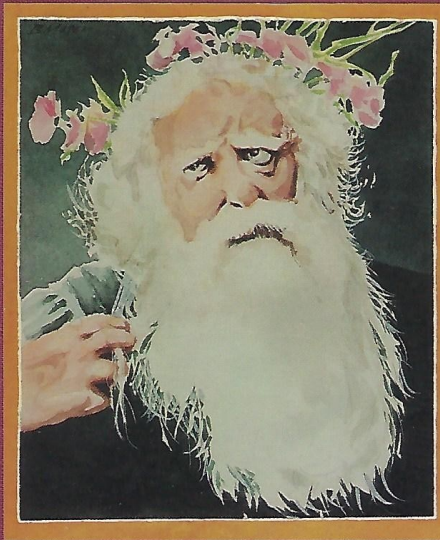


THE GUILD
Shakespeare



THE GUILD

Shakespeare

KING LEAR
CORIOLANUS

BY
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY
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Forewords by
Hal Holbrook and Michael Learned

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FOREWORD

to

KING LEAR

by Hal Holbrook



So many great minds have written about *King Lear* that one is humbled by the sheer weight of scholarship laid upon this play. Rather than add any small ounce of tonnage to the scales, I would like to remove some. I am an actor and what follows are the discoveries of one actor who has played the role of King Lear.

There are those who have said that this play is not producible, but these are mostly literary folk like Charles Lamb and I believe they are wrong. I think it is very difficult to do the play well—to make the story, relationships, and intentions clear and to soar in performance to its imperious height—and I believe this

From his early days with the Lincoln Center Repertory in New York through fifty-odd feature and television films, HAL HOLBROOK has become known as an actor's actor. The recipient of four Emmys, the Tony and Peabody Awards, his solo *Mark Twain Tonight!* has become a classic of the American theatre.

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FOREWORD BY HAL HOLBROOK

daughters to him in front of his entire court and makes a senile game of his confrontation with the specter of death. He requires his daughters to state publicly "which of you, shall we say, doth love us most." It's a shock to them. The two eldest daughters play the game smoothly, telling him exactly what he wants to hear. They are interested in real estate not truth. But Cordelia, his youngest daughter and the star of his heart, refuses to play the game of fakery. Lear is humiliated. He chokes on this bile, banishes her from his kingdom, and thus the wheel of fire begins to turn.

Goneril and Regan, having been awarded possession of the kingdom, suffer their father's presence but thinly. When Lear returns to Goneril's castle from the hunt it becomes clear that he has no intention of giving over his powers to anyone. With his train of a hundred loud and sweaty men, "breaking forth in rank and not-to-be-endured riots," Lear is like a bull at center ring. It is important to take note of Lear's excesses because they are an integral part of the fabric of his character. He is a very, very difficult old man. Boisterous, demanding, arrogant. He expects absolute obedience.

Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away!

Infuriated by his behavior, Goneril belittles her father and threatens to restrict his freedom, enraging Lear to such a pitch that he lays a curse on her and leaves.

It is in this scene that the theme of ingratitude is sounded

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THE GUILD SHAKESPEARE

is the reason it has seemed so daunting. But Mr. Shakespeare wrote this play for actors, so it is as an actor who has tried to scale this height that I speak to you. If I confine my discourse mainly to the character of Lear I hope you will forgive me. I see the play through him.

An actor approaching the role of King Lear must first look past the word "King" and search for the human being. What I have missed in most performances of *King Lear* is this human being in Lear. The man I can identify with. The person I know. Too often he has seemed a sonorous figure in a long gown growling and howling his way through the scenery; or so physically fragile at the start that a full development of the character's arc is unattainable and his ability to carry Cordelia on at the end unconvincing.

Lear is an 80-year old patriarch who has fought his way to the top in a sometimes brutal and primitive world, and as this play begins he is finally confronting the fact that he is going to die. I say "finally" because I doubt he's ever considered himself vulnerable enough to die. Death is for the weak and Lear scorns weakness. He is a man bursting with the primal energy of life, even at 80 years old; a warrior and a hunter, a tribal chieftain in ancient Britain. His sword, not divine right, has made him King.

But his mind is slipping. The paranoia of age is stalking him and he cannot fight it off. His memory has sudden blank spots in it, his flesh has fallen and his joints cry out in pain. These are real devils because they produce the humiliation that comes with age. They make Lear angry and impatient and even more arrogant as he—in his ironic phrase—"crawls toward death."

