Lear Study Guide

Lear by Edward Bond

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Introduction

Edward Bond's *Lear* was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1971. Bond's 1965 play *Saved* had already established his position as an important new playwright, and some believe early reviewers of *Lear* did not fully understand the play but were reluctant to condemn It, largely because of Bond's reputation. Many did find fault with the play, however, and much attention was focused on *Lear's* tremendous violence. Some were critical of that violence, while others defended its extremity as essential to the playwright's purpose. As with Bond's other plays, the violence in *Lear* remains a subject of critical debate to this day.

Another focus of attention on *Lear* is its relationship to William Shakespeare's play *King Lear.* As the playwright has noted, it is important to note that Bond's *Lear* be seen not simply as an adaptation of Shakespeare's play but as a comment on that drama. In various interviews, Bond has said that current audience reaction to Shakespeare's *King Lear,* which focuses on the artistic experience of the play, is far removed from the way Shakespeare's audience would have responded. Bond's purpose is to make Shakespeare's play more politically effective, more likely to cause people to question their society and themselves, rather than simply to have an uplifting aesthetic experience. As a socialist playwright, Bond writes plays that are not meant merely to entertain but to help to bring about change in society.

Lear has been called the most violent drama ever staged as well as the most controversial of Bond's plays. It has been revived a number of times since its original production, and Its reputation has grown as more critical attention has been paid to Bond's work Although It is clear that *Lear* is an important work among Bond's plays, its full effect on contemporary drama remains to be seen.

Author Biography

Edward Bond was born on July 18, 1934, to working class parents in Holloway, a North London suburb in England. When World War II began in 1939, Bond, like many children, was evacuated to the countryside. Even so, he was exposed to the violence of the war, the bombings, the continual sense of danger, all of which helped to shape Bond's image of the world as a violent place. Bond's education was interrupted by the war, and he left school for good at fifteen. He worked in factories and offices and served for two years in the British army. In his early twenties, he began writing plays.

At this time, in the 1950s, a new generation of playwrights was beginning to revolutionize British drama. These playwrights included John Osborne *(Look Back in Anger),* Arnold Wesker *(Chicken Soup with Barley),* and Harold Pinter *(The Homecoming)* . As a group, they moved away from the predictable, even insipid, British post-war theater to create drama, often political, that was new and vibrant Bond eventually became one of this group of new playwrights.

Bond wrote a number of plays before his first staged work, *The Pope's Wedding,* was produced in 1962. Although that play contained some violence, it was not until the production of *Saved* (1965), a play that includes an onstage depiction of the stoning of a baby, that Bond became notorious for the extreme violence of his work. The Lord Chamberlain, a public official responsible at the time for maintaining moral standards in British theater, heavily censored the original script. The eventual production of the play, in its entirety in 1965 at the Royal Court, resulted in the theater being prosecuted and fined.

Bond's next play, *Early Morning,* produced in 1968, featured cannibalizing. It was the last play banned by the Lord Chamberlain before censorship in the British theater was abolished that same year.

Other important plays by Bond include *Lear* (1971), *Bingo* (1971), and *Restoration* (1968). He has also written two volumes of poetry and a number of screenplays, including *Walkabout* (1971), directed by Nicolas Roeg.

In his later work, Bond continues to be noted for the violence in his Writing. A socialist and atheist, he is also known for the highly political content of his plays, and by the 1990s was considered a major voice in the British theater.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Lear opens at the site of a wall King Lear is having built in order to keep enemies out of his kingdom. Two workers carry a dead laborer onstage Just before Lear enters with Lord Warrington and Lear's daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, among others When Lear sees the dead man, his primary concern is with the resulting delay to the building of the wall, and he shoots the worker who accidentally caused the man's death. Bodice and Fontanelle object to Lear's violence and reveal their own plans to marry Lear's enemies, the Duke of North and the Duke of Cornwall, respectively. Lear's daughters believe their marriages will lead to peace, but Lear believes that only the wall can protect his people. After Lear and the others leave, Bodice and Fontanelle reveal the plans they share with their husbands to attack Lear's armies. In Scene 2, as Lear prepares for war, Warrington informs him that each daughter has written separately, each asking Warrington to betray Lear, then the other daughter

In Scene 3, each of the daughters complains about her husband and reveals plans to have him killed.

In Scene 4, the audience discovers that the sisters' armies have been victorious, but Bodice and Fontanelle each has failed at having her husband killed Warrington, now a prisoner whose tongue has been cut out, is brought before the sisters. Bodice calmly knits while Warrington is tortured by her soldiers Fontanelle calls for increased violence against Warrington, then deafens him by poking Bodice's knitting needles into his ears. Warrington is taken out by a soldier.

In Scene 5, Lear, in the woods, finds bread on the ground and eats it Warrington, crippled, and for whom the bread is intended, sneaks up behind Lear with a knife but leaves when the Gravedigger's Boy arrives with bread and water for Lear. The Boy asks Lear to stay with him and his wife. Scene 6 takes place at the Boy's house, where Lear finds out how the boy lives. The Boy has two fields and his pregnant wife, Cordelia, keeps pigs. When Lear goes out with the Boy, Warrington returns with a knife, and the Boy's wife calls out, saying that the Wild Man has returned. While Lear sleeps, Warrington returns with a knife, attacks Lear, then leaves.

In Scene 7, the Boy complains to Lear about the king who caused so much suffering for the workers building his wall, but asks Lear to stay. A sergeant and three soldiers come on stage looking for Lear. Warrington's body is discovered plugging the well. The soldiers kill the Boy, rape Cordelia, and kill the pigs. The Carpenter arrives and kills the soldiers. Lear is taken prisoner.

Act 2

In the first scene, saying Lear is mad, Bodice and Fontanelle bring him before a judge. When asked about Bodice and Fontanelle, Lear denies that they are his daughters. Bodice has her mirror given to Lear, as she believes that madmen are frightened of themselves. Lear sees himself in the mirror as a tortured animal in a cage. He is found mad and taken away. Bodice tells Fontanelle that there are malcontents in the kingdom and that there will be a civil war. Fontanelle replies that the rebels are led by Cordelia.

In Scene 2, the Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost appears to Lear in his cell. Lear asks the Ghost to bring him his daughters. The apparitions that appear are of Bodice and Fontanelle as young girls. Lear and his daughters talk as the two girls sit with their heads on his knees. Lear asks the daughters to stay, but they leave him. The Ghost reappears and asks Lear if he can stay with him. Lear agrees, saying they will be comforted by the sound of each other's voices.

In Scene 3, Cordelia appears with her soldiers, one of whom was wounded in a skirmish with Bodice and Fontanelle's troops. The Carpenter arrives. A soldier captured by Cordelia's men asks to join their forces, but Cordelia has him shot because he does not hate. The others go offstage, leaving the wounded soldier to die alone. In Scene 4, Bodice and Fontanelle, talking at their headquarters, reveal that their husbands have tried to desert. Fontanelle is given Lear's death warrant by Bodice and signs it. The Dukes of North and Cornwall arrive and are told they are to be kept in cells unless there is a need for them to be seen in public. Left alone, Bodice reveals that she started to have the wall pulled down, but that she needed the workers as soldiers.

In Scene 5, Cordelia's soldiers, who appear leading Lear and other prisoners, have lost their way. Lear says that he only wants to live to find the Ghost and help him. Fontanelle is brought in, a prisoner also. In Scene 6, Lear and the other prisoners, including Fontanelle, are in their cell. The Ghost arrives. He is cold and thin. Lear says he wishes he'd been the Ghost's father and looked after him. Fontanelle tells Lear that if he helps her, she will protect him if Bodice is victorious At the Carpenter's command, a soldier shoots Fontanelle.

A medical doctor who is also a prisoner arrives to perform an autopsy on Fontanelle. Lear is awed by the beauty of the inside of her body, in contrast to her cruelty and hatred when alive.

Bodice arrives as a prisoner, indicating that Cordelia's forces have defeated the last remnants of the daughters' regime. Lear tells his daughter that he destroyed Fontanelle. Bodice too has been sentenced to death. The soldiers stab her with a bayonet three times. Cordelia, now the Carpenter's wife, has asked that Lear not be killed. Using a "scientific device," the doctor removes Lear's eyes. In terrible pain, Lear leaves the prison with the Ghost. In Scene 7, Lear meets a family of farmers by the wall. They reveal that the father will go to work on the wall and the son will become a soldier. Lear feels pity and tells them to run away. Lear says that Cordelia does not know what she is doing and that he will write to tell her of the people's suffering.

Act 3

In Scene I, Lear is living in the Boy's old house with Thomas, his wife Susan, and John, all of whom care for Lear in his blindness. A deserter from Cordelia's wall arrives; the Ghost wants him to leave for the sake of everyone else's safety. Soldiers arrive, looking for the deserter, but Lear hides the fugitive Unable to find him, the soldiers leave. The others want the deserter to leave as well, but Lear insists that he-and all escapees who come to the house-can stay.

Scene 2 occurs some months later. At the Boy's house, Lear tells a group of people a fable. The audience learns from Thomas that hundreds gather to hear Lear's public speeches, but Thomas believes it is dangerous for Lear to continue speaking out against the government. Au officer arrives with Lear's old Councilor and accuses Lear of hiding deserters. The deserter from Scene 2 is taken away to be hanged. The Councilor tells Lear that Cordelia has tolerated Lear's speaking, but now he must stop. The Councilor and those who came with him leave. Lear complains that he is still a prisoner; there is a wall everywhere. The Ghost enters; he is thinner and more shrunken. The Ghost suggests that he poison the well so the others will leave; he will take Lear to a spring to drink. Lear sleeps, and John tells Susan that he is leaving and asks her to come with him John leaves, Thomas enters, and Susan, crying, asks Thomas to take her away from Lear. Thomas tells Susan to come into the house.

In Scene 3, Lear is alone in the woods. The Ghost arrives; he is deteriorating rapidly and appears terrified The Ghost believes he is dying and weeps because he is afraid. CordelIa and the Carpenter enter. Cordelia speaks of how the soldiers killed her husband and raped her and of the way in which her new government is creating a better way of life The Ghost watches his former wife, wishing he could speak to her. Cordelia asks Lear to stop working against her. Lear tells Cordelia she must pull the wall down, but she says the kingdom will be attacked by enemies If she does. When Lear continues saying he will not be quiet, Cordelia says he will be put on trial, then leaves.

The Ghost is gored to death by pigs that have gone mad. In Scene 4, Lear is taken to the wall by Susan. He climbs up on the structure in order to dig it up. The Farmer's Son, now a soldier, shoots Lear, injuring him. Lear continues to shovel. The Farmer's Son shoots Lear again, killing him Lear's body is left alone onstage.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

This play uses William Shakespeare's classic *King Lear* as the starting point for a contemporary exploration of violence - physical, emotional, spiritual, and political. Part of this exploration is a searching look at the effect that violence has on those that perpetrate it, as well as on those who are its victims. Secondary themes relating to the nature of love and of guilt are also developed.

At the site of construction on a wall Lear is building to keep out his country's enemies, a foreman and several workers struggle in vain to help an injured laborer, but the worker soon dies. Lear, Warrington, Bodice, and Fontanelle, accompanied by an engineer and several aides, arrive shortly afterward. As Fontanelle complains about how wet her feet are and Bodice thanks the engineer for giving them the tour, Lear complains about how badly the work on his wall is being handled. He also says that anyone who causes any delay in construction will be severely punished. When he discovers that it was a dropped axe that killed the dead laborer, he calls for the laborer who dropped the axe to be executed. The foreman pushes the guilty laborer forward. As a firing squad appears, Lear speaks at length about how he started the wall when he was young, and he expresses his suspicion that the guilty laborer is in the employ of one of the enemies the wall is intended to keep out, either the Duke of Cornwall or the Duke of North.

Bodice attempts to get Lear to stop the execution. After he whispers to her that what he's really doing is giving the men incentive to continue working, she publicly distances herself from him and his acts, and Fontanelle does the same. Lear tells them they can be merciful when he's dead - they'll have the wall to protect them. Until the wall is built, however, he can't and won't be merciful. Bodice tells him she has proof Cornwall and North aren't Lear's enemies, but he insists they are. Bodice and Fontanelle then announce that they're going to marry Cornwall and North. Lear says the dukes only want to get over the wall and take over the country. Bodice insists that the wall be pulled down, and Lear insists upon the execution. Warrington advises Lear to make his point about discipline by imprisoning the laborer rather than killing him. Lear grabs a pistol and prepares to shoot the laborer, and Bodice says this is proof that he's insane. Lear speaks at angry length about how he's given his life to serve and protect his people and how he won't let Bodice and Fontanelle destroy his life's work. He shoots the laborer, and orders the other laborers to get back to work. He then tells his daughters they've betrayed him and their country, that he pities the men who will share their beds, that their ambition will torture the people of the kingdom, and that the people will ultimately choose who they want as their ruler - him or them.

As the foreman and other laborers carry away the two bodies, Lear goes out. Bodice orders Warrington to keep an eye on Lear, saying she'll let him know what's to happen next. Warrington and the other aides go. Bodice and Fontanelle plan to go to the dukes

and prepare to make war on Lear - as Bodice says the attack must come "before the wall's finished." The sisters bid each other farewell and go.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

At each point in the play, there are three essential elements to be considered. The first is the way in which it parallels Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Several such parallels are evident in this scene - both Lears have two selfish, manipulative daughters, both daughters marry powerful lords (one of whom is named Cornwall in both plays), and both Lears have a trusted aide (Warrington in this play, Gloucester in the other) who end up destroyed. A key difference is that Shakespeare's Lear has a third daughter, the loving, loyal, upright Cordelia. Bond's Lear has no third daughter, but interestingly, the name Cordelia is used for a character who later appears in the play and functions in a very different capacity.

The most obvious parallel between the two plays is in the title character. Lear in both plays is an absolute monarch, an old man on the brink of insanity. Both Lears come into increasing conflict with their daughters, both become increasingly insane, and at the same time, both become increasingly ennobled as they realize the repercussions of their actions. In addition, they both end up dead. That being said, there are two important differences between Lear at the beginning of this play and Lear at the beginning of *King Lear.*

The first difference lies in the fact that at the beginning of Shakespeare's *Lear*, Lear intends to divide his kingdom between his daughters and their husbands. In this play, this is not his intention whatsoever. His self-righteous focus on keeping and extending his personal power is too dominant, an important aspect of his character that makes his eventual repentance and humility at the end of the play that much more poignant and thematically relevant. The second key difference functions within an aspect of both plays that defines both a key parallel and a key difference between them - that both plays are focused on violence.

In both plays, both Lears commit acts of violence. Shakespeare's Lear commits political and emotional violence, as he divides his country in two, his daughters against each other, and himself from his beloved Cordelia. Bond's Lear commits an act of physical and spiritual violence, killing an innocent man to make a point. On one level, the characters' mutual tendency to violence, along with their eventual destruction as the result of that tendency, defines both plays as classical tragedies, theatre in which an essentially noble character is destroyed by a single fatal flaw. The difference comes in how that tendency towards violence manifests, a difference defined by their intent which serves as the second key difference between the two characters

In the first scene of Shakespeare's play, when Lear does emotional violence to Cordelia by banishing her from his presence, he does so without the deliberate intent of destroying her life. In this first scene of Bond's play, Lear does physical violence to the laborer with the explicit purpose of killing him. This establishes them at very different

places at the beginnings of their journeys through the action of their respective plays. Shakespeare's Lear is impulsive and perhaps napve, but not cruel - he is, in some ways, an innocent. Bond's Lear, however, is calculated and merciless, and therefore far from innocent. This is important for two reasons. First, as previously discussed in reference to the self-righteousness in Bond's Lear, his remorselessness defines his transformation into humble repentance as more profound than it might be if he was as napve as Shakespeare's Lear. The second reason Bond's Lear is cruel where Shakespeare's Lear is foolish can be inferred from the way their parallel journeys both conclude. Because both characters end up the same way - mad, redeemed, dead - it's perhaps tempting to say there's no essential difference between the two acts of violence in the two plays. Physical violence, emotional violence, political violence - it's all the same thing. However, it can also be argued that Bond's Lear suffers more deeply than Shakespeare's Lear. Both men end up penniless, physically lost, and politically betrayed, but Bond's Lear is physically tortured and mutilated (Act 2 Scene 6). This suggests that that the intent to cause violence adds weight to the crime of violence, and therefore carries with it heavier consequences. The play doesn't explicitly say this, but such a thesis is easy to infer. Ultimately, the core thematic point of both plays is the same. The action of each bears out violence, of whatever sort, leading to more violence, and always with tragic results.

The third essential element to consider throughout the play emerges less frequently but is nonetheless indispensably significant. This is the presence of the wall, which, as Lear states here, serves to keep enemies at bay. Symbolically, however, it represents barriers to a wider perspective and understanding. For example, Lear refuses to see Cornwall and North as anything but enemies, and therefore puts up the wall. If he considered the possibility that they weren't, if he broadened his perspective, if he took down his emotional wall, he could possibly see Cornwall and North as friends, or at least as allies. This tendency towards limited perspective is another aspect of his character that defines him throughout the play, and that deepens the meaning of the transformation he undergoes by its conclusion. Also present in this scene, the wall symbolizes the barrier that exists between Lear and his daughters, and later in the play symbolizes several other sorts of inter-personal walls as well.

