

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Why Redistribute? The Jacobean Union Issue and *King Lear*

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The Jacobean Union, though a failed project, is striking in how it encouraged fundamental reconsideration of what constitutes the political and economic community and how relationships should be structured within it. King James VI and I's attempt to unite Scotland and England from roughly 1603-1608 met with strong, ultimately successful opposition in the English House of Commons.¹ Yet it also generated a much broader field of discourse – primarily of treatises, but also of poems, masques, progresses, plays – exploring and theorizing how 'Britain' might be seen as, in effect, a newly created political and economic world.

Scholars have shown increasing interest in this larger field of Union discourse and, in particular, in approaching writings supporting the Union not solely as flattery or Jacobean propaganda but as rather more thoughtful, complex and valuable for study.² My essay aims to show how Shakespeare's *King Lear* may be seen as engaging with the larger field of Union discourse and especially with pro-Union writings in which some of the more far-reaching and transformative ideas were taking shape about what Britain

¹ The 1606-7 English Commons refused to ratify the 'Instrument of Union', which had been negotiated by its own delegates and Scottish counterparts in London in 1604. For a detailed examination of the controversy over the Union, see Bruce Galloway, *The Union of England and Scotland, 1603-1608* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986).

² See Arthur H. Williamson's work on David Hume of Godscroft in 'Radical Britain: David Hume of Godscroft and the Challenge to the Jacobean British Vision', in *The Accession of James I: Historical and Cultural Consequences*, ed. by Glenn Burgess, Rowland Wymer and Jason Lawrence (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and, together with Paul J. McGinnis, in their introduction to *De Unione Insulae Britannicae* in *The British Union: A Critical Edition and Translation of David Hume of Godscroft's De Unione Insulae Britannicae*, ed. and trans. by Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); see also Christopher N. Warren, *Literature and the Law of Nations, 1580-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 96-126.

might become as a social, economic, and political community. Specifically, the essay argues for a relationship between Lear's and Gloucester's famous language on redistribution in *King Lear* and what the essay seeks to show was a vibrant discourse about economic redistribution that emerged during the Union issue.

Roughly the first half of the essay seeks to uncover within the Union issue a context for thinking about economic redistribution – its impetus, its benefits, its consequences for the political order. This part of the essay considers writings by both Scottish and English Union supporters that responded to largely English fears that the Union would trigger a redistribution of resources, in particular of wealth and offices, toward the Scots. Significantly, these writings did not for the most part deny this possibility, but rather sought to explain and authorize it. Such writings, I will suggest, envisioned an account of self-interest that allowed for a redistributive political economy. They asserted motives for redistribution that did not rest on charity but rather on a commitment to the common good, which was theorized as benefiting all participants. Such motives included viewing redistribution as reducing violence, building community, and recognizing equality.

The second half of the essay argues that *King Lear* may be seen as sympathetically engaging with these redistributive ideas circulating within pro-Union writings. The play's concern with the Union issue has been often observed. We know from the title page of the quarto version of the play that it was performed at the height of the Union issue on 26 December 1606, which is also the play's first known performance. Lear's division of the kingdom has long been regarded as addressing James's attempt at unification in some way.³ The possibility, however, that the Union issue also relates to the play's interest in redistribution has been underexplored.⁴

³ The conventional view is that the play flatters James by contrast; Lear's tragic division stands in contrast to James's attempted unification. Though still influential, this view has been significantly challenged. Scholars have argued that the play may instead be seen as ambiguous in relation to the Union and potentially as enabling critique, see Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 148-59 and Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 107-8 and *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 71. Philip Schwyzer has further argued that Lear's mistake might not be dividing the kingdom but trying to keep the 'daughter-kingdoms' bound up; he contends that the play 'can be read as anti-unionist drama' that celebrates Britain's division into England, Scotland, and Wales. See *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 160.

⁴ Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson raise the possibility of Shakespeare's interest in the Union issue having an economic as well as political dimension in their reading of *Macbeth*, though their focus is not

My aim in arguing for the play's sympathetic engagement with pro-Union redistributive ideas is not to claim that the play is pro-Union. Rather, my proposal is that the play may be seen as keenly interested in these redistributive ideas, in particular in broadening them and in protecting them against the Union issue's ephemerality. More specifically, by letting a redistributive logic akin to that of some Union supporters bump up against questions about what authorizes social distinction and degree, the play explores a challenge to social distinction latent within pro-Union discourse. Moreover, by locating these ideas across an un-idealized, fractured British landscape, the play at least imaginatively preserves their relevance in the face of the Union's already foreseeable political defeat.⁵

Interest and the Common Good

There was a general consensus among Union supporters and opponents that the Union's realization would trigger a flow of resources toward the Scots. This anticipated redistribution was one of the most contentious aspects of the Union. Part of the controversy centred on how such redistribution should be characterized, whether as an unacceptable act of charity (one violating the rule that charity must begin at home) or as something that would ultimately benefit both sides, as well as the greater British whole.

The association of redistribution toward Scotland with charity was a key element in arguments against such redistribution. English opponents of the Union attacked such redistribution as 'charity', by which they meant that it should not be given. For example, Sir Henry Spelman and the anonymous English MP who wrote the anti-Union manuscript *Against Uniting with the Scots* each contended that charity from England to Scotland violated the fundamental rule that charity must begin at home, since England

on issues of distribution, 'Macbeth, the Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union', *Studies in English Literature* 47.2 (2007), 379-401 (p. 382).

⁵ An anonymous anti-Union English MP writing in 1606 implied that there was a broad surreptitious awareness among English MPs, as early as the 1604 negotiations over the 'Instrument of Union', that they did not intend to implement the Union. See British Library (BL), Harleian MS 1314, fol. 18; this untitled manuscript is described in the catalogue of Harleian Manuscripts: 'A paper Book in 4to, transcribed (as I suppose) by my Lord's command, from the Papers of some eminent Member of the House of Commons, who in the Parliament A. D. 1606 (when an Union was to be made of both Kingdoms) was against uniting with the Scots'. The manuscript will be referred to herein as *Against Uniting with the Scots*.

did not have enough for itself to be able to give to another.⁶ More specifically, Spelman argued that charity to the Scots violated Christian and family values:

Shall we give entertaynement to strangers before we have taken order for our brethren? Charity begins first with herselfe, and the Appostle telleth us that they ar worse then infidells that provide not for their owne family.⁷

Spelman claimed that charity given to the Scots would be charity taken away from fellow members of the English ‘family’, effectively pitting the Union against England’s poor, and making clear that the Scots did not constitute ‘family’. Moreover, by describing the anticipated redistribution as ‘charity’, Spelman implied that the redistribution is not necessary; it is a voluntary act of giving that would be better directed. Similarly, the anonymous MP objected to the Union on the grounds that the law of charity is ‘First to serve it self, and then upon fit cause of Commiseration to afford the Surplusage (if any remayn) unto others’.⁸ He then argued that England had no such surplus. Like Spelman, the MP used the rubric of charity to insist on a self/other distinction between England and Scotland and to cast redistribution from England to Scotland as immoral, a violation of charity’s law. According to these arguments, the majority of English people – that is, the English poor – had a strong interest in, as well as moral justification for, opposing the Union.⁹

By contrast, numerous Union supporters justified redistribution but not on the grounds that it was charity that ought to be extended. Rather, they justified it on the grounds that it was necessary for the British common good and would ultimately benefit all participants, even the English. In doing so, they generated a theoretical discourse about the benefits of economic redistribution for both sides of the exchange, as well as for a larger political community.

