

## CHAPTER 3: TAKING THE WOMAN'S PART: THE PROBLEM OF MISOGYNY IN *KING LEAR*

If you want to know what any culture thinks of women, read its representations. Read the theatre. Read Cordelia. Read the body.

(Carol Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage*, 2001)

### Introduction

This chapter focuses upon the textual misogyny of *King Lear* (1605) and three ways in which it has inflected contemporary performances of the play. The first section analyses the dramatic text. It points to the difficulties the text's misogyny presents for performance, but also to dramatic and theatrical means by which this might be challenged. The next section focuses on the Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II (TNDM) production of the play in 1998. It argues for a new translation of the play that enables actresses to challenge the misogyny of the text more effectively and discusses the responsibilities of a national theatre in relation to women performers and women in the audience. The production itself did not explicitly identify misogyny as a problem. However, the ways in which the actresses prepared for their roles saw them dealing with problems inherent in the misogyny of the text. Moreover, the mechanics of the TNDM company structure and the priorities of this particular production made it difficult for them to construct a coherent challenge to this in performance. The third section examines the extent to which cross-gender casting might alter the sexual dynamics of the play by looking at Kathryn Hunter's performance of Lear in 1997. The final section explores what happens when the text is completely rewritten for performance out of a

perceived sense that the text is unrecoverable for women. It analyses *Lear's Daughters*, written by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group and performed by them in 1987. It suggests that such a strategy might also have a resonance in a Portuguese context.

### **I. The Textual Misogyny of *King Lear***

Adrienne Rich has written of misogyny as “organized, institutionalized, normalized hostility and violence against women”.<sup>1</sup> Howard Bloch defines misogyny as “a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate the more general term”. Consequently, “any essentialist definition of woman (...) is the fundamental definition of misogyny”.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I am considering misogyny to be an extreme manifestation of patriarchy that denies women even a basic humanity. I argue that such misogyny structures the representation of women in *King Lear*. In this sense, I am extending earlier feminist critical work which pointed to the patriarchal assumptions of the play. Ann Thompson, for instance, has noted that whereas Edmund's behaviour is explained, and to a certain extent justified, by the social ostracism that accompanies his bastardy, Goneril and Regan are simply ‘evil’ in a way that is not explained further:

He (Shakespeare) does not allow them to point out wrongs done to them in the past as eloquently as Shakespeare does, or to question the

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<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Rich, from a 1981 letter to Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson about the publication of her 1979 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, included in Henry Abelove *et al* (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> Howard R. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 4, 6.

fairness of their society's distribution of power as articulately as Edmund.<sup>3</sup>

Kathleen McCluskie's article "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*" (1985) places discussion of the text's patriarchal assumptions within a theatrical rather than exclusively textual context. It urges feminist criticism to concentrate on "the narrative, poetic and theatrical strategies which construct the play's (*King Lear*'s) meanings and position the audience to understand their events from a particular point of view".<sup>4</sup> In other words, "the focus of critical attention (...) shifts from judging the action to analysing the process by which the action presents itself to be judged" (95). However, McCluskie recognises the difficulty of finding a point of entry into *King Lear* for feminist criticism. The narrative constructs an identification of the reader or spectator with Lear which increases as the play progresses. This means that they judge events from his perspective and condone his demonisation of Goneril and Regan as unnatural and monstrous. With the drama so heavily weighted in favour of Lear and his view of "filial ingratitude", arguing a case for Goneril and Regan thus threatens to overturn the dramatic balance of the play. As McCluskie astutely points out:

A feminist reading of the text cannot simply assert the countervailing rights of Goneril and Regan, for to do so would simply reverse the emotional structures of the play and equate feminist ideology with atavistic selfishness and the monstrous assertion of individual wills. Feminism cannot simply take "the woman's part" when that part has been so morally loaded and theatrically circumscribed. (102)

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Thompson, "Are There any Women in *King Lear*?" in Valerie Wayne (ed.), *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen McCluskie, "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*" in Jonathan Dollimore & Alan Sinfield (eds.), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 92. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this article are indicated in parentheses.

Moreover, the condemnation of the two sisters is universalised to women in general, who are made responsible for the chaos of Lear's kingdom in a series of increasingly hostile remarks. Lear's characterisation of his madness as "the mother" (II, II, 246) which must be controlled and his dismissal of tears as "woman's weapons" (II, II, 465) are early indications of this.<sup>5</sup> It reaches a climax in his speech on the hypocrisy of the "simp'ring dame", who publicly abhors adultery, but privately indulges to excess so that "(t)he fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to't with a more riotous appetite". From this example of a specific "type" of woman, Lear moves to chastise all women:

**Lear:** Down from the waist they are centaurs, though women all above. But to the girdle do the gods inherit, beneath is all the fiend's: there's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption! Fie, fie, fie! Pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination. There's money for thee. (IV, VI, 120-127)

The contempt and disgust for women expressed in this statement is heightened by the fact that such an antipathy grows in tandem with his increasing understanding of what it means to be human. This linkage of the human exclusively with the male is something no-one in the all-male society surrounding him challenges. Indeed, Albany's angry confrontation with Goneril (IV, II) and Edgar's moralistic comments on women's lust (Act IV, Scene VI, 266) further build the case against women in general through the demonisation of the two sisters. It is this elision from individual women to all women, and the equally subtle elision from the male to the human that leads me to characterise the play's structure as misogynistic.

Such misogyny is particularly evident at the ending of the play. No woman is left living in the 'new' society of Edgar and Albany. A distracted Lear praises

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<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, The Arden Shakespeare, R. A. Foakes (ed.), (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

Cordelia's soft voice, which he labels "an excellent thing in a woman" (V, III, 271), although it is only "soft" because she is dead. Goneril and Regan have destroyed each other. To further emphasise the point, the bodies of the three dead sisters are all onstage in an uncanny parody of the first scene, where, as Carol Rutter points out, "the problematics of female speech" come to matter once more.<sup>6</sup> The misogyny of *King Lear* has destroyed every woman character in the play and cast the patriarchal power of the state as the only way to hold such chaos at bay. Therefore, as McCluskie concludes in relation to *Measure for Measure*, though it could apply equally to *Lear*, "Feminist criticism of the play is restricted to exposing its own exclusion from the text". (97) The consequences of this exclusion are, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

## II. Playing Against the Text

A crucial question to address, therefore, is to what extent it might be possible to counter the text's misogyny when it is so much a part of the drama's narrative and emotional structure. Marina Warner's examination of the demonisation of women in contemporary society suggests that no counter strategy can recast this demonisation positively:

The mythology of ungovernable female appetite can't be made to work for women; ironies, subversion, inversion, pastiche, masquerade, appropriation – these postmodern strategies all buckle in the last resort under the weight of culpability the myth has entrenched.<sup>7</sup>

Despite having written for theatre herself, Hélène Cixous suggests that attending theatre is invariably a problematic experience for women:

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<sup>6</sup> Carol Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p.17.

<sup>7</sup> Marina Warner, *Six Myths of our Time: Managing Monsters: The Reith Lectures*, (London: Vintage, 1994) p.11.

How, as women, can we go to the theatre without lending our complicity to the sadism directed against women, or being asked to assume, in the patriarchal family structure that the theatre reproduces *ad infinitum*, the position of victim? <sup>8</sup>

Feminist performance theory, however, has suggested that it might be possible to counterpoint the sexual politics of canonical drama through performance. Penny Gay, for example, claims that the only way an actress can play against the text is “by investing all the textualities of the production (speeches, costume, body language, how she inhabits the stage space and how she relates with the other performers) with her own energy, in a sense by *fighting for her role*, as the embodiment of a *particular* woman enclosed in a narrative that pretends to be universal” (author’s emphasis). <sup>9</sup> In other words, the more the actress constructs a particular, individualised woman character in performance, the less effective the essentialising pronouncements of the text become.

In relation to *King Lear*, constructing an anti-misogynistic reading of the play in performance first entails an unsettling of notions of textual linearity and an exploration of the text’s fragmentation. Peter Brook has argued that *King Lear* is “not a linear narrative, but a cluster of relationships” where the play does not deal with the straightforward triumph of good over evil, but instead “seems concerned with the sclerosis opposing the flow of existence, of cataracts that dissolve, of rigid attitudes that yield, while at the same time obsessions form and positions harden”. <sup>10</sup> Brook’s perspective enables, for example, family relationships to be viewed as important, but not the only form of relationship the play explores. It also emphasises the way that relationships change rather than remain constant. This has the advantage of not demonising all challenges to established patriarchal power as inherently evil or

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<sup>8</sup> Hélène Cixous, “Aller à la Mer”, trans. Barbara Kerslake, in *Modern Drama*, 4 (1984), vol. 27, p. 546.

<sup>9</sup> Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare’s Unruly Women*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1968), pp.102-3.

harbingers of chaos. Moreover, it downplays a focus on Lear and the patriarchal view of events he represents, as just one “cluster” among various. This allows alternative perspectives to emerge more forcibly in dramatic terms. Regan and Goneril’s actions, therefore, take place within a general setting where “obsessions form and positions harden”, rather than just representing the actions of inexplicably wicked characters. More generally, in a society that is characterised by “the sclerosis opposing the flow of existence”, misogyny can be represented as among the forces that prevent flow and growth, along with the seeming inability of that society to envisage a viable role for those of Lear’s age. This complicates audience identification with Lear for his violent outbursts against women puncture the sympathy engendered by his age.

