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Reviewing A Comic Drama

Presented By

THE FORD K. BROWN PLAYERS: "READING SHAKESPEARE AND CERVANTES"

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On our way to Greg's last Friday night, in search of that with which to cheer onward the latest effort of our freer spirit sparked this time by the art of Mr. Brown, we were trying without much success to imagine how to review his lecture with the least of the injustice we felt certain to do him. To us his performance much more than a lecture had been a perfect comedy, and we were reluctant to hack up ours or offend others impressions in a poor effort of sharing with those who had missed it. For a moment in this light we thought it might be well to let the review consist entirely of two citations, the first the lines over Shakespeare's tomb, the second the last lines from Don Quixote.

("Good friend for Jesus sake forbeare
To Digg the dust enclosed heare.
Blessed be ye man yt spares thes stones
And Curst be ye yt moves my bones."

* * * * *

"And thou, Reader, if ever thou can'st find him out in his obscurity, I beseech thee advise him likewise to let the wearied, mouldring bones of Don Quixote, rest quiet in the earth that covers 'em. Let him not expose 'em in Old Castile, against the sanctions of death, impiously raking him out of the vault where he really lies stretched out beyond a possibility of takng a third ramble through the world. The two sallies he has made already (which are the subject of these two volumes and have met with such universal applause in these and other kingdoms) are sufficient to ridicule the pretended adventures of Knights-Errants. Thus advising him for the best, thou shalt discharge the duty of a Christian, and do good to him that wishes thee evil. As for me, I must esteem myself happy to have been the first that rendered those fabulous, nonsensical stories of Knight-Errantry, the object of the publick aversion. They are already going down, and I do not doubt but that they will drop and fall altgether in good earnest, never to rise again. Adieu." *Ed.*)

But a little reflection made clear the possibilities for taking these amiss; so we went back to the beginning. There are some who say that a perfect comedy leaves everything or nothing to be said about it. We thought we had spotted an out here, given our readiness to accept the happier course, when we suddenly stopped transfixed like Socrates in the middle of the snow. A horrible thought had hold of us: do you remember when Mr. Brown, in mentioning the Duke's disguising himself as a friar, alluded so casually to the fact that this was an old gag used in just about every play to date? Suppose, just suppose for one awful instant, that for the last twenty-two years St. John's has unwittingly sheltered in her very bosom a Friar disguised as Ford K. Brown!

Like mad we ran to the front of Greg's, pulled out our notes once so joyously scribbled, and therein beyond doubt now saw the notorious Thomist revealed. O sly, O crafty Brown! Look:—first, and so devoutly, the obeisance to the TRINITY: tonight he would cover only about a THIRD of what he wanted to talk about; he had in mind a SERIES OF THREE which would yet be only ONE SUBJECT; he touched on that mode of reading which covers the outside THIRDS of a page to get at the ONE AND EVANESCENT meaning of the work. Next, and so fittingly, he emphasized the necessity of getting on a good footing and establishing a firm basis with respect to ARISTOTLE, in the words of St. Thomas himself, "That most glorious of Pagan philosophers." Then, and in the style of the very Summa itself, the appeal to authority; direct quotations from ARISTOTLE; Socrates; St. Augustine; ARISTOTLE; Prof. Smythe; Swift; ARISTOTLE; Anonymous; Ben Johnson; ARISTOTLE; Prosper le Tour; Congreve; ARISTOTLE; Charlie Chan. And the subject matter! How diabolically, professing to be concerned only with facts, he undermined us with his demonstration of Shakespeare's indifference to such things in "Measure for Measure", a morality play not only centering around the whole problem of CHASTITY, but also, according to the authoritative E. Haldeman-Julius "Little Blue Book" Library, "raising the whole problem of EQUITY." In conclusion, and so evangelically, a few exhortations: who can now suppose that the seemingly deprecatory remarks about arithmomania, cosmomania, and mountain climbing were aimed at anything but winnowing out those of little faith and

clearing these fields for the brave and tenacious, for those who, when they hear "Man at pinnacle have no place to go but off," can hear in glorious counterpoint the words of St. Thomas, "Through that leap is perfect freedom found."

So cruel a reversal, so stunning a revelation, barely left us with the strength to make it inside to a booth, where we hoarsely called for that which happily serves equally well to encourage the rising spirit or to console the fallen.

—R. O. D.

SECOND SONG

While we danced to the tinny moan of a
Vibra-harp and a saxophone the

Ocean fog began to spill like
Water over the window sill, and

In the mirror at my back I
Saw her face begin to crack.

When her bright facade broke
Fog to fog without spoke.

She moaned and turned away and ran she
Up the downward sliding sand, the

Ocean fog rose up around the
Melting dunes till she was drowned.

—Gene Thornton.

MYTHOLOGY

In a concise lecture Mr. Kieffer gave an example of the kind of careful analysis that a scholarly liberal artist is capable of employing to obtain an understanding of the relationship between the world of reality and the world of symbols.

It is this kind of careful, almost pedantic approach that is too frequently lacking from the dialectic of the coffee shop and even the seminar. It involves the thoughtful reading and well developed skills in the manipulation of the liberal arts that together with imagination produce the best poets and the most excellent liberal artists; for no person will reach his perfection without the mutual control between imagination and reason and the light which each faculty sheds on the other. The training which the liberal arts give the reason acts at once and as a spur and a rein to the imagination.

Mythology is a standpoint from which to view the world. It is the ordering of symbols, in such a way that they are intelligible, about something which the mind understands or thinks it understands. In the development of the Greek myth, one may see the ways in which one can view the world. Later we shall talk about the Greek myth as a source of education in the liberal arts, and about the relationship of the myth to modern science.

The Greek words mythos and logos are both symbols for the expression of human thought. However, they very early began to refer to this expression in different ways. Whereas mythos implies the wholeness of an expression and belongs to the world of poetry, logos implies analysis and belongs to the world of prose. Mythology, then, implies the separating, the ordering, and the classifying of facts to be presented as a story which represents reality.