Act 1, Scenes 2, 3 and 4

Act 1, Scenes 2, 3 and 4 Summary

These three scenes define the battle for control of Lear's kingdom within the context of an exploration of the characters of the bloodthirsty Bodice and Fontanelle.

Scene 2 - As a parade of soldiers passes and as Lear salutes them, Warrington attempts to get him to abandon his war with Bodice and Fontanelle, saying he's an old man and could always ask to live in peace in the country. Lear refuses, saying his daughters can't be trusted. Warrington then reveals that Bodice and Fontanelle have each independently asked him (Warrington) to betray Lear, each offering him financial and military and sexual rewards if he does. Lear comments that they live in a fantasy world, and then tells Warrington that if he (Lear) is killed, he (Warrington) must finish the wall. Warrington tells him there's no chance he will be defeated.

Scene 3 - Bodice, Fontanelle, Cornwall, and North hold a council of war. Bodice knits busily as they discuss how Lear will attack and how to respond. Meanwhile, Fontanelle and Bodice each speak in independent, parallel asides of how sexually, physically, and militarily feeble their husbands are. Each also refers to her plans to lure Warrington to her camp, militarily crush the other sister, and rule the entire kingdom on her own. Cornwall and North finish their conversation, and each takes his wife to bed. As they go, Bodice and Fontanelle again each speak in aside of their disgust with their husbands.

Scene 4 - Bodice, Fontanelle, Cornwall, and North arrive on the field of battle after the first skirmish has concluded. Bodice and Fontanelle react with frustrated anger when they learn that Lear has escaped, and then react with caution when they learn that Warrington has been captured. Again, they each speak in parallel asides, each revealing her awareness that the other sister can't be trusted, and each referring to her fear of being betrayed by Warrington. As Fontanelle reveals to the others that she had Warrington's tongue cut out, North and Cornwall go out to thank their armies, and Bodice orders a group of soldiers to bring Warrington to her. She knits as Warrington is brought in, the soldiers argue about the best way to kill him, and Fontanelle shouts at them to get on with it, becoming more and more deranged at each increasingly violent thought she voices. She and the soldiers beat Warrington as Bodice calmly continues knitting, but then she too joins in the violence, sticking her knitting needles in Warrington's ears.

Fontanelle wants to torture him further, but Bodice decides that he's to be released into the public as a warning to the people of what can and will happen if they support Lear. She and Fontanelle taunt each other, and then go out to see what their husbands are up to. The soldiers take Warrington out, with one of them commenting that if things had gone another way their situations could have been reversed, and adds that Warrington will live if he wants to.

Act 1, Scenes 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

In terms of the parallels between Shakespeare's *Lear* and Bond's *Lear*, the two sisters in both plays are equally devious, equally hungry for both power and good sex, and equally ruthless when it comes to their treatment of Lear's allies. Also in both plays, one of the sisters is more bloodthirsty than the other - in Shakespeare's *Lear,* it's Regan, and in Bond's *Lear,* it's Fontanelle. There are also similarities between the two plays in the power games and manipulations entered into by the two sisters and their husbands, and in the character of Warrington, who embodies traits of two characters from Shakespeare's *Lear*: the loyal advisors Gloucester and Kent. He gives Bond's *Lear* the best advice he can, in the way Gloucester and Kent do, and is ignored in the same way as they are. Finally, the torture Warrington endures at the hands of Bodice and Fontanelle has clear echoes of the torture Gloucester endures at the hands of Lear's daughter Regan and her husband. Meanwhile, a significant difference between the two plays is that an important sub-plot in Shakespeare's *Lear* involving the rivalry of Gloucester's two sons has no parallel in Bond's *Lear*.

In terms of the play's exploration of violence, it manifests in several ways in these three scenes. Most obvious is the previously referenced torture endured by Warrington. Other manifestations include the sexual/emotional violence Bodice and Fontanelle do to their husbands and Lear's respectful celebration of his troops (who are, after all, marching off to engage in the violence of war).

The play's most important symbol, the wall, is mentioned in passing only once, as Lear exhorts Warrington to ensure that the wall is built. This represents the way Lear is still determined to run his kingdom his way, to allow no perspective but his own to affect his judgment. The fact that two scenes later Warrington is rendered completely incapable of fulfilling Lear's orders, combined with the fact that Bodice and Fontanelle are determined to destroy their father, suggests that on some level Lear was right - sometimes walls are necessary for protection. On a deeper level, however, the story of the play, which is, after all, that of Lear's redemption, suggests that sometimes the pain and confusion associated with the breakdown of false conceptions (like Lear's about the love of his daughters and his own infallibility) is necessary to experience *if* it leads to redemption, openness, and spiritual freedom.

The asides spoken by Bodice and Fontanelle are examples of a common theatrical device in which the inner thoughts, feelings, and considerations of characters are revealed to an audience. The difference between an aside and a soliloquy, which performs a similar function (and which also is used in this play), is that asides are used when there are other characters onstage with the character speaking who do *not* hear what the character making the aside is saying. Soliloquies are spoken when a character is alone onstage. Asides are most often used as they are here, to convey a sense of irony - that characters in scenes with speakers of asides have no idea what those speakers are planning.

There is a subtle piece of foreshadowing here, when Bodice talks about using Warrington as a warning to members of the public who support Lear. Later in the play, when Lear has become something of a prophet, the leaders of the army that freed the country from the corruptive influence of Bodice and Fontanelle punish Lear's "disciples" as a warning to both Lear and his supporters as a warning of what will happen if Lear continues to teach and his followers continue to support him.

Act 1, Scenes 5 and 6

Act 1, Scenes 5 and 6 Summary

These scenes tell of Lear's flight from the field of battle and from his daughters, and of the sanctuary he finds at a farmhouse.

Scene 5 - Lear, wandering through the forest, discovers a dropped piece of bread and devours it hungrily. As he eats, Warrington appears and stealthily sneaks up on him as Lear muses aloud on how his daughters are torturing him. Warrington sees someone coming and runs off. The Gravedigger's Son comes, carrying bread and water. He explains, after being questioned by Lear, that it's for a wild man roaming the forest. Lear offers to buy it, but the Son says he can have it for free, and then offers to take Lear home with him. Lear asks whether the Son has any daughters, the Son says no, and Lear accepts the offer.

Scene 6 - As he guides Lear through the forest and as they arrive at his farm, the Son explains how he came to settle there. He refers specifically to having discovered water and dug a well, which he offers to show Lear. Meanwhile, when the Son's Wife brings soup, she sits down with Lear and the Son, and they eat. Lear mutters what sounds like poetic nonsense to himself, and the Wife looks at him curiously. Meanwhile, the Son offers Lear a place to stay. He refuses initially, again speaking in what sounds like nonsense, but then goes into the house with the Son.

A moment later Warrington, who has evidently been watching, appears. He ducks into the shadows as the Wife comes out, but she sees him and tries to chase him away. She runs into the house for a weapon, he hides in the well, she comes back out and finds him gone, and then sits and weeps. The Son comes in, followed by Lear. The Wife cries out that the "wild man" he went looking for (Scene 5) has come. The Son calms her, and then lies down to sleep beside her. Lear also lies down, apart from the other two, and after again speaking in strange, poetic language, falls asleep.

The Wife cries again and the Son attempts to comfort her but the Wife tells him she's afraid because he's always bringing strangers home, and comments that she saw blood on Lear's hand. The Son, who seems to have lost patience with her, tells her to go to sleep for the child's sake - apparently, the Wife is pregnant. The Son, the Wife, and Lear all sleep. Warrington emerges from the well and jumps on Lear, who shouts. The Son wakes up and chases Warrington off. Lear calls him a ghost, becoming upset almost to the point of hysteria. The Son and the Wife take him into the house as he insists that the appearance of the ghost means he's going to die.

Act 1, Scenes 5 and 6 Analysis

Parallels between the action of these scenes and the action of similar scenes in Shakespeare's *Lear* are quite basic - in both plays, Lear flees the war being waged on

him by his daughters and takes refuge in a farmhouse. Also in both plays, his mind becomes increasingly unhinged and he takes psychic refuge from reality in poetically voiced imaginative flights of fantasy.

The main difference between the two plays is the transformation of Warrington. In his pursuit and turning on Lear, he becomes unlike the characters of Gloucester and Kent in Shakespeare's *Lear*. Here he manifests as a symbolic embodiment of Lear's self-righteousness and close-mindedness, which nearly destroys Lear in the same way as Warrington does. It's important to note here that Warrington has himself been essentially destroyed by the self-righteousness of Lear's daughters, an aspect to the play that can be seen as one of its secondary themes - self-righteousness is ultimately self-injurious. Meanwhile, Warrington's attack on Lear is the only notable manifestation of violence in this section, the more general gentle lyricism of which serves as an effectively contrasting counterpoint to the violence of the scenes before and after it, and of the play as a whole. Finally, the appearances of the Son and the Wife here foreshadow the important parallels to characters in Shakespeare's *Lear* that they eventually become, a process that begins in the following scene.

In terms of the wall and its symbolic meaning, there is no literal reference to the wall in this section. What there *is*, however, is a thematically relevant illumination of what can happen when walls between people break down. Specifically, the immediate openness of the relationship between Lear and the Son, the easy and open intimacy between the Son and the Wife, and the Wife's burgeoning acceptance of Lear are all examples of the safety and trust possible when walls of suspicion and fear are transcended.

Act 1, Scene 7

Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

Scene 7 - The following day, the Son and the Wife are discussing the situation with Lear when a Carpenter appears with a cradle. The Son goes out to see to his pigs. The Carpenter asks the Wife whether there are any odd jobs to be done, and the Wife tells him a door needs repairing. As they make small talk, Lear appears and almost sits on the cradle. The Son returns and greets him. The Carpenter goes out to fix the door, the Wife goes into the house with the cradle, and the Son tells Lear not to worry, the Carpenter is always hanging around because he's in love with the Wife. Lear expresses his gratitude for how well the Son has treated him, speaking more coherently and wondering aloud where he's to go next. The Son offers him a place to stay, and after expressing a few doubts, Lear reveals his belief that he'll be happy there and accepts. The Son assures him the soldiers are too busy looking for the king to worry about him, says the wall is being pulled down, and tells angrily graphic stories of what life as a laborer on the wall was like. He then changes the subject, assuring Lear that the Wife will warm up to him eventually. He explains that she's afraid that their life will be disrupted by the strangers he keeps welcoming, and so wants to put a fence "round us and shut everyone else out."

The Wife appears and strings a clothesline as Lear recalls a dream he had of a giant fountain emptied by a storm to reveal a desert within which a king found a helmet and a sword. The Son comments that a clown told that story of the fair. The Wife comes out to finish her washing, but says the well water is dirty (this can be understood to be the result of Warrington having been in the well). The Boy climbs down to clean the well. Lear helps the wife hang her freshly washed sheets on the clothesline, saying the Son has offered him a place to stay. The Wife doesn't like the idea, she and Lear argue, and he compares her to his daughters.

As the argument continues, a squad of soldiers comes in. Two of them go into the house and search it while others watch Lear and the Wife, who try to leave but are restrained. The soldiers come out of the house, saying it's empty. The Wife tells them the man they're looking for is gone, one of the soldiers comments that no man would leave a lovely little woman like her on her own, and another reveals that they're looking for the Son. At that moment, the Son cries out from the well that Warrington's body is there, his neck apparently having been broken when he jumped in. As two soldiers take the Wife behind the sheets, other soldiers haul the Son and Warrington's body to the surface. The Son realizes that the Wife is being raped and calls out her name - Cordelia. He tries to rescue her but the soldiers shoot him and drop his body into the well, as well as Warrington's. Meanwhile, one soldier takes the Wife (Cordelia) into the house to finish what he started. Lear shouts out that since the soldiers have destroyed the people who live there the soldiers should also destroy the house - his daughters would expect it! Two soldiers take Lear out. The last remaining soldier comments ironically that now he's got something to put into a letter to his mother. The Carpenter

returns, armed with a chisel. He kills the soldier, takes his gun, goes into the house, and fires three shots.

Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

The most significant parallel in this scene between Bond's *Lear* and Shakespeare's *Lear* is the character of Cordelia. This is the name of Shakespeare's Lear's third and youngest daughter - the loving one, the honest one, and the only member of the family with any integrity. In *King Lear* Cordelia struggles to rescue her father and his kingdom - in short, she fights for what she believes to be morally and spiritually right. The Cordelia in this play, as the result of crimes perpetrated upon her and upon her home in this scene, fights the same fight. This is the most obvious similarity between the two characters, but there is another, perhaps less obvious one. In Shakespeare's *Lear*, an officer of the army, determined to overthrow her father, murders Cordelia. In Bond's *Lear*, Cordelia survives the attack on her in this scene and eventually becomes the leader of the rebellion against the forces of Bodice and Fontanelle. She eventually defeats those forces, but as the play reveals, ultimately performs the same repressive acts of ethical violence on Lear as Bodice and Fontanelle did. In other words, she ends up morally dead.

Another parallel between the two plays begins to emerge in this scene through the relationship Lear enters into with the Son. In Shakespeare's *Lear*, the character of The Fool is the one character with whom Lear appears consistently saner than at most other times throughout the play, and is the one character with whom he feels safe and in whom he feels he can confide. The Fool shares this characteristic with Edgar, Gloucester's son in Shakespeare's *Lear*, in whom Lear confides when he (Lear) believes him (Edgar) to be a poor beggar man. The functions of both the Fool and Edgar are echoed here in the function of the Son, a function that becomes even more similar when the Son returns as a ghost in the following scenes and haunts Lear throughout the play.

There is a vivid contribution to the play's exploration of violence in this scene - the attack of the soldiers that results in the death of the Son, the rape of Cordelia, and the arrest of Lear. The play's thematic point about how violence begets more violence is dramatized in the actions of the Carpenter, when he kills one of the soldiers with his chisel and apparently shoots another. The seeds for further dramatization of this point are also sown in this scene, growing into the increasing moral, military, and spiritual violence that Cordelia and the Carpenter perpetrate on Lear and others throughout the latter two acts of the play. In structural terms, meanwhile, the attack of the soldiers defines the climax of the act, and of the play to this point.

The symbolic value of the wall is reiterated and deepened through the Son's comments in this scene. In suggesting that working on the wall causes suffering for those constructing it, he is metaphorically suggesting that those who construct walls between themselves and other people, as well as between themselves and broader perspectives, are causing themselves suffering. This thesis is born out by the evident

damage being done to Lear as the result of his having insisted that the wall be built in the first place and by building an emotional wall between him and his daughters. The idea is also supported by the contrasting openness between Lear and the Son, whose mutual respect, honesty, and trust trigger peace and rationality in Lear's soul. Meanwhile, echoes of the wall's symbolic value can be found in the Son's passing comments about the Wife wanting to build a wall between them and the world. These comments also foreshadow Cordelia's later actions as she constructs several more walls. These include Lear's literal, physical wall, a moral wall between what she believes to be right action and the misbehavior of those she is trying to control, and a spiritual wall between what she believes to be the reasons for *building* that wall and Lear's reasons such a wall should never exist.

The oppressive and repressive nature of the wall is contrasted with the appearance of the cradle, which represents new life and faith in the future. On one level, this applies to the new humility, restraint, and openness beginning to appear in Lear. On another level, the image also applies to the freedom fought for by Cordelia later in the play. This, in turn, means there is irony inherent in this image, since the war fought by Cordelia eventually turns into the same kind of tyranny she experiences at the hands of the soldiers. Once again, here is the theme of violence begets violence - as she is raped, she turns around and morally rapes Lear at the end of the play.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

As a court convenes, North and Cornwall discuss what Bodice and Fontanelle will want to do with Lear, commenting that they shouldn't be allowed to have their way too often. Meanwhile, Bodice instructs the Judge as to what his course of action and his verdict should be - let him condemn himself by babbling in the way he does, and then pass down the judgment that he (Lear) cannot be allowed to live. As Bodice and Fontanelle sit, Lear recognizes the Judge, but denies that he has any daughters.

A series of witnesses takes the stand. Fontanelle testifies to what a bad father Lear was. An Old Sailor testifies that he taught Lear to sail and reminds him that he's got two daughters, adding that his own daughter takes good care of him. An Old Councillor testifies that he helped Lear escape the battle, but fled when he realized Lear was mad. Lear shouts out that he (the Councillor) betrayed him. At that point, Bodice shows Lear her mirror, whispering to the Judge that madmen are afraid of themselves. Lear looks at his face in the mirror and says that what he sees there is not the king, but a caged animal. He speaks at increasingly excitable length about the cruel torture the animal is enduring. Bodice takes the mirror away as he cries out for the animal to be killed and its suffering ended, and that monsters have taken his daughters' places in the world. Bodice and Fontanelle cry out that Lear is mad; he cries out that they're cruel, and the Judge adjourns the court. Lear is taken away as Bodice and the Judge congratulate each other.

