

THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE

360° SERIES

VIEWFINDER: FACTS AND PERSPECTIVES
ON THE PLAY, PLAYWRIGHT, AND PRODUCTION



KING LEAR

WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

MICHAEL
PENNINGTON

Direction:
ARIN ARBUS

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Notes

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Credits

“Synopsis,” “Biography,” and “Perspectives” written and compiled by Jonathan Kalb.

“Sources: A Legendary King Lear” written by guest contributor Cristine Brooks.

“Selected Performance History” written by and “Michaël Attias and the Music of *King Lear*” interviewed by guest contributor Emily MacLeod.

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THE PLAY SYNOPSIS AND CHARACTERS

The aging King Lear, wishing to retire and divide his kingdom among his three daughters, first asks each to profess her love for him publicly. When Cordelia, the youngest, refuses, he furiously disowns her, dividing the kingdom instead between her sisters Regan and Goneril. The Earl of Kent tries to intervene and is banished, and the King of France marries Cordelia despite her lack of a dowry. Lear keeps a retinue of 100 knights and intends to live alternately with Regan and Goneril, but Goneril soon loses patience with the knights' "riotous" behavior in her home. She tells her servants to treat her father rudely and insists that he reduce the number of knights. Lear leaves indignantly for Regan's, accompanied by his Fool and Kent, who has returned in disguise and been hired as Lear's servant.

Edmund, illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester, schemes to disinherit his legitimate brother Edgar. Believing a forged letter suggesting that Edgar plans to murder him, Gloucester declares Edmund his heir, and Edgar flees, disguising himself as the mad beggar Poor Tom to avoid capture. Regan and Cornwall, arriving at Gloucester's castle, punish Kent for insulting Goneril's insolent steward Oswald, and refuse to receive Lear when he arrives. When they and Goneril insist that Lear relinquish all his knights, he is enraged and rushes out into the stormy night. The castle gates are shut behind him.

Lear, increasingly mad, rails against the storm, with only the Fool beside him. They encounter Kent and Poor Tom on the heath, and eventually Gloucester, who leads them to shelter. Gloucester learns of a French invasion led by Cordelia and tells Kent to take Lear to her at Dover, convinced that Goneril and Regan want him dead. Edmund, learning these plans, betrays Gloucester to Cornwall, who arrests him and gouges out his eyes. Cornwall is killed when an outraged servant stabs him. Blind Gloucester meets Edgar on the road and asks to be led to Dover. Goneril and Regan become jealous of one another because both are attracted to Edmund. Goneril's husband Albany abhors the mistreatment of Lear but nevertheless feels obligated to help repel the French invasion.

In Dover, as a trick to cure despair, Edgar convinces Gloucester that Gloucester has miraculously survived a suicidal jump from a cliff. When Oswald attacks Gloucester, Edgar kills him, taking a letter from him proving that Goneril and Edmund plan to murder Albany. Cordelia and Lear are tearfully reunited at the French camp. Edgar, dressed as a beggar, gives Albany the incriminating letter, saying a "champion" will return to prove its truth. The French are defeated and Edmund sends Lear and Cordelia to prison with a secret order for their murder. Edgar returns as the masked champion to fight Edmund and mortally wounds him. Regan is poisoned by Goneril, Goneril stabs herself, and Edgar reports Gloucester's death from heartbreak. The dying Edmund reveals his order for the prison assassinations, but it is too late. Lear enters with Cordelia's body, curses heaven, and dies.

Characters

LEAR, King of Britain

GONERIL, eldest daughter to Lear

REGAN, daughter to Lear

CORDELIA, youngest daughter to Lear

EARL of KENT

DUKE of ALBANY, husband to Goneril

DUKE of CORNWALL, husband to Regan

EARL of GLOUCESTER

EDGAR, son to Gloucester

EDMUND, bastard son to Gloucester

FOOL, to Lear

OSWALD, steward to Goneril

GENTLEMAN, attendant on Cordelia

KING of FRANCE

DUKE of BURGUNDY

OLD MAN, tenant to Gloucester

DOCTOR

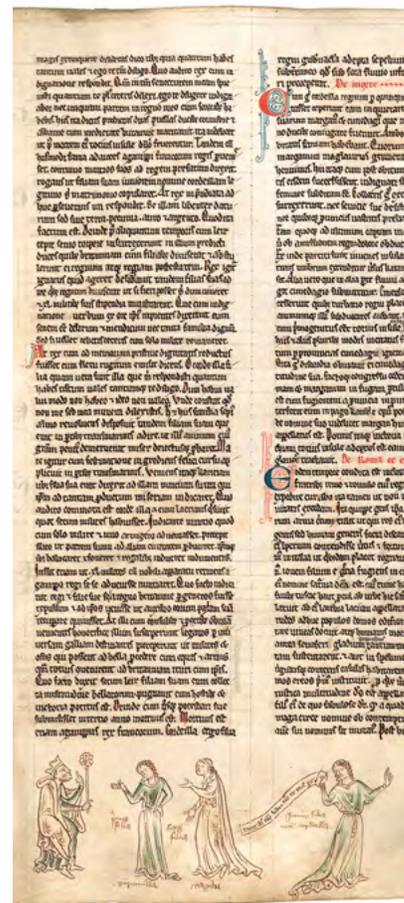
THE PLAY SOURCES: A LEGENDARY KING LEAR

In his collection of essays, *The Sacred Wood*, T.S. Eliot says, “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.”¹ Part of the genius of Shakespeare is not in his invention of story, but the way he takes pre-existing stories and intertwines, flexes, and alters them, filling them with new vigor and making them his own. Much of Shakespeare is adaptation, and looking at the way he makes use of and changes historical accounts and figures, folklore, and canonized literary works becomes just as useful and interesting to his plays as plot and language themselves.

In Shakespeare’s England, the story of King Lear was not only told as a piece of authentic British history from the island’s ancient, pre-Roman past, but also as a cautionary tale to contemporary fathers not to put too much weight behind the flattery of their children: “Remember what happened to old King Lear...”² The tale of King Lear first appears in England in the twelfth century in *Historia Regum Britanniae* or *The History of the Kings of Britain*, a Latin text written in 1135 A.D. by Geoffrey of Monmouth,³ a medieval English chronicler also known for bringing the figure of Arthur of the Round Table into European literature.⁴ During Shakespeare’s time, *Historia* was available, but it was not translated into English. However, Shakespeare still may have read it in Latin,⁵ or he may have taken details from more recent writers who directly or indirectly used *Historia* for their own works.⁶ In Shakespeare’s day, the stories found in *Historia*, such as King Lear, were still considered to be historical fact.⁷ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, folklorists noticed similarities between the story of King Lear and some earlier versions of the “Cinderella” tale. Shakespeare himself never makes direct use of these versions. However, in *Historia*, Geoffrey of Monmouth most likely drew upon a related body of folklore and folktales for which no record any longer exists.⁸

The English chronicler Raphael Holinshed also tells the story of King Lear in *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, a two-volume work originally published in English in 1577.⁹ The second edition of *The Chronicles of England*, published in 1587, was Shakespeare’s primary reference for most of his histories as well as many other plays, such as *Macbeth*. The story of King Lear as told by Holinshed became altered over time, and found its way, in these many modified versions, into numerous works that Shakespeare would have likely or certainly read, either for pleasure or research.¹⁰

In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s and Holinshed’s story of King Lear, the king tests the love of his daughters, rewarding the older daughters who flatter him and



“King Lear and Daughters,” from the *Northernland Bestiary*, ca. 1250; The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

1 114
2 Greenblatt, Stephen. “King Lear” in *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York: W. Norton & Company, 1997. 2308-09.
3 Wells, Stanley. “Introduction” in *King Lear*. Ed. Stanley Wells. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 17.
4 “Geoffrey Of Monmouth.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014. Web.
5 Woodford, Donna. *Understanding King Lear: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 3.
6 Halio, Jay L. “Introduction” in *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Ed. Jay L. Halio. 1992. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. 2.
7 Woodford, 3
8 Halio, 9
9 “Raphael Holinshed.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014. Web.
10 Wells, 18

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disowning the genuinely loyal youngest daughter. He then gives half of the kingdom to his eldest daughters, promising the other half upon his death. Shakespeare's *King Lear*, however, gives away his entire kingdom to his eldest daughters, which results in amplified tragedy since Lear is not only more responsible for his own demise, but he also learns more from it.¹ Shakespeare also changed the ending of the play. In the earlier versions of the *King Lear* story, Lear regains the throne with the help of Cordelia and her husband. He reigns until his death, and then hands the kingdom over to Cordelia, who kills herself after being deposed by her nephew several years into her reign. However, Shakespeare ends the play with Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan all dying, leaving a dead royal line and an heirless kingdom.²

Shakespeare was not the only playwright of the time interested in the historical *King Lear*. About a decade before Shakespeare's *King Lear*—which scholars believe was composed around 1605—an anonymous play called *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* was performed and published in London.³ Shakespeare's deviation from this play, as well as the stories of *King Lear* that came before, has defined the *King Lear* that we know today, making his story one of the most devastating of tragedies, within and without the categorical confines of Shakespearean plays.

In *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, as well as Shakespeare's earlier sources, which Monmouth also sets the pattern for in such works as John Higgins's *Mirror for Magistrates*, William Warner's *Albion's England*, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*—Lear is overthrown by his two eldest daughters and their husbands, but is eventually restored to the throne by the army of his youngest and beloved daughter's husband, the King of France. But, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, his original audience is not given the story of loss and restoration they would have anticipated, but instead are shocked by a tragic ending in which Lear enters Act Five with the lifeless body of Cordelia in his arms.⁴ In Shakespeare's alternate ending, Lear dies not only without his kingdom, but also with the knowledge that his foolishness has destroyed him and his only loving and loyal daughter Cordelia. Conversely, the historical Lear regains his kingdom and dies knowing that his kingdom will go to Cordelia, who most deserves it.

Shakespeare was also the first to combine the subplot of Gloucester and his sons, Edgar and Edmund, and the main plot of *King Lear* and his three daughters.⁵ This major second plot is inspired by the misadventures of the Paphlagonian King in an episode of Philip Sidney's prose romance *Arcadia*,⁶ whose most notable version was printed in 1590.⁷ In Book Two, Chapter Ten of the *Arcadia*, the princes Pyrocles and Musidorus encounter an old blind man led by his son, Leonatus. The old man is King of Paphlagonia, dethroned and blinded by his malevolent, illegitimate son, Plexirtus, who persuaded his father



Detail, "Portrait of Emma Hill (Study for Lear and Cordelia)" by Ford Madox Brown, 1848; Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham

1 Woodford, 3

2 Woodford, 2

3 Woodford, 1-2

4 Greenblatt, 2310

5 Woodford, 2

6 Halio, 3

7 "Sir Philip Sidney." *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition.* Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014. Web.

THE PLAY SOURCES: A LEGENDARY KING LEAR

to destroy the loyal eldest son, Leonatus. Plexirtus then takes over the kingdom so that his father (like Lear) is left with “nothing but the name of a King.”¹ The subplot universalizes Shakespeare’s theme and raises it to ‘cosmic’ proportions as “Lear’s world becomes the entire world, and it becomes clear that Lear’s fate may be the fate of any man.”²

Shakespeare presents a devastating tale of King Lear. Unlike his predecessors, he refuses to give his audience the sigh of relief that results from reconciliation and restoration, leaving relationships disjointed, injustices unrepaired, and Lear and his daughters dead. In the final scene of the play, Lear holds Cordelia’s limp body in his arms, howling with pain. In a moment that anticipates rectification, he says, upon testing her breath with a feather, “This feather stirs, she lives: if it be so, / It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows / That ever I have felt.”³ But she does not live, and Lear is not given this second chance. As Shakespeare yanks this possibility away from Lear, he forces the weight of the tragedy even farther down upon his audience. With this ending, Shakespeare moves the story of King Lear into a more realistic realm, where devastation, regret, and loss are the residual conditions of the play. As a playwright deeply concerned with the human experience, Shakespeare transforms the mostly happy ending tale of King Lear into one that strikes a more realistic, and thus a more tragic chord.

1 Halio, 4

2 Halio, 4

3 Act 5, scene 3, lines 263-65



"Lud Hurdibras, Bladud and King Lear (Lear)" and "Queen Cordelia" from Genealogy and Race of all the Kings of England by Giles Godelet, 1562-63; The University of Manchester Collections, Manchester

DIALOGUES THE TRUE KING

ALVIN KERNAN

At its political center, *Lear* stages [King] James's conception of the absolute king. Like James's history of monarchy [*The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 1598], the story of *Lear* begins in a primitive time when a king rules not by delegation of power (à la Buchanan [James Stuart's boyhood tutor]) or by any contract with terrified subjects but out of innate unquestioned authority and his own essentially kingly nature. Lear towers above his subjects, a titanic personality, "every inch a king" [4.6.106] a man who has in his countenance an inalienable authority that his followers "would fain call master" [1.4.28]. His will is locked, commanding, fearless, autocratic in every way. His natural right to rule is reinforced by time-honored custom and immemorial legitimacy. He is an old man, as old as Shakespeare can realistically make him, "fourscore and upward" [4.7.61], and he emerges, as in James's theory of divine right, out of the mists of the ancient past, as if there had always been kings of this kind, from time out of mind, before there were people.

One of the legendary kings of ancient Britain, Lear calls upon the gods to do his bidding with all the confidence of James's belief that the royal and the divine wills are one—"by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The [mysteries] of Hecat and the night" [1.1.110-11]. Like James, too, he assumes an unquestioned control over the natural order of things: "Hear, nature, hear...Suspend thy purpose" [1.4.268]. His own traditional ways of thinking and doing appear to him as the workings of nature itself—"Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life is cheap as beast's" [2.2.455-56]. This identification with a divine nature confers an undoubted ownership of the sacred land and consequent right of transfer on him:

even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with cham pains rich' d,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady. [1.1.63-6]

Shakespeare exaggerates for dramatic purposes all the powers claimed for divine right, including what some political theorists, James Stuart included, considered the essential mark of kingship, namely, priority to the law. "The laws



King James I of England and VI of Scotland by Daniël Mijtens, 1621; © National Portrait Gallery, London

of a sovereign prince, although they be grounded on good and lively reasons, depend nevertheless upon nothing but his mere and frank good will," is the way the French monarchist Jean Bodin put it.¹ Lear is the *lex loquens*² actualized, resigning his duties without consultation, giving his kingdom to whomever he will, disowning and banishing any who cross him, acting as if his royal title were indelibly his, even after he has surrendered its power. In James's political theory kings are part of the world's reality, woven inextricably into God's schemes of nature and history.

However, in his living image of the divine-right king, Shakespeare, first in the old-fashioned moral way of humanist mirror-for-magistrates art, goes beyond the immediate prince-pleasing functions of palace art to lengthen

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the shadows cast by the sun king. In the arbitrary exercise of his prerogative, Lear puts power into the hands of the selfish and wicked. His motives, too numerous for certainty, in exercising his prerogative are tainted with selfishness—an inordinate desire to be loved and praised, a determination to have his own way, a longing to seek his own ease in retirement, susceptibility to flattery (all prominent weaknesses of James Stuart). The root trouble is phrased crisply by his daughter Regan, “he hath ever but slenderly known himself” [295].