As Peter Brook also points out, although productions tend to play the first scene as heavy with premonition of the evil to come, this is not the only reading the text offers. Brook notes that in Goneril’s first speech to Lear, there is nothing which is marks it as evil:

The words are those of a lady of style and breeding accustomed to presenting herself in public, someone with ease and social aplomb. As for clues to her character, only the façade is presented and this, we see, is elegant and attractive. (...) In fact, if Goneril in her first appearance does not play a “monster,” but merely what her given words suggest, then all the balance of the play changes – and in the subsequent scenes her villainy and Lear’s martyrdom are neither as crude nor as simplified as they might appear.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, when Goneril first confronts Lear in her household, it is *his* commentary on her speech that constructs it as unnatural for the audience. The speech itself is, in fact,

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Brook (1968), *Op. Cit.*, p. 16. The Folio version of the play differs from the Quarto version(s) in this respect. Six lines from the Quarto, where Goneril is much more personally hostile to Lear are cut in the Folio and later in the play, Goneril and Regan both have speeches in the Folio edition which extend Goneril’s complaint about Lear and his knights to include arguments about the safety of the household. These do not exist in the Quarto. As R.A. Foakes suggests, the effect of the Folio version “is to provide Goneril and Regan with a more reasonable basis for their attitude towards their father in these scenes”. C.f. R.A.Foakes (1997), *Op. Cit.*, p. 144.

really rather reasonable. Indeed, in Brook's famous 1962 production of *King Lear*, he highlighted the rowdiness of Lear's hundred knights in order to emphasise Goneril's difficulty in maintaining control over her household when her authority is undermined by a wilful father. A contemporary audience might not find it difficult to understand the problems generated by having a cantankerous older relative share the same living space, especially when that relative has not in his own mind given up his previous hold on power.

Certainly, from this moment onwards the text makes it more difficult to sustain a more tempered reading of Goneril and Regan. Yet, it is not necessary to make the two sisters virtuous or ignore the suffering they impose to illustrate some of the dilemmas of their position as women. Although power is technically handed over to Goneril and Regan, this access to power is mediated through their husbands. Any act of disobedience on the part of women, however small, is construed as indicative of chaos. Effectively, this leaves women the choice of hypocrisy or silence. Such a double standard also operates in the area of sexual relations. It does, after all, take two to tango, in this case three, but Goneril and Regan, as overtly desiring sexual subjects, are condemned as monstrous and lustful, whereas for Edmund, his involvement is perceived as yet another sign of his adroitness. The absence of Cordelia for a large part of the drama also means that there are no positive representations of women during this long section of the play.

Yet even when the sisters are played as straightforwardly evil, other performative possibilities emerge from the text. Lear identifies similarities between Goneril and Regan, but he dismisses any similarities between them and himself. However, performance could illustrate that rather than representing the negation of Lear, family traits make Lear's daughters very much *his daughters*. Goneril's verbal



aggression is certainly redolent of her father's bullying, and Regan's casual cruelty and impulsiveness are qualities also found in Lear. Lear's speeches insist heavily on how "unnatural" the two daughters are, but if this were to be countered in production by a network of physical and kinetic similarities between father and daughters, a useful dramatic tension could be established to challenge Lear's self-serving characterisation of Goneril and Regan as unlike himself. In fact, such resemblances surface in the text. Lear acknowledges Goneril is "my flesh, my blood, my daughter" even when he likens her to "a disease that's in my flesh,/Which I must needs call mine" (II, II, 411-12). Similarly, the Fool reminds Lear of their essential similarity in difference:

**Fool:** I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are,  
They'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have  
me whipped for holding my peace" (I, IV, 173-6)

Would it not also make lines like Lear's 'Are you our daughter?' (I, IV, 210) even more dramatic if Goneril and Lear were seen to have evident physical similarities?

Together with establishing clear performance parallels between Lear and his daughters, it seems useful to distinguish Regan and Goneril from each other as far as possible rather than playing them as the rather pantomimic pair of ugly sisters productions often favour. McCluskie suggests the impossibility of recovering Goneril and Regan without aligning oneself with their acts, but some of the best theatrical roles in Shakespeare are those of the evil rather than the good characters. Given the choice, would not most actors rather play Edmund than Edgar? Why, then, should actresses not simply enjoy playing the malice of a Goneril or a Regan? If both sisters are played as evil, but differently so, the greater the chance that Lear's universalizing comments on women are discredited. This is because the two sisters are sufficiently dissimilar to make generalisation about all women suspect.

There remains, of course, Cordelia, whose dramatic potential is rarely brought out in performance. Neither Thompson nor McCluskie deal in detail with Cordelia, but more recent critical work, such as Carol Rutter's *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (2001) and Phillippa Berry's *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings* (1999) have devoted entire chapters to her. She does represent potentially the greatest challenge to the text's misogyny, as she embodies the paradoxical qualities of being female, good, and disobedient. In the first scene, Cordelia's obdurate refusal to "heave/My heart into my mouth" (I, I, 91-2) is as much the emotional and dramatic core of the scene as Lear's wounded incomprehension of her response. A dramatic swerving of the audience's sympathies between the two characters is already built into the text and offers the possibility of challenging Lear's dominance with a female position that discredits Lear's views on women. She also represents the most effective way to create a theatrical concentration of female energy and strength that is not linked to evil. Carlos Porto refers to her as a Brechtian character, in the sense that her plight throws into relief the chaos in the society which brings about her death.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that she does not appear onstage for a large part of the play hampers her ability to function in the way Porto suggests. This being said, her appearance in only three brief episodes of the play is not cast in stone for performance. The idea that the same actor might have played Cordelia and the Fool in early modern productions seems unlikely. Yet there have been several actresses who have played the Fool in contemporary productions. Might not the doubling of the Fool/Cordelia act as a conduit for audience awareness during the scenes in which "Cordelia" is absent and thus create a sense of dialectic in performance? If audience identification is consistently complicated between Lear and Cordelia/the Fool, it cuts across fixed gender

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<sup>12</sup> Carlos Porto, "O Sonho do Rei" in *Jornal de Letras* (28th Jan–10 Feb, 1998), p.8.

identifications and obviates the need to equate the masculine with the human which the dramatic text seems to require. Moreover, her presence during Lear's misogynistic outbursts would provide an obvious counterpoint to the universalizing premise of such views.

### **III. The Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II (TNDM) production of *Rei Lear* (1998)**

#### **III. I. The Case for a New Translation**

Translations of *King Lear* can either help to bring out some of these performative possibilities or submerge them more deeply. In terms of the TNDM production of *Rei Lear*, Paulo Eduardo Carvalho has suggested that the theatre could have spent some of its budget on a new translation of *King Lear* rather than on other elements of the production.<sup>13</sup> There are several translations of *King Lear* available but I would also agree that there is a need for a new translation of the play that reconsiders how existing translations create the women's roles.<sup>14</sup> The first Portuguese production of the play in 1904 used an adaptation by Júlio Dantas which was published in 1905 as *Rei Lear: Adaptação em 7 Quadros e em Verso da Tragédia em 28 Cenas e em Prosa de Shakespeare* (Lisboa: Viúva Tavares Cardoso) and reprinted in 1924 and 1939.<sup>15</sup> As indicated in the title, this is a free adaptation of *Lear* rather than a translation. In this version, Gonerill actually tells Edmund to come to her bed at night, (Act V), Edmund insinuates to Regan that she should eliminate Gonerill (Act VII), and the two sisters

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<sup>13</sup> Carvalho suggests that the fact that a new translation was not contemplated among other possibilities indicates the lack of importance attributed to translation generally. C.f. Paulo Eduardo Carvalho, "Pérolas, Esferas e Círculos: A Tradução de Teatro" in *Teatro Escritos 2: Está Tudo Bem Com o Teatro em Portugal?* (Lisboa: Cotovia, 1999), p. 58 note 34.

<sup>14</sup> The Biblioteca Nacional lists twelve translations of the play from this century. See Figure 3 in the introductory chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Maria João da Rocha Afonso calls Dantas' text a "dramatic adaptation" rather than a translation. See Rocha Afonso, "As Versões Portuguesas de *King Lear*" in João Almeida Flor, *Colóquio Sobre Shakespeare* (1987), (Lisboa: Gulbenkian, 1990). p. 75.



**Cordelia:** Se inda existem em vós sentimentos humanos  
Piedade! Respeite um velho d'oitenta annos! (Act VII)

(**Cordelia:** If you still retain some human tears  
Then pity a man of eighty years!)

The need for rhyme also leads to some rather strained vocabulary choices, such as when Gonerill tells Oswald:

**Gonerill:** Ides partir – Dizei  
Ao duque e a minha irmã que decidamente  
Eu não posso aturar este velho demente. (Act I)

(**Gonerill:** Go – Tell  
the Duke and my sister that as far as I can  
I will no longer stand this demented old man)

Just as translations which are exclusively in prose can be repetitious, the same can be true of translations exclusively in verse. Both remove the possibility of introducing differentiations between the characters and between situations. Gonerill, for example, speaks in the same register whether she is at home giving orders or seducing Edmund. Nevertheless, one positive quality of an adaptation such as this is as a reminder of just how open the text of *King Lear* can be if translators/adaptors allow it to be so. For example, Dantas places Lear's speech about the "simp'ring dame" in a context where the ladies of Gloucester's household pay homage to Lear and kiss his hand. Thus, each of the women that pass by is a specific example of womanhood. This allows an audience to measure the truth of Lear's statements against specific figures rather than women in the abstract.

There is also a translation of the play by the historic leader of the Portuguese Communist Party, Álvaro Cunhal. It formed part of a collection of Shakespearean

translations written between 1961 and 1966 and was not originally credited to him as he was imprisoned by the dictatorship at the time. It was, however, later printed with his name in 2002 as *O Rei Lear* (Lisboa: Caminho). Cunhal's translation of the play is in prose and aims to introduce lay readers to the works of Shakespeare with its careful notes and accessible vocabulary. In his introduction, Luís de Sousa Rebello notes two contradictory aims in the translation. The first is "faithfulness to the original" while the second is that it be read "with the fluency of a dramatic text which had been conceived of in Portuguese". Nevertheless, it negotiates these two concerns reasonably well.<sup>17</sup> The more immediate problem is that it is not a version for the stage, but a version to be read. Members of the TNDM company organised a dramatised reading of the translation in 2003 which appeared to bear this out. Cunhal also shows a certain prudery in his translation of the two sisters. He translates Edgar's "O indistinguished space of woman's will" (IV, VI, 266), for instance, as "Oh, limites *indefensíveis* da sensualidade da mulher" (my emphasis, 168), moralistically making the unbounded limits of women's lust "indefensible". He also seems unable to bring Cordelia completely to life and includes a translation error at a crucial moment of the play. Lear's line about the dead Cordelia is conveyed as: "A sua voz foi sempre suave, afável e branda: excelente coisa uma mulher," (Her voice was ever soft, /Gentle and low, *an excellent thing a woman*, (my emphasis, 197)

The translation used for the TNDM's 1998 production of the play was a 1973 version by Ricardo Alberty (Lisboa & São Paulo: Verbo), from which an adaptation for the stage was prepared by Maria João da Rocha Afonso.<sup>18</sup> Rocha Afonso noted in interview that Alberty's translation was originally also written to be read rather than

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<sup>17</sup> Luís de Sousa Rebello, "Introdução" to *O Rei Lear*, (Lisboa: Caminho, 2002), pp.8,9. Subsequent quotations from Cunhal's translation have page numbers indicated in parentheses.