As the court clears, Bodice and Fontanelle discuss a revolution against their authority that seems to be brewing, which Fontanelle describes as being led by Cordelia. Bodice comments in an aside on how much Fontanelle thinks she knows, but because she (Bodice) has spies in Fontanelle's camp they know exactly the same things. She goes with Fontanelle to make plans to quash the revolution, commenting, "victory is bad for soldiers, it lowers their morale".

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene contains little in terms of obvious parallels with Shakespeare's *Lear*, although in that play Lear imagines a trial in which his daughters face judgment for their betrayal of him. This scene can be interpreted as a reverse of that scene, with Lear being tried by his daughters. Meanwhile, the play's focus on violence plays out in this scene in terms of the legal violence done to Lear's right to a fair hearing, and the emotional violence done to Lear by Bodice and Fontanelle. In addition, Lear's story about the caged animal can be seen as a metaphoric explanation of the spiritual violence he's experiencing as the result of his daughters' actions. It's possible to see here what Lear is going through as a manifestation of the play's secondary theme relating to the way violence begets violence - he may not be suffering the way he is if he

had not insisted upon building the wall and shooting the innocent laborer (Act 1 Scene 1). On the other hand, Lear's experiences can also be seen as necessary in order to get him to the point he reaches in Act 3, having realized the dangers to his own soul and those of others by perpetrating violence. In other words, if he hadn't experienced it he'd never be able to condemn it.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

The Ghost of the gravedigger's son visits Lear in prison. Lear speaks to him with mad poeticism about the animal trapped in a cage, and cries out to see his daughters. The Ghost conjures images of Bodice and Fontanelle as children. They bicker girlishly about their clothes, sit playfully on Lear's knee, disobey him when he tells them to not wear their dead mother's dress, and seek comfort from him when they realize they're in a prison and become frightened. He assures them their suffering will pass, saying the animal will slip out of its cage, return to nature, and live happily. The images of Bodice and Fontanelle remain as three soldiers come in, conduct a routine search of Lear's cell, and go back out. After they've gone, the images also leave. Lear tries to restrain them but the Ghost insists they can't be stopped.

An Old Orderly comes in to collect the tray on which Lear was fed his dinner. When he sees Lear has eaten nothing, the Orderly leaves the tray and becomes chatty, telling how all the young prisoners are being sent to fight against the rebels, how he's been in prison so long he can't remember the crime he committed to get there, and how he'll never be able to know because the records have been lost. He sees that Lear has no interest in food, takes the tray, and goes out.

Lear, still speaking with mad poeticism, berates himself for having looked at "the animal". The Ghost offers to stay with him, saying that after he died his body shriveled and began to rot, and that as a result he's afraid. Lear says he can stay, offers to hold him, and says they can take turns crying as they watch each other sleep.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

As previously discussed (Act 1 Scene 7), the Ghost functions as a parallel to two characters in Shakespeare's *Lear*, the Fool and Edgar - in both plays, these characters are confidantes, allies, and the embodiment of Lear's conscience. This latter is particularly noteworthy, in that the Ghost is acting on Lear in much the same way as Warrington did in Act 1 Scenes 5 and 6 - as a manifestation of the way acts of violence haunt Lear. The Ghost would not *be* a ghost if it hadn't been for Lear's presence in his home and the soldiers coming to look for him. The explanation for why the Ghost haunts him, aside from the play's necessity for a confidante for Lear, is similar to the explanation of why Lear is tortured in Act 2 Scene 1 - he must become aware of the full effects of violence before he can justifiably and believably instruct others, including Cordelia, of its dangers.

The one aspect to the Ghost that doesn't have a parallel in the other play is his apparent mysticism, manifested here in his conjuring of the Bodice and Fontanelle spirits. This can also be seen as an example of what Lear must learn. As the result of his insistence

on building the wall, both the physical wall and the wall between himself and his daughters, the once open, innocent, and loving relationship he shared with them has itself been violently destroyed. He must learn to recapture that openness in order to be redeemed. The Ghost supplies a memory of that openness in order for Lear to know what he's looking for.

The essential function of the Old Orderly is twofold. The first is to provide information that Cordelia's rebellion is proceeding on its course. The second is to foreshadow the way Lear's past eventually slips away from him and he's able to live in a new present.

Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4

Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4 Summary

These scenes detail the circumstances of Cordelia's war against Bodice and Fontanelle.

Scene 3 - As rebel fighters treat their wounded and stand guard over a Captured Soldier, the Carpenter brings news to Cordelia of a scouting party of soldiers that wants to join them. Cordelia says they'll pick them up as she and the other rebels advance, and then interrogates the Captured Soldier, who tells them about the army's movements, and then confesses that he'd rather be fighting with them. The Carpenter urges Cordelia to accept him, but she says he'll fight with whoever has the advantage, adding that to fight like the rebels, people have to hate, otherwise they're no use. As she, the Carpenter, and the other rebel fighters prepare to move on, a Wounded Rebel urges them to not worry about them and to fight on - he does wonder, though, who'll tell his wife he's dead. Cordelia, the Carpenter, and the other rebels leave, taking with them the Captured Soldier. The Wounded Soldier, alone and dying, counts the stars.

Scene 4 - A napping Bodice is wakened by the arrival of a frantic Fontanelle, who is worried that their husbands have deserted them. Bodice tells her she's had them captured and brought back, saying she and Fontanelle need their armies to win the war. They bicker about whether their husbands are of any use, and then Bodice passes her a sheaf of documents, including Lear's death warrant. As Fontanelle signs them, Bodice tells her Lear and a group of other prisoners are being brought to headquarters, since the prisons had to be evacuated (presumably because the rebels were about to gain control over them). The captured Cornwall and North are brought in. Fontanelle wants to execute them immediately, but Bodice tells her to be quiet and then tells the men that from now on their function is to be purely ornamental - to escort her and Fontanelle in public and nothing more. She then dismisses Cornwall and North, they go out, and Bodice sends Fontanelle to bed. As Fontanelle goes she passes one of Bodice's aides, to whom Bodice gives the warrants. After the aide has left, Bodice speaks in soliloquy of how she's trapped by the circumstances of the war, her sister's foolishness, and their husbands' weakness. She recalls how, as a child, she always dreamed of having power, but now that she has it, she realizes that it's made her a slave.

Act 2, Scenes 3 and 4 Analysis

On one level, these two scenes are straightforward depictions of war; interestingly, from the points of view of the opposing sides. What's important to note here is that Cordelia on the one side, and Bodice and Fontanelle on the other, essentially do exactly the same thing - act ruthlessly in order to consolidate their power, to be seen as acting from a position of strength and determination. Yes, Cordelia expresses a degree of concern about the Wounded Rebel, but ultimately it means nothing - she leaves him to die so she can continue to fulfill her mission. This, in turn, means that Bodice's soliloquy at the

end of Scene 4 can be interpreted as referring to both her and Cordelia - both have become slaves to the power they're pursuing. This is another aspect of the play's thematic condemnation of violence - in this context, the statement is that those who pursue violence become consumed by it, eventually losing touch with their fuller humanity. In this context, it's interesting to note that in Scene 4, Bodice doesn't knit.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Three irritable soldiers lead Lear and four other prisoners, all bound, down a rough road. The prisoners are allowed to rest while one soldier reconnoiters the road ahead, and they pass a nearly empty canteen around as the soldiers study an outdated map and debate whether to desert and join the rebels. When the soldier sent down the road is late returning, the other soldiers wonder whether he's already done it. At the sound of gunfire the soldiers begin to become fearful, and Lear wonders where the Ghost is, calling out loud for him. The soldiers and prisoners, fearful that he'll attract gunfire, struggle to make him be quiet, eventually gagging him. A few moments later, the soldier who went out earlier is brought back in, having been captured by the Carpenter and other rebel soldiers. The rebels capture the other soldiers, and the Carpenter explains that their headquarters has been captured, and orders that they be tied together. When one of the prisoners asks to be untied, the Carpenter says they have to wait until they've been interviewed. Fontanelle, having been captured, is brought in by a rebel soldier.. While she's being tied to the other soldiers, Lear asks to be freed. Fontanelle weeps with humiliation. Lear tries to comfort her but doesn't recognize her. Fontanelle, who does recognize *him*, calls him a fool, and Lear tells her that no one listens to shouting. The Carpenter says he's seen Lear before, but doesn't recognize him. The rebels lead their two sets of prisoners off. Fontanelle pleads to be set free, but Lear tells her to behave and she'll be treated well. The Carpenter tells the rebels to watch Lear, saying he's a troublemaker. Lear says as he goes out that he needs to look for the Ghost, referring to how he was so kind to him and how he (Lear) is desperate to return the favor.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

Once again, the play defines the experience of war, this time from the perspective of its victims - those who suffer as the result of combat. In short, the scene relates to the play's thematic exploration of violence by dramatizing at least some of its consequences. This is done through its depictions of suspicion and fear (in the soldiers and the prisoners), through Fontanelle's ill treatment by the rebels, and through the way the Carpenter doesn't recognize Lear (which suggests that those who pursue violence, like the Carpenter, lose the ability to see clearly and honestly).

It's interesting that this character is given no name but is referred to only as a carpenter - which was, after all, the profession of Jesus Christ before he accepted his destiny as a prophet. On one level, the fight the Carpenter enters into can be seen as symbolic of Christ's struggle to lead his people to spiritual freedom. On another level, the Carpenter's name can be seen as an ironic commentary on the peaceful nature of Christ's struggle - the Carpenter is a war lover, whereas the carpenter (Jesus) was the so-called Prince of Peace. It's even possible that the name functions on both levels - the

Carpenter initially fights for freedom but eventually becomes corrupted by the appeal of violence as a means of gaining and maintaining power.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Lear, Fontanelle, and the other Prisoners sit in darkness, jumping with fear as they hear gunfire. The Ghost comes in. He and Lear explain to each other where they've been, and Lear comments that he wishes he had been the Ghost's father, saying he would have taken good care of him. After a Commandant and three other rebels take the other prisoners out, Fontanelle pleads with Lear to use his influence to get them a trial, saying that if she goes free she'll convince Bodice to be merciful to him, adding that she's been stupid and that she loves him. Lear, however, is lost in his madness and doesn't appear to hear her. The Commandant returns with the Carpenter, one of the Prisoners from Lear's chain gang (Act 2 Scene 5), and more rebels. The Carpenter reveals that Bodice has been captured and is about to be brought in. Fontanelle begs to die rather than be humiliated further, and the Carpenter obliges - he shoots her in the back and she falls dead. The Carpenter and Commandant go out.

The Prisoner orders the rebel soldiers to put Fontanelle's body on a nearby table. As the Ghost fearfully warns Lear of impending evil, the Prisoner reveals that he is in fact a Doctor, and that he's about to perform an autopsy on Fontanelle. Lear watches as the Prisoner cuts her open. As the Prisoner points out her various internal organs, Lear repeatedly questions whether she is who he says she is. As the Prisoner is becoming more impatient with him, Lear comments on how beautiful Fontanelle is inside, adding that if he'd known how beautiful she was he'd have loved her more. As the Ghost weeps, Lear asks, "Did I make this - and destroy it?"

Bodice is brought in by rebel soldiers, asking for assurance that a letter she wrote has been delivered to someone in authority and taking the fact that she's imprisoned with Lear as a good sign. She asks what's going on at the table. Lear tells her it's Fontanelle, adding that he destroyed her. Bodice protests that she and her sister did what they had to do, but Lear dips his hands into her guts, holds them up covered in blood and organs, and shouts that he killed her and now has to begin his life again. The Commandant rushes in, ordering the rebels to get the scene under control. As the Carpenter also runs in, Bodice tries to convince the Commandant that Fontanelle was behind both the fighting and Lear's madness. The Carpenter tells her she's been sentenced to death, but Bodice insists upon justice, saying the Carpenter has become cruel after having had a taste of power. She falls to her knees and begs for mercy, rebels move to restrain her, she fights, soldiers stab her with bayonets, and she dies. Soldiers remove her and Fontanelle's bodies.

The Commandant struggles to convince the Carpenter to execute Lear, but the Carpenter refuses, saying his wife knows him. From this it can be understood that the Carpenter has married Cordelia. The Prisoner (Doctor), meanwhile, overhears their conversation and suggests that he knows a way to neutralize Lear's influence. The Commandant tells him to go ahead, and then he and the Carpenter go out. The Doctor

puts Lear into a straightjacket, sits him down, pulls out what he says is a scientific device, and plucks out Lear's eyes, commenting on what's happening anatomically and scientifically as he does so. Lear writhes in agony as the Doctor and the other soldiers leave.

Lear cries out to the Ghost to free him and let him kill himself. The Ghost assures him that people will be kind to him now and unties him. Lear begs the Ghost to tell him the pain will stop. The Ghost tells him it will, that sometimes it will come back, and that he will learn to bear it. He helps Lear out, saying they can go back to the house in the forest where they will find peace. Lear begs to be taken somewhere to die.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

Aside from the emotionally intimate and mutually vulnerable relationship between Lear and the Ghost, which, as mentioned, parallels the relationship between Lear and both his Fool and Edgar in *King Lear*, the most notable parallel in this scene with Shakespeare's *Lear* is the moment at which the Prisoner/Doctor cuts out Lear's eyeballs. There is, however, a significant difference between the incident in this play and the one in the original. In Shakespeare's version, the loyal Gloucester has his eyes plucked out by the husband of the more bloodthirsty of Lear's daughters. A significant thematic point is made by the difference. Lear, to this point, has essentially been metaphorically blind to the role that his tendency towards violence has played in creating the hell in which he now lives. As the remaining action of the play suggests, now that he's physically blind he's able to spiritually see the consequences of what he's done. This is not to suggest that he's not on the road to understanding. What he does with Fontanelle's entrails is a graphic and gory dramatization of what he's coming to realize is the consequence of his insistence on walls, both literal and emotional. Lives are destroyed. People's guts, their hearts and souls, are ripped from their bodies. Their very beings are torn apart.

Other manifestations of violence in this scene are much less graphic than those experienced by Lear, by Fontanelle, and by Bodice, but are no less thematically relevant. These include the violence done to the truth by Bodice and Fontanelle in the moments before their deaths. Desperate to save themselves and preserve what they see as their hard won power, they lie, manipulate, and dissemble with increasing desperation until they, like Lear, are forced to confront the consequences of their actions.

Lear's comments about the beauty of Fontanelle's inner organs can be interpreted as manifestations of his realization that the human spirit, what's "inside", is a truer and deeper manifestation of human value than by defining oneself by the violence one is able to perpetrate on others, and by the control one gains as the result of that violence.

Act 2, Scene 7

Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

Near Lear's wall, Lear and the Ghost encounter a Farmer, his Wife, and their Boy. Lear begs for some money but the family refuses, saying they're poor. The Farmer explains that after the king went mad, work stopped on the wall and farmers moved onto the land and began to make homes. Now that the government's changed, soldiers are turning farmers like him off their land, construction on the wall is continuing, and sons like his son are being turned into soldiers. Lear expresses fear that the boy will be killed, but the Farmer's Wife says they have to hope he won't.

As the Farmer and his family go out, Lear comments that he could endure anything but the death of another boy. He falls to his knees crying out in agony, saying he's the king, saying he built the wall, and urging the farm family to run. The Farmer and his Wife help him to stand as the Boy goes off to the army camp. They debate what to do with him, and eventually decide to leave him to his freedom in the fields. Lear stands, saying that Cordelia's soldiers are being abused and crying out in agony yet again - the crying has opened the wounds in his eyes. He goes out in the company of the Ghost, saying he has to stop Cordelia before he dies.

Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

There are three essential purposes to this brief scene. The first is to foreshadow the appearance of the Farmer's Boy at the end of the play, at which point he shoots and kills Lear. The second is to define what's happened to Cordelia and the rebellion she's leading - that she's turning into the same kind of tyrant as Lear was. The third main purpose of the scene is related to the second, in that it yet again defines the darkly symbolic value of the wall. Specifically, the Farmer's story of how its land was used for an essentially life affirming purpose (providing homes and space for food to be grown) once Lear's determination to build it was ended, again defines the wall as repressive and life-destroying. The story therefore defines Cordelia's intent in continuing to build the wall as equally repressive and destructive.

Lear's crying out in pain is the climax of the act, simultaneously denoting a key point of his journey of transformation and reiterating a key thematic point. In this moment, Lear viscerally and painfully realizes that violence begets violence - his spiritual blindness is ended now that his physical blindness is complete. The pain of that spiritual blindness manifests in the pain he experiences in his eyes, and as a result of actually feeling that long-suppressed pain for the first time he realizes what he must do. The action of Act 3 is defined by his choices because of that realization.