So in the opening scene of the play he gathers his three

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daughters to him in front of his entire court and makes a senile game of his confrontation with the specter of death. He requires his daughters to state publicly "which of you, shall we say, doth love us most." It's a shock to them. The two eldest daughters play the game smoothly, telling him exactly what he wants to hear. They are interested in real estate not truth. But Cordelia, his youngest daughter and the star of his heart, refuses to play the game of fakery. Lear is humiliated. He chokes on this bile, banishes her from his kingdom, and thus the wheel of fire begins to turn.

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ceal their guilt. He exhorts the Gods to punish them and forgive him: "I am a man more sinned against than sinning." His pleas are drowned out by their indifference as the storm howls on.

Then, exhausted, Lear does something strange—for King Lear. For the first time he shows concern for his fellow man in the person of the Fool. "Art cold? I am cold myself," he says, and takes him inside the shelter. This moment is the first conscious turning away of Lear's mind from his rage and, strangely, the turn is toward sympathy for another human being. Interesting. Could this mean that beneath the wintry bluster there is a soft heart? That love hides somewhere there?

In the very next scene a great moment of self-realization begins to dawn in Lear. He has clung steadfastly to the conviction that he is a loving father, despite all evidence to the contrary. He says:

O Regan, Goneril,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave
all—

He pauses. Note Shakespeare's dash. It means something. Then:

O, that way madness lies; let me shun that!
No more of that.

Shun what? No more of what?? For the longest time the meaning of these lines escaped me. I grew to hate them. I complained to our director, Gerald Freedman, that I didn't under-

stand what in the hell Lear was talking about here and how stupid could he be to think he was a "kind father." Performances of a tremulous, pathetic Lear full of self-pity retched in my mind and blinded me to what Shakespeare was saying. Jerry remained quiet and waited for me to see the obvious—the obvious, which is sometimes the most elusive truth of all. One night, in a preview performance, as I cried "your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all—," the darkness in my mind parted. I thought, "My God, I believe this! I am *trying* to be kind. I think I am kind. I gave my kingdom to them, didn't I?" Then the shadow of doubt fell on me—"Maybe I wasn't kind . . ."—and doubt begat the line:

O, that way madness lies; let me shun that!
no more of that.

The light, the light had struck my poor mind. Now stunned by uncertainty I turned to John Woodson (Kent) and said:

Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own ease,
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
On things would hurt me more . . .

There it was. The turning point in the play.

Lear prays. He does not acknowledge his lack of kindness, his failure as a father. Instead, he prays for the poor naked wretches who have no home. Like himself. In this moment of self-realization I believe Lear slips into madness. I think it happens here, not earlier, and is the direct result of Lear's refusal to face the awful shaft of truth that has exploded in his mind. His very

next line in the scene is one of derangement. It comes upon Edgar's entrance. Lear sees this naked wretch and says:

Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And art thou come to this?

He listens to this babbling outcast, another of the "discarded fathers" of this world, and decides to learn from him: ". . . let me talk with this philosopher."

The mock trial comes next. Lear arraigns his daughters in an imaginary court, crying "is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" Then his tired brain stops spinning and he falls into a frantic, restless sleep.

We don't see Lear again for a long time. Meanwhile the coils of Evil spread and fester in the subplot of the play, its tentacles ensnaring all. Gloucester is blinded. The conspirators begin to turn upon one another in a frenzy of greed and self-gratification. When Edgar escorts his sightless father to Dover, Lear wanders into the play again, leaves and flowers in his hair, mind aflame with plans to mount an army and go on the march against his enemies. He stares at Gloucester: "Ha! Goneril, with a white beard!" And then: "They flattered me like a dog . . . ! To say 'Ay' and 'No' to everything that I said . . ." (Who's he talking about? Gloucester?) "I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause? Adultery?" (Gloucester committed adultery.) ". . . Die for adultery! No; the wren goes to 't . . ."

Gloucester has jested about his adultery in the opening scene of the play. Lear is focusing his scorn on him now. Gloucester, the good-hearted adulterer, the old friend at court who is a

yes-man to Lear ("They are not men o' their words"), who has played the diplomatic game at court and been betrayed by his own bastard son; who has banished his true son, Edgar, crouching like Tom o' Bedlam nearby. Gloucester has been a blind fool. "I remember thine eyes well enough . . . blind Cupid."

Now, worn down by the intensity of his own scathing tirades against the hypocrisy and hatefulness of a world he at last sees clearly, Lear acknowledges Gloucester, this man who, like himself, has been blind to the corruption around him:

LEAR If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
I know thee well enough; Thy name is Gloucester.
Thou must be patient. We came crying hither;
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee. Mark.

GLOUCESTER Alack, alack the day!

LEAR When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.