<sup>18</sup> Maria João da Rocha Afonso had worked with Carlos Avilez on the 1990 Teatro Experimental de Cascais production of the play. With Carlos Avilez the Director of the TNDM in 1998, she was invited once more to work on the play at the TNDM.

staged. Its long phrases and archaic word choice made it difficult for actors to speak and it seemed to her ‘heavy’ and ‘unperformable’ as a result.<sup>19</sup> Whereas for the 1990 TEC production of the play, she had only been asked to make the translation more flexible for performance, her adaptation for this later production ‘turned the text upside down’ so that it became almost ‘a new translation’.<sup>20</sup> Director Richard Cottrell had wanted to restore some of the ‘roughness’ to the text, and director and translator worked together closely to make Alberty’s translation less difficult to speak onstage and the language more sexual and more violent. Having compared Alberty’s original translation with Rocha Afonso’s adaptation, there does not seem to be as much of a thoroughgoing revision of the translation as Rocha Afonso suggests, at least not in terms of the women’s roles in the play. Her changes appear to be of two major kinds. The first is to shorten the long phrases in Alberty’s translation and to make their construction more colloquial for the stage. The second is to replace words that are no longer used, sound strange to a contemporary audience or have changed their meaning. A minor example of the latter comes in the first scene. The King of France’s assertion that Cordelia is “Most choice forsaken” is translated by Alberty as “sendo tão *deliciosa*, abandonada” and Rocha Afonso substitutes “*valiosa*” for the rather old-fashioned “*deliciosa*”. Rocha Afonso does cut several problematic phrases from Alberty’s translation. She removes an unprompted comment from Regan after the gouging out of Gloucester’s first eye that “O último a rir, é quem ri melhor” (‘he who laughs last, laughs longest’).<sup>21</sup> She removes an unnecessary addition by Regan to Edmund that she does not want him to be “intimate” with Goneril “no verdadeiro sentido do termo” (in the true sense of the word,

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<sup>19</sup> Personal interview with Maria João da Rocha Afonso, (16/2/2004). Subsequent quotations from this interview are indicated in single quotation marks. She suggested Alberty’s translation might have been used because the TNDM had a financial agreement with Alberty’s estate.

<sup>20</sup> Rocha Afonso said in interview that for this production, they worked from the Second Quarto and removed all that was not in it ‘with an almost mathematical rigour’.

<sup>21</sup> Ricardo Alberty, *Rei Lear; Macbeth*, (Lisboa & São Paulo: Verbo, 1973), p. 128. Subsequent quotations from this translation have page numbers indicated in parentheses.

170). She removes Lear's patronising reference to Cordelia in the final act as "minha tontinha" (my little fool, 191), a phrase that now also sounds quite dated. She also restores Cordelia's beautiful musical analogy when she talks of Lear's "untuned and jarred senses", which Alberty had removed.<sup>22</sup> However, the changes introduced by Rocha Afonso do not fundamentally alter Alberty's translation. Indeed, it is often more difficult to alter an existing translation than to create a new one. However many changes there are for the better, it still bears the marks of Alberty's original unwieldy translation with the worst excesses removed. Moreover, the scene where the audience hears indirectly of Cordelia's reaction to the events that have sent Lear mad is completely cut for the production, removing one of her already reduced 'appearances' in the play.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a cut made during the later rehearsal process removed the phrase "coisa adorável numa mulher" (an excellent thing in a woman) which follows Lear's comment on the qualities of the dead Cordelia's voice. This represents a tacit acknowledgment by the performers of how inappropriate this can sound to a contemporary audience at a crucial moment in the play.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth asking how a new translation could contribute further towards challenging the misogyny of the text. The case for some form of 'intervention' in the text is not hard to make. Like directors and performers, translators make choices about what changes they make in the text each time they translate. Translations which are to be performed always make cuts, and when the notorious inconsistencies between the Folio and Quarto texts of *King Lear* are added into the equation, it is not difficult for translators to resist charges from directors of unnecessary interference in 'the' text. The

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<sup>22</sup> Rocha Afonso translates this line from IV, VII as "Harmonizai o desconcerto dos sentidos desafinados de um pai regressado à infância". C.f. Maria João da Rocha Afonso, unpublished adaptation of Ricardo Alberty translation for the TNDM production of *Rei Lear* (1998), p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> Act IV, Scene III is present in the Quarto but not the Folio. As R.A. Foakes notes "The Cordelia of the Folio is a less prominent figure than in the Quarto, where the emphasis is on her 'heavenly' quality (4.3.31), but more active and warlike." C.f. R.A. Foakes (1997), *Op. Cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>24</sup> From the TNDM prompter's copy of the play, p. 172.



Folio versions of early scenes in Acts I and II could be included, for instance, so that Goneril and Regan present a sustained case for the difficulty of living with Lear and his hundred knights. In terms of other translation choices, cutting Lear's misogynistic speeches seems to me a negative solution to the problem. Actresses might also find it more difficult to fight for their roles against a less flawed Lear. Two other solutions present themselves. Firstly, it is important that the translation of Lear's role is matched by a similar energy in the translation of other roles, particularly that of Cordelia. In the translations under discussion, the attention given to Lear in terms of word choice and poetry is much greater than that given to those characters who appear with him. In Act IV, Scene VII, for instance, Cordelia's vigorous speech on the pity her sisters should have felt for Lear includes references to "warring winds", "deep dread-bolted thunder" and the "most terrible and nimble stroke/Of quick cross-lightning". The TNDM stage version, however, included only "a fúria dos ventos" (p. 147) which does not adequately bring out the cosmic drama of Cordelia's speech. Revealingly, no cuts are made to Lear's speeches in this scene. Cordelia and Lear share two important lines in the same scene (To be my child Cordelia/And so I am, I am) and (You have some cause, they have not/No cause, no cause), but in a prose translation the utterances become separated by full stops and the relationship between the comments becomes less taut. This brings me to my second point, which is that there needs to be sufficient formal variety in the translations in order to individualise different characters. This is particularly so in the case of Goneril and Regan. Prose alone is not varied enough to convey these differences and some speeches demand a form of verse. Examples would include Goneril's controlled speech to Lear asking him to check the behaviour of his knights or Regan and Goneril's carefully structured replies to Lear in the love test. In this way, translation could provide actresses with sufficiently nuanced language for different situations, as

well as the possibility of creating moments of beauty and dramatic tension in their performances.

### **III. II. “A Tiny Piece in a Very Large Puzzle”: Performing at the TNDM**

The beginning of the 1990's saw several productions of *King Lear* in Portugal after a long period in which the play was performed on average once a decade. Reasons for this spate of productions are discussed in the introduction, but apart from these external factors, there was a strong internal reason for the choice of play at the TNDM. The actor Ruy de Carvalho was a senior member of the TNDM resident company who had always cherished the dream of playing Lear. He had played Edmund in the 1955 Teatro Popular staging of the play, and in 1990 he played Thomas Bernhard's Minetti, a character who, paradoxically, spends the whole play not getting to perform the part of Lear. Carvalho's retirement from the TNDM and decoration by the President for 50 years of work in the theatre prompted the choice of the play as a vehicle for him. The extent to which the production was considered his production can be seen in the press coverage, which often effected a subtle elision between Carvalho's professional career and his dramatic role. This can be seen, for example, in the much-used newspaper headline “Rei Ruy” (King Ruy). On a darker note, it has also been suggested to me that it was Carvalho's disagreement with director Declan Donnellan's conception of the play that led to him being replaced by the less controversial Richard Cottrell.

The resident company at the TNDM was already rocked by crisis by the time their *Rei Lear* was produced in 1998 and this crisis worsened in the years following the

production.<sup>25</sup> Without a budget increase for a considerable period of time, essential repairs to the building and replacements within the existing theatrical company had not been carried out for several years. Eventually, in 1999, the TNDM workers took strike action to improve their pay and conditions. Carvalho criticised the theatre administration at the time in an interview for Radio Renasçenca and somewhat ironically, his comments were dismissed by the administration as the words of a “retired citizen”.<sup>26</sup> In this context of this long-term crisis, the programming of the theatre tended towards the conservative, with the theatre intent on selling its productions in the media and at the box office. This conservatism is evident in some of the production choices for *Rei Lear*. Firstly, the translation used for the production was an existing one by Ricardo Alberty, spruced up dramaturgically by Maria João da Rocha Afonso, when it might have benefited the production more to commission a new translation. Existing resources were used to invite English director Richard Cottrell to direct the production. Cottrell had considerable experience in directing Shakespeare and had been Artistic Director of the Old Vic in England. Without questioning his credentials as a director, it is important to consider why he was invited for the production and what he actually achieved. Essentially, Cottrell’s role was to give the production a veneer of English theatre respectability that would enable the TNDM to sell its Shakespearean product to the public. There are several references in the press, for instance, to the production being directed “à boa moda inglesa” (in the good old English way). Such references act as shorthand guarantees of the ‘quality’ of the production. Cottrell spent two months rehearsing with the company, assisted by Portuguese production assistant, Graça Corrêa. This kind of one-off theatrical exchange is becoming increasingly common

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<sup>25</sup> The production ran from the 23rd January 1998 to the 3rd March 1998. At the time of *Rei Lear*, the TNDM’s resident company still existed, but discussions were underway to break it up. In the new millennium, the resident company was reduced to an eight-member “quadro de actores”.

