ACTORS' ROUNDTABLE

Acting Shakespeare
A Roundtable Discussion with Artists from the Utah Shakespearean Festival's 2007 Production of *King Lear*

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Featuring: J. R. Sullivan (Director), Dan Kremer (King Lear), Carole Healey (Goneril), Anne Newhall (Regan), Shelly Gaza (Cordelia), Michael Connolly (Gloucester), James Newcomb (Kent), and Tim Casto (The Fool)

Flachmann: Although *King Lear* has always been popular in the twentieth century, we've recently seen an unprecedented surge in productions of the play, with major mountings of the script during the past two years at the Denver Theatre Center, the Goodman, the Milwaukee Rep, the New York Shakespeare Festival with Kevin Kline, the Chicago Shakespeare Festival, BAM with Ian McKellen, and the Stratford Festival with Brian Bedford. Why such a renewed interest in the play at this particular time in our history. What special truths does the script have to teach us? What is it about this play that speaks so eloquently to us today? Jim, if I could start with you, sir?

Sullivan: Of course. Thanks to everyone for coming to our festival and being here for this symposium. The critic Jan Kott said a generation ago that of all the plays Shakespeare wrote, this was the most shockingly contemporary. I don't think he used the work "shocking," but I think we would have to do so now in retrospect, and he compared it brilliantly to Beckett's *Endgame* and Ionesco. There is a remarkable irony when you look at this wonderful creation of Shakespeare's poetic Renaissance imagination four centuries ago in juxtaposition to the disturbing video clips we see nightly on CNN highlighting the results of personal and political miscalculation, barbarous torture, and human cruelty.

The world we live in, with its imperious leadership and self-annihilating acts of terrorism, is reflected in Shakespeare's play when a seemingly banal act at the beginning of the story ruptures this perilously thin membrane between chaos and civilized order and sends the narrative hurtling down the hill. This is precisely what makes the play so perfectly relevant, beyond even the extraordinary genius of the author's poetic imagination and the truth of the human condition. We are constantly bombarded with information and surrounded with images that are present in this 400-year-old play. I believe that the theatres you mentioned, Michael, have responded in kind to the reality of our existence, as theatre always ought to and as theatre is uniquely equipped to do. It ought to jolt us with how meaningful it is and please us with how well done it is. I like for both to happen, and I think, by and large, we deliver them here; but the jolting is what I'm most interested in as a director. I think that's why this play has re-emerged the way it has lately.

***Kremer**:* I don't know that I have a great deal to add to that, except for the hope that a play that deals at its core with clarity of vision and an individual's refusal to see the truth in front of him might have significant resonances for us as a population right now.

***Healey**:* I've had the privilege of being in this play three times, and each time some new revelation has been presented to me. In this production, those revelations are coming on a nightly basis. When I'm not on stage and I'm on the deck listening to this play, waiting for my entrance, it thrills me. It's such a difficult play to do because you almost feel as though you could never come up to the genius of this work, and you feel that you fail nightly because you can never, ever come up to the perfection of this play. But on the other hand, the struggle to speak this play and to embody this woman, Goneril, and to present her force in the world is such an exciting challenge. I keep saying to myself, night after night, to just *be* there, be present, with these words, and push him out into the storm. That's my job, and I am trying to stop being conscious of myself. I've been on these panels before, and I spend my entire time defending Goneril's actions. There's a line that Regan says to Gloucester: 'O sir, to willful men / The injuries that they themselves procure / Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors." I realize that the people who have hurt me deeply in my own life have been my greatest teachers. And Lear could never realize, could never come into the clarity of vision he achieves without these schoolmasters.

Flachmann: That's excellent. Anne, any response to that first question?

