

King Lear (and Derrida)

[first performance on 26 October 1606 before court of King James I]

James Shapiro [Columbia], *The Year of Lear* (Simon & Schuster, October 2015), 384 pp.

Mark Anderson, Alexander Waugh, and Alex McNeil (eds), *Contested Year* (Kindle, February 2016), 140 pp.

“Contested Year is an anthology of critical reviews of James Shapiro’s book *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*. It is also a side-by-side companion meant to be read and consulted as a supplement to *The Year of Lear*. In October 2015, fanfares of acclaim greeted *The Year of Lear’s* publication. Yet none of the reviewers seemed to notice its flaws. The roster of mistakes in *The Year of Lear* is enough to sink his entire thesis and cast doubt on his reputation as one of the world’s foremost Shakespearean scholars. *Contested Year* puts *The Year of Lear’s* errors to right with seventeen leading independent Shakespeare scholars correcting, explaining and expounding upon each of *The Year of Lear’s* multiple errors, false statements, omissions and unsupported conjectures, with concision, wit, erudition and keen attention to detail. *Contested Year* rebuts fallacies and clarifies misunderstandings while highlighting Shapiro’s inaccuracies of dating, his sloppy confusion of sources, his muddle of historical events, his topographical gaffes, his mix-up of British titles, his errors over names, his genealogical howlers and his flagrant mistakes concerning language, court custom and the historical connections between key figures in his story. *Contested Year* fills the vacuum left by Shapiro’s myopic and controversial insistence that 1606 was the year in which Shakespeare wrote King Lear by introducing a cornucopia of important evidence (omitted from his book) that undermines his thesis. *Contested Year* is an essential companion to one of the most flawed and misleading works by an accredited academic professor of the last decade” [from Amazon.com].

Brian Vickers [Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich], *The One King Lear* (Harvard University Press, May 2016), 416 pp.

Stephen Greenblatt [Harvard], “Can We Ever Master King Lear?”, a review of Vickers in *The New York Review of Books*, 23 February 2017, pp. 34-36.

Harold Bloom [Yale], *Lear: The Great Image of Authority* (Scribner’s, April 2018), 176 pp.

Derrida (1930-2004)

“The text of the other must be read, mercilessly interrogated but therefore respected and, primarily so, in the body of its letter. I can interrogate, contradict, attack, or simply deconstruct a logic of the text that came before me, in front of me, but I cannot and must not change it” [“Le texte de l’autre doit être lu, interrogé sans merci mais donc respecté, et d’abord dans le corps de sa lettre. Je peux interroger, contredire, attaquer ou simplement déconstruire une logique du texte venu avant moi, devant moi, mais je ne peux ni ne dois le changer”].

Jacques Derrida, *Papier Machine* (Galilée 2001), pp. 373-74.

“[Reading] cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than itself” [“(La lecture) ne peut légitimement transgresser le texte vers autre chose que lui”].

Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Editions de Minuit 1967), p. 227.