<sup>26</sup> Frederico Duarte Carvalho, “Greve no Palco” in *Tal e Qual*, 1999. From the TNDM archive.

when theatres have the budgets to do so. Much is claimed for it as a way of sharing skills and knowledge. Yet I would argue that its importance to the production often remains superficial. Patrice Pavis has been highly critical of what he refers to as “pan-European self-protective huddling”. He claims it is often restricted “to accumulating capital, multiplying selling points, and confirming national stereotypes and the standing of the actors”.<sup>27</sup> These points are particularly relevant in the case of *Rei Lear* given the financial crisis of the theatre company, the invitation to an English theatre director to direct the production and the notion of the production as a vehicle for Carvalho. Indeed, almost all the press coverage concentrated on Carvalho, reproducing endlessly repetitive stories about his life and career. Many of them focused on the relationship with his son, João de Carvalho, who played Kent in the production. This effectively eclipsed the rest of the actors. The only other performer who attracted press attention because he was well-known through his television work was Diogo Infante, the actor who played Edmund.<sup>28</sup> With two such media-friendly stars, the chances of other actors gaining audience or critical attention were almost non-existent.

Such a process was consolidated by the mechanics of the TNDM company itself. For those employed within it, despite recent job cuts, it remained basically a State-funded job for life. Indeed, it bore a rather disturbing resemblance to other public sector jobs, with its own sharply-defined company hierarchy and structure for career progress. This structure was based on five levels, A-E, and the importance of an actor’s public profile is stressed in the regulations outlining promotion within that structure:

Promotion of actors takes into account their artistic value, their probity and professional discipline, their evolution in creative terms

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<sup>27</sup> Patrice Pavis, “Intercultural Performance in Theory and Practice” in Goodman with de Gay (eds.), *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p.106. The production was certainly successful at the box office with 14, 756 spectators seeing the 32 performances.

<sup>28</sup> I discuss Infante’s portrayal of Edmund in detail in Chapter Seven.

and *the impact of their roles on the public*, along with analysis of their artistic curriculum (my emphasis).<sup>29</sup>

Howard Becker points out that the structure in which such “integrated professionals” are included tends to perpetuate itself as it “takes away their (the actors’) ability to respond to challenges or introduce innovations”.<sup>30</sup> Rui Mendes, who has performed at the TNDM and elsewhere, acknowledges that work at the TNDM is inevitably more “comfortable” than in other companies and the director Manuel Romano has stated that “(w)hen you work in a theatre like the ‘Nacional’ (and this is my experience), fundamentally everything works almost by itself. You go there and you are a tiny piece in a very large puzzle”.<sup>31</sup>

Even when, as was the case with *Rei Lear*, TNDM productions mixed ‘convocados’ (actors belonging to the house company) and ‘convidados’ (actors from outside this structure who are invited to take part in particular productions), the hierarchy within the company tended to prevail. In her articulate sociological study of theatre in Portugal, Vera Borges describes watching rehearsals for a production at the TNDM.<sup>32</sup> She notes the way that the process of theatrical blocking, where actors walk through their movements on stage with the director was conditioned by what she calls “symbolic blocking”. This is a process where actors with longer careers in the company demand the spaces most visible to the audience and positioning near or at the front of the stage. Borges even recounts an incident witnessed during rehearsals where an older actor informed a younger one “if you don’t mind, I really would prefer it if you didn’t

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<sup>29</sup> “A promoção dos actores tem em conta o seu valor artístico, a probidade e a disciplina profissional, a evolução em termos criativos e a projecção das representações junto do público, assim como, a análise do seu *curriculum* artístico”. Quoted in Vera Borges, *Todos ao Palco: Estudos Sociológicos sobre o Teatro em Portugal*, (Lisboa: Celta, 2001), p. 131, note 125.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Vera Borges, p.65.note 14.

<sup>31</sup> “Quando trabalhas num teatro como o Nacional (e isto é a experiência que eu tenho), no fundo, aquilo funciona quase por si próprio: vais lá e es uma peça ínfima de um *puzzle* muito grande”. *Ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> Borges accompanied rehearsals for São José Lapa’s production of Howard Barker’s *Cenas de uma Execução* (*Scenes from an Execution*), a production that preceded *Rei Lear* by six months. It ran from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1997 at the TNDM.

pass by in front of me”.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the company hierarchy tended to superimpose itself upon performances at the TNDM. In *Rei Lear*, for example, the social position of each character was made clear in the first scene by their positions at a large table. These positions echoed each actor’s position within the TNDM hierarchy. Carvalho was centre stage. The company actresses playing Goneril and Regan were seated at either end of the table with the actors playing their husbands on either side of the king. The younger company actress playing Cordelia sat somewhat awkwardly at one end of the table, visibly isolated.

As this suggests, the hierarchical working environment at the TNDM also contributed towards a marginalisation of actresses, particularly younger ones. In interview, the actress Lucinda Loureiro, who has worked within the TNDM as well as in other companies, commented on the specificity of being an actress within the national theatre:

In the ‘Teatro Nacional’, as actresses, we only really have to concern ourselves with being actresses, in other words with *looking as pretty as possible and being well turned out*. What I mean is we have to look good and present a good image. You have to be just an actress. You don’t have to concern yourself with the scenography or anything (my emphasis).<sup>34</sup>

This not only implied a de-skilling of the work of actresses at the TNDM, it also involved women members of the company in something of a vicious circle. They were encouraged to play their roles almost decoratively, in such a way that they did not ‘interfere’ with the larger male roles. However, the fact that they were not central to the productions meant they did not progress within a hierarchy which took into account the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.143.

<sup>34</sup> “No Teatro Nacional, enquanto atrizes, só temos de nos preocupar realmente em ser atrizes, e ser o mais bonitas possível, estar o mais arranjadas possível. Quero dizer, devemos estar bem, dar boa imagem. Tens de ser só atriz, não tens de te meter na cenografia, nada”. *Ibid.* p.127.

popularity of actors with audiences and the complexity of the roles the actors had played.

### III. III. Physical Performance Texts as a Challenge to Textual Misogyny

In her discussion of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Penny Gay has speculated on how the structural marginalisation of women within the company affected the representation of the Shakespearean women characters created there:

The actresses who perform these major roles must always feel outnumbered – patronized or disregarded - and respond at some level of their performance to this disempowerment with submission, aggression, defensiveness or irony<sup>35</sup>

Although Gay's point is made in relation to an English company and in relation to Shakespearean comedy, I would argue that it has a wider validity to theatrical structures in other cultural contexts, such as the Portuguese TNDM. Certainly, the actresses within the company found their theatrical roles circumscribed by their marginalisation within the company and by expectations of how female roles should be played. This helps to explain elements of both passivity and aggression in their performances in *Rei Lear*.

In interview, Paula Mora, who played Regan in the production, noted that the character was so distant from what prevailing moral standards consider a woman should be, that she first had to overcome her own aversion to the character in order to create the role.<sup>36</sup> Mora did not downplay the evil of Regan, but sought instead to find an appropriate means of expression for it onstage. This involved, firstly, an identification of the particular energy of the character. Mora is also a yoga instructor, and for this performance she centred her representation of Regan on the shakra around the belly.

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<sup>35</sup> Penny Gay (1994), *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview with Paula Mora, (2/3/2001).

This is an area of the body which is also very much connected with sensuality. From there, she built up a view of the character as instinctive and spontaneous in her cruelty, rather than consciously evil. This portrayal of a Regan who is almost childlike in her cruelty tied in with the wider view of humanity in *King Lear* where, like flies killed by “wanton boys” the gods “kill us for their sport”. In possibly the only press interview with the actresses in *Rei Lear*, Mora outlined her view of Regan as someone “very connected to the survival instinct”, adding that “violence gives her pleasure and this can make her seductive. (...). She seeks pleasure through power and violence which results in a certain sadism. (...). She is animalesque”.<sup>37</sup> Mora used touches and caresses at key moments of the performance to illustrate the interconnection between sensuality and power in Regan and often put her hand gently but firmly on the shoulders of the male characters to emphasise her use of seduction to gain power.

In relation to her partnership with Cornwall, Mora’s view was that “the smell of blood excites them, giving them a certain insensitivity because they both treat all people as ants”. During the blinding of Gloucester, for instance, she pulled his head back and taunted him. The cry of anguish she emitted when Cornwall was murdered came from someone who has lost a kindred spirit whose pleasure in cruelty equals her own. As this indicates, Mora’s representation of Regan was not a positive one. Her instinctive, casually cruel, sexually manipulative Regan took the textual demonisation of the character fully on board rather than trying to excuse or justify the character. She did, however, work towards creating a physical performance text which could function as an extra-textual history for the woman character. This personal history is one the text itself

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<sup>37</sup> “É uma rapariga muito ligada ao instinto de sobrevivência, agrada-lhe mesmo a violência, o que pode torna-la sedutora. (...) Busca pelo prazer através do poder, da violência, o que resulta num certo sadismo”. (...) É uma mulher um pouco animal”. (...) O cheiro do sangue estimula-los. Ambos possuem uma certa insensibilidade porque para eles todas as pessoas são formigas”. Ana Marcela, “As Filhas de Lear” in *Correio da Manhã (Forum Estudante)*, (20-26 Jan. 1998), p.8 Subsequent quotations from the actresses are from this article. Not only did the actresses receive little attention in terms of interviews, they were hardly mentioned at all in critical reviews of the play.



does not seem interested in telling. The performance text only surfaced sporadically in occasional gestures, movements or sounds, but it did go some way towards making moral judgements of the character secondary to theatrical interest in the way she moved, talked and expressed desire.

The other sister, Goneril, (Maria Amelia Matta), also highlighted the physicality of the elder sister, but in this case her suppressed aggression and violence. At one point, she attempted to strike Lear after he had slapped her on the side of her face, but Lear and Albany restrained her as she protested with a cry of frustration. This sense of brooding menace which could easily become physical violence characterised her relationships with both her father and Albany in a carefully controlled performance by Matta. Once more, Goneril's textual demonisation was combined with elements of an intermittent physical performance text that linked her evil with a history of profound, suppressed rage at her spatial containment by the male characters.

The two actresses did differentiate between the two sisters. Whereas Regan appeared spontaneous and unthinking in her cruelty, Goneril's cruelty seemed calculated and premeditated. Goneril was aggressive to achieve clearly-defined goals while Regan used her sensuality more indirectly and often without a specific objective. Goneril's physical violence seemed to be a response to physical attempts to control her by both Lear and Albany. Regan's relationship with other characters, on the other hand, was less overtly conflictual. However, at one key moment the two actresses worked together. In the scene outside Gloucester's castle (Act II, Scene II), the two sisters came to sense their power as they confronted Lear. As they reduced his followers further and further, they circled Lear together as if they were circling a prey. Mora detailed how the three performers worked together in rehearsal to make this movement effective before concentrating on speaking their words. They aimed to create a physical sequence where

their voices appeared intimately linked to their movements and where the two sisters were seen to move and speak together as one. This simple physical image of menace gave a sense of the magnitude of the encounter for all involved in its inversion of familial and state power.