Newhall: Theaters, when they are struggling to reach their audiences, often try to give them an umbilical connection to the text itself. For me, this play deals with aged parents, as I am doing in my own life right now. That perspective helped me identify with playing one of the daughters. It seemed to me to be the most vital connection from Regan's point of view. We don't know much about Lear as a father. But we (my fellow sisters and I) have all, of course, found our own arcs concerning what that might be and therefore what our jobs and points of view are in the first part of the play. That is how the play spoke to me. I think that avenue illuminates a reason why theaters might want to do such a classic as this, especially right now when their audiences are dealing with aged and infirm family members and such attendant concerns as living wills, Alzheimer's, and many other similar problems.

Gaza: A main reason this play speaks to me so eloquently today has to do with how Cordelia feels about what her father is doing to her and to her country. Frankly, without getting too political, I feel that very much in my daily life today. I feel love and loyalty toward my country even though I feel betrayed of late by those in power. And even though Cordelia is betrayed by her father, who is the ruler of the country, her loyalty remains steadfast. The idea of feeling disappointment in the authority in which we trust our lives seems particularly pertinent today.

Connolly: For those of us who were alive from 1987 until 1991, I think what we experienced with the failure of the last Soviet coup attempt in 1991 was an opening up of a possibility of a new kind of world, a new kind of arrangement with the failure of the Soviet Union and the disassembling of the Warsaw pact. I think that is one of the reasons why this play is back in business, because of the aggregation of "n" words in Lear, especially "no" and "never." I think for many people, today's future is not bright, is not wide open with possibilities; it is, in fact, rather grim. And this, to my mind, is the grimmest of all Shakespeare's plays. This is the third time I've done it. The second director I had said something that has stuck with me for some time now, which is that the next characters to walk onto the stage after the end of *Lear* are Vladimir and Estragon from *Waiting for Godot*. That seems to be an appropriate way of dealing with the ending of this play, and it embodies the attraction of it at this particular historical moment.

Newcomb: The great existential questions about artifice and authenticity run throughout Shakespeare, but they are most

profoundly expressed in *Lear* and *Hamlet*. All eras suffer fatally from the conceit of permanence, from the sense that our world will always be thus, and history, of course, has proven that's not the case. I guarantee that during first-century Rome, they thought there would never be a time when Rome wouldn't exist. I think this concept is particularly true in the Heath scenes in *Lear*, which I have found to be really extraordinary. I think for anybody who's ever played the Fool, Kent, Edgar, or Lear, there should be a "Brotherhood of the Heath." [laughter] There is something extraordinarily profound about that emptiness, that alienation from the world. Of course, the storm is an expression, a manifestation of what's happening in Lear's mind, but the concept is also true for many people in this country, particularly for those who are one paycheck away from homelessness. And here is a man who was King of the country, and he's alone in the wilderness. He has that profound sense that we all have, the "3:00 a.m. Syndrome," when you wake up and ask, "Why am I here?" "Why have I made the choices I've made?" And Shakespeare doesn't do this to bring us all down. [laughter] But these plays really put you into that framework, that mindset, and make you re-evaluate who you are. They ask the greatest existential question about identity: What's real and what isn't?

Casto: I actually agree with everything you said about the Heath. There should be a brotherhood of those who have had to do those scenes because they are quite exhausting. [laughter] The reason I think *Lear* is being done so often is that the violence is a result of the dysfunction in the play. For me, that's a mirror of what's happening in our society right now. I agree with Shelly: I've been on the Heath for a great number of years now, and I think directors around the country know they can use this play to make a personal statement.

Flachmann: Excellent. Thank you, Tim. We see as we always do that the greatest productions are founded in current events, even if they were written four hundred years ago. Anne brought up character arcs. I wonder if we could talk about those a little bit. Carole, I know you have some strong feelings about your particular character's journey in the play. I think it's appropriate to talk about this because we all paid $48 to see the show, and we want to be witness as the characters change and mature; beyond that, I suspect all of us in the audience want to change and mature through a kind of theatrical osmosis.

