

AN ACTOR'S APPROACH TO THE TITLE ROLE IN
THE TRAGEDY OF KING LEAR.

by

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to provide an actor's method of approach to performing the title role in William Shakespeare's play, The Tragedy of King Lear, in the hope that it will give aid to others acting out the role and, in general, add to the store of knowledge concerning the art of tragic acting. In so doing, it is hoped, too, that this study will contribute to the ideal end of all such activity---the pleasurable purgation of emotion and a sense of individual betterment felt by all who witness great tragic plays.

In the six chapters which cover this study, the author first endeavors to show that a knowledge of the history and background of the play and the age in which the action is set is helpful to the actor in his complex task of building a character.

A discussion of the philosophical implications is included since such study is considered necessary to the proper understanding of the title role.

In dealing with the basic dramatic structure of the play, a graph is submitted, to show the parallelism between the changing circumstances of Lear in the main plot and

Glouster in the sub-plot. The graph is intended as a specific help to an actor performing the title role.

The major body of the writer's impressions of the title character are contained in his discussion of the meaning and significance of some of Lear's more important speeches.

The effort to discover the implicit demands of the text upon the actor performing the title role is an important activity. Some of the most important of these demands are listed and given brief comment.

This study is terminated with an explanation of the writer's method of developing the character and reference to the ultimate findings and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY AND OF THE AGE IN WHICH THE ACTION IS SET

"The lifelike acting of an actor is built, not on his representing the copied results of feelings, but on his causing the feelings to arise, develop, grow into other feelings---to live before the spectator." This magnificent observation was made by Sergei M. Eisenstein, one of Russia's great film makers and theoreticians of the cinema. He believed that an actor must compel his imagination to depict pictures that evoke the required emotion, feeling, understanding and actual experience of the character. ¹

¹Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, Actors on Acting (New York, Crown Publishers, 1949), p. 450.

This writer believes that as soon as an actor is given a part, he must start to assimilate---piece together these pictures which will, during the performance, serve as the springboards of the character's true emotions.

The play itself is the fundamental source of reference in building these imaginary pictures, of course. However, as Stanislavsky states, a playwright cannot describe

all that has happened before the play begins, or after it ends. Nor can he describe all that has happened behind the scenes. He cannot detail all the shadings of feeling, thought, and action of the character. These things must be given depth and fullness through the imagination of the actor.² It is here that a knowledge of the history and

²Constantin Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 55-56.

background of the play and the age in which the action is set can prove helpful.

If history reveals that the source of the play lies in actual incident (Maxwell Anderson's Elizabeth the Queen is an example) or when the action of the play is given a definite setting in time, by either the playwright or the director of the production, the actor can turn immediately to whatever records are available on the everyday life of that age. The beliefs and superstitions of the people, the manners of eating, sleeping, and dress, the types of dwellings, the customs of the day, the demeanor in court, the idiosyncracies of the specific character, even knowledge of the weather identified with the locale and age in which the play is set---these are just some of the historical facts which can be helpful in creating imaginary pictures of the circumstances in which an individual character moves. Such facts can make important contributions to the verisimilitude

of the actor's emotions in the heat of performance.

Holinshed's Chronicles, a history of Britain, mentions that Lear reigned in the Year of the World 3105. In truth, experts conclude there is no substantial evidence that Lear ever lived. However, the story of the king and his three daughters was popular in ancient legends and folklore.³

³Louis B. Wright and Virginia L. Freund, editors, The Tragedy of King Lear by William Shakespeare (New York, Pocket Book Library, 1957), p. xxxvii.

The scope and design of Shakespeare's King Lear is of almost overpowering magnitude. In attempting to define that part of the play which demonstrates man pitted against the brutalities of filial ingratitude and the onslaughts of the physical powers of nature, the terms "cosmic" and "elemental" have frequently been used.⁴ Since its writing,

⁴E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1951), p. 240.

Shakespeare's King Lear has had an almost continuous history of performance, proof of its profound impact and the universality of its appeal.

Certainly, in choosing a time and setting which would provide an appropriate atmosphere for such a great tragic tale as King Lear, the bleak austerity of life in

Anglo-Saxon Britain comes readily to mind. But before turning to look at everyday life in Britain prior to the Norman Invasion, perhaps it is in order to observe first some of the probable sources from which Shakespeare derived King Lear.

Louis B. Wright and Virginia L. Freund of the Folger Shakespearean Library reveal that Shakespeare may have found the source of his play in the 1574 edition of Mirror for Magistrates, in Holinshed's Chronicles, or perhaps in Edmund Spencer's Faerie Queen.⁵ Richard Grant White corro-

⁵ Louis B. Wright and Virginia L. Freund, editors, The Tragedy of King Lear by William Shakespeare (New York, Pocket Book Library, 1957), p. xxxvii.

borates this, mentioning that the fifteenth chapter of the third book in Albion's England is another possible source.⁶

⁶ Richard Grant White, editor, Works of William Shakespeare (Vol. XI, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1865), p. 205.

He adds that this ancient story was even told of the Roman Emperor Theodosius in the Gesta Romanorum. It appears that Shakespeare was aware of an unknown author's play, The True Chronicle History of King Leir, entered on the Stationer's Register on May 14, 1594. There is little resemblance between it and Shakespeare's work in the matter of construction and language. Both plays merely owe certain incidents

and characters to the same ancient legend. In scope, spirit and purpose, the two are entirely dissimilar.⁷

⁷ Ibid., p. 202.

For a study of the everyday life of ancient Britain this writer selected a novel by Alfred Duggan, entitled Conscience of the King. Duggan, thoroughly steeped in the legends and bits of history of the era, paints a wonderfully vivid picture of a time of which relatively little is known.⁸ As an indication of the verisimilitude injected in

⁸ Alfred Duggan, Conscience of the King (New York, Coward-McCann, Inc., 1951).

this novel, the following passage is quoted:

At Christmas ... there was a great feast to celebrate the new alliance, but unfortunately fighting broke out when everyone was drunk. All were supposed to have come to the dinner unarmed, but the Saxons had brought the little seax-knives which they use for eating, and for other purposes as well; these are sharp iron knives, pointed and with a cutting blade on one side, though the other is thick and quite capable of parrying a sword cut. The Saxons say that their tribal name comes from these knives, which are sacred objects which they must always carry.⁹

⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

Following, listed in a fragmentary manner, are some of the phrases found in other parts of the colorful descriptions:

