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A FULL LENGTH PLAY

# LEAR

BY EDWARD BOND



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(LEAR)

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## LEAR

*Lear* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in September 1971. Taking as its starting point the story of an autocratic monarch deposed by his two power-hungry daughters, the play presents a parable of the ruthless cruelty imposed on us by the assumptions of modern society. Lear, his daughters and their conquerors too, have all suffered and are shown suffering hideously, caught in the trap. But freed at last from his sufferings, Lear perceives and gives voice to the urgent need both for an awareness of man's trapped state and for pity as a corrective.

'He has not cultivated a garden but created a landscape . . . it is one of the most powerful plays to have emerged in years . . . Although its tragic scale is unimaginable except in the theatre, it is not primarily a play for "theatre-goers", but is meant for anyone concerned with our apparently hell-bent course towards self-destruction.'

Helen Dawson in *The Observer*

*The photograph on the front of the cover shows Harry Andrews as Lear and Mark McManus as the Gravedigger's Boy in the Royal Court production and is reproduced by courtesy of John Haynes.*



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence.

Many animals are able to be violent, but in non-human species the violence is finally controlled so that it does not threaten the species' existence. Then why is the existence of our species threatened by its violence?

I must begin with an important distinction. The predator hunting its prey is violent but not aggressive in the human way. It wants to eat, not destroy, and its violence is dangerous to the prey but not to the predator. Animals only become aggressive – that is destructive in the human sense – when their lives, territory or status in their group are threatened, or when they mate or are preparing to mate. Even then the aggression is controlled. Fighting is usually ritualized, and the weaker or badly-placed animal will be left alone when it runs away or formally submits. Men use much of their energy and skill to make more efficient weapons to destroy each other, but animals have often evolved in ways to ensure they *can't* destroy each other.

A lot has been written on this subject and it is not my job to repeat the evidence; but it shows clearly, I think, that in normal surroundings and conditions members of the same species are not dangerous to one another, but that when they are kept in adverse conditions, and forced to behave unnaturally, their behavior deteriorates. This has been seen in zoos and

laboratories. Then they become destructive and neurotic and make bad parents. They begin to behave like us.

That is all there is to our "innate" aggression, or our "original" sin as it was first called. There is no evidence of an aggressive *need*, as there is of sexual and feeding *needs*. We respond aggressively when we are constantly deprived of our physical and emotional needs, or when we are threatened with this; and if we are constantly deprived and threatened in this way — as human beings now are — we live in a constant state of aggression. It does not matter how much a man doing routine work in, say, a factory or office is paid: he will still be deprived in this sense. Because he is behaving in a way for which he is not designed, he is alienated from his natural self, and this will have physical and emotional consequences for him. He becomes nervous and tense and he begins to look for threats everywhere. This makes him belligerent and provocative; he becomes a threat to other people, and so his situation rapidly deteriorates.

This is all the facts justify us in concluding: aggression is an ability but not a necessity. The facts are often *interpreted* more pessimistically, but that is another matter.

If we *were* innately aggressive, in the sense that it was *necessary* for us to act aggressively from time to time, we would be condemned to live with an incurable disease; and as the suffering caused by aggression in a technological culture is so terrible, the question would arise: does the human race have any moral justification for its existence? A character in my play *Early Morning* answered no, and he tried to kill himself. It is astonishing that many people who share his beliefs are not forced to draw his conclusions, but can still go about their

daily business. This ability shows mental shallowness and emotional glibness, not stoicism and spiritual strength. Their "realism" is really only the fascism of lazy men.

Then why do we behave worse to one another than other animals? We live in ways for which we are not designed and so our daily existence interferes with our natural functioning, and this activates our natural response to threat: aggression. How has this happened? Why, in the first place, do we live in urban, crowded regimented groups, working like machines (mostly for the benefit of other men) and with no real control of our lives? Probably this situation could not have been avoided. Men did not suddenly become possessors of human minds and then use them to solve the problems of existence. These problems were constantly posed and solved within an inherited organization or social structure, and this structure was redeveloped to deal with new problems as they arose. So there was probably never much chance for new thinking. As men's minds clarified they were already living in herds or groups, and these would have evolved into tribes and societies. Like waking sleepers they would not know dream from reality.