Healey: Almost everyone I meet after the show in the courtyard says to me, "You were so evil," and I just want to hit

them [laughter] because I realize I didn't do my job very well if that's what they think. If they can't see what it was like, if they can't use their imagination and listen to what Lear says to his daughters, then they're not paying enough attention. When he first asks us to tell him how much we love him, this is how he addresses the three girls: "Goneril, / Our eldest, speak first." "Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall." "Now, our joy."

***Flachmann**:* And that bothers you? [laughter]

***Healey**:* How do you think that would make you feel? And then shortly thereafter he's divided the country in three. Now traditionally, the eldest would get the biggest share or the whole shootin' match, especially if she has shown clearly that she is extremely intelligent and a powerful leader. I think Goneril inherited those characteristics from her father. And I know she would be an excellent leader of the country. She's politically savvy; she's always thinking two steps ahead of everybody else. Instead, he gives her, in our production, a Northern patch, quite small, and there's this laaaaarge swath [laughter] in the middle that has London in it, you know. And then there's this other Southerly patch, where it's warmer. I get the cold north near Scotland. And then, after I see what he does to his favorite daughter—how he treats her, how he banishes her forever, displaying the cruelest, harshest, most insane behavior—I say, I think rather prudently, to my sister, we've got to stick together: "If our father carries authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us." If your father exhibited that kind of behavior to his favorite child, wouldn't you be a little bit afraid for your own life?

Then he shows up at your house with one hundred knights and squires, and now that he's retired, he's ready to party. [laughter] He shows up with guys who are screaming for dinner: "Let me not stay a jot for dinner, aaaah, get it ready, aaaah." Can you imagine, coping with that kind of company in your house? Your father showing up with a hundred guys, not his own age, who might want to go to bed at a decent hour [laughter], but with a hundred young guys who are egging him on to more and more frat-boy behavior. And when I ask him to a little disquantity his train, he says "Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee . . . detested kite, thou liest," and he starts defending his men without ever considering that my request made any sense whatsoever. Never for a moment does he say, "O, I'm so sorry. You know what, let me send fifty of my guys just to a house down the road. Are we keeping you up? Are we upsetting your other servants?" [laughter] Not for a moment. [more laughter]

Kremer: I need to take a moment and straighten her halo. [laughter]

Healey: But after I take away fifty of his knights, he says, "Into her womb convey sterility; / Dry up in her the organs of increase." Can you imagine a father saying that to a daughter? To someone who obviously has no children? I'm sure he went exactly for the most vulnerable, hurtful, painful part of her life. So given all that [laughter], I think Goneril has a bit of a point, don't you? [laughter and applause]

Flachmann: I'm thinking maybe Mr. Kremer would like to respond to that. Am I right on that, Dan? Would you like a little equal time here?

Healey: Just don't call me names. [laughter]

Kremer: She didn't mention that little part about poisoning her sister, did she? [laughter] You know everything Carole said is quite accurate. And I think that productions achieve power when characters are not played in a stereotypical way. I've never seen the play very successfully done when you just have two evil sisters who team up and throw their father out of the house. The depth of characterization comes from understanding the motives of human beings. Goneril believes she's right, which sets in motion a believability of situation that allows all the characters to deepen and strengthen their roles in the play. From his perspective, Lear is right and justified in his actions as well.

The complexities of these relationships are so intricately woven, it's difficult for me to explain an overarching line of action. These are relationships that we discovered in the course of six weeks of rehearsals, working with one another moment by moment through the play. Each character behaves one way in one scene and then is affected by someone else and acts a different way in another scene. So as far as giving a picture of a character's arc through a story, I don't feel able to articulate that, but I do think that this production is greatly enriched by the talents of all of the actors up here and the actors who are not here today with us: the soldiers, the servants, the other characters who give the play such a living fabric, such a humanity. We all bring the play to life on stage.

Flachmann: Thank you, Dan. Anybody else want to talk about character arcs? Jamie?