... a great rambling place, stables and granaries ... wooden cabin for slaves ... frequent barbarian raidings and sackings (p. 13) ... hair and beard long, in German fashion ... silk cloak ... great forests (p. 15) ... a town house of timber-framed wattle and plaster (p. 16) ... gaily painted (p. 17) ... walled towns ... heavy swords (p. 19) ... bits of charcoal in a bronze pan on the table ... bar the door (p. 24) ... hill forts (p. 26) ... lack of sunshine (p. 30) ... good wine from Gaul ... tunics of unbleached wool ... sleeves and hooded cloaks of thick felt (p. 30) ... rolled up paper (p. 31) ... scramaseax ... sabre for slashing (p. 39) ... forest infested with deamons (p. 40) ... cover heads with cloaks to guard from ghosts ... moats (p. 42) ... frescoes in the plaster ... mosaic floors ... made by wizards who cast spells (p. 42) ... little linen bag for coins ... folding stool, ornamented with ivory (p. 45) ... the dawn mist (p. 72) ... rough plank table ... silver jug (p. 74) ... a feeling of ritual ... the family council rooms (p. 75) ... hunted with arrows (p. 76) ... pouch at waist (p. 83) ... weapons hung on wall (p. 103) ... peasants drink from horn (p. 104).

These descriptions, in a small but important way, help to construct pictures in the actor's imagination. These pictures, in turn, can arouse in the actor emotions which are peculiar to a specific character in a specific setting - in this case, King Lear in ancient Britain. Of

course, the greatest degree of stimulation to the imagination, by far, comes from the imagery which the playwright has offered in the script itself. The production's technical aspects, too---the lighting, stage properties, scenery, and music---make similar contributions in evoking the imaginative pictures which the actor finds so helpful. However, a study of the history and background associated with a play's setting in time and place can be of keen interest. And, from the actor's standpoint, it does help in his complex task of building a character. A teacher at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts once said to a class of actors, "First, steep yourselves in the atmosphere of the play." Such is the business of investigating the history and background of a play and the age in which its action is set.

CHAPTER II

THE BASIC PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PLAY

The theme of the play King Lear has been described as the education and purification of a man. The terms "pagan," "pessimistic," and "stoical" have been used to describe its philosophical implications. Louis B. Wright and Virginia L. Freund say that although some biographers have seen in King Lear a reflection of a personal tragedy in Shakespeare's life, there is no proof for such a belief. According to them, another conjecture is that the play is simply a reflection of the fatalistic and stoical attitudes that characterized much of the writing of the Jacobean period.¹⁰

¹⁰ Louis B. Wright and Virginia L. Freund, editors, The Tragedy of King Lear by William Shakespeare (New York, Pocket Book Library, 1957), p. xxxvii.

E. K. Chambers calls King Lear a philosophical drama. "It is analytic, not constructive; contents itself with an understanding of things, and offers no remedy to make these things all even." He further states that in this play Shakespeare seems "to seek the primary causes of tragic disaster, less in the imperfect mettle of a hero ... than in external forces ... unmoral and blind in their working."¹¹ When such

¹¹E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1951), p. 241-242.

philosophical notes are sounded in a play, it becomes the responsibility of the producer and the actor to determine how forcefully and to what length the author intended them to be played.

Extensive comment on the play's pagan elements is not necessary here. R. G. White is convinced Shakespeare intended to set the action of the play in Ancient Britain.¹²

¹²Richard Grant White, Works of William Shakespeare (Vol. XI, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1865), p. 205.

In this setting Lear could easily have been a member of a Celtic line which still refused to accept the principles of Christian teaching. Then, too, it may have been the playwright's intention, in including such elements, to show how an individual can come to a knowledge of Christian philosophy, not through the process of formal instruction, but simply as a result of colliding with the brutalities of human relationships and with a physical universe which is ruthless and uncompromising in the discipline of its instruction.

In considering the fatalistic and pessimistic attitudes which present themselves in the play, the many victories of evil, so dramatically prominent, cannot be ignored: Kent's banishment, Cordelia's disinheritation and dismissal

from the household, Edmund's wicked duping of his father, Edgar's need to flee in disguise from his father, Gloucester's destitution and loss of sight, Goneril and Regan's victory in the cruel subjection of their father, and in the storm, Nature's merciless buffeting of a man, already full of grief and age. And, while the black banner of evil flies high, there is no great voice proclaiming a confidence in better things to come, "...no remedy to make these things all even."¹³ Again and again it seems to Lear,

¹³ E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1951), p. 245-246.

as well as the audience, that his terrible punishments are in excess of the wrong he has done. And, because he does not realize the extremities of his pride, impetuosity, and rage, or their disastrous effects on the lives of those about him, his suffering seems a monstrous thing. For these reasons, it would appear that it is with no sense of self-pity, but simply through an incapability to understand what appears to be a gross miscarriage of justice, that the old king defiantly proclaims to the elements,

I am a man
More sinned against than sinning.
(ACT III, Scene ii, 61)

In the subplot, the gloom of fatalism is further heightened by such comments as that of the blind Gloucester, who, in the depths of despair and sorrow, cries,

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods.
They kill us for their sport.

(ACT IV, Scene 1, 44-45)

Yet, it is not enough to say that the philosophical implications of the play are pagan, pessimistic, and fatalistic, even though numerous lines belonging to Lear and Gloucester would seem to support such conclusions.

The moral issues of the play are expressed very generally; they are universal in their application; and, in the final observation, they are Christian-like in character, whereas the attitudes of fatalism and pessimism are of a transitory nature. To understand these issues, the changes in Lear's and Gloucester's views of the world and themselves must be observed. And it is worth remembering that, as Moulton states, these changes are wrought not by accident but by the individual's judgment. Or, as in all of Shakespeare's plays, "character dominates accident."¹⁴

¹⁴ Richard G. Moulton, Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker (New York, The MacMillan Co., 1921), p. 7.

Lear and Gloucester, as all men, are members of the highest form of natural life. Yet, before their suffering, both deviated from that level of behavior on which man was created to function. Lear's pride of authority was so great his self-image lived in the realm of the super-natural, the god-like.

Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
 (ACT I, Scene i, 52)

Hear me, recreant!
 On thine allegiance, hear me!
 That thou hast sought to make us break our vows,
 Which we durst never yet, and with strained price
 To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
 Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
 Our potency made good, take thy reward.
 (ACT I, Scene i, 180-186)

Glouster symbolizes the other extreme. His sin of sensuality displays an indulgence in behavior which is beneath man, or animal-like. Of his bastard son, Edmund, he says,

Though this knave came saucily into the world
 before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair,
 there was good sport at his making, and the
 whoreson must be acknowledged.
 (ACT I, Scene i, 19-23)

Before salvation is possible to either Lear or Glouster, they must learn the position of man in relation to the natural and the super-natural. They must learn that neither is he God nor is he animal. He is man---with the limitations of the one and the magnificence of the other. And when he loses himself in pride or sensuality, nature administers pain in some form, in an effort to return him to his proper relationship.