The consequences of an unchecked will and of putting the wicked and ruthless into power appear most dramatically in Act 3. Tom o’ Bedlam, the mad beggar (or the “poor, bare, fork’d animal” as Lear calls him [3.4.106]), mankind stripped of all the personality and all the role coverings normally provided by society, appears first. Tom is “the thing itself” [104] a crazed, superstition-ridden wanderer across the land, who stays alive by eating dead animals from the ditch and drinking the water from stagnant pools, in his fear seeing a world filled with devils and darkness. Tom is natural man—though not in Lear’s idealized sense of that term—reduced to little more than biological existence.

The second heath image is of natural, not human, emptiness: a bare land and a titanic storm that batters anything in its path, simply raging, indifferent to human existence, pitying, “neither wisemen nor fools” [3.2.12]. Human concerns and human values mean and are nothing in the face of this colossal power of a natural world that dwarfs in its energy—earthquake, flood, cyclone, fire—the puny powers of human beings. The human world as heart of darkness, all moral and social controls removed, provides a third image of a world from which the rule of the true king is gone. Off to the side of the heath is Gloucester’s castle, usurped by the savage Cornwall and the sadistic Regan. This fortress was built to protect life, but now it contains the most fearsome terror on the heath. Here a man and woman use their unrestrained political and physical powers to rip out the eyes of a helpless old man, the earl of Gloucester, who has crossed them. They act with all the sadistic joy that a barbaric humankind has taken in the exercise of power and the infliction of pain and torture in gulag and concentration camp, from Auschwitz to Cambodia, Beirut, and Sarajevo.

In *Lear*’s existential heath images Shakespeare looks far deeper into the state of nature on which kingship ultimately rests than did his royal master in his political writings. “Yes, yes,” James would have said, “these are excellent pictures of the kinds of suffering and savagery that God will visit on the land that revolts against the rightful king, or in which the king makes serious mistakes of judgment. But when the rightful king is restored, they will pass.” The heath, in James’s political philosophy, is an unnatural state of things; true nature is to be found in the hierarchical state. But these boundary scenes, which are a regular feature of Shakespearean political theater—Richard II in his dungeon, Hamlet in the Elsinore graveyard—are not in *Lear*, or elsewhere in Shakespeare, mere passing disturbances of rebellion, they are visions of a human and natural reality always underlying the surfaces of civilized life. They become visible only when the social order breaks down, and they will be covered if it begins to function again, but they are always there.

To look unprotected at this ground of things is dangerous, but not to understand the reality in front of which political power must operate is to remain unaware of the full human condition. All of Shakespeare’s kings come sooner or later to the heath in some form, and there their measure is taken by the fullness of their comprehension and their response to the primal scene.

The most desperate reactions in all Shakespeare to the emptiness and meaninglessness that lie on the heath just behind civil life are those of the two major characters of *King Lear*, the old king and his faithful noble, Gloucester. The villains of the play do not experience the heath in this play—what they see they ignore—and they remain therefore, as their deaths show, locked into a limiting rationalism that does not fully comprehend the depths of the world in which they live. The old king does experience it, fully and shatteringly. At first he rejects submission and tears for a defiance of evil that as it becomes more impotent drops off into madness. Shakespearean madness is never some clinical disorder, a non-functional way of thinking and acting, but rather a last-ditch defense of values that have become untenable but cannot be relinquished, the only way left to deal with terrors that cannot be denied but cannot be accepted. (R. D.

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Laing's analysis, though not his admiration, of schizophrenia as a defense against absurdity is close to Shakespeare's view.) And so Lear runs mad, defying all the terrible things that are implicit in what he saw on the heath and that now flood into his speech: the bestiality of human life, the foulness of sex, the cruelty and indifference of power to the suffering of others.

But still he continues to believe that he is somehow above this confusion and retains both the moral authority to denounce it and the power to punish it. All the conventional marks of sovereignty, even some of the slightest, "the power to legislate, to make war and peace, appoint higher magistrates, hear final appeals, grant pardons, receive homage, coin money, regulate weight and measure and impose

In James's political theory kings are part of the world's reality, woven inextricably into God's schemes of nature and history.

taxes" (Skinner, II, 288)³, appear in Lear's disjointed mad speeches in an almost programmatic fashion. Though jumbled together in the ramblings of a madman, they are the powers of a man who still thinks he is "every inch a king": "There's your press-money"—"It were a delicate stratagem to shoe a troop of horse with felt"—"I pardon that man's life"—"None does offend, none, I say none, I'll able 'em"—"they cannot touch me for [coining], I am the King himself" [4.6.86, 180, 108, 164, 84].

Suicide is at the opposite end from madness on the spectrum of human defenses against the intolerable, a surrender to the overwhelming while still protesting its injustice. This is the Earl of Gloucester's response to being sadistically tortured, blinded, and cast out to wander on the heath. He crawls away from the explosion in his face feeling that he has no way and that he therefore needs no eyes. Feeling

himself too weak to defy the power of evil gods who allow the torture of humans for their inexplicable amusement, even as humans in turn torture insects—and the insects torture some other life form?—he seeks to throw himself over the cliff at Dover in an attempt to be rid of a consciousness he can no longer endure.

After the abyss has been glimpsed on the heath, the minor characters try to moralize and philosophize what they have been through. "This shows you are above, You justicers" [4.2.79]. But their rationalizations are no more effective than the madness and suicide of the major characters. Tears are the things and "give me your hand" [4.6.25, 219, 279] the gesture that carry the silently growing feelings of community that eventually lead the way off the heath. Gloucester tries to help Lear, and Cornwall's servant attempts to prevent his master from putting out Gloucester's other eye. Edgar guides his blinded father away from the heath, Cordelia succors and forgives the crazed Lear, the Duke of Albany comes out on the king's side, and a French army appears to defend the king's party against the usurpers.

The bonds that are knitting together this new community are brought into close focus in act 4 in the parallel scenes in which Cordelia cures Lear's madness and Edgar momentarily restores his father's faith in life and willingness to live. That scene, so awkward always in the theater, in which Gloucester thinks he has jumped over Dover Cliff and is persuaded that he has been deluded into jumping by fiends and that his "life's a miracle" [55] suggests that an illusion of a caring deity is necessary if people are to go on living. Cordelia's treatment of Lear—music, new clothing, rest, medicine, and, finally, forgiveness for past wrongs—renews the sense of an ineradicable goodness and harmony in, not outside, life.

The feeling of basic human sympathy emerging in these scenes swells to embrace a universal community that includes all the poor and helpless, when Lear in the midst of his own sufferings breaks through to a perception of the dreadful injustices of the world. The beadle lashes the whore he lusts after, the justice is a greater thief than the man he condemns. In time a society can be and is rebuilt on his pity for the "poor naked wretches, whereso ere you

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are that bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,” and an acceptance of responsibility for their plight, “O, I have ta'en Too little care of this!” [3.4.28-29, 32-33]. The old kingdom with its divine-right pretensions and hierarchical metaphysics is gone, but in its place is a new community held together by a need for mutual support and a sympathy for the suffering of others—“Give me your hand.”

Everyone inside and outside the play would like for it to end here, with the mistakes paid for by suffering and something learned on which a new society can be built. But the plot sweeps on into the terrible last act, carrying away all attempts to manage history by thinking or feeling, madness or sanity, defiance or yielding. The army that would save the old king is defeated, and Lear withdraws from the world with Cordelia—“We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage” [5.3.9]—only to be followed by the murderer who kills her. Gloucester's heart bursts, and Lear at long last can endure no more.

In the usual Shakespearean manner a diminished world is put back together at the end of *Lear*. The wicked are punished, the good who survive (there are not many) are rewarded. But it all has a flat anticlimactic quality. Lear cannot extract any satisfaction from the retributive justice of killing Cordelia's murderer with his “biting fulchion!” Kent reveals himself and the faithfulness of service with which he has followed Lear all this way, and is now prepared to follow him into death, only to be met with the deflating “[You] are welcome hither” [87]. Albany promises justice, but even the death of the villains one after another seems somehow but a “trifle” [294]. With Lear dead, the kingdom is given to virtuous, decent men, Edgar and the duke of Albany, who, though they began the play as innocents, have been tested and toughened by going to the ends of the moral world. But each of them is in the final scene notably reluctant to accept the crown and oversee the restoration of the kingdom. Government and rule have become heavy burdens of necessity. Life is only bearable with illusions: “Look her lips, Look there, look there!” [309]. All that anyone is willing to assert is in Edgar's last flat words, “The oldest hath borne most; we that are young Shall never see so much nor live so long” [324-5]. ●

NOTES

Excerpt from “The True King” in *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613* by Alvin Kernan (Yale UP, 1995); Reproduced by permission of Yale University Press.

¹ Bodin, Jean. *The Six Books of a Commonweal*. 1576. Trans. Richard Knolles, 1606. Ed. Kenneth D. McRae. Cambridge, Mass., 1962. 156.

² Latin, literally meaning “speaking law” or his every word is law.

³ Skinner, Quentin. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. 2 vols. Cambridge, 1978. Vol 2. 288.

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THE PLAY PERSPECTIVES

The following quotes are selected perspectives on the play from notable scholars and artists.

A lively and lasting sense of filial duty is more effectually impressed on the mind of a son or daughter by reading *King Lear*, than by all the dry volumes of ethics, and divinity, that ever were written.

—THOMAS JEFFERSON, IN A 1771 LETTER

The family contains in embryo not only slavery (*servitus*) but serfdom also...all the antagonisms which later develop on a wide scale within society and its state.

—KARL MARX, QUOTED BY ENGELS IN *ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY*, 1884

Every old man is a King Lear!—
What once walked, and argued, hand in hand
Is long since past,
What loved with you, in you, suffered,
Has attached itself elsewhere;
The young are here for their own sake,
It would be madness to ask:
Come along, grow old with me.

—JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE, *ZAHME XENIEN*, 1827 [TRANS. JONATHAN KALB]

We think we know what Goethe meant
By 'every old man is King Lear.'
Neglect of daughters was in his mind,
Something about a parent's discontent,
The clash of generations and the loss of power,
How best divide, what to leave behind,
Quite forgetting the old man's prayer
(Let me not go mad)
Hurled back at him across the heath.
Age, he knew, was the true betrayer.
When the ebb recedes
There is only sand beneath.
No mould exists will form
Reality to fit an old man's mind.
A youth mislays his glasses and does not care,
But an old man may lose a room
And wander bleakly, trying to find
A wife or daughter who's no longer there.

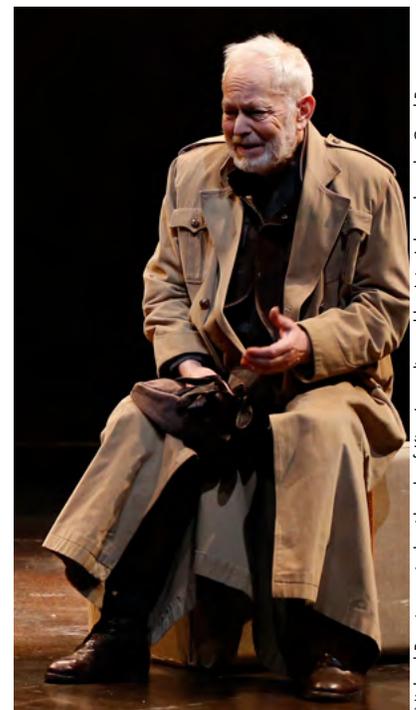
—PAUL GARDNER, "EIN ALTER MANN IST STETS EIN KÖNIG LEAR," 1990

In the final instance tragedy is an appraisal of human fate, a measure of the absolute. The grotesque is a criticism of the absolute in the name of frail human experience. That is why tragedy brings catharsis, while grotesque offers no consolation whatsoever. 'Tragedy,' wrote Gorgias of Leontium, 'is a swindle in which the swindler is more just than the swindled, and the swindled wiser than the swindler.'

—JAN KOTT, "KING LEAR OR ENDGAME," 1964



Night in a Harbour (Sisters) by Caspar David Friedrich, 1818-1820; State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Michael Pennington in the title role of *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

THE PLAY PERSPECTIVES

All good tragedy is anti-tragedy. *King Lear*. Lear wants to enact the false tragic, the solemn, the complete. Shakespeare forces him to enact the true tragic, the absurd, the incomplete.

—IRIS MURDOCH, "SALVATION BY WORDS," 1972

[The] battle in *King Lear* frees one from the idea that battles are won by the good instead of the strong. This is a profoundly unsuperstitious play. I do not agree that it is a nihilistic or pessimistic one. Certain states of being—reconciliation, forgiveness, devotion—are states of blessedness, and they exist while other people—conventionally successful people—are in states of misery and chaos.

—W.H. AUDEN, *LECTURES ON SHAKESPEARE*, 1946-7

Lear is not a study in redemption but in outrageousness and in being outraged; he is Shakespeare's perfection in the poetics of outrage, surpassing even Macbeth at evoking the audience's involuntary identification. Mortality is the ultimate outrage we all of us must endure, and Lear's authentic prophecy is not against filial ingratitude but against nature, despite his insistence that he speaks for nature.

—HAROLD BLOOM, *SHAKESPEARE: THE INVENTION OF THE HUMAN*, 1998

Kings are justly called gods for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth...God hath power to create or destroy, make or unmake at his pleasure; to give life or send death; to judge all, and [not] to be judged...the like power have kings: they make and unmake their subject; they have power of raising and casting down; of life and death; judges over all their subjects and in all causes, and yet accountable to none but God only. They have power to...make of their subjects like men at the chess, a pawn to take a bishop or a knight.

—KING JAMES I, SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT, 1610

Lear...contains a great deal of veiled social criticism...but it is all uttered either by the Fool, by Edgar when he is pretending to be mad, or by Lear during his bouts of madness. In his sane moments Lear hardly ever makes an intelligent remark.

—GEORGE ORWELL, *SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT*, 1950

The passion in Othello pours along, so to speak, like a river, torments itself in restless eddies, or is hurled from its dizzying height like a sounding cataract. That in *Lear* is more like a sea, swelling, chafing, raging, without hope, without beacon or anchor. Torn from the hold of his affections and fixed purposes, he floats a mighty wreck in the wide world of sorrows.

—WILLIAM HAZLITT, *THE LONDON MAGAZINE*, 1820

[*Lear*] is the most agonizing of all tragedies to endure: and if we are to feel more than a fraction of this agony, we must have a sense of [its] quality of grimmest humour.

