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PROGRAMME NO: 1/FOU A198H/71/X

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**A361 SHAKESPEARE**

KING LEAR - Workshop 1

Executive Producer: ..... Nat Taylor

Producer: ..... David Hoyle

Production Assistant: ..... Anne Pearson

Designers: ..... Paul Bannister  
George Wisner

Presenter: ..... Prof. Graham Martin

Dur: 24'15"

**CAST:**

Director: John Russell-Brown

Lear: Julian Glover  
Kent: James Laurenson  
Gloucester: Basil Henson  
The Fool: Karl Johnson

PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

This is the first of the two workshop programmes on King Lear. They differ a little from earlier programmes. We asked the actors to know their parts, to study the whole play, and to work on the scenes we've chosen before coming into the studio, so this is rehearsal at a more advanced stage than you've seen before.

We've concentrated on a number of key moments in the play, taking as our theme the progress of Lear's madness but treated very selectively. We begin with the part of Lear's abdication speech, the love test, that strange and puzzling act from which the rest of the tragedy flows. We then show the scene outside Gloucester's castle when Lear first begins to sense the appalling outcome of his decisions, and then move on to a famous speech, Lear on the heath, raging against the storm.

Starting with the idea of exploring Lear's madness, we found it was necessary to return to the beginning to look for its sources. Some productions present a Lear more or less crazy from the outset - John Russel Brown however, argued for a Lear who is entirely composed, self-aware, even ironic - as it were, playing a secret game with his daughters and their husbands and the entire court - and this interpretation has the additional advantage of

PROF. GRAHAM MARTIN Cont.

conserving the actors' energy in a very taxing role.

KING LEAR  
(Julian Glover)

Know that we have divided in three our Kingdom, and 'tis our past intent to shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths, while we, unburdened, crawl towards death. Our son of Cornwall, and you, our no-less loving son of Albany, it is this hour our constant will to publish our daughters' several dowers, that future strife may be prevented now. The Princes France and Burgundy, great rivals in our youngest daughter's love, long in our court have made their sojourn, and here are to be answered. Tell me my daughters, since now we will divest us both of rule, interest of territory, cares of state, which of you shall we say doth love us most, that we our greatest bounty may extend where nature doth with merit challenge. Gonerill, our eldest-born, speak first..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K. very good. The contrast to the scene we've just done couldn't be more..

JULIAN GLOVER

Absolutely not.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

More, astonishing. I mean the first thing is the way his control over syntax,

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN Cont.

so what he has to say can contain a parenthesis and yet come to a full close. The marvellous way in which he can bring every degree, degree of attention down to that simple word "love" which is like the kind of trigger for the whole play. What he cares about here is not merely his power, but actually something very secret which is called love. A simple monosyllable, and there's a whole syntax in the metre of that speech that brings it all down to that crucial point.

JULIAN GLOVER

But what's amazing is that what he's doing at this advanced time in his life is to actually challenge them on the most important thing in the world, which is love, which is the most outrageous thing he could possibly do, and I think he's been working on it for a long time.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, and I was very interested as you did that. There was on your face a flicker of humour at the ironies, "... and we unburdened crawl towards death.." You're not going to crawl towards death - You're going..

JULIAN GLOVER

No way

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

.. hunting it with a hundred knights.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN Cont.

But you're saying that - I wonder whether that irony, that is the irony actually should, could in fact be more private, that you get the humour for yourself, but you will not show it to them!

JULIAN GLOVER

Oh well, that's interesting, um, one would have to debate whether it's more valuable..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Exactly..

JULIAN GLOVER

to show them the humour or not.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, in the strategy of the whold play I think its terribly, terribly difficult decisions, the sort of, there are about half-a- dozen decisions to make about this first scene, the one is that, could we..

JULIAN GLOVER

Yeah. It's also very interesting, that word he uses, " we express our darker purpose", he uses the word "darker" for the word "hidden", so he does put a mystery onto it anyway, doesn't he?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes well...