Glouster's salvation is wrought through the pains of physical blindness and family disorder. Late in the play,

at Dover, when he is convinced that the gods have interceded to frustrate his suicidal attempt, he is able to see not only the sins of his life but also some providential power that strives to protect man from the folly of his judgment. With the loss of physical sight he has gained spiritual sight. Here, Gloucester proclaims,

Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
"Enough, enough," and die.
(ACT IV, Scene iv, 90-92)

Lear is brought to his knees by the merciless cruelty of Goneril and Regan and by the relentless storm on the heath. Finally, his fully festered pride breaks within him, permitting him to know for the first time the bitter reality of his folly and, through the unwavering devotion of Kent, Edgar, and the Fool, to gain at last a compassion for his fellow man. Then the old king cries out,

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just.

(ACT III, Scene iv, 35-43)

To be sure, when Lear first comprehends this wretchedness and suffering of humanity, his damaged mind believes man to be nothing more than a helpless plaything of the capricious fates. Before the hovel, while the storm rages on, his

wits at last leave him as he looks upon the exposed and miserable forms of Edgar, Kent, and the Fool and asks,

Is man no more than this? Consider him well.
 Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide,
 the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha!
 Here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art
 the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more
 but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou
 art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here.
 (ACT III, Scene iv, 107-113)

And, when Lear comes upon Gloucester in the open country near Dover, he still sees man as a "forked animal." His bitter comments on a lustful world whose justice is fraught with hypocrisy and deception are uttered in the stunned, dispassionate manner of a man whose mind has sought the sanctuary of insanity,

A man may see how this world goes with no eyes.
 Look with thine ears. See how yond justice rails
 on yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear. Change
 places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice,
 which is the thief? (ACT IV, Scene vi, 165-167)

Where is the end? Lear, in his pride, first saw himself on the level of lofty divinity---but now, no more than one of nature's abused, dumb beasts, the "fool of fortune." When, if ever, does the old man discover his true dimension in the universal scheme of things, his proper relationship to the other of nature's creatures and to his God? These truths come to him when, once again, he is united with Cordelia. For, it is then that he shows his pride of authority is no longer of any consequence to him.

When apprehended by Edmund's men he says to Cordelia,

Come, let's away to prison.
 We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage.
 When thou shall ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
 And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
 Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
 And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,
 In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by the moon.

(ACT V, Scene iii, 9-20)

He knows now the necessity for love, compromise, and forgiveness as the foundations for human dealings. But his offence was not only against his fellow men, but also the infinite God. And for reasons that are beyond the full comprehension of mortals, his complete redemption demands a final sacrifice, a final pain---the death of the one he loved the most. K. J. Spalding states that King Lear shows "...the rise of man through the discipline of suffering..."¹⁵

¹⁵ K. J. Spalding, The Philosophy of Shakespeare (Worcester & London, Trinity Press, 1953), p. 3.

There is something of Calvary in the final scene, as Lear carries in the body of Cordelia. The sacrifice had to be this great to impart to the old man the full knowledge of life's eternal truths and that exaltation of spirit that comes from complete forgiveness.

CHAPTER III

THE BASIC DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

This chapter does not attempt to present a picture of the complete dramatic structure of King Lear. This could not adequately be discussed, except at great length. Harley Granville-Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare, First Series, and W. B. C. Watkin's Shakespeare and Spencer are only two of many books which include an astute handling of the subject. (No actor, of course, agrees on every point of another's interpretation.) This chapter strives to show the structure of the play only to the degree that it reflects the dramatic parallelism between the changing circumstances of Lear in the main plot, and those of Gloucester in the sub-plot. This plot parallelism is pointed up in several authoritative sources, of course, but perhaps none is designed for the same reasons as this, to meet the special needs of the actor performing in the title role.

As the juxtaposed catastrophes of Lear and Gloucester progress, the profound dramatic values of one are repeatedly supported, nourished, and intensified by the other. Or as Edward Dowden describes it, "The thunder

which breaks over our head does not cease to resound, but is reduplicated, multiplied, and magnified, and rolls away with long reverberation."¹⁶ And, if an audience is to ex-

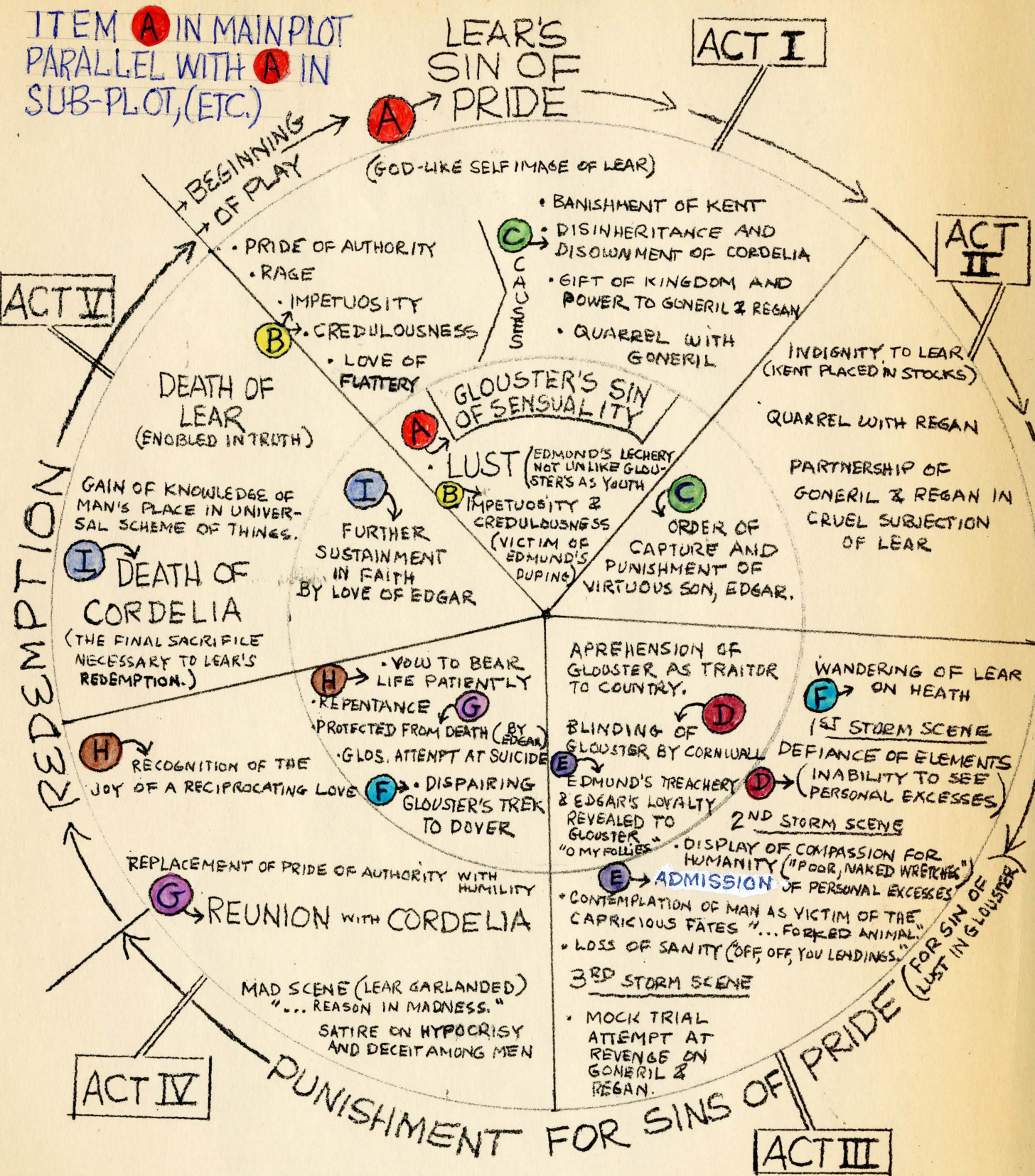
¹⁶ Edward Dowden, Shakespeare, His Mind and Art (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1918), p. 236.