—G. WILSON KNIGHT, *THE WHEEL OF FIRE*, 1949



Saturn Devouring His Son by Peter Paul Rubens, 1636-1638; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

DIALOGUES COMPETING FOR LOVE AND CRUELTY IN *KING LEAR*

GAIL KERN PASTER



Detail, “Bust of an old man with a flowing beard, the head bowed forward, the left shoulder unshaded” by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, 1630; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

For critics of *King Lear*, the huge storm that erupts in Act 3 is a symbol of disorder—the political disorder that Lear has wreaked on his kingdom and the emotional turmoil he has brought on himself by recklessly turning over that kingdom to his evil daughters and their husbands. The storm is a key cause of the physical suffering endured by Lear, his Fool, and Poor Tom before they are taken to shelter. And Lear experiences the storm in complicated ways—at moments pitying himself for being caught out in it, at moments enjoying its general destructiveness. Raging, he addresses the storm in vengeful terms, asking it to “rumble thy bellyful! Spit fire, spout, rain! / Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters” (3. 2.14-15).

As such language indicates, Shakespeare is using the spectacle of the aged king buffeted by wind and rain to make sharp moral distinctions relevant to the action of the play and to the real world outside it. These are distinctions between physical and mental suffering, between natural and human agency, and between the accidental and deliberate infliction of pain. The wind and rain cause Lear much discomfort, but the storm—unlike Lear’s daughters—does not intend to. It is the storm’s indifference to human suffering that makes it a fitting symbolic background for the central moral question of the play, when Lear asks, “Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?” (3.6.74-75).

King Lear—often regarded as Shakespeare’s bleakest tragedy—is a play preoccupied by the contents of hearts, the texture of flesh, and the storm of contending passions comprising cruelty, anger, ingratitude, and filial love. All those emotions are unleashed at the very beginning of the play when Lear, bent on abdication, asks his daughters to compete for shares of the kingdom by expressing their love for him. The love contest is bogus in any number of ways, but primarily because it confuses love as strife with love as bond. By authorizing hypocrisy, Lear causes Goneril and Regan to manufacture feelings they do not have and Cordelia to silence the ones she does have. Familial love not only entails a competition between sisters (as proxies for their husbands) but also dysfunctional strife within

COMPETING FOR LOVE AND CRUELTY IN *KING LEAR* GAIL KERN PASTER

the self between the embodied emotion of love and other bodily faculties. Goneril describes her love for Lear as “dearer than eyesight,” “a love that makes breath poor and speech unable” (1.1.56, 60). Regan, even more oddly, professes herself “an enemy to all other joys / Which the most precious square of sense possesses, / And find I am alone felicitate / In your dear highness’ love” (73-76). It is a speech against common sense in several ways, since Regan is presenting herself as an enemy to the wholeness of her own appetites and sensations—her “square of sense” perhaps being the appetites which guarantee a self’s basic instincts for preservation. Cordelia experiences this verbal production of love on demand as a violent extrusion of bodily contents: “I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth” (1.1.91-92). The image is one of disgust and physical impossibility, the larger organ thrust up and shoved into the smaller. Kent’s dark comment—“Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds / Reverb no hollowness” (154-155)—extends the imagery of the sisters’ behavior. Goneril and Regan may be surprised by Lear’s demand but they are able rhetorically to shape their bodies to their father’s will because their hearts are empty containers, lacking Cordelia’s plenitude of feeling. But Lear perversely misreads Cordelia’s unresponsiveness not as fullness of heart but as a hard-heartedness unnatural in a youthful female body: “But goes thy heart with this?” “So young and so untender?” (105, 107).

The massiveness of Lear’s error in authorizing untruth, ceding power to his false daughters, and banishing his true one is never in doubt. By abdicating, he not only cedes control over the physical and social elements of his kingdom but he also authoritatively sets in motion the growth of a hard new social environment of increasing “unkindness,” in the modern sense of that keyword. Thus it is important to understand that the sisters’ astonishing capacity for cruelty is presented as the result of this new political environment and the competition in cruelty afforded by it. Power grants Goneril and Regan to breed the hardness of their hearts, to nurture within themselves the cruel emotions to which their cold dispositions incline them. The new regime is one of rising physical and mental cruelty towards Lear himself, an increasing indifference to the physical suffering of others, and apparent delight in the infliction of pain and torture.

Shakespeare structures the escalation of Lear’s humiliation to emphasize the disparity between his rage and his powerlessness, between the intensity of his language and the ineffectuality of his means. The sisters make cruelty a matter of precept and policy, encouraging cruelty in their servants and competing with each other in the arts of

King Lear—often regarded as Shakespeare’s bleakest tragedy—is a play preoccupied by the contents of hearts, the texture of flesh, and the storm of contending passions comprising cruelty, anger, ingratitude, and filial love.

discipline and torture. The escalation of cruelty is clear: it begins by humiliating the king in front of his own servants and moves on to the insult of stocking his messenger, to denying Lear shelter, and to the climactic blinding of Gloucester for his loyalty to the old king. Regan and Goneril compete to dismantle Lear of his followers—“What need you five and twenty? Ten? Or five?...What need one?” (2.2.450, 452). And it is in the same competitive spirit that Regan and Cornwall put Gloucester’s eyes out one at a time. “One side will mock another - th’ other too,” Regan declares (3.7.70), suggesting that the sighted eye would claim its advantage over the other eye’s injury and blindness. She is so committed to the idea of rivalry that she imagines a natural competition between organs of sense that work better together.

Cruelty does not name a sin in early modern England and Elizabethans seem to have been hardened to the infliction of pain on people and animals in ways that seem horrific to us. The idea of cruelty in *King Lear*—climaxed by the blinding of Gloucester—is of a compounded cruelty. That

COMPETING FOR LOVE AND CRUELTY IN *KING LEAR* GAIL KERN PASTER

cruelty is born of a natural disposition, empowered by abdication, nurtured by contention and imitation, and escalating in an unjust social environment. Such a picture of cruelty serves as backdrop to Lear's anguished question about the making of hard hearts.

The spectre of human cruelty, then, serves as backdrop for the huge storm that erupts in Act 3. Shakespeare's insertion of the storm seems designed to highlight the contrast between human malevolence and natural adversity and to reveal the many kinds of cruelty and suffering in the world, embodied in the vivid representation of sheer poverty represented by Edgar's disguise as Poor Tom. Lear first experiences the storm as indifferent, then as its victim. But at moments he is also its co-agent, imagining it as a cherubic wind-blower, particularizing its features: "blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow, you cataracts and hurricanes." The violence of the storm's destructiveness matches the violence of his will to destroy the external world and the daughters within it, to lose himself in destruction. And it matches the violence of his daughters' lust for cruelty. In Shakespeare's theater, where a violent storm could only be represented by the rattling of tin sheets backstage, Lear's body functions as the material site of the storm, the place where natural elements and human emotions converge. This is why the stage image of Lear in the storm is virtually iconic of the play and the passions that propel it to its wrenchingly painful conclusion.

The storm in *King Lear* is a reflection in the macrocosm of the impassioned, microcosmic self. For the Elizabethans, the meaning of such a violent storm was hotly debated—whether or not such storms represented a direct expression of divine will. This is the contemporary debate glanced at in Gloucester's dour interpretation of "these late eclipses in the sun and moon" (1.2.103) and in Edmund's sturdy rejection of prognostication: "I should have been that I am had the maidenliest stars in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing" (1.2.131-32).

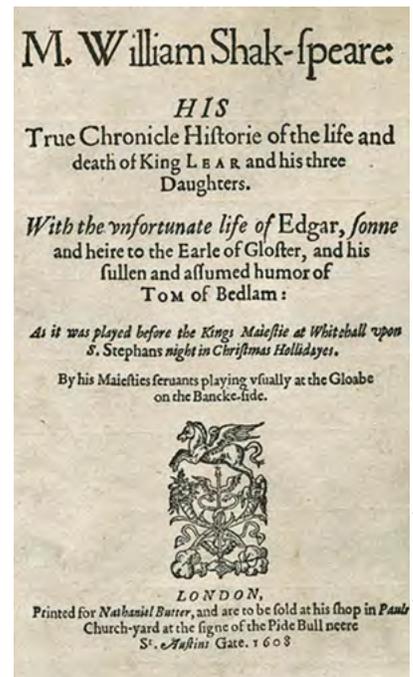
The play does not support Edmund's statement of radical individualism and apartness from the cosmos, even if it offers no comforting assurances in its place. Given the cruelty of the stage action and the wrenching pain of its denouement, it is not surprising that *King Lear* should raise

a question about the causes of hard hearts with far more urgency than it raises equally relevant questions about the causes of soft hearts—the force of loyalty and goodness that moves Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, and Cornwall's servant who tries to stop the blinding. Why, the play insinuates, do we not ask nature about the causes that make good hearts? What *King Lear* tells us is that the conflict between cruel emotions and kindly ones is as natural and violent as the storm. In this sense, Lear's question—"What cause in nature makes these hard hearts"—turns out to be tautological. The nature that makes hard hearts also makes soft ones and then puts them into fretful and tragic contention. ●

GAIL KERN PASTER is editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, the leading scholarly journal devoted to Shakespeare. She retired in July 2011 as Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library. She came to the directorship from George Washington University, where she was a Professor of English. She earned a B.A., *magna cum laude*, at Smith College, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and a Ph.D. at Yale University. She has won many national fellowships and awards, including fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, National Endowment from the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation. She was named to the Queen's Honours List as a Commander of the British Empire in May 2011. She has published widely—including three books (*The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* [1986]; *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* [1993]; and *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* [2004]).

THE PLAY SELECTED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

- 1606 The first recorded performance of *King Lear* is, according to the title page of its First Quarto publication, “played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall upon S. Stephans night in Christmas Hollidayes [sic]” (Dec. 26). Richard Burbage plays Lear. Audience reception during this time is not documented, but to receive a court performance it must have been successful.¹
- 1664 William Davenant produces the first revival of *Lear* after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The production closes without distinction.²
- 1681 Playwright Nahum Tate adapts *King Lear* by changing its structure to fit Restoration standards of dramatic unity. He sees the play as “a Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolisht; yet dazling in their Disorder [sic].”³ He cuts the character of the Fool, introduces a romantic subplot for Cordelia and Edgar, and ends the play happily, with both Lear and Cordelia alive. This extremely popular version is the only one staged well into the nineteenth century. The change to Shakespeare’s original text did not bother audiences, for many believed that his work needed to be changed to fit the trends and taste of their own culture.⁴
- 1742 Renowned actor and theater manager David Garrick performs *Lear* (Tate’s adaptation) at Goodman’s Fields in London. He changes the setting from the usual modern dress of Shakespeare productions to that of Ancient Britain. He also doesn’t show Gloucester’s eye-gouging on stage.⁵
- 1754 Hallams’ American Company produces the first colonial performance of Tate’s *Lear* in New York City on January 14th.⁶
- 1810 Performances disallowed in London because of King George III’s mental illness.
- 1820 George III dies. *Lear* is restaged in multiple productions in London. Edmund Kean’s performance proves more popular than Junius Brutus Booth’s (father of Edwin and John Wilkes) and runs for three years.⁷ Kean in preparation for the role visited hospitals in London like St. Luke’s and Bethlehem Hospital (also known as Bedlam) to observe “details and manifestations of real insanity.”⁸
- 1823 Edmund Kean wants to prove his dramatic chops by playing the grieving Lear over Cordelia’s body, so he restores Shakespeare’s ending for a few performances, but it fails to please the audience, so he reverts back to Tate’s version.⁹



Title page, first quarto of *King Lear*, 1608



Illustration of Edmund Kean as Lear, 1820, Drury Lane Theatre, London

1 Wells, Stanley. Introduction. *King Lear*. The Oxford Shakespeare. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 57.

2 Murray, Barbara A. *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice*. New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 2001. 39, 50.

3 Tate, Nahum. *The History of King Lear*. London: E. Flescher, 1681.

4 Wells 63

5 Brown, Rebecca. “*King Lear*: Stage History.” *Royal Shakespeare Company*. Web. 10 Jan. 2014.

6 Winter, William. *Shakespeare on the Stage, Second Series*. New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1915. 432.

7 Halio, Jay L. Introduction. *King Lear*. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 38.

8 Hawkins, F.W. *The Life of Edmund Kean, from Published and Original Sources*, Volume II. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869. 118.

9 Wells 69

THE PLAY SELECTED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

1834 William Charles Macready plays *Lear* for the first time in London. He writes in his diary that he “went to the theatre...as nervous as the first night I acted in London.” After the performance, which disappointed him, he writes:

“This is the last of the great characters of Shakespeare that I have left unattempted, and the tone which the Press takes up on it will materially influence my after life...I do not feel that I have *yet* succeeded, but it is consoling to me to believe that I have not failed. Persons think that we carry the applauses [sic] of the audience to our pillows, and that the sounds still rings as a delightful lullaby in our ears. I have no such pleasure; I wish the night past, that I may make up my mind to the impression diffused through the public mind.”¹

1838 While portions of Shakespeare’s original plot and text were starting to reemerge in performances of *Lear* over the 19th century, Macready is the first actor/manager to restore most of Shakespeare’s original work, including the role of the fool. He cast a young actress, Priscilla Horton, in the role.²

1862 American actor Edwin Forrest plays *Lear* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (in Tate’s version). He had played the role many years before at the age of 20, and continued playing it until his death in 1872.³ After enacting *Lear* for 40 years, he concluded, “next to God, Shakespeare comprehended the mind of man.”⁴ While Macready, whose rivalry with Forrest over the role of Macbeth sparked the Astor Place Riots of 1849, also played *Lear* in his earlier American tours, theater critic and historian William Winter identifies Forrest as the actor “more closely identified with [Lear] than any other actor was who ever assumed it on our stage.”⁵

1875 Edwin Booth is the first actor to perform the restored Shakespearean text of *King Lear* in the United States.⁶

1892 Famous actor/manager Henry Irving performs *Lear* at the Lyceum in London, co-starring Ellen Terry as Cordelia. He states that the play “is necessarily reduced to reasonable length to suit the exigencies of the present time” and “in the curtailment, all superfluous horrors have been omitted.” It was one of his least successful productions.⁷ Bram Stoker, famed author of *Dracula* but also the business manager of the Lyceum and assistant to Irving, wrote of the performance: “As Irving played it, the hunted man at bay was transformed from his gentleness to a ravaging tiger; he looked the spirit of murder incarnate.”⁸



Illustration of William Charles Macready as Lear, 1838, Covent Garden Theatre, London



“Portrait of Edwin Forrest in the role of King Lear,” attributed to Matthew Brady, c. 1840; Harvard Theatre Collection, Cambridge

1 Macready, William Charles. *The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833-1851*. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons. 1912. 140-141.

2 Winter 418

3 Culliton, Joseph. “Edwin Forrest.” *The Life & Times of Joseph Haworth*. Web. 13 Jan. 2014.

4 Winter 437

5 Winter 443

6 Wells 69

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8 Stoker, Bram. *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*. London: William Heinemann. 1907. Web. 13 Jan. 2014.