JULIAN GLOVER

Chooses the word "darker" rather than "hidden" or any other synonym.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

I think ~~there~~'s two ways of taking this first scene, one to take all.. well two major ways, and this is a major decision - that is, to play the sub-text about darker purposes and the sly intention of putting them on the spot and judging them, and show us Lear enjoying doing that, which I think was the decision that you had made in that. I'd like to see you do it with the other decision, so that you use "darkest" in the most openest way, just take it as secret, and you just feed yourself the knowledge which you have within yourself, it will not be shown in the expressive quality of "dark" or "crawl", it will be shown in the way in which you are capable of keeping your own attention inside it.

JULIAN GLOVER

That's right, and also of watching them all the time for what they're doing.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

And you come to this extraordinary word - "love" - and what are they going to do about it.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, that's right

JULIAN GLOVER

How will these mere underlings cope with this one?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

Because I'm just about to give you the world.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes. Do you see if you play against that sub-text, I mean externally in the words. I think it tingles with that kind of consciousness which comes right down.

JULIAN GLOVER

Are you saying technically speaking, that you're suggesting that it should be rather blander?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

And more ordinary?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes. But inside your mind is very quick, your eyes are watchful and you are feeding on the ironies as you go through. Show as little of it as you can, except in the efficiency with which you speak.

JULIAN GLOVER

Right

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Just try it, see, see if that can be done.

KING LEAR

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose. Give me the map there. Know that we have divided in three our kingdom

KING LEAR Cont.

and 'tis our fast intent to shake all cares  
and business from our age, conferring them  
on younger strengths, whilst we unburdened  
crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall -  
and you, our no less loving son of Albany -  
We have this hour a constant will to publish  
our daughters' several dowers, that future  
strife may be prevented now. The princes  
France and Burgundy, great rivals in our  
youngest daughter's love, long in our court  
have made their amorous sojourn, and here  
are to be answered. Tell me, my daughters  
since now we will divest us both of rule,  
interest of territory, cares of state, which  
of you shall we say doth love us most, that  
we our largest bounty may extend where  
nature doth with merit challenge. Gonerill,  
our eldest born, speak first.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K., O.K., OK.,

PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

Next, Act II Scene IV, Lear is now on the  
point of breakdown, what part in this  
process is played by Kent, or by his  
fool, or by Gloucester?

KENT  
(James Laurensen)

Um, why fool?

FOOL  
(Karl Johnson)

We'll set thee to school to an ant to  
teach thee there's no labouring i'the  
Winter. All that follow their noses are  
led by their eyes, but blind men; and



FOOL Cont.

there's not a nose among twenty but can  
smell him that's stinking. Let go thy  
hold when a great wheel runs down a hill  
lest it break thy neck with following.  
But the great one that goes upward, let  
him draw thee after. When a wise man  
gives thee better counsel, give me mine  
again; I would have none but knaves use  
it, since a fool gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,  
And follows but for form,  
Will pack when it begins to rain,  
And leave thee in the storm;  
But I will tarry, the fool will stay,  
And let the wise man fly.  
The knave turns fool that runs away;  
The fool no knave perdy.

KENT

Where learned you this, Fool?

FOOL

Not in the stocks, fool

Enter Lear and Gloucester..

LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They are sick;  
they are weary? They have travelled all  
the night? Mere fetches, the images of  
revolt and flying-off. Fetch me a better  
answer.

GLOUCESTER  
(Basil Henson)

My dear lord, you know the fiery quality  
of the Duke, how unremovable and fixed he  
is in his own course.

LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death, confusion!

'Fiery'? What 'quality'? Why Gloucester, Gloucester, I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER

Well, my good lord, I have informed them so.