What problems did these half-awake, superstitious men have to face? They were biologically so successful that they probably became too numerous for their environments and they could not go on living as loose bands of scavengers and hunters. And the environment itself changed, sometimes suddenly and sometimes gradually but inevitably. And perhaps the relationship between earlier instincts and human awareness produced its own problems. All these changes required adaptations in social organization and created new opportunities for

leadership. Habits and techniques of control would be strengthened. In critical times any non-conformity would be a danger to the group. People who are controlled by others in this way soon lose the ability to act for themselves, even if their leaders do not make it dangerous for them to do so. And then, as I shall explain, the natural feelings of opposition become moralized and work to perpetuate the very organization they basically oppose. The whole structure becomes held together by the negative biological response to deprivation and threat — it is an organization held together by the aggression it creates. Aggression has become moralized, and morality has become a form of violence. I shall describe how this happens.

Once the social structure exists it tends to be perpetuated. The organizing groups, the leaders, receive privileges. Some of these were perhaps necessary in the critical situations that created the need for leadership. But the justification for them becomes less when they are inherited by their children. At the same time they become more extensive and entrenched. They become an injustice. But the organizing group becomes self-justifying, because although its position is unjust it is the administrator of justice. At first opposition to it will not be revolutionary or even political; it will be “meaningless” and involve personal discontents and frustrations. When personal problems become private problems, as they must for the people involved in them, they are distorted, and then people seem to be acting in arbitrary, self-regarding ways. This can always be shown to be socially disruptive, of course. In this way an unjust society causes and defines crime; and an aggressive social structure which is unjust and must create aggressive social disruption, receives the moral sanction of being “law and order.”

Law and order is one of the steps taken to maintain injustice.

People with unjust social privileges have an obvious emotional interest in social morality. It allows them to maintain their privileges and justifies them in taking steps to do so. It reflects their fear of an opposition that would often take away everything they have, even their lives. This is one way in which social morality becomes angry and aggressive.

But there is another way. Social morality is also a safe form of obedience for many of the victims of the unjust organization. It gives them a form of innocence founded on fear — but it is never a peaceful innocence. It is a sort of character easily developed in childhood, when power relations are at their starkest. Then it is dangerous to have aggressive ideas against those in power because they can easily punish you, they are stronger and cleverer, and if you destroyed them how could you live? (In adults this becomes: We can't have a revolution because the buses wouldn't run and I'd be late for work. Or: Hitler made the trains run on time.) Our society has the structure of a pyramid of aggression and as the child is the weakest member it is at the bottom. We still *think* we treat children with special kindness and make special allowances for them, as indeed most animals do. But do we? Don't most people believe they have a right, even a duty, to use crude force against children as part of their education? Almost all organizations dealing with children are obsessed with discipline. Whenever possible we put them into uniforms and examine their minds like warders frisking prisoners. We force them to live by the clock before they can read it, through this makes no biological sense. We build homes without proper places for them. They interfere with the getting of money so mothers

leave them and go to work — and some of them are no longer even physically able to feed their own children. Parents are worn out by daily competitive striving so they can't tolerate the child's natural noise and mess. They don't know why it cries, they don't know *any* of its inarticulate language. The child's first word isn't "mummy" or "daddy," it is "me." It has been learning to say it through millions of years of evolution, and it has a biological right to its egocentricity because that is the only way our species can continue.

The point is this: every child is born with certain biological expectations, or if you like species' assumptions — that it's unpreparedness will be cared for, that it will be given not only food but emotional reassurance, that its vulnerability will be shielded, that it will be born into a world waiting to receive it, and that knows *how* to receive it. But the weight of aggression in our society is so heavy that the unthinkable happens: we batter it. And when the violence is not so crude it is still there, spread thinly over years; the final effect is the same and so the dramatic metaphor I used to describe it was the stoning of a baby in its pram. This is not done by thugs but by people who like plays condemning thugs.

One way or the other the child soon learns that it is born into a strange world and not the world it evolved for: we are no longer born free. So the small, infinitely vulnerable child panics — as any animal must. It does not get the reassurance it needs, and in its fear it identifies with the people who have power over it. That is, it accepts their view of the situation, their judgment of who is right and wrong — their *morality*. But this morality — which is social morality — now has all the force of fear and panic that created it. Morality stops being some-

thing people want and becomes what they are terrified to be without. So social morality is a form of corrupted innocence, and it is against the basic wishes of those who have been moralized in this way. It is a threat, a weapon used against their most fundamental desire for justice, without which they are not able to be happy or allow others to be happy. The aggressive response of such people has been smothered by social morality, but this only increases its tension. So they try to relieve it in extravert ways. Often they become missionaries and campaigners. They are obsessed with a need for censorship – which is only the moral justification of the peeping Tom. They find the wicked and ungodly everywhere – because these things are in themselves. Their social morality denies their need for justice, but that need is so basic it can only be escaped by dying or going mad; otherwise it must be struggled against obsessively. In this struggle pleasure becomes guilt, and the moralizing, censorious, inhuman puritans are formed. Sometimes their aggression is hidden under strenuous gleefulness, but it is surprising how little glee is reflected in their opinions and beliefs, and how intolerant, destructive and angry these guardians of morality can be.