THE PLAY SELECTED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

- 1910s Productions of *King Lear* directed by Max Reinhardt and Harley Granville-Barker (influenced by William Poel's reintroduction of the Elizabethan playhouse model to modern performance) employ more fluid staging and continuity of action rather than the scenery-driven productions of the Victorian era.¹
- 1962 Peter Brook directs Paul Scofield in a Royal Shakespeare Company. Heavily influenced by the work of Jan Kott and Samuel Beckett, Brook eliminates some of the redemptive moments in the play (including Edmund's last-minute attempt to save Cordelia), and creates a "hostile universe" in a post-World War II landscape. The production is later adapted to film in 1969. Critic Kenneth Tynan writes: "This production brings me closer to Lear than I have ever been; I...can place him in his harsh and unforgiving world."²
- 1984 Akira Kurosawa directs the Japanese film *Ran* (translated as 'chaos' and 'civil war'), with a story reminiscent of *Lear* set in feudal Japan.³ Kurosawa was first inspired by the Japanese legend of Monotari Mori, who had three loyal and trustworthy sons, and it wasn't until he started work on the script that he found similarities to Shakespeare's play and used them to his advantage.⁴
- 1990 Two British productions cast a female actress as the Fool, a rare occurrence since Priscilla Horton's turn in 1838. Linda Kerr Scott plays the role for Nicholas Hytner's RSC production (cast includes John Wood as Lear, Ralph Fiennes as Edmund). The Renaissance Theatre production features Emma Thompson as the Fool, alongside Richard Briers (Lear) and Kenneth Branagh (Edgar, also directed the production). This same year marked the first professional performance of *Lear* by a woman, Marianne Hoppe, directed by Robert Wilson in Germany.⁵
- 1997 Kathryn Hunter, directed by Helena Kaut-Howson, is the first British woman to play Lear professionally. The production played in Leicester and transferred to the Young Vic in London.⁶
- 2014 Playing the title role in *King Lear* has become obligatory territory for every middle-aged actor. In the last ten years, notable British and American productions have starred Kevin Kline, Derek Jacobi, Sam Waterston, and Ian McKellan. This year, along with Michael Pennington at Theatre for a New Audience, Frank Langella plays the monarch at Chichester Theatre Festival/BAM, Simon Russell Beale follows suit at the National Theatre in London, and John Lithgow will take up the crown in the Public Theater/Shakespeare in the Park season this summer.



Shimnosuke "Peter" Ichihata as Hidetora's fool Kyoami and Taisuya Nakadai as Hidetora Ichimonji in *Ran*, directed and co-written by Akira Kurosawa, 1985



Robert Pickavance and Kathryn Hunter in *King Lear*, directed by Helena Kaut-Howson, 1997, photo by Donald Cooper

1 Wells 71

2 Halio 47

3 Wells 79

4 Leggatt 172-173

5 Rockwell, John. "Robert Wilson Wins a Faithful Following, But It's in Europe." *The New York Times*. 20 June 1990.

6 Klett, Elizabeth. "'O How This Mother Swells Up Toward My Heart': Performing Mother and Father in Helena Kaut-Howson's Cross-Gender *King Lear*." *Shakespeare Bulletin* 23 (2005), 53-73.

THE PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHY

The most celebrated and widely produced of the world's great playwrights, Shakespeare was born and raised in the small country town of Stratford-upon-Avon, where his parents were prominent citizens, though his father, a tanner and glove-maker, seems to have suffered financial reverses around the time young William's formal education apparently ceased in 1577. He married a local girl, Anne Hathaway, in 1582, and over the next decade the marriage produced three children. Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, died at age 11, in 1596; his daughters Judith and Susanna survived him.

How and why Shakespeare entered the theatrical profession is unclear. He seems to have come to London in the late 1580s, and quickly made himself indispensable as a reviser of old plays and a supplier of new ones. By 1594, he had become a shareholder, along with the prominent actor Richard Burbage and the latter's business-manager brother, Cuthbert, in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the dominant theatre companies of its day, popular with the public and frequently in demand for performances at Queen Elizabeth's court. In the reign of her successor, King James I, the troupe was officially taken under royal protection and became the King's Men.

While he appeared regularly in works by others, Shakespeare's principal function seems to have been turning out new plays for his companies. Working in all the standard genres of the time—tragedy, comedy, romance, and episodes from British history—he rapidly developed both remarkable expertise and a startlingly individual, innovative style. *King Lear* is the last, often seen as the pinnacle, of his major tragedies, along with *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. It was probably written in 1605 and was performed at court for King James over the 1606 Christmas holidays.

Shakespeare retired from the King's Men around 1612, spending the last years of his life with his family in Stratford, where he died in 1616. His plays have never been off the stage. Theatres return to them time and again for their brilliant storytelling, theatrical excitement, incisive character expression and memorably intense poetry. To this day, Shakespeare is still the most performed, translated, adapted, quoted, analyzed and discussed author in the entire history of dramatic literature. Figures from his plays like Lear, Cordelia, Hamlet, Falstaff, Rosalind, Viola, Shylock and Prospero have virtually taken on an independent existence in the world.

In presenting this biography, Theatre for a New Audience acknowledges that there is a movement which includes prominent artists and intellectuals that questions whether the man from Stratford known as William Shakespeare wrote the plays attributed to him.



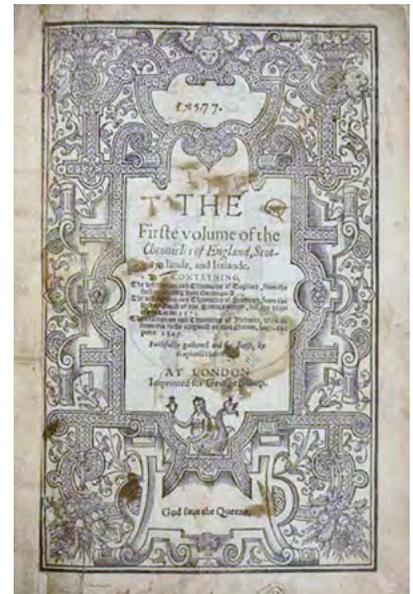
William Shakespeare, attributed to John Taylor, c. 1600s; © National Portrait Gallery, London

THE PLAYWRIGHT TIMELINE

- 1558 At the age of 25, Elizabeth Tudor is proclaimed Elizabeth I Queen of England, succeeding Mary I.
- 1564 William is born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-upon-Avon.
- 1565 John Shakespeare is made an alderman of Stratford.
- 1566 James Stuart is born to Mary Queen of Scots and Henry Stuart. Elizabeth is made his Godmother. He is crowned James VI King of Scots thirteen months later, after his mother abdicated.
- 1567 The Red Lion playhouse opens in Whitechapel, east of the city walls.
- 1568 John Shakespeare is elected Bailiff of Stratford.
- 1569 Richard Burbage is born. Richard, the son of James Burbage, will eventually play most of Shakespeare's leading parts like Hamlet, Richard III, Othello, and Lear.
- 1572 The "Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds" is enacted, requiring all companies of players to be authorized or licensed by individuals of the nobility. With licensure comes the financial backing and stature that solidifies and legitimizes repertory companies in London, effectively laying the foundation for the explosion of dramatic literature, players, and purpose-built theatres of the following decades.
- 1576 James Burbage opens the Theatre, London's first purpose-built playhouse, in Shoreditch, north of the city walls.
- 1577 *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* by Raphael Holinshed first published. His *Chronicles* include the legendary reigns of King Leir and Queen Cordeilla.
- 1578 Mary Arden Shakespeare pawns her estate at Wilmcote and her lands at Snitterfield to help pay off family debts.
- 1580 John Shakespeare is sued for his inability to redeem Mary's pawned properties.
- 1582 18-year-old William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway.
- 1583 Susanna is born to William and Anne Shakespeare.
- 1585 Twins, Hamnet and Judith, are born to William and Anne Shakespeare.
- John Shakespeare is fined for not attending church.
- 1587 The Rose playhouse opens on Bankside in Surrey.
John Shakespeare loses his position as alderman.
- 1589 King James marries Anne of Denmark
- 1590 *The Faerie Queene*, Books I-III by Edmund Spenser first published. A version of the 'King Leir' story appears in Book 2, Canto 10.
The True Chronicle History of King Leir probably written by an anonymous playwright. Records exist of the play being performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men as early as 1594.



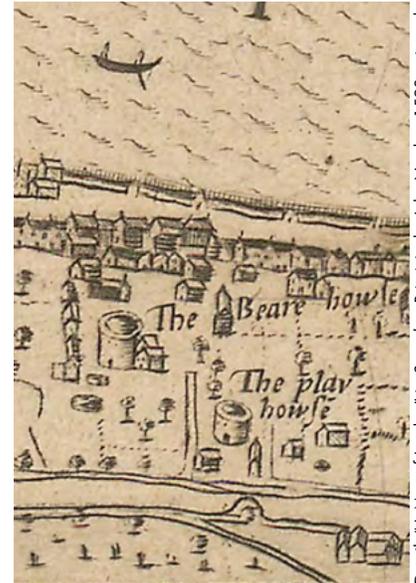
Detail, Queen Elizabeth Receiving Dutch Ambassadors, c. 1572, artist unknown; Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany.



A Marriage Feast at Barmocsey by Joris Hoefnagel, c. 1569; This painting depicts English men and women of a variety of social classes in Elizabethan England.

THE PLAYWRIGHT TIMELINE

- 1590 *Henry VI*, part 1
- 1591 *Henry VI*, parts 2 and 3
- 1592 *Richard III*
- 1593 In London, deaths from the plague are listed at over 10,000.
Comedy of Errors; Titus Andronicus; The Taming of the Shrew
- 1594 London's theatres officially reopen.
William Shakespeare becomes a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, helmed by James Burbage and his sons, Richard and Cuthbert.
The Two Gentlemen of Verona; Love's Labour's Lost; King John
"Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece," Shakespeare's epic poems, published.
- 1595 *Richard II; Romeo and Juliet; A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- 1596 *The Faerie Queene*, Books IV-VI by Edmund Spenser first published.
John Shakespeare is granted a coat of arms.
Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies at the age of eleven.
The Merchant of Venice; Henry IV, part 1
- 1597 James Burbage refurbishes the Blackfriars Theatre, located within the walls of the City of London. The company is unable to occupy it due to complaints from its neighbors. Various companies of boy players are allowed to occupy the Blackfriars after 1600.
The Merry Wives of Windsor
- 1598 James VI of Scotland publishes *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, a treatise on the divine right of kings.
James Burbage's the Theatre is closed. Building materials from the Theatre are used in building the Globe.
Henry IV, Part 2; *Much Ado About Nothing*
- 1599 The Globe opens.
Henry V; Julius Caesar; As You Like It
- 1600 Charles Stuart is born to James VI of Scotland and Anne of Denmark in Fife, Scotland. He is the youngest of three children to survive infancy.
Hamlet
- 1601 John Shakespeare dies.
Twelfth Night; Troilus and Cressida
"The Phoenix and the Turtle," Shakespeare's last epic poem, is published in Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr*.
- 1602 *All's Well That Ends Well*
- 1603 Queen Elizabeth dies, and James VI King of Scots is declared James I King of England and Ireland.



Detail, "A Map of London," in *Speculum Britanniae* by John Norden, 1593, reissued in 1653; British Museum, London. Note: The circle structure on the lower left center, labeled "The playhowse," is most likely the Rose Theatre, built in 1587.



James VI of Scotland and I of England by John de Critz, 1604; National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

THE PLAYWRIGHT TIMELINE

The Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company, are licensed by King James and renamed the King's Men.

1604 *Measure for Measure; Othello*

1605 The 'Gunpowder Plot,' named after a planned attempt to assassinate King James and blow up the House of Lords with 37 barrels of gunpowder located beneath Parliament, is thwarted.

King Lear

1606 *King Lear* is performed during Christmas festivities at Whitehall for King James.

Parliament passes "An Act to Restrain Abuses of Players." The Act censures specific language in plays.

Macbeth; Antony and Cleopatra

1607 *Coriolanus; Timon of Athens; Pericles*

1608 The first quarto of *King Lear* is published.

The King's Men are permitted to occupy the Blackfriars Theatre.

Mary Arden Shakespeare dies.

1609 Sonnets published.

Cymbeline

1610 *The Winter's Tale*

1611 The authorized King James Bible published.

The Tempest

1612 Shakespeare retires to Stratford.

Henry VIII, co-written by John Fletcher and Shakespeare; *Cardenio*, a play that is not extant

1613 The Globe catches fire during a performance of *Henry VIII* and burns down.

Two Noble Kinsmen co-written by John Fletcher and Shakespeare.

1614 The Globe is rebuilt and opens.

1616 Shakespeare dies on April 23 and is buried in Stratford's holy Trinity Church.

1619 Richard Burbage dies.

1623 The First Folio of Shakespeare's complete works is published.

Anne Hathaway dies.

1625 King James dies and is succeeded by Charles I King of England .

1642– The Puritans overthrow the monarchy of Charles I and close the

1660 playhouses during the English Civil War. Soldiers dissolve public performances by rebellious theatre companies, imprison the actors and strip them of their costumes. Charles I is executed at the beginning of 1649.



Detail, 'The Execution of the Conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot' by Claes Jansz Visscher, 1606; © National Portrait Gallery, London



Charles I with M. de St Antoine by Anthony van Dyck, 1633; Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

DIALOGUES IN CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL PENNINGTON

JONATHAN KALB



Michael Pennington in the title role of *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

While in rehearsals for King Lear, Michael Pennington sat down with Theatre for a New Audience Literary Advisor and production dramaturg Jonathan Kalb to talk about timing, artistic kismet, and the emotional and physical technique it takes to embody Lear.

KALB: Is Lear the fulfillment of a long-standing dream of yours?

PENNINGTON: In Britain there's still an idea that there's such a thing as a classical actor, a Shakespearean actor, which is different from just being an actor for all seasons. The idea is fainter than it used to be in the days of Olivier and Gielgud, but it still exists, and there is a sort of expectation that if you do a lot of Shakespeare and you're liked enough to get the good parts, there is a progress that you will go through, roughly speaking: from Hamlet to Richard III to Macbeth, and to King Lear.

So at my age, in my generation, I'm supposed to want to play Lear. But I'm not sure that I did want to until a couple of years ago. I couldn't think what I could possibly add to other performances that I'd seen. I didn't particularly feel a passion for the play. I'd been in it before in 1976, when I played Edgar/Poor Tom, and I've seen it quite often, but I didn't have a passion to do it. What happened was that about four years ago I was doing a play about a Lear-like character, the composer Richard Strauss, in a Ronald Harwood play. And one day during that project, while washing up from breakfast, I thought, "I want to play King Lear." That morning I rang some directors I knew and said, "I have decided I want to play King Lear." It was very royal of me to say such a thing.

The Strauss role had a tragic scale that reminded me of Lear, so I thought it was within my capacity to do such a thing at last. Everyone knows, in the theater industry, that you have a narrow window to play Lear. You've got to be old enough to be convincing—he describes himself as slightly over 80, though he may be exaggerating—and you've got to have the energy

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to fulfill the physical demands of the part and the vitality to learn it. You've got to have your memory intact. Now, the moment in every actor's career that they most fear is when the memory begins to wobble, or they become physically less capable, and you never know when that's going to be. It happens to some people in their 50s, and other people in their 90s. John Gielgud was working when he was nearly 100 years old. You've got to guess how long you've got.

KALB: That makes it sound almost like you're ticking off boxes. If the attraction was tragic scale, well, what has more of that than *Hamlet*, which you did decades ago? So what else made you hungry to act *Lear*?