LEAR

Informed them! Dost thou understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

LEAR

The King would speak with Cornwall, the dear father would with his daughter speak, commands, tonds, service. Are they 'informed' of this? My breath and blood! 'Fiery'? The fiery Duke? Tell the hot Duke that - no, but not yet! Maybe he is not well. Infirmity doth still neglect all office whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body. I'll forbear; and am fallen out with my more headier will to take the indisposed and sickly fit for the sound man. Death on my state! Wherefore should he sit here? This act persuades me that this remotion of the Duke and her is practice only. Give me my servant forth. Go, tell the Duke and's wife I'd speak with them - Now presently! Bid them come forth and hear me, or at their chamber door I'll

KING LEAR Cont.

beat the drum till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!

FOOL

Cry to it, muncle, as the cockney did to  
the eels when she put 'em i' the paste  
alive. She knapped em o' the coxcombs with  
a stick and cried 'Down, wantons, down!'  
'Twas her brother that in pure kindness to  
his horse buttered his hay.

LEAR

Ahq

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K. O.K. right  
crosstalking

PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

Cast and Director found themselves asking  
what relevance this play had to the modern  
world, and what elements in Shakespeares  
characters helped to project that  
modernity.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

.. I think we, all these people, exist  
today. I mean, I think Lear is really  
one of the plays which really demands to  
be done in modern dress, and to relate it  
to the world or, now, seems to me just as  
easy as to relate it to the Jacobean world  
or the early British world or whatever, and  
it does help, I think, to try and find

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN Cont.

the modern attitudes behind these words.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

I mean it's really the only way to live in this play I think.

JULIAN GLOVER

Well in fact that's the other way round isn't it. If you find the attitudes within the words, you will find they have modern connotations.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

That's right, that's right. Yes, yes.

JULIAN GLOVER

As always with Shakespeare.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

O.K. where can we take it from?.."fiery duke" again?

BASIL HENSON

Why not, why not.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Is that alright, Basil?

KING LEAR

'Fiery'? The 'fiery' Duke? Tell the hot Duke that - no, but not yet! Maybe he is not well. Infirmity doth still neglect all office whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body. I'll forbear; and am fallen out with my more headier will to take the

LEAR Cont.

indisposed and sickly fit for the sound man.

KENT

My Lord ..

LEAR

Death on my state! Wherefore should he sit here? This act persuades me that this remotion of the Duke and her is practice only. Give me my servant forth. Go tell the Duke and's wife I'd speak with them - Now presently! Bid them come forth and hear me, or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

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LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!

FOOL

Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put 'em i' the paste alive. She knapped 'em o' the coxcombs with a stick and cried 'Down, wantons, down!' 'Twas her brother that in pure kindness to his horse buttered his hay.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K.

JULIAN GLOVER

A matter!

Laughter

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, I wonder what would happen if you actually collapsed on the floor at that stage, so that we have.. yes and so that

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

the fool is dominant just at that last,  
as he sees that....

KARL JOHNSON

Don't stay up

JAMES LAURENSEN

To follow that through I'll grab you  
when you're starting to go down

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes, yes.

KARL JOHNSON

I suppose you want him to get up again ?  
You want him to fight, you....

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

No, no, no You don't want.. the Fool  
doesn't want him to do anything except  
take cover on the heath, actually you  
live as a fool by your acceptance of  
the absurdity.

KARL JOHNSON

I don't want him to fight, I..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

.. want him to enter your world.

JAMES LAURENSEN

Is he not saying, is he feeling, that  
the action that Lear is proposing, to  
cry a sleep to death is really totally  
stupid, and lacking practicality. I  
mean, fine, if you're going to do that  
you might as well hit eels on the head!

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

That's right.

JAMES LAURENSEN

It's all silly

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes....

JULIAN GLOVER

It's very interesting, the point about what he wants to do is to get me into his world.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

Do you think that's the reason the fool disappears when he does, because Lear has then entered his world and he's not needed any more?

JOHN RUSSELL BROWN

Yeah, well I think so

JULIAN GLOVER

Because he does enter his world.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes and I think he goes beyond his world actually. I mean, he goes through the..

JULIAN GLOVER

He's totally fulfilled his task.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes absolutely. I believe so.

