be *difficult*"—that the conditions of its creation necessarily made difficulty part of its texture. As much as Barnard, I want criticism to be clear and instructive, but I think at the present time it often needs to be difficult, challenging assumptions about how we have defined our task and our profession. Let us not confuse difficulty with obscurity, for they are not the same: we can avoid the latter; we should not shrink from the former.

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Reading *Lear*

To the Editor:

Lynda Boose's "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare" (*PMLA* 97[1982]:325–47) presents some interesting and stimulating insights into the ritualistic elements that contribute so much to the effectiveness of Shakespeare's plays. In her enthusiasm, however, I think that Boose has somewhat misread *King Lear*. In both the speeches quoted to show Lear's destructive attitude after his loss of Cordelia, the speaker is Goneril. Since Goneril's first speech in the play is a most enthusiastic and elaborate lie and since later events will prove that she lied when she promised to love and honor Albany, the weight of the evidence would suggest that she also lies when she accuses Lear and his followers of wrongdoing. Lear certainly denies the charge:

> My train are men of choice and rarest parts,
> That all particulars of duty know,
> And in the most exact regard support
> The worships of their name. (1.4.264–67)

This is Lear's view, and whatever his flaws may be, Lear is no liar.

Furthermore, Boose concludes that at the end of the play total disaster has occurred. Lear and his three daughters are dead. The play has come full circle. The incestuous father has brought only sterility to his house. I would suggest, on the contrary, that Lear, having learned a great deal in the course of his madness, is able to die a redeemed soul. His love for Cordelia is at last the love of one who recognizes her truth. Goneril and Regan have, indeed, died a sterile death, but it is a death brought about by their own greed, not by Lear's presumed incestuous desires. Cordelia is also and tragically dead, but surely not as a result of choosing father over husband. Rather, her husband has chosen to attend to his royal duties in France and has left her. As far as we can know, he entirely approved of her enterprise, having provided the armed forces for it. That she dies as a sacrifice to her sense of filial love and duty puts her into the mythic role of Antigone or even Christ, certainly not into the position of victim of her father's incestuous desires.

The play seems to me to follow the standard structure Greimas has put forward: a flawed social situation; actions that result from the flaw; reestablishment of stability, now without the flaw. In the beginning we have Lear reigning but not wise enough to reign well. At the end of the play Lear is at peace, but so is the kingdom, presumably, under the wise rule of Edgar.

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Ms. Boose replies:

Margaret Grimes's letter reflects the classic split between those Shakespearean scholars who assert and those who seriously question the notion that the ending of *King Lear* contains some kind of redemption, Christian or otherwise. In essence, the split represents two different responses to the unanswered question repeatedly raised within the play itself: does nothing come of nothing?

While it is true that I quote Goneril on two occasions and likewise true that Goneril deceives Lear and later Albany, the fact that the speaker is Goneril does not ipso facto discredit her statement any more than the fact that the speaker is Lear automatically credits his. Goneril's assertion, for instance, that Lear has "always lov'd our sister most" and Regan's retort that Lear "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.290, 293–94) are truths that seem verified by the action of the play; Lear's assessment of himself as a kind and loving father is, conversely, discredited by that same action. The play as a whole can be the only arbiter, and even this notion must be qualified, for a play is inevitably interpreted by the mind of the reader or the slant of the production. Nonetheless, Lear's behavior at Goneril's castle—a behavior defined by his repeated use of imperious orders for people to get his dinner, call forth his fool, and wait on him—and Lear's own words when he swears "by the marks of sovereignty, / Knowledge and reason" (1.4.232–33) seem to me to corroborate Goneril's contention that the ex-king is still attempting to "manage those authorities / That he hath given away" (1.3.17–18). As for the second citation referred to by Grimes, to accept Goneril's characterization of Lear's hundred knights as unruly, demanding, and quarrelsome (the image portrayed in most stage and film pro-

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