Greek Myth begins in attempts to remember memorable events. Such legends concerning the exploits of warriors, the ascent of kings and so forth were simple expressions of facts. After a while the legends began to lose touch with the actual persons and places involved and to tell the story for the value that the plot had, either as entertainment, or more particularly if the story had some advice for the conduct of human action. The third stage of the myth is concerned with etiology, with the ultimate causes of the coming to be of the Gods, and the world. Homer, by combining the several forms of the myths creates new myths and becomes the basis for the future Greek literature; for after Homer, the essence or plots of his myths were used by the tragedians who concerned themselves with etiology, or more particularly with morals, and human action. Plato, following them, used the myth in a new form, on the highest level, to attempt to say what are the ultimate causes of things. The myth seemed to be able to say what logos and dialectic are unable to say. The basic pattern which he exploited all thru this lecture can then be seen:—Homer concerned with recording legend and being an historian, the tragedians concerned with the myth as a source of enlightment for morals and law and religion, and Plato concerned with the myth as a vehicle for the understanding of being. The understanding of each level requires the understanding of the levels which have gone before it; so the understanding of ultimates may be achieved only by the understanding of the lower levels.

This three-fold division of the use of symbols is illuminated by and illuminates other fields of human knowledge. In medicine, for instance, the simple gathering of data such as is done by the pre-Socratic physicians is like the assembling of the facts of legend, that is, just setting down what has happened. The physician proceeds to the middle level when he attempts to predict the course of disease, and proceeds to the highest level when he investigates the causes of man's functions, that is when he attempts to know man as a living organism. In human affairs, history is a simple gathering of fact, oratory attempts to use fact for persuasion, and ethics attempts to find the true basis of political action. The constant correlation in Plato between the beautiful, the useful, and the good provides another analogy with these three levels of thought. The beautiful is concerned with things as seen, and the person who refuses to advance beyond their beguiling spell is an aesthete. But if the perfection of man's nature lies in knowing, one must advance from the beautiful to the useful and to the good; here also each higher level is understood thru a knowledge of the lower levels, and the lower levels are only truly understood as the higher level illuminates them.

In the ancient world, poets, scientists and philosophers derived their inspiration from the Muses, the mother of whom was Memory. The Muses were ill defined in their functions, and they gradually became only a formality to the later poets. However, after the Alexandrian age, they disappeared and in their place appeared the seven liberal arts which were the new guides of men in their intellectual endeavours, and became the curriculum for universities. Myth came to scorn and men called the ancient myths fairy tales, without recognizing that there was some difficulty in proving that they had constructed anything more than fairy tales. But the new myths that they constructed still commanded their respect because the child in man desires a *whole* story which only the myth could tell about the unknown.

This childishness in man is then one of the reasons that scientists theorize; but there is lack of recognition that their theories are mythical in character. Scientists indeed protest that mythology is about Gods, science about, say, elements. But here they are mistaking historical priority for what is the essence of a myth, namely that a myth is an expression of what man understands about the world around him. It may also be protested that science tries to find truth, whereas mythology is poetical; but the expression of scientific theory grows with the understanding of phenomena, perhaps beyond the understanding. For example, words used by modern scientists like gravity, and force, are no better words than those used by the ancients such as Gea and Zeus.

Let us apply the pattern of the first part of the lecture to what we are saying about science. Mythology starts in legend and runs through folk tales to dialectic. In science the same pattern of understanding is apparent, for science starts with the classification and collection of data and proceeds to techniques of measurement and then to the construction of a theory.

Mr. Kieffer suggested that a better understanding of the problem of knowing the world, or at least a verbal solution could be obtained by a comparison of the pattern he outlined with the divided line.

It is unfortunate that a sore throat prevented the lecturer from expanding the pattern more completely in regard to modern science, and particularly with regard to the mathematization of science which he barely mentioned. Perhaps a future lecture would aid in clarifying this subject, if undertaken soon enough so that he could assume that this one was still being held in mind.

—Vernon Derr.

THE CLOCK STRUCK TEN

Once upon a time in a far off country called Silopanna there lived a colony of sometimes happy beavers. But let me assure you that these were not the kind of beavers that you hear about, busily at work on some dam project or another. Oh, no, these little fellows had gathered in Silopanna for the express purpose of sharing an intellectual life with some of the smartest beavers that ever were! These bewhiskered playmates were unusual in another respect: you see, they, unlike most smart beavers, knew they were intelligent animals and didn't mind telling one another so. To *talk* to them one would think without a doubt that this was a group of very, very eager beavers.

Twice each week at 8 P.M. the colony would break up into small groups and assemble in the woods as Beaver Group Ia, Ib, and so on. And in these woods the beavers gave the appearance of working very hard. A handful busily chopped at old trees with exceedinly sharp axes while another small group dug deep holes into the ground. However, most of the others made feeble attempts with rusty scythes to remove the tall grass, while others pretended to search on hill tops, in the skies and atop trees. Now this, I know seems to be a silly way to spend a fine evening—beavers in other countries would just be schocked to see what they would call a ludicrous sight. But really it was not so fruitless a task as you might think. You see all of them were supposedly searching for Doog which is a magic herb and might be found almost anywhere. Once discovered, any and all who ate of it would be happy forever.

You might well ask why it was that some beavers had to do such hard work (that is chopping and digging) while others hardly any at all. The very truth is that things were not supposed to be this way for when the beavers came to Silopanna they agreed to work together and share the burden of the search. But—that was a long time ago. As you might expect this did cause a few unpleasantries. However, to make matters worse most of the beavers who had been searching in the skies and atop trees for Doog, were afflicted with extreme cases of decoclockomania. What a problem! Each night that the beavers met, some unhappy beavers would become frightfully sick and suffer severe chills culminating in a dead faint as the clock struck ten.

The situation was a bother, indeed, for even those who did not suffer from the disease grew increasingly annoyed and distressed. Soon it became apparent that there was less chopping of trees and less digging of holes into the ground. The poor, sick beavers unable to find the cause of the dreaded malady soon came to heckle other beavers and accuse them of carrying the germs.

What a trying time! Finally one of the brighter beavers decided that there was no time like the present to act. In fact he decided that there should be no time at all. And so one night when all of the little beavers were asleep, he gathered up all of the clocks and watches and smashed them into hundreds of pieces. This should do it, he thought. But, sadly on the very next meeting in the woods, he saw that all of the beavers who had been sick were still sick and had nice new shiny watches on their wrists.