Their morality is angry because they are in conflict with themselves. Not merely divided, but *fighting* their own repressed need for justice with all the fear and hysteria of their original panic. Because this isn't something that is done once, in childhood or later; to go on living these people must murder themselves every day. Social morality is a form of suicide. Socially moralized people must act contemptuously and angrily to all liberalism, contentment and sexual freedom, because these are the things they are fighting in themselves. There is no way out for them – it is as if an animal was locked in a cage

and then fed with the key. It shakes the bars but can never get out. So other people's happiness becomes their pain, and other people's freedom reminds them of their slavery. It is as if they had created in themselves a desolate, inhospitable landscape in which they had to live out their emotional and spiritual lives. This landscape reflects, of course, the inhospitable, unjust world in which they first suffered; and it exacerbates and reinforces their aggression and seems to give it added depths of bitterness. By calling the unjust world good they recreate it in themselves and are condemned to live in it. They have not learned that when you are frightened of the dark you do not make it go away by shutting your eyes. These people are the angry, gleeful ghosts of my play, *Early Morning*.

Not all children grow up in this way, of course. Some solve the problem by becoming cynical and indifferent, others hide in a listless, passive conformity, others become criminal and openly destructive. Whatever happens, most of them will grow up to act in ways that are ugly, deceitful and violent; and the conforming, socially moralized, good citizens will be the most violent of all, because their aggression is expressed through all the technology and power of massed society. The institutions of morality and order are always more destructive than crime. This century has made that very clear.

Even if a child escapes undamaged it will still face the same problems as a man. We treat men as children. They have no real political or economic control of their lives, and this makes them afraid of society and their own impotence in it. Marx has described adult alienation very well, but we can now understand more about it. We can see that most men are spending their lives doing things for which they are not biologically

designed. We are not designed for our production lines, housing blocks, even cars; and these things are not designed for us. They are designed, basically, to make profit. And because we do not even need most of the things we waste our lives in producing, we have to be surrounded by commercial propaganda to make us buy them. This life is so unnatural for us that, for straightforward biological reasons, we become tense, nervous and aggressive, and these characteristics are fed back into our young. Tension and aggression are even becoming the markings of our species. Many people's faces are set in patterns of alarm, coldness or threat; and they move jerkily and awkwardly, not with the simplicity of free animals. These expressions are signs of moral disease, but we are taught to admire them. They are used in commercial propaganda and in iconographic pictures of politicians and leaders, even writers; and of course they are taken as signs of good manners in the young.

It is for these reasons I say that society is held together by the aggression it creates, and men are not dangerously aggressive but our sort of society is. It creates aggression in these ways: first, it is basically unjust, and second it makes people live unnatural lives — both things which create a natural, biological aggressive response in the members of society. Society's formal answer to this is socialized morality; but this, as I have explained, is only another form of violence, and so it must itself provoke more aggression. There is no way out for our sort of society, an unjust society must be violent. Any organization which denies the basic need for biological justice must become aggressive, even though it claims to be moral. This is true of most religions, which say that justice can only be obtained in another world, and not in this. It is also true of many movements for political reform.

Moralized aggression can, of course, be mixed with ordinary kindness and decency, so can the aggression of the social institutions it maintains. But aggression is so powerful (it was after all evolved to deal with desperate situations) that it decides the character of all people and institutions it infects. So through historical times our institutions have been aggressive, and because of this they make it even easier for aggressive people to get power and authority. That is why leaders — revolutionary as well as reactionary — so often behave worse than animals. I don't say this as invective — it is a sad, historical truth.

So human aggression has important features that make it more destructive than the aggression of other animals. It *is* animal aggression, but it has to be accommodated by our human minds, and presumably it appears to us as more alarming and frightening than it does to other animals. This is true of our subjective feelings of aggression as well as of the aggression we meet from outside. We have more complicated resources to deal with this increased vulnerability. When panic and fear become unbearable it is as if we lied and said they were not there, and out of this lie we build social morality. Children are especially vulnerable in this way, as I have said, but we are all exposed to the same pressures throughout our lives. As animals we react to threat in a natural, biological way; but we must also react in more complicated ways as human beings — mentally, emotionally and morally. It is because we cannot do this successfully that we no longer function as a species. Instead we have created all the things that threaten us: our military giantism, moral hysteria, industrial servitude, and all the ugly aggressiveness of a commercial culture.