Newcomb: I think Carole's adamancy about her perspective on Goneril is one of the reasons why her performance is so strong: You have to believe in the reality of your character in the play. I do find it interesting, though, that the contract is made concerning

the division of the country at the beginning of the play. Lear expressly reserves a hundred knights, and he has given his daughters each a third of the kingdom. The kingdom! [laughing] He's probably not the easiest guy to live with, and he's getting worse and more mercurial as time has gone on, and there are indications about the fragility of his mental state at the very beginning of the play. I find it interesting that Regan and Goneril say in 3.1, well, how about twenty-five knights; how about ten; or why do you need even one? And then suddenly there's a storm brewing, and the daughters don't say, "You know, the weather looks bad, dad. How about if you just come in until the storm passes?" So there is, for whatever reason, a true vindictiveness in the daughters that gets more pronounced as the play goes on. Whatever the provocation may be, the fact that the daughters send their father out into the wilderness in a horrific storm is cruel.

Flachmann: Let the record show that Ms. Healey was shaking her head "no" during that whole dissertation by Mr. Newcomb. [laughter] Anne.

Newhall: I am the understudy for the role of Regan, having joined the cast in performance immediately following opening due to a medical emergency in the family of the wonderful actress, Carey Cannon, originally slated to appear and who is blessedly returning to the show for the last three weeks of the run. I share this because I needed to define Regan very quickly with no rehearsal and on my feet in front of an audience during performance. And so what I did was in confluence with the blocking as I understood it to be. I'm not certain I understood it initially, but I was very kindly shoved by various actors [laughter] out of their light [more laughter] on certain nights. I needed to find my way, not only as the middle child, the middle daughter, but I literally needed to find the acting path between what would have been already taken up by these two lovely ladies [referring to Carole Healey and Shelly Gaza]. I needed to learn how to survive as a middle child would between these two.

And there were moments of identity with both Cornwall and Edmund that helped me move towards the developments that happen in our part two [Shakespeare's acts 3, 4 and 5]. Regan's acme, her brief moment of "triumph," is the counting down of knights with her sister in 2.4. Goneril and Edmund become her obstacle and obsessive compulsion, respectively, in part two as she devolves into a disaffected, violent creature of bloodlust. She learns her sadism from Cornwall and the bloodlust from Edmund, whom Cornwall brings into their household, their "camp," and with whom

she falls into violent infatuation and more. That's how I found my arc, by nightly learning from both audience and fellow company members on my feet what I needed to contribute to the storytelling. I am not certain there is yet an inevitable logic to her arc. I don't think I'm in a position to know because I'm still learning at such a fast and furious pace. I cannot yet be as fierce an advocate for my character as I would like to be, but I do think that's always our job.

***Flachmann**:* Thank you, Anne. That was great. Michael, you have a fascinating arc as Gloucester. I think you move from fairly blunt comments about your bastard son to "I stumbled when I saw." Anything you want to talk about there?

***Connolly**:* In "The Casket" by Plautus, the prologue says, "Get up and stretch your legs. A long play by Plautus is about to begin." But I'm going to talk movingly about the most underappreciated character in the play, Gloucester. No, I'm not. [laughter] After you get the call and you have the contract to play Gloucester in *Lear*, you try to wipe your slate clean and pick up the text as if you'd never read it before and just react intuitively to the situations he's in. One searches in vain for serious critical treatments of Gloucester's life. I mean, there just aren't any, so you go ahead and do a search, and there aren't that many articles about Gloucester. When you read the play, you pretty much know why, because for three acts there's not a lot of memorable poetry. In the two other productions I've been in, the memorable poetry in 3.7 [the blinding scene] was cut to the bone. What you get out of your mouth is "Because I would not see thy cruel nails / Pluck out his poor old eyes," and we move to the blinding. Thank you, Jim—and thank you, God—for giving those fifteen lines their full weight! So, for an actor playing Gloucester, the most immediate thought that comes into your mind is how to honor the structural demand of this character, which is that the Gloucester-Edmund-Edgar part of the play, that triangle, must have some presence, and I think that's what I start off with.