The wheel of fire upon which Lear has spun throughout his long torture rolls to a momentary stop here. It pauses while the great truth of life comes home to these two old brokenhearted fools. I believe this is the moment of greatest philosophic penetration in the play as well as one of deep emotional catharsis for us all. Lear not only sees the truth of his utter vulnerability, he shares it with another human being in pain.

The rest of this sad story moves like a great symphony toward the final bitter coda, the unsweet taste of truth. After being found by Cordelia, the daughter Lear loves and has banished, the

two of them are captured, imprisoned, and she is killed in front of him. He bears her forth, howling the primal cry of all pain-struck creatures, and lays her down upon the ground. He grieves for her and lies down by her side and dies.

This play touches me to my heart and soul and I think that even in the final scene of death there is beauty. The beauty of truth. The truth about the pain that stalks us all if we do not learn to love in time; and which may strike us even then.

FOREWORD

to

CORIOLANUS

by Michael Learned



At the age of 20 I had the great privilege of playing opposite Paul Scofield in Michael Langham's production of *Coriolanus* at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario. Although Virgilia is a small role, the prospect of working with such luminaries as Scofield, Langham, Douglas Campbell (Menenius), and Elinor Stuart (Volumnia) thrilled and terrified me.

Mr. Langham's first direction to me was "Enter on the balcony weeping. I want to see the tears plopping to the floor." Being young, inexperienced, and fresh out of acting school, I struggled for "motivation" and agonized because crying on cue

MICHAEL LEARNED's diverse stage credits include Amanda in *Private Lives*, Queen Elizabeth in *Mary Stuart*, the title character in *Miss Margarida's Way*, and such Shakespearean roles as Virgilia in *Coriolanus*, Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. She is the recipient of four Emmy Awards as Best Actress for the television series *The Waltons* and *Nurse*.

was always a problem for me. I now suppose having Volumnia for a mother-in-law would be motivation enough, but at the time I used the fact that Virgilia feared desperately for her husband's life and welfare and longed to have him home, safe and sound. It didn't work. I kept waiting for "it" to happen, for the real feeling to emerge and start the tear ducts flowing. . . . Nothing. Finally, on about the fourth or fifth day of rehearsal, Douglas Campbell rolled to a stop during rehearsal and bellowed "Is she going to cry or not!" That worked!! From then on I used the old trick of staring into the lights backstage until my eyes watered and mascara did the rest. The tears plopped like crazy from the balcony to the floor, huge silver dollars shimmering on Stratford's revered and wonderful stage.

As I write this, I try to remember what it was like so long ago. Memories of the smell of spirit gum on Mr. Scofield's wig, his warm approving eyes—he was always supportive and is a wonderfully generous actor to work with. When you're young and insecure, these kindnesses are never forgotten. Tanya Moiseiwitsch's costumes come to mind, light as gossamer and made like real clothes right down to the undergarments. The play was set in the French Revolutionary period, and some of the critics were not terribly pleased with that. I remember the bright white lights on the Stratford stage, the only lighting that was used at that time. I remember the tunnels (vomitoriums), the rustle of the audience, and that goose-bump feeling when the theatre is silent and actors and audiences transcend themselves together. I remember Mr. Scofield's cry of rage and frustration when Coriolanus rails "there is a world elsewhere." It still echoes in my mind.

Coriolanus is not one of Shakespeare's most popular plays.

The box office at Stratford theorized that perhaps people didn't know how to pronounce it and consequently were embarrassed to call up and ask for tickets to that play. However, the experience was a wonderful one for a very young girl, mostly thanks to Mr. Scofield and to that wonderful Canadian theatre.

As I think about the play, I realize that my impressions of it today are quite different. My awareness at that time was a 20-year-old's awareness, and I've lived quite a full life in the meantime.

Coriolanus is usually presented as a play about pride, which seems a rather gross generalization. Pride and politics. As I reread it, it seems to me to be a more intimate play; a play about a boy and his mother; a play about a son fulfilling his mother's dreams; a play about a woman who basically hates men, including her son, and doesn't have much use for women either. Poor Virgilia. I feel that *Coriolanus*' hubris is really a desperate attempt on his part to deal with his pain at being ignored by the first and most important woman in his life.

Volumnia is a formidable and fascinating character. She is a woman who is trapped in her own time. A woman whose only means of power was to live through her son. The tragedy of *Coriolanus* is that in order to please his mother, he gives up himself, his soul, and, indeed, his very life. Nobody wins in the end.

