EVERY INCH A QUEEN: RECKONING WITH MISOGYNY/RECLAIMING THE FEMININE IN SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR*

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a production concept for Shakespeare's King Lear, to be adapted and directed by Alistair Newton as a part of the 35th Anniversary of Canadian Stage's Shakespeare in High Park presentations. The production employs a conceptual framework which seeks to interrogate the misogyny inherent in the play by recasting the king as a queen, inspired by the final days of queen Elizabeth I. Shakespeare's play is put into its historical context, the original source material that inspired its writing is examined, and an interrogation of Elizabethan attitudes towards gender is undertaken. This leads to the description of a directorial concept which addresses the play's problematic aspects, and employs the conceptual strategies of cross-gender casting, drag and gender play, and a queer reading of two of the central characters as a method of challenge and reinterpretation. The design for the physical production is then described in some detail.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will expound upon my forthcoming production of *King Lear* which is to be staged as a part of the 35th Anniversary Presentation of Canadian Stage's Shakespeare in High Park[1]. With *Lear*, Shakespeare presents a folkloric vision of ancient Britain as a thinly veiled version of 1606, the year in which it is widely held that he wrote the play (Shapiro, 2015). Following the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, James I began a lengthy and politically complex program which would eventually see the unification of the crowns of Scotland and England, and with *Lear*, Shakespeare confronts his audience with a narrative built on the division of land at a time of unification. Whereas Shakespeare employs a setting of ancient Britain to speak to 1606 by littering his text with anachronisms as a strategy to draw parallels to contemporary politics, — as professor Maynard Mack asserts, "the primitivism … and the folk-tale cast … are offset continually by vivid contemporaneous Elizabethanism … No member of Shakespeare's original audience … could doubt for a moment that the play was about a world with which he was deeply and centrally engaged" (Mack, 1965) — my production employs a similar dramaturgical strategy by using the early 1600s as a lens to speak to 2017.

In order to be true to the parabolic nature of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, the proposed production opens with the image of a contemporary woman who disassociates into the world of 1603 as a kind of death-bed fever-dream inspired by the final days of Elizabeth I. Through this conceptual lens, "Queen" Lear's journey becomes one of a monarch who rules in a man's world by taking on the hegemonic masculinity of a man, abdicates maternal expectations — as Mabou Mines Artistic Director Lee Breuer stated about his cross-gender production of *Lear*, "[Lear] is a person who is more a king than a father. Or more a queen than a mother" (Brater, 2016) —, and is able, finally, to reconnect with her femininity. The accumulated effect of this conceptual framework presents the audience with a vision of King Lear which challenges the play's misogyny while maintaining Shakespeare's original contemporary-analog structure, not only serving as a critique of patriarchal hegemony, but also communicating, to a contemporary audience, the play's thematic exploration of hubris, radical evil, nihilism, and the grace of redemption. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare reveals a society with a patriarchy so totalizing that even a woman who has achieved absolute power within it can only rule as a subject of its hegemony. This interpretation of *King Lear* explores, as director and author Tina Packer articulates about Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in her book *Women of Will*, a "story of what happens

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[1] The website of the Canadian Stage Company describes Shakespeare in High Park, which is staged annually between Canada Day and Labour Day in an outdoor Amphitheatre in Toronto's High Park, as "Your destination for decidedly untraditional Shakespeare under the stars, all summer long".

when a powerful woman loses herself and plays the patriarchal game—it ends in fascism" (Packer, 2015).

After providing a detailed plot summary which also points out key edits to the original text undertaken in order to yield a ninety minutes running time — which is mandated by the parameters of Shakespeare in High Park —, the play is situated in its historical context, and both the original source material as well as Shakespeare's points of inspiration are described. With a historical context established, the paper moves to an interrogation of the misogyny and attitudes to gender present both in Shakespeare's play, and in the socio-cultural sphere that he was creating within. With a historical and socio-cultural investigation complete, the paper concludes by ultimately describing the conceptual and scenographic strategies that the production will enact in order to communicate the directorial intent to a contemporary audience — such as the changing of two character's genders and the introduction of queerness into the play as an agent of complication and transgression.

Plot Summary

In order to facilitate a discussion of my proposed production, it is necessary to provide a summary of Shakespeare's play which also points to the alterations in the edit — which I created in consultation with director and playwright Peter Hinton — to allow for the ninety-minute running time of the Shakespeare in High Park presentations; this edit also informs the conceptual approach to the production which is discussed later in this paper.

A prologue has been added that shows a woman, dressed in a nightshirt, seated on a throne on a bare stage. She is attended by a cross-dressed fool, and appears in a catatonic state, staring blankly. The ensemble enter, and ceremoniously dress the woman into a costume reminiscent of Elizabeth I — farthingale, petticoat, bum-roll, overskirt, bodice, ruff. During the dressing, we hear a soundscape of court gossip, out of which rises the voices of the widowed Countess of Kent (the character being gender-inverted for this production) and the Earl of Gloucester. The woman, now fully dressed, rises from the throne and enters into the play as "Queen" Lear.

The Queen gathers together her court to divide her kingdom amongst her two sons-in-law, the Dukes of Albany (husband of her eldest daughter Goneril) and Cornwall (husband to her middle child Regan), as well as to marry off her youngest, favoured daughter Cordelia to one of two suitors, the Duke of Burgundy or the King of France. Lear proclaims that she will maintain the title of queen, as well as a train of 100 knights, and she intends to split her time between the palaces of Goneril and Regan. The Queen demands her daughters compete to

see who can best express their love for her, with the reward of more favourable shares of her kingdom. Goneril and Regan each make protestations of love, but when Cordelia is asked to speak, she refuses, and is disowned by her mother, then married-off to the King of France after being rejected by the Duke of Burgundy. Kent, who attempts to intercede on Cordelia's behalf, is exiled under sentence of death by Lear, and Goneril and Regan agree to plot together to deal with their mother's erratic behaviour.

Meanwhile, the Duke of Gloucester's bastard son Edmund conspires to overthrow his legitimate elder brother Edgar and seize their father's land. Edmund forges a letter from Edgar which expresses a wish to murder his father, and the paranoid and romantic Gloucester is easily taken-in by the scheme. Edmund then tells his brother that their father is in a rage against Edgar and convinces his brother to hide in Edmund's room until Edmund can resolve the issue.

Queen Lear departs to visit her daughter Goneril, with her rowdy knights in tow.

To escape her banishment and continue to support her queen, the Countess of Kent takes on the disguise of Caius, a male servant, and pledges her service to the Queen when they meet on the road to Goneril and Albany's palace.

Weeks later at Goneril and Albany's palace, Goneril is aghast at the behaviour of her mother's train, and she and the Queen argue about the necessity of maintaining so many followers. Lear's anger explodes and she curses her daughter's womb with sterility, then departs Goneril's house with her retinue, bound for Regan and Cornwall's palace where she hopes to find more sympathy.

Goneril sends her steward Oswald to her sister Regan with a letter explaining their mother is en route to Regan's house, and advises her sister that she should not be at home when the Queen arrives, so Regan and her husband depart for Gloucester's palace.

Lear sends the disguised Kent ahead to Regan with a letter explaining Goneril's mistreatment of their mother, and asking for shelter. However, Goneril's letter reaches Regan first.

Back at Gloucester's palace, Edmund betrays his brother's whereabouts to their father (unbeknownst to Edgar), then stages a fake duel, sends Edgar away, and claims to Cornwall and Regan that he has been wounded by the traitor Edgar. Gloucester and Cornwall promise to use their combined influence to capture Edgar and put him to death. Edmund then pledges fealty to Cornwall.

Oswald and Kent encounter each other before Gloucester's palace, an argument ensues, they fight, and Cornwall enters and orders Kent be put in the stocks as punishment for attacking Oswald.

Meanwhile, to escape his pursuers, Edgar takes on the disguise of a serving man in Cornwall's employ[2].

Lear comes upon Kent, and demands to know who has stocked her servant. An argument rages between Lear and her two daughters regarding the size of the queen's attendant knights, and Regan and Goneril demand Lear must dissolve her train and go to live with Regan. A mighty storm arises, and in a wild rage, Lear departs into it, the gates of the palace are then barred behind her.

Lear, the Fool and Kent stumble through the storm across a heath and Kent begs the queen to take shelter in a hovel on Gloucester's land.

Gloucester, who has learned that the civil war between Cornwall and Albany has intensified, tells Edmund that he has received a letter from Cordelia informing him of an impending invasion by France which seeks to restore Lear to the throne. Edmund hatches a plan to accuse his father of being a traitor by telling Cornwall that Gloucester is a spy for France.

Before the hovel, the Queen prays for the poor in her kingdom, finding — for the first time — empathy for them, after realizing the toll that her tyrannous rule had inflicted upon her subjects. Gloucester appears to inform Kent that Goneril and Regan seek the Queen's death and that his own son seeks his. Finally Gloucester, the Fool and Kent are able to coax the queen into the hovel where they take shelter from the storm.

Edmund enacts his plan by providing Cornwall with proof of Gloucester's foreknowledge of a French invasion. Cornwall promises to have Gloucester killed and install Edmund as the new Earl of Gloucester.

Inside the hovel, Gloucester tells Kent to lead the mad Queen to Dover where Cordelia's armies will land.

Cornwall tells Goneril to bring word of Gloucester's treachery and the French army's imminent landing to her husband Albany. Oswald appears and informs Cornwall and Regan that Lear is bound for Dover to meet the French army, and Goneril and Oswald depart. Regan and Cornwall — along with Edgar, disguised as their servant — find Gloucester, arrest him, interrogate him, and torture him by gouging out his eyes. Edgar attempts to stop them, but is wounded in a fight with Cornwall. Cornwall, who is also wounded in the skirmish, is killed by Regan and Edgar is powerless — or unwilling — to pursue her.

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[2] This edit cuts the sub-plot of Poor Tom entirely, both for reasons of length and to heighten the agency of Edgar. In this edit, by disguising himself as a servant of Cornwall, he is able to remain within the world, rather than fleeing from it. In this way, Edgar's disguise becomes a plan of *action*, rather than one of *reaction,* as in the original text.

Regan departs, and Edgar approaches the blind Gloucester, maintaining his disguise. He frees his father from his bondage, and agrees to lead him to Dover where Gloucester can end his life by jumping from the cliffs.

Oswald informs Goneril that Albany has suffered a crisis of conscience when he learned that the French invasion force had landed on British soil. Goneril sends Edmund to rally Cornwall's armies, confronts Albany — who tells her that her sister has murdered Cornwall and seized control of his armies — and then shames her husband into committing his armies to defending Britain against the French invasion.

Oswald arrives to tell Regan that Albany's armies are mobilized for the oncoming war with France. Regan reveals her romantic intentions with Edmund, and orders Oswald to tell Goneril that Edmund is better suited for herself than her sister. Regan then orders Oswald to kill Gloucester if he should happen upon him.

Edgar leads his blind father to the cliffs of Dover and lets him think he has jumped, and somehow survived. Lear enters, mad and delusional, comforts the blind Gloucester, and then departs. Oswald comes upon Edgar and his father and proclaims his intention to kill Gloucester. Edgar intercedes and kills Oswald. Oswald begs that the letter he carries from Goneril to Edmund be delivered, but Edgar reads it instead. The letter asks Edmund to murder Albany and take Goneril as his wife.

The mad Lear is found by Cordelia's troops and she sleeps in the French camp. When she awakes, she is terrified that Cordelia will reject her for her cruelty, but Cordelia forgives her mother.

In the British camp, Edmund and Regan await the arrival of Oswald with news of Goneril and Albany. Regan makes a play for Edmund, and Goneril and Albany arrive to plan their strategy for the oncoming battle. As the love triangle between the sisters and Edmund intensifies, Edgar appears, still disguised, and gives Oswald's letter to Albany which proves Goneril and Edmund's treachery, then asks Albany to read it before the battle. The letter promises that a champion will appear at the sound of a trumpet to right the wrongs that the letter revealed.

Edmund promises to stop Albany from showing any mercy to Lear and Cordelia, as he debates which sister he should choose.