What is the key to this guy that will give an arc to the play and will also hopefully create a character whose contribution to the narrative enriches and renders more complex that theatrical experience? Luckily, somewhere around early March I actually opened my ears again and heard the phrase, "Our good old man." And from that point on, I tried to construct textually the nuances of this first scene in which he's not a very "good old man" talking about his bastard son in the way he does. What is "good" about Gloucester? And when do the wheels fall off the cart, and what

happens as a result of that? So, that's the fun part, and then you bring all that homework into rehearsal on the first day, and you see what Jim has in mind. Because you know that's really what it's about. It's about this extended conversation or negotiation, in some cases, with your director and with your colleagues, because you're not a solo act.

That's what I love about the theatre. You're in there plotting out your particular piece of business before, and it's like Clausewitz's first dictum on war: you know, all plans evaporate at the sound of the first bullet and all planning evaporates [laughter] at the moment of the first rehearsal because then you've got to be open to the experience, you've got to be able to say "yes" to everything that's going on around you. Happily in my case, a lot of the long-term thinking about Gloucester bore fruit because I was in a place where people were willing to deal with the homework I had done. And also the wonderful thing about playing a character like Gloucester is that not too many people pay attention to him, so there aren't very many hard and fast ideas about how the role ought to be played.

Flachmann: Excellent. Thank you. A few literary scholars who don't know much—nobody at this conference, of course [laughter]—have argued that *King Lear* is unactable, unplayable. As someone involved with the rehearsal process, I would say the script is admittedly challenging and difficult, but certainly actable. I wonder if you could talk about which scenes were the toughest to stage and why.

Sullivan: I think most recently it was Harold Bloom who said that, and he was echoing Charles Lamb, who, I think, said it first. I look to Granville Barker on this question, who points out that Shakespeare was a very practical man of the theatre. He wrote the play to be acted. That ought to count for something. [laughter] Every character in the play is conceived as a part of the theatrical puzzle; everybody makes sense in the universe of this play. Peter Brook observed that Shakespeare doesn't take anybody's side; he makes everybody right in his or her own mind. That's because Shakespeare was both a writer and an actor. It's one thing to read the play and be struck by its force and beauty, its nihilism and its power, but relying on the "read" only removes one from the mimetic force of the play. Being physically present to that language on stage, among each other and in the audience, takes us beyond the sublime experience of reading the play into an entirely different world of grandeur and excitement. Nobody owns this work. Eachone of us comes to it in our own time, and it will surge on beyond us and last because of its strength as a piece to be performed.

Flachmann: Wonderful. Dan, the toughest scenes to do? Could you pick one and tell us how you solved it? Or is the whole play just immensely difficult? [laughter]

Kremer: I think the scenes on the Heath and that world of increasing madness and isolation where chaos reigns is one of the strangest experiences to go through as an actor on stage and is sometimes physically disorienting. I think early on we found that coming out of those scenes was a little jarring. It just upsets everyone's equilibrium, and rightly so. I hope that is the effect those scenes have on the audience, too.

Flachmann: Thank you. Carole?

Healey: The Fool has this line that he says to Kent when he's in the stocks: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill lest it break thy neck with following." For me, that's the sensation of the inevitability of the play. Jamie and I did a very rigorous hike on Sunday, one of those hikes in which you had to look carefully where you were placing your feet or you might break your leg. It was strewn with boulders and branches and other hazards, and every now and then you would stop and look up, and it was so majestic and beautiful that you had to catch your breath. But then you had to go back to that task of placing one foot in front of the other and overcoming each obstacle, each boulder. That's what it's like to be in this play, I realized. It's like going down a precipitous, dangerous path every single night. In our first scene when Dan says, "How now, daughter? What makes that frontlet on? / You are too much of late i' the frown," I love what Shakespeare does, because he has this very strange line ending, and I realize if I'm very strict with the verse, I do myself a great service in terms of the acting: "Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool, / But other of your insolent retinue / Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth / In rank and not-to-be-endured riots." The line ends with the word "sir," which implies that she stops herself because all this anger and frustration is tumbling out of her; the injustice of what's she's had to endure is tumbling, tumbling, tumbling, and she has to stop herself on that line-ending as if she's on the edge of a cliff. There's never any time to think in this play. The action is always on the line and with the line and through the line. And if you stop to have a "moment" as an actor, you do the play a horrible disservice. The sheer inevitability, the force of this play, will take you on an amazing journey which makes it hard to breathe. It's difficult physically to act these scenes, but the play will take you where it wants to go.