JULIAN GLOVER

It never occurred to me that, very good.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

So I think you're sort of in charge as it were at the end of this scene.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes, he is isn't he?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Could we do it from the..er. "wherefore should he sit here" could we do it from there?

LEAR

Wherefore should he sit here? This act persuades me that this remotion of the Duke and her is practice only. Give me my servant forth. Go tell the Duke and's wife I'd speak with them - Now presently! Bid them come forth and hear me or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum till it cry sleep to death.

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JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Right thank you, thank you, I think we'll leave that scene now, thank you; Actually, you never stop.



PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

FX - storm and thunder

Lear is now on the heath, raging against the elements, with madness already evident. On thinking about the meaning of this speech, actor and director discuss a key problem about Shakespeare's language, its availability to the modern audience, and the degree to which double meanings can actually be conveyed.

LEAR

FX - storm and thunder

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, vaunt-carriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, singe my white head! And thou..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Can we do that again?

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes. Can I talk about one bit of text that seems to be very pedantic in here. It says 'sulphurous and thought-executing fires, vaunt carriers of oak-cleaving' - it sounds like an Indian take-away doesn't it?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

This speech has three words in it which are used for the first time in the English language as far as the Oxford Dictionary tells us. Thought-executing, means fires that go as quickly as thought, and that is the first time that compound is used. Vaunt carriers,

means boasting heralds or heralds that go before, that is.

JULIAN GLOVER

I absolutely understand that, but why cant..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

But I mean Lear uses and creates that word in order to express his mind. It's not an easy word, it is a word which he achieves which means that the thought-executing fires, the blinding flash of lightening is like your mind and that it is only the precursor of destruction. That's what it means, and Lear is functioning at a level that he is actually drawing on his word horde in a way which is compounded with strength and imagery.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Now I tell you all that, and we're trying to make it live off the page. What I'm saying is, don't be frightened of the, of the artificiality of that language, because it is expressing the energy of Lear's mind.

JULIAN GLOVER

Absolutely. I was just thinking in terms of contemporary comprehension.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes well.

JULIAN GLOVER

I see, and you've got your, you've got your meaning for 'thought-executing fires'. There is another meaning isn't there, which is fires which are so powerful that they even eliminate thought.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

O.K.

JULIAN GLOVER

I mean, nobody will understand the differences of meaning, that's what you are talking about isn't it? What we're hear.. what we're hearing is, is words that are coming out with a certain intention behind them.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

How do you make a contemporary audience actually understand exactly what you're saying? You can't.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

You can't. All you can do is to feed upon the images which are required. I think one needs to make a choice about 'thought-executing' meaning fires which actually make thoughts into deeds..

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

or um. . . . .

JULIAN GLOVER

Or destroy them.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Or destroy them, and I think you'd better make a decision, one or the other. I think this is a very positive speech. I would therefore go for the former one.

JULIAN GLOVER

Rather than destruction.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Rather than destruction, because it is going to do things for you in a minute.

JULIAN GLOVER

But he is talking, the whole speech is actually about destruction, isn't it?  
" .. you've drenched our steeple, drowned the cocks.."

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, but it is..

JULIAN GLOVER

"Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world, crack Nature's moulds.."

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, but..

JULIAN GLOVER

".. all gormens spill.."

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, but it is moving with your thoughts. You are not suffering under it.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yeah, I totally take that point, absolutely.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

And I think that's what's important to get.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yeah.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Can we do it again then, from the top?

LEAR

FX - thunder and storm

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage!  
Blow! you cataracts and hurricanoes,  
spout till you have drenched our steeples,  
drowned the cocks! You sulphurous and  
thought-executing fires, vaunt-curriers  
of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, singe my  
white head! And thou, all-shaking  
thunder, strike flat the thick rotundity  
o' the world, crack Nature's moulds, all  
germens spill at once that makes ingrateful  
man.

FOOL

FX /otd.

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house  
is better than this rain-water out o' door.  
Good nuncle, in; ask thy daughters'  
blessing. Here's a night pities neither  
wise men nor fools.