Now being a smart beaver he suddenly realized that his fellow beavers were somehow enjoying the disease although they really suffered from it. And so he called a caucus of all the beavers who were not afflicted and together they decided that the only thing they could do was to search on harder than ever as though the poor, sick beavers were not there and just hope for the best.

This is the end and the moral is clear: a Beaver who *thinks* must be of good cheer; he must forget friend Shirker, the non-working worker and continue to endeevor to be an eager beaver.

—Bob Goldberg.

THE FINE ARTS

"A KING, A KING."

In late February Donald Wolfit brought his English company to the Century Theatre in New York and played three weeks of repertory in *Volpone* and four plays by Shakespeare. *King Lear, As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet* were the Shakespeare plays and except for the last, of which it cannot be said that we lack frequent presentation, none of the others has been professionally offered to New York for some years. Besides the Old Vic's visiting repertory last spring, which included both parts of *Henry IV,* Wolfit's repertory presented, with two successful exceptions, the only Shakespeare that New York had seen in a dozen years that was not secure under the patent of Margaret Webster. The Old Vic, although provincial and suburban in origin, is a highly professional London group; Wolfit's players make up a provincial company which spends most of its time touring the small towns of England, Scotland and Wales. If the New York journalists had found the Old Vic's Shakespeare dull, it was predictable that they would exacerbate their perceptions to finding Wolfit's Shakespeare tedious. New York had not seen an actor like Wolfit since Mantell and Hampden more than twenty years ago. The reviewers, however, did not thump each other on the back in helpless invocation of the good old days: they congratulated themselves, if Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were examples, on the obvious progress of their pity, their irony and their wit. There were exceptions, and the majority endorsed *Volpone* with an almost alarming recognition of that play's merit, but however disposed they were toward Wolfit and his company, it was clear that the reviewers didn't take to the plays in his repertory and couldn't entertain the notion that those plays demanded serious dramatic presentation or critical treatment; it was never "Such plays as these don't deserve what Wolfit does to them," it was always "Why bother with these plays at all?" The victory of Margaret Webster's "Shakespeare Without Tears" productions was more radically complete than the Theatre Guild's seduction of its patrons into Art by means of *Oklahoma!*

Years ago, with *Richard II,* Margaret Webster started out by claiming that modern audiences required the old razzle-dazzle before they would look at Shakespeare. She has practiced this theory often enough (*Henry IV, Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Macbeth, Othello, The Tempest*) and successfully enough to have become a school marm to the reviewers on the New York dailies, who are presumably of her own generation. What was assumed in Webster's early and reiterated thesis is that Shakespeare hasn't enough *show*—otherwise the 'old' razz'e-dazzle would be proper and usable. Another more important assumption is that The Swan of Avon, whom she loves with a passion and with whom she conducts an *affaire du coeur* with the newspapers as her semi-private liaison, is, let's face it, boys and girls, just plain dull in parts and, in parts, also silly. (The let's-face-it approach assures everyone that Webster is intimate enough with The Bard and his plays to be authoritative.) Now what Webster did about this was to keep the dull and silly parts in, as a challenge, and distract the illiterate audience with business and spectacle. This was most effectively achieved by singing actors but that had a certain monotony and she then called in razzle-dazzle casts, people like Paul Robeson and Vera Zorina and Canada Lee. Webster's most recent and most daring effort, last fall, was with *Henry VIII,* which was so dull and silly that it needed more panoply and costuming than any other play of The Bard's she had tried. She succeeded and I understand the spectacle of the show was only rivalled by the plushy revival of *Lady Windermere's Fan.* A play of Shakespeare's less pretentiously done or a play specifying, in her own terms, fewer pretentions, was unthinkable to Webster at this stage; her affair with The Swan has become so close that she is One with The Master. Unfortunately, Webster produced *Henry VIII* with the American Repertory Theatre, a new company that could hardly afford the budget of an M-G-M musical.

Donald Wolfit works on assumptions different from those of Margaret Webster and he has had audiences more difficult to persuade. When he started his group he wanted to take Shakespeare all over England, and he had trouble: Shakespeare is as foreign to Swansea as it is to Duluth. The war also interrupted Wolfit's touring plans, which did not materialize until 1944. He travelled on the continent and in London he gave hour-long excerpts from Shakespeare at lunch-time, the dramatic equivalent to the National Gallery concerts. There were 2500 performances of Shakespeare in all and at one time his theatre was the only one open in the city. The company's equipment is at a minimum, all the plays have unit settings that allow rapid pace, the costumes are not dazzling and the lighting is, by New York standards, of high school caliber. To Wolfit the play is the thing and anything less than or more than the play itself is inadmissible. Temptations to use more than elemental scenery, props, costumes or special effects are prohibited by respect for the work as a drama written for the stage, where it is most easily and best understood. Students of Shakespeare as literature might have been disappointed with his repertory, not because the plays were contradictory in dramatic presentation on a stage or violated the meaning of plays in their intelligibility as literature, but because Wolfit acts within a dramatic and not a literary tradition. This means that at the end, one of the plays might be paraphrased in the same way that it is paraphrased after a reading of it, but that the means by which the paraphrase is possible differ fundamentally; the difference is between understanding the work as one understands any other book and understanding the work as a play. Literary illusion (Margaret Webster's dullness and silliness) might suffer distortion on the stage: so it should if literature has forgot itself and failed to note essential differences inside itself.

King Lear is the play of Shakespeare's that has figured most in the argument about plays as literature and plays as playable. If Lamb and Bradley are right, to portray Lear is a "betrayal" of Lear. This play "is Shakespeare at his very greatest, but not the mere dramatist (*sic*) Shakespeare." Thus Bradley, a great critic. The great Shakespeare critic who was also an actor, a director and a producer, Granville-Barker, disagreed: "At best, of course, the actor can be but a token of the ideal Lear; and (thanking him) some of us may still feel that in the rarefied spaces of our imagination without his aid we come nearer to Shakespeare's imaginings—though what have we after all but a token of words upon paper to measure these by? But does the actor only remove us a stage farther from our source? I think not. He gives the words objectivity and life. Shakespeare has provided for his intervention. He can at least be a true token." I think Donald Wolfit's production of *King Lear* proves Granville-Barker's point. The play turns out to be as playable as *Hamlet,* and this is especially true because with all its virtues, Wolfit's production has myriad faults. With some intelligence, no actor who can also project and disguise his voice can go wrong in the part: it is a "natural." There is, after all, as much shilly-shallying in the actor-producer's fear of the play as there is in the musician-conductor's dread of the Storm Section in the Pastoral Symphony: both were written to be played.