Editor's Introduction to

KING LEAR and *CORIOLANUS*



Can you make no use of Nothing, Nuncle?
King Lear, I.iv.139–40

The man who utters this seeming nonsense is a self-professed Fool. He claims no wisdom or authority. As the King's jester, he doesn't even pretend to coherence. But in a world that exhibits less reason than the rhymes of an imbecile, his "Matter and Impertinency mix'd" (IV.vi.173) will prove altogether to the point.

By focusing on the word "Nothing" the Fool's remarks draw attention to the paradox at the core of *King Lear*. They allude to Cordelia's laconic reply when her father asks what she can say to inherit his amplest bounty (I.i.86–87). They echo the King's rejoinder, when the irritated Lear warns his youngest daughter that "Nothing will come of Nothing" and admonishes Cordelia to "Mend [her] Speech a little" (I.i.91, 95). They recall the com-

ment Gloucester makes to Edmund when the Bastard pretends to conceal a letter he misrepresents as his brother Edgar's and the gullible Duke insists that the "Quality of Nothing hath not such need to hide it self" (I.ii.34-35). They reinforce the Fool's suggestion that the King who has spurned his favorite child and divided his realm between her unloving older sisters has reduced himself to a cipher, an impotent "O without a Figure" (I.iv.207). They anticipate Kent's gruff dismissal of the base Oswald as an "Unnecessary Letter" (II.ii.62). They look forward to the remorseful Lear's admission that he was silly to believe Goneril and Regan when they told him he "was every thing" (IV.vi.106). And they resonate with the scores of other references to "Nothing" and related concepts in a tragedy that functions in many respects as a riddle.

But of course *King Lear* is not the only Shakespearean work in which audiences are obliged to make something out of "Nothing." The same word-game lies at the root of *Much Ado About Nothing*, where the title plays on the homonym "Noting" and on the Elizabethan notion that a "weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7), whether female in reality or only in metaphorical terms, is deficient in part because it possesses "no thing." A similar conundrum informs *Timon of Athens*, where the world-weary protagonist says that "My long Sickness / Of Health and Living now begins to mend, / And Nothing brings me All Things" (V.ii.71-73). Another variation on the theme occurs in *Richard II*, where a deposed head of state concludes that "Nor I nor any Man that but Man is / With Nothing shall be pleas'd till he be eas'd / With being Nothing" (V.v.38-40). And yet another approach to the topic appears in *Coriolanus*, where an exiled and now vengeful

hero is depicted as "a kind of Nothing, Titleless," until he has "forg'd himself a Name a'th' Fire / Of burning Rome" (V.i.13-15). In this passage an awesome warrior who has been previously described as a "Thing of Blood" (II.ii.114), as a "Noble Thing" (IV.v.99), and as a "thing / Made by some other Deity than Nature" (IV.vii.88-89) is defined, not by what he is, but by what he is not. What is to come of this "Nothing," however, and what that metamorphosis will signify, is left to be resolved.

A similar indeterminacy about the implications of nothingness is one of the most salient features of *King Lear*. In the opening scene, for example, Goneril says that she bears her father "A Love that makes Breath poor, and Speech unable" (I.i.61). The meaning Goneril expects the King to derive is that her devotion to him is too abundant, too rich, to be expressed verbally. But her treatment of Lear elsewhere in the play shows Goneril's "Breath" to be "poor" in a more elemental sense: like the counterfeit "Love" it conveys, and "like the Breath of an unfeed Lawyer" (I.iv.138-39), it is worth nothing.

Meanwhile this kind of "Love" makes Cordelia's "Breath poor" too: because corrupt "Speech" leaves Cordelia speechless (I.i.63), because Cordelia knows that Goneril's "glib and oily Art / To speak and purpose not" (I.i.228-29) will make any plain and honest profession of love seem "poor" by comparison, and because the ultimate consequence of Goneril's foul "Breath" will be to render Cordelia's "Speech unable" as she lies limp in her grieving father's arms at the end of her pilgrimage of mercy (V.iii.260-61).

In the tragedy's concluding scene the dying monarch asks the silent Cordelia "Ha: / What is't thou sayst?" Hearing noth-

ing, he explains that "Her Voice was ever Soft, / Gentle, and Low, an excellent thing in Woman." A short while later, having finally resigned himself to the fact that she'll "come no more," he cries "Why should a Dog, a Horse, a Rat have Life, / And thou no Breath at all?" (V.iii.269-71, 303-4).

For the King who had hoped to set his "Rest" on Cordelia's "kind Nursery" (I.i.124-25), this moment is devastating, so much so that within seconds Lear too will be struggling for his final gasps of air. Five times he moans "Never." And as he cradles the daughter his own folly has brought to nought, the old man's abject posture reminds us of the miscalculations that have led him to this incalculable loss.