A battle takes place between the French and British armies; Edgar lays his father by a tree, who then dies. Lear and Cordelia are captured by the British forces, and the French army is overthrown.

In the triumphant British camp, Cordelia rages against her captors, but her mother tells her to be calm; they will be together in prison, talk of old times, and make amends. Edmund secretly orders that Cordelia be hanged in prison. Albany orders Edmund be arrested for

treason, and sounds a trumpet to summon his champion. Regan dies after being poisoned by Goneril, and Edgar appears, revealing his disguise and mortally wounds his brother in a duel. Albany stands up to his wife, who flees, then commits suicide by stabbing herself. Over Edmund's dying body, Edgar reveals that their father died after Edgar revealed his disguise to him. Edmund has a deathbed change-of-heart and reveals that he has ordered that Cordelia be hanged. Edgar rushes to stop the jailor from carrying out the order but he is too late. Lear appears carrying the body of Cordelia. Kent reappears, her disguise discarded, and tells the Queen of her deception. In the sublimity of her grief, the queen dies over her daughter's body. Albany renounces his power and declares that Edgar and Kent should rule in his place. Kent rejects the offer and the crown falls to Edgar.

In an epilogue, the corpses of the slain rise from the stage (save for Lear) and it is revealed that the woman from the prologue was, in fact, being dressed for her funeral. The ensemble enact a funeral procession, which includes the display of the queen's effigy dressed in her farthingale, petticoat, overskirt and bodice according to Elizabethan tradition (figs. i,ii,iii,iv.).

HISTORY

Historical Context

In his recent book *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*, professor James Shapiro offers a portrait of a Shakespeare who would, in that single year, produce three of his most mature tragedies, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. By now a man of forty two — and the eldest member of his company, the King's Men, who had recently received the mandate of the newly enthroned James I following the death of Elizabeth I, the royal patron of his previous company the Chamberlain's Men —, the aging playwright had entered a brief fallow period in terms of his publishing output. This period represented the first time in the playwright's career where "for the first time since his writings began to be published in 1593, not even a poem or a reissue of an earlier play appeared in print" (Shapiro, 2015). 1606 also saw the first raising of the Union Jack as the flag of Great Britain, the departure of ships which would found the first British colony at Jamestown Virginia, and a recrudescence of plague which rivalled the horrors of the outbreak of 1603 that lead to the shuttering of London's playhouses; eventually, more than thirty thousand Londoners would die, with "nearly a third of the population [having] been struck" before the winter months finally slowed the infection rate (Shapiro, 2015). Also backgrounding Shakespeare's work in 1606 was the foiling the previous year of the Gunpowder Plot, which saw Catholic terrorists attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament. This political uncertainty was coupled with James I's constant attempts to unify his two crowns of Scotland

and England, an ambition which came to obsess the monarch and, by extension, “his subjects in the early years of his reign” (Shapiro, 2015). Into a capital ravaged by plague and contained of a traumatized populace, Shakespeare chose, for his next dramatic work, to renovate the plot of an earlier hit play by the rival Queen’s Men. In an age of religious conflict — which had been simmering since the reign of the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I and had nearly exploded with the plotters’ power-kegs on the 5th of November, 1605 —, Shakespeare turned to the anonymous play *King Leir.* This version of the Lear story, like Shakespeare’s renovation, takes as its original source material the invented myths of ancient Britain, and both plays turn on plots which concern the disillusionment of a kingdom, the hubris of leaders, and the dangers of absolutist beliefs.

Kings Leir and Lear

The Stationer’s Registry records the publishing on May 8th, 1605 of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters,* and although the author of the work remains lost to us, this work is “presumably the same as the old play of ‘King leare’ staged twice by the Queen’s and Earl Sussex’s Men in April 1594” which was recorded in the Registry under the title *Leire Kinge of England and his Three Daughters* on May, 14, 1594 (Foakes, 2013). According to James Shapiro, Shakespeare purchased a copy of *King Leir* in 1605 — the play script having been one of several that were sold-off in 1594 “by the cash-poor Queen’s Men” to a London publisher after the company was supplanted by Shakespeare and the Chamberlain’s Men as “England’s premiere company” —, though he may have also attended a performance given by the Queen’s Men of the play at the Rose Theatre in Southwark in April of 1594 (Shapiro, 2015). Shapiro speculates that Shakespeare may even have performed in the Queen’s Men production of *Leir* when the company toured through Stratford-Upon-Avon in the late 1580s — though Shapiro is quick to acknowledge that the “absence of any information about what Shakespeare was doing in his early twenties” renders this pure historical guess-work. Nevertheless, Shapiro asserts that “*King Lear* draws so extensively from *King Leir* that Shakespeare’s indebtedness couldn’t have come solely from what he recalled by acting in it or seeing it staged years earlier” and he describes Shakespeare’s work with the earlier play as “a gut renovation”, with the goal of “preserving the frame, salvaging bits and pieces, [and] transposing outmoded features in innovative ways” (Shapiro, 2015). All that being said, however, as professor Jeffrey Kahan points out, given “our inability to know exactly when Shakespeare wrote these plays, we cannot say that all [the parallels between *Leir* and *Lear*] mean Shakespeare borrowed from *King Leir*”,

and that it is even “possible that the anonymous author of *King Leir …* borrowed from Shakespeare” (Kahan, 2008).

Regardless of the order in which the two plays of King Lear were written — and who took influence from whom —, the similarities between the two works are striking. Both works concern the story of a king who divides his kingdom — as dowries — between his three daughters, though in the case of *Leir*, each daughter is to be married off to a suitor, whereas in Shakespeare’s version, Goneril and Regan are already wed to the Dukes of Albany (Cambria in *Leir*) and Cornwall, and it is only Cordelia who is subject to the “amorous sojourns” (Act 1, scene 1) of the Duke of Burgundy and King of France (Kahan, 2008). Another difference between the anonymous *Leir* and Shakespeare’s *Lear* relates to the story-arc of his youngest daughter, called “Cordella” in the former, and “Cordelia” in the latter. In *Leir*, Gonoril and Regan “plan to out-vie [Cordella] in protestations, with the hope that she will be cheated out of a husband”, and “as in Shakespeare’s play, Cordella fails the test, but unlike in Shakespeare’s play, she is thrust-out-of-doors, penniless and friendless” — not unlike Kent’s dramatic trajectory in *Lear* — whereas her older sisters are wed to Cornwall and Cambria (Kahan, 2008). *Leir* also does not contain the Gloucester sub-plot[3], and aspects of Edmund’s role are taken on by a messenger character — who is actually more akin to Shakespeare’s construction of Goneril’s steward Oswald than Edmund — and the role of the loyal servant to Lear is exemplified by Perillus in *Leir* (Kahan, 2008) as opposed to Kent in *Lear*. The primary difference between the plays is that, in place of Shakespeare’s dramatic landscape with its savage Jacobean ending, *Leir* ends happily. In *Leir,* Perillus and the king travel to France disguised as peasants, reunite with the banished Cordella — who is now married to the King of France, as in *Lear* — raise an invasion force, and return to Britain to vanquish the armies of Cornwall and Cambria (Kahan, 2008).

Though questions of provenance remain to be definitively answered, the anonymous Queen’s Men’s play *King Leir* and Shakespeare’s *King Lear* are based on the same mythos, and we will now explore the root-myths that informed the creation of both works.

The Mythos of Lear

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[3] As Harold Bloom points out, “*King Lear* is unique among the tragedies in having a fully developed subplot, the first in the plays since *Henry IV*” (Bloom, 1998), and it is also unique in its roots in the comic tradition of the Greeks, what Northrop Frye calls an, “ironic [version] of stock comic themes, Gloucester’s story being the regular comedy theme of the gullible *senex* swindled by a clever and unprincipled son.” (Frye, 1957)

Regardless of which play of the story of the mad king and his three daughters influenced which, the mythos which informs the story can be traced to several sources of inspiration. As the scholar Northrop Frye explains, the Lear story finds its origin in an invented mythic history of Ancient Britain. According to Frye,

> A Welsh priest living in the twelfth century, called Geoffrey of Monmouth, concocted a fictional history of early Britain modelled on Virgil, and according to this, Britain was settled by Trojan refugees led by one Brutus, after whom Britain was named. There follows a long chronicle of kings and their adventures, mostly, so far as we can see, gathered out of Welsh legend and historical reminiscence. This is where the story of Lear and his three daughters came from: Lear was supposed to have lived somewhere around the seventh or eight century before Christ (Frye, 1986).

James Shapiro speculates that Shakespeare may have first encountered the Lear myth "in his well-worn copy of Holinshod's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland"* or in any of either "Edmund Spencer's brief account of it in *The Faerie Queene" , "Mirror for Magistrates",* or, *Albion's England*" (Shapiro, 2015). Shakespeare did much to assert what originality his version of the story did contain when the quarto version of *King Lear* was published in 1608, as the word "HIS" is added to the title page in capital letters, as well as denotation of the subplot — Shakespeare's invention[4] — making the full title *M. William Shakespeare: HIS True Chronicle History of the life and death of King LEAR and his three daughters. With the unfortunate life of Edgar, son and heir to the Earl of Gloucester, and his sullen and assumed humour of Tom of Bedlam*; the "HIS" being purposefully capitalized for publication (Shapiro, 2015). While the question of the provenance of Shakespeare's *King Lear* may never be conclusively settled, the subsequent history of the play, especially under the reign of Charles II, is well known, and worth discussing.

Love Conquer All: Nahum Tate's Revision

Though a hit on the stages of Jacobean England — whose theatrical tradition, exemplified by plays such as John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612-13), Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) and Shakespeare's own *Macbeth* (1606), spun bloody tales of revenge, murder, and brutality —, the public taste (and that of the monarch) had changed considerably by the time Charles II became king in 1649. King Charles' taste, forged

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[4] Though it was Shakespeare's innovation to add the subplot to his version of the Lear story, the plot itself was very likely taken from Philip Sidney's *Arcadia,* a 1590 Romance in prose which contains "the striking image of a blind and suicidal old man being lead to the edge of a cliff by his good son, both of whom appear 'weather beaten' and in rags" (Shapiro); this image bearing very specific resemblance to Gloucester and Edgar's journey to the cliff's of Dover in Act 4 of Shakespeare's play.

by his time spent in exile in France, was heavily influenced by the "rather restrictive Neoclassical principles" of "The Three Unities" (Kahan, 2008). These Aristotelian theatrical dictums — so in contradiction to Shakespeare's less realistic Elizabethan theatrical universe — took the form of the Unity of Action, which states that "the strong moral message of tragedy should not be enervated by comedy", the Unity of Place, that mandated "the play's action was to be limited to a single location", and, perhaps most antithetical to Shakespeare's plays, the Unity of Time, which prescribed that "the events dramatized were not to exceed a time span of twenty four hours" (Kahan, 2008). In order to appease the French tastes of the king, several popular works from the recent past were re-worked to better reflect the Unities. The most famous of these adaptors was the Irishman — and future English Poet Laureate — Nahum Tate. Tate's 1681 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Lear* sought to correct not only the play's wildly theatrical treatment of action, time, and place, but also to bring the play's brutal violence and nihilistic bleakness into line with contemporary sensibilities. Tate's primary alteration was to cut Shakespeare's especially brutal fifth act, and to produce an ending where Cordelia and Lear survive, and restoration is achieved. As Jeffrey Kahan reports, "anyone could strew the stage, as Shakespeare had, with corpses — a sight, Tate feared, which would only elicit laughter, or what he called 'unseasonable Jests'. It took a real artist to find a way to retain fear and pity while reassuring the audience that good always triumphs over evil" (Kahan, 2008). Tate makes use of Shakespeare's play to put forward moralistic statements far less complex than those of his source material. For example, in Tate's revision, Edmund not only plays Regan and Goneril against each other, he also seeks (unsuccessfully) to bed Cordelia, and the play ends with Regan and Goneril poisoning one another (Goneril's suicide being deemed too gruesome for Tate's sensibilities), and after Edmund has been vanquished by Edgar, "Albany then turns over the kingdom to Lear, who then turns it over to Edgar, on the condition that he marry Cordelia" (Kahan, 2008). The tidy moral lesson of the Edmund story (lechers will be punished and socially-sanctioned love will win out) is accompanied by a happy ending for Lear, Kent and Gloucester, who "then pack up for some nice retirement villa, leaving the young couple to rule in peace" (Kahan, 2008). This sanitized, less morally complex version of the play — of which Samuel Johnson wrote a defence by way of an introduction to the published version saying of Tate's tinkering, that "I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue (Kahan, 2008) — remained the primary way audiences encountered the play "until well into the nineteenth century", even as late as 1860 (Foakes, 2013). Tate's version maintained a presence on the world stage in spite of the efforts of actor William Charles Macready, who railed against Tate's gutless version, chastising the

audience of an 1826 production staring Edwin Forrest for "applauding all the disgusting trash of Tate's" (Kahan, 2008). Due in part to Macready's own very vocal condemnation of Tate's revision, and inspired by a presentation of a partially restored version of *Lear* in 1768 by playwright George Colman, as well as an 1823 production by Edmund Kean that restored Shakespeare fifth act, significant public interest had grown to warrant a production of Shakespeare's original version of *King Lear.* This lead to the presentation — by Macready — of a fully restored version of Shakespeare *Lear* at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in 1838 (Kahan, 2008).