James and his supporters tended to articulate the British common good in material terms. For example, in his first speech to the English Parliament in 1603, James argued

⁶ Sir Henry Spelman, ‘Of the Union’, in *The Jacobean Union: Six Tracts of 1604*, ed. by Bruce R. Galloway and Brian P. Levack (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society by C. Constable, 1985), pp. 161-84 (p. 175); *Against Uniting with the Scots*, fos 107-8. I have regularised i/j and u/v when citing early modern texts; otherwise original spelling has been retained.

⁷ Spelman, p. 175.

⁸ *Against Uniting with the Scots*, fos 107-8.

⁹ Charity was not the exclusive province of Union opponents. Hume identified charity as vital to the Union, but in the context of describing the work that would be necessary to unite the church. See David Hume of Godscroft, *De Unione Insulae Britannicae* in *The British Union*, p. 301.

that Scotland and England were clearly intended by God and nature to become one community because they have so much in common – one geography, one language, one religion – and that their union would bring peace to the whole island.¹⁰ The anonymous Scottish author of ‘A Treatise about the Union of England and Scotland’ described this peace as in turn generating wealth. God and nature, he wrote, placed so similar and equal nations on one island so that ‘by their mutuall union and incorporation a solide and perpetuall peace may bread wealth at home’.¹¹ The Scottish Union advocate, David Hume of Godscroft, also focused on the wealth that a united Britain would enjoy and its intimate relationship with peace: ‘crops, flocks, metals, gold, silver, and everything which is derived from these; wealth growing at home; trade carried on abroad’, to which he added ‘All these things peace serves and augments’.¹² It should be said that the benefits of Britain were not regarded exclusively as material. David Hume and John Gordon (the Dean of Salisbury) identified the establishment of one church as a primary benefit of the Union.¹³ And, as Markku Peltonen has shown, Francis Bacon envisioned a Britain that strove for ‘civic greatness’.¹⁴ Yet, there was a strong, consistently materialist bent to Union supporters’ visions of Britain. For instance, Sir Thomas Craig, a Scottish Union supporter, identified the principal benefit of the Union as conformity to God’s will and chided those who think only in terms of the interests of the kingdom, but then went on to demonstrate that the Union will serve a material common good, benefiting both the English and the Scots.¹⁵

Union supporters tended to appeal to their readers’ interest in the British common good by asserting harmony between them. There are moments when such supporters called on their readers to suppress self-interest. For example, John Thornborough commanded his reader ‘Let not privat respects hinder a common good: let every man be as one man’, and Sir William Cornwallis warned his reader that ‘to bring private driftes to the

¹⁰ James VI and I, *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. by Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 134-7.

¹¹ Anon., ‘A Treatise about the Union of England and Scotland’, in *Jacobean Union*, ed. by Galloway and Levack, p. 47.

¹² Hume, p. 79.

¹³ Ibid., p. 301; John Gordon, *Enotikon or a Sermon of the Union of Great Brittannie*, in *Antiquitie of Language, Name, Religion, and Kingdome* (London, 1604), p. 47. See also Charles W. A. Prior, *Defining the Jacobean Church: The Politics of Religious Controversy, 1603-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 75-8.

¹⁴ Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 194-5; see also pp. 202-14.

¹⁵ Sir Thomas Craig, *De Unione Regnorum Britanniae Tractatus*, ed. and trans. by C. Sanford Terry (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the Scottish History Society, 1909), pp. 431-60, esp. pp. 431-3.

publique busines, is an impietie of the highest nature'.¹⁶ Yet, these writers (both of whom were English Union supporters) were also at pains to show that participation in Britain, even if requiring the suppression of perceived self-interest, would ultimately benefit all. Cornwallis, for example, bid the English to realize that English and Scottish interests, as well as the common good, would be served by accepting the Scots as equal participants in Britain:

wee [the English] must either interest them in the gaines, or wee must expect cold endeavours. For nature hath given us abilityes for our use and preservation, which though our reason perswadeth us to use for the common good, yet never for the common good without including our owne perticular.¹⁷

In other words, it is in the interest of the presumed English reader to respect and accommodate the interests of the Scots. Neither England nor Britain, Cornwallis contended, will benefit by making the Scots inferior. David Hume similarly claimed that the Union would benefit the Scots and English both as peoples and as individuals, and that self-interest will conform to the common good:

As for the republic, motives don't matter. It's sufficient for the republic that we act for the public interest, even though we do it because it is expedient for our own private affairs. Let us learn therefore to add that which is generally expedient to the balance sheet of even our private concerns, and to acknowledge that the common good is a good thing for individuals also. As for me, let's not have England rise at the expense of Scotland and vice versa (nor any part of England or part of Scotland: to wit, city, citizen, or county, not London, Edinburgh, or York; nor any of the orders which comprise society: the common people, the nobility, the gentry, the officers of state, the merchants, etc.). Let all men think their own private interest is involved in this; if it be beneficial for the island, then it is good for them: thus for England, for Scotland, for Edinburgh, for London, for a common man, for a nobleman, for a private citizen, and for one who exercises authority.¹⁸

¹⁶ John Thornborough, *The Joiefull and Blessed Reuniting the Two Mighty and Famous Kingdomes, England and Scotland into their Ancient Name of Great Brittain* (Oxford, 1605), p. 77; William Cornwallis, *The Miraculous and Happie Union of England and Scotland; by how Admirable Meanes it is Effected; how Profitable to Both Nations, and how Free of any Inconvenience either Past, Present, or to be Discerned* (London, 1604), sig. C3v.

¹⁷ Cornwallis, sig. D4r.

¹⁸ Hume, p. 71.

Hume claimed that, if people rightly apprehend their interest, they will pursue the common good, which he tellingly described elsewhere as a ‘community of interests’.¹⁹ As in the above passage, he asserted the need for a balance of resources across Britain and across the different levels of society, with no one part or social level benefiting over another.

Motives to Redistribute

The pro-Union writers discussed above each urged their readers to accept redistribution as ultimately in their interest, even if they are the ostensible losers (the distributing English). They conceived of interest as able to take account of one’s participation in and dependence on a social body. In effect, these Union supporters argued for a complex understanding of interest, for its harmony – or its need for harmony – with the common good, rather than for its suppression. This account of interest may explain the emergence within Union discourse of a set of interconnected arguments for, specifically, why it is in each participant’s interest – the imagined reader, the English, the Scots – not just to allow, but actively to pursue, redistribution.

One argument for redistribution was that it would reduce violence and help bring about peace. The anonymous Scottish ‘A Treatise about the Union of England and Scotland’ claimed that peace is a fair exchange for the Scots sharing in England’s riches. The treatise argued that England had already benefited greatly from the Union, achieving peace from its own internal tumult and uncertainties, and that its resistance to redistribution was in effect a refusal to pay for those benefits. Specifically, before James’s ‘confusion of the two sovereignties’, England was a ‘dowtfull and diseased state’ that was highly vulnerable to invasion by its neighbours (presumably including the Scots) and forced to endure heavy taxation and spending to enjoy peace:

Since we ar the instruments of their peace and enriching, and by us they have received so many great benefits, shall they not be ashamed to thinke us unworthie to be parttakers of their wealth?²⁰

According to this treatise, England’s achievement of internal and external peace through the Union entitled Scotland to partake of its wealth.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 261.

²⁰ ‘A Treatise about the Union of England and Scotland’, pp. 51-3.