LEAR

FX /otd.

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout  
rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are  
my daughters. I tax you not, you elements  
with unkindness; I never gave you  
kingdom, called you children. You owe me  
no subscription; then let fall your  
horrible pleasure. Here I stand, your  
slave, a poor, infirm, weak and despised  
old man. But yet I call you servile

LEAR Cont.

ministers, that will with two pernicious  
daughters join your high-engendered  
battles 'gainst a head so old and white  
as this. Ahh 'tis foul!

CLOSING CREDITS:

1. Presented by  
Professor Graham Martin
2. Director  
John Russell-Brown
3. King Lear: Julian Glover  
Gloucester: Basil Henson
4. Kent: James Laurenson  
The Fool & Edgar: Karl Johnson
5. Production Assistant  
Anne Pearson  
  
Designers  
Paul Bannister  
George Wisner
6. Vision Mixer  
Moirra Brown
7. Lighting: John Fane  
Sound: Colin Tugwood  
VT Editor: Chris Dixon
8. Producer  
David Hoyle
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conserving the actors' energy in a very taxing role.

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(Julian Glover)

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JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K. very good. The contrast to the scene we've just done couldn't be more..

JULIAN GLOVER

Absolutely not.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

More, astonishing. I mean the first thing is the way his control over syntax,

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN Cont.

so what he has to say can contain a parenthesis and yet come to a full close. The marvellous way in which he can bring every degree, degree of attention down to that simple word "love" which is like the kind of trigger for the whole play. What he cares about here is not merely his power, but actually something very secret which is called love. A simple monosyllable, and there's a whole syntax in the metre of that speech that brings it all down to that crucial point.

JULIAN GLOVER

But what's amazing is that what he's doing at this advanced time in his life is to actually challenge them on the most important thing in the world, which is love, which is the most outrageous thing he could possibly do, and I think he's been working on it for a long time.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, and I was very interested as you did that. There was on your face a flicker of humour at the ironies, "... and we unburdened crawl towards death.." You're not going to crawl towards death - You're going..

JULIAN GLOVER

No way

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

.. hunting it with a hundred knights.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN Cont.

But you're saying that - I wonder whether that irony, that is the irony actually should, could in fact be more private, that you get the humour for yourself, but you will not show it to them!

JULIAN GLOVER

Oh well, that's interesting, um, one would have to debate whether it's more valuable..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Exactly..

JULIAN GLOVER

to show them the humour or not.

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Yes, in the strategy of the whold play I think its terribly, terribly difficult decisions, the sort of, there are about half-a- dozen decisions to make about this first scene, the one is that, could we..

JULIAN GLOVER

Yeah. It's also very interesting, that word he uses, " we express our darker purpose", he uses the word "darker" for the word "hidden", so he does put a mystery onto it anyway, doesn't he?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes well...

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Chooses the word "darker" rather than "hidden" or any other synonym.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

I think there's two ways of taking this first scene, one to take all... well two major ways, and this is a major decision - that is, to play the sub-text about darker purposes and the sly intention of putting them on the spot and judging them, and show us Lear enjoying doing that, which I think was the decision that you had made in that. I'd like to see you do it with the other decision, so that you use "darkest" in the most openest way, just take it as secret, and you just feed yourself the knowledge which you have within yourself, it will not be shown in the expressive quality of "dark" or "crawl", it will be shown in the way in which you are capable of keeping your own attention inside it.

JULIAN GLOVER

That's right, and also of watching them all the time for what they're doing.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

And you come to this extraordinary word - "love" - and what are they going to do about it.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, that's right

JULIAN GLOVER

How will these mere underlings cope with this one?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

Because I'm just about to give you the world.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes. Do you see if you play against that sub-text, I mean externally in the words. I think it tingles with that kind of consciousness which comes right down.

JULIAN GLOVER

Are you saying technically speaking, that you're suggesting that it should be rather blander?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

And more ordinary?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes. But inside your mind is very quick, your eyes are watchful and you are feeding on the ironies as you go through. Show as little of it as you can, except in the efficiency with which you speak.