At this point in the play, it's possible to see a parallel between this play and another classical piece of theatre - the Greek tragedy of Oedipus, who was also blinded (albeit

by his own hand) shortly after he "sees" the truth of his life. Like Lear, Oedipus' life is also transformed by this truth, specifically the truth of his guilt. Unlike Oedipus, however, Lear was not an innocent victim of fate - when he killed the laborer in Act 1 Scene 1 he knew what he was doing. Oedipus killed, but as far as he knew, it was in self-defense and he definitely did *not* know he was killing his father. It's this additional layer to Lear's knowledge, that on some level he knew he was doing wrong but self-righteously justified it, that makes his suffering so great and so thematically essential. Both he and Oedipus, however, are essentially staggering into their futures unaided and at the same time unencumbered by lies. They are both free.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

This scene takes place in the setting for Act 1, Scenes 6 and 7 - the home of the Ghost when he was still alive, when he was still the Gravedigger's son. Thomas comes on, and is greeted by Susan and an anxious Lear, eager to learn whether there's any response to his letter to Cordelia. Thomas tells him there's no word, calming Lear before he can get any more upset. Susan goes out to prepare the evening meal. A Small Man comes in, asks for water, and explains that Lear knew him when they were both soldiers. Lear says he remembers him and invites him to stay for dinner. Thomas shows the Small Man into the house, but then turns back and tells Lear there isn't enough food. Lear says he'll tell the Small Man he can't stay. Thomas goes into the house. The Ghost appears and tells Lear the Small Man is a deserter from Cordelia's army; that he's been wandering through the countryside asking everyone he meets where Lear is, and that Lear will be lucky if the rebels searching for him don't find him.

The Small Man comes out and makes small talk with Lear about how comfortable the place is and how welcoming Susan and Thomas are. Lear comments that they saved his life, and asks the Small Man to tell him his story. The Small Man says there's not much to tell, but then when Thomas comes out, he (the Small Man) says he's been wandering the world ever since his wife died but is down and out because he got attacked and beaten up. Lear and Thomas accuse him of lying and at first he protests, but then admits he's a deserter from the wall, that he left because he was ill, and that everybody in the work camps at the wall is afraid. Lear asks why, and the Small Man explains that everyone believes Lear is going to get rid of the army, blow up the wall, and free all the prisoners (these being the soldiers from the armies of Bodice and Fontanelle who created such pain and suffering when they were in control).

A neighbor, John, appears with news of soldiers approaching. Lear tells Thomas to take the Small Man into the woods and to tell Susan that he (the Small Man) was never here. Thomas takes the Small Man out and Lear sits with John. An Officer and three soldiers come in. Lear greets them and gives them permission to look around. As the soldiers search the place, Susan comes out of the house and listens as the Officer tells Lear someone in the village was looking for him. Lear promises to let him know if anyone comes by. The soldiers finish their search, having found nothing. The Officer comments that from now on, the farm will be watched closely, then he and the soldiers leave. John sees them off, Susan says she'll give the Small Man some food and send him on his way, then Thomas appears and comments that the Small Man must be gotten rid of quickly.

A Young Man who says he attended Lear in prison comes looking for Lear and saying that soldiers "put [him] on the wall" as a punishment for serving bad food. At this point, it's understood that the wall is now being used as a means of torture and punishment. Lear offers the Young Man refuge, but Thomas refuses, saying if they get caught, they'll

all be punished. Lear tells him he came to the farm and wasn't turned away; therefore, no one who comes to the farm with a good cause will be turned away. He promises to write Cordelia again, and leads everyone into the house. As he goes in, the Small Man comments that they'll have to be careful whom they let in from now on.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

The parallels between this play and Shakespeare's *Lear* are relatively slight at this point. In both plays, Lear becomes dependent upon the kindness of others, and in both plays, Cordelia takes on an increasingly important role. That's about the extent of the similarities. What's more interesting to note is the differences. First, in Shakespeare's play, opposition and conflict continue to be embodied in the characters of Regan and Goneril, Lear's older daughters. With their counterparts in this play, Bodice and Fontanelle, out of commission, opposition and conflict are provided by the revised character of Cordelia, who, as previously discussed, embodies the play's secondary thematic point about the corruptive nature of violence and power. The contrast here is stark - Lear has rejected violence and found peace, while Cordelia who earlier had wanted *only* peace has espoused violence and as a result destroyed lives, including the potentially valuable life of the revised Lear.

The symbolic value of the wall is stated with stark clarity in this scene. The Young Man's admittedly somewhat oblique reference to its being used as an instrument of torture is a verbalization of what's been a sub-textual thematic point all along. In other words, every time the wall appears or is spoken of to this point, it seems to have caused pain - pain of separation, jealousy, conflict, falseness, smallness of perspective, and more. Only now is that value specifically defined - those manifestations of the wall's power are torturous to humanity. This idea is reinforced by the story of the Small Man, whose experience of working on the wall is defined further in the following section. His comments about the fears of those working on the wall, meanwhile, represent the reason why people build walls of all sorts: emotional, physical, spiritual, and moral - they're afraid suffering will result if such walls aren't present.

Other than serving as an additional means of defining the wall, the key purpose of the Small Man, for whom there is no clear counterpart in Shakespeare's *Lear*, seems to be to serve as a vehicle by which Lear's newly found humanity and compassion are defined. Specifically, Lear's attitude towards him puts into practice what he theorizes poetically about in the following scene - that no being should be imprisoned, or "walled up" by what other people perceive him to have done.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Several strangers listen as Lear tells this poetic story - a man lost his voice, found the bird that stole it singing beautifully, captured it, and took it before the king. The bird didn't sing, but wept because it had been caged. Lear tells how the man was been beaten by the king and then freed the bird, but not before complaining to himself loudly and frequently that the king had been a fool. He then tells how the bird learned to copy what the man said, how the king went into the forest one day and heard the bird repeating what he'd learned, how he punished the bird by nailing it alive to a tree, and how the man felt the bird's pain and anguish. At the conclusion of the story, some of the strangers want to ask Lear questions, but Thomas dismisses them. He takes Lear to one side and urges him to send the Young Man back to the wall as a spy, to infiltrate the camps and find out what Cordelia and her armies are planning. The Young Man says he's willing to be tortured if it does Lear and his allies good, but Lear says "If [he] saw Christ on his cross [he] would spit at him" and asks to be taken away. Thomas and the Young Man plead to be heard, but Lear goes.

Susan comforts the frustrated Thomas. Conversation between them reveals that Susan is always busy taking care of the people who come to hear Lear, that she's expecting a baby, and that Thomas is concerned that all they're doing for the people who come to hear Lear is talking to them, rather than empowering them to fight for their freedom. An Officer, Soldiers, and the Councillor (Act 2 Scene 1) appear, and as they're arresting the Young Man and the Small Man for being deserters from their work camps at the wall, Lear comes out of the house. An Officer explains what he's doing, the Young Man begs to be taken, and the Small Man protests that he's innocent. Lear urges the Officer to be lenient, but the Councillor tells him that the time has come for him to be silent - Cordelia has decreed that in future, his public speeches must stop.

Lear loses his temper, suggesting that Cordelia and her government are proving their power by punishing petty criminals like the Small Man. He then calms himself, explains that he knows that Cordelia has a lot of his (Lear's) wrongs to put right, but insists that she's going about it the wrong way. The Councillor insists that the Small Man must be hanged. Lear speaks with angry irony about the "goodness" and "decency" and "honesty" of people like Cordelia and the Councillor. Soldiers take the Small Man out and he pleads for mercy, wondering why he made a bid for freedom at all. The Officer and the Councillor follow. Lear loses control completely and pushes all the listeners away; saying the government in its power has spoken! Thomas assures them as they go that he will try to calm Lear down. After the listeners have all left, Lear shouts for everyone else to leave him alone. Thomas and Susan go into the house. Lear, alone, speaks in soliloquy about how he's "buried alive in a wall" of suffering and misery, adding that he's old and should know how to live by now, but knows nothing.

The Ghost appears, commenting on how Lear is tortured by being unable to help people, and Lear speaks poetically about how he's unable to help people who need it so desperately. The Ghost offers to poison the well so no one can ever come back there, and offers to take Lear deep into the forest where there's clean water and where no one can find him. He then tells him Cordelia is coming to see him tomorrow, and then lulls him to sleep.

Susan and John come out of the house. John professes his love for her, urging her to leave with him because Thomas no longer loves her and saying he'll wait for her in the village for a few days. Susan protests that Thomas truly does love her. John goes. Susan sits and weeps. Thomas appears. Susan begs to be taken away, but Thomas says he can't leave Lear and urges her to come inside. She stops crying and follows him in.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene effectively dramatizes both a parallel and a difference between this Lear and Shakespeare's - in both plays Lear becomes a kind of prophet, but in Shakespeare's play he is less actively so. He doesn't specifically lecture to followers, but instead inspires people around him by action, which results from a similarly new clarity of thought to this Lear's. What this difference indicates is that certain aspects of Lear's character remain the same, even though other very significant aspects have changed - he may have learned about the dangers of violence, but he's still got an ego, he still believes what he says and feels and believes is law, and he's still self-righteous. Shakespeare's Lear, on the other hand, becomes a creature of utter humility and remorse much sooner; a spiritual state of being Bond's Lear only reaches in the play's final few moments.

That being said, however, Lear's story about the bird is a poetic narrative of his own process of transformation. Specifically, the suffering felt by the man at the moment of the bird's suffering is essentially an echo of the suffering Lear experienced at the hands of the Prisoner/Doctor following the death of Fontanelle (Act 2 Scene 6). Through their mutual suffering, both Lear and the man know that they, directly and indirectly, caused the suffering of others. Lear's story ends before he reveals what the man *does* as the result of this new knowledge. However, Lear's passionate advocacy against Cordelia and the suffering she causes throughout the remainder of the act offer hints as to what the next part of the story might be - taking action to prevent further suffering.

There is another important parallel in this scene, but it is not a parallel to an aspect of Shakespeare's *Lear* - but to another aspect of *this* play. Specifically, the triangular relationship between Susan, Thomas, and John parallels and echoes the triangular relationship between Cordelia, the Son (Ghost), and the Carpenter. What's interesting is that Cordelia ends up with the Carpenter, while Susan remains with Thomas in a relationship that by the end of the play promises to be based on love, hospitality, and compassion. This is very different from the relationship that seems to have evolved between Cordelia and the Carpenter, which seems to be built upon a foundation of

violence. Yes, they started out sharing the same goal, which Cordelia herself defines in the following section as being *freedom* from violence.

However, as the action of the play has shown, Cordelia and the Carpenter have fallen victim to the corrupting power of violence, have constructed walls between themselves and the people they profess to be determined to save. The actions of Thomas and Susan ironically embody exactly the values to which Cordelia and the Carpenter are now just giving lip service. There is the suggestion here that emotional fidelity of the kind Susan maintains for Thomas leads to spiritual fidelity to one's goals and morals, as opposed to Cordelia's emotional infidelity to the Son/Ghost, which seems to lead to infidelity to one's morals and aspirations.

It's ironic that in this scene Lear sees himself as buried in a "wall of suffering". At this point in the play he is, in fact, more open to the experiences of others and to a broader truth than he's ever been. He was absolutely behind a wall of preconception, anger, and violence in the play's first scene. Now he's angry at the similar wall Cordelia and the Carpenter are constructing. He no doubt perceives that this wall is being built around him and those like him, but the fact remains that he is still spiritually free, and will remain so even if Cordelia's plan to silence him succeeds. This is another example of how his old ways of thinking within narrow parameters remain - he can't see his spiritual freedom as a personal manifestation of grace, he still thinks he's on a mission. In this sense, perhaps he's right; perhaps he *is* walled in - only not by Cordelia, but by his own habits. If this is the case, his actions at the end of the play (destroying the wall he built and which Cordelia is reinforcing) are a proclamation of ultimate freedom from both Cordelia and himself.

Lear's reference to Jesus Christ is essentially a scornful comment on the idea of self-sacrifice. The comment is more than a little ironic, since the action of the rest of the act takes Lear to a similar place to that in which Christ found himself - executed by those in authority as an example to others who would think and believe and act independently. Within this irony, of course, there is an even deeper one - Lear is killed for *exactly* the same reasons for which he killed the laborer at the beginning of the play.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Lear wanders through the woods. The Ghost appears, telling Lear that Cordelia's soldiers are moving into the village and cutting Lear off from the people. Lear recalls how his (the Ghost's) body and Warrington's are buried in the forest. The Ghost weeps, sad that he's dead, that he's lost the fully happy life he had in the forest, that his mind is going, and that he's so lost.

The Carpenter and Cordelia come in (Cordelia, it must be remembered, was the Ghost's wife when he was still alive). She greets Lear with friendliness, and they recall the circumstances of their first meeting (Act 1 Scenes 5 and 6). Cordelia then explains why she's doing what she's doing - she promised herself that there would be no more of the brutality that ended the lives of her husband and unborn child, going on to say that Lear must stop obstructing her work in ending that brutality. As the Ghost begs Lear to say something to Cordelia about him, Lear tells her to stop building the wall. When she says she can't, he says that nothing has changed, that the wall will destroy her, and that he *must* be heard - he's suffered, he's made mistakes, and speaking out is his way of atoning. He speaks passionately about how might would be right if a god made the world, but because humans made the world the only thing that makes it livable is pity. He concludes by saying, "the man without pity is mad". The Ghost weeps as Cordelia tells Lear that the only pity he understands is self-pity, that there are other opponents she has to fight and which she has to construct the wall to keep out, and that she has every intention of creating the society he speaks of. Lear comments that it's strange but not surprising that Cordelia intends to have him killed. "Your law", he says, "always does more harm than crime, and your morality is a form of violence". Cordelia tells the Carpenter to make sure plans are set in motion for Lear's arrest and trial the following day, and together they go out.

The Ghost demands to know why Lear said nothing about him to Cordelia, and then goes out to watch her leave. Thomas and Susan appear and offer to take Lear back to the house. Lear, however, tells them he has other plans - for Thomas to go off to work the next day and for Susan to lead him somewhere else. He says he has one desire left - to live until he's much older. The offstage squealing of angry pigs interrupts their conversation. Thomas and Susan rush out to put them back in their pens. Lear listens to their shouting. The Ghost appears, bleeding and shouting that he's been gored by the pigs and afraid that he's going to die. Lear takes him in his arms, saying he's already dead and that he (Lear) will always love him but that for his own sake the Ghost must fully die. As the sounds of the squealing pigs fall silent, Lear speaks poetically of his intense grief.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

The reunion between Lear and Cordelia in Shakespeare's *Lear* is a relatively joyful one, in that Lear in that play, like the Lear in this play, has repented of his misjudgments and destructively violent actions. His act of atonement is his apology, his killing of the guard that eventually kills Cordelia, and his own death. In Bond's *Lear*, Lear's atonement is related much more closely to the play's thematic statement about violence as he urges Cordelia to abandon the kind of violence he knows he participated in, that he knows leads to social, moral, emotional, and personal destruction, and that he knows has corrupted her. His description of her morality as a form of violence is a clear and overt statement of the play's theme - that violence is not only physical violence, and that *any* kind of violence is equally destructive.

It's interesting to note how Cordelia here seems to be much more the daughter of Lear than Cordelia in Shakespeare seems to be the daughter of *that* Lear. Specifically, this Cordelia is easily just as self-righteous as this Lear. *That* Cordelia is nowhere near as judgmental as *that* Lear. This is not to say that this Cordelia's goals are wrong-headed, only that the way she goes about achieving them is. Lear himself falls victim to this trap, as evidenced by the fact that in spite of the Ghost's repeated urgings to say something to Cordelia about him, Lear essentially ignores him as he's so focused on his own ends. In other words, he's still got something of a wall around him - when something seems to be interfering with what he wants to accomplish, that something is beneath his notice. His journey of transformation, in spite of the vividly portrayed ways in which he *has* transformed to this point, is not yet complete. Only in the final scene does he reach the point of thorough change, a change triggered by the death of the Ghost. As he holds the Ghost in his arms, perhaps a parallel image to that of Shakespeare's Lear holding the dead Cordelia in *his* arms, Bond's Lear finally realizes the necessity for transcendent compassion and action. As a result, he also realizes that for him, the ultimate act of compassion is to demonstrate for those oppressed by Cordelia a way they can free themselves from that oppression. This is what he does in the following, final scene.

Act 3, Scene 4

Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

Susan leads Lear to the wall and tells him where the tools are. Lear tells her to go, but she says she can't leave him - Thomas would never understand. Lear tells her that once she goes back he will, and Susan goes out.

Lear finds a shovel and starts digging the earthen wall, breaking it up. A group of workers arrives and watches, but Lear (who is, it must be remembered, blind), is oblivious. The Farmer's Boy (Act 2 Scene 7), now wearing the uniform of an officer, calls for him to come down. Lear continues to dig. The Farmer's Boy aims a pistol at him. Lear continues to dig. The Farmer's Boy fires, and wounds Lear in the arm. Lear continues to dig. The Farmer's Boy fires again, and Lear is killed, falling off the wall as he dies. Some of the workers move towards him, but the Farmer's Boy tells them to leave him alone and ushers them off. "Lear's body is left alone on stage."

Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

This short but profoundly intense scene contains the play's dramatic and thematic climax, as Lear symbolically destroys the wall he constructed within himself and around his soul. This psychological wall prevented his complete and unconditional caring for another human being, and prevented him from seeing and understanding the full consequences of his actions - specifically, the repercussions of both his acts of violence and his tendencies towards violence. These, in turn were manifested in the *physical* wall he caused to be constructed. Therefore, his attempted destruction of the physical wall symbolizes his atonement for the chain of physically, socially, emotionally, and morally violent acts he set in motion when he called for it to be constructed.