perience the full, awesome impact of such a picture, the actor performing in the title role must keep aware of this striking association between the actions of Lear and Gloucester, not merely during the four scenes in which these two tragic figures meet before the audience, but at all other times during the play. Herein lies the problem. It is no small thing to ask an actor, already over-busy with costume changes, hand props, makeup adjustments, and the urgencies of the next scene, to keep conscious of the varying relationships of Lear's and Gloucester's actions throughout five acts. This is especially true during the initial performances of a play. The circular graphic illustration that follows is an effort to provide for the actor a tangible, helpful view of this parallelism, to which he may make immediate reference when off stage during a performance. For, if an actor has a ready knowledge of Gloucester's changing circumstances during the five acts, it can be to his advantage in two ways: First, he can achieve more easily the precise emotional key of his next scene or scenes, thereby helping toward the best possible orchestration of the production.

And secondly, through discussion with the director and the actor performing in the role of Gloucester, he can help plan and alter body-movements, gestures, speech-phrasings, various stage-pictures, etc., which will contribute toward that end implied by the play's structure---the holding up of the lives of Lear and Gloucester to the audience side by side, in the light of universal truths, for profound and awesome comparison.

PARALLELISM BETWEEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LEAR IN THE MAIN PLOT & GLOUSTER IN THE SUB-PLOT

ITEM **A** IN MAIN PLOT PARALLEL WITH **A** IN SUB-PLOT, (ETC.)



NOTES: LARGE CIRCLE = MAIN PLOT; SMALL, INNER CIRCLE = SUB-PLOT, CIRCLED LETTERS IN MAIN PLOT (A, B, C, ETC.) REFER TO CIRCLED LETTERS (A, B, C) IN SUB PLOT.

A study of the graph will reveal that, nearly always, Lear's action finds its supporting parallel action in Gloucester in the same act. An instance when it is found in a different act is cited by W. B. C. Watkins: "...blind Gloucester smelling his way to Dover in the opening scenes of the Fourth Act parallels Lear's storm-wanderings in the Third."¹⁷

¹⁷W. B. C. Watkins, Shakespeare and Spencer (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 81.

Again, this writer considers that viewing in graphic form the basic actions of these tragic figures has been an important help in determining the emotional levels, body-movements, gestures, stage-pictures, and similar items which can contribute to an audience's fuller appreciation of how the catastrophe of Lear is dramatically reflected in that of Gloucester. Since the graphic observation of the overall form of King Lear has proven of value in this instance, it may indicate that directors and actors, when dealing with a play of complex structure, could find help through the construction of a similar schematic drawing, including as many essential factors of plot development as are desirable.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SOME OF LEAR'S MORE IMPORTANT SPEECHES

In a discussion of the probable motivations for certain events in King Lear, W. B. C. Watkins states, "What is being done is so much more engrossing than why it is being done."¹⁸ This is well worth remembering when one

¹⁸ W. B. C. Watkins, Shakespeare and Spencer (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 93.

finds himself confused by the amount of speculation concerning almost every line the old king speaks in this play. This does not mean that an actor does not have to make what he believes to be the best-founded conclusions concerning why Lear does what he does. It simply means that, when individuals are seeking causes for the conduct of a man whose years could easily have made him the victim of unpredictable senility, there is no reason to expect that a complete set of answers will be found. And, if one starts to become too confused by the variations of opinion from critics, let him take heart. The scope of stage business in King Lear is so great that any initial improbabilities

are easily forgotten by an audience once it is "caught in the web" of Shakespeare's imagination. And, of course, one of the fascinations of working with his plays is that, often after a positive conclusion concerning the purpose of an individual speech has been reached, someone finds in it a new facet of meaning, and the entire scene is examined in a new light.

How does one attempt to select a few of Lear's most significant speeches for interpretation of their meaning and poetic quality? Considered individually, many of them are examples of some of man's most profound thinking and exquisite poetry. And yet, a conception of their full magnificence is possible only when they are viewed in relationship to the complete dramatic work of which they are a part. Since, however, practical limitations must be set on the number of speeches chosen for such analysis, those passages which represent some of the major transitions in the life of Lear, from his division of the kingdom until his death, were chosen because they are a grouping of obvious importance.

The audience sees in the very first scene of King Lear an upheaval so great that the larger part of the play's total business is a direct consequence of it. So few words are necessary to shatter in an instant Lear's looking glass.

Cordelia. Nothing, my lord.

Lear. Nothing?