GENRE

On Irony and the Grotesque

Now that we have established a production history and situated *King Lear* within a historical context, we may turn to an investigation on the genre of the play, as we move towards establishing a conceptual framework though which the Shakespeare in High Park production will be staged. This section will attempt to situate *King Lear* inside a coherent literary genre by examining the concepts and precepts of tragedy and the grotesque.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye posits a system for the defining of literary genre, and he makes use of *King Lear* as a way to expound on a form of tragedy whose extreme thematic darkness places it at the ironic edges of satire. Frye labels this dramatic form the "'comedy of the grotesque'", calling it an, "ironic parody of the tragic situation" (Frye, 1957). "The chief distinction between irony and satire [as opposed to satirical comedy]", Frye explains, "is that satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (Frye, 1957). "Grotesque" is a term also frequently invoked by scholar Jan Kott in his essay *'King Lear', or Endgame,* in which he finds in Shakespeare's play, a dramatic, conceptual, and philosophic precedent for the existential universe of Samuel Beckett. Drawing a distinction between tragedy and the grotesque, Kott states that, "tragedy is an appraisal of human fate, a measure of the absolute" whereas "the grotesque is a criticism of the absolute in the name of frail human experience. That is why tragedy brings *catharsis,* while the grotesque offers no consolation whatsoever" (Kott, 1965). W H Auden seems to agree with Kott in theory, but disagrees when it comes to the nature of the factors of which man is at the mercy. While never attaching the term "grotesque" to the play, Auden places the play outside the traditions of tragedy as defined by the Greeks, by way of pointing to one important distinction between Greek tragedy and those of Shakespeare. In the

former, Auden explains, “the hero is a fated victim” as opposed to the Shakespearian model where — as in Kott’s promulgation — characters “are not victims of fate but of their own passion” (Auden, 2000). Kott’s view of the grotesquery of Lear’s dramaturgy certainly also allows for the folly to be man’s own. Speaking to the relentless drive towards *Lear’s* tragic outcome, Kott states that, “the tragic and the grotesque worlds are closed, and there is no escape from them” (Kott, 1965). Furthering the distinction between the tragic and the grotesque, Kott explains that, “in the tragic world this compulsory situation has been imposed by the Gods, Fate” (Kott, 1965) whereas the grotesque world of *Lear* is ostensibly godless. The notion of fate and cosmology is a fascinating one in *Lear*, for though the play contains more talk of the supernatural dimension than any of Shakespeare’s other plays, the world of *King Lear* is ultimately a godless one where nothing supernatural actually occurs on stage; the play, contains rather, what Harold Bloom calls “a cosmos cantered upon Lear’s needy greatness” (Bloom, 1998). The controlling influence of theistic gods are continually spoken of throughout the play, most directly by Gloucester. Gloucester expresses belief in the potential that “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us” (Act 1, scene 2), and later laments the futility of life under a celestial dictatorship whose relationship to mankind is one of “flies to wanton boys” (Act 4, scene 1); this is something Edmund easily dismisses, once by pledging his allegiance to nature, and later by branding his father’s belief in astrology “the excellent foppery of the world (Act 1, scene 2). Theistic gods are also invoked in the play through Lear’s calling on the goddess of nature to strike his daughter’s womb barren (Act 1, scene 4), and the king is continually imploring various deities to curse his enemies — or defend him against them — such as his plea “If you do love old men, if your sweet sway / Allow obedience, if yourselves are old, / Make it your cause; send down, and take my part!” (Act 2, scene 4). Seemingly also in agreement with Frye, Kott employs the metaphor of holy fools and men in holy orders to encapsulate *Lear’s* paradoxically godlessly-polytheistic cosmology, and to further his claim that *Lear’s* genre lies outside the boundaries of traditional Greek Tragedy:

> The dispute about the tragic and grotesque interpretation of human fate reflects the everlasting conflict of two philosophies and two ways of thinking; of two opposing attitudes defined by Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski as the irreconcilable antagonism between the priest and the clown. Between tragedy and grotesque there is the same conflict for and against such notions as eschatology, belief in the absolute, hope for the ultimate solution of the contradiction between moral order and everyday practice. Tragedy is the theatre of priests, grotesque is the theatre of clowns (Kott 1965).

In his defence of Shakespeare against the barbs of a dismissive Leo Tolstoy, George Orwell also speaks to the godless-grotesquery of *Lear,* and also places it outside the discourse

of traditional/cathartic Greek tragedy. "It is doubtful", Orwell contends, "whether the sense of tragedy is compatible with belief in God: at any rate, it is not compatible with disbelief in human dignity and with the kind of 'moral demand' which feels cheated when virtue fails to triumph" (Orwell, 2008). The clear-eyed expression of this "belief in human dignity" is precisely the value of Shakespeare's grotesque "militant irony", and the very thing that escaped both Tate and Johnson in their condemnation of the play's fifth act. As Orwell points out, the very extremity of the debasement and brutalizing horror to which Shakespeare subjects his characters — much like the hapless, put-upon tramps and wretched invalids of Beckett — is what provides the play its great moral worth. Shakespeare's *Lear* and Beckett's oeuvre both concern a world in which, "man is nobler than the forces which destroy him" (Orwell, 2008).

GENDER AND MISOGYNY

Women's Weapons: The Gendered World of King Lear

In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom asks, "are Shakespeare's perspectives in *Lear* incurably male?" (Bloom, 1998). Reckoning with this question — and interrogating the misogyny that is expressed in the play — will provide a foundation on which to build a directorial concept which seeks to cure Bloom's hypothetically incurable hegemonic "maleness".

Though written in the early days of James I's rule, *Lear* springs very much from an Elizabethan world view, which saw "gender as a biological binary made up of direct opposites and complements" with Shakespeare's theatre reflecting the "polarized view of gender and social politics of the time (Power, 2016). In his recent biography of Elizabeth I's final years, the historian John Guy dispels the claims made by many of the queen's other biographers that, "Elizabeth was accorded the status of an honorary man by virtue of her royal rank, [and] that monarchy as an institution is androgynous", asserting that "England in the sixteenth century was a highly patriarchal society in which women, including royal ones, were viewed as subordinate to men" (Guy, 2016). Speaking to the highly gendered, misogynistic, and officially patriarchal society of Shakespeare's time, Guy summates that even for a woman who had achieved supreme power within it, "none of Elizabeth's contemporaries, other than a few Italian intellectuals … believed that a woman's high rank could trump her gender" (Guy, 2016).

In the case of *King Lear*, the text contains many examples of overt misogyny, and highly gendered language. Lear himself equates the display of emotions — commonly associated with

femininity — with weakness. Lear refers to tears as “women's weapons” and commands himself not to weep, imploring the gods instead to touch him “with noble anger” (Act 2, scene 4). Later, the king goes so far as to say that he would have his heart “break into a hundred thousand flaws / Or ere I'll weep” (Act 2, scene 4). Another potent example comes later in the play where Lear — after previously cursing his daughter’s womb with infertility — refers to his daughters as “centaurs” and invokes an image of the infernal to describe the vagina, raging that “to the girdle does god inherit, beneath is all the devil’s: / there's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit, / burning, scalding, stench, consumption!” (Act 4, scene 4).

The female characters are also not immune to a simplistic view of the gender binary. This is most openly illustrated by Goneril who — though allowing herself the agency to “take the thing she begs” (Act 1, scene 4) — is also, hypocritically, expressly subscribed to a rigid, and highly gendered social view[5]. This world view is shown in her chastising of her husband as a “milk livered man”, mocking his inaction with the shaming and sarcastic scold, “France spreads his banners in our noiseless land; / Whiles thou, a moral fool, sit'st still, and criest / 'Alack, why does he so?’” (Act 4, scene 2). Albany’s response to his wife’s insult also reveals the nature of *Lear’s* gendered world. Threatening violence, Albany retorts that “Were't my fitness / To let these hands obey my blood, / They are apt enough to dislocate and tear / Thy flesh and bones: howe'er thou art a fiend, / A woman's shape doth shield thee” (Act 4, scene 2).

Even the very frame which establishes the narrative of *King Lear* — namely the division of the kingdom amongst Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia — is not explicitly (or legally) an *inheritance* of Lear’s daughters as is commonly assumed, but comes, rather, by way of the daughters’ “several dowers”: the king must still obey the (gendered) laws of land-claim by framing the shares of his kingdom as dowries bestowed on his two sons-in-law, and he must also conspire to have his third daughter married-off in order that she may have “A third more opulent than [her] sisters” (Act 1, scene 1)[6].

If we take the view that *King Lear* contains problematic misogyny, not only expressed *consciously* (or subversively) as a character device — as in Goneril’s hypocrisy — but also as a *subconscious* expression of the highly gendered, patriarchal socio-cultural atmosphere of

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[5] In her confrontation with her father when he and his rowdy train return from a hunting trip in Act 1, scene 4, Goneril reprimands her father that he should be keeping company with men “as may besort your age, / Which know themselves and you”, and further expresses the rigidity of her class-based social views when she becomes enraged at her father’s “disordered rabble” who “Make servants of their betters” (Act 1, scene 4).

[6] As we have previously shown, this is further heightened in the anonymous *Leir,* wherein all three daughters are to be married-off in the division scene.

Elizabethan/Jacobean England, how might a contemporary production enact a conceptual framework to engage and expose the play's inherent misogyny and seek to transcend it?

CONCEPT

The Final Days of Elizabeth I

In *Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years*, John Guy attempts to correct many misconceptions about the reign, and death, of Elizabeth I. We have already stated some of the ways in which Elizabeth's reign was complicated by the political and socio-cultural limitations of her gender, and we will now speak to them in greater detail.

John Guy cautions that to, "assume that a woman ruler could exercise power simply by being crowned is a fundamental mistake" and he situates Elizabeth-as-queen as "occupying the hinterland between a man's and woman's world" (Guy, 2016). Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII — sounding Lear-like himself — clearly stated his own views on the suitability of a female monarch, stating that if a woman, "shall chance to rule, she cannot continue long without a husband, which by God's law must then be her governor and head, and so finally shall direct the realm", though his daughter just as clearly asserted her own agency and divine allowance to rule, saying "For all men are mortal. And though I be a woman, yet I have as good courage answerable to my place as ever my father had. I am your anointed queen. I will never be by violence constrained to do anything" (Guy, 2016). Unlike her father, Elizabeth encountered many challenges not faced by a male monarch, and for Elizabeth, ruling as a woman in a world which remained strictly patriarchal, "the art of queenship would not simply be the art of statesmanship. It would involve surreptitious convolutions geared towards increasing her power and decreasing her vulnerability" (Guy, 2016).