Our situation has been made much worse, at least for the time being, by our technological success. The problem can now be described in this brief, schematic way.

We evolved in a biosphere but we live in what is more and more becoming a technosphere. We do not fit into it very well and so it activates our biological defenses, one of which is aggression. Our environment is changing so rapidly that we cannot wait for biological solutions to evolve. So we should either change our technosphere or use technology to change human nature. But change in our society is really decided on urgent commercial imperatives, so nothing is done to solve our main problem. But a species living in an unfavorable environment dies out. For us the end will probably be quicker because the aggression we generate will be massively expressed through our technology.

This is very over-simplified and our fate is far from being so certain. But the combination of technology and socialized morality is very ugly, and it could lead to disaster. Alternatively, governments should begin to use technology to enforce socialized morality. That is by using drugs, selection, conditioning, genetics and so on, they could manufacture people who would fit into society. This would be just as disastrous. So if we do not want either of these things we must do something else. There are signs, in the search for counter-cultures and alternative politics, that we are beginning to do so.

What ought we to do? Live justly. But what is justice? Justice is allowing people to live in the way for which they evolved.

Human beings have an emotional and physical need to do so, it is their biological expectation. They *can* only live in this way, or all the time struggle consciously or unconsciously to do so. That is the essential thing I want to say because it means that in fact our society and its morality, which deny this, and its technology which more and more prevents it, all the time whisper into people's ears, "You have no right to live." That is what lies under the splendor of the modern world. Equality, freedom and fraternity must be reinterpreted in the light of this – otherwise real revolutionary change is impossible.

We can express this basic need in many ways: aesthetic, intellectual, the need to love, create, protect and enjoy. These are not higher things that can be added when more basic needs are met. *They* are basic. They must be the way in which we express all our existence, and if they do not control our daily life then we cannot function as human beings at all. They are not weakness, but they have nothing to do with the caricatures that pass for strength in our society – the hysterical old maids who become sergeant majors, the disguised peeping Toms who become moralists, the immature social misfits who become judges. Society pays lip service to these needs, but it has no real interest in them, and they are of course incompatible with the strident competitiveness of a commercial culture. So really we deny them. Like ghosts we teach a dead religion, build a few more prisons to worship Caesar in, and leave it at that. Blake said that when we try to become more than men we become less than beasts, and that is what we have done. Our human emotions and intellects are not things that stand apart from the long development of evolution; it is as animals we make our highest demands, and in responding to them as men we create our deepest human experience.

I have not answered many of the questions I have raised, but I have tried to explain things that often go unnoticed but which must be put right if anything is to work for us. They are difficult to put right because reforms easily become socially moralized. It is so easy to subordinate justice to power, but when this happens power takes on the dynamics and dialectics of aggression, and then nothing is really changed. Marx did not know about this problem and Lenin discovered it when it was too late.

There is no need for pessimism or resignation, and this play is certainly not either of these things. Lear is blind till they take his eyes away, and by then he has begun to see, to understand. (Blindness is a dramatic metaphor for insight, that is why Gloucester, Oedipus and Tiresias are blind.) Lear's new world is strange and so at first he can only grope painfully and awkwardly. Lear is old by then, but most of the play's audiences will be younger. It might seem to them that the truth is always grounds for pessimism when it is discovered, but one soon comes to see it as an opportunity. Then you don't have to go on doing things that never work in the hope that they might one day – because now you know they *can't*. Even bourgeois politics is more efficient than that.

Finally, I have not tried to say what the future should be like, because that is a mistake. If your plan of the future is too rigid you start to coerce people to fit into it. We do not need a plan of the future, we need a *method* of change.

I want to say something brief about the play. Lear did not have to destroy his daughters' innocence, he does so only because he doesn't understand his situation. When he does understand he

leaves Thomas and Susan unharmed. But I think he had to destroy the innocent boy. Some things were lost to us long ago as a species, but we all seem to have to live through part of the act of losing them. We have to learn to do this without guilt or rancor or callousness – or socialized morality. So Lear's ghost isn't one of the angry ghosts from *Early Morning*, but something different.

Apart from the ten or so main characters of the play there are about seventy other speaking parts. In a sense these are one role showing the character of a society.