Flachmann: Thank you Carole. Anyone else have comments about scenes that are difficult to stage. Jamie?

Newcomb: I found it tough to commit fully to the circumstances of the Heath scenes until we had an audience. We sort of halted, bungled our way through it, dropped lines; it never had any consistency or flow to it until we were actually able to commit to being in that storm and in those circumstances, which were physically exhausting. One of my insights about the function of Kent is that he's like Horatio in many regards: He's the audience. He watches a great deal of the play as you do. We see him and see the action of the play though his eyes as well.

The first scene with the disowning of Cordelia is a terrible event, and then my own banishment follows because I can only speak truth to power. Kent is a pragmatic man. I've always been able to speak directly to Lear, but suddenly I'm banished and make a statement about how I'm going to shape my "old course in a country new." So Kent is the essence of loyalty. But one of the truths I find interesting about the arc of Kent is the analogy of the Wheel of Fortune. You think life can't get worse, and then it does. When you think the wheel has made its turn to the bottom, often times it hasn't. And the glorious moment of reconciliation between Cordelia and Lear, when he comes out of madness and sees her, recognizes her for who she is and apologizes, is a stunning moment, and there's a feeling that the wheel has finally moved back up for Kent; and of course that's not the case. In the end, I think Kent becomes the audience for the play.

Flachmann: Thank you. Michael, perhaps a word from you, sir?

Connolly: I just want to make a comment about whether this is an actable play. Margreta DeGrazia did a great job on her deconstruction of the Shakespeare industry in the nineteenth century, on the *primus principia* of critics taking over the study of Shakespeare as opposed to letting it live in the theatre, where it was actually having quite an interesting life at the time. And one of my old mentors, Roger Hertzel, made a very good case, both in class and in print, that if ever a playtext were the detritus of a live performance, we have it in Shakespeare. This is totally unlike Ben Jonson, who oversaw the publication of his complete works because he was bucking for poet laureate.

We're actually dealing with texts that may be several removes from their original author, so to privilege textual examination over theatrical performance is an incredibly old-fashioned idea that we really don't need to get into any more. I have colleagues teaching

in the English department who refuse to deal with Shakespeare's texts as playhouse documents, who will not allow questions from our students about the theatrical history or the theatrical moment in which these plays were produced, and I just think that's probably not very constructive. [laughter]

Flachmann: Could you have them strung up as soon as possible? [laughter] Tim, do you see the Fool as standing for some particular trait within the character of Lear?

Casto: No. The reason I say so is because as an actor that isn't something I feel I can play. What I am able to play as the Fool is that my fate is tied to Lear's fate because he has been my benefactor, and I love him. As he rose, I rose with him. I function as a truth teller, not unlike Kent. I think I get away with a lot more than Kent because I am the Fool; I have a license to tell the truth. So I have to think of myself as the truth teller. What happens to Lear is what happens to the Fool. If he loses his power and his place, I lose mine, too.

Flachmann: I think that's a brilliant answer that illustrates the fascinating gap between literary questions and theatrical solutions to those questions. Thank you, Tim. Jamie, what's loveable about this old man?

Newcomb: When Caius first meets the king, he asks if I know him, and I reply "No, sir, but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master." He has an innate nobility, the authority of a king, which everyone recognizes and respects. This is all back-story, which is something interpretive that can be conceptualized in many different ways in that first scene. What I play is that there have been signs of deterioration. I remember him from earlier days. And this decision to split the country up and give away his power is not a wise choice in my opinion. There are three truth tellers, really. The Fool, Cordelia, and myself speak the truth and are punished for it ultimately. So it's an intangible quality that Lear has, and I am loyal to that to the end.