As previously mentioned in relation to Act 3 Scene 2, the means and moment of Lear's death are deeply ironic, in that he dies in the same way as the laborer he killed at the beginning of the play - shot because his actions are perceived as being a threat to the established order. There is yet another layer to this irony. In this act of atonement for his role in perpetuating violence, he is actually doing it again - he triggers (no pun intended) the violence of the Farmer's Boy toward not only him but toward the other workers, who are on the receiving end of a morally violent act, the prohibition of exposure to other attitudes and ways of thinking.

There is a certain nihilistic hopelessness about the end of the play. In the final stage direction referring to Lear's body being left alone on the stage, there is the implied question of what his sacrifice was for, what his journey of transformation into someone who understands the nature of violence served. In bringing him to a violent end and by abandoning him to the sky and to memory, the play seems to be saying that the power of violence is so pervasive and so unchallengeable that even the greatest of souls has

no hope of triumph. Yes, Thomas and Susan, and presumably Susan's unborn child, live to convey his message to others of this generation and later ones as well. The point must be made, however, that they are not seen in these final moments. At least at the end of Shakespeare's *Lear*, there are indications in the character of Edgar, the one "good" character who remains alive, that there is hope for the future. This is perhaps the reason why there is no clear equivalent to Edgar in Bond's *Lear*. Maybe the ultimate message of both playwright and play is that it ultimately doesn't matter how many spiritual or physical or emotional walls are broken down. As long as human beings carry with them even the seed of violence, there can be little or no hope.

Characters

Ben

Ben is an orderly m the prison who is kind to Lear When Ben, pursued by soldiers, later appears at the Gravedigger's Boy's house, Lear takes him in despite the danger in doing so.

Bishop

The Bishop appears briefly in the first act, blessing Lear's army. He tells Lear that God will support him, not the women who act against him.

Bodice

Bodice is Lear's daughter and Fontanelle's sister. In the first scene, she objects to her father's cruelty m killing one of his workmen, but when she marries the Duke of North and leads a successful rebellion against her father, she becomes more cruel than he was, even coolly planning her own husband's murder. Although in many ways she is quite similar to her sister, Bodice is the more cold and calculating of the two. Whale Warrington is being tortured, Bodice calmly knits, and her concentration on her knitting throughout this horrid scene is so extreme that it becomes darkly comic. As the play progresses, Bodice's desire for power grows, and she imprisons her husband and speaks of eventually killing her sister. She is, however, the more intro spective of the two sisters, and in a monologue speaks of her own feeling that all of her power traps her and makes her its slave. When Bodice is finally imprisoned, she is as calculating as ever. She is killed by Cordelia's soldiers while in prison, and it is clear that she has learned nothing.

Carpenter

The Carpenter is first seen at the home of the Gravedigger's Boy and his wife, Cordelia. The Gravedigger's Boy says that the Carpenter comes to their home often because of his love for Cordelia. Shortly after soldiers kill the Gravedigger's Boy and rape Cordelia, the Carpenter comes on stage and kills the soldiers. He and Cordelia marry. Although his killing of the soldiers seems to be a noble act, when Cordelia gains power, he becomes a part of her corrupt government.

Cordelia

The audience first sees Cordelia, the Gravedigger's Boy's Wife, at home with her husband when Lear comes seeking shelter. She is not as compassionate as the

Gravedigger's Boy and wants Lear to leave. After her husband is killed by the soldiers who cruelly rape her, Cordelia marries the Carpenter and leads a rebellion against Bodice and Fontanelle. *Her* rebellion is successful, but once in power, she is every bit as cruel as those she fought against. It is Cordelia who leaves her own wounded soldier to die alone, who orders the executions of

Bodice and Fontanelle, and the blinding of Lear She allows Lear to live but tries to stop his public speaking. It is one of her soldiers who finally kills Lear.

Duke of Cornwall

The Duke of Comwall begins as an enemy of Lear's kingdom, but Fontanelle says that by marrying him, she can bring peace between him and her father. Instead, he becomes a part of Fontanelle and Bodice's revolution against Lear. Fontanelle quickly tires of him and attempts to have him killed. He survives, but Fontanelle later has him imprisoned. As a character, he is virtually interchangeable with the Duke of North

Duke of North

Initially an enemy of Lear' s kingdom, the Duke of North marries Bodice, supposedly in order to bring peace, but then supports Bodice and Fontanelle's revolution. Bodice, however, soon grows tired of him and tries to have him killed Although that attempt fails, she eventually succeeds m having him imprisoned. There is little difference between the Duke of North and the Duke of Cornwall, Fontanelle's husband.

Farmer

The Farmer appears by Lear's wall with his wife and son shortly after Lear is released, blinded, from prison. When Lear asks to rest in his home, the Farmer explains that he has lost everything due to the madness of the king and his obsession with building the wall. Lear begins to see the real effects of what he has done and to feel compassion for the people of the kingdom.

Farmer's Son

The Farmer's Son appears with his mother and father at Lear's wall. At the time Lear meets him, he is being conscripted into Cordelia's army. Lear begs him not to go, but to run away instead. In the final scene, it is the Farmer's Son, now a soldier, who shoots and kills Lear.

Farmer's Wife

The Farmer's wife appears at Lear's wall with her husband and son. She is resigned to the dark fate of her family.

Firing Squad Officer

The Firing Squad Officer commands the firing squad that is supposed to shoot one of Lear's workers at his command. When they are not quick enough, Lear shoots the man himself.

Fontanelle

Fontanelle is Lear's daughter and Bodice's sister. In the first scene, her objection to her father's killing of a workman makes her seem compassionate, but when she and Bodice lead the rebellion against Lear, it becomes clear that she is Immensely cruel. Fontanelle plans the murder of her husband, an effort which fails, but is shown at her cruelest during the torture of Warrington, when she becomes so excited about Warrington's suffering that the result is a sort of black humor. *Her* extreme pleasure in the torture contrasts with Bodice's calm state. Although Fontanelle and Bodice are supposedly working together, they are not loyal to one another; Fontanelle has her own spies. Fontanelle is finally imprisoned by Cordelia and executed. Afterwards, she is autopsied onstage and Lear is moved by the beauty of the inside of her body In viewing Fontanelle's autopsy, Lear becomes aware of his responsibility In the formation of his children's characters. Although she learns nothing herself, in death Fontanelle contributes to Lear's clearer understanding of his own cruelty.

Ghost

See Gravedigger's Boy

Gravedigger's Boy

The Gravedigger's Boy plays a strong part in teaching Lear about compassion When he first meets Lear, the Gravedigger's Boy is living in a pastoral setting with his pregnant wife, Cordelia. The simplicity of his life and his kindness bring about the beginning of Lear's change. After the Gravedigger's Boy is murdered by soldiers, he later appears to Lear In his prison cell, now as a Ghost. As the Ghost, he continues to teach Lear as he tries to help him, but the Ghost himself is in a state of continuing deterioration. He is slowly dying and is afraid. Lear, calling the Ghost his boy, becomes his protector, but is unable to save the Ghost from his decline. Meanwhile, the Ghost continues in his protective attitude toward Lear. The two learn to help and teach each other and to show

one another true kindness and compassion. Finally, however, the Ghost is mauled to death by maddened pigs, and Lear feels the pain of his second death.

Gravedigger's Boy's Wife

See Cordelia

John

John lives with Thomas, Susan, and Lear at the Gravedigger's Boy's house. He is more critical of Lear and eventually leaves for the city, asking Susan to leave Thomas and come with him She stays with Thomas and Lear

Judge

The Judge, who is clearly under the control of Bodice and Fontanelle, presides at Lear's trial and concludes that Lear is mad.

Lear

Lear is the play's title character. The action revolves largely around his growth as an individual. When he first appears on stage, it is as a cruel king bent on building a wall around his kingdom, supposedly to protect his people. His actions, however, soon show his indifference to their lives, as he kills a workman who has accidentally killed another and thus delayed the completion of the wall. When Lear is deposed by his daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle,

he begins to suffer and to change through that suffering. When the rebellion first begins, Lear denies that he even has daughters, but he eventually takes responsibility for his part in building their characters. His relationship with the Gravedigger's Boy, and subsequently with the Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost, also changes him as he begins to see the possibility of true kindness. Much of Lear's change, in fact, comes because of his relationships with other people. As he sees the world through their eyes, he develops compassion and is finally willing to give his own life because of the good It might do others. His final act, an attempt to dig up his own wall, shows the extent of his transformation. It is this transformation that is the center of the play.

Officer

The Officer comes to the Gravedigger's Boy's house while Lear is living there With Thomas, Susan, and John. He accuses Lear of harboring deserters and takes the Small Man away to be executed.

Old Councilor

The Old Councilor is loyal to whatever regime is in power. He begins as a minister of Lear's, supports Bodice and Fontanelle when they are in power, and eventually works for Cordelia.

Prisoners

Four Prisoners appear with Lear in a prison convoy. One of them is also the Prison Doctor who performs the autopsy on Fontanelle and later blinds Lear.

Small Man

The Small Man is a deserter pursued by soldiers. He asks Lear, Thomas, Susan, and John to hide him. Lear tries to protect him, but he is eventually found by the soldiers and taken away to be executed.

Soldiers

Fourteen soldiers have speaking parts in the play, and others appear on stage. These soldiers are a frequent presence throughout the play and are usually seen ill the act of killing or torturing people. They are in the service of the various corrupt regimes.

Susan

Susan is Thomas's wife and lives at the Gravedigger's Boy's house with Thomas, John, and Lear Like Thomas, she is concerned that Lear's compassion for others will endanger the household, but it is she who leads Lear to his wall so that he can commit his defiant final act.

Thomas

Thomas, his wife Susan, and John live with Lear at the Gravedigger's Boy's house after Lear has been blinded and released from prison. Thomas is compassionate, but unlike Lear, he is reluctant to endanger the household by helping those pursued by Cordelia's army. He is also concerned that Lear's public speaking will bring trouble. Yet he says he wants to fight for the good of the people. Susan and John want him to leave Lear, but he refuses.

Warrington

Warrington is loyal to Lear. He is captured and brutally tortured under the direction of Lear's daughters when they first rebel against their father. The daughters decide not to kill Warrington and for a time he lives in the woods and is referred to as "the wild man" by the Gravedigger's Boy and his wife. He drowns in their well.

Wild Man

See Warrington

Workmen

The three workmen appear in the first scene, where they are seen building Lear's wall. Their only value to Lear is m their ability to work on the wall. When one is accidentally killed, Lear's only concern is for the resulting delay m building the wall.

Wounded Rebel Soldier

The Wounded Rebel Soldier was injured fighting m Cordelia's army. She, the Carpenter, and the other rebel soldiers abandon him to die alone.

Themes

Parents and Children

In *Lear* Bond provides a picture of a family that has disintegrated. In the very first scene of the play, Bond portrays hostility between Lear and his daughters. Bodice and Fontanelle reveal to their father that they will marry his enemies, the Duke of North and the Duke of Cornwall, then tear down Lear's wall. Lear responds in kind, telling them he has always known of their maliciousness. When Lear leaves the stage, Bodice and Fontanelle reveal their plans to attack their father's army. Lear and his daughters are literally at war with one another; when presented with Lear's death warrant, Fontanelle eagerly signs it. At his trial Lear seems to reject his children altogether, saying he has no daughters.

Yet in prison, Lear shows a desire for a relationship with his children. Lear asks the Ghost to bring him his daughters who, he now says, will help him. Apparitions of the daughters as young girls appear, and the audience is given the sense of happier, more peaceful times. The daughters are afraid of being in prison, but Lear comforts them. When they say they must leave, Lear begs them to stay. Lear realizes that at some point in the past his daughters were kind, lovable people. Later, when Fontanelle is killed and autopsied, the procedure reveals to Lear that his daughter is flesh and bone and not some evil beast in human guise.

Lear is awed by the beauty and purity of the inside of Fontanelle's body. He sees no maliciousness, no evil, there, just base human matter. He says that if he had known how beautiful Fontanelle was, he would have loved her. "Did I make this-and destroy it?" he asks. It is only at the autopsy that Lear realizes that he is responsible for the evil in his daughters. He has shaped their personalities and behavior. They learned all of their cruelty, greed, and thirst for power from him There is an inherent connection between the children and the parent who nurtured their development, and Lear can no longer see himself as simply the victim of his daughters' evil. Lear and his daughters are inextricably bound together. By the time Lear realizes this, however, it is too late. Both daughters are dead, and he cannot change the past. The disintegrated family cannot be rebuilt. Lear must live with his guilt.

Violence and Power

In his preface to *Lear* Bond states, "I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners." For Bond, violence is an integral part of contemporary society; writing about modern culture means writing about violence. *Lear* begins and ends with violence. In the first scene, Lear shoots a worker who has accidentally caused another worker's death; in the last scene, a soldier shoots and kills Lear. In between, there are numerous acts of brutality. Warrington's tongue is cut out, he is tortured, and knitting needles are shoved into his ears. The innocent Gravedigger's Boy is shot, and Ins wife

is raped. Even as a Ghost, the Gravedigger's Boy suffers a second violent death, this time an attack by pigs. Fontanelle is shot and Bodice is gored by soldiers. Numerous minor characters also die violent deaths

Aside from the violence, there are scenes depicting graphic gore. The autopsy of Fontanelle and the blinding of Lear are among the most horrifying scenes in recent literature As traumatic as watching Bond's violent scenes may be for the audience, however, it is important to note that these scenes are not mere titillation or sensationalism; Bond uses the violence in *Lear,* as well as in his other plays, to highlight the violence of modern society. His interest is not simply in the violence itself, but in the circumstances that provoke such savagery in both reality and fiction.

Most of the violence in *Lear* is directly related to the desire for power. When the first worker is shot in Act I, the audience immediately realizes a connection between Lear's power and the violence that has repeatedly been used in the formation of his regime. Supposedly horrified by Lear's violence, Bodice and Fontanelle revolt against their father, but once in power, they are every bit as violent as he. One might expect Cordelia, originally one of the oppressed masses, to also govern without violence, but, once in power, she is as ruthless as Lear and his daughters. Although the rulers change, their policies of governing through violence remain the same. The very structure of this society is violent. It is Bond's intention that the audience see the violence of Lear's society as a reflection of its own time. Through recognition of its own savagery, society may change.

Transformation

Lear begins the playas a violent man, a ruthless king. His rancor is immediately highlighted when he shoots one worker who has accidentally killed another. The crime, in Lear's View, is not in taking an innocent life, but in delaying the building of the wall. Although the king, when he talks of his people in the abstract, speaks of his duty to protect them, as individuals their lives mean nothing to him. As the play progresses-and his circumstances change-Lear begins to perceive things differently. When his daughters' revolution succeeds, he flees to the countryside, where he meets the Gravedigger's Boy, who generously feeds him and gives him sanctuary.

Lear witnesses the human ability to forgive when the Boy tells him of the subjects' suffering caused by the building of the wall and yet allows the deposed king to stay. Lear's education in suffering is continued when he sees the Boy killed, Ins wife raped, and their livestock killed. His imprisonment by his daughters also teaches him about pain. In prison, Lear develops feelings of protectiveness toward the Ghost Also in prison, Lear's observation of Fontanelle's autopsy helps him to further see the damage for which he is responsible. At this point, when he is beginning to see, Lear is blinded.

The blind Lear is released and meets the farmer, his wife, and their son; Lear now truly sees their suffering and longs to end it. He begins to live among the people and endangers his own life by offering sanctuary to all who need It and by speaking out

against Cordelia's regime. Lear's last act is his attempt to tear down the wall, an attempt that will clearly fail, and he dies in this symbolic act. Violence and evil still reign. Yet, in Lear's transformation and virtuous final act, an example for positive change has been presented.

Style

Epic Theater/Alienation Effect

Twentieth-century playwright Bertold Brecht *(The Three-penny Opera)* developed the modern concept of the epic theater for use in his political dramas. Unlike conventional drama, epic theater develops from a sequence of many scenes, as in *Lear,* that often take place over a considerable time period and employ a large number of characters. The continuous movement from scene to scene is meant to keep the audience from becoming too emotionally involved with the characters. This lack of emotional involvement is also developed through Brecht's alienation effect, which occurs when the audience is continuously made aware that it is not watching reality but a play.

In *Lear* characters periodically speak to the audience rather than to one another. This sort of speech is called an "aside" and contributes to the alienation effect. When Warrington is tortured, the darkly comic comments of Bodice and Fontanelle remind the audience that this is an exaggerated fiction removed from reallty. This is part of the alienation effect as well. The purpose of this method is to force the audience to use its intellect rather than its emotions in considering the themes and action of the play. Brecht believed that focusing on reason, not emotion, would be more effective in conveying the motives of political drama.