The pictures you might have seen of Wolfit as Lear are bad photographs, but the impression of a bent figure with a chalk-white face, long white hair and beard, costumed in light colors rather than in royal hues, is generally accurate. Wolfit is not, however, the absurd "old man tottering about the stage with a walking stick," for whom Lamb predicted certain failure. In the first scene of the play, the authoritative impatience of "Come, noble Burgundy," at his exit is not less authentically forceful

and impatient than "Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy," at his entrance, although the impatience is of another sort. In Scene 4 Wolfit uses the cracking but still powerful voice of an old king—of an old man young enough to hunt—when he is impatient for his dinner and for his Fool, and when he interviews Kent. At his ignored demands for his Fool, the impatience takes on pathos and there is a suggestion of what Lear's madness will be. He asks for his Fool when he cannot effectively call for anything else. When one of his knights goes in search of the Fool, Lear is animated to strike Oswald, Goneril's steward, for his impertinence. The actor conceals a long whip in his belt under his cloak and when he lashes Oswald with it, the surprise is immense and in one moment the sources of authority remaining to Lear are defined dramatically. Lear would like to belie the Fool with his native wit when the Fool begs him to "keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie"—the Fool would "fain learn to lie," ever since the king made his daughters his mothers—but Lear can merely fall back on the whip and threaten him. His impatience with the discovery that he has lost his old authority during the interview with Goneril in this scene, is an impatience no longer justified because he is no longer a king, and it is this stubborn impatience that he knows might drive him mad. His direct questions to Goneril, "Are you our daughter?" and, "Your name, fair gentlewoman?"—both questions Goneril does not answer, insist upon his authority in vain, and Wolfit asks them in a regal ironic tone which does not admit that any reply of Goneril's will be unsatisfactory: he is beginning to remember his Fool. When Wolfit strikes his head at "O Lear, Lear, Lear!" and appeals to nature repeatedly to curse his daughter and dooms her to laughter and contempt, the king becomes a figure with the stature of Oedipus and the knowledge of Tiresias.

The Fool carries his purpose too far and Lear whips him when he is direct: "Thou shouldst not have been old before thou hadst been wise." Lear's next lines as he drops the whip, the only verse he speaks in this short scene,

"O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven;
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad.",

show his vision of the absurdity in the vexation he must still assume he can be possessed by. At the end of the scene, the Fool brings the whip to Lear, he takes it, pulls the Fool close to his side and they exit with Lear's "Come, boy." as the thunder cracks.

Wolfit's delivery of the often quoted speech "O! reason not the need. . . " at the end of Act II is more moving than I would have thought possible. He read the speech differently in the two performances I saw. Goneril and Regan are on either side of him and at Regan's line he throws his cape over his shoulder and turns from them for the first part of the speech and weeps as he beseeches the gods not to let women's weapons stain his cheeks. As he turns back to them, flinging his cape and pointing with down-turned palms and outstretched fingers as if groping for articulation, he predicts his revenge in a low and ghastly knowing voice that is reminiscent of the "Away, away" after his earlier cursing of Goneril, and the silence after "they shall be the terrors of the earth" is the quiet of his having terrified the whole earth. He has quieted himself as well as Goneril and Regan with his vague terrors and he turns his back again, weeping as he swears he'll not weep.

His prediction to the Fool that he will go mad is more plausible by this reading of the speech than by the Titanic reading Wolfit gave it another time. Gods are not inarticulate and although force and authority are terrifying when he turns back and points to his daughters with a firm hand and fixes them with a rageful eye, they become absurd at Lear's inability to name his revenges, and his wanting not to weep is unnecessary: Titan's don't. The first reading is the better bridge to the real Titan that Lear can become on the heath against other, simpler elements, and to the madness that he suffers there.

The Storm Scenes are not done over-realistically, but there is lightning and plenty of thunder, which often interrupts the speeches. Wolfit's voice, the largest I have heard in a theatre, is not inaudible for this, but the Fool and Kent are not heard at all at the beginning. Lear stands leaning against a narrow high rock, the Fool clutching him in fear, and does not move throughout his first scene. I'm afraid I don't find the thunder interruptions offensive. The wonder of the words is a theatrical and dramatic wonder and if their clarity is sacrificed in a few lines I am pleased at the reality of the other lines, a reality I do not always find in them on a page. It is not, again, so much the reality of the lines themselves that I question as the unreal quality the scene and the situation have in the text. I suppose I am saying that the Storm Scenes in *King Lear* are incredible to me as I read the play as a "poem" or, better, that I cannot read the play as a *poem*. The text is more than a poem, however "huge," and if I can't read the lines aloud or hear someone else read them, the full value of the text is not conveyed. No one who has called

it a great poem, and most people have, doubts its achievement, but they have found it impossible to discuss it except lyrically or epically. These critics tremble at the stage consequences of the witches in *Macbeth* and the Ghost Scenes in *Hamlet*. My simple nature is embarrassed when the witches and the ghost are not thoroughly visible when I see these plays. Similarly, the Storm Scenes in *Lear* seem to me to demand performance. I confess that the scenes are enormous problems for the actor and the director, that the actor's voice will easily fail him if the scenes are not broken, that the director must not obscure whole sections of speeches with over-zealous realism, etc., but these difficulties are of a simpler sort than the imaginative difficulties spoken of by Bradley, for instance. "The Storm-scenes in *King Lear* gain nothing [on the stage] and their very *essence* is destroyed." Shakespeare the dramatist has failed and Bradley re-instates him in the library with a brilliant case based upon poetic rather than dramatic, achievement. It is extraordinary that Bradley, who appreciated Shakespeare's being "immensely effective in the theatre" in most of the plays, should have noted collapse here. *King Lear* is an enormous work not wholly intelligible in one performance, but neither is it at a single reading, or many readings. As Granville-Barker said, both words and actors are tokens. For Shakespeare the words were for the sake of the actor, who could best give them to us. Bradley's readings led him to anticipate the miraculous in a performance of *Lear*. When he didn't find it, he called it impossible. Literature and its critics might become less embarrassed at finding the playwright Shakespeare in their midst; the evidence of an acting tradition that Wolfit brought to New York should remind us that much literary criticism of Shakespeare is potentially nonsense.