We remember the outrage with which a wrathful father discounted his beloved's "little seeming Substance" (I.i.201). We remember him decreeing "thy Truth then be thy Dow'r!" (I.i.109). We remember Kent's prayer that the "Gods to their dear Shelter" take the maiden a crazed King has discarded (I.i.185). We remember France's description of this "unpriz'd precious" bride as a treasure "Most Choice Forsaken, and most Lov'd Despis'd" (I.i.264, 256). And we register the play's reverberations of such Biblical passages as 2 Corinthians 6:10, where the Apostle Paul refers to the lot of the Christian in this life "as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Because if Cordelia's corpse is an image of the nothing that has come of "Nothing," her life has been an illustration of the chastened Lear's belated realization that "The Art of our Necessities is Strange / And can make Vild Things Precious" (III.ii.70-71).

Though the King has cast her aside as a piece of refuse, "Unfriended, new adopted to our Hate," Cordelia alone of the old man's offspring has remained true to her "Bond" (I.i.206, 94). She alone has returned those "Duties back as are right Fit" (I.i.98). She alone has gone about her father's "Business" with "No blown Ambition" to advance her own designs (IV.iv.24, 27). And although she alone has had cause to hate a father who has treated her despicably, as Lear acknowledges in IV.vii.70-73, Cordelia has instead loved and forgiven him with a devotion that "redeems Nature from the Gen'ral Curse" that Goneril and Regan have brought it to (IV.vi.203-4). Small wonder, then, that when a spent Lear awakens to Cordelia's beatific countenance after his traumatic night in the storm, his initial impulse is to believe his rejected daughter "a Soul in Bliss" (IV.vii.44).

Like the Gloucester who has served as Lear's chief minister of state, the King to whom we are introduced at the beginning of the play is a "Lust-dieted Man" (IV.i.66), a sovereign so spoiled by "Pomp," so accustomed to having all his needs supplied and all his wishes pampered, that he has never even imagined the hardships of ordinary mortals. But suddenly Lear finds himself afflicted by the "Injuries" his own vices have procured (II.ii.483-85). At the outset he has only curses for the "Pelican Daughters" who seem hellbent on devouring the "Flesh" that "begot" them (III.iv.76-77). And he maintains, quite rightly, that he is "a Man / More sinn'd against than sinning" (III.ii.59-60). Before long, however, Lear's "Manhood" becomes shaken in a way he would once have found shameful (I.iv.310-13). He disavows the brine that often accompanies "Noble Anger" (II.ii.459); but before his agony is over, he feels the stirrings of compassion. In the fierce

tempest that objectifies his inner turmoil, Lear takes pity on "Poor Tom," the naked Bedlam who becomes, for the King, a symbol of "Unaccommodated Man" (III.iv.111). Scrutinizing this "bare Forked Animal," this emaciated manifestation of essential humanity, Lear suddenly recognizes that it is a disadvantage to be "Sophisticated" (III.iv.112, 110). He discovers, as Gloster will phrase it later (IV.i.20-21), that frequently "Our Means secure us, and our mere Defects / Prove our Commodities." Like Gloster, Lear learns that what we think of as good fortunes are often bad for us, because they shield us from reality and foster a complacency that can be our undoing; on the other hand, he observes, our bad fortunes, our severest handicaps, can be our truest counselors and our most valuable assets.

Once he has taken note of this lesson, Lear begins stripping off the "Lendings" (III.iv.113) that differentiate a pompous monarch from his humblest subjects. He hurls scorn at the "Robes and Furr'd Gowns" (IV.vi.164) that hide the wealthy from the eyes of Justice; he upbraids the "Excess" that permits the idle nobleman to indulge himself in luxury while the peasant scrambles to scrape together a meager sustenance (IV.i. 69-70). He acts on a remark he'd earlier spoken in sarcasm, that "Our basest Beggars / Are in the Poorest Thing superfluous" (II.ii.447-48), and by exposing himself "to feel what Wretches feel" he finds a way to make "use of Nothing" and "shew the Heav'ns more Just" (III.iv.34, I.iv.139-40, III.iv.36). In the process, like the Gloster who must be deprived of his sight before he can perceive things "feelingly" (IV.vi.147), the King is brought to the awareness that "A Man may see how this World goes with no Eyes" (IV.vi.148-49).

When he reaches this point, Lear is "cut to th' Brains" (IV.vi.191). But he remains "ev'ry Inch a King," and now in a sense that could never have been applied to the tyrannical dictator who stormed onto "this great Stage of Fools" in the opening scene (IV.vi.109, 182).