JULIAN GLOVER

Right

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Just try it, see, see if that can be done.

KING LEAR

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose. Give me the map there. Know that we have divided in three our kingdom

KING LEAR Cont.

and 'tis our fast intent to shake all cares  
and business from our age, conferring them  
on younger strengths, whilst we unburdened  
crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall -  
and you, our no less loving son of Albany -  
We have this hour a constant will to publish  
our daughters' several dowers, that future  
strife may be prevented now. The princes  
France and Burgundy, great rivals in our  
youngest daughter's love, long in our court  
have made their amorous sojourn, and here  
are to be answered. Tell me, my daughters  
since now we will divest us both of rule,  
interest of territory, cares of state, which  
of you shall we say doth love us most, that  
we our largest bounty may extend where  
nature doth with merit challenge. Gonerill  
our eldest born, speak first.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K., O.K., OK.,

PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

Next, Act II Scene IV, Lear is now on the  
point of breakdown, what part in this  
process is played by Kent, or by his  
fool, or by Gloucester?

KENT

(James Laurence)

Um, why fool?

FOOL

(Karl Johnson)

We'll set thee to school to an ant to  
teach thee there's no labouring i'the  
Winter. All that follow their noses are  
led by their eyes, but blind men; and

FOOL Cont.

there's not a nose among twenty but can  
smell him that's stinking. Let go thy  
hold when a great wheel runs down a hill  
lest it break thy neck with following.  
But the great one that goes upward, let  
him draw thee after. When a wise man  
gives thee better counsel, give me mine  
again; I would have none but knaves use  
it, since a fool gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,  
And follows but for form,  
Will pack when it begins to rain,  
And leave thee in the storm;  
But I will tarry, the fool will stay,  
And let the wise man fly.  
The knave turns fool that runs away;  
The fool no knave perdy.

KENT

Where learned you this, Fool?

FOOL

Not in the stocks, fool

Enter Lear and Gloucester..

LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They are sick;  
they are weary? They have travelled all  
the night? Mere fetches, the images of  
revolt and flying-off. Fetch me a better  
answer.

GLOUCESTER  
(Basil Henson)

My dear lord, you know the fiery quality  
of the Duke, how unremovable and fixed he  
is in his own course.



LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death, confusion!

'Fiery'? What 'quality'? Why Gloucester, Gloucester, I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER

Well, my good lord, I have informed them so.

LEAR

Informed them! Dost thou understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

LEAR

The King would speak with Cornwall, the dear father would with his daughter speak, commands, tends; service. Are they 'informed' of this? My breath and blood! 'Fiery'? The fiery Duke? Tell the hot Duke that - no, but not yet! Maybe he is not well. Infirmity doth still neglect all office whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body. I'll forbear; and am fallen out with my more headier will to take the indisposed and sickly fit for the sound man. Death on my state! Wherefore should he sit here? This act persuades me that this remotion of the Duke and her is practice only. Give me my servant forth. Go, tell the Duke and his wife I'd speak with them - Now presently! Bid them come forth and hear me, or at their chamber door I'll

KING LEAR Cont.

beat the drum till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!

FOOL

Cry to it, muncle, as the cockney did to  
the eels when she put 'em i' the paste  
alive. She knapped em o' the coxcombs with  
a stick and cried 'Down, wantons, down!'  
'Twas her brother that in pure kindness to  
his horse buttered his hay.

LEAR

Ahq

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K. O.K. right  
crosstalking

PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

Cast and Director found themselves asking  
what relevance this play had to the modern  
world, and what elements in Shakespeares  
characters helped to project that  
modernity.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

.. I think we, all these people, exist  
today. I mean, I think Lear is really  
one of the plays which really demands to  
be done in modern dress, and to relate it  
to the world er, now, seems to me just as  
easy as to relate it to the Jacobean world  
or the early British world or whatever, and  
it does help, I think, to try and find

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN Cont.

the modern attitudes behind these words.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

I mean it's really the only way to live in this play I think.