The Wolfit production is cut for intermission at Act III, Scene 4, with the putting out of Gloucester's eyes (the whole play ran two hours and a half, with cuts). Just before this, in the Hovel Scene, the play loses its momentum. The set for the scene is too confined and the people too crowded in it for either their words or their movements to be clear. I am sure that those who were unfamiliar with the play didn't know there was a mock trial of Goneril and Regan going on; it was only plain that Lear was as mad as Edgar pretended to be. If better direction could not be mustered, Wolfit might have heeded the Folio and omitted the trial. This was the first time that careless direction sacrificed the whole meaning of a scene.

The madness of Lear is not the traditional problem that the "madness" of Hamlet has been because Lear is a simpler, less intellectually astute character and certainly also because debility is not unnatural to old age. In *King Lear* it is a noble madness, in *Hamlet* a noble mind o'erthrown. Wolfit's Lear is a very old man and his madness from Act III until his reunion with Cordelia in Act V would therefore seem to be less marked than if he played the part more vigorously, but I think this interpretation is essential to the play. Lear is afraid of madness and repeatedly says that he is afraid of it not only because of what has been done to him, but also because of how this must affect a man like him. One of Shakespeare's ways of making him the man he is is by the long list of repetitions, natural to the aged, that he gave Lear to speak ("O! you sir, you sir, come you hither, sir."; "Hear, Nature, hear! dear goddess, hear!"; "O Lear, Lear, Lear!"; "No, no, no, no!", etc.) There are a number of examples and whatever other functions these repetitions have, the frailty and carelessness and helplessness they reveal in the king is their first, simple purpose. Stark Young, the one critic who knew the play well enough and respected it enough to care what Wolfit did with the role, found his madness exaggerated and extreme. I don't think this view is tenable unless Lear is played as a much younger man. Perhaps there have been agile, comparatively youthful Lears (I remember seeing a portrait of Macready in the role and although his hair was white and profuse, his strong unwrinkled face was not bearded), but I would suspect that Lear's madness in such performances would suggest the grotesque, as some scenes do in *The Duchess of Malfi*, say, rather than provoke the horrible and the piteous.

The degeneration into madness in Act III can nevertheless fail in effect without physical as well as vocal techniques on the actor's part. Wolfit accomplishes this splendidly by moves and gestures as frail as before except that in the mad scenes, Lear's imperious gestures, which he could still make in the early part of the play, are also frail and aimless; he wills to make these gestures but they have the mark of nervousness that his involuntary gestures had previously. In the meeting with Gloucester at Dover, Wolfit enters *Mad* (Shakespeare), carrying a small bouquet (a compromise with Capel's addition, *fantastically dressed with wild flowers*). Anything more than the bouquet in the Wolfit setting would have been pretentious: the flowers were the only color in it and a *lei* would have made the scene visually a burlesque. Gloucester does not help Wolfit in this scene and Edgar is ornamental, yet with the set resembling the facade of Sing Sing and standing on a papier-mache

rock, he carries it, against all immediate odds and against odds imposed on his dramatist. Act IV, Scene 6 is filled with quotations from The Bard and I was disposed for paralysis. These were not played up; it was a pleasure to see the clever playwright win out with all the words. They were all Wolfit had and all he needed.

Wolfit follows a melancholy but respected tradition for his reunion with Cordelia and lies sleeping in his tent as soft music plays at the beginning of the scene. This is moving but not as moving as the playwright's direction would have been: *Enter Lear in a chair carried by servants,* and the analogy between the chair and Lear's throne is missed. The changes the actor produces in the Lear we saw last in the scene with Gloucester is not an ingenuous return to the Lear before the Heath Scenes; his patience is weary with the result of his impatience, Lear is fatigued at emerging from a madness that is the effect of his just agitation, caused in turn by his wrath with Cordelia. Cordelia cannot miraculously revive him. Lear's contempt for her has been dearly paid for, the interval has been filled with enduring, there have been too many counteractions for him to turnabout and quickly embrace the object of the folly that was their cause. It is at Cordelia's wish to confront her sisters that he can refer to the complete and redeeming joy he might find with her. But this possibility is cut off by her death, the final resolution of the folly the gods still judge pitiless. Lear, even had Cordelia not died, would have doubtless perished in attempting to live the lesson of his folly without remembering the awful devices by which he gained it. I think this is the answer Granville-Barker wanted to the plea, "Try to imagine his survival. . ." Cordelia's death in the Wolfit production was no less inexorable or wanton than the other works of the arch-villians, Goneril, Regan and Edmund, however imperfectly those parts were played. As Lear has suffered from their caprice for his own fault, or rather as his fault had been *coincident with* their wickedness, he had negatively authorized their caprice and although they are now dead, they have all been killed by their own hands as it were, and not by the demand Lear might have made. In terms of Lear's not having acted against them directly, they go on living and Cordelia must die. The bodies of Goneril and Regan on stage, which Wolfit flinches at, confirm this. Lear of course was powerless to have them executed because of his abrogation of his own position, an abrogation his daughters read without scruple. In the world the vile daughters inhabit, which is also the world of Edmund, the king has no wish to act. The other world he describes to Cordelia, where they will "tell old tales, and laugh at gilded butterflies," is the same transcendent world Richard II paints for Aumerle, a magical world where they will "make foul weather with despised tears," and a world, for Lear, where there is no need of noble anger.

Before Wolfit's entrance with Cordelia's body, the beginning of Lear's line, "Howl, howl, howl. . ." is heard off-stage. He enters and kneels, supports her on his left knee, then lays her down. "And my poor fool is hang'd" crushes Lear more. The fact that this line is notable and that the recognition of Kent is complete illustrates how Wolfit avoids the "insufferable" effect that Bradley foresaw for any effort to "turn continually in anguish towards the corpse." The last speech of Lear had, as Wolfit played it, enough pathos to remind me that Bradley had called it the most pathetic speech ever written. But afterwards I wondered if the pathos had been sufficient to sustain Bradley's astonishing perception that Lear imagines Cordelia to be still alive.