Cordelia. Nothing. (ACT I, Scene i, 92-94)

He cannot believe his ears. His face flushes hot with embarrassment before the court. This was to have been his day of days. He had dreamed of it as a time of dazzling pomp and ceremony---when he would hear from his daughters their grand testimonials of love, divide his realm among them, and then step into a state of freedom from the everyday problems of directing a kingdom. He would retain "the name and all the additions to a king," of course; this would be in keeping with the honor, love, and obedience due old age and an individual whom everyone would look upon with kindness and special reverence. Now, with the prick of one word, "nothing", his day is ruined; his bubble is burst. And, when his solicitation of flattery is so totally unrewarded by the one he loves most, the injury to his pride is humiliating, and his characteristic impetuosity and rage know no bounds. Cordelia and Kent are the first to suffer. Coleridge acutely observes,

There is something of disgust at the ruthless hypocrisy of her sisters, and some little faulty admixture of pride and sullenness in Cordelia's 'nothing' and her tone is well contrived, indeed, to lessen the absurdity of Lear's conduct, but answers the more important purpose of forcing away the attention from the nursery tale the moment it has served its end, that of supplying the canvas for the picture.¹⁹

¹⁹S. T. Coleridge, Notes and Lectures Upon Shakespeare (New York, Harper & Bros., 1871), p. 138.

In connection with this first scene, a consideration which evolved from conversation with Dr. A. O. Simley, professor of Psychology at the University of Arizona, is worthy of comment: Unreasoning and unreasonable actions, abrupt changes of emotion, and hyper-sensitive feelings are some of the characteristics of senile-dementia, a wasting of the brain tissue through a gradual deficiency of nourishment. If such is the case with Lear (a very old man), then the activity of the first scene is not as contrived or unaccountable as might be first observed. Of course, he could not be completely senile, or the play would lack all dramatic balance. However, it is probable that the audience should sense rather quickly in Lear some of the irascible qualities which are seen in so very many old people. These characteristics, coupled with those of boundless pride and love of flattery, are powerful ingredients for unpredictable and uncompromising action. Indeed, the term "uncompromising" seems to keynote the business of the first scene. Someone once said, "It is a pity when the old and young have to live together." This is inevitably true when there is no compromise of desires. Because neither Lear nor Cordelia would "bend a little," a catastrophe was set into motion.

As for the poetic qualities of Lear's first words

with Cordelia, what could more effectively point up the dramatic shock of this moment than to interrupt the abundant flow of passionate ten-syllable lines with first a moment of hesitated silence and then the simplicity of

Nothing, my lord.

Nothing?

Nothing. (ACT I, Scene i, 92-94)

The effects of his childish actions are soon apparent.

The jests and prattlings of the Fool have become a familiar and companionable sound to the old man over many years, and Goneril's charge that the Fool is "all-licensed" in court is near the truth. For these reasons, the Fool is able to serve a special dramatic purpose in the play. He is the personification of Lear's conscience. As this affectionate character crouches first at the knee of his master, then at his elbow, his perceptive jibes reveal with amazing clarity the inner-workings of Lear's mind, telling things that the old man would not dare admit to anyone---not even himself.

Lear. When were you wont to be so full of
songs, sirrah?

Fool. I have used it, nuncle, ever since
thou madest thy daughters thy mother;
for when thou gavest them the rod,
and puttest down thine own breeches,
[Sings] Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a King should play bo-peep
And go the fools among.

Goneril's words and action in the same scene prove the truth of the Fool's words. The uncompromising will of this eldest daughter has no bounds. The perplexed king's

terrible quarrel with her is inevitable. In four powerful speeches, he accuses, warns, threatens, and finally curses this thankless, "detested kite." And when even this is met with utter defiance, his rage reaches its limit. His voice breaks.

Life and death! I am ashamed
 That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;
 That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
 Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
 The untended woundings of a father's curse
 Pierce every sense about thee!--Old fond eyes
 Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out,
 And cast you with the waters that you loose
 To temper clay. Yea, it is come to this?
 Ha! Let it be so. I have another daughter
 Who I am sure is kind and comfortable.
 When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
 She'll flay thy wolfish visage. Thou shalt find
 That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think--
 I have cast off for ever. (ACT I, Scene iv, 299-314)

Lear means everything he says. Here is a picture of diabolical hate. The deep-throated finality with which he speaks is given emotional impact by the lines' measured, regular rhythms which flow uninterrupted until the old king stumbles past his daughter and from the room. And before he leaves the castle to seek the kindness of Regan, he says in a hollow voice,

O, Let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
 Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!
 (ACT I, Scene v, 43-44)

Soon the audience sees Kent, the official messenger of the king, put in the stocks by Cornwall and Regan. Lear's heart swells with anger at the outrage of such an

indignant act. One expects that his anger will be uncontrolled when Regan and Cornwall finally appear. Lear expects it himself. When he sees his second-eldest, however, his anxiety to tell her of the depraved actions of Goneril make him, for the moment, set aside thoughts of the recent indignity. When he does refer to it, he is unable to believe that Regan had anything to do with it because he needs her love too much! Perhaps he is doing here what many parents do---gradually shifting full blame for the act on the in-law, in this case Cornwall. Not until the issue of the hundred knights has reached a climax and the king asks in stunned disbelief.

What, must I come to you
With five-and-twenty, Regan? Said you so?
(ACT II, Scene iv, 284-285)

will Lear admit in his heart the devastating truth about Regan. She answers, "And speak it again my lord. No more with me." Then, with hands joined, she and Goneril torment him further, asking, "What need one? [to tend you]" In a strident cry Lear answers,

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest things superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady:
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why nature needs not what thou gorgeous wearest,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need--
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,

And let not women's weapons, water drops,
Stain my man's cheeks! (ACT II, Scene iv, 298-312)

In these words is seen a change in Lear, indeed---his recognition that with all of man's self-sufficiency, a selfless spirit is needed to make life bearable among humans. And more than this, he learns that man must pray for the patience to endure when no one will understand. Harley Granville-Barker says, "This abandoning of the struggle and embracing misfortune is a turning point of the play, a salient moment in the development of Lear's character..." In speaking of the poetic elements, he draws attention to the broken eloquence of Lear's appeal to Regan and the distraction of his

No, you unnatural hags!
I will have such revenges---on you both
That all the world shall---I will do such things---
What they are yet, I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth! You think I'll weep.
No, I'll not weep.
I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad! --
(ACT II, Scene iv, 312-320)

And how magnificently this speech conveys the bewildered thinking of this most desperate figure.

On the heath, as the storm rages, Lear first defies the elements for joining their "high engendered battles" with "two pernicious daughters" in his cruel punishment. At this point he sincerely believes himself "more sinned against than sinning." His pride blinds him to the excess of his errors. So the storm, symbolic of the torture in

his mind, keeps beating him, beating him, beating him, until on his knees, with uplifted arms, he opens up his heart and pours forth a compassion for his fellow man, "Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are," he begins; the rest need not be quoted. As A. C. Bradley comments, "This is one of those passages which make us worship Shakespeare."

Then, the rapture of poetic imagery is shattered by the wild voice of Mad Tom. Kent and the Fool, miserable victims of the storm, are crouched together near the king. And now, when they are joined by a third even more wretched, they become to Lear a symbol of the hopeless destitution of all humanity.