After having endured a long reign, attended by constant attempts to undermine her authority, Elizabeth manifested many Lear-like tendencies, most notably her temper which "added to the often feverish atmosphere of the Court" (Guy 2016). Also like Shakespeare's king, Elizabeth faced a steep decline in her final years, and was beset by both physical and mental decline. Guy describes the aging queen's disintegration, a portrait which not only rings true for Shakespeare's construction of Lear, but also adds the dimension of navigating aging as a female ruler in a misogynistic culture:

> With the years taking their inexorable toll, Elizabeth would find herself tormented by insomnia, arthritis, digestive ailments, bad dreams, and what she claimed was the insolence and insubordination of her younger, prettier attendants. Outwardly, she would seek to bridge the mismatch between her queenly role and her appearance by a mixture of spin and cosmetics. Inwardly, she struggled to assert her will and retain her grip on

> power as her courtiers battled for place and position and her newly emboldened subjects called for the monarchy to be made accountable to Parliament (Guy, 2016).

In the final months before her death, Elizabeth was overcome by her various ailments, and began "stubbornly refusing to go to bed for two days and three nights … [sitting] immobile on a stool in her nightgown, staring into space", because of "a persuasion that if she once lay down, she would never rise" (Guy, 2016). This insomnia was caused by a nightmare that the feverish queen believed to be a premonition wherein, "she had seen a ghoulish apparition of herself 'in a light of fire', and she feared a similar nightmare if she returned to bed, taking it to be a terrible portent of the torments of hell" (Guy, 2016). This image of a once great, now demented, paranoid figure, finally brought-low by the ravages of age, and the weight that attended her rule as a woman in a paternalistic world, informs the prologue and opening image of my production. In addition to her appearance of "The Woman" in the prologue, during the first two acts, Lear remains on stage, and each time she is to make an exit, she simply sinks back into the demented state of "The Woman" from the prologue — the rest of the ensemble, with the exception of The Fool, don't see her unless she is playing the queen in a scene — and with every entrance, she simply rises and again takes on the role of Lear[7]. This convention is broken when the queen is cast out into the storm at the end of Act 2, marking the first time she leaves the stage; the conceptual proposal here being that "the dreamer" has departed, but the dream continues, which illustrates the fracture of the moment in the dramaturgy when Lear's world has been shattered irreconcilably, her authority has been challenged, her power has been usurped, and her fragile mental state is quickly degenerating. The conceit of the prologue/epilogue (explained in the plot summary) are left purposefully open-ended by having The Woman begin dressed in a contemporary nightshirt, and then having her dressed into a version of an Elizabethan court costume (a discussion of the costume design will be undertaken in a later section of this paper). This ambiguity leaves the image open to interpretation: is this woman *literally* Elizabeth I, imagining a version of her life in which she wasn't barren, but still had no male heir? Might some audience members see their own grandmother, suffering from dementia? Could this woman be their own mother, sister of elderly friend? Perhaps some in the audience will recognize themselves. The image is purposefully dense, and is triangulated to allow for a myriad of interpretations.

"King" Hunter and "Queen" Maleczech

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[7] The conceit of having Lear remain onstage was ultimately abandoned during onstage rehearsals; see Final Conclusion and Reflection.

The proposed production takes the history of Elizabeth I as a jumping off point for a cross-gendered, female "Queen" Lear, and we will now investigate two productions which cast women as Lear, one having the king played *as a king*, and the other allowing a woman to play Lear as a queen. Before we engage in a discussion of either performance, it is worth pausing to acknowledge and adopt a working definition of "gender", as it is a distinct concept/phenomenon from biological sex. For the purpose of the discussions of these two *Lears*, we will use Judith Butler's framework of gender as a socially constructed and enacted "performance", which seeks "to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 1990).

Helena Kaut-Howson cast Kathryn Hunter in her 1997 production of *Lear*, and the director was quick to point out her casting choice was "definitely not a feminist statement", the idea actually having been "prompted by her Jewish Polish mother's final years, and her admiration for Kathryn Hunter's remarkable abilities as a actress" (Croall, 2015). Kaut-Howson's production begins in a contemporary geriatric ward, with — as relayed somewhat sarcastically in Charles Spencer's negative review of the production for *The Telegraph* — "Mrs Lear, [as] a grim old biddy in a wheelchair throwing her choccies on the floor", before being "rushed to a bed in intensive care" following a heart attack (Spencer, 1997). Hunter's Lear, however, enters into the play-proper as a king, with "long white hair, a tiny goatee beard and … a black three-piece suit several sizes too large" (Spencer). Hunter's performance was groundbreaking in that at the time of Kaut-Howson's production, "only three other actresses had played King Lear professionally, Maria Casares in Paris, Janet Wright in Toronto, and German Marianne Hoppe, at the age of seventy-nine" (Croall, 2015), and as Hunter recalls, many critics of the time — like Spencer — were dismissive and glib in their verdicts on the production. Hunter speaks to the expectation that attends any new production of one of Shakespeare's major works, and the especially large weight of taking on a cross-gender major role. As Hunter recalls, "There was a lot of fuss about it in the press. Some questions put to me were less than sophisticated, such as 'Are you going to go naked in the storm?' Anyone playing Lear is nervous before they go on, but this was fantastically scary, because I had the additional pressure of knowing people were sitting there going, 'Oh really? Well prove it'" (Croall, 2015). The subversion of Hunter's performance of Lear can only go so far to addressing the play's misogyny and rigid gender-play, though, because the text remained in-tact, with no alterations to pro-nouns or gender signifiers, and only the directorial conceit of the production served to interrogate the patriarchal misogyny of Shakespeare's play — what Spencer dismisses as nothing more than "irritating gimmicks" (Spencer, 1997). That being said, as professor Terri Power points out, whenever, "women perform in roles traditionally played by male actors, they

destabilize tightly held beliefs about male privilege, patriarchal positions of power, the performativity of masculinity and the subversive nature of cross-dressing” (Power, 2016).

A production that is more germane to our present discussion of the play is Lee Breuer’s *Lear* which more thoroughly re-framed the play, and redrew its gender lines entirely. In Breuer’s production with his company Mabou Mines, company member Ruth Maleczech portrayed Lear as the matriarch of a Southern family, in a production set in 1950s Georgia, thereby “[transforming] the canonical tragic father figure into a mother, reversing the inherited notions of paternalistic universalism…[and expanding] the boundaries of what women are allowed to say and do, onstage and in life” (Brater, 2016). In *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*, Alisa Solomon speaks to the revolutionary potential for what professor Jessica Brater calls Breuer/Maleczech’s “inherently dialectical” production (Brater, 2016), claiming that:

> The relentlessly American setting — Georgia in 1957 — immediately dislodges the play from hoary classicism and makes it feel uncomfortably close. At the same time, the reversal of the character’s genders — all the men have been changed to women, and all the women to men (expect the Fool who is played, like a French *folle*, as a man in drag)— makes it startlingly strange and provocative, even paradoxical. After all, to posit a female at the centre of *Lear* is to offer a resistant, even parodistic, reading of Shakespeare’s grandest tragedy. Yet the text remains virtually unaltered: only pronouns, references to royalty, and sexually marked epithets and images have been changed—with care to sustain the meter as much as possible (Solomon, 1997).

With the genders entirely swapped[8], complete with pronoun changes and a radically reinterpreted setting, Breuer was able to re-frame Shakespeare’s play to comment on contemporary ideas/ideals of feminism/femininity, creating an intellectual arena through which to beg the question, “‘what happens when women are the one’s in power?’” (Solomon, 1997). Presenting a patriarchal world with a female ruler, “necessarily encompasses issues of bourgeois feminism” (Solomon, 1997). Breuer’s directorial re-envisioning poses a provocative question to middle class second wave feminism, by asking if women who “have taken on roles traditionally held by men” in corporate and political arenas “have [also] adopted the values of these institutions, and if so, inevitably?” (Solomon, 1997). By presenting Lear as a powerful matriarch who expresses her power in a hegemonically masculine way and is then brought low and must, necessarily, rediscover her feminine/maternal impulse in the reconciliation with her child, the “Mabou Mines *Lear* tests the hidden assumptions of a patriarchal society where to lose power is to become ‘feminine’” (Solomon, 1997), thus dealing with one of the major sites of misogyny in Shakespeare’s original text — namely, the equation of femininity with weakness.

[8] My proposed production only inverts the genders of Lear and Kent, leaving the other characters’ genders as written; however, all appropriate pronouns and titles have been changed in the text.

Not only does the Mabou Mines production call into question notions of hegemonic masculinity as it relates to female power, by reframing the narrative from a female perspective, it allows for a reexamination of the notion of universality that is often associated with Shakespeare's works. Professor P A Skantze speaks to the problematic nature of any current societal/cultural moment declaring a work of art to be "universal", especially when such a metric fails to apply "to Shakespeare's works … the corrections made against notions of universality by all critical attention—attention to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, and the post-colonial—that have been used to critique it" (Skantze, 2008). However, Professor Skantze did find something of a "universal" experience in viewing the Mabou Mines *Lear*, precisely because it re-frames the piece to speak directly to — what is for her — a more personal politic. For Skantze, in watching Maleczech play Lear, "something of the universal, tired and bedraggled as its canonical self was, opened up and invited me, temporarily, to let the sight and sound of performance undo my mind's reception by inviting all my receiving body to experience the great tragedy in the language of women" (Skantze, 2008). This triumph of the personal over the universal allows for the literary product of a misogynistic age to communicate to a contemporary audience.

The Fool as Drag Queen

Now that we have examined the radical potential for a female Lear — played as a queen — we move to an examination of two other aspects of my production which contain equally, and perhaps even greater, radical potential to question and complicate heteronormativity and received beliefs for a contemporary audience[9]. In Breuer's production for Mabou Mines, The Fool is played as a high-camp drag queen who "provides Maleczech with a reverse mirror of her own behaviour as Lear as it features the stereotypically feminine behaviour (preening, vamping, sashaying) that Maleczech's Lear never displays" (Brater, 2016), allowing for "the archetypal role of the drag queen [to meet] the archetypal role of the fool: the slippery term that by its dressy motley emphasizes the world turned upside down plays in a world where kings are queens" (Skantze, 2008). Jan Kott might just as easily have been describing a contemporary drag queen when he says that the Shakespearian fool is one who, "although moving in high society, is not part of it, and tells unpleasant things to everybody in it; he, who disputes everything regarded as evident. He would not be able to do all this if he were part of that society

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[9] Nahum Tate was well aware of the radical potential of clowns and fools to upset the convention of tragedy: "Neoclassical theory declared clowns, fools, and bawdy jokes to be undignified and inappropriate in a tragedy, [so] Tate was forced to cut the entire role of the Fool" (Kahan, 2008)

himself; then he could at most be a drawing-room scandal-monger" (Kott, 1965). The drag queen's movement in that aforesaid high society is especially challenging for a drag queen who is unable to "pass" as a cis-gendered woman, the sort of queen who presents a stylized or hyper-exaggerated feminine pose and posture. Using Divine — the 300 pound drag queen and star of the early transgressive films of John Waters — as an example, Judith Butler makes the claim that "Divine … whose impersonation of women implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real … destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates" (Butler, 1990). The figure of the fool — Divine being a contemporary example of a drag-queen fool *par excellence*, but also of Kott/Frye's ideal of the grotesque if ever there was one — "continually reminds us of women's marginality by presenting and deconstructing an exaggerated image of femininity" (Solomon, 1997).

My production of *Lear* continues in the tradition of Breuer's gender-play by having The Fool also played as a drag queen, but my reference is Australian Performance Artist, fashion designer and club freak, Leigh Bowery (ill. 5), who — through the use of extreme body-modifying and gender-defying costumes and makeup —, "committed himself to the total theatricalization of the self, using the night club as a stage (Als, 1998).