Anachronism

An anachronism is an objector idea that is from a time period different from the one in which a work of literature is set; it is something that is clearly out of context with the rest of the work's environment. The modern workers building Lear's wall are an anachronism, as is the futuristic "scientific device" used to blind Lear. Anachronisms can have two major effects. They are sometimes used to make a story more universal-to illustrate that the story is not only about the time in which it is set but that it uses themes and ideas that apply to all tunes. Anachronisms can also contribute to the alienation effect, creating a sense of the surreal that reinforces the unreality of the proceedings. In *Lear,* Bond's anachronistic technique serves both purposes.

Allusion

An allusion refers to something outside of the play, usually a literary work. By using allusion, the playwright is able to enrich the audience's experience of the drama. Though a complete story in Itself, Bond's entire play is an allusion to William Shake speare's *King Lear.* Because the play is about Shakespeare's text, familiarity with *King Lear* will deepen the audience's understanding of Bond's interpretation. Bodice's knitting in tunes of mayhem is an allusion to Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities,* a novel about the French Revolution in which the character Madame Defarge, one of the revolutionaries, knits a list of aristocrats who must die into a scarf.

Setting

Bond's play takes place in a year numbered 3100, presumably in ancient Britain, although Bond fills his story with modern devices, indicating that the action may be taking place in some distant future. Read in this manner, Bond could be condemning the phenomenon of history repeating itself. If the play is set in the future, then the events are a recreation of the original Lear legend that took place centuries before.

The action of the play takes place in a multitude of locations, but there are some that reappear within the play. Although the audience does not actually see Lear's wall until the final scene, the play opens near the wall, which becomes a pervasive symbolic presence throughout the play. Frequent references to the wall cause the audience to sense a feeling of enclosure and claustrophobia that is representative of the oppression caused by the different regimes throughout the play. Paradoxically, in the final scene the audience is shown the wall, and thus the possibility of a future on the outside; the inspiration for freedom is deepened by Lear's insistence that the structure, and all that it symbolizes, be destroyed.

The Gravedigger's Boy's house is also an important location. It is in this more pastoral setting that Lear experiences the possibility of change and the depth of human kindness. It is to this house that the blind Lear returns and establishes a sanctuary for fugitives from the regime. The house represents the chance of happiness and freedom, an Idyll from oppression. Another important location is the prison, where Lear learns of his own responsibility for the suffering of others. Imprisoned with his daughters, he becomes aware that their evIl is a reflection-and creation-of his own capacity for such behavior:

Metaphor

A metaphor is a word or phrase whose literal meaning is subverted to represent something else. The wall, the play's greatest metaphor, is a presence which pervades the play even when It is not seen. It is representative of the oppression and control of various corrupt regimes. Bodice and Fontanelle as well as Cordelia initially see the wall as something that must be dug up. Yet whoever ascends to power realizes that the wall is a means to preserve their authority. At the same time, the people see the wall as the source of their misery. Because of the massive effort put into constructing the wall, their farms are lost and the men sicken and die. The structure is also a metaphor for the "wall" that Lear has figuratively built between himself and his adult daughters, as well as between himself and the emotional needs of his subjects Lear's final attempt to dig up the wall represents his realization that such oppressive structures must be demolished to advance humanity.

The blinding of Lear is also metaphoric. In literature blindness is often associated with greater insight. Tiresias, the mythological Greek prophet, is blind as is the character of Oedipus. Lear 18 blinded just as he begins to realize his own responsibility for the pain of others. In these cases, physical blindness enables greater insight into the human

condition. It is also symbolic of an epiphany or great self reflection. As with the legend of Oedipus (who unwittingly killed his father, married his mother, and, upon learning what he had done, blinded himself), Lear's blinding occurs at the moment that he gains full realization of his life's atrocities.

Historical Context

British writers of Bond's generation were profoundly influenced by World War II and its aftermath German leader Adolf Hitler's intense bombing of London, known as the "blitz," brought the horrors of war home to British soil At the end of the war, the discovery of the Nazi concentration camps (in which millions were put to death for their perceived threat to the German regime) revealed a previously unimagined evil. The American use of the atomic bomb at the end of the war led to new fears about the fume of the planet, fears which were exacerbated when Britain tested its first hydrogen bomb in 1954.

For the British people, the violence of war was very real. At the close of the conflict, Britain began to lose its status as a nation. It had once been said that the sun never set on the British empire. Now that same empire was gradually dismantled as former colonies such as India and Africa regained their autonomy. The Suez crisis of 1956, in which Britain tried to gain control of the Suez Canal in Egypt and was subsequently condemned for its military interference, caused great disillusionment with the government. After the United Nations condemned Britain's action, troops were forced to withdraw, and the prime minister resigned. Equally sobering for leftist causes was the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 and its subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Socialism, seen by many as a hope for the future, was revealed to be as aggressive, dictatorial, and violent as any other political system.

The postwar years in England also saw the development of the Welfare State, in which responsibility for the poor would rest largely on the government. In 1946, the National Insurance Act and the National Health Service Act were passed. The National Assistance Act of 1948 was designed to provide government relief for the poor. Many believed that through the government's actions, poverty and unemployment would be abolished, a line of reasoning that was quickly proven false. The belief in the need for government assistance for the poor, however, continued into the late 1960s and early 1970s. In these later years, government policies also became increasingly liberal. Homosexuality, previously illegal, was now considered outside of government jurisdiction. The National Health Service began to fund contraception and abortions for the poor. Women and members of minority groups began to agitate for their rights. The Lord Chamberlain's power to censor the theater was abolished.

In his preface to *Lear* Bond writes, "We can see that most men are spending their lives doing things for which they are not biologically designed. We are not designed for our production lines, housing blocks, even cars; and these things are not designed for us." Bond's suspicion of technology is a reflection of his times. During this period the idyllic pastoral life depicted at the home of *Lear's* Gravedigger's Boy was fast disappearing as farms became more industrialized There was also the sense that the Increase in technology, because of the resulting displacement of workers, was a large contributor to the problems of unemployment and, thus, poverty. Medical advances were also under suspicion. When the first heart transplant was performed m England in 1967, some compared that breakthrough to the depiction of biological technology (and the creation of a monster) in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein.*

The time m which Bond wrote *Lear* was also a time of violence. In 1968 alone the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated, and the Six Day War was fought in Israel. During these years, the war in Vietnam was escalating, and British troops were sent into Northern Ireland to quell unrest over that country's sovereignty Students became deeply involved in politics and there were mass demonstrations. It also became clear, however, that the students could turn violent as well. In 1970, three members of the radical American group "The Weathermen" were killed when the bomb they were building for terrorist purposes exploded. It was this type of destruction, this kind of violence, that is dramatized in *Lear,* a play in which all governments and all revolutions are shown to be violent and, ultimately, alike in their ruthless cruelty and disregard for human life.

Critical Overview

The pervasive violence of Bond's *Lear* has been a focus of criticism since the play's premiere in 1971. By that time, Bond was well known for the graphic nature of his 1965 play *Saved,* which features a scene in which a baby m a carriage is stoned to death. That play, m part because of its intense savagery, received many negative reviews, but its importance in British theater was virtually unquestioned by the time of *Lear's* debut six years later. Richard Scharine, in *The Plays of Edward Bond,* quoted the *Lear's* assistant director, Gregory Dark, on the influence of *Saved's* reputation on early reviews of Bond's 1971 work: "On the whole, we felt that the critics were scared of giving an outright condemnation-they had been caught out that way with *Saved-but* obviously did not like the play, so they chose a middle road which satisfied nobody, and really meant nothing." Critic Benedict Nightingale, quoted by Scharine, managed criticism and qualified praise of *Lear* at the same time: "I must admit that the more seats around me emptied, the more the play impressed me, albeit against many of my instincts and much of my judgement." Nightingale also offered mild criticism of Bond's violence, saying that "The play's horrors. . have their perhaps overemphatic place."

In *Bond on File* Philip Roberts quoted early reviews by Irving Wardle and Helen Dawson, both of whom defend Bond's graphic depictions while acknowledging their profoundly disturbing nature. Wardle wrote, "At first glance [Bond] seems totally lacking in common humanity. But what passes for common humanity in other writers can mean that they share our own compromising attachments." Dawson noted that "the violence is not at all gloating; it hurts, as It is meant to do, but there is no relish in It. As a result, *Lear,* despite its unflinching brutality, is not a negative work."

When the play was revived in 1983, twelve years after its original production, Anthony Masters, also quoted by Roberts, wrote, "What is unbearable about seeing Edward Bond's greatest. .play again. . . is not the horrors and bleakness of war, the bayoneting and mutilations. . . and the other brutalities that had members of Thursday night's audience carried out in seizures of shock. "

For Masters, what was truly horrible was "the knowledge that [the play] is even more topical now and will become more so as man's inhumanity gains subtle sophistication with the twenty-first century's approach." For Masters, it was not so much the violence itself that was upsetting, but what Bond was saying by the portrayal of such violence According to Masters, "the reality of the violence was the true horror."

Nonetheless, for most later critics, it is the violence that remains disturbing and continues to dominate discussion of the play. David L Hirst, in his book *Edward Bond,* wrote that "It may be that the excessive amount of realistic violence in the play-far greater than in any of Bond's previous dramas and never equaled in any play since considerably alienated reviewers and public alike when the play was first performed." The violence, according to Hirst, creates two problems for the audience member: "There is an escalating violence in the play which makes very tough demands on the audience; and there is no apparent escape from it."

However, this is not necessarily negative for Hirst. He saw *Lear* as part of a tradition of twentieth century drama, an example of Bertolt Brecht's concept of the alienation effect. For Brecht, because drama is supposed to teach, it is important that theater audiences not simply have feelings about the play's characters, but that they think. Such tremendously disturbing scenes of. brutality can overwhelm the audience so greatly that viewers disengage themselves from identifying with the characters and are able to view the violence in a more distant way to examine it. In that sense, audience alienation is a desirable effect as it enables the audience to go beyond emotion to thought.

On the other hand, Jenny S. Spencer in her book, *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond,* saw the savagery in *Lear* as intended to have the opposite effect. Spencer referred to the violent scenes in the playas "akin to terrorist tactics, depend[ing] upon a certain amount of shock, and play[ing] upon the audience's socially conditioned fears." For Spencer, "Bond calls on his audience to witness' and 'suffer' the full force of the characters' actions. . . one must *feel* the urgently unacceptable nature of events before desiring to change them." According to this viewpoint, what Bond intends is not alienation, but identification. The audience is not meant to feel distance from the characters, but, through its shock and horror, to empathize.

Despite differing viewpoints on *Lear's* violence, few critics now simply condemn the play, as earlier critics condemned *Saved,* for its excesses. The focus of most criticism is to consider, not the violence itself. but Bond's purpose in portraying such severity. The question is not whether such intensity is appropriate, but what Bond is trying to show and whether the violence of *Lear* ultimately serves its purpose.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Cross is a Ph.D. candidate specializing in modern drama. In this essay she discusses the moral development of Lear in Bond's play.

In his play *Lear,* Edward Bond focuses on the moral development of the title character, a king in ancient Britain. Although Lear begins the playas an old man, his behavior is that of a child; he is totally absorbed in himself and his own security and needs. He is literally building a wall to keep others out. As the play progresses, however, Lear loses his position of power and is forced to move outside of his self-absorbed sphere and into the society he helped to create. As he suffers along with his former subjects, Lear begins to mature, realizing that others are human beings with needs and desires of their own. For the first time, Lear truly sees other people, and this leads him to recognize the consequences of his own actions and to take responsibility for what he has done. His moral growth, however, is only complete when he turns his understanding into action. It is only then that he becomes a morally mature human being.

When the audience first meets Lear, he is morally a child, seeing nothing beyond his own needs and desires. He is obsessed with the building of his wall, which he claims will benefit his people. It is clear from the beginning, however, that Lear has a callous disregard for others He complains about the workers leaving wood m the mud to rot, then almost immediately turns to complaints about the living conditions of the men. Bond makes it clear, however, that Lear's complaints do not arise from true concern for his workers. His dissatisfaction about their living conditions is, in fact, parallel to his complaint about the wood. "You must deal with this fever, " he tells the Foreman. "When [the men] finish work they must be kept in dry huts. All these huts are wet." Like the wood, the men are being left to rot. Lear goes on to tell the Foreman, "You waste men," a statement that shows that to Lear, the workers are simply more materials to be used in building the wall.

Bond makes Lear's attitude even more clear when Lear's primary concern with the accidental death of a worker is that it will cause delay in building the wall. Lear insists, over the protests of his two daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, that the worker who inadvertently caused the death be executed. Here Bond contrasts Lear's spoken concern for his people with his actions. When his daughters say they will tear down the wall, Lear says, "I loved and cared for all my children, and now you've sold them to their enemies I" Immediately after this statement, Lear shoots the worker who caused the death; it is Lear who is the true enemy of his people

What Lear's wall actually protects is not so much his subjects but his position as their king. When his daughters reveal their plans to take over the kingdom, Lear turns on them as well, saying, "I built my wall against *you* as well as my other enemies." In his book *The Art and Politics of Edward Bond,* Lou Lappin pointed out that Lear's wall also functions as a glorification of himself. Lear says, "When I'm dead my people will live in freedom and peace and remember my name, no-venerate it." Lappin called the building

of Lear's wall "a self-absorbed gesture, an act of solipsism that seeks to ennoble itself in a cult of personality. "

Like a child, Lear thinks only of himself.

In his book *The Plays of Edward Bond,* Richard Scharine wrote, "When Lear is overthrown, he is propelled into the society he created like a baby being born." Scharine went on to say, however, that "the mere fact of his being overthrown does not teach Lear moral maturity." At the Gravedigger's Boy's house, Lear is still very much a child. Physically, he depends on the Gravedigger's Boy and his wife to feed and shelter him. "You've looked after me well," says Lear. "I slept like a child in the silence all day." Like a child, Lear retains his self-absorption. When he glimpses the tortured Warrington, Lear's emphasis is not on Warrington's pain, but on the effect of that sight on himself: "I've seen a ghost. I'm going to die. That's why he came back. I'll die." When Cordelia, the Gravedigger's Boy's Wife, tells Lear he must go, his response resembles a child's tantrum: "No, I won't go. He said l could stay. He won't break his word... .No,1 won't be at everyone's call" My daughters sent you! *You* go" It's you who destroy this place! We must get rid of you!" It is only when the soldiers arrive, killing the Gravedigger's Boy and raping Cordelia, that Lear shows some recognition of the pain of others when he says to the soldiers: "0 burn the house! You've murdered the husband, slaughtered the cattle, poisoned the well, raped the mother, killed the child-you must burn the house!" Yet as Jenny S. Spencer pointed out in her book *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond,* Lear's cry of horror is "ironically underscored" by Lear's "unrecognized responsibility for the soldier's brutality." Lear has begun to see outside of himself, but he still does not recognize that the pain he sees is the consequence of his own actions.

Lear's lack of insight continues in the courtroom scene. As Scharine noted, Lear "still does not understand that he himself is the architect of his prison." Not only does he not realize his responsibility for his daughters' actions, he denies that he has daughters at all. In his madness, he sees himself in the mirror as an animal in a cage, but in viewing himself as an animal, he also sees himself primarily as the victim of others and an object of pity. "Who shut that animal in that cage?" he asks. "Let it out. " Yet at the same time, Lear's View of himself as an animal implies a greater connection with those around him. "No, that's not the king," he says. He is not above the others. In fact, Lear shows the mirror around to those in the courtroom, letting them see the animal, an act that equates the others with himself. In a sense, all are victims Lear can now see pain outside of himself. However, his moral growth is still incomplete. He still does not take responsibility for his actions, still does not see his own guilt.

It is in his prison cell, after the Gravedigger's Boy's Ghost appears to him and brings him his daughters as young children, that Lear begins to see a connection between his daughters and himself. In the courtroom he says, "My daughters have been murdered and these monsters have taken their place."

Yet when Bodice and Fontanelle appear as young girls, Lear shows that they are, in fact, his daughters. The apparitions sit next to Lear with their heads on his knees, and he strokes their hair. When they finally leave, he asks them not to go. At this point, Lear

begins to see what he has done, saying, "I killed so many people and never looked at one of their faces." When the Ghost, already deteriorating, asks to stay with Lear, Lear responds for the first time with real compassion: "Yes, yes, Poor boy. . . . I'll hold you. We'll help each other. Cry while I sleep, and I'll cry and watch while you sleep.. . The sound of the human voice will comfort us." Lear recognizes not only that the Ghost can help him but also that he can help the Ghost Later, when walking with the other prisoners, Lear expresses even more concern, saying "I don't want to live except for the boy. Who'd look after him?" In his relationship with the Ghost, Lear also begins to develop a sense of his own responsibility, saying of the Ghost: "I did him a great wrong once, a very great wrong. He's never blamed me. I must be kind to him now." Lear is now moving toward moral maturity, toward the recognition that he needs to practice compassion, responsibility and action.