JULIAN GLOVER

Well in fact that's the other way round isn't it. If you find the attitudes within the words, you will find they have modern connotations.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

That's right, that's right. Yes, yes.

JULIAN GLOVER

As always with Shakespeare.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

O.K. where can we take it from?.. "fiery duke" again?

BASIL HENSON

Why not, why not.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Is that alright, Basil?

KING LEAR

'Fiery'? The 'fiery' Duke? Tell the hot Duke that - no, but not yet! Maybe he is not well. Infirmity doth still neglect all office whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body. I'll forbear; and am fallen out with my more headier will to take the

LEAR Cont.

indisposed and sickly fit for the sound man.

KENT

My Lord ..

LEAR

Death on my state! Wherefore should he sit here? This act persuades me that this remotion of the Duke and her is practice only. Give me my servant forth. Go tell the Duke and's wife I'd speak with them - Now presently! Bid them come forth and hear me, or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!

FOOL

Cry to it, muncle, as the cockney did to the cels when she put 'em i' the paste alive. She knapped 'em o' the corncombs with a stick and cried 'Down, wantons, down!' 'Twas her brother that in pure kindness to his horse buttered his hay.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, O.K.

JULIAN GLOVER

. A mutter!

Laughter

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, I wonder what would happen if you actually collapsed on the floor at that stage, so that we have.. yes and so that

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

the fool is dominant just at that last,  
as he sees that....

KARL JOHNSON

Don't stay up

JAMES LAURENSEN

To follow that through I'll grab you  
when you're starting to go down

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes, yes.

KARL JOHNSON

I suppose you want him to get up again ?  
You want him to fight, you....

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

No, no, no You don't want.. the Fool  
doesn't want him to do anything except  
take cover on the heath, actually you  
live as a fool by your acceptance of  
the absurdity.

KARL JOHNSON

I don't want him to fight, I..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

.. want him to enter your world.

JAMES LAURENSEN

Is he not saying, is he feeling, that  
the action that Lear is proposing, to  
cry a sleep to death is really totally  
stupid, and lacking practicality. I  
mean, fine, if you're going to do that  
you might as well hit eels on the head!

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

That's right.

JAMES LAURENSEN

It's all silly

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes....

JULIAN GLOVER

It's very interesting, the point about what he wants to do is to get me into his world.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

Do you think that's the reason the fool disappears when he does, because Lear has then entered his world and he's not needed any more?

JOHN RUSSELL BROWN

Yeah, well I think so

JULIAN GLOVER

Because he does enter his world.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes and I think he goes beyond his world actually. I mean, he goes through the..

JULIAN GLOVER

He's totally fulfilled his task.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes absolutely. I believe so.

JULIAN GLOVER

It never occurred to me that, very good.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

So I think you're sort of in charge as it were at the end of this scene.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes, he is isn't he?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Could we do it from the...er. "where-  
fore should he sit here" could we do  
it from there?

LEAR

Wherefore should he sit here? This  
act persuades me that this remotion of  
the Duke and her is practice only. Give  
me my servant forth. Go tell the Duke  
and's wife I'd speak with them - Now  
presently! Bid them come forth and  
hear me or at their chamber door I'll  
beat the drum till it cry sleep to  
death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But  
down!

FOOL

Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did to  
the eels when she put 'em i' the paste  
alive. She knapped 'em o' the coxcombs  
with a stick and cried 'Down, wantons,  
down!' 'Twas her brother that in pure  
kindliness to his horse buttered his hay.  
laughter..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Right thank you, thank you, I think  
we'll leave that scene now, thank you;  
Actually, you never stop.

PROFESSOR GRAHAM MARTIN

FX - storm and thunder

Lear is now on the heath, raging against the elements, with madness already evident. On thinking about the meaning of this speech, actor and director discuss a key problem about Shakespeare's language, its availability to the modern audience, and the degree to which double meanings can actually be conveyed.