As the actresses discovered, there is much theatrical pleasure in simply playing the sisters as evil and using physicality to convey something of the stories that are not told about them in the text. Nevertheless, creating a physical performance text to counter the textual demonisation of the two sisters also has its limitations. In a play where the importance of self-justification is crucial, the problem remains that Goneril and Regan are condemned by the words of Lear, Albany and Edgar and have no effective verbal response. The howl of Regan and the hard slap Goneril attempts to give her father were theatrical moments that indicated their frustration but as they lacked speeches in which to voice such frustration, they had no sustained means of response. This textual limitation was compounded by the deficiencies of the actresses' own vocal techniques. Matta has a rasping voice and in moments of dramatic tension tended to shout. Mora's voicing of the text often seemed stiff and forced. Moreover, if the actresses were not facing the audience their voices could sometimes not be heard at all. Ironically, the one area of the physical that came through most strongly in their performances was that of costume. All three sisters paraded what seemed to be an unnecessarily large number of different costumes. The fact that Goneril and Regan often wore dresses of a similar design, but in different colours, created a degree of homogenisation that countered their attempts to differentiate the two characters. Moreover, during the battle scenes they were dressed in military-style jumpsuits and boots but seemed to play no part at all in commanding their various troops.

As the movements of the actresses were subject to the director's blocking and the company hierarchy, the possibilities of expression through physicality were also necessarily limited. Additionally, the proxemics of the production reflected the primary importance of Carvalho's performance as Lear. The negative effects of this can be seen above all in the Lear/Cordelia stage relationship.<sup>38</sup> The actress Lúcia Maria called her role "thankless", for Cordelia is present for such a short time in the play and has to create a powerful response in the audience from her first appearance. Yet certain directorial decisions about the role were also, to my mind, unjustifiable. In the first scene, her position upstage, spotlight, meant that the audience was brought closer to her in the dilemma of what she should say to Lear. However, after her rejection by him, the actress remained in the same position until the end of the scene while the male characters moved constantly in front of her. As she was standing sideways on, the audience could not even see any of her facial expressions clearly. Similarly, in the reconciliation scene with Lear, Cordelia knelt before him with her back to the audience and they were once more forced to concentrate on the more visible presence of Carvalho. Finally, when Lear entered in the final scene, he dragged Cordelia's dead body behind him across the stage using the rope that had hung her. Her lifeless body acted only as a support for Carvalho's emotional last speech. This might seem like a minor point, but, as Carol Rutter suggests, playing dead is still an important part of performing a role:

Speechless, motionless, reduced by death from somebody to *the* body, the corpse, the actor's body occupies a theatrical space of pure performance where it has most to play when it has least to act.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lúcia Maria stated in interview that Cordelia shows how like Lear she is. "She identifies with Lear. She's impulsive, obstinate, but deeply sincere. She understands and loves him." C.f. Ana Marcela (1998), *Op. Cit.* p.8 yet this was not brought out in the little time she had to perform with Lear, and any physical similarity was dismissed by the totally inappropriate short, blonde curly wig she wore. Similarly, her white dress emphasised Cordelia's purity over her strength.

<sup>39</sup> Carol Rutter, (2001), *Op. Cit.* p.2.

In this production, Cordelia ceased to matter here. She was Lear's 'prop' in both senses of the word. Additionally, the dead bodies of the other sisters lay in the darkness at the back of the stage, forgotten. This final sequence of events was the last straw in a production that was characterised by a consistent marginalisation of its actresses.<sup>40</sup>

Yet while researching the production, I was struck by a shadow version of the play being 'performed' in the stories about Carvalho in the press. For example, when he was decorated onstage by the President of the Republic on his 75th birthday, Carvalho confessed to journalists how tearful he had been with the words "I'm not able to hide my emotions, tears begin to emerge". His son João added that "Tears are not women's things, they are for men too".<sup>41</sup> I mention this story for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the use of such 'human interest' stories to help sell the production in the press. The fullness of such coverage contrasted with the emptiness of the actual onstage production which did little more than go through the motions. Secondly, these intertexts do provide us with a tantalising glimpse of what the production *might* have been like with a Lear who was both more human and more vulnerable. It could have been a production where a complexity in the representation of Lear encouraged additional complexity in terms of audience response. Instead, there was a performer "acting the King", at the end of his career, and indulged because of his reputation.<sup>42</sup> The rest of the company performed as if they were very aware of the spaces they could occupy without

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<sup>40</sup> Maria João da Rocha Afonso has informed me that this ending was 'highly contested' by the performers themselves, who felt it was inappropriate that a father would drag in his beloved daughter in this way. A useful contrast might be drawn with the earlier 1990 TEC production of this scene. Like Carvalho, the actor playing Lear also had back problems, but the production got around this by having Cordelia's body brought onto the stage by Kent and placed at the front of the Elizabethan-style apron stage which was surrounded on three sides by the audience. Here the focus on Cordelia's body was almost unavoidable.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Filomena Matos, "Ruy de Carvalho Condecorado por Jorge Sampaio," in *Caras* (Jan.1998).

<sup>42</sup> The phrase is Peter Brook's. Brook is discussing the way in which "deadly theatre" has contributed towards bringing the terms of tragedy into disrepute and claims, quite rightly, that "(if) we do not understand catharsis, that is because it has become identified with an emotional steam bath. If we do not understand tragedy, it is because it has become confused with Acting the King. We may want magic but we confine it with hocus pocus, and we have hopelessly mixed up love with sex, beauty with aestheticism". C.f. Peter Brook, (1968), *Op. Cit.* p.107 Let me clarify that my quarrel is not with paying homage to an actor's career, but with allowing that to dominate a major production.

challenging the total stage dominance of Carvalho. There was an English director who came and went without using any of this raw material to structure performances. In such a context, misogyny was not even considered a problem. For the three actresses, it might have represented a battle for their roles and their future theatrical careers in a precarious situation for the company. Even here though, the structure of the company encouraged accommodation rather than exploration.

### **III. IV. The Role of a National Theatre**

As I have indicated, the extent to which actresses can ‘play against the text’ is conditioned greatly by the theatrical context in which productions of the play take place. I would like to end this section by raising some questions about the responsibility of a national theatre to women, whether actresses, dramatists, technical staff or audience members.

Maria Helena Serôdio suggests three features which should characterise the work of a national theatre. These are that they produce work regularly, that they stage national drama and that they engage the best artists and technical staff.<sup>43</sup> This represents a rare attempt by critics to envisage a role for the national theatre network in Portugal. A more common critical reaction is that of Carlos Porto, who simply dismisses the work of the main national theatre, the TNDM in Lisbon, as “excessively discreet”. For Porto, their theatre practice has been “on the margins of twentieth century

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<sup>43</sup> Maria Helena Serôdio, “Theatre as a Social System: Portugal,” in H. Van Maanen & S.E. Wilmer (eds.), *Theatre Worlds in Motion: Structures, Politics and Developments in the Countries of Western Europe*, (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998). In the unpaginated Internet version of this article to be found at the ‘Centro de Estudos de Teatro’ site ( [www.fl.ul.pt/centroestudosteatro.htm](http://www.fl.ul.pt/centroestudosteatro.htm)), this assessment can be found on page 19.

theatre” and has “revealed an inordinate inability to find the right tone in the scenic creation of the text”.<sup>44</sup>

Evidently, specific questions relating to women cannot be divorced from general questions of repertoire and theatrical practice. A national theatre which is “excessively discreet” and that is not abreast of theatrical tendencies is not likely to produce challenging contemporary representations of women. Similarly, a national theatre which does not promote Portuguese dramatic writing will not reflect the ways in which women’s roles have changed in Portuguese society. Nevertheless, this close connection between the specific concerns of women and more general theatrical practice also means that demanding changes for women tends to have a corresponding impact on general theatrical practice. If a national theatre, therefore, aims to promote dramatic writing which reflects the changing role of women it might be more likely to commission contemporary national drama. Similarly, if it makes a commitment to improving the status of its actresses, this may in turn improve overall conditions for those who work there.

The question of repertoire at the TNDM is fundamental. The choices made about which plays to perform need to take more account of the number and type of roles for actresses. Currently, especially in major productions like *Rei Lear*, there are few major roles for women and the majority of dramatic roles for actresses are invariably supporting roles. There also needs to be more attention given to the diversity of roles for actresses. Even now, they continue to play subsidiary roles where the way they look is often the most important consideration. This also entails commissioning more dramatic

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<sup>44</sup> Carlos Porto & Salvator Teles de Menezes, *10 Anos de Teatro e Cinema 1974-1984*, (Lisboa: Caminho, 1985). More recent developments within the theatre’s own company are dealt with in later sections of this chapter and in Chapter Seven. It is interesting to compare the lack of critical interest in the TNDM, for example, with the increasing critical interest in the work of the TNSJ.

writing by women dramatists, who at the moment are underrepresented in the TNDM repertoire.

Another crucial area has to be the technical staff at the TNDM.<sup>45</sup> Women tend to be concentrated in the areas of costume and public relations, for example, and absent from other areas of theatre work. There are several ways in which this situation could be remedied. Firstly, the TNDM could aim to promote women in other areas of production, such as scenography or directing. Secondly, it could take advantage of its statutory ability to invite theatre practitioners for particular productions and its ability to co-produce work with other companies. It could use these powers to invite women directors and technical staff who are working outside the TNDM structure to work there for particular productions or seasons. It could also rethink its policy in relation to the theatre professionals it invites from abroad, given that at the moment they tend to be overwhelmingly male.