PENNINGTON: There's a big difference with *Hamlet*. First of all, *Hamlet* is a younger man's play. It's longer and more physically demanding than *King Lear*, but of course you are in your 30s or, at the most, perhaps 40s, when you play it. The big difference with *Lear*, which in other respects is a *Hamlet*-like peak in a career, is that *Hamlet* has this relationship with the audience, expressed in the famous soliloquies, which for some reason makes the part much easier to play. You've got to learn those speeches, you've got to perform them well, but the relationship with the audience and what the audience gives you back in terms of vitality is a major difference. *Lear* doesn't have any soliloquies. He is essentially locked off in the action of the play, and this makes the part tougher, more hermetic, if I can use that word, more unapproachable. You haven't got that easy contact with the audience.

At no point does *Lear* explain to the audience, "Now, the reason I don't like Goneril as much as I like Regan is this..." Or, "the reason I don't trust Cordelia is this..." He doesn't express his secrets. They're all locked up inside himself. So you watch this fellow lose his wits, whatever that means, and go on this terrible journey entirely within the framework of the play. *Macbeth* also talks to the audience all the time about how he's feeling about what he's done. *Richard III*, perhaps best of all, talks to the audience with glee and relish about his tremendous transgressions. But *Lear* is sealed off in the play. That is a fascinating and daunting challenge.

KALB: What happened after you called those directors?

PENNINGTON: Well, most of them said, "let's meet in a month or two when I finish my current show and have a provisional talk about it." There wasn't quite the pickup that I'd hoped for. On the other hand, everyone thought it was a splendid idea and we should talk about it. But nothing much happened for a couple of years. And then there was a slew of *Lears*. Everybody suddenly did *Lear*. And the fashion was for younger actors. Greg Hicks played it at Stratford in his 50s. Simon Russell Beale is playing it now in his 50s. There seemed to be a fashion for getting the good actor while he was still highly capable: in other words, middle-aged rather than elderly. So I couldn't muscle in.

At this point I came over to New York as part of a tour with Peter Brook's sonnet show *Love Is My Sin*, which Jeffrey Horowitz included in TFANA's 2010 season. And a number of curious things happened there, one of which was that I spied, across a crowded room at a party, Arin Arbus. It sounds romantic, and professionally romantic it turned out to be. She was talking to a group of actors, including some of the cast of her *Othello*, and I was sort of eavesdropping on their conversation about Shakespeare. I could hear them talking passionately and laughing and said to Jeffrey, "Who is that?" Jeffrey told me a bit about her, and Arin and I met and just started talking about Shakespeare. Not about *King Lear* particularly. And she said such interesting things about the plays that she's done, especially about the female characters Desdemona and Katherine in *Shrew*, and I thought, "I would really like to work with her."

Meanwhile, in another part of the town, Peter Brook was saying to Jeff, "You know, Michael should play *Lear* before too long." Arin wasn't ready to direct *King Lear* at that time, but like the good godfather, Jeffrey kept us talking about it by email as he developed plans for the Polonsky Theater. The next step was a workshop. In 2012, we spent a week working on *Lear* with some of Arin's favorite local actors, just working through the play, seeing if we all got along and seeing if our hunches about each other and about the project were right. And we had a fantastic week, at the end

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of which Jeffrey and I sat down and said we both wanted to do this.

KALB: What preparation did you do this year before arriving for rehearsals?

PENNINGTON: I learned the part. I'm of an age when I need to have a good head start on learning a part of this size. Not because I have a memory problem, but because I am slower than I was. In the old days, I'd learn in rehearsal. But nowadays there's increasingly a fashion to learn the lines before you start. Directors like it because it spares them that terrible week when the actors have just about put down the book but still don't know it very well and are constantly making mistakes and attacking themselves for their stupidity. The only bits I didn't learn were the stuff with the Fool, because that is prose material, very different, and it seemed to me very dependent on how the Fool would be played. I thought it would be better to set up the interplay and then pin down the lines. Same with the Poor Tom scenes for the same reason—the strange stream of consciousness when Edgar is assuming madness and Lear is on his way to madness.

KALB: So now the big question: who is Lear, for you? Is he a man of overweening pride? Or is he essentially a weak man, deep down? How do you see him as a person?

PENNINGTON: Shakespeare doesn't give you the sort of thing you would look for as a good Stanislavskian actor. He gives no information about whether Lear has or has not been a good king. He gives no information about whether he normally loses his temper as badly as he does in the first scene. He gives you no information about whether he has had any kind of problem with mental stability before now.

KALB: But there are clues. People do seem to love him, for instance, and follow him very loyally despite his temper.

PENNINGTON: That's what we've increasingly found in rehearsals. Oddly enough, he inspires a great deal of loyalty from people who don't necessarily

have to give it to him—like Kent, whom he brutally banishes but who sticks to him like a limpet. Also Cordelia, and Gloucester. So I have to conclude that something beyond the office of king is at work here. The safest assumption is that he has been a good, if autocratic, king. Autocratic in the sense that Richard II is, with whom he offers a rather interesting comparison. There are obvious differences between those two parts. But Richard II was born to



Michael Pennington and Arin Arbus in rehearsal for Theatre for a New Audience's *King Lear*, photo by Gerry Goodstein

be king, and his tragedy is that he's disabused of his assumption that he's next to God. In a way, Lear is too.

There's no question of any kind of social revolution in *Lear*. He clearly is used to power and used to people doing what he orders them to do. In that sense he's a tyrant and an autocrat, but he may be a benevolent autocrat. And increasingly he has a very short fuse. He gets very angry very quickly, and when he gets angry, he becomes excessive. His curses on his children are long-winded, inventive, and imaginative. He seems to find some kind of release in these denunciations. Whether he was always short tempered I don't know.

KALB: Have you made a choice as an actor about what's going on with him in the first scene?

PENNINGTON: Yes, I think he splits the kingdom

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out of exhaustion. It's a very extraordinary thing for him to do, particularly as he's what we're calling an autocrat. To divide the kingdom is like declaring a democracy, and it's a very odd thing. Why does he do it? Well, why do people resign power in Shakespeare? The character of the Duke in *Measure for Measure* does it, I think, out of exhaustion, and also a curious instinct to learn how somebody else does the job.

I think that Lear—though it's not really anywhere in the text—is concerned about the future. He worries, even if it's only about remembering names. He feels his mental faculty weakening a little bit and wonders whether he can go on doing his job. Wouldn't it be

Michael Pennington and Jake Horowitz in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg



better to retire and do the equivalent of gardening? In his case, that means visiting his daughters in rotation. He fancies retirement and assumes that his three daughters will take up the slack and continue his tradition. I don't like the idea that he's just sort of lazy. He seems to be a man of energy, physical energy and certainly vocal energy. I think he's just had enough, based on assessing his own capabilities. It's not any kind of self-indulgence.

KALB: What are your thoughts about his madness? What mental journey do you see him taking over the course of the play?

PENNINGTON: It's hardly a journey. It's more a kind of ricochet from one wall to the other. In the storm, having issued his great challenge to the heavens, "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks," he says, "my wits begin to turn." Something is happening to him then, but he's had a premonition. Earlier when he talks to the Fool, he says, "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heavens! Keep me in temper, I would not be mad." I think he fears the violence of the emotions involved with Goneril and Regan, when they, as he sees it, betray him in the bargain that's been set about staying with each of them for a month with his 100 knights. Dotted through those early scenes is a little regret about having banished Cordelia, mixed with the shock that he's not being treated better by Goneril and Regan. That's what leads him to say, "Let me not be mad," as if the extremity of his disappointment and anger and frustration could actually upset his mental balance.

KALB: Do you think something in him breaks?

PENNINGTON: Not really, no. No, I think he's put under pressure. My mother used to say, "I can't remember someone's name. I must have Alzheimer's." I said, "You don't have Alzheimer's, you're just afraid of having Alzheimer's, and that's making you forget the names." It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fear of a thing brings the thing about. In Lear's case, he has these extreme emotional reactions to what's happened to him, and no sooner does that happen than he is confronted by the figure of unaccommodated man, Edgar, dressed as Poor Tom. He has a wonderful speech about this: "Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the

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beast no hide.” And he becomes fascinated by this wayward figure.

He follows him like he’s a guru, and there’s something kind of demented about that. He even imitates him a bit, saying, “let me talk with this philosopher.” He’s his “Athenian” philosopher. And you’re thinking, “What’s happened to you, Mr. Lear? What are you talking about here?” But that coincides with the realization, which is not at all lunatic, that there are people who are poor—the great big banner line in *King Lear*, “I’ve taken too little care of this.” He’s never thought about it before. He’s never thought about the serfs. He’s the czar, but he’s never thought about the mass of people he rules over, and he suddenly has this revelation about it.

It’s an amazing moment when Lear says, “My wits begin to turn.” He turns to the Fool, who’s shivering out there in the rain, and says, “Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold? I am cold myself.” And they go toward the hovel together. It’s the first time he appears to have noticed, really, what’s going on with anybody around him. And no sooner does Lear have this realization than he’s confronted by the Bedlam beggar, Poor Tom. He becomes sort of socialist.

KALB: How do you see Lear’s relationship with the Fool?

PENNINGTON: The kings of England had fools to keep them in order and keep them from getting out of control mentally and hubristically. There seems to be an affection and a protectiveness toward this character. Lear clearly has a need for a confidant, or what he thinks is a confidant, but he discards the Fool and turns to Poor Tom. The Fool, I think, dies, or at least goes out of the play, because his place is taken by Poor Tom. This is a very terrible moment for the Fool, who is trying harder and harder and harder to get closer to Lear and entertain him, and all Lear will say is, “No, no, I have to talk to my philosopher, Poor Tom.”

So he’s rejected. There is something paternal about his relationship to the Fool as well as something professional about it. The Fool is a professional post,



Jacob Fishel and Michael Pennington in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

but there’s fondness. At the same time, Lear has never really bothered much about the Fool. He has never noticed whether he is warm or cold or healthy or well-fed or anything. He’s a tyrant to that extent. So this moment of saying, “I’m going mad. Are you alright my darling?” to the Fool is wonderful. What he calls going mad is taking an interest in other people. This is a tremendous irony.

KALB: What about Lear’s relationship to his daughters? Have you had Stanislavskian conversations about that?

PENNINGTON: Freudian ones. And Stanislavskian too. This play is a sort of textbook family tragedy, and it’s also a political play. That’s something Shakespeare often did. What kind of father has Lear been? He appears to be a single parent, as Gloucester is, and very many parents in Shakespeare are. Where is Mrs. Lear? It turns out that she’s dead, there’s a brief reference, but we don’t know how long ago she died. It’s very difficult to find the biography because Shakespeare, as usual, isn’t much bothered by it.

The main thing is that there’s nothing, I don’t think, genetically wicked about Goneril or Regan. We’re used to seeing them as hateful people, but the legacy

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of Freud and Stanislavsky is that you try to see the best in the most evil of apparently evil characters. What makes them the way they are? And are they even like that before the play begins? I personally think Lear puts the whole family through a terrible, humiliating joke in the first scene.

I mean, fancy, in what is essentially a public political meeting, getting your three daughters, for no particularly good reason, to improvise speeches about how much they love you in order to get bigger and bigger parts of the kingdom. What kind of trick is that? It's like putting a kid on a table and saying, "Now talk to everyone at the party about how much you love your daddy." It's not good parenting. And you have great sympathy with Cordelia for not cooperating, though you also feel, sometimes, with Cordelia, "Well, she could try a bit harder." Cordelia has her father's stubbornness.

But Lear is so unaware of all their needs that he sort of humiliates them publicly in competing for sections of the kingdom when in fact he has already decided what he's going to do. He has the three sections of the kingdom worked out, and he's going to give each of them a third. But he still makes them compete as if there was a question about the finish. It's an oddly cruel and vain and wayward thing for anyone to do.

KALB: Why does he do it?

PENNINGTON: Well, he also has a need for love, or as he would say, he doesn't get the love he deserves. I think he most of all wants to hear that Cordelia loves him. He's one of these needy men who have to be told all the time, even when they haven't really earned the love. He doesn't deserve those speeches. I think they do really well, Goneril and Regan. They speak very impressive pieces of flattery, with enormous sincerity.

KALB: What's your take on the famous problem of pace and modulation with Lear—the challenge to the actor to start the play on a top note, getting enraged right away in the first scene, and then have a variety of places to go from there?

PENNINGTON: It's hard. You've got to play your

instrument fortissimo, and then find a different way of playing it fortissimo. Ralph Richardson, the great and eccentric actor, said, "Playing Lear is like lying on your back on the floor with a machine gun firing at different targets floating around on the ceiling, and with a bit of luck you'll hit a few of them." By which he meant the targets were the eleven scenes that Lear has. You might get four or five out of eleven. You're not likely to get all eleven.

The early part of the play is especially difficult, because the language is highly structured, very ornate, very rhetorical, clumpingly metaphorical, and monumental, to use that overused word. But by the time everything dissolves into madness and then reconciliation, it becomes like clear water. The reconciliation with Cordelia has very beautiful monosyllabic speeches that have an enormous emotional effect, and one ought to be able to pull that off. The first half has the tough stuff. It's really difficult to be that overweening tyrant, and to keep the changes coming and convincing.

The difficult part is the progression, the three consecutive crisis scenes from when he banishes Cordelia and Kent to the storm. The early scenes are quite short, just two or three pages. But then he travels to Goneril's house, has the crisis with her, curses her, curses her fertility, then goes to Regan's house, finds she's not there and has to go to Gloucester's. The consecutive scenes in which he confronts Goneril and Regan and finds they won't house him and all his knights are very difficult. It's in part a matter of length. The second scene with Regan recapitulates, roughly speaking, what's happened with Goneril. You know what's going to happen. You know that Regan is going to reject him too, but for some reason that scene is significantly longer, about ten pages. The other one is about four, and that's a difficulty. You would think it would be the other way around. You'd think with two scenes on a similar subject or similar material, you'd have the big one first and then the recapitulation would be quicker. Like in *Much Ado About Nothing* when Benedick and Beatrice are hidden and eavesdrop on people discussing how much the other loves them. That's the central joke of the play, and the second scene with Beatrice is much, much shorter than the first

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with Benedick. But *Lear* has it the other way around. The reprise is longer than the original, and that feels unfair. It certainly imposes a real danger of repeating your effects, vocal patterns and physical patterns.

This is where you're most put to your shifts as a performer to keep up the variety and distinguish between one thing and another as it goes along. After that, once you get out in the storm, it gets much simpler. The scenes in the second half, though they demand all your gifts, aren't nearly as problematic. You can see what the through-line is and what Shakespeare is up to. The reconciliation with Cordelia is intensely moving partly because it's so brief. It's like a little window that opens and then closes again, and she's hanged—a tiny moment when he sees clearly and she's back with him, they

go to prison, and then she's dead. You see, that's Shakespeare's mastery of the narrative. That's why the play is so upsetting. •

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Lilly Englert and Michael Pennington in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg



THE PRODUCTION MICHAËL ATTIAS and the MUSIC OF KING LEAR

While in rehearsal for *King Lear*, Sound and Music Designer **Michaël Attias** sat down with Humanities Intern Emily MacLeod for a Q & A about collaboration, Shakespeare's inherent sound, and the music of *King Lear*.