Now, gods, stand up for faggots: Queering Edmund

In addition to the radical potential of a drag-queen fool, my production also presents a flamboyant, sexually radical, queer Edmund. In his opening soliloquy, Edmund declares himself in opposition to everything that his society stands for, including sexual propriety. After acknowledging the fatuousness of the religious and socio-political convention of legitimacy of birth, Edmund praises the sexual passion which attends the conception of bastard children and mocks the dispassion of sex that exists within monogamous marriage. He praises the sexual passion of those "Who in the lusty stealth of nature take / More composition and fierce quality / Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed / Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops /Got 'tween a sleep and wake? (Act 1, scene 2). Like the drag queen, the effeminate gay man has come to occupy a place of radical potential in our current assimilationist world, where the gains in LGBT rights — the right to legally marry chief among them — has lead to a parallel rise in the aping of heteronormative bourgeois social traits and customs amongst queer people.

Overtly sexual and effeminate gay men have the potential for political radicalism, as Leo Bersani states, even amongst homosocial spheres. Although Bersani concedes that "You can be victimized and in no way be radical", admitting that "it happens very often among homosexuals

as with any other oppressed minority … [and] it is perhaps our anti monogamous promiscuity that … frees us from some of the benefits of a social assimilation to which some of us understandably but no less sadly aspire" (Bersani, 2010). By reframing Edmund as an unrepentant queer in the vein of the heroes of Jean Genet, not only does his revenge against "legitimacy" take on a new, more contemporary dimension for gay and straight audience members alike, but the connotations of "base" and "bastard" with which he is branded also gain another layer of meaning as the slurs of a puritanical class; in this reading of the character, Edmund becomes the rebel who refuses to conform, and expresses nothing but cold contempt for the preposterous societal conventions that "deprive" him. In this way, Edmund is the kind of anti-assimilationist queer that challenges the contemporary LGBT condition Bersani laments: "once the historical case was made about the evil society constituting us as homosexuals, it turned out that what we wanted was getting into that very system that has done us terrible harm" (Bersani, 2010). Trans queer theorist Jack Halberstam allows for the radical potential of this kind of "queer negativity", but they question Bersani's anti-social theory, because of the "excessively small archive that represents queer negativity" (Halberstam, 2011). This "archive" is limiting for Halberstam because it tends to draw on white, cis-gendered icons such as Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet and Tennessee Williams to establish its set of signifiers and codes, but Edmund's queer potential for radicalism draws on the transgressive darkness that Halberstam offers as an antidote: "If we want to make the antisocial turn in queer theory, we must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange in order to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate" (Halberstam, 2011).

In the figure of a queer Edmund — with his disdain for all the conventions of his time and, by extension, ours — we are able to find the expression of trans activist and author Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's clarion call for "a flaming faggotry that challenges the assimilationist norms of a corporate-cozy lifestyle" (Sycamore, 2012).

DESIGN

Alexander McQueen Elizabeth I: Costume

Now that the directorial concept for the production has been discussed, the practical elements of the physical production can be described in greater detail, starting with costume.

To illustrate the conceptual idea of the production being the fever-dream of a

contemporary woman dreaming herself into 1603, the general proposal for the costumes — designed by Carolyn M Smith — involves a post-modern approach that combines period Elizabethan/Jacobean silhouettes with contemporary high fashion aesthetics, rendered in a limited palette of blacks and white[10]. This Elizabethan-through-the-lens-of-high-fashion takes influence from several contemporary designers who engage with historical sources, and filter them through their own personal aesthetics for the purpose of creating contemporary cultural commentary. As curator Harold Koda explains in the catalogue for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2001 exhibition *Extreme Beauty*, "Beginning with Vivienne Westwood, a number of British designers have enlivened the fashion world with their paradoxical combination of historical affinities and seditionist impulse. Like Westwood, John Galliano and Alexander McQueen refer to historical periods but combine them in ironic Postmodern constructions" (Koda, 2001).

Queen Lear has the most period look (ill. 8), though the shape and detailing of her bodice and overskirt has been severely reduced to place her into a contemporary fashion context. Speaking of late-Elizabethan fashion aesthetics, author Valerie Cummings reports that, "…during the last 20 years or so of Elizabeth's reign, the clothing worn at English court became more idiosyncratic, mirroring the increasingly ornate and artificial world of the Queen and her courtiers", with women wearing looks featuring "unnaturally long-waisted bodices, wide farthingales and huge, decorated sleeves" (Cumming, 1989). The conceptual rationale for choosing period shapes for the women is to emphasize the great efforts that have historically gone into the illustration of female power (ill. 7). As fashion journalist Colin McDowell asserts, "During the Elizabethan period…apparel was like a visible form of politics" and clothing's "magnificence was intended to strike awe and fear into those who saw it, and who understood the ruthlessness and disregard it represented" (McDowell, 2013). Indeed, Cummings described the Elizabethan woman as "spikily-caged fortresses to which none of the apparently emasculated, dandified men would consider laying siege" (Cumming, 1989). The exaggerated Elizabethan silhouette, expertly stylized to create a symbol of fierce authority, was "an amalgamation of all the zones [of the body] — face framing collar, suppressed bust, dilated shoulders, corseted and attenuated waist, farthingaled hips, and narrow shoes with heels" (Koda, 2001), where "the ruff floated the head above the body at an ambiguous point that appeared farther than physical reality", and "the farthingale imposed a conical silhouette … abetted in part by a petticoat worn beneath the skirt … [and] the bum-roll, a thick bolster-like bustle that held out the skirt when it was tied around the hips" (Koda, 2001).

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[10]The rationale for the monochromatic colour scheme is to allow aesthetic cohesion across the two periods that are being combined (early 17th Century and 2017), and as an ironic commentary on the supposedly black and white morality of the play.

For the male characters, this takes the form of period menswear such as suits and jackets, combined with selected period elements, such as ruffs, pieces of armour, or contemporary top coats worn over one shoulder and tied with a chord to resemble an Elizabethan cape (ill. 11). The Fool's costume (ill. 6) takes inspiration from fool's motley, the fashions of Elizabeth I — to reinforce the idea discussed earlier of The Fool serving as an exaggerated mirror for the queen — and the extreme fashions of Leigh Bowery (ill. 5). For Lear's daughters, each has a period look below the waist — farthingale, petticoat, overskirt — and a contemporary top (ill. 10). The accumulated effect of these large architectural silhouettes on a bare stage seeks to achieve a similar effect as the costumes in the Shakespeare work of Robert Wilson, where "moving bodies incarnate design principals and belong to the design stratagems of the whole" (Shevtsova, 2016).

Risking the Void: Set

"In *King Lear*", declares Jan Kott, "the stage is empty throughout: there is nothing, except the cruel earth, where man goes on his journey from the cradle to the grave" (Kott, 1965). Taking this principal of Elizabethan stage craft as a starting point — the turn of the last century heralded the rebirth of the Elizabethan scenographic tradition when designers "like Appia and Craig most notably, had argued that a visual language for Shakespeare cannot be found either in sceno-architectural precedent or in pictorial representationalism" (Doona, 2016) — the scenic design for my production begins with the principle of a (mostly) empty space and an Elizabethan style unit set which allows for circular staging, multiple levels, and many possible entrances and exits. The Czech master Josef Svoboda advocated for a scenic design for *Lear* which had the potential for "many changes of clearly defined space", so he employed an "architectural mass with rapid light changes … in order to move from interiors to exteriors, or warmth to isolation and coldness" with the goal "to evoke harshness, isolation and the ability not only of man, but of nature to turn against humanity" (Billing, 2016). This scenographic principal was echoed in the famous production by Peter Brook which took its influence from Kott's ideas about Shakespeare's play's connection to Beckettian aesthetics. Like Svoboda's "architectural mass":

> "As director and designer Brook defined the key scenic elements of *Lear* as two great rectangular canvas flats set symmetrically like open jaws…rough, almost megalithic sculptural objects … [which] seek only to extend the sense of desolate, barren and inhospitable landscape beyond the flat, dead walls of the space. This is not only a pre-industrial, pre-modern world but it is a godless world, where an apparently doomed humanity plays out futile, inevitably tragic power struggles" (Doona, 2016).

Both of these approaches, as well as the more expressly Elizabethan proposal being used by myself and set designer Claire Hill (ill. 15), employ a mostly empty void-space, broken up by the architecture of stairs, balconies and doorways, but otherwise untied to specificity of location or time, as a "means to unfold a world that is mostly out of sight in the plays' composition as [in] … the bare-stage Shakespeare employed for his productions" (Herrmann, 2016). The unit set is augmented with two towering, monolithic reflective surfaces which mask a large portion of the back wall of the space, created with plexiglass and treated with a paint effect that give the impression of chemical emulsion, or a precious metal. The monoliths have continuity at the base, and then splinter apart as they reach their maximum height, like a shattered mirror, or broken, jagged crown. The choice of scenic augmentation to the Elizabethan Unit Set was carefully considered so as not to root any particular scene in a specific location, as well as to express the megalomaniacal tyranny of Lear in the beginning of the play, and to dwarf her — by way of a kind of fascistic stagecraft that employs massive structures to make everyone who is not the leader seem comparatively small and insignificant — when her power, authority, and sanity desert her. The only furniture piece is a throne, based on a 17th Century Inquisition chair (ill. 13), which was chosen not only to serve as the stocks for Kent (Act 2, scene 2) but also to pose questions about the simultaneously menacingly emboldening, and paranoiacally entrapping aspects of absolute power.

A Rationale for Realism: Staging the Storm

One of the initial questions any director approaching *Lear* must grapple with is how to stage the storm. The storm is, in many ways, the crux of the drama in *Lear*, and this is especially the case through the lens of my concept wherein — as previously discussed — it is the moment of the storm when the dreamer departs, and the dream continues.

Northrop Frye believed that the storm is the point-of-no-return in the play, and that "It is during and after the storm that the characters of the play begin to show their real nature, and from then on we have something unique in Shakespeare: a dramatic world in which the characters are, like chess pieces, definitely black or white" (Frye, 1986). This may be over simplifying Shakespeare's moral universe, but this is just one of a myriad of view points on the meaning of the storm. "Commentators have for centuries been asking [whether the storm] is really an externalization of the storm in [Lear's] mind" (Harris, 2015), or a naturally occurring event, and as such, whether or not it requires support from sound and lighting to realize on stage. W H Auden takes the position that, in the case of *Lear*'s storm scene, "realism is required" because "the storm is *not* the macrocosm of inner passion, though Lear would like it to

be. The storm is without passion, and pays no attention to who is just and who is sinful. The storm goes its way, but Lear remains the same" (Auden, 2000). Auden continues, asserting that, "The real counterpointing in the play is the world of passion, of man's nature, versus the elements, the physical world of the universe. The storm is infinitely strong compared to man, and is of the moment only. It is pitiless, but innocent. It has no malice, it doesn't want to be anything else but a storm" (Auden, 2000). This call for realism in realizing the storm on stage is echoed by professor Alexandra Harris in her book *Weather land: Writers and Artists Under English Skies*, where she posits that during the storm, "Lear feels both the sympathy and violence of a storm which works with and against him. The storm, of course, is not really doing either. It is just being a storm" (Harris, 2015).

In a stylized production, it may seem strange to look to realism as a solution, but Lear's attempts to out-shout the storm — in a sense, to assert her will against god — must be provided with a realistic obstacle, in order for her war against nature to seem as futile as it ultimately is; the storm's very banality and lack of supernatural meaning or cause are what give it its startlingly humbling dramatic power. In a similar (yet technically opposite) way, my production puts the literal depiction of supernatural forces onto the stage[11] in the form of The Fool as a Jacobean symbol of death who appears in Act 5, scene 1 with two deathly chorus members played by the actors who previously played the murdered Cornwall and Oswald and who take on all the subsidiary roles in Act 5 (ill. 12), or my addition of the appearance of Goneril and Regan as veiled ghosts in the final scene; in the case of the storm, the realism actually *opens up* dramaturgical and conceptual possibilities rather than truncating them.