Act One shows a world dominated by myth. Act Two shows the clash between myth and reality, between superstitious men and the autonomous world. Act Three shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it.

Lear lived about the year 3100. He was king for sixty years. He built Leicester and was buried under the River Soar. His father was killed while trying to fly over London. His youngest daughter killed herself when she fell from power.

(Holinshed and Geoffrey of Monmouth)

## CHARACTERS

*Lear* was presented by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre with the following cast:

FOREMAN	Geoffrey Hinsliff
FIRST WORKMAN	Matthew Guinness
SECOND WORKMAN	Struan Rodger
THIRD WORKMAN	Ron Pember
SOLDIER	Bob Hoskins
LEAR	Harry Andrews
BODICE	Carmel McSharry
FONTANELLE	Rosemary McHale
WARRINGTON	Anthony Douse
OLD COUNCILLOR	George Howe
ENGINEER	Gareth Hunt
FIRING SQUAD OFFICER	William Hoyland
BISHOP	Gareth Hunt
DUKE OF NORTH	Eric Allen
DUKE OF CORNWALL	Alec Heggie
SOLDIER A	Bob Hoskins
THE GRAVEDIGGER'S BOY	Mark McManus
THE GRAVEDIGGER'S BOY'S WIFE	Celestine Randall
CARPENTER	Oliver Cotton
SERGEANT	Bob Hoskins
SOLDIER D <i>at Gravedigger's Boy's House</i>	Ray Barron
SOLDIER E <i>at Gravedigger's Boy's House</i>	Geoffrey Hinsliff
SOLDIER F <i>at Gravedigger's Boy's House</i>	Anthony Milner
JUDGE	William Hoyland
USHER	Gareth Hunt
OLD SAILOR	Matthew Guinness
BEN, <i>a Prison Orderly</i>	Derek Carpenter

SOLDIER H <i>Guard in the Prison</i>	Geoffrey Hinsliff
SOLDIER I <i>Guard in the Prison</i>	Richard Howard
SOLDIER G <i>Guard in the Prison</i>	Bob Hoskins
OLD PRISON ORDERLY	Anthony Douse
WOUNDED REBEL SOLDIER	Matthew Guinness
BODICE'S AIDE (Major Pellet)	Struan Rodger
SOLDIER J <i>Convoy Escort</i>	Bob Hoskins
SOLDIER K <i>Convoy Escort</i>	Geoffrey Hinsliff
SOLDIER L <i>Convoy Escort</i>	Richard Howard
PRISONER 1	Struan Rodger
PRISONER 2	Ron Pember
PRISONER 3	Derek Carpenter
PRISONER 4, <i>later Prison Doctor</i>	William Hoyland
PRISON COMMANDANT	Gareth Hunt
SOLDIER M <i>Prison Guard</i>	Ray Barron
SOLDIER N <i>Prison Guard</i>	Matthew Guinness
SOLDIER O <i>Prison Guard</i>	Eric Allen
FARMER	Geoffrey Hinsliff
FARMER'S WIFE	Marjorie Yates
FARMER'S SON	Anthony Milner
THOMAS	Alec Heggie
JOHN	Richard Howard
SUSAN	Diana Quick
SMALL MAN	Ron Pember
OFFICER	Gareth Hunt
A BOY	Ray Barron

OTHER SOLDIERS, WORKERS, STRANGERS, COURT OFFICIALS, GUARDS: Geoffrey Hinsliff, Matthew Guinness, Antony Milner, Ray Barron, Ron Pember, Eric Allen, Anthony Douse, Bob Hoskins, Richard Howard, Gareth Hunt, Derek Carpenter, Marjorie Yates, Struan Rodger.

*Directed by William Gaskill    Costumes designed by Deirdre Clancy*  
*Sets designed by John Napier    Lighting by Andy Phillips*

## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE

SCENE: Near the wall. A stack of building materials — shovels, picks, posts and a tarpaulin. Silence. Then (offstage) a sudden indistinct shout, a crash, shouts. A FOREMAN and TWO WORKERS carry on a DEAD WORKER and put him down. They are followed by a SOLDIER.

FIRST WORKER. Get some water! He needs water.

FOREMAN. He's dead.

SOLDIER. Move 'im then!

FOREMAN. Get his legs.

SOLDIER (to FOREMAN). Can yer see 'em? Look an' see!  
They're comin' up the ditch on the other side.

(FOREMAN goes upstage to look off. THIRD and FOURTH WORKERS come on.)

THIRD WORKER (coming on). I shouted to him to run.

FOREMAN (coming downstage). Go back, go back! Work!