John Doddridge also associated peace with material distribution, in particular with equal rights with respect to possessions and the benefits of favour (as well as with respect to liberties and the law). Doddridge described the fruit of the Union:

tranquilitie, peace and future felicitie of government, when bothe people shal bee equallie respected by the lawes, stand uppon equall termes in the favour of theire soveraigne, and enjoye equall immunity and priviledges of the persons and possessions.²¹

Likewise, William Cornwallis, although questioning the assumption that the Union would necessarily trigger a flow of resources northward, alleged that any increase in Scottish wealth would enable a greater British peace. Specifically, Cornwallis disputed apparent allegations that increased wealth due to the Union would make the Scots more inclined to feud by arguing that the Union would instead make them more peaceful because having wealth is precisely what makes ‘ill men good citizens’. The only way, Cornwallis said, to make individuals understand the equitable principle ‘to yeeld every man his owne’ is for them to have something of their own.²² Cornwallis presented increased Scottish wealth as a counter to violence and, consequently, a strategy for securing peace.

In a sermon preached before James at Whitehall in 1604, John Gordon linked the distribution of material resources by the Union with peace from the tumult and confusion caused by unbalanced passions. Comparing Britain to the inward man, Gordon observed:

the whole people and subjects of this Iland should consider, that if they will follow the law of their *king reason* (which they must needes doe, or els they cannot remaine united with their soveraigne king, whose kingdome is ruled by reason) it behoveth them all to make every one participant of an others helpe, and aide, in communicating mutually one to his neighbour, and fellow the emoluments, and preferments on both the sides. For when the heat of the hart is withdrawn from the cold moistnesse of the lungs and humiditie of the liver: or when the lights, and the liver doe withdraw their refreshing from the heart, then the kingdome of the *inward man* is brought to confusion, and desolation, by the

²¹ John Doddridge, ‘A Breif Consideracion of the Unyon of Twoe Kingedomes’, in *Jacobean Union*, ed. by Galloway and Levack, 142-60 (pp. 143-4).

²² Cornwallis, sigs C4v-D1r.

division of the subjects in withdrawing the commodities one from another which should be common to both.²³

Gordon aligned the liver with desire and covetousness, the heart with anger, and the lungs with fear.²⁴ The passage quoted above thus alleges that distribution of resources – ‘emoluments’, ‘preferment’s’, ‘commodities’ – between England and Scotland, which he elsewhere mandated must be apportioned equally,²⁵ will enable a healthful balance among the passions and, consequently, the quelling of ‘desolation’ and ‘confusion’. Gordon not only figured Britain as an interconnected and interdependent body, but he contended that resources must be shared in order for peace to be attained.

Echoing Hume’s argument quoted earlier, Union supporters also argued that redistribution was vital to the British political economy through building, interconnecting, and sustaining it. For example, in a proposed draft document of the Scottish and English Union Commission, which met in 1604 to negotiate the ‘Instrument of Union’, Francis Bacon presented a common market as generating a healthy and necessary redistribution throughout the body politic:

commerce between both nations be set open and free, so as the commodities and provisions of either may pass and flow to and fro without any stops or obstructions into the veins of the whole body, for the better sustentation and comfort of all the parts; with caution nevertheless, that the vital nourishment be not so drawn into one part, as it may endanger a consumption and withering of the other.²⁶

Bacon conflated an open common market with equitable distribution. For Bacon, redistribution, provided that it achieved a healthful balance, was a key element of the material health of the new British social body. Given the general view in England that such redistribution would tend to flow northward, Bacon appeared to be arguing that trade would remedy an imbalance between England and Scotland that is unhealthy for

²³ Gordon, p. 13.

²⁴ For Gordon’s discussion of the nature of the liver, heart, and lungs, see Ibid., p. 12.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁶ Francis Bacon, ‘The Most Humble Certificate or Return of the Commissioners of England and Scotland, Authorized to Treat of an Union for the Weal of both Realms. 2 Jac. I. Prepared but Altered’, in *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon...*, ed. by James Spedding, vol. 3 (London, 1861-74), p. 243. Spedding notes that this draft was not used, Ibid., III: p. 242.

the common body.²⁷ Likewise, William Cornwallis, after first arguing that London as the centre would ultimately accrue the most wealth, further argued that if there was a flow of resources from England to Scotland, this ‘dispersion’ would increase the overall health and prosperity of the commonwealth:

But might it be that their [Scottish] wealth would be encreased, the publique good purchaseth not losse but profit, for by the dispersion the state findeth the people more able and more industrious, from whence ariseth the increase of traffique to the subject, and of custome to the Prince.²⁸

‘Dispersion’, in effect, pushes people toward more active and fruitful participation in the commonwealth. Both Bacon’s and Cornwallis’s arguments assume that the redistribution generated by a vigorous common market would benefit all. They also suggest that such benefits would outweigh the redistributive costs for all concerned, even for the initial losers. They depend on a lively participation in a united market by subjects on both sides, liveliness that Cornwallis suggested redistribution itself will only enhance. The peaceful, prosperous Britain that these Union advocates imagined was predicated on a willingness on both sides to enter into cultural and economic exchange.

Samuel Daniel went even a step further than Bacon and Cornwallis in imagining how the Union’s redistribution might build and support a new economy by suggesting that it might trigger a population increase, even while generating ‘inough’ for all. Daniel’s *A Panegyrike Congratulatorie*, which he presented to James during his royal progress from Scotland to England in 1603, encouraged ‘England’ not to fear the Union’s redistributive effects on the grounds that it too ultimately would be enriched. In stanza 29 of the panegyrike, Daniel begins a multi-stanza meditation on the Union and, in stanzas 33-4, describes England as standing to ‘gaine so much’ when, as he tells it, ‘thou shalt see there is another grace / Then to be rich; another dignitie / Then money’.²⁹ In stanzas 35-6, Daniel elaborates the good effects of adopting such a stance:

By which improovement we shall gaine much more
Then by *Peru*, or all discoveries;
For this way to imbase, is to instore
The treasure of the land, and make it rise:

²⁷ Gordon makes a similar argument about the need for resources to flow through and supply all the parts of the body and body politic, p. 10.

²⁸ Cornwallis, sig. C4v.

²⁹ Samuel Daniel, *A Panegyrike Congratulatorie to the Kings Majiestie, Also Certaine Epistles* (London, 1603), sig. A5r.

This is the onely key t'unlocke the dore,
To let out plentie that it may suffice,
For more then all this Ile, for more increase
Of Subjects then, by thee, there can increase.

This shal make roome, and place inough for all,
Which otherwise would not suffice a few,
And by proportion Geometricall
Shall so dispose to all, what shal be due³⁰

Daniel calls on England to learn to value money less and to embrace redistribution: 't'unlocke the dore, / To let out plentie'. Yet he also contends that England will benefit from this realization and action, even more so than by the discoveries in the New World, a bold comparison that implies monetary gain.³¹ Daniel further claims that redistribution will produce something akin to an economy of scale. He associates 'letting out the plenty' with the provision of enough for everyone, so much in fact that there can be more people. In other words, redistribution will have the seemingly paradoxical effect of allowing population increase while enabling everyone to have 'enough' with resources that 'otherwise would not suffice a few'. By embracing material loss, the English would produce overall material gain, including for themselves.

