

*A draft letter to Dan Skinner of the Ambrose or Rose Theatre Company. Circa 1991. ed.*

Dear Dan Skinner,

This is just to let you know that after checking my own numbers I have found one error. I now make the total for Scene 2, Act II 529 not 528, which brings the total for Act II up to 671. I was happy to find this error, because the total for the whole play of 3185 is unquestionably correct (in the light of every thing I know about "Shakespeare's numbers", and of the figure for Lear which arises most immediately and elegantly from this total, with the five act totals) - but now it is no longer necessary to include Edgar's answering trumpet as a converted line of speech.

You may find this sort of juggling a bit dubious. But in fact, in every play, there are places where one has to stop mechanically counting and to think. In 'Macbeth' one has to think about the songs in the Hecate scenes, referred to by their first lines, but not quoted in full - (The upshot is crucial to the figure). With 'Lear' I am all the time skating on thinnest ice because I don't know the play by heart - the ideas that the structure reveals will have to be put to you - but about the total I am certain, and so I was right to look for an extra line. (I argued: Edgar surely did not blow his own trumpet, but had a trumpeter near-by, just as the herald did. And just as the Herald had to speak, "Again...Again", so surely did Edgar, with "Now!" or "Yes!" or some such word. Of course he could simply have nodded or made a sign, but the fact of the missing line seemed to imply that he must have spoken - only the audience cannot hear what he said.) The fact that the line proves not countable in the end, does not invalidate this sort speculation. It's just another illustration of the way one is led to enter into the most literal detail through wondering about the numbers and their relationships.

I have heard from Michael Willey, who tells me that you and he hope to come to Salisbury to see me some time soon.