By the time his excruciating journey approaches its terminus, Lear has discerned some of the "Uses of Adversity" (*As You Like It*, II.i.12). Like Gloster, like Edgar, and like Kent, he has come to "within a Foot / Of th' extreme Verge" (IV.vi.25-26). He has been cured of "the great Rage" (IV.vii.76) that made an earlier Lear lash out at anyone who crossed his will. He has surrendered any ambition to master "the Cause of Thunder" (III.iv.160). So Job-like has his patience become, indeed, that the King now thinks of Cordelia and himself as "Sacrifices," submissive instruments of Heaven, who will reverently take upon themselves "the Mystery of Things" (V.iii.20, 16).

But what are we to make of Lear's concluding moments? Is the old man who enters for the final time with exclamations of "Howl, howl, howl!" (V.iii.255) a reversion to the Heaven-defying King of before? Is the Lear who asks for help to "undo this Button" removing his last "Lendings" in contempt of a world that has proven too "tough" for further endurance (V.iii.306, III.iv.113, V.iii.311)? To put the query in the starkest theological terms, does the protagonist expire convinced that his sufferings add up to no more than "a Tale / Told by an Idiot, full of Sound and Fury / Signifying nothing" (*Macbeth*, V.v.26-28)? Or do his closing words about Cordelia's lips hint that, in some way not clear to anyone else, Lear is granted "a Chance which does redeem all Sorrows" (V.iii.264)?

Most of us would like to infer that, like Gloster's, the old King's "flaw'd Heart" bursts "smilingly" (V.iii.196, 199), with at least a shred of faith and hope intact. We'd prefer to believe that he attains what T. S. Eliot was later to call "A condition of complete simplicity / (Costing not less than everything)." In the final reckoning, however, the only thing we can affirm with certainty is that Lear's legacy is a "gor'd State" whose stunned survivors are left to bear the "Weight of this Sad Time" without any visible sign of support from above (V.iii.317, 320).

The emotions we feel at the end of *Coriolanus* are not totally unlike the ones that draw the curtain on *King Lear*. Here too a title character who appears to have gained some insight from what has happened to him is "cut off" (V.vi.140) before he can fulfill the promise afforded by his revised perspective. Here too it seems a tragic waste to have a man "end / Where he was to begin" (V.vi.64-65). But here too we sense a logic to events that, if not inevitable, is at least forcible enough to mark the outcome as "a purpos'd thing" that "grows by Plot" (III.i.36).

In *Coriolanus* as in the work that opens this volume of *The Guild Shakespeare*, the dramatist compels us to confront the problem of arranging equitable "Distribution" for a society's resources (*King Lear*, IV.i.66-70). The action commences with unrest over a "Belly" (a Patrician elite) that is evidently failing to provide adequate nutrition to the "Discontented Members" of Rome's body politic (I.i.101, 115). In response to agitation by the city's Plebeian masses, the ruling oligarchy amends a recently formed republican constitution to enfranchise as Tribunes five spokesmen for the general populace.

For most of Rome's Patricians this concession to the People

is an unwelcome but unavoidable compromise, the only feasible means of averting revolution and restoring civil concord. Aristocrats such as Cominius and Menenius view the Commons with disdain, and they have only contempt for the two Tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, who claim roles as principal advocates for a public that they too treat with condescension. Notwithstanding its potential for disintegration, however, the new hybrid government is capable of success, and for a brief interlude it appears to function harmoniously and productively (IV.vii).

What destabilizes the system is an inflexible Patrician who refuses to conceal or temper his opposition to any type of political power-sharing. For Caius Martius Coriolanus the "many-headed Multitude" (II.iii.18) can only be regarded as a monster to be suppressed. In "soothing" the mob with rewards for unruly behavior, Martius asserts, the nobility have committed a grave error, one that will inevitably "nourish 'gainst our Senate th' Cockle of / Rebellion" (III.i.66-68). Rather than continuing to yield to the "Yea and No / Of Gen'ral Ignorance," Coriolanus advocates a return to the days when Rome was under the exclusive control of those who embody "the Fundamental Part of State," the cultivated few with the capacity to exercise and execute sound judgment (III.i.143-44, 149).

Not surprisingly, Sicinius and Brutus envisage Martius as a threat to their newly created offices, and they mobilize the Plebeians against "this Viper / That would depopulate the City and / Be ev'ry Man himself" (III.i.257-59). Thanks in large measure to Martius' "Choler," which cooperates with his critics to break the hero's own neck, the Tribunes manage to get Rome's most coura-

geous military defender condemned as an "Enemy to th' People and his Country" (III.iii.25, 115) and banished.

