ABSTRACT

JACOB CHRISTIAN BERGER. Three Daughters, Two Stories, One Tragedy:
Ownership and Incest in *A Thousand Acres* and *King Lear*. (Under the direction of
Professor Christopher Crosbie.)

Jane Smiley retells William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in her 1991 novel, *A Thousand
Acres*. Scholarship has traced the themes of ownership and incest in Shakespeare’s *Lear*,
but until Smiley’s reworking, the female perspective of the play has often been left
unheard. Smiley takes the pernicious Goneril in *Lear* and turns her into Ginny, *Acres’*
complex narrator. I consult scholars like Mark Blechner, Rita Whetton, Mark Taylor, and
others who study incest and father/daughter dynamics in *Lear*. Having the foundation for
ownership and incest in *Lear*, I then reference scholars like Susan Ayres, Vander Scott
Ploeg, and others who examine how Smiley underscores Shakespearean themes in her
novel. I argue Shakespeare’s female voice becomes drowned out by the louder masculine
voice which ultimately obscures the women’s lived experiences. This essay reveals how
Smiley gives voice to the women and by doing so shows how ownership diminishes and
devastates the persons subjugated. Smiley’s use of incest highlights the latent, but largely
ignored, psychological effects suggested by King Lear’s possessive conception of
parental roles. In turn, this essay counters the vicious cycle of abuse and silence endemic
to these narratives.