Thou wert better in thy grave than to
 answer with thy uncovered body this extremity
 of the skies. Is man no more than this?
 Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no
 silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool,
 the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on's
 are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself;
 unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor,
 bare, forked animal as thou art.

(ACT III, Scene vi, 106-113)

The horror of such an image supplies the final injury to Lear's mind. Tearing his garments, he raves, "Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here."

As the storm continues to rage, Lear, Edgar and the Fool begin the fantastical trial scene, a manifestation of the old man's thoughts of revenge on Goneril and Regan. Here, ideally, the audience is compelled to join with Lear for a moment and dwell in his world of madness. It is

almost as if the spectator were inside the poor king's hurt mind, looking out upon a world of dismay. How desperately he needs to find some small, pleasant thought about the past. In his wild imaginings it seems that even his little dogs, Tray, Blanch and Sweetheart, bark at him. Properly executed, this scene is one of the most fascinating in which one can participate. In it, an actor may achieve an incredible rapport with his audience.

Lear now leaves the stage for the longest period at any time in the play. This allows an extension of the business in the sub-plot to that sublime moment when Lear and Gloucester meet at Dover. Of this meeting, Harley Granville-Barker says,

What could better point the transcendent issue Shakespeare has developed from the two old stories than this encounter of the sensual man robbed of his eyes with the willful man, the light of his mind put out.²⁰

²⁰ Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1953), p. 179.

The rage in Lear's madness is gone. He is a tired, dispassionate old man. He speaks the incoherent, unrelated thoughts of one whose witless mind is now numb from abuse.

Nature's above art in that respect. There's your press money. That fellow handles his bow like a crowkeeper. Draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted cheese will do it. There's my gauntlet; I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up

the brown bills. O, well flown, bird! i' the
clout! Hewgh! Give the word.
(ACT IV, Scene vi, 102-108)

Capel comments that Lear's ravings in this speech

...rise chiefly from the exercises that he as king has been used to, namely, war, and war's appendages then; in some he is listing, engag'd in battles in others, in others training his bowmen and seeing them exercise; it was once thought that falconry (a kingly amusement) had a place in these ravings, and that 'bird' was meant of the hawk; but 'tis better understood of the arrow, which he calls "well-flown" from its being lay'd in the 'clout.'²¹

²¹Horace Howard Furness, The Variorum Shakespeare, King Lear, Seventh Edition (Philadelphia, Lippincott's Press, 1880), p. 276.

Considering the speeches of this scene collectively, they are a bitter satire on the lust, deceit, and hypocrisy that exist in man. To be sure, in his pessimism Lear sees nothing in life except that which is disgusting. Yet, through it all, he has developed an all-embracing pity for his blind and ignorant fellowmen who have their lesson yet to learn.

It will be observed that speeches in this scene, as in so many throughout the play, contain broken lines, interrupted meter, sudden switches from verse to prose. Harley Granville-Barker says, concerning these characteristics,

As to his verse, it runs smoothly or roughly, into rhymed couplet or lyric, imperceptibly into prose and out again,

yet always with such direct dramatic purpose that the question of form seems negligible. From the beginning he has been moving towards this, towards the making of his verse a dramatic language which he will speak uncalculatingly. And this, I suppose, is the great artist's final achievement, to absorb his medium into the purpose of his art. Nor, perhaps, is any art quite satisfying till the medium is so transparent that we are not conscious of it at all, but only of the matter itself. 22

22

Harley Granville-Barker, On Dramatic Method (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1931), p. 107.

Lear's reunion with Cordelia is certainly one of the most touching scenes in all Shakespeare's work. It is a beautifully simple display of the priceless worth of reciprocating love. Through this meeting, Lear is able to recognize man's intended place in the universal scheme of things. He is not god, nor is he beast. He is the magnificent compromise between the two. And to properly function as such, to live in harmony with his fellow man, he must control his desires. In humility Lear says, "You must bear with me. I pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish. (ACT IV, Scene vii, 96-97) Lear does not know where he is, what garments he wears, or how he found shelter, but through Cordelia he does recognize that to which all else is incidental---the need to love unselfishly, and be loved in return. It is this final moral perception that produces in Lear, as A. C. Bradley observes, "that serene

renunciation of the world, with its power and glory and resentments and revenges, which is expressed in the speech,"²³

²³A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, Macmillan and Co., 1937), p. 289.

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison.
 We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage.
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
 And ask of thee forgiveness. So, we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
 Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
 And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,
 In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by the moon.

(ACT V, Scene iii, 9-20)

What feelings does an audience carry with it from the theatre upon hearing Lear's final words?

No, no, no life!
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never!
 Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.
 Do you see this? Look on her! Look! Her lips!
 Look there, look there! (ACT V, Scene iii, 367-373)

It is hard to agree with E. K. Chambers that there is no salvation for Lear and Cordelia.²⁴ Perhaps Bradley is

²⁴E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare, A Survey (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1951), p. 248.

correct in stating that Lear dies with "An unbearable joy," believing that Cordelia lives.²⁵ Harley Granville-Barker

²⁵A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, Macmillan and Co., 1937), p. 291.

describes the moment with, "his heart breaks."²⁶ To say

²⁶Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1953), p. 155.

which is closest to Shakespeare's intention is a matter of personal selection. The manner of handling the lines to agree with the psychological and philosophical evolutions which precede them demanded some experimentations on the part of the author. This process is covered in the findings and conclusions contained in the final chapter.

CHAPTER V

SOME OF THE TEXT'S IMPLICIT DEMANDS UPON THE ACTOR

The text of King Lear makes a number of implicit demands upon the actor which need his consideration far in advance of any attempt to perform the title role. Although many student actors can meet several of these demands with relative ease, there are a few which to be satisfied may require special study or the further development of techniques and skills. It is not the plan of this chapter to indicate the procedures for meeting each of these demands. It is designed primarily to make the student actor aware of the text's demands upon the individual who undertakes the role, so that he may direct his early preparatory work with greater understanding. Some of the text's more important demands are:

Sufficient good health to withstand the unusual expenditure of physical energy (Approximate running time of the play is three hours. The succession of highly emotional scenes can quickly tire the body.);

An ability to make full use of the creative imagination (Lear vacillates from senility to varying manifestations of insanity.);

Flexible use of the voice in order to deliver the more difficult speeches (The storm scenes demand dominance of the voice over any sound effects of the raging storm.);

A knowledge of how to speak poetic verse, in order to project the emotional quality of its rhythms (The emotional impact of the events in King Lear are greatly heightened by a sustained fluidity of speech. The voice must not drop at the end of each line of verse, only at the termination of the complete thought.);

A knowledge of what some dialecticians call "Standard English" speech (that which is used on the London stage) is helpful, because many are accustomed to associating Shakespearean verse with this dialect. Productions of Shakespeare's plays have been done most effectively with use of "Americanese" speech, however;

A knowledge of the techniques of body movement, gesture, and facial expression (Verisimilitude in dramatic action depends importantly on the spontaneous and correct use of these movements.);

The possession of adequate physical characteristics to make the interpretation of the role believable to an audience (This is rarely a serious problem.);

The faculty and willingness to take direction from the producer of the play (The success of the play depends strongly on the organization of the cast under one who can view its progress objectively);

The potential and desire to achieve a close interpretation of the author's intentions and objectives in the play.