Finally, Union supporters linked redistribution with the Union's equality. One of the main reasons for the expected redistribution was the equal access to offices and trade promised by the Union. Markku Peltonen has shown that many Union advocates advanced an idea of British 'citizenship' on the Roman model by advocating the mutual naturalization of the English and Scots so that each would have equal access to offices.³² Union advocates predicated the success of Britain on this equality of English and Scottish persons and its robust expression. They conceived of equalities across Britain not just as legal principles but also as guarantees for people energetically to use, with the well-being of the new British community depending on it. John Gordon, in the 1604 sermon at Whitehall mentioned above, argued that the English and Scots not only must be viewed as equals but that the practice of such equality was crucial to making a British body:

³⁰ Ibid., sigs A5r-v.

³¹ Daniel shifts from using the word 'thou' in stanza 34 to using the word 'we' in stanza 35. 'We' though presumably also refers to the English, since the English are ones who would be embracing the 'improvement' and since Daniel, the panegyrike's implied speaker, is English.

³² Peltonen, pp. 214-16.

So that all men of worth, and merit, be equally participant of the honours, dignities, preferments, and offices of *great Britannie*, according to their talents, places, and merits, laying aside the place of their birth, whether it be *South*, or *North*. This equalitie is the only meane to establish this blessed worke of the *Union* in the members³³

Moreover, Gordon suggested that the redistribution of resources was itself a needful recognition of that equality. Invoking the familiar analogy of the kingdom to the body, Gordon claimed that Scotland and England must apportion benefits equally because they are equals. For instance, after telling ‘the South’ not to take more than its equal share, Gordon similarly told ‘the North’ not to ‘withdraw from his fellow the offices, preferments, and dignities that proceed from the head, which equally should pertain to them both’.³⁴

David Hume explained how equality and its active practice would advance British prosperity:

Goods of every kind shall be imported and exported, bought and sold, in every region of the island by each and every citizen engaged in commerce. Each one shall possess the same rights as any of the others and not be subjected to any discrimination by reason of his origins. There shall be free trade in metals, grain, food and drink, wool, flocks and herds, horses, weapons, and all other commodities.³⁵

Hume thus envisioned equality producing economic exchange across the island. His idea of ‘each and every citizen engaged in commerce’ possessing equal rights and needing to exercise them reveals how the British citizenship envisioned during the Union issue was infused with an ethos of actively expressed equality. Hume’s image of a robust, free economic exchange raises the possibility of the principle of equality in the Union affording greater freedoms to trade and travel. This association of equality with robust commercialism suggests how Britain, despite being James’s ambition, could potentially afford critical purchase on monopolies – a considerable source of royal income – since monopolies in either realm would seem to run afoul of the kind of exchange Hume described, in which trading partners must be equals. On Hume’s account, the equality of the Union goes beyond simply levelling the playing field

³³ Gordon, p. 40.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁵ Hume, p. 199.

between north and south. For Hume, asserting and wielding equality is a key component of British citizenship. His language generates an expectation that British people will actively assert their liberties – including with respect to trade and offices – and that active assertion is crucial for Britain’s success.

Lastly, the pro-Union treatise *Rapta Tatio*... (thought to be written by Sir John Skinner) argued that equality of merit warranted equality of resources:

Yet since the men on both sides are serviceable, make their conditions as agreeing amongst themselves; so fit for the Common-Wealth: let the one enjoy more, the other covet lesse; so shall both encrease apace, and *Rome* be well served.³⁶

The treatise contended that similar serviceability should entail similar material conditions, and also that such redistribution will ‘encrease’ both sides. On this account, redistribution is not rooted in idealism but materialism. The English should be willing to redistribute because it will bring increase to themselves as well as to the whole. Considered together, Gordon, Hume, and *Rapta Tatio* suggest that British equality was conceived of as something that should be manifest in distribution.

Before turning to Shakespeare’s interest in these redistributive ideas in *King Lear*, I want briefly to point to evidence of their perceived relevance and their appropriation beyond the context of pro-Union thought. In particular, the potential for the redistributive logic of Union supporters to be transferable to contexts outside the Union issue, especially in relation to the issue of monopolies, did not seem to go unrecognized. Sir Edwin Sandys, who was a spokesman for Union opponents in the House of Commons and thus intimately aware of pro-Union thought, echoed pro-Union arguments for redistribution in his advocacy of ‘free trade’, but with the key difference that he directed such arguments toward only England’s political economy. Sandys’s 1604 report of the House of Commons’ committee on free trade advocated against monopolies, in particular London-based charter companies, on behalf of England’s lesser merchants.³⁷ Sandys’s first argument against monopoly was the recognizable argument that it violates English liberty: it is ‘against the natural Right and Liberty of the Subjects of England to restrain it [merchandize] into the Hands of some few, as now

³⁶ John Skinner[?], *Rapta Tatio: The Mirrour of his Majesties Present Government, Tending to the Union of his Whole Iland of Brittonie Martiall* (London, 1604), sig. G4r.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of the report, see Robert Ashton, ‘The Parliamentary Agitation for Free Trade in the Opening Years of the Reign of James I’, *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 40-55.

it is'.³⁸ But, he then advanced a vision of England that resonated with Union's supporters' visions of Britain:

The more equal Distribution of the Wealth of the Land, which is a great Stability and Strength to the Realm, even as the equal Distributing of the Nourishment in a Man's Body; the contrary whereof is inconvenient in all Estates, and oftentimes breaks out into Mischief; when too much Fulness doth puff up some by Presumption, and too much Emptiness leaves the rest in perpetual Discontent, the Mother of Desire of Innovations and Troubles: And this is the proper Fruit of Monopolies.³⁹

Sandys proposed here that a more equal distribution across the realm serves the common good, increasing its 'Stability and Strength'. Like Union supporters, he warned that when distribution is too unequal, violence ensues. His argument for a balanced distribution through the body echoed Bacon's idea of balanced distribution throughout the British body discussed earlier. Historians have energetically debated the underlying motives for Sandys's and fellow MPs' support of freer trade.⁴⁰ Yet, whatever the MPs' motives, it is significant how Sandys sought publically to justify them. In particular, Sandys identified a more equal distribution of wealth as a fundamental good and an important goal of government policy. The possibility of latent considerations, for which this argument could offer cover, only emphasizes that this was a moment when the idea that wealth ought to be distributed more equally had political currency, especially when directed toward the king. David Harris Sacks has argued that Elizabeth entwined the English common good with a language of 'benefit and favour', which worked to defend royal grants and, implicitly, the inevitability of hierarchy and economic difference.⁴¹

³⁸ *Journals of the House of Commons, 1547-1714* (London, 1803-63), I, p. 218; hereafter abbreviated *CJ* in text and notes.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴⁰ Astrid Friis contends that the 'free trade' MPs were motivated by economic conflict between London and the outports, *Alderman Cockayne's Project and the Cloth Trade: The Commercial Policy of England in its Main Aspects, 1603-1625* (Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard; London: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 149-56. By contrast, Theodore K. Rabb proposes self-interest, suggesting that the MPs sought to disable chartered companies in favour of joint-stock companies in which they could invest, 'Sir Edwin Sandys and the Parliament of 1604', *The American Historical Review* 69.3 (1964), 646-70 (p. 664). Sympathetic to and expanding Friis's thesis, Robert Ashton argues that the MPs' defence of provincial interests should not be seen as narrow, as it may have enabled the 'growth of a truly national consciousness' 'Jacobean Free Trade Again', *Past and Present* 43 (1969): 151-57 (p.155).

⁴¹ David Harris Sacks, 'The Countervailing of Benefits: Monopoly, Liberty, and Benevolence in Elizabethan England', in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. by Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 272-91 (pp. 282-91).