It could be countered that in all these respects, the TNDM merely reflects an existing situation rather than an inherent bias against women. However, this is where it is important to consider whether the role of a national theatre should be just to mirror what exists, which invariably tends towards the lowest common denominator, or whether it should take initiatives which are designed to place it at the forefront of theatrical developments. As the theatre with the largest budget and the status of main national theatre, it is surely the responsibility of a national theatre like the TNDM to lean towards the latter. Indeed, it is the only theatrical organisation *that is able to*

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<sup>45</sup> A quick look at the cast list and technical team for the production of *Rei Lear* illustrates this containment of women within certain areas. Although they are present in areas like costume, public relations and production, all other areas, such as direction, setting, music, lights and sound are overwhelmingly male. In relation to the company itself, 27 male actors performed in the production compared to 6 women. It should be pointed out, however, that there are several situations where women are in important 'assisting' roles, most notably Graça Corrêa as assistant to the director, and Maria João da Rocha Afonso's adaptation of Ricardo Albery's translation.

counter such structural inequalities in theatrical practice.<sup>46</sup> The resident company at the TNDM, which could be seen as the greatest obstacle to change, does not now exist. In thinking about how to face the future, proactive measures to support and develop women's work there are essential if it is to fulfil its vocation as a national theatre in the new millennium.

#### **IV. Stumbling over Olivier *et al*: Kathryn Hunter as Lear at the Young Vic (1997)**

As well as witnessing a spate of performances of *Lear* in Portugal and England, the year of 1990 also saw two productions where actresses actually played the role of Lear. Ruth Maleczech performed the role in Mabou Mines' cross-gendered and cross-cultural *Lear* in New York and Marianne Hoppe played Lear in Robert Wilson's Frankfurt production. When asked how she felt about taking on the role, Maleczech replied:

Peter Brook said *Lear* was a mountain impossible to climb, and on the way up you trip over the corpses of Charles Laughton here, Gielgud here, over yonder Olivier. Women don't tackle this part, so I'm not likely to stumble over the corpse of Eleanora Duse.<sup>47</sup>

She added "Lear's language seduces me. Why should I, a woman, be denied access to such beautiful language?"

Yet how effective is such cross-gender casting in challenging the misogyny of a text like *King Lear*? In the English context, cross-gender casting or 'regendering'

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the year of 1998, when *Rei Lear* was produced, is an exceptional, and for this reason interesting year to illustrate how much is possible when the theatre has a financial and political motivation to do so. The international exhibition Expo 1998 put Portugal very much on the international stage during this year, and the TNDM productions of that year included a production of Caryl Churchill and David Lan's *A Mouthful of Birds*, produced in collaboration with the 'Escola de Mulheres', and Luisa Costa Gomes' *O Céu de Sacadura*. Women played a much more prominent role in TNDM productions during this year.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Susan Bennett in *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p.76. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that most reviewers *do* compare the women's performances with those of Olivier and others.



gathered force in the 1980's and has earned itself a key place within the new millennium's theatrical practice.<sup>48</sup> In its contemporary form, it does not just include well-known actresses playing major male roles, but also actresses playing non-major male roles.<sup>49</sup> Examples have included Imogen Stubbs as Cassius in *Julius Caesar* and an all-female set of Rude Mechanicals in Cheek by Jowl's 1985 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Cross-gender casting as practised nowadays, then, is not just about the isolated and the exceptional. It is becoming a regular feature of everyday theatre practice applicable in principle to all male roles. It has accompanied a similar movement towards integrated or inter-ethnic casting, where actors from different ethnic backgrounds perform roles which traditionally have been played by white actors. Thus, as it appeared in the 1980's, cross-gender casting was part of a wider series of demands to raise the profile of previously marginalised groups within theatre.

The arguments in favour of cross-gender casting for actresses appear to be straightforward. In an article by director and drama teacher Helen Alexander, she stresses the implications of 'regendering' in terms of theatrical equality. She notes that:

(a)pproximately three quarters of theatre roles in Britain are reserved for male actors – thus depriving women actors and women theatre-goers of the equality they deserve. The key to change is in the casting of existing texts.<sup>50</sup>

Cheek by Jowl's Barbara Matthews has also commented that "(w)hen we did it with *The Tempest*, which included a Queen of Naples, it made no difference to the reading of

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<sup>48</sup> The term 'regendering' was originally used to refer to the process by which women moved into areas of employment where they had traditionally been absent, such as engineering. It perhaps suggests a more far-reaching recasting of the text in performance than the term 'cross-gender casting'. In Portugal, there has recently been a Prospera in *The Tempest* (2004), played by Valerie Bradell, but I know of no other recent cases where actresses have played male Shakespearean roles.

<sup>49</sup> In this sense, it differs from the earlier work of actresses such as Vanessa Redgrave (Prospero) and Frances de la Tour (Hamlet) in male Shakespearean roles.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in an article by Dan Glaister, "A Woman's Part – So Welcome Queen Lear" in *The Guardian*, (23/6/1997).

the text so it made no difference if it was a woman. We used the most appropriate and best actor for the part”.<sup>51</sup> Alexander ends her article challenging artistic directors to “take greater risks” with regendering, arguing that “(b)y changing the gender you can make a brilliant story a different brilliant story”.<sup>52</sup> Yet Alexander’s arguments point to differing conceptions of what regendering is and what it can be used for. For some, it simply represents a formal move towards theatrical equality for actresses. It works from the premise that casting a woman in a man’s role will make little or no difference to the performance of the text. For others, it is part of the process whereby an actress is cast in a male role precisely so it does make a difference. The intention here is to change the story, or tell a different story. Moreover, in some cases, regendering involves making the character a woman as well, as with Cheek by Jowl’s *Queen of Naples*. This also implies changing forms of address, for example from Sir to Madam. In other cases, the character remains gendered male, though whether this is smoothed over or drawn attention to by the actress constitutes yet another choice to be made. What seems at first to be one process, therefore, actually interweaves different, sometimes mutually exclusive, objectives.

The actress Kathryn Hunter played Lear at the Young Vic, London, in 1997. The production was also directed by a woman, Helena Kaut-Howson, and set within a menacing, wartime environment. In interview, Kaut-Howson explained that she cast Hunter “because I believe the part is about old age and not about gender. It should be available to women and men. The issues that were of interest in the play were ones that the actress was capable of embracing”.<sup>53</sup> Yet in a somewhat apocalyptic piece included in the production programme, Jacek Laskowski reinterpreted the play from the

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem.* Kaut-Howson had previously been Artistic Director of Theatr Clwyd.

perspective of Lear as an old woman looking back over her life. He suggested that this female Lear might be no madder than anyone else, but that:

(h)er otherness, her seeming madness, is just as likely a reflection of her struggle to discover the mysteries of life, to make sense of her life and that of her generation, to come to terms with the irresistible life-giving forces in a world dominated by destruction, senselessness, and despair, to answer the fundamental, unanswerable question: why live, and why give life? <sup>54</sup>

This hinted at a more fundamental reworking of the Shakespearean play than Kaut-Howson's justification for casting Kathryn Hunter implies. Crucially, by the time of the London performances, the prequel to the play presenting Hunter as a hospitalised old woman for whom the play itself is a fantasy, had been reduced to a single scene at the beginning of the play where she was brought onto the stage silently in a wheelchair.

Predictably, the production attracted much press coverage, both positive and negative. The *Times*, in an article entitled "Queen Lear", affirmed "Kathryn Hunter makes gender irrelevant in a superb portrayal of the tragic monarch". <sup>55</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, however, in "A King who's not every inch a Man" disagreed. He characterised the production as "an experiment high on daring and inventiveness, which left me brooding about the sheer perversity of the production". <sup>56</sup> He concluded adamantly that "these cross-gender acting forays just do not work". For De Jongh, discarding the conceit of the play as Hunter's fantasy creation was a mistake "since a woman can make a believable King Lear only if it's her *fantasy projection* of being a male monarch" (my emphasis). He argued that a more viable alternative would be to present a play called *Queen Lear*, adding that "Miss Hunter's Lear would be more convincing if she had not

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<sup>54</sup> Jacek Laskowski, "Old Age, Power & Nature" in Programme for Young Vic production of *King Lear* (1997), unpaginated.

<sup>55</sup> Listings insert in *The Times*, (4/7/1997).

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, "The King Who's Not Every Inch a Man" in *Evening Standard* (3/7/97) All subsequent quotations from this review are indicated in inverted commas.

aspired to masculinity. Her bass, throaty voice, *which lacks the Shakespearean range*, may sound like a man's, but she comes over as thoroughly female" (my emphasis). He concludes "This King Lear is a *domestic old girl*, with a walking stick, not given to rage or implacability – two essential character components. It's a *courageous, touching* performance, with Hunter sharply conveying the sense of Lear's dazed confusion, but *missing the epic anger and anguish*" (my emphasis). De Jongh also criticises the production generally for "an insufficient pitch of cruelty, extremism or horror". It is worth drawing attention to two features of this review. The first is its patronising tone throughout, conveyed in phrases like "domestic old girl" and in the suggestion that the only way an actress can make sense of a major male role is as a "fantasy projection". The second is the way in which de Jongh sets up the straw figure of a correct way to play Lear which is implicitly linked to masculinity. He then measures Hunter's deviation from it in terms of her femaleness. For de Jongh, Hunter's performance is "courageous" and "touching" yet the "true" Lear, the Lear of epic anger and anguish remains tantalisingly out of her reach. Although he does not make this explicit, the "norm" he invokes is that of key previous performances of the role by Laurence Olivier and other male actors. What this means is that he fundamentally misjudges Hunter's performance, which used a much wider variety of emotional registers than de Jongh implies. It ranged from visible anger to bafflement to impatience to genuine concern and even wonder.

In *The Times* review, entitled "Mother of All Fathers", Jeremy Kingston takes a different view from de Jongh. From a traditional perspective, he acknowledges that Hunter's performance might be seen as lacking as, "(h)er voice does not beat against the roof in the storm scenes, and I suspect it may not be up to doing so". But, as he adds, "such suspicions are irrelevant because she builds the performance on a different

structure, and the rewards come plentifully in the closing scenes, when the king flickers in and out of madness. Here Hunter finds for him a kind of divine grace".<sup>57</sup> Kingston also notes:

(...) a puckish amusement in this elderly baby's face; fingers twitch excitedly as Hunter hobbles towards Cordelia, fondly confident of even more love and cherishment. "Nothing will come of nothing" is spoken as a caring parent might say it, explaining an error, not stamping on an offender.