The text makes yet another demand upon the actor: Since relatively few stage directions are included in King Lear, it is sometimes necessary for the actor to study the sense of various speeches and their construction, for implications of what they suggest regarding the use of voice and body. Following are some of the instances of such study and the resulting conclusions:

Act I, Scene IV

In this scene Lear has just returned from hunting.

He is hungry, impatient for dinner, and logically hurrying to his rooms in Albany's castle. His speech, "Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go get it ready." is followed immediately by the words, "How now? What art thou?" The implication here is that the disguised Kent has placed himself in Lear's path, to impede the old man's progress in order that he may speak with him. The king's short, abrupt speeches that follow seem to indicate his impatience at the interruption. Restless pacing would perhaps accompany his words until rather irritably he asks, "Dost thou know me, fellow?"

Kent. No, sir, but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.

Lear. What's that?

Kent. Authority. (ACT I, Scene iv, 26-31)

Kent is wise. Nothing he could say would have pleased the old man better. Lear's head rises in pride. He pauses a moment to relish the word...authority! His attitude toward this stranger suddenly becomes most condescending.

Later, in this same scene, the Fool makes his first entrance. Even if he is apparently "all-licensed" in court, it seems correct to assume that the irascible old man would not endure the pointed, cutting jibes of the Fool if delivered in a face-to-face, realistic manner. The symbolic presentation of the Fool during this scene appears quite strongly implied, and when he is regarded as the

personification of Lear's conscience, the scene has most agreeable "correctness" in feeling. Only occasionally should Lear direct his glance toward the Fool, even when his "boy" is capering before him. Sitting hunched and immobile, Lear stares preoccupied with his thoughts, while the Fool reveals them one by one. A hint of the symbolism of the Fool is in the fact that at no time is he observed in direct conversation with anyone but his master.

Act I, Scene V

Here, while the horses are being readied that will carry Lear and his retinue to Regan and Cornwall, once more attention is turned to the old man and his fool, left alone for a moment in the courtyard. The Fool's pathetic attempts to establish a gay mood are shattered by such interjections from the king as, "I did her wrong." (ACT I, Scene v, 23) "So kind a father!" (ACT I, Scene v, 31) "Be my horses ready?" (ACT I, Scene v, 31-32) In this scene the audience is able to behold the marvel of Lear's mind working on two levels. He vacillates from thoughts of his daughters to a consciousness of the immediate action. To project this, it is a requirement that the actor hesitate for an instant before showing an awareness of the Fool's separate questions. A moment later he utters,

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!
(ACT I, Scene v, 43-44)

Such a speech would tend to prompt the king to move away from the Fool---to seek solitude before making his tortured plea. This is broken by the interruption of the gentleman with news that the horses are prepared.

Again, in Act II, Scene IV, there is present an urgency for a move similar to that just considered. Lear, in reacting to Kent's imprisonment in the stocks, would retreat from the immediate group before coming forth with

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
Hysterica passio! Down, thou climbing sorrow,
Thy elements below! (ACT II, Scene vi, 63-65)

As the scene nears its close, the theatre is filled with the chilling words

No, you unnatural hags!
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall--I will do such things--
What they are yet, I know not; but they shall be
The terrors of the earth!
(ACT II, Scene iv, 312-316)

As the broken lines in this speech tell the actor that his delivery must be hesitating, to show the utter bewilderment of the old king, they also imply that a kind of trembling and erratic gesturing should sweep the space before him, until he falls for support to the shoulders of the Fool. "O Fool, I shall go mad." (ACT II, Scene iv, 320) His words are punctuated with the crash of thunder.

Act III, Scene II

Whether or not considerable sound effects are used when Lear is seen exposed to the onslaughts of the storm,

he must display here---through the appropriate use of gesture, body movement, facial and vocal expression---not only Lear's physical punishment, but also the mental torment he is suffering due to the upheaval of the natural relationship between parent and child. (The storm can be considered a symbol of Lear's social world; his relationships with both God and man are ruptured.) From a technical standpoint, the actor should determine what level of voice projection is needed in order that it dominates the sound effects of the storm. Experimentation during rehearsal will accomplish this. Since the major part of the play remains to be done after this scene, the actor cannot afford to over-extend his vocal limits. A knowledge of diaphragmatic control appears essential to the effective execution of such moments as this:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
 You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Strike flat the thick rotundity of the world,
 Crack Nature's molds, all germens spill at once,
 That make ingrateful man! (ACT III, Scene ii, 1-9)

On the heath, before Lear's speech beginning, "Poor naked wretches..." (ACT III, Scene iv, 35) there is specific indication in the stage directions that the Fool enters the hovel. Such action implies the need for a pause of considerable length before the speech is begun. After a sustained look toward the hovel, in contemplation of the Fool's wretchedness, the actor may give added importance to the

beginning of the speech by moving down, even upon the apron of the stage, before he stumbles to his knees, stretches his arms before him and starts the first words of his prayer of compassion.

Act III, Scene VI

It is the third scene of the storm. His wits gone, Lear holds his trial of revenge. The Fool and Edgar can do nothing for the old man now but try to placate him through their feigned participation in his madness. There is some placement needed on stage for the imagined entrances and exits of Goneril and Regan. The text demands that Lear establish this area. And, for maximum verisimilitude in the scene, the other "madmen" on stage, when speaking to the daughters, should direct their lines to the same area. Careful attention to pantomime can make this scene tremendously effective.

Act IV, Scene VI

As in the trial scene, Lear's reference here to various imagined objects, persons, etc., makes the use of precise and exacting pantomime a major consideration. The mention that the king is garlanded with flowers implies that he no longer rages in his madness, but now possesses a more dispassionate manner.

Act IV, Scene VII

During Lear's reunion with Cordelia, he speaks,

Pray, do not mock me.
 I am a very foolish, fond old man,
 Fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less;
 And to deal plainly,
 I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
 (ACT IV, Scene vii, 68-72)

The fact that the line "And to deal plainly" stops in the middle of the regular ten syllable beat may imply that for the moment the king is at a loss for words.