The quote above suggests how arguments supporting James's Union might have enabled a very different association of the common good with the spreading out of wealth and even with the notion that discontent resulting from imbalance should be the subject not of condemnation but necessary redress. We cannot be certain that Sandys was in fact appropriating the redistributive logic of Union supporters to challenge monopolies, but he hinted at such an appropriation:

Under our gracious *Salomon*, a Prince of Wisdom and Peace, we are like to be in League or Amity with all Nations; whereby, as there will be greater Freedom abroad to trade to all Places, so, fit to have greater at home for all Persons to trade.⁴²

Sandys used James's call for robust, freer trade with Scotland (and increased trade abroad in general) to call for the same within England itself.

Redistributive *Lear*

One of the more enduring interpretations of *King Lear* is that the play depicts a tension between a communal or feudal social vision and a capitalist one, the latter of which is associated with an emergent self-interested subjectivity. Correspondingly, the scholarship has tended to view the play's interest in redistribution as drawing on Christian or feudal traditions, and there is an assumption that redistribution in the play should be interpreted primarily as a form of charity, however radical and levelling that charity may be. Attention to such redistribution tends to focus on two key speeches. Lear, facing the storm and realizing his past neglect of the poor, calls on pomp to divest himself: 'Take physic, pomp, / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them / And show the heavens more just';⁴³ Gloucester gives his purse to Poor Tom with a call to the heavens to redistribute excess: 'Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man / That stands your ordinance, that will not see / Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly. / So distribution should undo excess, / And each man have enough' (4.1.66-69). Some critics have associated these calls for

⁴² *CJ*, p. 219.

⁴³ 3.4.31-4. All references to *King Lear* are to Stephen Orgel's edition, *King Lear: The 1608 Quarto and 1623 Folio Texts* (New York: Penguin, 2000). Further references to *King Lear* will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the Quarto text and the essay will observe differences with the Folio.

redistribution with charity that has a radical levelling effect or aspect.⁴⁴ Others, also interpreting these calls for redistribution as calls to be charitable, have challenged their radicalism.⁴⁵ Among the latter, Jonathan Dollimore has argued that, even while the play demystifies hierarchy, it shows pity and empathy as states of mind always attained too late, when the one who pities has become as deprived as the object of his pity. Dollimore makes the important point that even if charity becomes imbued with radical aims and motives, it may not present much of a challenge to the status quo.⁴⁶

Redistribution in the play need not, however, be interpreted solely in terms of charity, however radical, or, for that matter, as opposed to rising commercial forms at the time. The Union issue, as we have seen, generated a context for thinking about redistribution, its benefits, and its relationship to the political economy. Leah Marcus has examined redistribution in *King Lear* in the context of the Union issue, but she too thinks about redistribution in the Union issue and in the play in terms of charity. She argues for a topical association between what she sees as calls for charity in the play and as James and his supporters' calls for charity by the English to the allegedly poorer Scots. For

⁴⁴ John F. Danby sees these calls for redistribution as looking backward to medieval Christian communism and forward to the Diggers and Levellers of the English civil war, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), pp. 18-88. Walter Cohen associates them with radical Christian thought, especially sixteenth-century Anabaptism, but filtered through an aristocratic perspective, reflecting 'a radical version of noblesse oblige'. Cohen does though see the mad Lear as letting go of this aristocratic perspective and embracing a fully radical levelling Christian charity, *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 333-4.

⁴⁵ Judy Kronenfeld argues that Gloucester's and Lear's language should be interpreted in the context of the dominant discourse on charity during Shakespeare's time, which was controlled by secular and church authorities and took social inequity for granted, and thus as conventional calls to give to the poor, *King Lear and the Naked Truth: Rethinking the Language of Religion and Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 170-99. Along somewhat similar lines, Paul Delany argues that Lear and Gloucester realize the injustice of poverty and hunger but still regard 'social inequality from the traditional perspective of Christian charity' so that the appropriate remedy is for the rich to give more, not for the poor to demand it, 'King Lear and the Decline of Feudalism', *PMLA*, 92. 3 (1977), 429-40, (p. 435). Delany though sees the mad Lear as becoming partly but ineffectually 'a Christian radical', *Ibid.*, pp. 435-6. Christopher D. Johnson has cautioned against a view of the play as endorsing a 'Pauline or proto-Marxist vision of economic justice', but on the different grounds that Lear's and Gloucester's words and their effects should be seen as 'far more subjective than ideological', *Hyperboles: The Rhetoric of Excess in Baroque Literature and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 338-44.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Sussex, The Harvester Press, 1984), pp. 191-93. On the inefficacy of empathy realized too late, see also Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Being and Having in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 127-28.

Marcus, ‘the play’s lesson about succor for the needy and downtrodden’ may be interpreted as exhorting the English to be charitable to the Scots.⁴⁷ She further contends that the play reflects James and his supporters’ failure to secure this charity. James’s parliamentary supporters, she claims, ‘argued in vain that it is better to give than to receive’, and James, through the figure of Lear, may be seen as ‘martyred for his faith in extralegal charity and brotherhood’.⁴⁸ Yet, as discussed above, in the Union issue, it was mostly Union opponents who described redistribution to the Scots as ‘charity’ – and derisively so. My aim here is to show that the play’s concern with redistribution may instead be seen as drawing on Union supporters’ arguments that redistribution may be justified by mutual benefit.⁴⁹ Certainly I will not argue that pity and empathy are not prominent in the play, but I will propose that the play’s concern with redistribution may lean more strongly toward ideas of mutual benefit and a common good than has generally been recognized.

It is often noted that the play’s geography corresponds to Britain,⁵⁰ so much so that Willy Maley has observed, ‘Everyone now agrees *Lear* is a British play’.⁵¹ Yet the

⁴⁷ Marcus, pp. 153-59, esp. p. 156.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 156-57.

⁴⁹ We do not know what specific Union treatises, if any, Shakespeare had access to or read. This is particularly true of the writings of the two Scots, Hume and Craig. The first part of Hume’s *De Union Insulae Britannicae* was published in 1604, but the second part, completed in 1605, existed only in manuscript, McGinnis and Williamson, ‘Introduction’, pp. 48-51. Craig’s *De Unione Regnorum Britanniae Tractatus* was largely written in 1604 and existed only in manuscript (though Craig’s viewpoint would likely have been part of the Union discourse in London, since Craig was a prominent Scottish commissioner negotiating the ‘Instrument of Union’ in 1604), C. Sanford Terry, preface to *De Unione Regnorum*, by Sir Thomas Craig, v-vi. Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor have, moreover, observed that in reading Latin texts Shakespeare tended to focus on the authors he would likely have been familiar with from school, ‘Introduction’ to *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. by Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1. Yet, whether or not Shakespeare read a particular Union text, given the prominence of the Union issue starting from James’s English accession, the considerable number of treatises and other documents published relating to it, and the tendency of these writings to assume a general awareness of the various disputed issues, it seems likely that Shakespeare was aware of the controversy over redistribution. Furthermore, David Norbrook has shown that Shakespeare may have engaged with Scottish political discourse, in particular with Scottish historians such as George Buchanan (who influenced Hume), in writing *Macbeth*, ‘*Macbeth* and the Politics of Historiography’, in *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 78-116 (p. 84).