(FOURTH WORKER goes off again.)

THIRD WORKER. You heard me shout!

FIRST WORKER. He says he's dead.

FOREMAN. Work!

SOLDIER (to FIRST WORKER). You! — make yerself responsible for 'andin' in 'is pick t' stores. (Suddenly he sees something off stage and runs down to the others.)  
Cover 'im! Quick!

FOREMAN (pointing to tarpaulin). Take that!

(The WORKERS cover the body with the tarpaulin. LEAR, LORD WARRINGTON, an OLD COUNCILLOR, an OFFICER, an ENGINEER and Lear's daughters – BODICE and FONTANELLE – come on. The SOLDIER, FOREMAN and WORKERS stand stiffly. WARRINGTON signs to them and they work by the tarpaulin.)

BODICE (to FONTANELLE). We needn't go on. We can see the end.

ENGINEER. The chalk ends here. We'll move faster now.

COUNCILLOR (looking at his map). Isn't it a swamp on this map?

FONTANELLE (to BODICE). My feet are wet.

LEAR (pointing to tarpaulin). What's that?

ENGINEER. Materials for the –

WARRINGTON (to FOREMAN). Who is it?

FOREMAN. Workman.

WARRINGTON. What?

FOREMAN. Accident, sir.

LEAR. Who left that wood in the mud?

ENGINEER. That's just delivered. We're moving that to –

LEAR. It's been rotting there for weeks. (To WARRINGTON.) They'll never finish! Get more men on it. The officers must make the men work!

BODICE (shaking ENGINEER's hand). Our visit has been so enjoyable and informative.

FONTANELLE. Such an interesting day.

WARRINGTON. We can't take more men. The countryside would be left derelict and there'd be starvation in the towns.

LEAR. Show me this body. (WARRINGTON and the SOLDIER lift the tarpaulin.) Blow on the head.

FOREMAN. Axe.

LEAR. What?

FOREMAN. An axe, sir. Fell on him.

LEAR. It's a flogging crime to delay work. (To WARRINGTON.)

You must deal with this fever. They treat their men like cattle. When they finish work they must be kept in dry huts. All these huts are wet. You waste men.

COUNCILLOR (making a note). I'll appoint a hut inspector.

LEAR. They dug the wall up again last night.

OFFICER. Local farmers. We can't catch them, they scuttle back home so fast.

LEAR. Use spring traps. (To FOREMAN.) Who dropped the axe?

WARRINGTON (to FOREMAN). Be quick! (FOREMAN and SOLDIER push THIRD WORKER forward.)

LEAR. Court martial him. Fetch a firing squad. A drumhead trial for sabotage. (Quiet murmur of surprise. The OFFICER goes to fetch the Firing Squad.)

FONTANELLE. My feet are wet.

BODICE. She'll catch cold, father.

LEAR. Who was a witness?

WARRINGTON (points to FOREMAN). You!

FOREMAN. He dropped a pickaxe on his head. I've had my eye on him, sir. Always idle and —

LEAR (to THIRD WORKER). Prisoner of war?

FOREMAN. No. One of our men. A farmer.

LEAR. I understand! He has a grudge. I took him off his land.

(The FIRING SQUAD is marched in by the OFFICER.)

OFFICER. Squad as a squad — halt!

LEAR. I shall give evidence. He killed a workman on the wall. That alone makes him a traitor. But there's something else suspicious about him. Did you dig up the wall last night?

BODICE (sighing). It can easily be checked if he missed their roll calls.

LEAR. I started this wall when I was young. I stopped my enemies in the field, but there were always more of them. How could we ever be free? So I built this wall to keep our enemies out. My people will live behind this wall when I'm dead. You may be governed by fools but you'll always live in peace. My wall will make you free. That's why the enemies on our borders — the Duke of Cornwall and the Duke of North — try to stop us building it. I won't ask him which he works for — they're both hand in glove. Have him shot.

THIRD WORKER. Sir.

FONTANELLE (aside to BODICE). Thank God we've thought of ourselves.

OFFICER. Squad as a squad to firing positions — move!

LEAR (indicating the FIRING SQUAD). They must work on the wall, they're slow enough. (Turns to WARRINGTON.) See this is done. I'm going down to the swamp. (OFFICER ties THIRD WORKER to post.)

BODICE. Father, if you kill this man, it will be an injustice.

LEAR. My dear, you want to help me, but you must let me deal with the things I understand. Listen and learn.

BODICE. What is there to learn? It's silly to make so much out of nothing. There was an accident. That's all.