With Fontanelle's autopsy, Lear's responsibility becomes even more clear to him. When he sees the inside of her body, he says, "She was cruel and angry and hard. . .. Where is the beast?" He is surprised to find there is no monster inside of Fontanelle. "I am astonished," he continues. "I have never seen anything so beautiful" Unlike the Ghost, Fontanelle had done Lear wrong, so he could continue to see her as a monster, separate from himself, but at this point Lear understands his responsibility in forming her character. "Did I make this," he asks, "and destroy it?" Earlier, when the Ghost had tried to take Lear away from the Jail, Lear answered, "I ran away so often, but my life was ruined just the same. Now I'll stay." Lear continues now in his desire to face reality. He says,

"I must open my eyes and see."

Lear's desire to finally see is followed almost immediately by his blinding. Scharine quoted Bond as saying, "blindness is a dramatic metaphor for insight, that is why Gloucester, Oedipus, and Tiresias are blind." Once blinded, Lear is released into the countryside. Near the wall, he meets the Farmer, the Farmer's wife, and their son, all of whom describe how the lives they had known were destroyed by Lear's wall Lear now sees that he has harmed not only isolated individuals but all of his society, and he is horrified. Falling on ills knees, in a posture that asks forgiveness, Lear begs the Farmer's Son not to go into the army, but his efforts are fruitless As Scharine pointed out, "The society that Lear created has been perfected. Cordelia's subjects are socially moralized and go to their consumption by the social order without questioning." Lear cannot unmake the society he has created, and he sees the depths of his guilt.

In the third act, Lear is seen living at the Gravedigger's Boy's former house with Susan, Thomas, and John. In a sense, this is an attempt to return to the idealized, pastoral life that he glimpsed while living with the Boy and Cordelia-the life he lead in his child-like phase. Lear, however, has changed. He is no longer the self-absorbed child, simply seeking the help of others. Now it is Lear who shows compassion, even as the others, including the Ghost, are concerned that Lear is endangering himself by helping those the government considers enemies. When Lear is told to protect himself, to tell those who come to him that they must leave, Lear insists that all can stay: "I won't turn anyone

away. They can eat my food while it lasts and when it's gone they can go if they like, but I won't send anyone away."

Lear is not only taking people in, however; he is also speaking out against the government he helped to create. Lear's former Councilor appears, telling him he must end his public life: "In future you will not speak in public or involve yourself in any public affairs. Your visitors will be vetted by the area military authorities. All these people must go." Knowing that he cannot defeat Cordelia's regime, Lear despairs. He is trapped. "There's a wall everywhere," he says. "I'm buried alive in a wall. Does this suffering and misery last forever?. I know nothing, I can do nothing. I am nothing."

After Cordelia tells Lear that he will be tried and executed, however, Lear is again able to move beyond himself and his own despair to his final act, an attempt to dig up and destroy the wall he created.

In their book, *Playwrights' Progress,* Colin Chambers and Mike Prior saw Lear's final act as "so random and so futile that it seems an almost meaningless choice except in terms of the individual conscience." For Chambers and Prior, "Lear's final nod towards the continuing existence of a will to resist is . . . a gesture."

Yet Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, in their book *Bond: A Study of His Plays,* disagreed. "The gesture he makes is neither final nor futile," they wrote. "It is the demonstration of Lear' s integrity to those he leaves behind that action is both necessary and responsible" Knowing that he will die soon anyway, Lear uses his death to show the need, not only for compassion and responsibility, but also for action. No longer the child who hides behind his wall, Lear has reached a position of moral maturity and even an ability to teach others. In the final scene, as the workers leave Lear's body on stage, one looks back, showing that others can learn from Lear's death, that there is purpose m his moral journey, that his final act is not futile.

Lear's attack on the wall also carries symbolic weight, for the barrier he seeks to destroy is not only the physical wall he has built but the metaphoric wall he has constructed between himself and others. In gaining compassion for his former subjects and human life in general-Lear completes his transformation by seeking to eradicate both of these walls. Yet where he fails to destroy the physical wall, he more importantly succeeds in tearing down the wall within himself.

Source: Clare Cross, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt, Bulman discusses how Bond related the themes of Shakespeare's King Lear *to his belief that playwrights "must be morally responsible to their societies," the result being his own version of the classic play.*

Edward Bond thinks that playwrights must be morally responsible to their societies. Their plays ought not only to analyze history-how societies became what they are-but also to suggest ways in which societies can better themselves. Too often, he believes, theater is immoral. It encourages playwrights who have no political awareness; it fosters uncritical attitudes toward plays that have become classics. Such plays, he argues, may have been moral enough ill their days. But they have outlived their historical moments and entered the realm of myth; and because myth codifies and perpetuates the values of the old order, It is dangerous. Bond wants his audiences to "escape from a mythology of the past, which often lives on as the culture of the present," and thus be free to correct injustices: theater therefore must commit itself to political reform if it is to be moral instead of frivolous. Its aesthetic cannot be divorced from that commitment.

Not surprisingly, then, Bond has turned repeatedly to our most revered cultural myths as subjects for his plays. By doing so, he has been able to feed on fables of proven theatrical power, yet, by revising them, to attack their social and political presuppositions The myth of King Lear haunted Bond most of all. Why Lear? Bond replies: "I can only say that Lear was standing in my path and I had to get him out of the way. *(Theatre Quarterly,* Vol 2, No.5, 1972)" For Bond, Lear epitomized all that was best and worst in Western culture. Lear was authoritarian, his rule was socially oppressive, he was blind to the needs of common humanity, and he resorted to violence. And yet the old king learned to see he acquired the power to penetrate the myths of the civilization he had made-belief that tyranny can be just, that despotism can be benevolent, that violence can preserve peace. Bond loved the old king for his insight, loathed him for neglecting to act on it. Likewise, Bond admired Shakespeare's *King Lear* for its potent critique of the human condition; but insofar as Shakespeare elected to focus on Lear's *personal* suffering rather than on the society that Lear had tyrannized, Bond condemned the play as a dangerous product of Its age, bound in by the very myths It exposed.

Perhaps "condemned" is too strong a word. In *The Activist Papers,* Bond explains that the Elizabethan aesthetic was different from ours' in soliloquy, Hamlet and Lear spoke not merely through their own consciousnesses, but through "the consciousness of history itself." Their voices were at once personal and universal:

When Shakespeare wrote the court had political power and the rulers were a private family as well as a state institution. This meant that Shakespeare didn't need to distinguish clearly between public and private, political and personal. He could handle the two things tugether so that it seemed as if political problems could have personal solutions.

That is, the problems of Lear's world could be purged within the confines of Lear's own imagination.

What was true for the Elizabethans, however, is not true for us. Bond suggests that by maintaining a fascination with the personal at the expense of the political, with the individual at the expense of the social, modern drama has devolved into absurdity; and he rejects the theater of the absurd on moral grounds:

Now society can no longer be expressed politically and morally in terms of the individual and so soliloquies don't work in the same way. The individual is no longer a metaphor for the state and his private feelings can no longer be used to express cause in history or will in politics. Changes m social and political relations make a new drama urgently necessary ... The bourgeois theatre clings to psychological drama and so it can't deal with the major dramatic themes. Hamlet's soliloquy has withered into the senile monologue of Krapp's last tape

This in part explains, I think, why Bond felt compelled to revise *King Lear-to* rip it from the embrace of bourgeois psychology where our modern sensibilities are wont to lock it and to address more clearly the moral issues it raises; to make It the public play that Bond thought it had the potential to become. Bond's model for such revision was Brecht. He had seen the Berliner Ensemble when it visited London in 1956, and his work with George Devine and his successor William Gaskill in the Royal Court Writers' Group educated him more formally in Brecht's methods. *Lear,* which he began in 1969 and which opened at the Royal Court in 1971, represents Bond's first significant attempt at *epic* drama. In it, he presents a series of scenes (equivalent to Brecht's *gestus)* that offer social and moral perceptions of the world: he disavows coherent psychological motivation of characters and eschews conventional notions of dramatic causality.

A few instances will illustrate how Bond has transformed Shakespeare' s original into a Brechtian critique of contemporary culture. 'For example, he does not allow Lear a loving Cordella to forgive him his Sills and entice him into the antisocial resignation of "Come, let's away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds in the cage." Such *contemptus mundi* finds no sympathy in a socialist bent on reforming *this* world. In fact, Bond regarded Shakespeare's Cordelia as "an absolute menace--a very dangerous type of person." I suspect he felt this way for two reasons. First, by fighting a war on her father's behalf, Cordelia presumes to use violence to protect the "right", and "right" to her means returning society to what it was-reinstituting a patriarchy. And second, by defending her father, by ignoring his past iniquities and assuring him that he has "No cause, no cause" to feel guilt, she reduces the play to a melodrama about a poor old man who has been mightily abused. Bond abstracted those qualities of Cordella that seemed to him politically most significant-her self-righteous militarism and her willingness to overlook Lear's social Irresponsibility-and divided them between two characters in his own play: the new Cordelia (no longer Lear's daughter) and her husband, the Gravedigger's Boy.

Bond's Cordelia is a victim of the war that Lear wages against his daughters and that his daughters wage against each other. She hears soldiers slaughter her pigs; she watches

soldiers brutally murder her husband; then she herself is raped. These atrocities prompt her to take revenge. She becomes a kind of guerrilla leader bent on reform who, once victorious, attempts to make her country safe by rebuilding a wall to protect It. She thus repeats Lear's error of building the wall in the first place. Lear himself has' come to understand the folly of It. Walls only bring woe; and so, as a blind prophet at the end of act three-a British Oedipus at Colonus-he speaks against them. Cordelia defends herself with the myth that one needs walls to keep out enemies; and when he protests. "Then nothing's changed! A revolution must at least reform!", she replies: "Everything *else* is changed" Through CordelIa, Bond dramatizes what he regards as the major flaw in our conception of a humane society' defensiveness.

Against this self-destructive CordelIa, Bond pits the Gravedigger's Boy, who embodies the more charitable instincts of Shakespeare's Cordelia-someone who would allow the king to retreat from self-knowledge and live out his old age in ignorance of what he has done. Rather like Lear's Fool, the Boy attempts to talk sense to the poor old king-to calm the storm raging within-when the king comes to him unhoused. Later, when he returns as a ghost, the Boy tempts Lear, in the words of Simon Trussler, "towards an easeful rather than a useful death" -with a vision of Idyllic retreat such as Shakespeare's Cordelia offered her father But Bond's Lear knows he must resist the temptation, because It would mean turning his back on political responsibility; and Bond's Lear has learned, as Shakespeare's had not, that to reform society, to build it into something more humane, one must acknowledge the loss of innocence and then act on that loss by tearing down the wall that separates men from other men, not merely suffer in guilty silence.

Together, then, Cordelia and the Gravedigger's Boy represent the Scylla and Charybdis, maimed in opposition, of political defensiveness and private retreat between which Lear must sail if he is to become a genuinely moral man. . . .

Source: James C Bulman, "Bond, Shakespeare, and the Absurd," in *Modern Drama,* Volume XXIX, no 1, 1986, pp.60-70.

Critical Essay #3

Sinfield uses the occasion of concurrent productions of Shakespeare's and Bond's similar works to compare Bond's modern version with that of its classical inspiration He concludes that, despite criticism to the contrary, Bond's play is not a satire or "hostile critique" of Shakespeare's work but merely employs the story to relate themes both universal and contemporary.

King Lear is a great play. By itself, the proposition seems harmless enough, and I don't mean to dispute it, but its ramifications in English culture are considerable. The 1982 production by the Royal Shakespeare Company at their main theatre in Stratford and the concurrent presentation of Edward Bond's *Lear* at The Other Place provoke fundamental questions about the way we use Shakespeare.

Since Its first production at the Royal Court in 1971 Bond's play has been regarded, in the main, with horror and respect as a modern gloss on *King Lear.* What critics have found It difficult to say outright, because of this matter of greatness, is that Bond's *Lear* amounts to a systematic and hostile critique of Shakespeare's play, at least as it is usually understood.

King Lear suggests that loosening the conventional bonds of authority m society gives rein to all manner of violent disturbance. Bond believes the opposite: that the State, as we have developed It, is the main source of injustice, cruelty and misery: "Your Law always does more harm than crime, and your morality is a form of violence." We need not regard this just as Bond's act of faith; the same conclusions are reached by Richard Leakey through his palaeoanthropological research (see Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *People of the Lake,* London, 1979). By making his Cordelia the leader of an insurrection which, when successful, re-establishes most of the repressive apparatus of the government it has overthrown, Bond draws attention to the fact that m *King Lear* Cordelia seeks to redress the wrongs committed by her sisters by having her army fight their army. In other words, at the level of the State and its readiness to take and to sacrifice the lives of ordinary people, *King Lear* does not envisage the need for an alteration in principle. Shakespeare's king perceives that the State has perpetuated injustice: "Take physic, Pomp;! Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel/That thou mayst shake the superflux to them," but pomp is not called upon to revise its authority, only to distribute superfluity. Albany's final proposal is that Kent and Edgar should "the gor'd state sustain." Bond's point, in relation both to *King Lear* and to certain modern ideas about revolution and social change, is that you cannot expect to modify the repressive Lear society without challenging its fundamental structures.

Shakespeare's and Bond's attitudes are dependent finally upon divergent views of human nature. When Shakespeare's Lear demands, "Then let them anatomise Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?," there is no reply. It seems that we must refer the answer to the gods, who are not as systematically concerned for humanity as Lear once thought The autopsy on Fontanelle in Bond's play leads Lear to appreciate the potential beauty and goodness of

humanity: "She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child. The things are so beautiful. I am astonished. I have never seen anything so beautiful." For Shakespeare the problem begins when authority is weakened. That is why there is no prior motivation for Lear and his daughters: established hierarchy guarantees order and no remoter source is in question, except perhaps the gods. Bond, however, shows that his characters have been socialised into paranoia and violence. Shakespeare's Lear spends most of the play discovering what the world is, essentially, like; Bond's Lear discovers that things do not have to be the way they are.

The positive force in Shakespeare's play is the personal loyalty of Cordelia, Kent and Edgar. It is shown to transcend the punitive ethic assumed by the king:

I know you do not love me, for your sisters Have, as I do remember, done me wrong: You have some cause, they have not No cause, no cause.

But the play knows no way of relating this generosity of spirit to the structure of State authority. That is why it is difficult to reconcile Cordelia's initial legalism with her subsequent magnanimity: one belongs to the endorsement of formal order in the play, the other to the interpersonal ethic which responds to the collapse of order. Shakespeare, with great integrity, makes his inability to relate the two apparent when he has Cordelia's army defeated. The interpersonal ethic remains as a subversive intuition of another way of relating, but the reconstitution of the State over the dead body of Cordelia is offered as the most satisfactory attainable conclusion.

The most provocative aspect of Bond's *Lear,* conversely, is the repudiation of merely personal solutions. The Gravedigger's Boy represents a pastoral withdrawal which is destroyed, initially, through Lear's selfish intrusion. His ghostly presence helps Lear to recover his sanity through the experience of personal affection (the combined role of the Fool and Cordelia in Shakespeare's play). But Bond makes his Lear realise that this is not enough. Whereas Shakespeare allows Lear to rejoice m the prospect of imprisonment with Cordelia and the selfishness of this sentiment is not foregrounded, the Boy's notion that Lear should withdraw from political engagement, put a wall around them and accept the demands of the State, is recognized as a temptation. So Lear allows him to die and sets out to begin dismantling the wall. Individual "redemption" through interpersonal love is not enough, the State must be confronted.

In August 1982 Bond's *Lear* seemed relevant enough, With the Falklands, Lebanon and Poland in mind. Without necessarily agreeing With Bond, we can see that he has engaged with major political issues. The RSC production by Barry Kyle was excellent. The epic mode of the play is not immediately suited to a small space with the audience on three sides, and it may be that this staging altered the implications of the violence in the play, bringing it into our homes (as it were) rather than keeping it out there in the political arena where it belongs. But perhaps this corresponds to the effect of TV-the medium through which *most* of us experience political violence-and is therefore appropriate. Barry Kyle made strong use of diagonal lines where a conventional stage would have permitted depth, and managed to establish stylisation and allusion-for instance, taking the clothes-line behind which the Gravedigger's Boy is killed diagonally,

and the final interview between Cordelia and Lear, with the Boy behind him, at right angles to that line. Bob Peck was massive as Lear; it became quite excruciating to follow his weary, painful limbs in movement Mark Rylance was both gruesome and winning as the Boy and his interaction with Lear was physical and moving. It falls to these two actors to repudiate any imputation that Bond is deficient in positive human feeling-to show that the rejection of the interpersonal pastoral is grounded in sufficient awareness of what is sacrificed. To my mind they achieved this.

Adrian Noble, who produced *King Lear,* was evidently conscious of the main lines of Bond's critique. Bob Crowley's set, a towering, bleak imperial facade (the back of which was torn out when Lear is exposed on the heath) was reminiscent of the wall which dominates the Bond set; many of the costumes were the same-rough, clumsy greatcoats, the gear of an army on the march, exposed to danger, accustomed to discomfort. Some of the casting of the two plays overlapped significantly, and Bob Peck looked like Michael Gambon, who was Shakespeare's Lear. I am about to make a number of intricate and critical points about this interpretation of *King Lear,* so it should be established at the start that Gambon's performance was an extraordinary achievement: entirely convincing, broad in scope, moving though not In the expected places, inventive but not quirky.

