

Mack, Maynard, King Lear in Our Time (University of California Press) 1965

p. 9 "Why should," Tate writes,

p. 10 These Scenes lie hid, in which we find
 What may at once divert and teach the Mind?

From his dedicatory letter it is clear that he regards his bringing of Shakespeare's scenes before the Restoration public as a pious tribute. He has been emboldened to it by a persuasive friend (a certain Thomas Boteler) and by his own "Zeal for all the Remains of Shakespeare." When we open to the text, we discover that his zeal for these remains has carried him to invent a love affair between Cordelia and Edgar, to omit France and Lear's Fool, to give Cordelia a waiting woman named Arante, to supply a happy ending, and to omit, conflate, and rearrange Shakespeare's scenes while rewriting (and re-assigning) a good deal of his blank verse. Tate's own description of these efforts, in his letter to Boteler, suggests that, like "art" in Aristotelian aesthetics, his function has been to help extravagant "Nature" - "a Heap of Jewels, unstrung, and unpolish'd; . . . dazzling in their Disorder"-realize its implicit goals. And in a curious literal-minded way, that is exactly what he has done. He has seized on the romance characteristics of Shakespeare's play and restored it to what must have seemed to him its intended genre. . . .

p. 12 Such is Tate's method throughout. The upshot of his reworking is that there is no longer question but that the play is indeed tragical-comical-historical-pastoral romance and, in a sad, shriveled

p. 12 way, effective "theatre." And so it proved for one hundred and fifty-seven years.

I have dwelt on Tate's King Lear because its stage history is actually longer than any other continuous stage history the play has yet had, and because it established, I think, for a very long time (even after the text had been restored) the performer's approach to the play. Tate's text was the vehicle for all the actors who tried Lear during Pope's and Johnson's century: Betterton, George Powell, Robert Wilkes, Barton Booth, Anthony Boheme, James Quin, Garrick, Spanger Barry, John Kemble, and several more. We know very little about any of them before Garrick. Lear was widely reputed to be Garrick's finest role.

p. 29

p. 28 If I may consult my own/ experience during the same three decades, I am obliged to register the suspicion that our stage, for all its advantages, and with a few honorable exceptions, has worked out ways of altering the effect of Shakespeare's text which are quite as misleading as any our ancestors used, and seem to spring, at least in large part, from the same determination to rationalize, or generalize, or unify according to a particular plan what is not regular, not rational, or not really unifiable on that plan.

p. 29 The siren's rock on which efforts to bring King Lear to the stage (as well as, in some quarters, critical efforts to interpret it) oftenest split is the desire to motivate the bizarre actions that Shakespeare's plan calls for in some "reasonable" way. This desire lay behind many of Tate's alterations, as we saw. It helped influence the nineteenth century to rationalize absurdity and barbarity by attributing them (in the manner exemplified by Dr. Johnson's allusion to petty princes of Madagascar) to some appropriately remote and barbarous time or place. It prompted Bradley to regard his considerable lists of inconsistencies and implausibilities as serious "dramatic defects."