LEAR

FX - storm and thunder

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, vaunt-carriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, singe my white head! And thou..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Can we do that again?

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes. Can I talk about one bit of text that seems to be very pedantic in here. It says 'sulphurous and thought-executing fires, vaunt carriers of oak-cleaving' - it sounds like an Indian take-away doesn't it?

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

This speech has three words in it which are used for the first time in the English language as far as the Oxford Dictionary tells us. Thought-executing, means fires that go as quickly as thought, and that is the first time that compound is used. Vaunt carriers,



means boasting heralds or heralds that go before, that is.

JULIAN GLOVER

I absolutely understand that, but why cant..

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

But I mean Lear uses and creates that word in order to express his mind. It's not an easy word, it is a word which he achieves which means that the thought-executing fires, the blinding flash of lightening is like your mind and that it is only the precursor of destruction. That's what it means, and Lear is functioning at a level that he is actually drawing on his word horde in a way which is compounded with strength and imagery.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Now I tell you all that, and we're trying to make it live off the page. What I'm saying is, don't be frightened of the, of the artificiality of that language, because it is expressing the energy of Lear's mind.

JULIAN GLOVER

Absolutely. I was just thinking in terms of contemporary comprehension.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, yes well.

JULIAN GLOVER

I see, and you've got your, you've got your meaning for 'thought-executing fires'. There is another meaning isn't there, which is fires which are so powerful that they even eliminate thought.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

O.K.

JULIAN GLOVER

I mean, nobody will understand the differences of meaning, that's what you are talking about isn't it? What we're hear.. what we're hearing is, is words that are coming out with a certain intention behind them.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes

JULIAN GLOVER

How do you make a contemporary audience actually understand exactly what you're saying? You can't.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

You can't. All you can do is to feed upon the images which are required. I think one needs to make a choice about 'thought-executing' meaning fires which actually make thoughts into deeds..

JULIAN GLOVER

Yes

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

or um. . . . .

JULIAN GLOVER

Or destroy them.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Or destroy them, and I think you'd better make a decision, one or the other. I think this is a very positive speech. I would therefore go for the former one.

JULIAN GLOVER

Rather than destruction.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Rather than destruction, because it is going to do things for you in a minute.

JULIAN GLOVER

But he is talking, the whole speech is actually about destruction, isn't it?  
" .. you've drenched our steeple, drowned the cocks.."

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, but it is..

JULIAN GLOVER

"Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world, crack Nature's moulds.."

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, but..

JULIAN GLOVER

".. all germens spill.."

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Yes, but it is moving with your thoughts. You are not suffering under it.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yeah, I totally take that point, absolutely.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

And I think that's what's important to get.

JULIAN GLOVER

Yeah.

JOHN RUSSELL-BROWN

Can we do it again then, from the top?

LEAR

FX - thunder and storm

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage!  
Blow! you cataracts and hurricanoes,  
spout till you have drenched our steeples,  
drowned the cocks! You sulphurous and  
thought-executing fires, vaunt-carriers  
of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, singe my  
white head! And thou, all-shaking  
thunder, strike flat the thick rotundity  
o' the world, crack Nature's moulds, all  
germens spill at once that makes ingrateful  
man.

FOOL

FX /ctd.

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house  
is better than this rain-water out o' door.  
Good nuncle, in; ask thy daughters'  
blessing. Here's a night pities neither  
wise men nor fools.

LEAR

FX /ctd.

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout  
rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are  
my daughters. I tax you not, you elements  
with unkindness; I never gave you  
kingdom, called you children. You owe me  
no subscription; then let fall your  
horrible pleasure. Here I stand, your  
slave, a poor, infirm, weak and despised  
old man. But yet I call you servile

LEAR Cont.

ministers, that will with two pernicious  
daughters join your high-engendered  
battles 'gainst a head so old and white  
as this. Ahh 'tis foul!

CLOSING CREDITS:

1. Presented by  
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Gloucester: Basil Henson
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The Fool & Edgar: Karl Johnson
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