With characteristic haughtiness, Coriolanus retorts "I banish you!" (III.iii.120). Emphasizing that "There is / A World elsewhere" (III.iii.131-32), he then proceeds to the residence of his only real rival for battlefield glory, a Volscian general whom Martius has defeated on several prior occasions. At first Aufidius is ecstatic to receive the "Service" (IV.v.84) of his erstwhile enemy. He offers Coriolanus half the "Directitude" of his army (IV.vi.67), and together they "rudely visit" the Romans "in Parts Remote" (IV.v.125). As they prepare for an assault upon the gates of the capital itself, however, it becomes apparent that Martius is too widely admired by the men of his adopted ally. The envious Aufidius believes that he is "dark'ned in this Action" (IV.viii.5), and he decides that he can "renew" himself and burnish his reputation only by engineering his partner's "Fall" (V.vi.48). An opportunity arises when Coriolanus brings about a reversal through his own naiveté.

The Martius who leads the Volscians against his native Rome has gone to such an extremity because "Anger's" his "Meat" (IV.ii.50). Bred from birth as a firm, unbending "Sword" (I.vi.76), a soldier who is most at home when he can position "himself alone, / To answer all the City" (I.iv.52-53), Coriolanus has long taken pride in a "Nature" that is "too Noble" to bow to the constraints of lesser beings (III.i.249). There has been "no Man in the World / More bound to's Moth'r" (V.iii.158-59), in Martius' case a matron who has made him the soldier he is and who represents the very "Life of Rome" (V.v.1). Yet despite the promptings of the prepossessing Volumnia, Coriolanus has thus

far proven incapable of framing his upright "Spir't" to any "Baseness" he regards as incompatible with his "own Truth" (III.ii.96, 119-22).

Now to his astonishment he is confronted with a dilemma a man of more maturity would have foreseen from the beginning. The same Mother who has persuaded her son, against his own instincts, to seek to crown his martial achievements with a Consulship, the same Mother who has twice convinced Martius to try dissembling with his disposition (III.ii.61) in order to curry favor with the impressionable Plebeians, comes to Coriolanus with an appeal for him to forswear his mission of mass slaughter and spare his "Mother's Womb" (V.iii.123-24). For a brief interval Martius attempts to "stand / As if a Man were Author of himself, / And knew no other Kin" (V.iii.35-37). He essays to purge his heart of the residual bonds of "Affection"; he tries to "Let it be Virtuous to be Obstinate" (V.iii.24-26). But eventually he feels his resolution "melt" as his "Hardness" gives way to "a Woman's Tenderness" (V.iii.28, 91, 129). At his Mother's urging, he consents to "imitate the Graces of the Gods" (V.iii.150) and negotiate a treaty that will reconcile two warring states, both externally, as the Romans and the Volscians conclude another round of hostilities, and internally, as Coriolanus endeavors to mediate the "diff'rence" between the dictates of his "Honor" and the pleadings of "Mercy" (V.iii.200-1).

As Martius accedes to his Mother's request, he suspects that what he terms an "unnat'ral Scene" will prove "Mortal to him" (V.iii.184, 189). But with an acceptance of his destiny that recalls Edgar's "Ripeness is all" (*King Lear*, V.ii.11) and the Prince of Denmark's "Let be" (*Hamlet*, V.ii.236-37), he says "let it come"

(V.iii.189). He rules out any thought of returning with his family to his former home—though in V.v.4-5 the suggestion of a "Repeal" of his banishment makes such an option conceivable for the future—because he recognizes that his first task is to go back to the Volscian Lords and persuade them to ratify a truce that will be much less gratifying to them than the Rome-annihilating "happy Victory" (V.iii.186) they had had every assurance of celebrating.

The Martius who parades into the Volscian capital to "great shouts of the People" in the final scene of the tragedy is no longer the man who was hooted out of his birthplace by an earlier public outcry. This Martius has evolved from a "Grub" to an infant "Butterfly." He "has Wings, he's more than a Creeping Thing" (V.iv.12-16). But "to be Tender-minded / Does not become a Sword" (*King Lear*, V.iii.31-32), and Coriolanus is now defenseless in a way that the more primitive Martius was not when he was last required to "answer" all the Volscians (I.iv.50-53). For though he surmises, correctly, that he can no longer conduct himself as "a lonely Dragon" (IV.i.30), Coriolanus has no aptitude for his newly adopted role as a solo diplomat. Without fully comprehending his predicament, he finds himself, like the lost soul Matthew Arnold was to portray in one of the most poignant lyrics of the nineteenth century, "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born, / With nowhere yet to rest [his] head."