Q: Michaël Attias, you have frequently collaborated with theatre director Robert Woodruff and with Theatre for a New Audience before, but this is your first time working with director Arin Arbus. What makes your collaboration with her different?

A: Every relationship is different and specific to the person, the project, the space. Every director has their own ways and instincts in dealing with music and sound. For each of my five collaborations with Woodruff, we began fresh from a new set of premises with every piece allowing the dialogue to find radically different expression each time, but in general, the sound and music were always integrated from the very beginning of the rehearsal process. In the case of *Battle of Black and Dogs* (Yale Rep 2010), I was also the translator which gave me direct access to the innermost life of the language. With Arin, I'm discovering the process for the first time and we've really only just barely begun. She prefers to establish the scene work with the actors before bringing in the sound and is giving me a lot of room to imagine what that might be. The work she's doing with the actors and the space is very beautiful, real, instinctual and rigorous at the same time.

Q: Designers have many strategies for starting their work on a production. During your design presentation, you mentioned being inspired by certain lines in the text as well as the set design by Riccardo Hernandez. How do you usually start your process? Do you read the script? Speak with the director and/or the other designers? What is your "way in"?

A: Arin brought this great word to the first meeting: fracture. That was my way in to her vision. The text comes first. Because I have a busy musical career outside of theatre, I have the luxury of only working on texts that I love and that matter to personally. A visceral engagement with the work and my collaborators is what I'm looking for in whatever I do. So my way in is to immerse myself in the words, in the author's worldview and entire output. I try not to think about my own work, what I'm going to produce, for a long time. I try to experience the piece and let it wash over me...let it seep into me. And delay the moment when I actually start making things, because I feel like by that point, my decisions will be grounded and informed by this preliminary immersion, and I can work quickly and with a lot of flexibility in response to what the directors, the actors and the other designers bring.

Q: You have performed your own music live in multiple productions, such as *Notes from Underground* and *Battle of Black and Dogs*, and will be again in *King Lear*. During the presentation on music, Arin commented on how valuable it is for the actors to have live music. From your perspective, what is the relationship between the musicians and the



Michaël Attias speaks to the cast of *King Lear* as director Arin Arbus looks on, photographed at The New 42nd Street Studios by Gerry Goodstein

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actors/characters in the play?

A: In some shows, there is a more or less clear dramaturgical reason for using live musicians. Sometimes they can also function as characters. In *Notes from Underground*, I was the main character's valet/torturer and spoke lines; the sounds goaded and prodded him towards his ultimate disclosure. In *Autumn Sonata*, I composed piano music for the wonderful actor/musician Meritt Jansson who played the character of the handicapped daughter, and because she was mute, every note she played, every gesture was an expression of an inner broken language that could find no outlet in speech. Why live musicians as opposed to playback? Because the actors are live. We don't have a recording of Michael Pennington saying the speeches. We don't want that. We go to live theater because we want to see live bodies on stage, making it new every night. And the way that it's the same and the way that it's different from one night to the next is what's interesting and dangerous. I think that if you have sound and music in the piece, it shouldn't be decoration, it should have a life of its own in the same way that the text does, that the actors do, that the light does. Then something vital can happen between the actors and musicians with a real opportunity for interplay between us. We share the inner tempo, the deep rhythm of the play - the way events, gestures, words, echo each other across the entire length of piece - the motor, the wheel of it turning.

Q: Working on Shakespeare is a rite of passage for any theatre professional. Have you composed or designed for a Shakespeare play before? How is composing for Shakespeare different than for a new work?

A: I worked on *Cymbeline* at Yale School of Drama for my wife Louisa Proske's thesis project and a staged reading of *Titus Andronicus* with Woodruff. Shakespeare is a great composer of sound. The text is already a weave of voices so the challenge is to think of the music and the sound as part of that polyphony. Sometimes speeches are not about telling the story, they're really about making time happen, coloring time, creating moments of waiting, of speeding it up or slowing it down. It's so masterful. Every syllable, every breath, every tempo comes out of this incredibly powerful sonic and scenic imagination. There's something scary about it, because it's so powerful, so strong on its own, and the thought shifts so quickly you don't ever want to lock it in, stop it from breathing and changing. How do you relate? That question is there with any work, but Shakespeare's puts the bar highest. For example, in the storm scene, Lear has this extraordinary language creating the storm, enacting the storm. He is not describing it, he's invoking it and making it actually happen inside the language, in every consonant and vowel, a storm of words that cracks open the piece and Nature and Kingship and Lear's mind and the theatre itself all at once. The power of poetry means that it's already embodied, incarnate, and begs the question of what is sound or music going to add? If I add a sound of a thunderbolt to the words "crack thunder," the redundancy becomes ridiculous, and also puts a ceiling on



Satoshi Takeishi and Michael Attias in rehearsal for *In a Year With Thirteen Moons*, 2013

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the signification of the storm. At the same time, as Michael Pennington says, avoiding the reality altogether would be cheating. So how do you create something that doesn't dwarf the power of the language, that doesn't compete with it? How do you create a texture of reality and metaphor where the power of the language is multiplied rather than diminished, by the sound?

Q: What made you interested in working on *King Lear*?

A: Of all Shakespeare's plays, this has been one of the closest to me. *Pericles*, *Hamlet*, and *Timon* are others. I'm fascinated by how the actual form of the play folds in on itself, bifurcates, breaks open, and mirrors what's happening between the inner world, the consciousness of Lear, and the outside world in which he is. It's a play that constantly reinvents its own vocabulary with this tremendous void at its center. And then, I remember when I was 20 years old traveling across America for 8 months, getting stranded in Minneapolis, Minnesota after a car accident. It was during the winter, I worked on an assembly-line, there were storms, and every day I would see homeless people out in the cold and recite to myself that speech [from *Lear*]: "Poor naked wretches wheresoe'er you are, that bide the pelting of this pitiless storm." That language has lived inside of me for a long time.

Q: You will be using cymbals, drums, reeds and a contrabass to create the aural landscape of the play, a "pre-musical" world where sound is just about to turn into music. How does the setting of the play affect your work? Does that change what instruments and/or musical styles you use?

A: Arin from the beginning has talked about something ancient but not specific. The instruments live on the threshold between pure sound and the moment that the sound becomes a note or becomes musical. I wanted these very archetypal sounds, the sound of a string being plucked or bowed or a drum being struck or a breath blowing against a reed. There's something that's very ancient about all of those, but at the same time, you know, it's 2014 and we're in a high-tech theater, and we're using all kinds of technology for this thing to happen and I don't want to mask that. But the choice of sounds is going towards the sense of almost pre-musical. Archetypal, ancient sounds. In 2014.

Q: There are no full songs written into *King Lear*, besides a couple musical moments with the Fool, who will be playing concertina in this production. Where do you find places for music? What is the purpose for adding music to a particular moment or scene?

A: Rhythm. The rhythm of the whole play, of the moment. The text is multilayered. There's pure storytelling and information at the top layer, but further down there are themes that echo each other and move at a slower speed than the story, sometimes specific to character, sometimes not. The themes of nothingness, of superfluity, of excess, of being outside, of mothers. There are no mothers in the play and yet there are mothers everywhere. By their absence, they are even more present. This glaring absence indicates that birth is from a "sulphurous pit", and that the catastrophe of being born is more dire than death which comes as a release, a relief. Because the reason for their absence is not spoken, music can express the patterns of their appearance and disappearance in the language. The language shifts from being a storytelling device to being something that indicates other themes and forces in the play, and music brings those shapes out and helps to identify them for the spectator. When there is a sound, it changes the way you hear the words. And when the sound goes away that silence changes the way you hear the words too.

Q: The scenes in *Lear* move between very different "worlds" – the court, the heath, the battle. Do you use music and sound to distinguish between these different settings? How can music and sound illustrate the different worlds of the play?

MA: A lot of this play is about being nowhere, and the purest expression of that nowhere is the heath. The sound of nowhere, of nothing, is what I really want to find. For the court, we're having Mark Stewart

THE PRODUCTION MICHAËL ATTIAS and the MUSIC OF *KING LEAR*

build instruments inspired by the shape and sound of bronze age horns that Arin discovered in a video about ancient Irish music. In general, there are the sounds that come from below, the violence surging up through Lear, unleashing the forces that take all of the characters over the edge of the cliff into Nothing. And those that come from above, the heavens, the “servile ministers” who join their “high-engendered battles against a head so old and white as this.”

For both the storm and the battle, I’m imagining a very slow accumulation of disparate sounds that coalesce into a horrific noise. And then silence. It’s really about the silence after. I learned so much from Robert Woodruff, who’s a great musical thinker, and one of the things I learned was that the choice of sound you make and for how long you make it is not about the sound, but rather about the silence that follows. Silences have different qualities of relief.

Q: One of the most famous scenes in *King Lear* is the storm. What kind of musical elements will be involved in that event?

A: A contrabass with various preparations, various drums, cymbals both bowed and struck, air, resonance, all of it moving in the space above and around the audience. Extremes of register hitting against each other. That’s a storm, right? the conflict between earth and sky. Lear talks about climbing sorrow, forces coming from below him, under him. At the same time, is it a punishment from above, is there a God in this piece, who knows? High and low get closer to each other and denser over time, weaving through the language, changing locations. Sometimes the storm is far away and sometimes it’s close.

Q: Do you have a favorite line in the show?

A: Always changing, right now it’s “Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?”

Q: Is there anything else you want audiences to know?

A: The names of the wonderful musicians I will be working with: Satoshi Takeishi on percussion and electronics, Pascal Niggenkemper on double-bass, and of the equally extraordinary co-sound designer, Nicholas Pope.



Michael Attias in rehearsal for Yale Repertory Theatre's *Notes from the Underground*, 2009, photo by David Zinn

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

BIANCA AMATO (*Regan*). Broadway: *Macbeth*, *Arcadia*, *The Coast of Utopia*. Off-Broadway: *The Broken Heart*, *Neva*, *The Trumpery*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Mr. Fox: A Ruminantion*. Regional: *Private Lives* (Elliot Norton award-Best Actress, IRNE Nom), *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Arcadia*, *As You Like it*, *Pygmalion*, *Pride And Prejudice*, *Top-girls*, *Proof*, *Greek*, *Kindertransport*, *A Doll's House*, *Under Milkwood*. Television: "Unforgettable", "The Big C", "Blue Bloods", "The Good Wife", "Sex and The City", "Isidingo", "The Adventures of Sinbad", "Gegen Den Wind".

BENJAMIN COLE (*Ensemble*). Regional: *The Tempest*, *A Christmas Carol* (The Hartford Stage Company), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Barrington Stage Company), *33 Variations* (The Majestic Theatre). Film: "Finally Famous" directed by Chris Rock. Education: B.F.A. Actor Training from The Hartt School. Awards: Connecticut Critics Circle. Thank you to TFANA for this amazing opportunity

MARK H. DOLD (*Oswald*). TFANA: *Romeo & Juliet*. Broadway/Off-Broadway highlights: *Absurd Person Singular* (Gerald Friedman); 2 years as C.S. Lewis in *Freud's Last Session* (New World Stages); *Timon of Athens*, *The Seagull* with Meryl Streep and *Othello* (NYSF); *Shockheaded Peter* (The Little Shubert); CSC. Regional highlights: Mark Taper Forum; The Old Globe; Chicago Shakes; Huntington Theatre; The Shakespeare Theatre; Long Wharf; Barrington Stage Company (Associate Artist). TV/Film/Web Series highlights: "It Could Be Worse", "Ironside", "Suits", "Gossip Girl", "Third Watch", "Conviction", "Law & Order" triumvirate; 6 years on "All My Children", "Charlie's Party", "Say You'll Be Mine". Graduate of The Yale School of Drama and a member of The Actor's Center Workshop Company. www.markhdold.com

LILLY ENGLERT (*Cordelia*) graduated in May 2013 from The Stella Adler studio of acting. Previous roles include Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (TFANA) Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. Lilly is very excited to be returning off-Broadway in such a wonderful theatre and with such an incredible company of actors.

JACOB FISHEL (*Edgar*) returns to TFANA after appearing in *The Broken Heart*. Broadway: *Fiddler on the Roof*. Off-Broadway: *The Common Pursuit* (Roundabout Theatre Company), *Titus Andronicus* (The Public Theater), *Women Beware Women* (Red Bull Theater), *Macbeth* (NYSF). Television: "Cold Case", "Medium", "Without a Trace", "Numb3rs." Film: *Things I Cannot Tell*, *How I Got Lost*. Jacob is a graduate of The Juilliard School where he received the John Houseman Prize for Excellence in Classical Theatre.

JASON THOMAS GRAY (*Ensemble*). Theatre: *Ivanov* (Columbia Stages), *unbidden* (NY Fringe), *Othello* (Hudson Valley Shakes), *Playing With Fire*, *The Crucible* (dir. John Gould Rubin), *Rounding Third*, *Click Clack Moo* (Hangar Theatre), *Hamlet* (BADA); Film: *Milkman* (Gbrain Productions), *Blind Love* (AiNY). Graduate/Teaching Artist: Stella Adler Studio of Acting. Shine on! www.jasonthomasgray.com



Bianca Amato in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Resegg



Jacob Fishel in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Resegg

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

JONATHAN HOOKS (*Ensemble*). Theatre includes: *Julius Caesar* (The Royal Shakespeare Company at BAM), *The House of Von Macramé* (The Bushwick Starr), *Richard's Rampage* (BAM), *Torch-Bearers* (Williamstown). Film includes: *Haitian Son* (dir. Marc-Eddy Loriston); *I Do?* (dir. Reinaldo Green). Training: The Public Theater's Shakespeare Lab, The University of Oklahoma School of Drama. www.iamjonathanhooks.com

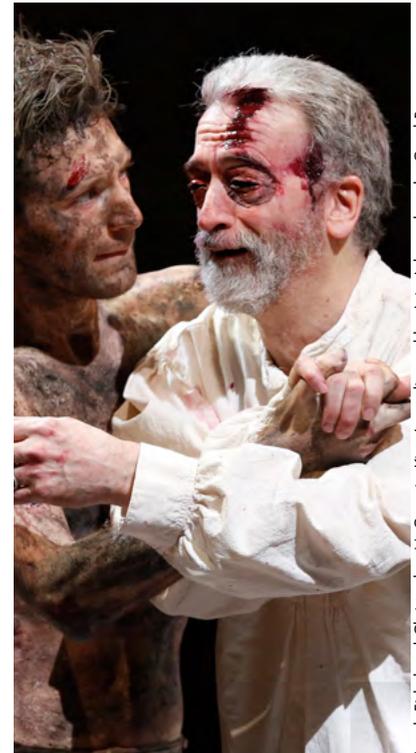
JAKE HOROWITZ (*Fool*) was last seen as Lysander in TFANA's inaugural production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Julie Taymor. His stage debut was off-Broadway in Barrow Street's Award Winning production of *Our Town* directed by David Cromer. He is a recent graduate of LaGuardia high school and is continuing his studies as an actor at CalArts. He extends deep thanks to his family and his many excellent teachers.