The second time I saw the play I tried to justify the apparently natural lack of sympathy people once had for its unhappy ending. Their inclination was supported by the substituted version of Nahun Tate, which was inserted in all performances of Lear for a hundred and fifty-seven years until Hazlitt and others prevailed upon Kean to restore the original ending. (Kean did this in 1823 and in 1838 Macready restored much of the play, although Granville-Barker notes that he, too, "tampered with its structure and—by much omission—with its text".) Bradley turned "with disgust from Tate's sentimental version, from his marriage of Edgar and Cordelia, and from that cheap moral which every one of Shakespeare's tragedies contradicts, 'that Truth and Virtue shall at last succeed.'" Then again Bradley wasn't sure "that we are right when we unreservedly condemn the feeling which prompted these alterations." *King Lear* thus fails for Bradley as he wishes the king and Cordelia to escape their doom. Such a failure would of course be just as gross in the "work of poetic imagination" he contrives to save Shakespeare's reputation. Unreserved condemnation of the feeling which prompted the alterations will be just with any insight into the subject matter and situation of *King Lear* and the differences from the other tragedies this was bound to exact from its author. The new world that Lear found, that he was forced to find, is no unhappy one. Lear's difference from Shakespeare's other heroes, the play's difference from all the other plays, warrants a questioning of the work as a dramatic tragedy but does not allow of slothful

inquiry so much as to call it a dramatic gloss. Literary appreciation and criticism of Shakespeare can unnerve actors, producers and audiences alike. Bad taste in the drawing room becomes bad taste on the stage. But to bother with Shakespeare at all is to ignore taste; he was offensive to Tate's time, to Johnson's time, to Hazlitt's time, to Bradley's time and to ours. No better antidote is to be found than in productions of his plays by Wolfit and others like him, whatever their faults.

The faults of this *King Lear* are many. Wolfit's performance is the only great one. The other people in the cast are typical members of a provincial stock company, some good, some satisfactory, but mostly bad. This has unfortunate consequences for the play as a whole and I can understand Bradley's dissatisfaction at productions like this, which once were probably legion in England, but the degree to which Wolfit compensates for the defects by his illumination of Lear is immense and I personally found the *play* more rewarding than my reading of Bradley's lectures on the subject. (I am not being snide; I can find no higher example.) The near loss of the play's sub-plot was one of the consequences. Frederick Horrey, who gave an excellent performance in *Volpone,* delivered Edmund's first long speech to the audience in an intimate, off-hand attitude—in the manner of a 17th century French wit, as if he were Osric in *Hamlet,* so that the audience not unreasonably questioned his capability for any evil greater than snitching sandwiches. I read in my program that Horrey had played Oedipus in the London production of *The Infernal Machine* and when I saw the play again I attempted to discover more in his reading of the role. Despite his resemblance to him, Edmund is *not* Iago and he will compromise his wickedness by flippancy, and Horrey was still the flippant carefree devil. Eric Maxon, the old character actor of the company, was Gloucester (when you see the parts the regulars play in *Lear,* their roles in the other plays can be guessed; Maxon does Tubal, Polonius and Corbaccio). His performance was effortless and the simple rattling-off of lines although his appearance was adequate. It is elementary in acting that actors must listen to what other actors say to them and not anticipate their cues; the attention requisite for listening is not just fixing the eyes and staring in feigned concern at what is being said or maintaining an impervious, occupied expression that defies scrutiny. I am sure that Mr. Landau never considers his actors perfect in this respect, but the King William Players are more skilled in the minimum requirement than some of the players were in Wolfit's *King Lear.* Gloucester and Edmund together almost cancelled out the dramatic value of the sub-plot. Gloucester's blinding is ghastly by nature and Wolfit's actors tried to tone it down, which abashed Shakespeare and the audience, neither of whom shirks horror when it is called for. Gloucester sat in a chair facing backstage; Cornwall and Regan were not a jot more frightening than a couple of barbers. The scene is brilliantly lighted! To confirm our suspicions that nothing dreadful occurred, the bandage that Gloucester wears over his eyes is wet with only perspiration and is less bloody than a bandaid. Perhaps Wolfit (who presumably staged all the plays) had in mind Bradley's "the blinding of Gloster belongs rightly to *King Lear* in its proper world of imagination; it is a blot upon *King Lear* as a stage-play." I keep hoping that Lionel Barrymore will some day leave Hollywood for a few months and take on the role for which his flair is indispensable. He seems to me the ideal Gloucester. Years ago I understand he played scenes from *Lear* with his brother on the radio. He might search for another Lear and fulfill the debt he owes his art and not continue to wait for the good movie role that comes to him once every aeon.

The scene at Dover where Gloucester throws himself off an imaginary cliff was absurdly managed. A small, low rock stood stage-center and when Gloucester leaped it was at considerable effort that he did not merely stumble. The sound of the sea in the background was the only credible aspect in the scene. Mr. Van Doren, however, did not admire this effect as I did and remarked that of course Gloucester and Edgar were not near the sea at all. The scene direction *The Country near Dover* was thus literally ignored by Wolfit, but as I re-read the scene and also try to discover how it should have been done, I still think the sea-sound is needed for the pathos the scene must produce in the theatre. The real quality of the sound of the waves certainly showed up the make-shift quality of the realistic set in the Wolfit production, but might not the trouble here have been not the sound of the waves but the naive imitation in the scenery? Gloucester, early in the scene, says that he does not hear the sea, which as a blind man would be his clue, and Edgar describes the dizzy height and the fisherman along the beach to deceive him, for he knows his intent and wants to prevent it. Perhaps the two actually are on a hill and not on a cliff over the sea, perhaps Gloucester is so determined to end his misery and is so anguished by his eyes that he cannot heed the evidence of his other sense, but in the theatre I don't know how the audience is to be made aware of what Edgar is doing unless an actual

cliff and beach are close by for him to be saving his father from. The sea-sound also has an unreal and mysterious quality that would assist a setting less real. A cliff extending far backstage, dimly lighted, with the sea below on three sides and the land slightly lower on the other, might accomplish what I have in mind. Gloucester would not then fall in a ridiculous fashion into a pail of water, as it were, and when Edgar turns him toward the land the audience would have no doubt that he is saving his father, and the slight incline would permit Gloucester to fall forward and down, all of which would tend to stress the pathetic rather than the comic. Gloucester would not be over-credulous when he is persuaded that he has truly fallen. The scene is an awfully difficult one and I do not possess the "common sense" that made it easy for Bradley. I have not been to Dover but the sound of the sea must be audible for miles in the surrounding country. I know Mr. Van Doren will not mind my speaking of his objection. No solution would have occurred to me if he had not made it.