LEAR (half aside to her). Of course there was an accident.

But the work's slow. I must do something to make the officers move. That's what I came for, otherwise my visit's wasted. And there *are* saboteurs and there *is* something suspicious about this man –

BODICE. But think of the people! They already say you act like a schoolboy or an old spinster –

LEAR. Why are they waiting? It's cruel to make him wait.

OFFICER ) Sir – you're –

WARRINGTON) Move, sir.

(LEAR moves out of the FIRING SQUAD's way.)

BODICE (loudly). Listen to me. All of you notice I disassociate myself from this act.

LEAR. Be quiet, Bodice. You mustn't talk like that in front of me.

FONTANELLE. And I agree with what my sister says.

LEAR. O my poor children, you're too good for this world.  
(To the others.) You see how well they'll govern when I'm dead. Bodice, you're right to be kind and merciful, and when I'm dead you *can* be – because you will have my wall. You'll live inside a fortress. Only I'm not free to be kind or merciful. I must build the fortress.

BODICE. How petty it is to be obstinate over nothing.

LEAR. I have explained and now you must understand!

BODICE. It is small and petty to make –

LEAR. I have explained.

BODICE. Small and petty! All these things are in your head.  
The Duke of Cornwall is not a monster. The Duke of North has not sworn to destroy you. I have proof of what I say.

LEAR. They're my sworn enemies. I killed the fathers, therefore the sons must hate me. And when I killed the fathers I stood on the field among our dead and swore to kill the sons! I'm too old now, they've fooled me. But they won't take my country and dig my bones up when I'm dead.. Never.

FONTANELLE (to BODICE). This is the moment to tell him.

BODICE. I'm going to marry the Duke of North and my sister's going to marry the Duke of Cornwall.

FONTANELLE. He's good and reliable and honest, and I trust him as if we'd been brought up together.

BODICE. Good lord! – how can they be your friends if you treat them like enemies? That's why they threatened you: it was political necessity. Well, now that's all in the past! We've brought them into your family and you can pull this absurd wall down. There! (Slight laugh.) You don't have to make your people slaves to protect you from your sons-in-law.

LEAR. My sons-in-law?

FONTANELLE. Congratulate us, father, give us your blessing.

BODICE. I'm marrying North.

FONTANELLE. And I'm marrying Cornwall.

LEAR (pointing to THIRD WORKER). Tie him straight! He's falling! (OFFICER does so.)

BODICE. So now you don't have to shoot him. Our husbands could never allow you to, anyway.

FONTANELLE. I know you'll get on with my husband. He's very understanding, he knows how to deal with old people.

LEAR. Straighter!

BODICE. You'll soon learn to respect them like your sons.

LEAR. I have no sons! I have no daughters! (Tries to be calmer.) Tell me – (Stops, bewildered.) – you are marrying North and you are marrying – – No, no! They've deceived you. You haven't met them. When did you meet them? Behind my back?

FONTANELLE. We sent each other photographs and letters. I can tell a man from his expression.

LEAR. Oh now I understand! You haven't met them. You're like blind children. Can't you see they only want to get over the wall? They'll be like wolves in a fold.

BODICE. Wall, wall, wall! This wall must be pulled down!

FONTANELLE. Certainly. My husband insists on that as part of the marriage contract.

BODICE (to OFFICER). I order you not to shoot this man. Our husbands will shoot anyone who shoots him. They offer us peace, we can't shoot innocent men because we think they're their spies!

LEAR. Shoot him!

BODICE. No!

LEAR. This is not possible! I must be obeyed!

WARRINGTON. Sir, this is out of hand. Nothing's gained by being firm in little matters. Keep him under arrest. The Privy Council will meet. There are more important matters to discuss.

LEAR. My orders are not little matters! What duke are you marrying? Who have you sold me to?

BODICE. If the king will not act reasonably it's your legal duty to disobey him.

WARRINGTON. Ma'am, you make this worse. Let me –

LEAR (taking pistol from the OFFICER and threatening the FIRING SQUAD). Shoot him!

BODICE. There, it's happened. Well, the doctors warned us, of course. (Loudly.) My father isn't well. Warrington, take the king back to his camp.

FONTANELLE. He shouldn't have come out today. This mud's too much for him. My feet are wringing.