⁵⁰ Lear aims to divide his kingdom, as John Kerrigan puts it, into ‘the traditional domains of the North (or Albany), the Celtic West (governed by the Duke of Cornwall), and England (Cordelia’s intended portion)’, ‘Divided Kingdoms and the Local Epic: *Mercian Hymns* to *The King of Britain’s Daughter*’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13.1 (2000), 3-21 (p. 3). In the Quarto, Gloucester refers to the anticipated

play's landscape of poverty contrasts sharply with James and his supporters' optimistic British land of plenty. Like Spelman and the anonymous author of *Against Uniting with the Scots*, Shakespeare is highly aware of poverty. It would be tempting to see the play as simply widening charitable jurisdiction from England to all of Britain, into a unifying rather than a divisive condition. Yet the play's depiction of affect and family is at odds with the ideology of charity as articulated by Spelman and the anonymous MP. These writers view the state as an affective analogy to the family. Their arguments that charity begins at home assume that charity is given at home.

The play, by contrast, levels a bitter scepticism at the idea that family love is natural or necessarily charitable.⁵² Lear's description of his daughters as 'pelican daughters' (3.4.69) inverts the longstanding emblematic association of the pelican with charity and sacrifice, as the pelican was thought to cut its breast with its beak in order to feed its young with its blood. Lear conjures an image not of him opening his breast to his children, but of his children tearing into and feeding on his flesh.⁵³ In considering the inversion, it is fruitful to consider King Leir's use of the emblem in *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, Shakespeare's main source for *King Lear*. King Leir deploys the emblem to describe himself as a father and king and in doing so couples it with his potential for tyranny and cruelty. Specifically, Leir justifies his refusal to listen to his advisors' counsel to reconsider his treatment of Cordella:

I am as kind as is the pelican
That kills itself to save her young ones' lives,
And yet as jealous as the princely eagle
That kills her young ones if they do but dazzle
Upon the radiant splendor of the sun.⁵⁴

division as 'the division of the kingdoms', emphasizing a sense of these domains as distinct entities within a greater whole (1.1.4).

⁵¹ Willy Maley, 'Critical Review: "Great thing of us forgot"?: New British Angles on *King Lear*', in *King Lear: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 156. As Maley further observes, such consensus does not extend to whether the play is pro- or anti-Union.

⁵² For an account of the play's scepticism about the durability of familial or 'blood' bonds, see Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory*, p. 161.

⁵³ See Russell A. Fraser, *Shakespeare's Poetics: In Relation to 'King Lear'* (London: Routledge, 1962), pp. 91-2. For a discussion of the extremity of the violence expressed by the image of 'pelican daughters', see Naomi Conn Liebler, 'Pelican Daughters: The Violence of Filial Ingratitude in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* 143 (2007), 36-51.

⁵⁴ *A Critical Edition of 'The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan and Cordella'*, ed. by Donald M. Michie (New York: Garland, 1991), 1.6.43-7.

Leir figures himself as willing to sacrifice himself for his children and to kill them for any challenge or slight. The opposition between pelican and eagle is intimate and internal to Leir, such that he may modulate between a kind and self-sacrificing father/king and a violent, jealous, and punishing one.⁵⁵ Shakespeare's inversion of the emblem of the pelican in *King Lear* makes explicit what is implicit in Leir's words, namely that the father/king's charity and kindness are entwined with and an expression of his power. In the context of Lear's 'pelican daughters', where Lear's power has dissipated, the association of the pelican with charity and self-sacrifice has also dissipated, and the very meaning of the 'pelican' has shifted. Lear as 'pelican' is not the powerful purveyor of charity and sacrifice, but the object of violence. The 'pelican' has become a vivid expression of victimhood and impotence. The inversion thus conveys not only the cruelty of the daughters but also scepticism about the naturalness of charity and charitable feeling within familial (and monarchical) relations, as it shows instead their dependence on the structures of power within those relations.

The play's concern with redistribution, by contrast, focuses on strangers (or at least seeming strangers) and on connections forged outside of established order. The play associates redistribution with motives that echo the redistributive logic of Union supporters: reducing violence, building community, and recognizing equality. Like Union supporters, the play links need and violence and, correspondingly, material redistribution and peace. The Quarto and the Folio contextualize Gloucester's distribution of his purse to Tom quite differently. In the Folio, Gloucester simply gives his purse to Tom after learning that Tom knows the way to Dover. However, in the Quarto, Gloucester gives the purse to Tom not just in response to Tom knowing the way to Dover but also, and more immediately, in response to Tom's description of himself as pursued by five fiends, who are a violent and lusty crew:

Edgar.

...Bless thee, goodman, from the foul fiend. Five fiends have been in Poor Tom at once, of lust as Obidicut, Hobbididence, prince of dumbness, Mahu of stealing, Modo of murder, Flibbertigibbet of mopping and mowing, who since possesses chambermaids and waiting-women. So bless thee, master.

Gloucester.

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues

⁵⁵ By contrast, Meredith Skura views Leir's description of himself as a 'pelican' as supporting a reading of Leir as sinful only in relation to Cordella. See 'Dragon Fathers and Unnatural Children: Warring Generations in *King Lear* and Its Sources', *Comparative Drama*, 42.2 (2008), 121-48 (p. 124).

Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier. Heavens deal so still.
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man
That stands your ordinance, that will not see
Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly.
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover? (4.1.56-70)

Poor Tom is, of course, a disguise assumed by Edgar, but it is still significant how Shakespeare presents Edgar representing Tom's abjection, and how Gloucester responds to this abjection. Whether or not Edgar to some degree inhabits or just performs Tom, he translates Tom's condition of need into an aggressive state of mind. The Quarto's preface to Gloucester's speech makes that redistribution not only a response to Tom's evident need but also to the violent and melancholic passions (and seemingly acts) produced by that need. Tom's description of his state of mind heightens the significance of Gloucester's observation that the purse will make Tom 'happier'. Gloucester's suggestion is that material redistribution might remedy the melancholy and violence that lurk behind Tom's need. Tom's description of his previous state also gives greater weight to Gloucester's alignment of himself with the 'lust-dieted'. 'Lust-dieted' points to an imbalance between Gloucester and Tom, rather than simply to Gloucester's general enjoyment of excess. The contrast between Tom plagued by lust and Gloucester 'dieted' upon it implicates Gloucester's own excess in Tom's violent psychology; Tom wants what Gloucester has too much of. Gloucester's redistribution may thus restore balance to both sides.

Tom and Gloucester's exchange dramatizes a psychological connection between violence and need, depicting what was a radical idea at the time, with echoes of Book 1 of Thomas More's *Utopia*, namely that a depressed and violent psychology should be addressed by remedial distribution. The exchange links poverty and violence and offers a swift way to address that link: material redistribution. Richard Strier has observed that neither Gloucester here nor Lear in his 'take physic pomp' speech, 'raises the issue of the worthiness of the imagined recipients, an issue on which virtually all the Tudor-Stuart manuals and laws on charity and poor relief insist'.⁵⁶ William Carroll among others has noted that Tom represents a mode of poverty that generated enormous

⁵⁶ Richard Strier, review of Judy Kronenfeld, *'King Lear' and the Naked Truth: Rethinking the Language of Religion and Resistance*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.4 (2000), 496-8 (p. 498).

anxiety and alarm at the time – the wandering, aggressive, ‘sturdy’ male beggar.⁵⁷ Tom’s opening words to Gloucester detail just the kind of violent, immoral desires and actions that would certainly have made him ‘unworthy’ within the rubric of official charitable giving.⁵⁸ Yet the exchange is structured so that Gloucester redistributes to Tom, not in spite of Tom’s frame of mind, but because of it – to make him ‘happy’. Gloucester’s recuperative redistribution to Tom after being specifically reminded of the threatening and disruptive poverty that Tom embodies might well show how redistribution might remedy violence across social lines.