Kempster Barnes, the matinee idol in the Wolfit group, looked splendid as Edgar. He has a quiet voice with a range so narrow that its sound is more striking than the words it speaks. In the Heath Scenes the distortion he gave his voice did not help its audibility. Kent, played by Alexander Gauge, was probably the most satisfactory performance. Kent is not disposed to express himself passionately, yet since his love for Lear is the passion he lives by, Gauge could have given him more than the duty of a mascot. The Fool (Geoffrey Wilkinson) I thought so bad the first time I saw him that I went the second time prepared to protest publicly. His voice is shrill and offensive and he could not lend the Fool's songs either the melody or the lyrical quality that Shakespeare put them there for; instead he shrieked in rhythm, with snatches of intelligibility. If music would disguise the words, screaming destroys them. The Fool hopped about the stage awkwardly and ungracefully in his first scene. Ballet, of course, is not required, but a hop-scotch executed without nimbleness is grotesque and no Fool could think it diverting or funny. Ready as I was to declaim against him, Wilkinson had calmed down for the last performance and I was more struck by the artful way Wolfit used the Fool, defining his relation to him by a careless and almost inattentive heeding of his words at first. Doubtless Lear is not solicitous about the Fool during the Storm and "It is foolish of him, no doubt, to follow his master into such a storm—but, then, he *is* a fool" and that is the only virtue Lear wants in him. Granville-Barker also says that the Fool is characterless alone, and in this sense Wilkinson was a perfect foil for Wolfit.

As for the smaller parts, Cornwall and Albany were done adequately, particularly the latter, and Oswald, whom Johnson thought the one wholly evil character in all Shakespeare, was understood in the same way by John Wynyard, who affected this idea to excellent dramatic advantage.

Rosalind Iden's Cordelia was lovely in appearance and absolutely competent in performance, yet I was indifferent to her portrayal. After I had observed Miss Iden's success in the comic roles I explained her failure as Cordelia as a lack of natural response to a tragic part, but her Ophelia was so staggering that this became nonsense. My indifference might be accounted for by the problem everyone has in talking about Cordelia. How can any actress play the role except negatively, in sweet contrast to Goneril and Regan? Cordelia must be proud in the first scene, but there, too, the conniving obeisance of her two sisters will assist the actress who portrays her. Cordelia should not be excessively solicitous with the king in the last scenes. Miss Iden did not mother him, but her awe of him could have been greater.

Goneril and Regan are acted by Violet Farebrother and Ann Chalkley, respectively. Both were extraordinary English females and albeit past their bow-and-arrow, bicyclin' days, each bore the stamp of those rolickin' times. Both were commanding, one was heavy in flesh, which she was obliged to display by her costume, and both had the English sandpaper voice—the most rasping, breathless voices I have ever heard. Miss Farebrother was so enormous and so patently the Brunnhilde type that I was convinced she was in the wrong auditorium. Heaving divas we must tolerate; heaving actresses, never. Miss Farebrother's entrance into Gloucester's castle was a moment I shall not forget. Her blue costume was emblazoned with a bright red toga and when she suddenly threw open the gates and stood holding them apart, the effect was, at first, terrifying. Unfortunately the only possible sequel to the full melodramatic manner in which Miss Farebrother executed this entrance was the Battle Cry from *Die Walkure*. Both these ladies intimidated the audience and not their proper objects within the play.

That *King Lear,* the least happy of all his productions, was still no minor success, was a particular and very special achievement for Donald Wolfit. All the defects, alongside his Lear, are not striking in the theatre while the play is in progress; insofar as the character and the number of the faults specify the degree to which projection into temperament and participation in the play are manifestly necessary, Wolfit's accomplishment is more manifest still.

King Lear has been acted only twice in New York since the days of Robert B. Mantell—since the first World War. Curtis Cooksey and the Shakespeare Theatre actors produced it unsuccessfully in 1932. Sam Jaffe gave a performance as Lear in a semi-professional production of the play at the New School in 1940. The Wolfit presentation is probably the last we shall see for many years, unless the Old Vic company can be persuaded to endure again the circus maximus that is the Century Theatre and bring to New York their *King Lear* with Laurence Olivier and Alec Guiness.

I don't know when Wolfit played Lear first, but it is his most famous role and he had recently finished a limited London engagement in the play in the early fall of 1944. This was the season of John Gielgud's repertory of *Hamlet, The Duchess of Malfi, Love for Love* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* of the Old Vic's *Richard III, Peer Gynt* and *Arms and the Man,* and incidentally the season of the first of the over-stuffed revivals, Wilde's *An Ideal Husband.* The London theatre public differs from the intelligentsia public that would have mainly supported such plays in New York, and the English newspapers and periodicals reflected this audience's enthusiasm for Wolfit's *King Lear.* It is strange that this same actor in the same play, which was admired tremendously among other great portrayals in other great plays in London in 1944, should have been despised in New York in 1947. The theatre in New York cannot boast of anything in so typical a London season except a plushier Wilde revival, more musical comedies and Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. In New York there are no great actors. No new great plays is no excuse for this; there are no new great plays in London, either. Acting is sustained and extended by Shakespeare's plays and others like them. Accidentally—and it is only accidental—the London revivals can compete with popular plays and musical comedies because the London public likes the classical drama and enjoys good acting. The pretentiousness of potential repertory theatres in New York has doomed them before they have begun; they have imagined that they must compete with what they are there to prevent. Undisguised and honest presentation of classical drama in New York might well serve a higher function and cause a more valuable reaction than the revivals have done in London. Constant revival of classical plays will certainly restore acting and that might also startle critics, by competition. The art by which the actor participates in the playwright's imagination is a high critical art. Surely of Shakespeare it is the best criticism we shall ever have.