Act V, Scene III

In the final scene of the play, Lear is heard to say,

I have seen the day with my good biting falchion
 I would have made 'em skip, I am old now,
 And these same crosses spoil me. Who are you?
 (ACT V, Scene iii, 331-333)

The final line quoted contains such an abrupt transition in thought that perhaps the grieving Lear's attention has been drawn to Kent by the fact that his old friend has affectionately touched his arm for a moment.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROCEDURE OF DEVELOPING THE CHARACTER

Shakespeare's profound understanding of human behavior is reflected in characters with whom people feel immediate and intimate identification. Through the speeches, magnificently poetic whether in verse or prose, the spectator is able to look upon the inner-most psychological workings of character. Like works of great music, his plays are timeless. They have something important to say to all people of all ages. Their beauty can thrill an audience again and again. These are some of the reasons why performing in any of Shakespeare's plays is one of the most worthwhile challenges an actor is afforded. Perhaps at only a few other times in life does an actor know the deep sense of responsibility that he experiences when handed the text of King Lear and told he is to perform the title role. The inadequacy he feels when standing before this colossus of dramatic literature may prompt him, however, to make an initial error. His immediate urge may be to run quickly to surround himself with the words of the great critics of Shakespeare's writings. But, he has much

to do before gathering the very important help of Bradley, Harley Granville-Barker, Coleridge, and their fellows. By all means let him go first to Shakespeare and the text he has just received. For, each concentrated study of the play itself will send his imagination soaring, and though he is certain to gather his share of misconceptions of the author's intent, if he is to be a true creative artist, he must place the greatest confidence in the validity of those early impressions which Shakespeare's own words evoke in the imagination. The actor should achieve his own concepts of the character by study of the play alone (relating its action to his own experience and observations in life), and then qualify them by reference to the sources of literary criticism. The reasons why his work cannot be a mixture of others' concepts is, of course, completely obvious. The actor is a creative artist and the core of his work should be his own.

When one reads the play, he automatically forms images of what he reads. These images are related in some way, however large or small, to various events in the reader's past life, which either he experienced personally, or which he was able to observe in the circumstances or actions of someone else. When given a part, the actor may come across actions in the character to which none of his personal experiences are a strong parallel. Neither, perhaps, has he observed such incidents in the life of another.

If this is so, or the recalled image is blurred with time, he will certainly have difficulty approaching the role assigned. There is a solution. He must begin immediately to look about him. For instance, if he is to perform the role of King Lear, he may find it necessary to observe and talk to one who is impetuous, or excessively authoritative, or unduly proud, or mentally infirm, etc. In adapting the results of such study, however, there should be no exact copy of the characteristics of the person observed. If this mistake is made, the impetuosity is not Lear's impetuosity, the pride is not Lear's pride, the mental infirmity is not Lear's mental infirmity. What the actor should try to comprehend in the people he watches and speaks with is not their mannerisms or visible peculiarities, but that which is under the surface and invisible---their thinking and feeling processes. Both these borrowed concepts and those personal to the actor are then, in a sense, blended and mixed with the particular and individual circumstances of Lear's life, both past and present. Through this approach, the externals of a character (gestures, body-movements, facial and vocal expressions, etc.) are not hung on the personality, but come about as the natural outward manifestations of the internal intellectual and emotional processes which the actor has made part of King Lear, specifically, and no other individual. This is the best way the writer knows to describe the somewhat abstract procedure by which he creates a character.

If the past and present circumstances in Lear's life are vital to the process of building the character, the actor must know what these circumstances are. He must know what kind of a man Lear is. As contained in chapter one, some knowledge of the age in which the character lives is helpful to an understanding of him. And, the important study of what literary men have observed about this man has been mentioned. From the most important source of all, the text, the actor can learn in three ways what kind of a man Lear is: by observing what Lear does, what Lear says, and what other characters in the play say (in truth) about Lear.

In the first scene, Lear's disownment in an instant of his youngest daughter tells something of his character by what he does. His extreme pride of authority is evidenced by what he says: "Peace, Kent! Come not between the dragon and his wrath." (ACT I, Scene i, 29-30) And even more is learned of him by what others say about him.

Goneril declares,

You see how full of changes he is. The observation we have made of it hath not been little. He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

(ACT I, Scene i, 317-321)

Regan returns, "'Tis the infirmity of his age; Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself." (ACT I, Scene i, 322-323)

and more,

The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look from his age to receive, not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithall the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

(ACT I, Scene i, 324-328)

This process of examining the text for its indications of what Lear does, what he says, and what others say about him is recommended highly to any actor who performs the role. This writer found it helpful because it is an exacting manner of considering all that the text tells about this man. What an individual feels is lacking in the portraiture of Lear contained in the previous chapters would certainly be provided from such a study.

What has been said thus far, then, is hoped to be an adequate explanation of how this writer approached the title role in King Lear. The text was studied, the literary critics' views were sought. People were observed. For help in observing senility and insanity, a trip to the mental institution in Phoenix was planned, but could not be carried out. However, the previously mentioned conversation with Dr. A. O. Simley was of important help in understanding senile-dementia. Great trust had to be placed in recalling previous observation of cases in mental hospitals. The rest proved to be the everyday trial-and-error procedure of the rehearsal period---adapting to the other actors, the stage, the props, the costumes, and the makeup.

From the original concept of the man which resulted from the study contained in the foregoing chapters, there was little change required in either rehearsal or performance. This surprised the writer, but perhaps its happening offers some proof of the value of an organized study when approaching an acting chore of the complexity of King Lear. The decisions reached with the director, Peter R. Marroney, regarding the character of Lear were very much in keeping with the results of my previous study. No differences of view are noteworthy. And again, conversations in advance of rehearsals with the literary advisor to the production, Dr. Christian H. Kiefer, revealed an unusually agreeable meeting of minds on general and specific views of the play and the title role.

Perhaps some would expect that an actor would have a few startling things to say about how the theories derived from study and research demanded considerable adjustment when placed before a matter-of-fact audience. Actually, they survived the test with more than usual ease. In reference to the closing scene of the play, this writer first played the death scene in the general light of Harley Granville-Barker's "his heart breaks." In later performances, it was given more of Bradley's "an unbearable joy." Any recognizable difference between the two from the standpoint of physical drama proved to be quite subtle by the time it passed from the stage to the audience. The general observation learned from spectators by this writer was that the old man dies in peaceful

resignation---with the exaltation of spirit that comes from knowledge of life's eternal truths and from a sense of final redemption through pain and sacrifice.

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