

THE COMMONPLACE BLOG OF JEFFREY M. JONES

COMMONPLACE BOOKS (OR COMMONPLACES) EMERGED IN THE 15TH CENTURY WITH THE AVAILABILITY OF CHEAP PAPER, MAINLY IN ENGLAND. THEY WERE A WAY TO COMPILE KNOWLEDGE--ESSENTIALLY SCRAPBOOKS FILLED WITH ITEMS OF EVERY KIND--AND WERE USED BY READERS, WRITERS, STUDENTS AND HUMANISTS AS AN AID FOR REMEMBERING USEFUL CONCEPTS OR FACTS THEY HAD LEARNED. EACH COMMONPLACE BOOK WAS UNIQUE TO ITS CREATOR'S PARTICULAR INTERESTS. CRITICALLY, MANY OF THESE WORKS ARE NOT SEEN TO HAVE LITERARY VALUE TO MODERN EDITORS.

FEBRUARY 18, 2010

Twelve Thought Experiments on Gauging Distance

This piece--originally written as a program supplement for Young Jean Lee's Lear (SoHo Rep, February, 2010) was occasioned by a review which described the play as "an intermittently funny but mostly flailing attempt to excavate new meanings from the consideration of a celebrated text... a big fat nothing." While I obviously disagree, that review raised general questions of how what lawyers might call a "derivative work" should stand in relation to its source.

Most of the specific references to Lee's text should be clear from context (e.g, there is a character named Goneril, who says "'I am a woman and my name is Goneril. And oh, how I long to be good to you. That is all I wish is to be good to the people around me, to make them feel whole and important so that they will dance to my bidding and bend to my will?") The quotation cited in Question 9 is Lear's last speech in Shakespeare's play; the quotation cited in Question 11 are the last lines in Lee's play. Nor does the character of Lear appear in Lee's play.

1. Gauge the distance between *The True Chronicle of the History of the Life and Death of King Lear and His Three Daughters* by William Shakespeare, and some other object. Does this distance define a relationship? Does the distance change if the object changes? If so, does changing the distance change the relationship? Is there an *optimal* distance between *The True Chronicle ...* and another object?
2. Gauge the distance between *The True Chronicle...* and some other object named "Lear." Does this distance define a relationship?
3. What happens when the object named "Lear" is not Lear?