

**CARE AND CONTAGION IN
SHAKESPEARE'S CHANGING WORLD**

Edited by Darryl Chalk and Rebecca Totaro

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For Peter and Sandra Chalk and Mike and Martha Totaro

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This volume itself owes its existence to the pre-Covid-19 pandemic care of its earliest contributors, each of whom participated in at least one of two related seminars: “Keeping Care in Early Modern England” co-facilitated by Mary Trull and Rebecca at the Shakespeare Association of America in 2020 and “Circuits of Disease and Caregiving in Shakespeare’s Changing World” co-facilitated by Darryl and Rebecca at the 2021 World Shakespeare Congress. The original contributors to these seminars, which were expected to be held in person, included our current contributors, Susan, Molly, Eileen, Jennifer, and Katarzyna. With the decision of each set of blessedly agile conference organizers to change the venues to allow for online rather than face-to-face exchange, excitement for our seminar’s essays grew. Our topic became more timely in light of Covid-19, and with warm outreach from our partners in this adventure, Lara Bateman and then the wonderful and ever-patient and supportive, Jade Grogan, Commissioning Editors at The Arden Shakespeare, we decided to move forward with the volume. We invited along our additional contributors, whose “yes” made the trek more delightfully engaging. Over months, and months, of additional pandemic, post-pandemic, hurricane, and other emergent events, we stayed the course, shared ideas, supported each other through revisions and changes, and now we present for you the following volume. Rebecca’s warmest love and thanks over these years go to Mom and Dad (joyfully featured in dedication) and always also to Vicky and Michael (we three monsters, remembering Grandpa and all we owe). Darryl’s eternal thanks go to my whole family: to the loves and joys of my life, Tonia, and our son, Oscar (who both make me better understand what care is everyday), to my Mum and Dad (to whom this volume is appreciatively co-dedicated), to Tonia’s parents Ron and Karen Gwydir (who provided childcare at crucial moments in the gestation of this book) and to my sister Lana, brother-in-law Paul, niece Elaina, nephew Harrison, and brother-in-law David.

Chapter 1

CARE AND CONTAGION IN *KING LEAR*, BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Darryl Chalk

Act Four of *King Lear* presents several scenes of caregiving. In a brief respite from the tempestuous scenes of familial division, and in the calm before the storm of tragic deaths still to come, a mentally ravaged Lear is reunited with his once-banished youngest daughter, Cordelia. Before the reunion, she immediately enquires after his care and a possible treatment for his condition: “What can man’s wisdom / In the restoring his bereaved sense, / He that helps him take all my outward worth” (4.4.8-10).¹ She is answered by an unnamed Gentleman that recovery is possible with the appropriate regime of medical procedures:

There is means, madam.
Our foster nurse of nature is repose,
The which he lacks: that to provoke in him
Are many simples operative, whose power
Will close the eye of anguish. (11-15)

Lear is in need of a healing kind of sleep, to be induced by certain herbal medicines, as the Gentleman suggests nursing him through a restorative coma. This scene and its follow up in Act Four Scene Seven are rarely considered in critical readings of *King Lear*, and even less so in representations of early modern caregiving practices. This is perhaps in part due to most modern editions accepting the Folio’s character change to “Gentleman” from the Quarto version’s “Doctor.” But both scenes invoke processes of healing, referring to common remedies for treating patients suffering from the aftereffects of humoral infection—in Lear’s case, a surfeit of anger, a madness symptomatic of “ungoverned rage” (4.4.19). I wish to revive the Doctor here, or at least the Gentleman as doctor, for reasons that are crucial to my argument. First, that