The link between violence and need arises repeatedly over the course of the play. Tom connects his evil demons with hunger when he seeks to assuage his anger with inadequate food ‘that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow dung for sallets’ (3.4.120-2); and also when he bids blackness not to ‘croak’ for food, since there is none: ‘Hoppedance cries in Tom’s belly for two white herring. Croak not, black angel: I have no food for thee’ (3.6.26-8). These links between violence and material want point to the effect of want on psychology and also, significantly, to the contingent nature of that effect. Edgar presents the demons as both in Tom and also as distinct from Tom. Want produces a desire for violence that is in Tom but not necessarily essential to him. Poverty’s violence is demonic – leaving the actor not beyond recuperation.

Critics often note that the play’s first known performance was on St. Stephen’s Day, a day on which the poor could demand charity as an entitlement and which held the threat of violence if that charity was withheld.⁵⁹ The day itself thus pointed to the ideas that charity could conceptually be transformed into a right and redistribution could be an exchange for peace. In her reading of *King Lear*, and with echoes of Mikhail Bakhtin, Margreta de Grazia interprets St. Stephen’s Day as a ‘ritualised instance’ that justifies the usual social order – a moment when order is up-ended but which thereby works to contain revolution and to legitimate social hierarchy.⁶⁰ The play, however, does not seem invested in such containment. Edgar, in particular, challenges the possibility of containing force in relation to want. He observes that Bedlam beggars, whose example

⁵⁷ William C. Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 190-4. See also, Raman Selden, ‘*King Lear* and True Need’, *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987), 143-69.

⁵⁸ By contrast, Delany argues that Shakespeare tends to represent the ‘deserving poor’ sympathetically, ‘but if they should resort to direct action on their own behalf they mutate into that old standby the mindlessly destructive Shakespearean mob’, p. 435.

⁵⁹ See Marcus, pp.154-6; Margreta de Grazia, ‘The Ideology of Superfluous Things: *King Lear* as Period Piece’, in *Shakespeare’s Tragedies*, ed. by Susan Zimmerman (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), p. 272.

⁶⁰ De Grazia, p. 272.

he plans to follow, 'with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers / Enforce their charity' (2.3.19-20). Edgar's language of compulsion ('bans', 'enforce') has the same effect as St. Stephen's day in causally linking need with force and converting charity into entitlement. Edgar, however, presents this need and its force as part of everyday life.

Also like the redistributive logic of Union supporters, Gloucester's distribution to Tom sets the stage for a mutually beneficial relationship. The view of Gloucester's transfer of his purse to Tom as charity is complicated by its association with Tom's guidance, a link that is stressed when Gloucester gives Tom another purse upon arriving at the cliff (4.5.28-9). Gloucester is not simply paying for services – or else Gloucester's speech on the justice of redistribution would be meaningless. However, the exchanges are also not one-sided charity. Rather Gloucester and Tom embark upon a sustained exchange that is important to the well-being of both. The complication of Gloucester receiving benefit from redistributing his excess does not undermine his redistribution but reveals how redistribution may be embedded in the context of mutually beneficial relationships.

This is not the only occasion in the play when redistribution fosters community building. The small community that emerges around Lear and, ultimately, rises up against the new rulers is built on various expressions of concern for the material well-being of others and acts of redistribution. There are glimmers of a new political economy around Lear. Gloucester's succour for Lear binds himself, Lear, and Lear's remaining group of followers; Lear's insistence on giving Tom shelter – 'food and fire' – so that Tom might become his 'philosopher' folds Tom into that community (3.4.143, 165-6); Cordelia's small dose of security, comfort, and rest to Lear brings him back from madness. Lear's own path into madness and out again suggests not only a strong connection between material comfort and psychological well-being but also the surprisingly powerful restorative effects of just a small amount of material comfort. The sinews of Lear's and Cordelia's resistance community are, thus, strikingly material. The play does not represent redistribution as producing the kind of increased prosperity that Union supporters ascribed to Britain, but it does represent redistribution as recuperating and strengthening its participants and as enabling structures of mutually beneficial exchange. The emergence in the play of such affectively rich yet mutually beneficial bonds may hark back to Cordelia's 'bond' (1.1.82) whereby, as she tells Lear: 'You have begot me, bred me, loved me. / I return those duties as are right fit, / Obey you, love you, and most honor you' (1.1.85-87). Cordelia envisions an exchange of care that is materially beneficial to both sides and also loving.

Finally, like some Union supporters, the play links distribution of resources with recognition of equality, but here the play's relationship to the redistributive logic of

Union supporters is more oblique and interventionary. I want now to return to Lear's recognition during the storm of his neglect of the poor, where to quote these lines again, Lear calls out: 'Take physic, pomp, / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them / And show the heavens more just'. Howard Felperin has described this speech as a 'set speech on charity...right out of morality tradition'.⁶¹ A complication though with seeing the speech as primarily about charity arises by virtue of the Tom's request not long after for 'charity': 'Do Poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes' (3.4.54-5). If Lear's speech is understood to be about charity, Lear should respond to Tom by giving him charity. Lear's ultimate response to Tom seems, however, to do something quite different than what Tom has asked for:

Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more but this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Here's three on's are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. [*Removing his clothes*] Off, off, you lendings, come on. (3.4.93-100)

Lear's undressing is a direct response to Tom's need, but it is not clearly an act of giving. More specifically, and somewhat counter-intuitively, Lear's response to Tom's asking for charity is not to give it but instead to seek a likeness with him. Whereas charity is conventionally seen as disinterested and an end in itself, Lear's undressing is intimate and seems concerned with relational effects, especially for Lear himself. The undressing is not an act of redistribution, but it is predicated on the idea that changes in distribution may effect changes in social relations, such that Lear may, through divestment, achieve likeness with Tom. The scene in no way glamorizes Tom's presumed level of abjection and its effects, but it lingers over Lear and Tom's companionship following Lear's undressing, through which Lear's distress seems briefly ameliorated. Even in the context where resources are all but non-existent, levelling distribution seems to offer some succour and grounds for sociability. Some critics have cautioned that the association of Lear's act of undressing with madness may work to undermine any social vision implied by that act.⁶² The sociable effects of Lear's

⁶¹ Howard Felperin, 'Plays within Plays' in *King Lear*, ed. by Kiernan Ryan (New York: St Martin's, 1992), p. 39.

⁶² Delany, 436; Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 262.

undressing, however, at least imply that Lear's act has power and, therefore, his words prior to undressing are not necessarily devalued by their association with madness.⁶³

Yet if the play may be seen as exploring redistribution and relative distribution not only as something other than charity but also as challenging social distinction and, implicitly, social hierarchy, this would be more general and radical than the Union discourse on redistribution would seem to authorize. Union supporters did not contest hierarchy and degree, and some supporters specifically assured their readers that redistribution would not have any such effect. John Hayward's 'A Treatise of Union', for example, specified that he called for geometrical, not arithmetical, equality across Britain:

I speak not of equalitie in degree, or in estate, for that were the greatest inequality that could bee; but in liberitie and priviledge, (which is the maine supporter of peace) and in capacitie both of office and change.⁶⁴

Similarly, the anonymous 'A Treatise about the Union of England and Scotland' took care to say that James's subjects according to 'the qualitie of his condition of birth or state' would have equal access to office and enjoy 'common freedoms and privileges of naturalization'.⁶⁵

Union opponents, however, implied that such caveats were ineffectual; they contended that the Union and its redistributive effects would necessarily threaten social hierarchy because social distinction meant that there was no excess anywhere in England to be redistributed. Both the anonymous author of *Against Uniting with the Scots* and Sir Henry Spelman cast redistribution as necessarily in tension with the English social order and with Englishness, because England had no surplus beyond what is due according to these registers. The anonymous author of *Against Uniting with the Scots* argued that there is simply no excess anywhere in England and therefore nothing that can be redistributed: 'wee Englishmen enjoy already no super abundance of meanes for others, but want them for our selves'.⁶⁶ He moreover recounted in some detail how there is no excess at any level of English society: worthy gentlemen cannot obtain offices; students

⁶³ Peter Mack argues that Lear's madness has within it moments of insight made available by Lear's affective relationship to others, 'Madness, Proverbial Wisdom, and Philosophy in *King Lear*', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. by Patrick Gray and John D. Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 284-303, esp. p. 299.