Flachmann: Great. Michael, do you want to chime in on that?

Connolly: In answer to an earlier question, did you see *Der Untergang, Downfall*? It's a German film that came to America I think two years ago, which features Bruno Ganz playing Adolf Hitler in the last two weeks of the Reich. There's a brilliant scene where Magda Goebbels goes to her sleeping children who have all been drugged and puts cyanide capsules into their mouths and holds their little jaws together so the children will all die. I mean she kills her children, and this is a loving mother! So it seems to

me that *King Lear* begins with these kinds of inconsistencies. If you were in Germany in the 1920's when it was riven by internal dissent, if you were there when your country was humiliated at the Versailles Treaty, and this charismatic person came along and said, "Here's the future; I can make it happen"—to be at that moment is one thing, but to be at the end of that sequence is another thing.

Shakespeare very clearly gives two titles to Lear's two daughters: one in the farthest southwest of the kingdom and one in the farthest north of the kingdom. So there's this implicit sense in the play that Lear has been a unifier. He has created a kingdom out of nothing, and the people who were there at the beginning in the "Beer Hall Putsch" of the reign are Kent and Gloucester, the last two survivors standing. So we've had lifelong loyalty to this man, and Gloucester has a habit of loyalty, a habit of allegiance. So even when Lear retires, Gloucester still tries to find a way to move his house forward in the power system and in 3.3 makes his first real moral decision in the play when he says, "No, I'm not going to go along with the way they're treating Lear; I'm going to try and save my old friend the king." So I think there's sufficient evidence in the script for Kent and Gloucester and the Fool that they have been part of an enterprise that was flourishing, positive, and beneficial for everyone, and there was also a great deal of personal loyalty forged in that relationship. It's not just about the accumulation of power.

Flachmann: Thank you Michael. Shelly?

Gaza: Cordelia knows her father well enough, I believe, to realize that he's not himself in that first scene. When she returns from France to search for her father, she hopes to find the man she remembers from her childhood, the man who has been absent for so long. In the end, no matter what he has done, Cordelia will always love Lear because, most simply, he is her father.

Flachmann: Is there a pecking order among the three daughters?

Healey: Where are all the mothers in this play? Because there's no one else around, I think Goneril certainly mothers Regan. We decided during rehearsals that Cordelia was always just a little different than the other girls. She was what we called "a tree hugger." [laughter] There's obviously a deep-seated love between Lear and Cordelia. When he banishes Kent in our production, Lear picks up his sword and says, "O, vassal! Miscreant!" It's a very violent moment in the play. Regan rushes to me, and I protect her. And Jim has always had Cordelia be a little bit separate on stage from her sisters. In that first scene, there's a lot of fear in

terms of what's going to happen. He starts laying down the law, and my feeling is, "Whatever you say, dad. I will do whatever you say. Just don't kill me. Don't hit me. Don't banish me. Don't take everything away from me. I will agree to anything you say. And I will be obedient." Now all Cordelia had to do was to say "I love you, dad," and everything would have been fine. [laughter]

Newhall: Since I was not part of the rehearsal process, I made my own psychological peace with how I should act as the middle sister. I was the absolute darling of my father's eye till the death of our mother, whom my father does mention in 2.4 to me. I know my sister is coming to join us, but Dad doesn't. This helps me anticipate the strength and support I'm going to get from Goneril, my surrogate mother, when she finally does arrive. I know I'm his darling (relative to her), and I feel those early speeches in 2.4 with my father show that he sees a remembrance and devotion to my mother as a weakness in me, which provides a way for him to get to me, to secure me on his "side," until, of course, Goneril does arrive and the dialogue between the two sisters reveals their collusion and their enmity one with the other. That's how I placed her as the middle sister.