As Martius launches into what will prove to be the crucial performance of his life, he is harshly interrupted by a crafty adversary who knows that his intended victim has not sloughed off all the simplicity and crudeness of the "Boy" his "Tears" have

begun to help him outgrow (V.vi.100). Like the Tribunes who have stage-managed Martius' frenzy in Rome, Aufidius provokes Coriolanus to one last outburst of "Impatience" (V.vi.146). Whether Martius reverts entirely to his former self is a matter of interpretation, but his fiery rebuttal to his accuser's taunts offers a pretext for the treacherous Aufidius to give the signal for a deed that displays anything but the kind of "Valor" (V.vi.133) the Volscian champion had exhibited up to the moment when he cursed his "condemned Seconds" (I.vii.22) for rescuing him during an earlier confrontation with Coriolanus.

Ironically, though Martius' body is stabbed and trodden upon as if it were a lump of offal, the unvanquished spirit of the valiant Roman gets "the Best of it" in yet another encounter with his emulous rival (V.vi.148). In the circumstances of his demise, then, if not in every stage of the stormy career that has led him to this tragic consummation, the protagonist of *Coriolanus* garners "a Noble Memory" (V.vi.155).

Shakespeare appears to have written his fourth and final Roman tragedy in 1607-8, during a period when England itself was divided over economic issues similar to those in the opening scene of the play. Just how the author's own involvement in contemporary affairs may have affected his choice and treatment of the topic of social justice has been, and will continue to be, vigorously debated.

For the main outlines of Coriolanus' story Shakespeare drew upon Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, the same source the dramatist had harvested so fruitfully when he composed *Julius Caesar* (circa 1599) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (circa 1607). For Menenius' Fable

of the Belly in I.i, the playwright took details from Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1595) and William Camden's *Remains of a Greater Work Concerning Britain* (1605). He may also have derived material for the play from Philemon Holland's 1600 translation of Livy's *Roman History*, and from George Chapman's Englishing of Homer's *Iliad*, the first installment of which had been published in 1598. Coriolanus resembles Achilles in his philosophy that "Brave Death out-weighs Bad Life" (I.vi.71) and in his conviction that a true man will "prefer / A Noble Life before a Long" (III.i.150-51). Aufidius departs from this heroic ideal, of course; but in his employment of "Conspirators" to dispatch a foe he has been unable to defeat in single combat he mimics Achilles' resort to his Myrmidons to butcher the honorable Hector. Shakespeare had dealt with that disgraceful episode in V.viii of *Troilus and Cressida*.

For *King Lear*, which he seems to have completed in 1604-5, the playwright adapted, and gave a tragic ending to, an anonymous *Chronicle History of King Leir* (circa 1590). He also took material from a variety of other sources, among them the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), the multi-author *Mirror for Magistrates* (1574, 1587), Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostors* (1603), and John Florio's 1603 translation of Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*. For his portrayal of the unworldly "foolishness" of Christian behavior, as typified by such characters as the Fool, Cordelia, Edgar, Kent, and Albany, Shakespeare drew inspiration from the Gospels and from the epistles of the Apostle Paul, especially 1 Corinthians 1-2 and 2 Corinthians 6. No doubt

he also derived some themes from Desiderius Erasmus' treatment of the same subject in *The Praise of Folly*, translated into English by Sir Thomas Chaloner in 1549.

The only textual basis for *Coriolanus* is the printing of the work that appeared in the 1623 First Folio collection. The Folio text contains an unusually large number of metrical elisions (forms such as *a'th'* and *and't*), and the *Guild* edition reproduces those elisions in the compressed style in which they occur in the play's original publication.

For *King Lear* there are two textual authorities, (a) a 1608 Quarto that contains some 300 lines not included in the Folio version, and (b) a 1623 edition that supplies approximately 100 lines not found in the Quarto. The Quarto text is now viewed as an earlier state of the tragedy, and the Folio text is usually interpreted as an adapted script from which many of the Quarto passages were deliberately excised either for performance or for reasons having to do with the sensitivity of their political or religious implications. Many of today's scholars prefer to approach the two texts as totally separate works of art, each with its own structural integrity. But it is just as difficult to be sure about that assumption as it is to demonstrate the older hypothesis that behind the two extant versions of *King Lear* there must once have existed fuller manuscripts only partially conveyed by either of the printings that survive.

The Guild Shakespeare offers a *King Lear* based primarily on the Folio rendering, but with the pertinent Quarto passages spliced in as they occur. The Quarto supplements are noted individually in the commentary that accompanies the text.