LEAR. My enemies will not destroy my work! I gave my life to these people. I've seen armies on their hands and knees in blood, insane women feeding dead children at their empty breasts, dying men spitting blood at me with their last breath, our brave young men in tears — — But I could bear all this! When I'm dead my people will live in freedom and peace and remember my name, no - venerate it! . . . They are my sheep and if one of them is lost I'd take fire to hell to bring him out. I loved and cared for all my children, and now you've sold them to their enemies. (He shoots THIRD WORKER, and the body slumps forward on the post in a low bow.) There's no more time, it's too late to learn anything.

BODICE. Yes, you'll ruin yourself. Our husbands can't let you terrorize these people — they'll be *their* people soon. They must protect them from your madness.

LEAR. Work! Get your men to work! Get them on the wall! (WORKERS, SOLDIERS and FOREMAN go out. They take the two bodies with them.) I knew it would come to this! I knew you were malicious! I built my wall against *you* as well as my other enemies! You talk of marriage? You have murdered your family. There will be no more children. Your husbands are impotent. That's not an empty insult. You wrote? My spies know more than that! You will get nothing from this crime. You have perverted lusts. They won't be satisfied. It *is*

perverted to want your pleasure where it makes others suffer. I pity the men who share your beds. I've watched you scheme and plan — they'll lie by you when you dream! Where will your ambition end? You will throw old men from their coffins, break children's legs, pull the hair from old women's heads, make young men walk the streets in beggary and cold while their wives grow empty and despair — I am ashamed of my tears! You have done this to me. The people will judge between you and me. (LEAR goes out. The ENGINEER and the OLD COUNCILLOR follow him.)

WARRINGTON. I'm sorry, ma'am. If you'd spoken another time—

FONTANELLE. You should have taken him away when you were told—

BODICE. You were caught out. Well, learn your lesson. As it happens, no harm's done. Go and keep in with him. We'll let you know what must happen next. (WARRINGTON goes out. BODICE and FONTANELLE are left alone.) We must go to our husbands tonight.

FONTANELLE. Happiness at last! I was always terrified of him.

BODICE. We must attack before the wall's finished. I'll talk to my husband and you talk to yours. The four of us will sit in the Council of War. We must help each other. Good bye.

FONTANELLE. Good bye. (The daughters go out.)

## SCENE TWO

**SCENE:** Parade ground. A saluting stand. **LEAR, OLD COUNCILLOR, WARRINGTON, BISHOP, MILITARY AIDES.** Marching, march music, and parade commands are heard during the scene. **LEAR** stands with both arms stretched out in a gesture of salute and blessing.

**LEAR.** Greetings to the eighth regiment! (Still saluting. To **WARRINGTON.**) You will command my right flank and circle them on the right. Then I attack the center. That's how I crushed the fathers. (Still saluting.) I salute my loyal comrades!

**WARRINGTON.** We could refuse this war. We're old, sir. We could retire and let these young men choose what to do with their own lives. Ask your daughters to let you live quietly in the country.

**LEAR** (still saluting). How could I trust myself to them? My daughters are proclaimed outlaws, without rights of prisoners of war. They can be raped – or murdered. Why should they be held for trial? Their crimes aren't covered by my laws. Where does their vileness come from?

**WARRINGTON.** I've given you advice it was my duty to give. But I'm proud you've rejected it.

**LEAR** (still saluting). Greetings to my glorious ninth!

**WARRINGTON.** I have two letters from your daughters, sir. They both wrote in secret and told me not to let anyone know, especially each other.

**LEAR.** Give them to me.

**WARRINGTON.** No, sir. They ask me to betray you and then each other. They'll both make me head of the army and

let me share their bed.

LEAR. They live in their own fantasies! They chose their husbands well, they should be married to my enemies! Have the ceremonies taken place? It doesn't matter. (He takes the letters from WARRINGTON. He reads part of one.) "He is mad. If he won, what security would you have?" (He reads from the other.) "He would turn on you as he turned on us." (Salutes as before.) Greetings to my friends the ninth! (Still saluting.) Warrington, if I'm killed or fall into their hands you must take my place and build the wall.

WARRINGTON. Sir. This fry won't take you. Your army is paraded!

BISHOP. Our prayers go with you into war, sir. God blesses the righteous. He has nothing to do with women who make war.

COUNCILLOR. I feel confidence in my bones. That's never failed me. If only I were a young man!

LEAR. The trumpet! I smell victory! (Cheers and trumpet. They go out.)

### SCENE THREE

SCENE: Daughters' War Council. Table, chairs, map. BODICE, FONTANELLE, NORTH, CORNWALL. BODICE knits.

NORTH. We share the command between us.

CORNWALL. Yes.

NORTH. We must guess how Lear will attack.

BODICE (knitting). He'll send Warrington round the right and