CONCLUSION

It is a generally accepted principal that the applying of contemporary ethical views to art works from previous eras is inherently problematic, because each era has its own widely divergent set of socially sanctioned ethical codes. This is especially true when it comes to the consideration of stage works, given that the theatre is arguably the most public of art forms, and particularly when said works contain social politics — such as gender and sexuality — that arise from an ontological, intellectual and ethical milieu which is not only pre-twentieth century, but

[11] This choice is made to heighten the fever-dream conceptual proposal of the production — the audience is given a more direct window into the queen's mind. This will also be achieved with realistic sound — such as barking dogs — where appropriate.

also pre-Enlightenment[12]. That notwithstanding, I would argue that as artists of the theatre our primary concern must be to the engagement with the contemporary audience who will experience our work, and in this way, the perpetuation of potentially toxic socio-cultural and socio-political content — when presented unchallenged in a context that assumes a relativistic historical/moral vacuum — betrays the theatre's civic function as a public art form. In the case of Shakespeare's *King Lear,* much like Wagner's *Parsifal* — both works of a mature genius at the top of his artistic form, and both containing of highly problematic socio-political content[13] —, the opportunity is present to make use of a work which is considered by many to have "universal value" as a kind of theatrical Trojan Horse, in order to bring to a mass audience the conceptual, intellectual, and political provocations usually found at the margins of the artistic avant garde. Through directorial intervention and a careful editing process, my production of *Lear* attempts this difficult feat: to stay true to Shakespeare's original dramaturgical intent, while questioning and re-framing the aspects of the play that have the potential to perpetuate misogynistic notions of patriarchal exceptionalism and rigid heteronormative gender roles. Through the enactment of a conceptual frame that includes gender-inverted characters and overtly queer content, this proposed *Lear* has the potential to provoke and edify while it entertains.

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[12] It is worth clarifying that this supposition refers to works created and evaluated from a contemporary western perspective.

[13] In the case of *Parsifal*, this takes the form of coded anti-Semitism through the portrayal of Klingsor, the rapacious sorcerer.

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APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

ill. 1

ill. 2

ill. 3

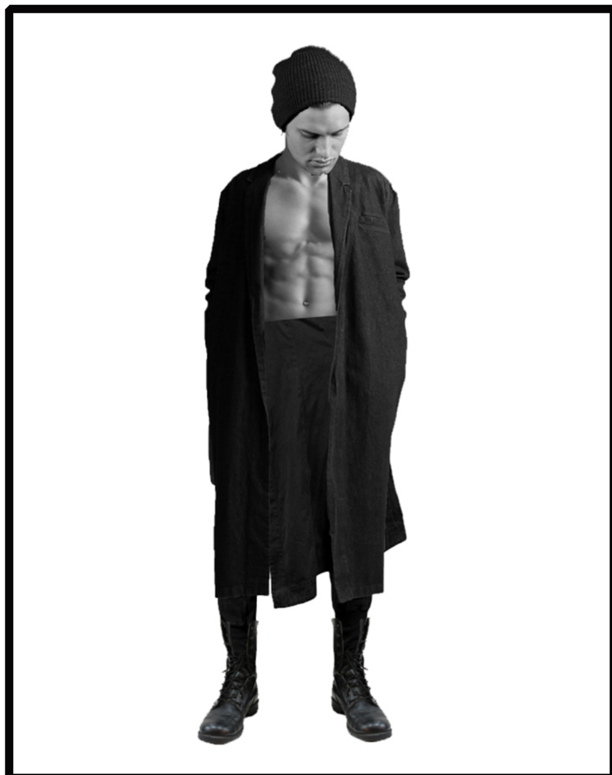
ill. 4

ill. 5

ill. 6

ill. 7

ill. 8



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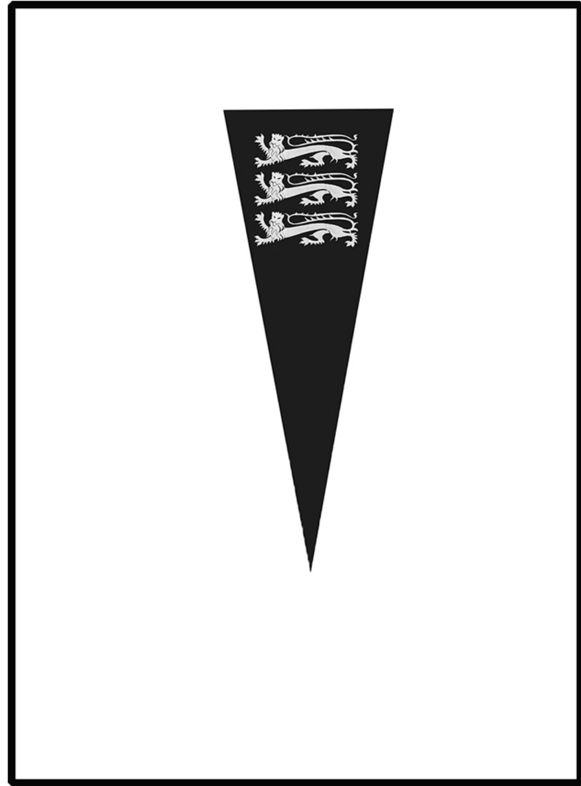

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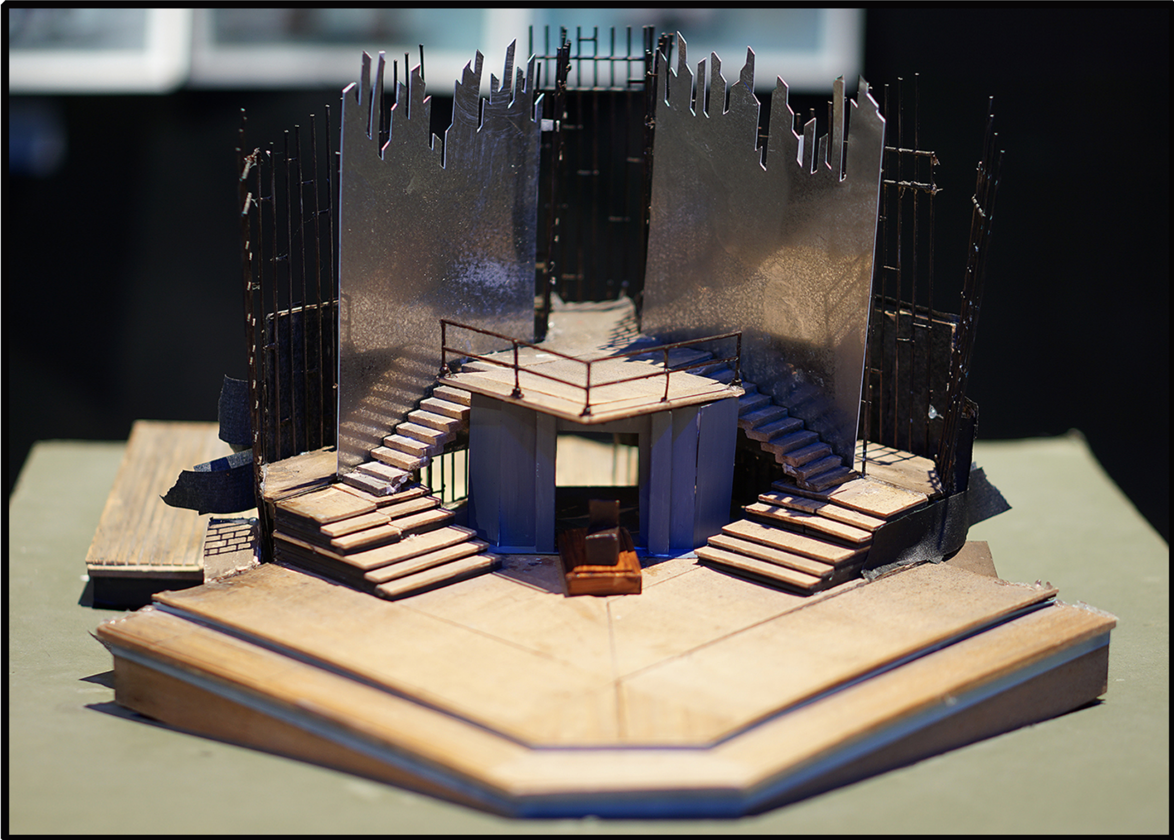

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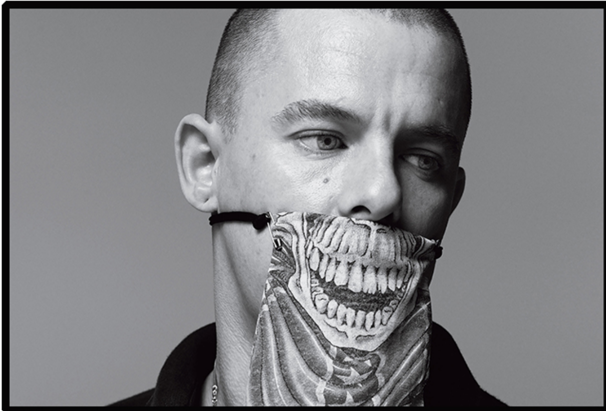

ill. 17

ill. 18

ill. 19

APPENDIX B: PRODUCITON PHOTOS BY CYLLA VON TIEDERMANN

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

Image 9

Image 12

Image 10

Image 13

Image 11

Image 14

APPENDIX C: REHEARSAL JOURNAL

Stage Management Prep Week (May 9 - 14)

Having never worked in rep before, I approach the scheduling of rehearsals with trepidation, but my mentor (Peter Hinton) provides expert advice on how to best manage the primary and secondary rehearsal structure. At Hinton's instruction, I divide the play into 53 French scenes — plus the prologue and epilogue — and assign an approximate amount of rehearsal necessary for an initial pass; this will turn out to be as crucial as Hinton suggested.

Also inspired by Peter Hinton, I create a vision board on one wall of the rehearsal hall made up of nearly two hundred images culled from the file of reference material I have been collecting for the past two years. Having assisted Hinton on two previous projects (the musical *Cabaret* in 2004 and Hinton's own adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* in 2016) which also employed this mass-image wall as a temporary installation in the rehearsal hall, I have seen how it continues to inspire the curiosity and feed the imagination of the ensemble and creative team. I am pleased to have the opportunity to share not only the "world" of the play through specific reference images that inspired design elements, but also present the plays' aesthetic "universe", by way of images that speak to its politics and tone.

Tanja Jacobs — director of *Twelfth Night*, which will run in repertory with *Lear* — and I decide to share the first two days of rehearsal, in order to launch the company simultaneously into both plays, and to establish some continuity in order to make the transition from one play to the other less jarring (this turns out to be a wise choice, as evidenced in moments such as when a wave of audible recognition sweeps through the hall when the ensemble realizes that both plays contain the Elizabethan song "When that I was and a little tiny boy [With hey, ho, the wind and the rain]").

I also use this week to finalize edits on the excellent research package that my assistant director (Sadie Epstein Fine) has created for the company. Providing a context for the social and gender politics of 1603 will provide a firm footing for the ensemble, especially given the conceptual/post-modern rendering of this interpretation of *Lear*. I ask Sadie to investigate practical issues that can inform the ensemble's character work, including details about the peerage to help the actor's navigate the shifts in status in the play. Said also explores issues related more specifically to the conceptual interpretation, such as Elizabethan gender and sexual politics. I will give Sadie time to present this package to the ensemble in the first week of

rehearsal, as a way to situate her in the room as a useful and active member of the process, inspired by the way Peter Hinton generously did the same for me both times I served as his assistant (this will pay dividends as we move forward, not only in the actors' active engagement with the research, but also in their continual use of Sadie as a resource).

Image 15

Week 1 (May 16 - 21)

Because of a scheduling conflict with one of our performers, it is decided to split the read throughs between the first two days — *Twelfth Night* will be read Tuesday morning followed by design presentations for both plays, and the reading of *Lear* is moved to the following morning. Tanja Jacobs and I each present with our designers, and after a meet and greet with the company and the staff of Canadian Stage, the rest of the afternoon is spent on an introductory address to the ensemble by Jacobs.

The initial reading of *Lear* clocks in at an hour and forty minutes, which trespasses on our ninety minute time limit mandated by the city for Shakespeare in High Park presentations. I am aware that at least ten minutes will be shaved off the running time when it is played at speed, but it is vital to me to create room for the play to breath, and the run time for the reading also doesn't take into account time spent on the prologue and epilogue. I spend the evening and following morning cutting an additional 112 lines, and inform the company that this dramaturgical process will continue throughout the process, and that their input is not only welcome, but required (the choice to remove an entire thread of the story from Edgar's track — his disguise as the mad beggar "Poor Tom" — will necessitate ongoing cuts, rewrites, and tweaks here and there throughout our time in the rehearsal hall, and this is taken on by the ensemble with attention and generosity).