As a member of the International Shakespeare Conference I had the advantage of a question and answer session with Noble, so I know that it was his intention to bring out a contemporary political dimension in *King Lear.* He said that the effect of concurrent work on Bond's play was like a steady drip of cold water, preventing them from keeping *King Lear* In a separate historical pocket; that the country was at war when the play was in rehearsal, that he wanted to show "the potential for violence which you get within an absolute State," and that they had felt the events and value system of the play to be relevant constantly in the current political climate.

In many ways this was a triumphantly political interpretation. "We did want to put a war on stage," Noble remarked, and the sense of unnamed people moving about a recalcitrant terrain, menaced by each other, was strong, and the sense that they had to lift really heavy objects, had trouble keeping warm, keeping going. The great achievement was the refusal or suppression of the transcendence which is usually assumed to be the goal of certain episodes. In this production Edmund, Goneril and Regan are not evil incarnate (nor is there any attempt to make them seem justified, as in Peter Brook's version). Edmund (Clive Wood) is butch, sulky and scornful; Goneril (Sara Kestelman) is like an obsessive landlady, tidying up the set, who goes on to accosting the lodgers in the hallway. They are cruel and selfish, but they are people. The account of Cordelia shaking "The holy water from her heavenly eyes" is all but smothered by soldiers humping sandbags around the stage; "Ripeness is all" is shouted, desperately, over the drum of the preparing army in turbulent lighting Frequently lighting is used to disconfirm the centrality of the main protagonists. it refuses to focus them but, instead, moves independently, so that they come in and out of it. When Edgar flees, the spotlight rakes the stage and the audience, as if from a watchtower m a prison camp.

The whole effect is to quell the commonest interpretation of the playas "tragedy," wherein the king, especially, transcends events by the intensity of hIs inner experience. So Noble reserves attention for the range of characters and for the power of political relations. Gambon's Lear is not inward looking: he does not discover reality in the depths of himself. He is mad for much less of the time than is commonly supposed, so that there is far less pitiful raving, far less sense that the essential struggle, the essential reality, is inside his head. In the disputes with Goneril and Regan he retains the unwavering baleful glare with which he began; hIs anger is rarely uncontrolled, he is frail but determined, nobody's fool. In particular, he is rational at the Dover meeting with Gloucester, so that "A dog's obey'd in office" comes through as powerful analysis. This scene was most effective: there was little courting of expressionist significance, but two old men seeing the way the world goes, nodding, chuckling and crying together. Again, when Lear wakes with Cordelia, the whole impression is of a bemused old man, and of physical frailty: it is a human incident, and the visual key is given by pyjamas rather than the customary flowing white robes of an Old Testament prophet/penitent. "Come, let's away to prison" is spoken matter of factly, flatly, as a clear perception of the kind of life that may be left to them; and at the end Lear is sane, though he has trouble coping with a stage full of people. At every point in the latter part of the play Noble and Gambon prevent Lear becoming an ultimate representative of "man."

This assault on the transcendence often ascribed to the "tragic hero" is expressed most importantly in the treatment of the blind/sight imagery-"I stumbled when.1 saw." The production is very physical throughout Lear is ready to strike anyone, and also to hug anyone-be hugs Goneril, the Fool, Kent, Edgar, Gloucester. "I see it feelingly," Gloucester says. The production takes this up, and so disqualifies the whole dichotomy of mundane versus transcendent vision. The point is not insight into a further reality, there is no further reality-just the material world in which people and systems do things to you, and you respond to it most fully through the sense of touch. Touch is both more basic (in Platonic thought sight is the highest sense, touch the lowest) and more communicative, more to do with human interaction. For this Lear, the chaos and threat is not, finally, inside him; the precision of Gambon' s acting is all directed towards responding to other people. This is a Lear of reaction, not distraction.

We have, then, a production which turns one eye towards Bond, which is aiming at a political awareness relevant to the problems of the world today. At the same time, in the middle of the production, there is an alternative, incompatible conception, equally powerfully realised. This split exposes with almost brutal clarity the uses to which Shakespeare is put by the RSC and English culture at large.

The Issue is focused by the storm, which is brilliantly staged with flashing lights, billowing smoke, and noises which were those of the elements but which also (several people remarked) led one to think of an air raid on Beirut (the current international horror). This was a tour de force, a land of infernal discotheque. And perched above it all, on a platform on a pole fifteen feet above the stage, were Lear (looking like a Blakean deity) and the Fool clinging to him. But all this magnificent effect worked against a socio-political understanding of what was going on. A society in dissolution

was transformed into the universe in apocalypse. The idea is in the text-"Is this the promis'd end?" but Doomsday is not a socio-political concept.

Noble said that his Idea in staging the storm was to show "what it's like inside that head .. what it's like when the horizon tilts." Fine, but this is suddenly to transform the action into the interior monologue which in other respects it is not. The presentation of real human relations, with all the disparities of power, suffering and understanding, and their implied ramifications in society at large, could well continue through the scenes on the heath. But Noble is tempted into another manner--he mentioned Ian Kott's essay "King Lear or Endgame."

The Beckettian aspect is developed through the Fool, who is played with great agility, inventiveness and conviction by Antony Sher. Initially his relationship with Lear is played realistically: he tries to cheer Lear up but cannot avoid mentioning the source of Lear's disquiet. But the manner of the professional clown is already hinting at a more abstract notion of the Fool's role. When he and Lear crouch at the front of the stage and peer desperately at each other, their shadows thrown monstrously on to the back wall, and when the Fool, left for once to himself, goes off like a spring released, cavorting manically round the stage and shaking his fist at the sky, we begin to suspect that the Fool is supposed to stand for something, perhaps an aspect of Lear's psyche. Adrian Noble in fact confirmed that this was his conception: this is why, in the most striking innovation of the production, *Lear kills the Fool.*

Lear is anatomizing Regan-plucking handfuls of feathers out of a pillow (a few are still in the air in the closing scenes of the play); he flings the pillow across the stage, sending a light swinging, and the Fool, who has Jumped in fright into a large dustbin *(Endgame)* catches it; Lear stabs the pillow, and the Fool through it; Lear never realises what he has done. Noble meant this to be Lear killing his conscience, that of which he is ashamed. I didn't think of this at the time, and I don't see how Lear is supposed to manage without a conscience in the second part of the play (he seems to have it at the reunion with Cordelia).

Two general reflections arise from the confusion in this production-three if we begin, as we should, by granting without reserve its sheer professional competence, intelligence and power to provoke thought. The first concerns the RSC. In the 1960s it was a spearhead, in some ways more important than the Royal Court, of a left-liberal involvement in the theatre and ultimately in the country. By the end of the decade, this movement had become established-had become an establishment. In theatre, it had purpose and committed audiences when the West End was floundering; it successfully challenged censorship; it had the endorsement of national subsidy; it gave birth to the National Theatre. The dominant influences were Brecht, representing political concern; and Beckett Artaud, representing a sense that the human condition is fundamentally absurd and violent. Together, these influences destroyed the assumptions of naturalism and opened the way to vital developments in theatrical stylisation, but, finally, they are incompatible. The first is materialist and optimistic about humanity, tracing our ills to changeable political structures. The second is essentialist and nihilistic, discovering in the depths of personality inexorable tendencies towards cruelty, alienation and self-

destruction. Their co-occurrence in the work of Peter Brook for the RSC, including his *King Lear* of 1962 (much influenced by Jan Kott), *The Marat-Sade* and *US,* rendered this work powerful but politically and artistically incoherent The same conjunction infonns the 1982 production of *King Lear.*

But the original movement, contradictory as it was, was of its time. These were new, exciting influences, and the confused and compromised political stance was characteristic of other institutions in the period. Bond's use of violence to shock us into awareness also shows signs of Artaud. What we must ponder now is how far the RSC is living off the manner which served it before, how far it is depending on the thought of an earlier generation rather than assessing, clarifying and challenging that thought Two pieces of evidence are quite disconcerting. One is Noble's appeal to Jan Kott ("one has to read Kott")-Lear even leaves his boots at the front of the stage, like Estragon The other is the programme. The RSC pioneered the intellectual programme, but this one is all design, a production job, in which pictures and quotations from the inost diverse prestigious intellectual sources are jumbled together in an evocative collage (including Auden, Dylan Thomas, Keats, Kozintsev and Dostoyevsky); and, in particular, we find the political awareness of Orwell and Bond ("Our world is not absurd-our society is") alongside the apocalyptic transcendentalism of Ecclesiastes and Yeats. It seems, at least, that the RSC is in danger of parodying its former achievements

However, and this is my second general reflection, it is probably not fair to blame this gifted company for problems which may be traced much further back, namely to our whole conception of Shakespeare and his" greatness." Since *King Lear* is a great play-I think this is the underlying argument-it must speak to our condition. And If our condition seems to involve brutally destructive political systems and profound inner compulsions which threaten a general apocalypse, then the play must be seen to address such issues The text as we have received it tends to encourage certain ways of seeing the world and to inhibit others and does not, of course, envisage modern society. Therefore the play and current concerns must, by one means or another, be brought into line.

Hence the extraordinary conventions which govern contemporary productions. In the attempt to get the play to "work" as the director wants, almost anything may be cut, almost any "business" may be added to affect the significance of the words and, increasingly, words may be altered or added. But all these developments are mashed together so that only the expert can see what has been done, and the impression that we are "really" seeing Shakespeare is preserved For an excellently detailed and discriminating description of such practices, see Stanley Wells's account in *Critical Quarterly* of two productions of *Measure for Measure.* Of one production he concludes: "Some of the ways in which it departed from tradition were entirely legitimate. Others required textual tinkering. The resulting play may be more sentimental, and happier, than that suggested by the script that has come down to us, but in its own terms it worked." But Dr. Wells still speaks, throughout, of "the play:" It is assumed that we remain, importantly, in the presence of Shakespeare's original genius.

My objective is not a theoretical discussion of at what point this or that production becomes no longer "the same" play; nor is it a complaint that Shakespeare's text is

being tampered with (it is still there for another day). I am trying to identify the cultural assumptions, based on a conception of Shakespeare's greatness, which hold that we can and should ventriloquise contemporary significance through the plays, and the manipulations of presentation which ensue.

In part directors are trying to cope with the fact that most people in the audience don't understand the language: part of the greatness is that Shakespeare speaks to us even across such barriers of comprehension. Hence the business which breaks up a conversation or a line unexpectedly, making a joke unanticipated in a straightforward reading (it is called "making the scene work"). But also, the cutting and business are designed to wrest the text away from what seem to be its dominant concerns and into a preferred dimension of meaning, using every slightest cue, nuance, crux and hiatus to develop an "interpretation." If, instead, the company reworked the play explicitly, the interpretation would lose the apparent authority of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's basically conservative oeuvre would lose the apparent authority of speaking to all conditions. This is the great collusion in which most productions of Shakespeare have become involved. The shuffles commonly conducted maintain both these dubious authorities, and more adventurous treatments-like Bond's and Charles Marowitz's become objects of suspicion.

It is these pressures that he behind the kinds of efforts the RSC makes to achieve relevance. This production pushes the conventions of interpretation to the limit by having Lear kill the Fool and by omitting (as Brook did) Edmund's attempt to save Cordelia and Lear. The first is designed to develop Lear's inner experience in a way barely suggested by the text; the second is designed to suppress issues of good, evil and the perversity of fortune and to leave the responsibility for falling to secure the safety of Lear and Cordelia with Albany who (No ble says) is preoccupied with the feud in his own family-so that the theme of the damage done by arbitrary rule is sustained to the end. In so far as these intentions are (as I have argued) contradictory, they witness to a theatrical mode which is in danger of ossification. By offering extreme instances of the conventions of presentation which accompany that mode, they draw attention to their artificiality. Noble leads his audience (or those to whom I spoke) to ask whether this is *really* Shakespeare.

The questions which should be asked, however, are whether any production which aspires to modern relevance is really Shakespeare; whether our conception of the greatness of *King Lear*- meaning capable of speaking positively to all conditions-is honest; and whether attempts to ventriloquise a modern political stance through the play will inevitably be confused by countervailing implications in the text. It may be that the only way to produce a more definite political theatre (or criticism) is not to interpret *King Lear* but, as Edward Bond sees, to quarrel with it

Source: Alan Sinfield, *"King Lear* versus *Lear* at Stratford," in *Critical Quarterly,* Volume 24, no. 4, Winter, 1982, pp.5-14.

Topics for Further Study

Discuss the difference between William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Bond's *Lear.* In what ways has Bond changed Shakespeare's play? What might be the significance of those changes? Consider especially Bond's characterizations of Lear and Cordelia.

Compare Lear to Oedipus in Sophocles's play *Oedipus Rex.* Compare the blinding of Oedipus to that of Lear How does blindness work as a metaphor in each play?

Using Machiavelli's *The Prince* as a resource, discuss the nature of political power. How is power obtained and maintained? Is it possible to seek power in an ethical manner? How do individuals seek and secure power today?

Research Bertolt Brecht's concepts of epic theater and the alienation effect. How does Bond employ Brecht's concepts in *Lear?*

While some critics consider Lear's final act of digging up his wall futile, others have seen purpose in it. Given that Lear knows that he cannot destroy the wall and that he almost certainly will die if he tries, what could be his purpose In the attempt? Is anything achieved by Lear's defiance?

Compare and Contrast

1971: Advances in science and technology create fears that humankind is tragically abandoning its bucolic past. Contemporary problems such as overpopulated urban areas and vast unemployment are blamed on technological advances that replace humans with machines

Today: Computers have revolutionized business, education, and personal lives in developed countries but are also criticized for leading to alienation and an escape from "real" life. The successful cloning of sheep leads to questions about medical ethics.

1971: American intervention in Vietnam and British military presence in Northern Ireland make the horrors of war real as American and British young men die in violent altercations with the results being televised Four student protesters are killed at Kent State University in Ohio, leading to a further sense of violence at home.

Today: Wars continue, including those in the Balkan regions and the Persian Gulf, but public protests against these conflicts are less visible. Concern about violence focuses more on gang wars and other types of urban crime.

1971: Focus on helping the poor is primarily evidenced in legislation and government assistance, but there is some movement toward abolishing Britain's welfare state as Education Minister Margaret Thatcher ends the free milk program in schools.

Today: Many government social programs of the 1960s and 1970s have been dismantled There are still efforts at governmental assistance to the poor, but people in general are more skeptical that government can make such programs work. Focus is on the assistance of the private sector and there is a greater emphasis on volunteerism.

1971: Despite the oppression of socialist regimes, such as those of the Soviet Union and East Germany, socialism is romanticized, particularly by the young. In Britain especially, socialism is considered a viable alternative form of government.

Today: The Soviet Union has been dismantled and the Berlin Wall tom down. Socialism is rarely romanticized as it was. There are comparatively few socialists in the United States, but the movement still has some strength in Britain. This is particularly evident on the British stage.

What Do I Read Next?

King Lear, a play written by William Shake speare in about 1605, is the Original source of Bond's adaptation In essence, Bond's play is not a rewriting of Shakespeare's play but a reaction to that text, particularly to Shakespeare's portrayal of King Lear and his three daughters.

Saved, Bond's 1965 play, also focuses on the violence of today's culture. As in *Lear,* Bond's use of onstage violence is extreme, but his focus this time is on the contemporary working class.

Mother Courage and Her Children, a play written by Bertolt Brecht in 1939, also focuses on the horrors of war. As in *Lear,* the fact that the ruling regime changes does not matter. The people continue in their poverty and degradation. Like Lear, the character of Mother Courage suffers greatly, but she does not change because of her suffering.

The Wall (1979) is a concept album by the group Pink Floyd. Its story deals with a disillusioned rock star who, through various events in his life, constructs an imaginary wall between himself and the rest of the world. Within his mind the wall becomes a real barrier that he must destroy to once again join humanity. The work was also adapted as a film by director Alan Parker.

The Prince, by Renaissance philosopher Nicolo Machiavelli, is a classic discourse on the proper way to rule, marked by its emphasis on the need for a ruler to maintain power by all means necessary, including violence and cruelty.

Further Study

Chambers, Colin and Mike Prior. *Playwrights' Progress: Patterns of Postwar British Drama,* Amber Lane, 1987. This book is a good general introduction to British drama after World War II. It includes individual chapters on Bond and a number of his contemporaries

Hirst, David L *Edward Bond,* Macmillan, 1985.

This is a general introduction to Bond's work.

Sked, Alan, and Chris Cook. *Post-War Britain: A Political History,* Penguin, 1990.

This book provides a history of politics in Great Britain from World War II through the 1980s, includ1ng a detailed look at the 1970s, when *Lear* was first produced

Spencer, Jenny S *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond,* Cambridge, 1992.

Spencer's book provides strong analyses of many of Bond's plays, including *Lear.*

Trussler, Simon, Editor. *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies,*

Eyre Methuen, 1981

This book contains sixteen interviews with contemporary British playwrights, including Bond, reprinted from *Theatre Quarterly.* In his interview, Bond discusses *Lear.*

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

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A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

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Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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