Flachmann: How about Shelly and then Jim?

Gaza: Carole brings up a great point: Cordelia, like Goneril and Regan, is very like her father. She's strong-headed and willful and doesn't always say the right thing, which gets her into trouble. She's not just a nice, sweet, come-and-save-your-father-at-the-end-of-the-play kind of character. She has grit to her that she shows when she says farewell to her sisters. She also displays it when she tells Burgundy off for rejecting her. She certainly is her father's daughter in that sense. However, being the baby of the sisters means that she was probably loved and coddled by her father in a way that her other sisters weren't. So she inherited the strong-willed part of her father, but she also got emotion from him, too, which is probably why she's capable of having more of an emotional arc than the other sisters have. That's how being the baby changed her.

Sullivan: I just want to make a couple of short observations about the family relationship of the play. It's a circle that comes back to Lear from oldest daughter through youngest daughter. And they are all alike. The first storm of this play is in the first scene, in which Cordelia says I will be patient and say nothing. And in the storm on the Heath, Lear says I will be patient and say nothing. Whatever love was once there and whatever loyalties existed based on what Lear did for the country, all that is now changed.

This is an eighty-year-old man who is no longer able to reign. All of these ideas I agree with. Whatever that back-story is, the one constant is the need for love, the human requirement for love. When you read the Old Testament in the patriarchal story of the prophets, there's a constant demand of Israel from the "All-Loving God," and the primary sin is loving somebody else or having another idol before Him. The wheel of the play is that you have an enormous sense of universal forces being played out in individual fears and passions. And this is what makes it emotionally stunning.

Flachmann: Carole and Shelly, how has inheriting a new middle sister affected the dynamic of the play?

Healey: Yes, it was a huge change. Anne is such a different actor than Carey, even though she is doing the same blocking and making the same choices Carey made because Anne didn't participate in the rehearsal process. But she has to connect her own humanity to the character of Regan, which makes everything different. I feel in so many ways more protective towards Anne as Regan. She's more vulnerable than Carey was. Carey was slightly aloof, as if she wasn't going to show all her cards to me. I feel Anne is much more vulnerable and in need of protection, and I have that instinct to take care of her more. In the scene with Lear, when he says, "I gave you all," and she responds, "And in good time you gave it," it's like she's pulling a knife out of her heart. It hurts her terribly to have to say that to her dad. Carey played it more strongly, and she justified her action because she had to wait so long for her inheritance. Intellectually, she said that's why I'm justified in doing what I'm doing. With Anne, it's more of a painful choice for her. So you have two actresses taking a very different approach to this particular moment in the play. You put a different actress into that middle role, which is so pivotal, and everything changes. It's fascinating!

Gaza: Well, the problem about Cordelia is that she doesn't actually interact very much with anybody in the play except for Lear and Kent. Anne and I just have a very brief conversation in that first scene. So a very blunt answer to the question is that it didn't affect me much because we don't get a chance to act very much on stage together. But the process has been very interesting for me because most of my play is backstage. I come on in the first scene, and then I have an hour and fifty minutes off to make tea and hang out in the Green Room [laughter], and I listen to the show over the monitor. Much of my show is based on what I hear, which has been a really interesting experience for me. I've never gone through a play in quite that way before. In regard to how

having Anne in the cast has affected the chemistry of the play, I notice subtle differences in the character of Regan, but the overall dynamic of the play has remained essentially the same.

Flachmann: I can't possibly thank you guys enough for taking time out of your busy schedules to come here and talk with us today. How about joining me in a hand for these wonderful actors and this great director? [applause] You're all so incredibly articulate and insightful, and listening to you talk helps us so much to get inside the play and inside your skins for a little while. We appreciate that opportunity very much. I also want to thank Michael Bahr, Matt Nickerson, Jess Tvordi, and everyone else who's helped put together the Wooden O Symposium. And thanks so much to everyone for coming to this festival that we all love so much. [applause]