ROBERT LANGDON LLOYD (*Old Man / Knight / Doctor / Ensemble*). For Theatre for a New Audience he appeared in *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *The Broken Heart*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He was a founding member of Peter Brook's Paris Company and a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company. American credits include world tour of Brook's *Dream*, *Lear* (San Francisco Opera), *Conference of the Birds* (La MaMa), *The Mahabharata* (BAM), VOICE theatre's *Hay Fever* and *Legacy*.

PATRICK McANDREW (*Ensemble*) is very excited to be part of this production and would like to thank everyone at Theatre For a New Audience for this opportunity. Some past credits include *Twelfth Night* and *Titus Andronicus* at the Shakespeare Theatre Company, *Bachelorette* at the Studio Theatre and *Measure for Measure* and *Henry IV, Part I* at the Folger Theatre.

CHRISTOPHER McCANN (*Gloucester*). TFANA: *The Changeling*, *Richard II* and *III*, and *Pericles*; NY highlights: *Everything Will Be Different* (Schultz), *True Love* (Mee), *Mad Forest* (Churchill), *The Grey Zone* (Nelson), *The Devils* (Egloff), *Buried Child* (Shepard) & *The Lights* (Korder); Recent Films: *God's Pocket*, *All That I Am* (SXSW Jury Award Ensemble Cast), and *Bluebird*. Recent TV: "Elementary", "The Good Wife", "Boardwalk Empire". He teaches at Purchase College.

RYAN MCCARTHY (*Ensemble*) is a NYC actor from Madison, NJ. He is ecstatic to be making his Off-Broadway debut with this talented and dedicated group of artists. He holds a BFA from Albright College, Reading, PA. Special Thanks to Mom, Dad, Kira, Rebecca, Jeff Lentz, Julia Matthews, Cocol Bernal, Clark Middleton, Joseph Discher, and Stephen Brown-Fried. He would also like to thank Arin Arbus and Deborah Brown for this opportunity.



Jacob Fishel and Christopher McCann in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

SAXON PALMER (*Cornwall*). Theatre for a New Audience: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Broken Heart*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice* (NYC & RSC), *The Jew of Malta*. Broadway: *Three Sisters*, *Design for Living*. Other New York: *Measure for Measure* (The Public Theater), *You Never Can Tell* (Roundabout Theatre), *A Flea in Her Ear* (Bill Irwin, dir.), *Twelfth Night* (LaMaMa), *Belle's Stratagem* (Davis McCallum, dir.). Regional: *Tonight at 8:30* (Williamstown), *King* (NY Stage & Film), *David Copperfield* (Joanne Woodward, dir.), *The Pillowman* (Wilma), title roles in *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* (John Dillon, dir.). Film/TV: *Limitless*, "Law & Order", "Ed", "All My Children", "As the World Turns." Training: Florida State University and Florida School of the Arts.



Saxon Palmer in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

MICHAEL PENNINGTON (*King Lear*) last appeared in New York in Peter Brook's *Love Is My Sin*, presented by TFANA at the Duke Theatre in 2010. His celebrated solo show on Shakespeare, *Sweet William* (now available on DVD) has been seen at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, the Guthrie in Minneapolis and the Colorado Festival. He is an Honorary Associate Artist of the RSC, for whom he has appeared as Hamlet, Timon of Athens, Angelo, and Berowne; he has played Coriolanus, Macbeth, Henry V and Richard II for his own English Shakespeare Company, which twice visited the Chicago International Festival. He has played Oedipus on television, and the central roles in the plays of Ibsen, Strindberg, Osborne, Pinter, Stoppard, O'Casey, Bennett, Shaffer, Mamet, Hecht and MacArthur, and many others. He has directed in Tokyo, Chicago and Bucharest, written four books on Shakespeare and also *Are You There, Crocodile?: Inventing Anton Chekhov*, while he continues to tour his solo show about Chekhov around the world.



Rachel Pickup in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

RACHEL PICKUP (*Goneril*). TFANA debut and thrilled. Amongst many highlights, some favourites include: New York Theatre: *Dancing At Lughnasa*; *Airswimming*; *Explorers Club*; London: *Miss Julie* (Critics' Circle Best Actress nomination); *39 Steps*; *Barefoot In The Park*; *Dr Foster*; For Royal Shakespeare Company: *Troilus & Cressida*, *Julius Caesar*, *Two Gents*. US/UK Regional: *Ideal Husband*; *Twelfth Night*; *Three Sisters*; *Fortune's Fool*; *The Sea*; *Hamlet* (Best Actress, Edinburgh Festival); *Time And The Conways* (MEN Best Supporting Actress). TV/Film includes: "Elementary"; "Dogtown"; "Midsomer Murders"; "Small Island"; "Garrow's Law"; "Victoria and Albert"; *Fearless Love*; *Basil*; *AKA*.

RYAN QUINN (*King of France / Curan / First Servant*). TFANA: *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Killer* (upcoming). REGIONAL: Eight Seasons with The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival; *Yellowman*, Milwaukee Rep; *Hamlet*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Old Globe*; *The King Stag*, Yale Repertory Theatre; *King Lear*, Princeton Repertory Shakespeare Festival. NEW YORK: *Binibon*, *The Kitchen*; *Frag*, *The Strangest*, HERE Arts Center. MFA: Yale School of Drama. Much love to Katie, Mom, and Hanna. For Dad, who taught me how to tell stories.

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

IAN TEMPLE (*Ensemble*) is proud to return to the stage in his native Brooklyn where he graduated from Edward R. Murrow HS playing various leading roles. He graduated from SUNY Purchase's acting program originating the role of Kev from Broadway's *Bengal Tiger At The Baghdad Zoo* by Rajiv Joseph through The Lark theater company, as well as roles including Orlando, from *As You Like It*. Film includes: *Retina* (dir. Carlos Ferrer). Writer of TV show "Lofty Dreams" pilot to be filmed this summer. Ian's other passions include film production, martial arts and hypnotherapy.

JON STEWART JR. (*Burgundy / Messenger*) hails from Saginaw, Michigan. He is a recent graduate from the Acting Conservatory at SUNY Purchase College. His most recent Theatre Credits include *Hedda Gabler* (Eijlert Lovborg) and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Don Pedro), *Rock N Roll* (Ferdinand), all three in Purchase Rep. Family Forever. Love you always NLG.

TIMOTHY D. STICKNEY (*Kent*). Co-Founder/Stickney Theatre Project. Has led award-winning productions of *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear* and *The Pecong* (Stratford Shakespeare Festival). Stickney made three features with Christopher Plummer and Des McAnuff including *Caesar* and *Cleopatra* and *The Tempest. Macbeth* (St Louis Repertory); Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida* (Shakespeare Theatre); Orsino in *Twelfth Night* (Seattle Rep); Lorenzo in *Merchant of Venice* (Hartford Stage). Best known as R.J. Gannon on ABC's "One Life to Live".

CHANDLER WILLIAMS (*Edmund*). Broadway: *The Winslow Boy* (Roundabout), *the vibrator play* (LCT), *Mary Stuart* (Donmar), Lieutenant Yolland in the acclaimed revival of *Translations* (MTC). Off-Broadway: *Richard III* (Old Vic/World Tour/BAM), *Crimes of the Heart* (Roundabout), *Rope* (Drama Dept.), *The Mysteries* (CSC). Regional: *Richard II* (title role, PlayMaker's Rep), McCarter, Center Stage. Several seasons at Williamstown. Film: *Kinsey*, *Heights*, *The Caller*, *Public Enemies*. TV: "Person of Interest", "The Good Wife", "Law & Order: SVU" (opposite Jeremy Irons).

GRAHAM WINTON (*Albany*). For TFANA: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming Of The Shrew*, *Macbeth*, *Measure For Measure*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Don Juan*, *Julius Caesar*. Broadway: *Cyrano De Bergerac*, *A Man For All Seasons*, *The Tempest*, *Two Shakespearean Actors*. Off-Broadway: Public Theater, ten shows including: *Henry VI*, *Winters Tale*, *Twelfth Night*. CSC: *Hamlet*, *Richard II* and *III*, *Age Of Iron*. 20 plus shows regionally. Recent TV: "Black List", "The Americans", "Blue Bloods", "Louie", All "Law And Orders".

ARIEL ZUCKERMAN (*Ensemble*) is a recent graduate of The Stella Adler Studio of Acting in NYC. Credits include *Merchant of Venice* with the Worcester Shakespeare Company and *Cadence: Home with TE'A* at the Straz Center in Tampa, Fl. He is thrilled to be making his off-Broadway debut with such an illustrious company.



Timothy D. Stickney in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rossegg



Chandler Williams in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rossegg

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

MICHAËL ATTIAS (*Composer / Co-Sound Designer / Musician*) performs throughout the world as saxophonist and bandleader. He has created music for dance, theatre, and film, both in the U.S. and Europe. Recent theatre credits include several collaborations with director Robert Woodruff at Yale Repertory Theatre: *In A Year With Thirteen Moons*; *Autumn Sonata* (Music Director); *Battle of Black and Dogs* (Translator/Composer); *Notes From Underground* (La Jolla Playhouse, TFANA) and *Chair* (TFANA).

PASCAL NIGGENKEMPER (*Musician*) New York City-based German-French bassist, composer and improviser Pascal Niggenkemper is a performing and recording artist active on the creative music scene in the US and in Europe. The “prepared” bass is a central theme in his music. Augmenting the vocabulary of the instrument, he creates entire worlds and soundscapes using the expanding vocabulary of the bass in its altered state.

SATOSHI TAKEISHI (*Musician*) is a native of Mito, Japan. He has been living in New York since 1991 and he has performed and recorded in vast variety of genre, from world music, jazz, contemporary classical music to experimental electronic music with musicians such as Ray Barretto, Carlos ‘Patato’ Valdes, Eliane Elias, Marc Johnson, Eddie Gomez, Randy Brecker, Dave Liebman, Anthony Braxton, Mark Murphy, Herbie Mann, Paul Winter Consort, Rabih Abu Khalil, Erik Friedlander, Ned Rothenberg, Michaël Attias, Shoko Nagai, Paul Giger, Toshiko Akiyoshi Big Band, Ying String Quartet, Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, Dhafer Youssef, Lalo Schiffrin, and Pablo Ziegler to name a few. He continues to explore multi-cultural, electronics and improvisational music with local musicians and composers in New York.

ARIN ARBUS (*Director*) is the Associate Artistic Director at Theatre for a New Audience for which she directed *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure* and *Othello* (Lortel nomination). She has directed at Chicago Lyric Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Woodbourne Correctional Facility, The New School for Drama, The Intiman Theatre, The Hangar Theater, Theatre Outlet, FringeNYC, Storm Theatre, HERE Arts Center, Juilliard and Williamstown Workshop. She was a Playwrights Horizons Directing Resident, a Williamstown Workshop Directing Corps Member, a member of Soho Rep’s Writer/Director Lab, is a Drama League Directing Fellow, and a Princess Grace Award Recipient.



Timothy D. Slickney, Michael Pennington, Jacob Fishel, and Jake Horowitz in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosagg



Graham Winton in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosagg

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

RICCARDO HERNANDEZ (*Set Designer*). Broadway: *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* (Tony 2012 Best Musical Revival), *The People in the Picture* (Studio 54), *Caroline, or Change*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, *Noise/Funk* (also National Tour and Japan), *Parade* (Tony/Drama Desk Noms), Hal Prince director, *The Tempest*, *Bells are Ringing*. Recent: *La Mouette*, *Jan Karski*, *Mon Nom Est Une Fiction* (both for Avignon Festival: Cour d'Honneur, Opera Theatre, France), *The Dead* (Abbey Theater, Dublin) *Il Postino* (L.A. Opera, PBS Great Performances), Philip Glass' *Appomattox* (SFO), *Lost Highway* (London's ENO/Young Vic) Over 200 Productions US/Internationally: NYSF/Public, BAM, LCT, ART, Guthrie, Lyric Opera Chicago, NYCO, HGO, OTSL, Theatre du Chatelet, Festival Automne, Paris; Vienna's Theater an der Wien, Opera de Nice, Oslo National Theater, MXAT Moscow, Teatr Polski, Warsaw; London's National, Old Vic, Royal Court. Princeton Lecturer.

MARCUS DOSHI (*Lighting Designer*) designs for theatre, opera & dance as well as collaborating with artists & architects on a wide array of non-theatrical ventures. With Theatre for a New Audience: *Othello* (Lortel Nomination), *Hamlet* (Drama Desk & Henry Hewes Nominations), *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *The Broken Heart*, & *The Taming of the Shrew*. His work has been seen internationally in Edinburgh, London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Marseille, Castres, Venice, Vienna, Tunis, Sousse, Cairo, Beirut, Kuwait, Mumbai, New Delhi, Phnom Penh, Jakarta, and Sydney. His work has been seen in the US with Seattle, Florentine, Boston Lyric, and Baltimore Operas as well as The Lyric Opera of Chicago—where he recently lit *La Traviata* directed by Arin Arbus—The Lincoln Center Festival, The Park Avenue Armory, The Signature, The Mint, NYTW, Civilians, and most major regional theatres. Education: Wabash College & Yale University School of Drama. Company member: Sabab Theatre. Assistant Professor of Design at Northwestern University. More information at www.marcusdoshi.com.

SUSAN HILFERTY (*Costume Designer*) has designed over 300 productions across the globe. TFANA: *The Broken Heart*, *General From America*. Directorial collaborators include Athol Fugard (set, costumes, co-director), Mayer, Lapine, Falls, Woodruff, Mantello, Akalaitis, Wright, Lamos, Galati, McAnuff, Ott, Petrarca, Nelson, Ashley, Leon, Laurie Anderson, Kushner, Hynes and Mann. Recent work: *Rigoletto*, Metropolitan Opera. Broadway: *Annie*, *Road to Mecca*, *Wonderland*, *Sondheim on Sondheim*, *Spring Awakening* (Tony nom.). Her numerous awards include Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards for *Wicked*. She chairs Graduate Design at NYU/Tisch.

B. H. BARRY (*Fight Director*). TFANA productions: *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Saved*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Richard III*, *Richard II* and *Macbeth* twice. He has received an Obie and Drama desk awards for consistent excellence in Fight Direction and a life time achievement Tony for his work on Broadway.



Lilly Englert and Michael Pennington in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosagga

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

JOHN CARRAFA (*Movement*) is the Tony Nominated Broadway choreographer of *Urinetown* and *Into the Woods*. He received the Media Choreography Award for his work on *The Polar Express*. He happily balances between the worlds of theater, film and television. He currently stages the musical performances for the ABC television show “Nashville”.

NICHOLAS POPE (*Co-Sound Designer*). Broadway: *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder*. Off-Broadway: *Natasha*, *Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, *Passion* (Classic Stage Company), *Arlington* (Vineyard Theatre). Yale Rep: *Notes from the Underground*, *Battle of Black and Dogs*. Other credits include: *Nobody Loves You*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Gift of Angels*. Graduate of Yale School of Drama.

