy as contrasted with justice. The trial judges are to be “Poor Tom”—the “robèd man of justice,” naked and hunted—and the Fool, his “yokefellow of equity,” whose only equity is that all men are fools. The prisoners on trial are joint-stools, and the scene onstage is heartrending. A king without a throne rails at joint-stools, real or imagined, without occupants. There is a bitter little joke embedded in this scenario, since the phrase “Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool” appears often in the period as a proverbial expression of disparagement. When in the course of the trial scene in *King Lear* the Fool offers this very phrase as an insult to (the absent) Goneril, he is speaking, in literal fact, to a piece of furniture, thus reversing the usual gesture, in which a wooden “person” is called a thing. The Fool thus offers his backhanded apology to a stool (“Sorry, I took you for a stool”), and his mordant wit may recall the puncturing critique of other Shakespearean literalists, like the gravedigger in *Hamlet* (“Upon what ground?” Hamlet demands of him, and he replies, “Why, here in Denmark”). But the scene is rawly painful, and Edgar weeps as Lear had wept (Edgar: “My tears begin to take his part so much / They mar my counterfeiting” [3.6.17-18]). The storm now inhabits and afflicts them all. “Sir,” says Kent, “where is the patience now / That you so oft have boasted to retain?” (3.6.15-16). But the King is mad, and the Fool of practical wisdom departs the play.



## From Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946/2003)

Then, in the course of the sixteenth century, the Christian-figural schema lost its hold in almost all parts of Europe. The issue into the beyond, although it was totally abandoned only in rare instances, lost in certainty and unmistakability. And at the same time antique models (first Seneca, then the Greeks also) and antique theory reappeared, unclouded. The powerful influence of the authors of antiquity greatly furthered the development of the tragic. It was, however, unavoidable that this influence should at times have been at odds with the new forces which, arising from contemporary conditions and the autochthonous culture, were driving toward the tragic.

The dramatic occurrences of human life were seen by antiquity predominantly in the form of a change of fortune breaking in upon man from without and from above. In Elizabethan tragedy on the other hand—the first specifically modern form of tragedy—the hero's individual character plays a much greater part in shaping his destiny. This is, I believe, the prevailing view, and on the whole it appears to me to be correct. But it needs to be qualified and supplemented. In the introduction to an edition of Shakespeare which I have before me (“The Complete Works of W.S., London and Glasgow, n.d., Introduction by St. John Ervine, p. xii) I find it expressed in the following terms: “And here we come on the great difference between the Greek and the Elizabethan drama: the tragedy in the Greek plays is an arranged one in which the characters have no decisive part. Theirs but to do and die. But the tragedy in the Elizabethan plays comes straight from the heart of the people themselves. Hamlet is Hamlet, not because a capricious god has compelled him to move to a tragic end, but because there is a unique essence in him which makes him incapable of behaving in any other way than he does.” And the critic continues by emphasizing Hamlet's freedom of action, which allows him to doubt and hesitate before he comes to a decision—a freedom of action which Oedipus and Orestes do not possess. In this form the contrast is formulated too absolutely. It is not possible to deny Euripides' Medea a “unique essence” and even freedom of action or to overlook the fact that she has moments of indecision when she fights her own gruesome passion.