Kingston's final paragraph celebrates a new kind of universality in Hunter's performance where "(t)he sex of the actor is immaterial before such capacity to reach the core of an experience". This supportive review of Hunter's performance starts from the premise that the production should be judged on its own terms, rather than in relation to a theatrical tradition of male actors playing the role. It also attempts to convey something of the physical presence of the cross-gendered performance onstage. Words like "puckish", and descriptions such as that of the "gravelly, wavering voice" hint at how the actress and the male character might momentarily interact onstage (see photograph no. 4 at the end of this chapter).

Perhaps the greatest advantage of cross-gendered performances such as Hunter's is that they bring out something in the text which is not necessarily connected with gender, but is prompted by such gender changes. In this production, for instance, there was a strong sense that authority resided in a series of symbols rather than in some natural, inherited characteristic of the King. Examples of this were the chair acting as a throne or the music accompanying the king. This gave extra meaning to comments like Kent's that authority seemed to emanate from Lear's countenance (I, IV, 30) for it showed, in a very theatrical way, how authority was constructed through symbols and only retrospectively seen to be an attribute of a certain person. The contrast between the

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<sup>57</sup> Jeremy Kingston, "Mother of all Fathers" in *The Times*, (4/7/1997). All subsequent quotations from this review are indicated in inverted commas.

power of the symbols and the fragility of Lear as a human being was especially visible in the storm scene. Hunter wheeled herself frantically around the stage as she raged and there was a gaping chasm throughout between the grandiloquence of Lear's speech, the immensity of the storm and Lear's evident physical weakness.

Yet to return to the question of how effective regendering is as a tool against the text's misogyny, Lear's hostility and contempt for women remained part of the performance text for this production. Did having an actress rather than an actor give these speeches make a difference? Moreover, how much difference could one isolated example of cross-gender casting make when all the other roles were performed conventionally? <sup>58</sup> As can be seen from reviews of Hunter's performance, a major advantage of casting a woman in the role of Lear is to point out precisely just how much current thinking about major Shakespearean roles continues to rely on sexist stereotypes. Kathryn Hunter's Lear obviously annoyed de Jongh sufficiently to respond in the way he did and such a response clarified the premises upon which his reviewing operates. However, while it made a strong case for casting women in the role so that such simple theatrical prejudice could be challenged, the performance was less effective in highlighting the text's misogyny. This is because the arguments for cross-gender casting are often based on a demand for access to the great and universal Shakespearean roles. As such, they do not acknowledge that the same patriarchal assumptions and misogyny that have historically prevented actresses from playing these roles continues to traverse the dramatic text used for performance.

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<sup>58</sup> This was particularly noticeable in the Gloucester-Lear relationship, where the male actor playing the role seemed to be giving exactly the type of Shakespearean performance Hunter sought to act against. This is not to say the whole cast need be regendered in order for cross-gender casting to work. Hunter's acting associate from *Théâtre de Complicité*, Marcello Magni, picked up on and echoed Hunter's nervous physical energy in his performance as the Fool (see photograph no. 4 at the end of this chapter). Many reviewers picked up on this cross-cultural casting in a negative way, arguing that Magni's Italian accent made him difficult to understand. This is not a criticism that I share.

## V. Rewriting as a Feminist Strategy: *Lear's Daughters*: (1987)

Adapting Shakespearean texts specifically in order to focus more attention on their women characters is not a common strategy within Portuguese theatre.<sup>59</sup> A rare exception is Eduarda Dionísio's *Antes Que a Noite Venha*, (Before Nightfall), performed for the first time in 1992 and published in the same year.<sup>60</sup> Dionísio takes four 'mythical' women characters: Juliet, Antigone, Medea and the Portuguese Inês de Castro, and creates a series of short, intensely poetic monologues where they address absent male characters, or objects. She writes three monologues for Shakespeare's Juliet. The first is addressed to her "fat, old Nurse" and is an account of a young girl on the threshold of a new life as a result of her first experience of romantic love. She is unsentimental about the fact that this means leaving her past behind forever. The second is addressed to the full moon and evokes the heightened sensations which accompany anticipation of a lover's arrival. The third is addressed to Romeo himself and is a gloriously macabre monologue from a Juliet who has faked her death "as happens so often in the theatre" (29). She tries desperately not to make a movement that will alert her relatives as they file into the crypt and let their tears fall on her inert body. Anxiously awaiting the arrival of Romeo, she gradually becomes aware that the heavy limbs on top of her are those of her dead lover.

To my knowledge, there has been no such Portuguese adaptation of the women characters in *King Lear* like Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group's *Lear's*

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<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the adaptation has been a form in which women have traditionally engaged, and in the 1990's there were several adaptations/rewritings of classical texts by women which did foreground women characters. These would include Elsa Valentim's *As Troianas* (1994), Teresa Faria's *Eurípides para Duas Mulheres* (1996), Hélia Correia's *Exercício sobre Helena* (1998) and Isabel Medina's *As Mulheres no Parlamento* (1999), based on Aristophanes. The only example of an adaptation of Shakespeare by another Portuguese woman writer is Luíza Maria Martins's *Anatomia de uma História de Amor* (1969) which is based on *Romeo and Juliet*, although *LM-Lady Macbeth*, a dance piece based on a text by Nicola Lusuardi, was performed in Portugal in 1996 by the Balletteatro company.

<sup>60</sup> Eduarda Dionísio, *Antes que a Noite Venha*, (Lisboa: Cotovia, 1992) Subsequent references to this text have page numbers indicated in parentheses.

*Daughters*, which was performed by the Women's Theatre Group for the first time on the 12th September, 1987.<sup>61</sup> Lizbeth Goodman has called the play "a landmark in feminist "reinventing" of Shakespeare. It takes as its premise the notion that (...) all of history as presented in standard texts may resemble a genealogy of "false fathers".<sup>62</sup> Susan Bennett notes that it "asks audiences to intervene in and to reconstruct Shakespeare's play in an active and critical way",<sup>63</sup> and in their introduction to a collection of Women's Theatre Group plays, Gabrielle Griffin and Elaine Aston call it "a play which speaks directly to audiences of the Thatcher years".<sup>64</sup>

*Lear's Daughters* functions as a prequel to *King Lear*. It provides each of the three daughters with different dramatic backgrounds and stage personalities and explores the sexual politics of the play from an explicitly feminist point of view. In the process of doing this, it elucidates the ways in which women are demonised in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In terms of the play's performance, role-swapping, multi-racial casting and cross-dressing were used to disrupt any view of the play as a simple response to the Shakespearean text. In the first production, Regan and Goneril were played by black actresses, while Cordelia was played by a white actress. In the second, however, all three sisters were played by black actresses, but the Fool and the Nanny were played by white actresses. The Fool was a highly theatricalised, sexually hybrid figure, made up as a clown and dressed in an evening dress, a man's dinner suit and a pair of false breasts.

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<sup>61</sup> However, Edward Bond's *Lear*, which has interesting roles for actresses, was performed by CETA (Círculo Experimental de Teatro de Aveiro) in 1992 and has been analysed by Maria Helena Serôdio in her *William Shakespeare: A Sedução dos Sentidos* (Lisboa:Cosmos,1996).

<sup>62</sup> Lizbeth Goodman, "Women's Alternative Shakespeares and Women's Alternatives to Shakespeare in Contemporary British Theater" in Marianne Novy (ed.), *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 220. Goodman does not mention another prequel to the play written by Gordon Bottomley in 1914 and performed in 1915 entitled *King Lear's Wife*, which made an appeal to the emergent "new woman" of the period.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Bennett, (1996), *Op. Cit.*, p.52.

<sup>64</sup> Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, *Lear's Daughters*, in Gabrielle Griffin and Elaine Aston (eds.), *Herstory: Plays by Women for Women*, 2 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), I, p. 13.



The fact that the play is a prequel to the Shakespearean text allows it some independence from the written text while also throwing light on subsequent events in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In the Shakespearean text, Lear's wife is dead, but she casts her shadow over the play. In *Lear's Daughters*, the Queen is also dead at the beginning of the play, but is recalled parodically by the Fool, who puts on a veil when changing character. The Queen also has a dramatic 'double' in the Nurse, who takes over looking after the girls after her death. Their duality is emphasised throughout the play by the suggestion that the daughters have two mothers; one biological, one cultural. As the Fool quips, they have "the mother who's paid and the mother who's paying".<sup>65</sup> This allows the play not only to explore the oppression of women within motherhood, but also issues of class in the Nurse's exploitation as paid carer. The Queen is portrayed as having suffered greatly at the hands of Lear. When she is first recalled, she is ill because of Lear's obsessive desire to have a son. Regan tells of a primal scene in which she crept downstairs and saw her father's treatment of their mother:

He is singing, banging his fist on the table, not quite in tune, not quite in time and his arm is around Mother's neck. I think it's Mother. He has a hand inside her dress, holding her breast. Not tender, he's just holding her. And Mother's face. It is Mother. I'm certain it is. Her face is blank, without expression, like a figure made of wax. I'm scared now. (Scene 3, 352)

Eventually, exhausted by these assaults and the needs of her own daughters, the Queen dies and the daughters are looked after by the Nurse. However, a later section of the text suggests the Queen in fact died after giving birth to Cordelia and the matter is left ambiguous. Lear is seen by his daughters having sexual intercourse on the day of the

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<sup>65</sup> Elaine Feinstein & The Women's Theatre Group, *Lear's Daughters*, in Lizbeth Goodman (ed.) *Mythic Women/Real Women: Plays and Performance Pieces by Women* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), pp. 343-384, Scene 5, p. 357. All subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are indicated in parentheses.

Queen's funeral, still desperate to have the son who eludes him. Yet later, in a scene entitled "Scene Fourteen – The Nurse Reveals All", a different story emerges. The Nurse tells how she gave away her own baby in order to have milk for Lear's children, and that she exchanged her child, Cordelia, for the male child born to Lear.

The daughters recognise that they are expected to follow in their mother's footsteps. This is most obvious in the decisions concerning the marriages of Goneril and Regan, where their only task is to accept the good match decided upon for them by Lear. In Goneril's words "It's our job. It's what we're here for. To marry and to breed" (Scene Twelve, 376). However, after the marriages have been arranged, it becomes clear that Regan has already become pregnant. She is first chastised by Goneril for thus reducing her value in the marriage market and then induced to have an abortion using a herbal remedy prepared by the Nurse. The weddings themselves are surreal. Goneril, Regan and Cordelia alternate between delight and anger with the Fool as Lear acting as priest/master of ceremonies.