JEFFREY HOROWITZ (*Producer*) began his career in theatre as an actor and appeared on Broadway, Off Broadway, and in regional theatre. In 1979, he founded Theatre for a New Audience. Horowitz has served on the Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts and on the Board of Directors of Theatre Communications Group. He is currently on the Advisory Board of The Shakespeare Society and the Artistic Directorate of London’s Globe Theatre. He received the John Houseman Award in 2003 and The Breukelein Institute’s 2004 Gaudium Award. *King Lear* is the sixth production of Shakespeare directed by Arin Arbus in which Jeffrey and Arin have worked together (*Othello*, *Measure For Measure*, *Macbeth*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*).

JONATHAN KALB (*Dramaturg*) is Literary Advisor and Resident Artist at Theatre for a New Audience and Professor of Theatre at Hunter College, CUNY. He has twice won the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism, which he received for his books *Beckett in Performance* (1991) and *Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater* (2012). *Great Lengths* also won the Theater Library Association’s George Freedley Award.

ANDREW WADE (*Vocal Coach*) is Resident Director of Voice at Theatre for a New Audience where he has coached *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Broken Heart*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Chair*, and *Notes from Underground*. Head of Voice, RSC, 1990-2003. Assistant Voice Director, RSC, 1987-1990. Verse Consultant, *Shakespeare in Love*. Adjunct faculty at Juilliard and Guest Artist at Stella Adler Studio. At Guthrie Theater Andrew has coached *Primerose Path*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Hamlet* and *As You Like It*; He is Voice Director for *Matilda* and Director of Voice & Speech at The Public Theater.

DEBORAH BROWN (*Casting Director*). This is Deborah Brown’s 22nd season with Theatre for a New Audience. She has cast for Broadway, Off Broadway and many of the leading regional theatres in the country. She shared an Emmy for the HBO series “From the Earth to the Moon”. Other television includes “The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd” and New York casting on “Band of Brothers”.



Soxton Palmer and Christopher McConn in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

RENEE LUTZ (*Production Stage Manager*). Theatre for a New Audience: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Merchant of Venice* (New York, Royal Shakespeare Company, national tour), *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *Anthony & Cleopatra*, *All's Well*, etc. Venues include Barrington Stage, Goodspeed, NY Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla, Playwrights Horizons, MTC, Vineyard and numerous off-Broadway and regional productions. As always, best credit and longest run: her husband, actor Gordon Stanley. Her work is dedicated to the memory of her father, Ross Lutz.



Michael Pennington in the title role of *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

RESOURCES GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Definitions in the following glossary have been sourced from the *Arden*, *Oxford*, and *New Cambridge editions of King Lear* (see *Bibliography*); and *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary & Language Companion* by David Crystal and Ben Crystal (Penguin, 2002) and *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*, Vols I and II by Alexander Schmidt (Dover, 1971); Sources indicated by the following notations: (A) *Arden*, (O) *Oxford*, (NC) *New Cambridge*, (C) *Crystal*, (L) *Lexicon*

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Cordelia – Stems from the Latin *cor*, meaning heart. Might be related to the French *coeur de lion*, meaning heart of a lion. The historical Cordelia became queen after Lear's death and ruled peacefully for five years, but her nephews (the dukes of Albany and Cornwall) contested her reign and fought battles against her. She was eventually imprisoned and committed suicide.

Duke of Albany – Husband of Goneril. Albany was the ancient name for northern Britain, including Scotland. King James I bestowed the title on his son Charles (later King Charles I). The title is now extinct.

Duke of Cornwall – Husband of Regan. Modern-day Cornwall constitutes the southern-most part of England's southwest peninsula. The title, Duke of Cornwall, is traditionally given to the monarch's oldest son. In Shakespeare's time, that was James I's eldest son Henry who died in 1613, twelve years before James' death. The current Duke of Cornwall is Prince Charles.

Earl of Kent – Lear's advisor. Kent is a county in the south-east of England.

Earl of Gloucester – Nobleman. Gloucestershire is southwest of London near the Welsh border.

Edgar – from Old English words, *ead* meaning rich, happy, prosperous, and *gar*, meaning spear.

Edmund - Means "rich protector." From Old English, *ead* = rich, blessed, *mund* = protector. Edmund and Edgar were also the names of the sons of Malcolm III of Scotland who killed Macbeth. Malcolm III's Edmund also betrayed his family, and the younger (and presumably more noble) brother Edgar defeated him.

Goneril – based on Gonorilla, from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* or *History of the Kings of Britain*.

Lear, King of Britain – based on the ancient and legendary Leir of Britain, who ruled for sixty years around the 8th century BCE. Monmouth claims that the king founded the town of Leicester.

Regan – Irish for "little king."

PLACES REFERENCED IN THE PLAY

Britain – The first reference to prehistoric Britain appeared in the writings of Greek explorer Pytheas around 330 BCE. Lear would have ruled in what is considered the early British Iron Age, a time of technological growth and increased interaction with countries on the continent. This period ended with the Roman invasion in 45 CE.

Dover – a coastal town in the county of Kent that is separated from France by a narrow stretch of the English Channel. The White Cliffs of Dover are a striking landmark, visible from the French coast as a symbolic guard against intruders to England's shores.

France – called Gaul in the Iron Age. The rivalry between England and France started with William the Conqueror and progressed through Agincourt and the defeat of Napoleon. Shakespeare's French characters like Joan of Arc and the Dauphin in *Henry V* are written as deceitful and bombastic respectively, but the King of France in *King Lear* allies with Cordelia and provides an army to fight for Lear's cause (though he does not appear after the first scene). In 1892, Bram Stoker recalled

that after seeing the play, Prime Minister Gladstone found it to be "unpatriotic conduct" to "take aid from the French...under any circumstances whatever of domestic stress."

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Moiety: usually a half, or a share, referring to Lear's 'darker' purpose, to divide his kingdom into three parts (A).

Gloucester: Curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety

"The mysteries of Hecate and the night": secret rites of the goddess of the infernal regions, associated also with night and the moon, and with witchcraft (A).

Lear: thy truth then be thy dower: / For by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and the night...

Propinquity: kinship, rights of possession or disposal due to their blood relationship (A).

Lear: Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood

"The barbarous Scythian": the savagery of people from the area around the Black Sea and Asia Minor was legendary, also referenced in *Titus Andronicus* and Marlowe's dramatization of a Scythian shepherd in *Tamburlaine* (A).

Apollo: pagan (ancient Greek and Roman) god of the sun, noted as an archer and for being clear-sighted (A).

Kent: Now, by Apollo, King...

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Fops: fools (not 'dandies,' a meaning first recorded by *OED* in the 1670s) (A).

Edmund: Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops, / Got 'tween asleep and wake?

Gad: a sharp point of metal (L); the phrase "upon the gad" means suddenly, as if pricked by a spear or spur (A).

Gloucester: All this done upon the gad!

Ursa Major: the Great Bear, an animal

seen as ‘rough and lecherous’; the constellation also known as the Big Dipper, and the Plough (A).

Edmund: My nativity was under Ursa Major; so that it follows I am rough and lecherous.

“Catastrophe of the old comedy”: event or person which produces the arbitrary or contrived denouement as in old-fashioned comedy, similar to *deus ex machina* (O, A).

Edmund: Pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy.

Tom o’Bedlam: a name commonly taken by a beggar who claimed to have come from Bedlam, or Bethlehem Hospital for the insane in London (A). Also the name and persona Edgar takes up in disguise.

Edmund: My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o’ Bedlam.

“Fa, sol, la, mi”: Edmund sings, as if unaware of Edgar’s approach, in order of the fourth, fifth, sixth and third notes of the scale of C major (A). Some commentators think Edmund is deliberately singing across the interval of an augmented fourth, or ‘the devil in music,’ a most unpleasant sound suggesting disharmony (NC).

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Lubber: heavy fellow (L), clumsy lout (A).

Kent: If you will measure your lubber’s length again, tarry.

Coxcomb: professional fool’s cap, with a crest like a cock’s comb (A).

Fool: Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

Nuncle: a variant of ‘uncle,’ contracted from ‘mine uncle’ (A), the customary address of a licensed fool to his superiors (L).

Fool: How now, nuncle?

“Truth’s a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out, when the Lady Brach may stand by the fire and stink”: The Fool’s line puts himself (or Cordelia) in the role of ‘Truth’ that



Rachel Pickup and Bianca Amato in *King Lear*, directed by Arin Arbus, photo by Carol Rosegg

is punished, whereas Lady Brach (female dog, bitch) might refer to Goneril or Regan (A). Fools would be whipped for speaking out of line (NC).

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Kibes: blisters (A), a chap or sore in the heel (L).

Fool: If a man’s brains were in’s heels, were’t not in danger of kibes?

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Lipsbury pinfold: usually taken to mean ‘trapped between my teeth.’ *Lipsbury* = lips-town (there is no place of this name), perhaps the space between the jaws and the teeth, and a *pinfold* is a pound for stray animals (A).

Kent: If I had thee in Lipsbury pinfold, I would make thee care for me.

Carbonado: score or slash, as if for grilling meat (A).

Kent: Draw, you rogue, or I’ll so carbonado your shanks.

Jakes: latrine, privy

Kent: I will tread this unbolted villain into mortar and daub the wall of a jakes with him.

“Goose, if I had you upon Sarum

plain, I’d send ye cackling home to Camelot.”: Picturesque but obscure. Sarum is the old name for Salisbury, the cathedral city in Wiltshire. The plain, which has Stonehenge at its center, was notorious for highwaymen, and geese ‘are plentifully pastured’ there (Sugden). Camelot (perhaps chosen partly for alliterative, partly historical effect), the legendary capital of King Arthur, is sometimes identified with Winchester, not very far from Salisbury. Kent calls Oswald a goose because his smiles remind him of cackling, and says that if he had him at his mercy he would chase him a long way. There may be sexual overtones: ‘goose’ could mean both whore and a whore’s client (O).

“None of these rogues and cowards / But Ajax is their fool.”: Kent’s muttered response arouses Cornwall’s fierce outburst because he believes Kent identifies him with the foolish Greek warrior who is easily duped by others (as in *Troilus and Cressida*). Kent’s pun, intentional or otherwise (‘Ajax’ – a jakes) does not help matters (NC).

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ACT 2, SCENE 4

Hysterica passio: Latin, suffering of the womb. ‘Mother’ was the common name for hysteria, a disease mainly of women that arose from the womb and

caused painful colic in the stomach and giddiness in the head (A, O).

Lear: O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow...

“Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put ‘em i’ the paste alive; she rapped ‘em o’ the coxcombs with a stick, and cried ‘Down, wantons, down!’”:

The point of the Fool’s joke is that the *cockney* (a nice or affected woman; Londoner) acts too late in striking live eels on their heads (*coxcombs*, relates to Fool) when they are already in the pastry for the pie, and crying ‘Down!’ to the frisky creatures (*wantons*) (A). No other instance of this anecdote is known. It is a parable of Lear’s fruitless attempt to subdue his ‘rising heart’ (O).

Carbuncle: tumor, growth, lump

Lear: Thou art a boil, / A plague sore, or embossed carbuncle / In my corrupted blood.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

“Out-paramoured the Turk”: i.e. had more lovers than the Turkish sultan had in his harem (NC).

Edgar: Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly; and, in woman, out-paramoured the Turk.

Plackets: openings in the front of petticoats and skirts for convenience in putting them on and taking them off (A).

Edgar: Keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders’ books, and defy the foul fiend.

“Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind”: possibly a fragment of an old ballad (O).

Flibbertigibbet: the name of a devil.

Edgar: This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet...

“Aroint thee, witch.”: meaning ‘be off with you.’ Here, and in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses what may be a term from Midlands dialect (A).

Athenian: learned man, referring to Athens as the seat of learning and philosophy (O). The cynics in ancient Greece chose to live in rags and poverty, despised wealth and power, and were sharp in reproving vices (A).

Lear: Come, good Athenian.

“Child Rowland to the dark tower came / His word was still, “Fie, foh, and fum, / I smell the blood of a British man.”: Edgar saying nonsense verses. A line possibly from a lost ballad concerning Roland, hero of the twelfth-century epic *Le Chanson de Roland*, is tied into a familiar cry from some version of Jack the Giant-killer (A). ‘Child’ was a title given to young noblemen awaiting knighthood (O).

ACT 3, SCENE 6

“Fratreretto calls me and tells me / Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness.”: More nonsensical references from Edgar. Frateretto is a devil associated with music and the fiddle. The fiddler in hell perhaps suggested Nero, and Chaucer’s ‘Monk’s Tale,’ where Nero is depicted as an angler who delighted to fish (A). The ‘lake of darkness’ is the Stygian lake, fed by the River Styx, by which the classical dead entered the afterlife. Angler was slang for a thief who used a rod with a hook attached for pilfering (O).

Persian attire: Persia was noted for its luxury, and for producing fine silk. Lear’s words are ironic in relation to the rags on Edgar’s body (A).

Lear: I do not like the fashion of your garments. You will say they are Persian attire, but let them be changed.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

Distaff: device for weaving, spindle. Goneril implies that her husband is more suited to a woman’s work (C).

Goneril: I must change arms at home and give the distaff / Into my husband’s hands.

“I have been worth the whistle.”:

worth watching out for. Goneril marks Albany’s reluctance to encounter her by recalling the proverb ‘It’s a poor dog that is not worth the whistling’ (A).

ACT 4, SCENE 4

“Crowned with rank fenitar and furrow-weeds, / With burdocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers...”:

Lear wears this crown when he enters later in the act. The weeds and flowers Cordelia mentions here belong to the summer season in Britain and provide the only indication of a time of year in the play. Lear seems to emerge from the storm scenes into a more summery world burgeoning with plant-life, but including weeds, such as fenitar (or fumiter), a weed known as smoke of the earth because it sprawls vigorously (A).

ACT 4, SCENE 6

Press-money: payment to recruits when they enlist. Lear may give real or imaginary money to Edgar and Gloucester or to imaginary soldiers (A).

Lear: There’s your press-money.

“Sweet marjoram.”: Edgar humors Lear with this fanciful password, which may allude to the wildflowers bedecking Lear and/or to a ‘blessed remedy for diseases of the brain’ (Blunden, cited by Muir), relating to Lear’s madness (NC).

ACT 5, SCENE 3

Compeers: equal, match, be the peer of (C).

Regan: In my rights, / By me invested, he compeers the best.

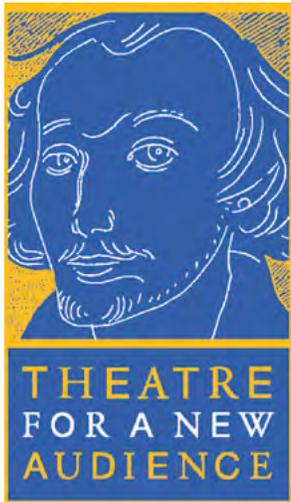
Falchion: curved broadsword (C).

Lear: With my good biting falchion / I would have made them skip.

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