TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

General Editor: Michael Scott

The series is designed to introduce students to the themes, continuing vitality and performance of major dramatic works. The attention given to production aspects is an element of special importance, responding to the invigoration given to literary study by the work of leading contemporary critics.

The prime aim is to present each play as a vital experience in the mind of the reader – achieved by analysis of the text in relation to its themes and theatricality. Emphasis is accordingly placed on the relevance of the work to the modern reader and the world of today. At the same time, traditional views are presented and appraised, forming the basis from which a creative response to the text can develop.

In each volume, Part One: *Text* discusses key themes or problems, the reader being encouraged to gain a stronger perception both of the inherent character of the work and also of variations in interpreting it. Part Two: *Performance* examines the ways in which these themes or problems have been handled in modern productions, and the approaches and techniques employed to enhance the play's accessibility to modern audiences.

A synopsis of the play is given, and an outline of its major sources, and a concluding Reading List offers guidance to the student's independent study of the work.

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KING LEAR

Text and Performance

GĀMINI SALGĀDO

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[Gāmini Salgādo died shortly after the first publication of this book. His untimely death proves a great loss to contemporary Shakespearian studies. He is sadly missed.

—M.S.]

TO
FENELLA
WITH LOVE

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

For many years a mutual suspicion existed between the theatre director and the literary critic of drama. Although in the first half of the century there were important exceptions, such was the rule. A radical change of attitude, however, has taken place over the last thirty years. Critics and directors now increasingly recognise the significance of each other's work and acknowledge their growing awareness of interdependence. Both interpret the same text, but do so according to their different situations and functions. Without the director, the designer and the actor, a play's existence is only partial. They revitalise the text with action, enabling the drama to live fully at each performance. The academic critic investigates the script to elucidate its textual problems, understand its conventions and discover how it operates. He may also propose his view of the work, expounding what he considers to be its significance.

Dramatic texts belong therefore to theatre and to literature. The aim of the 'Text and Performance' series is to achieve a fuller recognition of how both enhance our enjoyment of the play. Each volume follows the same basic pattern. Part One provides a critical introduction to the play under discussion, using the techniques and criteria of the literary critic in examining the manner in which the work operates through language, imagery and action. Part Two takes the enquiry further into the play's theatricality by focusing on selected productions of recent times so as to illustrate points of contrast and comparison in the interpretation of different directors and actors, and to demonstrate how the drama has worked on the modern stage. In this way the series seeks to provide a lively and informative introduction to major plays in their text and performance.

MICHAEL SCOTT

PLOT SYNOPSIS AND SOURCES

i: Gloucester introduces his illegitimate son Edmund to a fellow-courtier, Kent. Lear decides to abdicate, sharing his kingdom among his three daughters in measure as they express their love for him. Goneril and Regan respond with hypocritical hyperbole, but the youngest, Cordelia, tersely affirms a dutiful filial affection. Lear, wrathful, disowns her, banishes Kent for defending her and divides his realm between Goneril and Regan and their respective husbands, Albany and Cornwall. Cordelia marries the French king. Edmund plans to dispossess his legitimate brother Edgar by poisoning Gloucester's mind against him. Lear goes to live with Goneril. To be rid of him and his retinue she encourages her servant Oswald to be insolent. The disguised Kent enters Lear's service. After a furious quarrel with Goneril, Lear curses her and departs to Regan's castle.

ii: Edmund convinces Gloucester of Edgar's disloyalty while persuading his brother to flee. Kent, on his way to Gloucester from Lear, quarrels with Oswald and is put in the stocks by Cornwall and Regan. Lear vainly protests at Kent's humiliation. Goneril arrives and the sisters insist that only Lear, without his knights, may lodge with them. Cursing, Lear departs into the stormy night.

iii: In the storm Lear inveighs against mankind. With his Fool and Kent he enters a hovel where Edgar meets them, disguised as a mad beggar. The deranged Lear holds a 'trial' of his daughters. Cornwall, learning from Edmund of Gloucester's loyalty to Lear, blinds him and is mortally wounded by a nauseated servant. Gloucester discovers Edmund's treachery.

iv: With Edgar's help, Gloucester reaches Dover, where he intends to commit suicide. Edgar thwarts this and kills Oswald who plans Gloucester's death. They meet the mad king who is restored to sanity and reconciled with Cordelia, arrived with the French army.

v: The invading French forces are defeated, but Edgar wounds Edmund mortally in single combat. Dying, Edmund vainly tries to countermand his orders for the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Goneril, jealous of Regan's love for Edmund, takes poison and dies. Edgar reveals himself and recounts his father's death. Lear enters bearing the dead Cordelia and dies, heartbroken, shortly after.

SOURCES

Elements in the story occur in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae* (12th cent., with French and English translations) and in Raphael Holinshed, *Historie of England* (part of the *Chronicles* published by him, 1577) – both of which treat of a legendary King Lear. A more immediate source is the anonymous play *The True Chronicle of the History of King Leir and his daughters* (printed c. 1590, reprinted 1605). (Llyr, a Celtic sea-god, figures in the Welsh *Mabinogion*.)