—F. M.

SPORTS

Climaxing a five-game winning streak, an alert Junior-Senior 1A quintet nosed out a formidable Junior 3 team by a 29 to 28 score to cop the basketball championship before an estimated crowd of ten people in a night game played in Iglehart Hall.

The Junior-Seniors spotted the losers a 10 point margin in the opening minutes of the game, as Steve Terry drove under the basket four times and Bill Ross dropped in a set shot. Only a one hander by Ray Cave kept the winners from being blanked in the first quarter.

Coming back after the rest period, Stern and Schleicher tallied and Krol dropped in a free throw to bring the score up to 7-10 before Clark scored for the Juniors. Three baskets by Cave put the Junior-Seniors into a one point lead, and the score see-sawed then until the half, when it read 16-16.

In the third period, the score continued to waver back and forth until a set shot by Earl Bauder and a free throw by Cave put the Junior-Seniors into a three point lead. In the final frame, both teams tuned up their defense to a frenzied pitch, with much of the play consisting of intercepted passes and violent struggles under the hoops. A lay up by Dick Matteson and a basket by Wes Gallup brought the Juniors in the lead again, but Roll Schleicher, with two men hanging on, tallied for the winners. Cave then tossed in a one hander, but Gallup came back fast to put in a hook shot shortly before the game ended.

Foul throws were the deciding factor, with the winners sinking five of their eight attempts, while the Juniors only scored on two out of seventeen tries, Gallup missing ten of eleven chances.

Cave led the scoring with six baskets and a free throw for thirteen points, while Terry paced the losing team with five baskets and a foul for eleven points.

In their third encounter, Junior 3 once more downed the cellar-position Sophomores, this time by a 48 to 35 count. The Sophomores functioned smoothly but continual substitutions did more to hurt than help their organization. Matteson maintained first position in individual scoring by tallying 26 points, and Wallace scored eight to lead the Sophomores.

Junior-Senior 1A got off to a fast start against the Freshmen, piling up a 43-9 margin at half-time and then coasting in to win 65-29. Cave scored 20 points and Thomas of the Freshmen hit the hoop for 10 points.

Junior-Senior 2B continued along the come-back trail with a 55 to 51 upset over Junior 3. The Juniors stepped out to a 13-9 lead in the first quarter, but the Junior-Seniors crept up in the second frame and a basket by Van Sant on a pass from Hooker put them into a 22-20 lead at the half. In the third period, the Juniors pulled up one hard fought point and early in the final period they pulled into the lead as Matteson, Gallup, Ross and Derr all scored; but three baskets by lanky George Van Sant brought the score even and a one-hander by Bill Elliott put the Junior-Seniors ahead again. In the closing minutes, the gap widened as Hooker, Elliott, Krol and Van Doren tallied to make the score 55-49. Matteson of the Juniors dropped one through the basket just before the game ended.

A near upset came when an inspired Sophomore team led the champion Junior-Senior 1A outfit through three quarters of play, only to go down to a 43-41 defeat in the closing minutes. The Sophomores piled up a 17-4 lead in the first few minutes, but the winners rallied and were trailing by one point at the half. In the third period, the Sophomores continued to hold a slight edge, but early in the last quarter, the Junior-Seniors pulled into the lead to win the game. Schleicher scored 17 points to lead the winners, while the Sophomores were paced by Gargle with eleven and Wallace with ten points.

Junior-Senior 2B won its fifth straight game, downing the Freshmen 61 to 37. The Freshmen were only trailing by one point at half-time, but in the second half, the Junior-Seniors turned on the heat and piled up 38 points to the Freshmen's 15 points. Van Doren scored 20 points for the winners and Thomas led the Freshmen with 15.

In the final game before the championship match, the two Junior-Senior combinations came together once more, 1A risking a season record of seven wins and two losses, and 2B riding on the crest of a five game winning streak. When the dust had cleared 1A had racked up another victory, by a 66-54 count. The winners scored first on baskets by Bauder and Cave and stretched the margin to 18-12 at the first quarter. In the second period, 1A showed an alert defense and yielded only nine points, while pouring 29 counters through the hoop as first Schleicher and then Cave got hot. With the score reading 47-21 against them, 2B turned on the heat in the third period and tallied 17 points before 1A could recover from the shock, but after pulling up to 42-53 at the end of the third period, the drive collapsed and the two teams battled neck and neck in the final frame. Schleicher, of 1A took scoring honors with 22 points, and Charlie Van Doren totalled 20 for the losers.

Final standings in basketball:

	W.	L.	Ave.	Pts.	O.P.
Jun.-Sen. 1A	9	2	.818	541	373
Junior 3	8	4	.667	540	432
Jun.-Sen. 2B	5	5	.500	417	501
Freshmen	4	7	.363	437	544
Sophomores	2	10	.167	417	502

Individual scoring:

Player and Team	*Games*	*Pts.*
Matteson, Junior 3	12	242
Cave, Junior 1	13	186
Schleicher, Senior a	13	174
Krol, Seniora a	16	117
Bounds, Junior 3	11	102
Gallup, Junior 3	12	97
Wallace, Sophs	12	88
Thomas, Frosh	9	81
Weinstein, Sophs	11	78
Van Doren, Senior b	6	71

Although a 28-game basketball schedule has been completed without a single forfeit, athletics at St. John's appear destined to continue on the downgrade which started when the war began. Fall softball was cancelled because of poor turnouts; swimming is no longer possible; only ten of fifteen football games were played; lacrosse is no longer scheduled in the former backyard of the national champions; and volleyball, according to a recent canvas by Mr. Lathrop, will be played only by Aristotle, Plato, Kant and Mrs. Perlitz.

On the basis of such representation, it is impossible for schedules to be arranged in these sports, but it is suggested that those individuals who are interested in playing volleyball or lacrosse contact the members of their seminar, and prepare a list of potential players to submit to Mr. Lathrop. Only by such action can any kind of competition be arranged which will allow for regular scheduling of these sports; and without regular schedules, team spirit as well as competent officiating is lost.