After I lead the company through an overview of the conceptual framework of the play, and a broad-strokes version of some of the ramifications of the changes I have made in my editing of the text, my long time collaborator Dan Rutzen arrives to lead the actors though a choral arrangement of the chorus of *Proserpina*, a song that will make up a portion of the epilogue. Being a group with a wide range of musical skill and experience, taking on choral singing at the start of the process is partly strategic, as a method for Rutzen to suss out the skill level of the group as a means to check the difficulty level of his composition. At the end of an hour session, the ensemble are showing shades of the beautiful choral sound they will end up achieving, and it is decided not to simplify the arrangement. Jacobs takes the remainder of the day for more work on launching the company into her interpretation of *Twelfth Night*.

My perception coming out of the read through is that my biggest challenge will be to dispel the assumptions that attend this piece — every "great play" comes with baggage, but when a work is routinely described as being among the greatest works of dramatic English literature, the weight of that baggage can be crippling. I perceive in the reading a range of verse skills — which is to be expected — but I am reaffirmed in my casting choices, as the characters sound "right" as voiced by this ensemble. My assumption of the necessity of working against the assumptions of the black and white morality of "villains and heroes" is made evident by the reading; I am reminded of Northrop Frye's great observation that in order for *Lear's* cathartic potential to be reached, the audience's sympathies must switch from the put-upon victims of a corrupt and brutal society (i.e. the daughters of Lear and the bastard son of Gloucester) to the older generation who become the victims of their children's revenge in the final three acts of the play.

The following day is my first primary rehearsal, and I choose to use it to spend the day around the table with the entire company, reviewing the research and engaging the company in a discussion of character, and the play's major themes. I speak to my aim of achieving Frye's reversal of sympathies, I speak to the genre of the play as Kott outlines it (which leads to a discussion of the cosmology of the play and how religion functions) and I outline the need for clarity when performing in High Park. I open a discussion about the major character arcs by inviting the company to explore the play's primal, archetypical aspects so as not to get lost in 21st century psychology. I invite the actors to consider their character's super objective in the play in terms of one of four 'r's: redemption, retribution, restoration, and revenge. These board archetypes will serve as a hand-hold throughout the process. I explain that inside the world of the play, there are characters who seek to restore the natural (i.e. god-ordained) order — such as Kent, and Gloucester —, characters who feel wronged and must strike back in order to right a perceived moral wrong (this is the retribution arc, best exemplified by Edgar, but Goneril also straddles this arc), the characters who take their retribution to a more selfish place, mutating it into revenge (Edmund and Regan), and the characters whose journey is one of redemption (Lear in her identification with her subjects during her prayer before the hovel, Albany in his moral awakening in confronting Goneril, and Cordelia in her forgiving of her mother in the French camp). This thought experiment is not done to shrink the complexity of the actor's discovery process or box them into a specific single objective, but rather to situate their greater placement in the story, to provide a sense of continuity. Diane D'Aquila and I will maintain close dialogue throughout the process, checking in daily on the work ahead, and she will become a real partner in the room and captain of the ensemble. We are in agreement that Lear's journey is one of locating *clarity* though her madness — just as Gloucester finds *insight* through blindness. In many ways, Lear *begins* the play "mad" and ends in sanity.

I originally set a first stumble through for our third Sunday (out of four) in the hall, so this will mandate maintaining a very brisk pace in our initial pass through the blocking of the play. To achieve this, I fold table work into staging — beginning each session of scene work with reading and discussion, and then move the actors directly onto their feet — and I am able to block Act I in two primary days. This pace of work is taxing, but there is an energy to it, and it requires quick thinking and bold choices. The actors seem able and willing for the work, and I am heartened by the positive feedback I receive at the end of the first week. The energy in the room feels very enlivened, my leading lady and I have formed a respectful, open, and warm

confederacy and the design work is progressing in the shops. I am confident that we have launched into the oncoming work in a positive way, and I am excited for week two.

Week 2 (May 23 - 28)

Tanja Jacobs and I had previously decided that our favoured rehearsal schedule is alternating two primary days each, and I begin the second week with two secondary rehearsal days.

One of the wisest statements of the twentieth century in my view, is when Bertrand Russell observed that “Orthodoxy is the grave of intelligence” and I have always held this maxim in mind when it comes to working with actors; I reject the premise that there is one correct way to work with actors, and that a director’s process should be personalized to suit the working methods of each individual actor. With our ensemble for Shakespeare in High Park, we have a wide range of experience levels with Shakespearian verse speaking, as well as a diversity of performance experience. To this end, I perceive from the read through and initial text work that the presence of a major stage veteran of the calibre of Diane D’Aquila is proving intimidating to a particular performer who has achieved great acclaim in her own right, but only in musical theatre. I arrange a session to check-in with this actor, and we have a very profitable and encouraging session going over some practical aspects of Shakespeare (the meaning of punctuation and how it can inform your acting choices, as well as aspects of the iambic structure such as how a line that contains less than ten feet of verse indicates a pause and how that can also inform an acting choice). I feel very good about the outcomes of this meeting, and I notice an ease from this performer once we get back into scene work.

Also in the reading, I realize that two of my younger performers seem to be caught on playing a generalized wash of “evil”, and I challenge each of them to examine the difference in the meaning of the words “evil” and “wicked”: “evil” is purely an external judgement on an action taken, as it says nothing about the *intent* of the person committing the act, whereas “wicked’ insinuates doing “evil” *on purpose*. For example, there are times when Goneril’s actions can be considered “evil”, but she feels entirely morally justified in taking them, whereas Regan allows herself permission to indulge in out-and-out wickedness once she finally tastes power. Edmund is a more challenging case, as he seems to be both “evil” and “wicked” at various times thorough the play, both revelling in the pleasure of his nihilism, but still presenting his actions as the justifiable course of one who has been wronged. Keeping an eye on a tendency to make

general choices from actors who have pre-judged their characters will be an ongoing challenge I believe.

I am able to get through the staging of Act 2 and nearly finish Act 3 between primary calls and secondary work (the detailed scheduling breakdown continues to prove vital), and we also have our first few session with Simon Fon, our fight director — I find Fon's narrative instincts sensitive, and the chance to collaborate with an artist of great skill and expertise who is focussed on one very particular aspect of story telling is one I welcome.

After two weeks of work, I would identify the primary challenges thus far as being the amount of time that must be sacrificed to reiterating the logic at the top of every session of scene work, and the misleading nature of the dimension of stage space that are represented in the rehearsal hall — Peter Hinton visits for a check-in and wisely reminds me of this fact, advising to focus more attention on downstage positions, and I take this to heart. The most challenging scene thus far on both a staging level and a character objective/intention level is the finale of Act 2, in which Regan rejects her mother, and Lear departs into the storm. My sense of Regan's action in the scene is one of desperately wanting to lord power over her abusive mother, but being strategic enough to wait until she feels she has the safety to do so. This is a difficult action to play for the actress playing Regan as well as for Lear, because the text seems quite clear that Regan is enjoying — perhaps for the first time in her life — wielding power over her mother, but if she gives away the extent of her pleasure too early in the scene, Lear's reactions don't make sense. Regan must play the scene in such a way that the audience is aware of the pleasure she finds in her new-found status, but also allow for Lear to fully believe that Regan will provide for her and her hundred knights. I am pursuing the idea that the hinge moment in the scene comes when Lear again curses Goneril, and pins all her hopes on the assumption that Regan will take her in. This is a scene that require much more detailed work, as I believe that it is at the end of Act II that the world of the play fractures, and we begin Frye's reversal of audience sympathies.

We end the week by exploring Gloucester and Edgar's journey in Act 4 to the cliffs of Dover in secondary rehearsals, and I am able to begin work on the blinding of Gloucester in a primary. Ongoing text changes, edits, small rewrites, and additions continue to clarify the essential elements of the story, and as we move into sections of the play where more drastic cuts have been made, the importance of establishing logic becomes even more essential — it also continues to be a negotiation between when it is useful to think of the original/uncut version of the play and when it only confuses the proceedings.

Dan Rutzen makes another visit to the hall to work with the ensemble on the *Proserpina* chorale, and by the end of the session it is sounding beautiful. We schedule a recording session for Wednesday of week three; this recording session will also include some crowd reactions which will be used to create the sound of the French army, and Lear's hundred knights having a wild party at Goneril's palace. I decide not to use my final secondary rehearsal of the week, due to the calls for *Twelfth Night* combined with two actor's scheduling conflicts.

Week 4 (June 6 - 11)

After having reexamined the text, I come into week 4 with some anxiety about the run time, and decide to push through to my scheduled first-stumble through on Thursday, despite the fact that several of the scenes have only had an initial pass (this ends up changing to Friday to accommodate the schedule of the lighting designer, which turns out to be of great use, as the Thursday session provides many discoveries about the pivotal end of Act 2, and the power dynamic between Goneril, Regan, and Lear).

I have a private session with the actress playing Regan in order to try to address some of her questions regarding her character arc, and super-objective. The first time I work on the finale of Act 2, Peter Hinton is observing and points out to me that my Regan seems to be lost in trying to play her backstory, rather than engaging with the actual stakes of the scene. I identify this to be an ongoing issue which is blocking the actress from fully understanding the action of her scenes. In this meeting, I communicate this to her, and she seems receptive, and we also more clearly chart the emergence of Regan's cruelty as she descends into sadism in the second part of the play. This conversation pays great dividends when we return to the meeting with Regan and Lear at the end of Act 2, and I am able to create a staging and emotional trajectory that clarifies their relationship. I add Edgar and Edmund into this scene, which has now become one of the few scenes involving nearly the entirely company (minus Albany). This addition helps to further clarify the story of Edgar-as-Cornwall's-servant, and also provides time for Edmund to observe the sister's machinations and confederacy. Unlocking Regan's action in the scene (the enjoyment of finally having power over her mother) helps Lear navigate the incredibly swift mental shifts that her character undergoes throughout that scene. We also illustrate how the dynamics of power have shifted in the kingdom by having Gloucester be the only character who bows to the queen, and I add a beat of Kent and Gloucester attempting to support the queen after her daughter's and Cornwall turn on her. I also alter the exit image of Cornwall, Regan, and

Goneril to better reflect the shift in power (Cornwall sits in Lear's throne, and the daughters link hands, and sit regally on the platform as it exits).

After staging the blinding of Gloucester with Simon Fon's assistance, I am happy with the general shape, and the way it communicates the killing of Cornwall by Regan; however I end up with a long moment of dead-air at the end of the scene as I have failed to solve how Cornwall's body is carried off stage (I have arranged for Oswald to enter, having been called on stage by Regan's mock-cries for help, but this presents a dramaturgical problem: if Oswald sees Gloucester blind, it creates a logic problem in his next scene with Goneril — namely, there is no reason why Oswald, a loyal servant, wouldn't report this detail to his mistress). My Lear suggests that I might consider having Edgar's monologue overlap the exit of Cornwall's body, and I realize it actually clarifies the storytelling to have Edgar flee after being disarmed by Regan and witnessing the killing of Cornwall. In this version of the scene, Edgar is not only unable to stop his father's blinding, he also has to contend with actually fleeing the scene. This has the additional benefit of referencing Edgar's trajectory from the full-text, in which his disguise as Mad Tom is purely a reaction and attempt to hide, rather than in my edit where Edgar's disguise as a servant to Cornwall and Regan is one of action and agency.

