

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21L.016 / 21M.616 Learning from the Past: Drama, Science, Performance  
Spring 2009

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

# Nahum Tate's "The History of King Lear"

## Excerpt from Act III

### *Gloster's Palace. Enter Bastard.*

*Bast.*

The Storm is in our louder Rev'lings drown'd.  
Thus wou'd I Reign cou'd I but mount a Throne.  
The Riots of these proud imperial Sisters [50]  
Already have impos'd the galling Yoke  
Of Taxes, and hard Impositions on  
The drudging Peasants Neck, who bellow out  
Their loud Complaints in Vain — Triumphant Queens!  
With what Assurance do they tread the Crowd.  
O for a Tast of such Majestick Beauty,  
Which none but my hot Veins are fit t' engage;  
Nor are my Wishes desp'rate, for ev'n now  
During the Banquet I observed their Glances  
Shot thick at me, and as they left the Room [60]  
Each cast by stealth a kind inviting Smile,  
The happy Earnest — ha!

*Two Servants from several Entrances deliver him each a Letter,  
and Ex.*

[*Reads.*

Where merit is so Transparent, not to behold it  
Were Blindness, and not to reward it Ingratitude.  
Gonerill.  
Enough! Blind, and Ingratefull should I be

Not to Obey the Summons of This Oracle.

Now for a Second Letter.

[*Opens the other.*

If Modesty be not your Enemy, doubt not to

Find me your Friend.

Regan.

Excellent *Sybill!* O my glowing Blood! [70]

I am already sick of expectation,

And pant for the Possession — here *Gloster* comes

With Bus'ness on his Brow; be husht my Joys.

***Glost.***

I come to seek thee, *Edmund*, to impart a business of Importance; I knew thy loyal Heart is toucht to see the Cruelty of these ingratefull Daughters against our royal Master.

***Bast.***

Most Savage and Unnatural.

***Glost.***

This change in the State sits uneasie. The Commons repine aloud at their female Tyrants, already they Cry out for the re-installment of their good old King, whose Injuries I fear will inflame 'em into Mutiny.

***Bast.***

'Tis to be hopt, not fear'd.

***Glost.***

Thou hast it Boy, 'tis to be hopt indeed,

On me they cast their Eyes, and hourly Court me

To lead 'em on, and whilst this Head is Mine

I am Theirs, a little covert Craft, my Boy,

And then for open Action, 'twill be Employment  
Worthy such honest daring Souls as Thine.  
Thou, *Edmund*, art my trusty Emissary,  
Haste on the Spur at the first break of day [90]  
With these Dispatches to the Duke of *Combray*;  
[*Gives him Letters.*]  
You know what mortal Feuds have alwaies flam'd  
Between this Duke of *Cornwall*'s Family, and his  
Full Twenty thousand Mountaners  
Th' invetrate Prince will send to our Assistance.  
Dispatch; Commend us to his Grace, and Prosper.  
***Bast.***

Yes, credulous old Man,  
[*Aside.*]  
I will commend you to his Grace,  
His Grace the Duke of *Cornwall* — instantly  
To shew him these Contents in thy own Character, [100]  
And Seal'd with thy own Signet; then forthwith  
The Chol'rick Duke gives Sentence on thy Life;  
And to my hand thy vast Revenues fall  
To glut my Pleasure that till now has starv'd.  
***Gloster going off is met by Cordelia entring, Bastard observing  
at a Distance.***  
***Cord.***

Turn, *Gloster*, Turn, by all the sacred Pow'rs  
I do conjure you give my Griefs a Hearing,  
You must, you shall, nay I am sure you will,  
For you were always stil'd the Just and Good.  
***Glost.***

What wou'dst thou, Princess? rise and speak thy Griefs.  
***Cord.***

Nay, you shall promise to redress 'em too, [110]  
Or here I'll kneel for ever; I intreat  
Thy succour for a Father and a King,  
An injur'd Father and an injur'd King.

***Bast.***

O charming Sorrow! how her Tears adorn her  
Like Dew on Flow'rs, but she is Virtuous,  
And I must quench this hopeless Fire i'th' Kindling.

***Glost.***

Consider, Princess,  
For whom thou begg'st, 'tis for the King that wrong'd Thee.

***Cord.***

O name not that; he did not, cou'd not wrong me.  
Nay muse not, *Gloster*, for it is too likely [120]  
This injur'd King e're this is past your Aid,  
And gone Distracted with his savage Wrongs.

***Bast.***

I'll gaze no more — and yet my Eyes are Charm'd.

***Cord.***

Or what if it be Worse? can there be Worse?  
As 'tis too probable this furious Night  
Has pierc'd his tender Body, the bleak Winds  
And cold Rain chill'd, or Lightning struck him Dead;  
If it be so your Promise is discharg'd,  
And I have only one poor Boon to beg,  
That you'd Convey me to his breathless Trunk, [130]  
With my torn Robes to wrap his hoary Head,  
With my torn Hair to bind his Hands and Feet,

Then with a show'r of Tears  
To wash his Clay-smear'd Cheeks, and Die beside him.

***Glost.***

Rise, fair *Cordelia*, thou hast Piety  
Enough t' atone for both thy Sisters Crimes.  
I have already plotted to restore  
My injur'd Master, and thy Vertue tells me  
We shall succeed, and suddenly.

[*Exit.*

***Cord.***

Dispatch, *Arante*, [140]  
Provide me a Disguise, we'll instantly  
Go seek the King, and bring him some Relief.

***Ar.***

How, Madam? are you Ignorant  
Of what your impious Sisters have decreed?  
Immediate Death for any that relieve him.

***Cord.***

I cannot dread the Furies in this case.

***Ar.***

In such a Night as This? Consider, Madam,  
For many Miles about there's scarce a Bush  
To shelter in.

***Cord.***

Therefore no shelter for the King, [150]  
And more our Charity to find him out:  
What have not Women dar'd for vicious Love,

And we'll be shining Proofs that they can dare  
For Piety as much; blow Winds, and Lightnings fall,  
Bold in my Virgin Innocence, I'll flie  
My Royal Father to Relieve, or Die.

[*Exit.*

***Bast.***

Provide me a Disguise, we'll instantly  
Go seek the King: — ha! ha! a lucky change,  
That Vertue which I fear'd would be my hindrance  
Has prov'd the Bond to my Design; [160]  
I'll bribe two Ruffians that shall at a distance follow,  
And seise 'em in some desert Place, and there  
Whilst one retains her t' other shall return  
T' inform me where she's Lodg'd; I'll be disguis'd too.  
Whilst they are poching for me I'll to the Duke  
With these Dispatches, then to th'Field  
Where like the vig'rous *Jove* I will enjoy  
This Semele in a Storm, 'twill deaf her Cries  
Like Drums in Battle, lest her Groans shou'd pierce  
My pittying Ear, and make the amorous Fight less fierce. [170]

[*Exit.*