Indeed, even Sophocles, that almost model representative of classical antiquity, shows at the beginning of his *Antigone*, in the conversation between the two sisters, an example of two persons who find themselves in exactly the same situation but who decide—without any pressure of fate and purely in accordance with their own particular characters—in favor of different courses of conduct. Yet the English critic's basic idea is sound: in Elizabethan tragedy and specifically in Shakespeare, the hero's character is depicted in greater and more varied detail than in antique tragedy, and participates more actively in shaping the individual's fate. But it is also possible to describe the difference in another way: one might say that the idea of destiny in Elizabethan tragedy is both more broadly conceived and more closely linked to the individual character than it is in antique tragedy. In the latter, fate means nothing but the given tragic complex, the present network of events in which a particular person is enmeshed at a particular moment. To whatever else may have happened to him during his life, so long as it is not part of the prehistory of the present conflict, to what we call his "milieu," little attention is given, and apart from age, sex, social status, and references to his general type of temperament, we learn nothing about his normal existence. The essence of his personality is revealed and evolves exclusively within the particular tragic action; everything else is omitted. All this is based upon the way in which antique drama arose and on its technical requirements. Freedom of movement, which it reached only very slowly, is much less, even in Euripides, than in the modern drama. In particular, the above-mentioned strict limitation to the given tragic conflict is based upon the fact that the subjects of antique tragedy are almost exclusively taken from the national mythology, in a few cases from national history. These were sacred subjects and the events and personages involved were known to the audience. The "milieu" too was known, and furthermore it was almost always approximately the same. Hence there was no reason to describe its special character and special atmosphere. Euripides challenged the tradition by introducing new interpretations, both of action and character, into the traditional material. But this can hardly be compared with the multiplicity of subject matter, the freedom of invention and presentation which distinguish the Elizabethan and the modern drama generally. What with the great variety of subject matter and the considerable freedom of movement of the Elizabethan theater, we are in each instance given the particular atmosphere, the situation, and the prehistory of the characters. The course of events on the stage is not rigidly restricted to the course of events of the tragic conflict

but covers conversations, scenes, characters, which the action as such does not necessarily require. Thus we are given a great deal of “supplementary information” about the principal personages; we are enabled to form an idea of their normal lives and particular characters apart from the complication in which they are caught at the moment. Thus fate here means much more than the given conflict. In antique tragedy it is almost always possible to make a clear distinction between the natural character of a personage and the fate which befalls him at the moment. In Elizabethan tragedy we are in most cases confronted not with purely natural character but with character already formed by birth, situation in life, and prehistory (that is, by fate)—character in which fate has already had a great share before it fulfils itself in the form of a specified tragic conflict. The latter is often only the occasion which releases a tragic situation prepared long before. This is particularly apparent in the cases of Shylock and Lear. What happens to them individually, is individually predestined for them; it fits the specific character of Shylock or of Lear, and this character is not only the natural character but one prepared by birth, situation, and prehistory, that is, by fate, for its unmistakable idiosyncrasy and for the tragic situation destined for it.

# Further Reading Suggestions

Recommended Secondary Literature:

- \* Adelman, J. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays: Hamlet to The Tempest* (1992)
- \* Bate, J. *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1997)
- \* Bloom, H. *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (2003)
- \* Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1992)
- \* Drakakis, J. Ed. *Alternative Shakespeares* (2002)
- \* Woodbridge, L. *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (2010).

You can find a full list of suggestions for further reading and secondary literature on all of the primary texts in these booklets on the website:

**<https://www.notestoliterature.com/twelve-books-to-have>**

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If you would like to pursue further independent reading on any of the authors in the booklet, or if you are setting up a reading group, I'm always happy to send on reading lists and guided reading questions that might be helpful for your discussions.

And of course, if you are interested in taking a course with Notes, I'd be delighted to hear from you. I offer free no-obligation meetings to discuss your goals, talk about some aspects of my approach, and think about how the courses could be tailored for you.

Happy reading.



## *About Me : Jonathan Gallagher*

I received my doctorate in 2019 from the University of Edinburgh, where I taught several undergraduate courses, ranging from medieval and early modern literature, to Romantic, Modernist and Late-Modernist poetry and drama. My doctoral research examined the relationship between processes of state-formation in early modern England and the spectacular flourishing of religious poetry witnessed during the same period. This work has been published by leading academic journals in my field, and tries to show that religious poetry was vitally and critically responsive to broad changes in social relations and practices of rule in 17C England.

In my teaching, as in my research, I'm drawn to examining intellectual history and literary art in the context of given social and political conditions. With that in mind, in 2022, I founded Notes to Literature. My hope is that Notes will grow into a distinguished provider of personalised adult education in the humanities. The plan is to go about this one client at a time.

You can learn more about Notes and me here: <https://www.notestoliterature.com/my-work>

<https://edinburgh.academia.edu/JonathanGallagher>