The pathos of the daughters' containment in marriage is enhanced by the suggestion that although patriarchal society only values them as wives and mothers, all three daughters in fact have strong passionate interests of their own. At the beginning of the play, each daughter is allowed to introduce herself and her passion simultaneously. Cordelia claims to be in love with words, having taught herself to read. As she states "I look up at the sky, and it's full of words" (Scene One, 346). Regan talks of her love of the texture of wood and her skill in sculpture:

When I carve, it is as if there is a shape lying within the wood already, waiting to be released, moving my knife independently of the hand that holds it (Scene One, 347)

Goneril's passion is for colour and for painting. The play begins with the daughters talking about their passions and ends with them talking about the ways in which these passions have been affected by the events that have brought them to adulthood. By this stage, Goneril has discarded her paints and can now only, quite literally, see red: "(c)ontrolling by my hatred, the order of my life. Lear's daughter. Blood in my eyes and lost to heaven" (Scene Fourteen, 383). Regan, after the abortion, has learnt that to be a woman means to be a hypocrite. Cordelia, too, reassesses her love of words;

I hold two (words) in my hands, testing their weight. "Yes" to please, "No" to please myself, "Yes", I shall and "No", I will not. "Yes" for you and "No" for me.....I shall be silent now, weighing these words, and when I choose to speak, I shall choose the right one. (Scene Fourteen, 384)

The daughters are seen to be very much daughters of both their parents. Although Goneril obediently accepts her marriage, there is also a suggestion she may have inherited some of her father's characteristics. In the argument over Regan's illegitimate child, it is she who acts as the voice of patriarchal authority, leading Regan to comment "It's him. You've got his face" (Scene Twelve, 377). Earlier, she has recounted her own primal scene when she crept downstairs and sat on Lear's throne:

When he comes in, I am smiling, and he is angry because he knows what I am thinking and I smile on – because I want him to know (Scene Three, 352)

This suggests Goneril has inherited her father's love of power. Later, Lear tries to also pass on to her his love of wealth.

Cordelia's relationship with her father is shown to be a complex and contradictory one. When she talks about her early childhood, she remembers Lear as a

father playing with his children and she is shown to be Lear's favourite daughter. However, there is a later incident when Lear orders Cordelia to dance and Cordelia does not want to do this. Although she finally agrees, the scene has a strong element of coercion. Near the end of the play, Cordelia confesses to having "two voices", those of a little girl and an adult. The little girl does what she's told. The adult wants to do what she likes.

The patriarchal family structure is given extra strength by the suggestion of a wider social context in the play. The battles within the immediate family are externalised, in that Lear is also involved in an ambiguous relationship with his subjects. His daughters and the reader/audience are unable to say with certainty whether his people love or hate him. The sexually androgynous figure of the Fool, referred to throughout as "It" provides another angle on these power relationships. When Regan asks what "It" would be if not a Fool, the response is "A dog with no masters" (Scene Four, 355) and when relating what really pleases Lear the Fool makes it clear that sexist jokes about women please him the most. The non-naturalistic style of the play, however, undercuts patriarchal authority by telling many different stories about important events in the play. This not only echoes the way in which members of families tend to remember past events subjectively, it also shows that some stories tend to be given the status of truth over others. For instance, fairy tales are given an authority that is invariably not conferred on them, and in a wonderful twist, the seemingly non-miraculous account of Cordelia's birth is ended by the intrusion of one totally 'miraculous' fact – the undivided attention of her father at her birth.

There are obvious advantages and disadvantages in such rewritings. Firstly, given the audience's overwhelming identification with Lear and Lear's point of view in the Shakespearean play, rewriting might seem to be the only viable way of focusing

attention on the characters and concerns of the three daughters as women. The fact that Lear is absent from *Lear's Daughters* aids the process of seeing to what extent the Shakespearean play forecloses any alternative readings of events. Using such a well-known text allows readers and audiences to explore the sexual politics of the text and to challenge the patriarchal version of events that the text narrates. The writing is both moving and energetic and seeks to help contextualise, rather than judge, the behaviour of the three daughters in the play.

Nevertheless, can this reworking of the *Lear* narrative stand on its own as a play in its own right? Is there anything like the same audience for *Lear's Daughters* as for *King Lear*? Whilst the idea behind writing the play is necessarily interstitial, I believe it is strong enough to stand as a performance piece on its own. Although the play did not tour round England's mainstream venues, it did tour for a second year "by popular demand," which suggests there was an interest in the play. I would also suggest there might be an audience for the play in Portugal. The fairy tale structure it bases itself upon and critiques is culturally available, and the language is both poetic and accessible for translation. The 'Escola de Mulheres' theatre company have produced adaptations of canonical texts which often use anti-naturalistic performance techniques. The actress Paula Mora, who played Regan in the TNDM production has worked with the 'Escola de Mulheres', as has Lucinda Loureiro. Although it is true that translation of the Shakespearean play could promote a certain amount of 'rewriting' of the text in itself, the advantage of working with a completely rewritten play like *Lear's Daughters* is that it does explicitly start from the point of view that the misogyny of the text is a problem.

<sup>66</sup> Performing *Lear's Daughters* would enable actresses to explore the questions the play raises without the claustrophobic presence of Lear himself. It also illustrates that there are alternatives to patriarchal authority. And if not a performance of *Lear's Daughters* in Portugal, why not another completely new rewriting of the play?

## Conclusion

This chapter has started from the premise that the misogyny of *King Lear* is a problem which inevitably affects the performances of actresses in productions of the play. The fact that the audience is positioned with Lear in his judgements of events means that the play asks the audience to accept a connection between order and male power which casts women as the instigators of disorder and as less than human. Although it has been suggested that the demonisation of women that characterises Shakespearean tragedy might not be recoverable in performance, I have attempted to suggest ways in which the text of *King Lear* might be opened up more in performance, namely through an attempt to differentiate Goneril and Regan from each other and enhance their similarities to Lear, and a commitment to genuinely making the role of Cordelia one that can rival Lear's dramatic dominance in the play.

The actresses in the TNDM production of the play were aware of the ways in which their roles might be problematic. Paula Mora and Maria Amelia Matta were playing characters they knew would be unpalatable for audiences and who would have little chance to put forward an alternative point of view. Lúcia Maria recognised that the immense significance of Cordelia all had to be conveyed in two scenes. The chapter has

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<sup>66</sup> In this respect, it is interesting that the notion of misogyny being problematic is now being discussed by Portuguese theatre practitioners and critics. A recent adaptation of *Hamlet* saw the director of the production, Ricardo Pais, explicitly signal the thematic importance of misogyny in the production, and this was picked up on by the critics Paulo Eduardo Carvalho, Eugénia Vasques and Helena Vasconcelos in their reviews of the play. See the TNSJ newspaper *Dois Colunas*, no. 6 Set. 2003, pp. 16-22.

explored how the mechanics of the TNDM company, along with the fact that this was seen as very much Ruy de Carvalho's production, meant that the ability of the actresses to construct a physical performance text which would create some autonomous space from the written text was greatly circumscribed. The horrifying spectacle of the inert Cordelia in the final scene, as the quote from Carol Rutter that begins this chapter indicates, speaks volumes about what the TNDM considers to be an appropriate stage representation of a woman.

Kathryn Hunter's *Lear*, along with Fiona Shaw's *Richard II*, represented something of a theatrical turning point in English theatre. It helped to clarify that there was a struggle going on between those who considered the existing roles for women in Shakespeare sufficient and those who sought to redefine what could be considered roles for women in Shakespeare. Cross-gender casting seems to me something that can only be supported, for it is a simple demand for theatrical equality. Having an actress play the role creates a consistent "alienation effect" throughout performance which focuses attention on the sexual politics of the play through opening up a separation between actress and character. Yet, as I have argued, it is insufficient on its own as a way of making the misogyny of the play problematic. This is because arguments in favour of equality tend to stress integration into a system that is already defined as sufficient in itself, in this case the Shakespearean canon. On its own, it does not challenge the 'greatness' of Shakespeare as a playwright who expressed 'universal' truths, it demands equal access to this universality. Moreover, the fact that other elements of the staging tended to function against rather than in tandem with Hunter, also limited the ability of cross-gender casting to suggest wider possibilities for sexual transgression in the play. In this respect, it is revealing that the more thoroughgoing revision of the play and its themes suggested in the article by Laskowski was discarded by the time the play faced

the London critics. This vision of the possibilities offered by regendering created much more autonomous space for the performance text than the production that played in London and might well have been more effective in highlighting the misogyny of the Shakespearean text.

Whilst I have indicated that there are strategies available for actresses working with the Shakespearean text, rewriting the play completely does, perhaps, constitute the most effective tool against the text's misogyny. Of the three productions, *Lear's Daughters* is the only one where the different systems of staging, ranging from the anti-naturalism of the text, to the non-illusionistic performance strategies of the actresses, created an autonomous space for the performance text. *Lear's Daughters* is a fine piece of writing with imaginative possibilities for performance. It is destined to occupy an important position in feminist performance history. In the series of stories it conjures up, there is an emphasis on open-endedness that expands the fragmentation of the Shakespearean text in order to open it up to alternative readings. Goneril and Regan remain flawed, but they are given histories that contextualise why they act in the way they do, while Cordelia becomes something of an everywoman in her description of the duality forced onto young girls as they grow into women. I have suggested that it is a play that might have a resonance in a Portuguese context whilst also, by touching upon Eduarda Dionísio's beautiful rewriting of Juliet, indicating that there is always going to be more than one way to rewrite a canonical text.



3. Goneril (Maria Amélia Matta), Lear (Ruy de Carvalho) and director Richard Cottrell in rehearsals for the Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II (TNDM) *Rei Lear*. Copyright *O Público*. Courtesy of the TNDM Archives.

4. Lear (Kathryn Hunter) and the Fool (Marcello Magni) in the Young Vic production of *King Lear*. Copyright Tristram Kenton. Courtesy of the Young Vic.