⁶⁴ John Hayward, 'A Treatise of Union of the Two Realmes of England and Scotland' (London, 1604) p. 19.

⁶⁵ 'A Treatise about the Union of England and Scotland', p. 61. See also Daniel, sig. A5v.

⁶⁶ *Against Uniting with the Scots*, fol 111.

cannot get legal or ecclesiastical livings; spinners of yarn starve when they cannot get a week's supply of wool.⁶⁷ In 'Of the Union', Sir Henry Spelman represented Englishness itself as a source of minimal, necessary entitlement, extending a lack of English excess even to its freedoms and liberties:

The English ar our family; shall we then give awaye their breadde, which is their freedomes and libertyes, unto straungers? Mak the Scottes free of Englande, what will be the sequele?⁶⁸

Spelman here figured English freedoms and liberties as a possession that cannot be given away without being lost. For Spelman, the Union does not constitute the promise of an interactive, increasingly prosperous and free British people but an attack on the English and their due. Also, like the anonymous writer, Spelman presented the English poor as especially vulnerable:

none of all thiese sortes of Scottishmen that shall thus remove into England but there will hang about them greate numbers of their poore and idle people, seeking places of abroad and service amongst us, to the greate hurte of our owne poore and the encrease of idleness.⁶⁹

Englishness and relative hierarchy were thus presented as the proper adjudicators in an already scant political economy. There was no room for the fluid, generative political economy envisioned by Union supporters.

These arguments that the Union should be precluded by an absence of excess within England may afford some light on the play's strange and seemingly counterintuitive insistence on excess where we would least expect it, among the socially 'low'. Edgar, in the guise of a Bedlam beggar, will take from those who would seem to have no excess to give: 'poor pelting villages' (2.3.18). Lear protests his daughters' refusal to honour his retainer with the outcry: 'O reason not the need! Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous. / Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life is cheap as beasts' (2.4.241-4). Lear's description here of beggars as having excess has led some critics to conclude that, at this point in the play's action, he is mentally still firmly entrenched in the world of the court. For example, Annabel Patterson contends that Lear's belief that beggars can have excess evidences his deluded understanding of

⁶⁷ Ibid., fos 109-12, 149-50.

⁶⁸ Spelman, p. 175.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 178.

distribution and poverty, an understanding that will only be debunked once he encounters poverty in the world below the court. But, Lear's words sound less like a man still caught in, as Patterson puts it, 'elementary thinking' and more like one who is thinking and feeling anew.⁷⁰

Lear's insight that even the 'basest beggar' has 'excess' has philosophical implications. It proposes, somewhat slyly – since the 'degree' in question is that of a beggar – that all social status produces excess or, conversely, that social status can never be the proper register of what is enough. Lear opens the door for his own, and also for a beggar's, need to be something that does not correspond to what is 'due' according to social designation. To paraphrase Lear's speech quoted above, Lear says that even beggars have excess, yet if a man does not have more than he needs, his life is like that of a beast. The two halves of this idea appear to be in conflict, with Lear simultaneously arguing 1) that beggars have more than enough and 2) that people need more than what is necessary to survive. This tension, however, lifts if we take account of Lear's shift from degree to person as the register of need. The first half of the speech figures even the most unlikely social station as having excess. The second half makes 'need' a function of being a person. Lear effectively challenges social station as the register for what is enough. Far from there being no 'excess' available for redistribution in the play's imagined Britain, there is in fact a great deal of potential 'excess' at all levels of society. Lear forges a link between equality and distribution that Union supporters simultaneously enabled and attempted to limit. Lear's challenge to social station and its association with ideas about distribution that rely on considering the interests of others may be seen as an alternative to Edmund's challenge to social station, which authorizes a kind of zero-sum grab for resources. As Edmund puts it to the imagined figure of his brother Edgar: 'I must have your land' (1.2.16).

If the play may be seen as more radical than Union supporters' theories of redistribution, its decoupling of distribution from status opens the door for the kind of fluid political economy that pro-Union writers were envisioning – a political economy rooted in beneficial redistribution and a complex but mutually complementary adjudication between interest and the common good. The play points toward how such a political economy need not depend – as it tended within the context of pro-Union discourse – on a fantasy of Britain as a land of abundance and excess. The play moreover suggests such political economy need not be conceived as entwined with the

⁷⁰ Patterson, *Popular Voice*, p. 112. See also de Grazia's argument that Lear's words offer 'a grim illogic' that shores up the distinction between rich and poor, pp. 271-2; and Selden's argument that Lear's thoughts here 'on beggary are not yet formulated', pp. 157-8.

success of the Union. The relevant whole for the duration of the play is a divided Britain; it is, as Albany describes it at the play's end, 'the gored state', neither an idealized whole nor autonomous parts (5.3.318). The play locates the redistributive ideas of pro-Union writers within the context of a fractured and un-idealized Britain and, in so doing, detaches them from the floundering Union project. The relationships and community it depicts cross over a British landscape without necessarily requiring either territorial or sovereign unity.

Recognizing a connection between the play's interest in redistribution and pro-Union redistributive ideas may also allow us to see how Shakespeare may have been interested in re-imagining social and economic relations. The play has sometimes been seen as nostalgic. Margreta de Grazia has influentially seen *King Lear* as resisting rising commercialism and holding onto a feudal past. For de Grazia, the play cleaves to the connectedness of feudalism and digs in its heels against the emergent detached mobility – both of identities and commodities – of modernity and capitalism. It intertwines persons and things – identity and property – 'in an attempt to withstand flux or fluidity, superflux or superfluity'.⁷¹ She argues that the play shows persons and property as the same, with property preceding and constituting personhood. The play's historical context does not, however, require seeing it as caught in – or taking sides in – binary struggles between capitalism and feudalism, mobility and connectedness, self-interest and community, past and future. Union supporters imagined a Britain that was commercial yet also committed to connectedness and a common good. For these writers, a common market and an active exchange were not associated with detached mobility. To the contrary, as evidenced by Bacon's and Hume's vision of a balanced political economy, commercialism would serve the common good. Moreover, it was precisely pro-Union writers' articulation of a complex account of self-interest that enabled them to envision redistribution as something quite different than charity – something that should be pursued even by the transferor. On this account, self-interest does not constitute a detached subjectivity but one attuned to its dependence on the interests of others. The play's concern with redistribution need not then be seen as nostalgia. It may instead be seen as a bold exploration of the potential effects – and expansions – of the redistributive logic that underwrote pro-Union thought.

⁷¹ De Grazia, pp. 259-60.