We manage to stumble through the play, and as expected, the scenes that have been passed over two or three times hold up quite well, and the scenes which have only been run once (often several weeks prior) become general and loose. I am heartened by the relative clarity of the emotional arcs and the storytelling, but I am also able to quickly identify places of confusion that need clarification (such as the specifics of Edgar's plan for his disguise, and the reporting of the details of the deaths of Regan and Goneril by The Fool). Without the prologue or epilogue, the stumble through lasts 110 minutes, so I know my first challenge is to find more material to cut. I believe that 10 minutes will come off the run time when it is played up to speed, but this still requires another 10 minutes or so to be cut. Thankfully, the stumble through also points to scenes that could be easily removed, and I manage to cut three pages. I know it is the best thing to do, yet it is still very disappointing to have to cut the mad trial scene in Act III. My solution involves collapsing the scene before the hovel and the scene within the hovel into one sequence, and I take the most pertinent emotional and expository elements from both scenes and create a single, interior hovel scene. I also combine the scene between Edmund and Cornwall where Edmund reveals Gloucester's letter from Cordelia, with the blinding scene, which makes Cornwall's endorsement of Edmund public. I also reassign Oswald's lines in the blinding scene to Edgar, which allows for Edgar to be off stage so as not to hear details which

would muddy his narrative, while also strengthening the notion of his servant disguise for the audience. This also helps Oswald's placement in the rest of the scene, as he is now able to make an exit at Cornwall's command to find Gloucester and make him "ready for our apprehension", and also helps make better sense out of Oswald's insertion into the last part of the scene to carry off Cornwall's body.

It is my general practice not to give notes after a first stumble through as the actor's tend to be so focussed on getting through the show, that much of the detail work slips away. I can see the work that lies ahead, but I am heartened that the architecture of the staging and the proposal of the edit seems to mostly work — the most challenging aspect of the first stumble through is that I purposefully pitched the work at a much larger scale than the hall can bear in order that the move to the park will be as painless as possible. This decision does make it difficult to absorb the work in the rehearsal hall, because it becomes difficult to judge whether or not any particular acting moment is too arch or if it will work on the High Park stage.

Next week I have one final day in the rehearsal hall where I will stage the prologue and look at my rewrites in Act 3, and then we move to the site for Thursday/Friday. I ask for the lighting level session to be moved from Thursday night to Friday night so I can avoid a 14 hour day, and I am hopeful this will be possible.

APPENDIX D: FINAL CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION:

On the Failure of the Central Conceit

It became evident to me as soon as I moved onstage, that a major element of my central conceit for the production simply did not hold in the outdoor setting. Without the benefit of control of lighting in the first two acts of the play, making clear the premise that Lear was arising in and out of a demented state was unclear, and was muddying the storytelling. I abandoned this conceptual proposal, and instead of having Lear remain on stage, I gave her proper entrances and exits. With this relatively major alteration, the prologue takes on a new meaning, and the opening image has the potential for two readings. The audience is invited to interpret this image as a 'real-time' scene of the queen in her chamber suffering a psychotic episode, and after she is comforted by The Fool, she rises from her bed to be dressed. Alternatively, there is still the potential that what we are seeing is still a contemporary woman experiencing a fever-dream as was originally intended. I find the latter premise much less coherent with the removal of the Lear-remaining-on-stage convention. This change — which I remain convinced was the correct choice — profoundly alters the intended meaning of the production, but I do believe allowing for a double-reading is an interesting unexpected addition, even given the ultimate failure of the original central conceit.

On Working in an Outdoor Setting

I have been reflecting on what advice I might offer future directors in High Park. Given the fact that I lost an entire day of spacing work on deck due to the site not being ready because of torrential rainfall, coupled with the loss of half of one of two tech days to rain, the question that I have been contemplating is: when working in the park, should one construct a show that can be efficiently achieved in the actual number of the days scheduled, or should one count on losing some amount of time, and simplify the show so it only requires a portion of the time? The production I created required a full four days of spacing, and two full days of tech, and with the lost time I found the company was playing catch-up through the previews. The tradeoff in this scenario is that I think it is vital to create a production with enough stimulation to sustain the company's interest and continue to fire their imaginations over the course of a long run. At this point, I don't regret the level of technical complexity that I put into the show, and my advice to

future directors in the park would be to create a production that can be achieved in the time scheduled. That being said, it does give me pause given the challenges I faced.

On Replacing a Key Player

Certainly the most challenging aspect of this process was having to replace a key actor with extremely limited rehearsal time (because of the additional costs involved, we were provided with one two hour session to talk through the part with the replacement actor, and one two hour full call on deck). Having worked in opera, I am familiar with the tradition of the “fly in”, where a singer will literally be flown in the day of an evening performance, and go on stage with only the most basic talk-through by the assistant director (in the case of a production of *Otello* that I worked on at the Canadian Opera Company, such a session was conducted by me). It was initially thought that the original actor might be able to return to the show, so with only an afternoon to improvise a costume, I went on stage for four performances while the actor rested. In order to accommodate the actor’s return after a few days rest, I altered the blocking and costume. I feel that these changes — all of which I think I managed to make work within the conceptual framework of the production — demonstrated to me the strength and clarity of the conceptual architecture of the piece, seeing that even with these last-minute alterations to some key moments, the story held and the themes continued to be communicated. When it became clear that the actor would need a permanent replacement, I continued to attend the show and give notes to the replacement actor, and I worked with his scene partners to forge new relationships with new backstories. I hoped to free the new actor of the burden of trying to create a facsimile of the original performance. On reflection, I feel that the production is certainly different in the absence of the original player, but the change caused other threads of the story to come forward, and it reframed the experience of the production in an interesting — if not altogether as successful — way. Certainly a learning experience if ever there was one.

On the Edit

From the reaction of the ensemble, the company, critics, and audiences — as well as my own personal opinion —, my reduction and adaptation of the play communicated a clear story, but was it the story Shakespeare intended? Removing the Mad Tom plot line and collapsing Edgar’s disguise plot point into the servant who rises up to defend Gloucester in the blinding

scene did turn out to have a profound impact on the overall meaning of the play: in my edit, themes of madness recede into the background, and a discussion of class and status and the way both relate to power comes to the fore. There is plenty of evidence in the full text to support this dramaturgical/thematic intervention/reframing, and the imagery in my production served to magnify this — the prologue dressing of the queen, the Countess of Kent's disguise as the poor man Caius, Edgar's shedding of his fine clothes, the additions of diadems for Regan and Goneril at the end of Act II as each begins to ascend to power, Edmund's embellished military jacket when he takes on the role of British general, and the final processing of the queen's dress in the funereal epilogue. However, by removing Mad Tom a key dialogue about madness — and its ability to bring about clarity — is lessened in impact, and the play takes on a more socio-political focus. I stand behind this choice, and I believe it to be a successful method of cutting the play for length while adapting the dramaturgy to highlight thematic elements which are present in the original text, but I will readily admit that something important was lost in my editing process.

On 'Queen Lear'

Though it caused much debate amongst my mentors, my initial hypothesis of changing the gender of the title character proved to resonate with all strata of people who came in contact with the production. When I initially proposed the idea, I was unable to properly articulate my defence of this choice, relying on instinct and a general notion that the stakes of the play are raised with a woman on the throne (for reasons I have outlined in this paper). For this reason, I don't blame my mentors for not totally being on-board with this bold proposal, but on reflection, I am very confident that the mother-daughter relationship plays out in just as complex and fascinating a way as that of a father and his daughters, and the addition of a dialogue about gender and power is totally appropriate. Much of the success of this idea has to be given to the tremendously convincing fortitude of Diane D'Aquila's performance; in Diane's hands, Lear feels as though he were always intended to be a woman. The journey of a the queen from broken invalid, to 'mad' tyrant, to frightened little girl, to wise sage, to repentant mother, to graceful parent seems to me to be a totally satisfying one, with nothing being lost in inverting the gender. Although I never considered having Diane play Lear "as a man", I am especially happy with how the gender-switch played out in the process and the final production.

On Queer Edmund

Perhaps the most contentious aspect of my production seems to be the choice to have Edmund played as an effete, radical homosexual. Reflecting on this choice is especially interesting because the reaction to this choice seems to divide along sexual identity lines: queer people seemed to immediately understand it, and many straight people were challenged by it. I received the same critique from several heterosexual reviewers that found it difficult to believe that Edmund could seduce Goneril and Regan, but the queer critics seemed to have no issue in believing a cunning and beautiful gay man could convince two heterosexual women to fall in love with him. The idea that Edmund must *legitimately* care about either daughter seems fatuous to me, seeing as he tells the audience of his plan to murder them both in an aside, but this continually came up as a criticism, so I feel I must take it on. The queer coding throughout the production was embedded in a way reminiscent of the queer cultural critic Vito Russo's hermeneutic readings of Hollywood cinema in his seminal work *The Celluloid Closet.* The covert nature of this coded-queerness feels appropriate to me, given that the queer content in the production is present as a strategy to question and destabilize the rigidity of Elizabethan (and, by extension. contemporary) gender norms. I think part of what stood in the way of the success of this idea was my inability to get a consistent performance from the actor who played Edmund — I have found over the course of this process that I have much more success with actors who have a natural aptitude with creating consistency over a run, and I lack the skills to coax a performance which hits consistent sign-posts while remaining alive and evolving from actor's who don't. This is something I must work on moving forward.

On Playing in Rep

I made the decision in previews not to alter too many aspects of my production in previews, both because I was happy with the shape of much of the show, but also in order to be sensitive to the burn-out being experienced by the company. That being said, the few things I did alter had profound impact, such as abandoning the idea of keeping the queen on stage throughout the first two acts and having her come "in" and "out" of a demented dream-like state instead of making physical entrances and exits. I was momentarily thrown when the technical rehearsal schedule was changed at the last minute, which meant I unexpectedly faced a five day gap between rehearsals, so the lack of major changes that needed to be implemented

when we did move into previews proved to be a blessing. It was also revealed that the amount of onstage clean-up rehearsals had been miscalculated in the production schedule, so the work I was planning to do was suddenly truncated, as two rehearsal calls were unexpectedly cancelled. In the spirit of the rep, I gave the final onstage rehearsal — which should have been for *Lear* — to the other production, which was facing greater technical challenges at that point in time.

One thing I found very pleasurable as a method of rehearsing was having time off between rehearsal calls — the time this provided for reflection was a revelation for me, and this is a schedule I wish were possible in more professional contexts in this country (as it is in many parts of French Canada, or at the summer festivals where the rep demands such a schedule). This method of rehearsing suits my method very well and I hope to be able to work under these conditions much more often in the future.

Final Reflection

Coming away from this process, I feel my greatest success was to finally marry the more European *auteur* aspects of my sensibility with an actor-centric rehearsal process. This is manifest in what I feel to be the success of the stylized image-based aspects of the production — something I have never seen fully realized in the park — with the excellent feedback I continually received form the ensemble throughout our work in the hall and on deck. I value this achievement as it proves to me that I am ready to take on the challenges of working at ensemble-driven institutions where a large conceptual scope and scale is mandated by the size of the repertoire. I feel confident in my work with the physical production elements and the construction of image and stage picture which synthesizes costume, set, props, sound, and lighting, and I believe my areas of weakness lie in my inability to know when to be lead by an actor's impulses, and when to intervene by imposing what might be a more successful proposal of my own. Put another way — and these value judgement are, of course, highly reductive — I feel my skill level at working with actors allows me to take a "good" actor and make them "great", or a "bad" actor and make them "good", but I lack the nuance to take a "bad" actor and make them "great". Also, I find I tend to focus my attention on the actors who are the most successful at achieving what I am asking for, rather than putting more focus on the actors who require the most help. These are both challenges I have witnessed some of the master directors I have assisted overcome, and I am confident I can also find these skills as I gain more

experience working with a wide variety of actors of various skill and experience levels. I also feel that I was too intimidated by the short length of the time in the rehearsal hall, and that more time could have been spent at the table before we moved onto our feet. I also made the choice to purposefully pitch the actor's performances above the level of the rehearsal hall to mitigate the adjustment of moving on deck, and this proved a mixed blessing: it seemed to achieve the desired effect, but it limited my ability to give useful notes in the hall on a moment-to-moment level, because of the size of performances I was asking the actors to create. This is another aspect of this process that I remain ambivalent about, and also something I found interesting and educational.

In spite of the myriad challenges of directing in High Park, I feel it is a project one should attempt more than once, and I hope to get another chance in the near future, forearmed with all that I have learned.