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## APPROPRIATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* IN MODERN BRITISH DRAMA: EDWARD BOND'S *LEAR* (1971) AND HOWARD BARKER'S *SEVEN LEARS* (1989)

The following article is an attempt at looking at the modern appropriations of Shakespeare's King Lear's story in two British plays: Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971) and Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* (1989). Both dates signify the first stage premieres of the plays in question: Bond's play was first opened at the Royal Court Theatre, London and Barker's play was opened October at Sheffield Crucible. Both plays explicitly relate to King Lear's story by their titles and both are recognized as the best-known and most powerful dramatic reworkings of the Lear story. Although both playwrights place themselves within two disparate theatrical traditions: Rational Theatre (Bond) and The Theatre of Cruelty (Barker), they are noted for their political allusions. Yet the primary concern of the following article will be to see to what extent is the "myth" of Lear modified in two modern versions. To achieve this effect the author of the article will closely look at the spatial arrangement, time scheme, plot development, story line, character presentation and values, as well as some major themes. Also Lear as the main character will be shown in its various roles and relations: as a loving father, a king, a leader, a madman and a tragic figure.

KEYWORDS: appropriation, Lear, violence, cruelty, insight, Rational Theatre, Theatre of Cruelty

### 1. LITERARY ADAPTATION/APPROPRIATION

To start with the defining terms, Julie Sanders (2006) introduces an important distinction between the loosely used terms: *adaptation* and *appropriation*. Although both modes of reworking texts are similar in the adaptive process "*appropriation* frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (Sanders 2006: 26). The notions of *adaptation* and *appropriation* are encompassed by a broader practice of *intertextuality*. *Intertextuality* proves that texts refer back to the other texts and rework them. According to Hawthorne (2000: 182), *intertextuality* means "a relation between two or more texts which has an effect upon the way in which the *intertext* is read." The *intertext* is, in turn, the text within which other texts reside or echo their presence (ibid.). Most researches in *intertextuality* start with the study of Julia Kristeva (1980), who first introduced this critical term, which later has been widely

applied, defined and redefined, and, as a result, intertextuality has taken on various forms. Among them figure the two terms, *adaptation* and *appropriation*, which both evoke the original text (the sourcetext), however in the case of appropriation, the relation between the appropriated text and its source text is not so clearly signaled as in the process of adaptation (Sanders 2006: 26ff).

Shakespearean appropriations have been made with reference to many of his plays, adapting them for the stage or the screen, or by involving them in a generic shift (e.g. from drama to the novel). Moreover, the Shakespearean canon has been subject to all possible alterations – “as long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays” (Fischlin/ Fortier, as quoted in Sanders 2006: 46).

It is all too evident that the two modern British playwrights, although representing two different approaches to theatrical art, have a lot in common. Both are playwrights, directors and active adaptors of literature; for example Bond has seen through the production of seventeen original plays and has produced highly acclaimed adaptations and translations of *The Cherry Orchard*, *A Chaste Maid of Cheapside*, or *The White Devil*. His plays refer back to myths (e.g. the Trojan war is referred back in *The Woman*, 1978), or the classic canonical texts like *Lear* (1971). Similarly, Howard Barker is both a playwright and director – The Wrestling School Theatre Company was formed to stage Barker’s plays. Between 1988 and June 2005 The Wrestling School has produced 24 plays written by Barker. Of these 24 productions, three have seen Barker entering the territory of appropriating classic texts: Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1604), *King Lear* (1606) and Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* (1899) (Gritzner/ Rabey 2006: 40). Apart from that *Women Beware Women* (1986) is Barker’s reworking of a Jacobean tragedy by Thomas Middleton. Let us not forget that Shakespeare himself was “an active adaptor and imitator, an appropriator of myth, fairy tale and folklore, as well as of the works of specific writers as varied as Ovid, Plutarch and Holinshed” (Sanders 2006: 46). Most of Shakespeare’s characters or storylines were borrowed from other sources. *King Lear*, for example, borrows from the old *Leir* play, an old play of unknown authorship, which flourished at the court in the early 1590s. However Shakespearean version differs from the original source by primarily the tragic ending (Bate/ Rasmussen 2007: 2007).

There are basically two types of literary adaptation/appropriation: parallel plot adaptation and prequel/sequel plot adaptation. The first of these can be exemplified by Bond’s play, the latter with Barker’s play. What is even most intriguing is that Barker’s play interacts with Bond’s play so that “adaptation and appropriation also create their own intertexts” (Sanders 2006: 24) by performing in dialogue with other adaptations, as well as their informing source (*ibid.*). Although the aim of the present article is to focus entirely on a relationship of the two plays to their main source, it has been recorded that Bond’s and Barker’s appropriations create their own *intertexts* as well.

It is interesting to note that most adaptations may arise from some dissatisfaction with the original source (the hypotext). Jane Smiley, an American novelist, explains why the story of Shakespeare's *Lear* served for her as the background for her novel *A Thousand Acres* (1991). She says that her acceptance of the tragedy was *pro-forma* and she did not like either *Lear* or Cordelia. She says:

Beginning with my first readings of the play in high school and continuing through college and graduate school, I had been cool to both Cordelia and Lear. (...) he struck me as the sort of the person, from beginning to end, that you would want to stay away from – selfish, demanding, humourless, self-pitying ... (...) I didn't like Cordelia either. She seemed ungenerous and cold, a stickler for truth at the beginning, a stickler for form at the end. (Smiley, as quoted in Cakebread 1999: 85)

In a similar way, Edward Bond expresses his reasons for rewriting *King Lear*: “the social moral of Shakespeare's *Lear* is this: endure till in time the world will be made right. That's a dangerous moral for us. We have less time than Shakespeare.” (Bond, as quoted in Patterson 2003: 140). And further on, the playwright states that: “as a society we use the play in wrong way. And it's for that reason that I would like to rewrite it so that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our problems” (3-4).

Bond's *Lear* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in September 1971 (Free 1996: 83) and the critics' reviews of the play were more positive than those greeting Bond's earlier plays. Bond's play is “both a commentary upon and an extension of Shakespeare's,” “a forthright transformation of *King Lear* into contemporary terms” (Halio 1992: 57-58). Both plays share similarities and differences between them. For example, “*Lear's* descent into madness and his agonizing growth in self-knowledge remain the central focus” (57). *Lear's* only daughters are his two elder daughters, and the Fool's place is taken by the Gravedigger's Boy.

Bond has rewritten Shakespeare's play since he had the feeling that the play had one major flaw: *the preaching of resignation* (Patterson 2003: 140). However, the most obvious thing about Bond's play is that he treats the original in a loose way, allowing himself for more freedoms so that “his version has little to do with the original” (4), and, accordingly, Bond creates an almost entirely new situation out of the elements of the original, but his *Lear* is **anti-Lear** (*ibid.*).

## 2. EXTREMITY OF VIOLENCE:

### SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* AND BARKER'S *SEVEN LEARS*

The following discussion of the two appropriations of *Lear's* story will begin with one element shared between them; namely the extremity of on-stage violence.

To reiterate a familiar fact about Shakespeare's *King Lear*, it is definitely the one of Shakespeare's canon with the most horrible depiction of evil and display of

human cruelty and atrocities. "We feel throughout the play that evil is abnormal; a curse which brings down destruction upon itself; that it is without any long career ...") (Dowden, as quoted in Bonheim 1960: 36).<sup>1</sup> It is at this point that Shakespeare, Bond and Barker converge. Bond explains his interest in violence in the following way:

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. (*The Author's Preface*, 1976: v).

The playwright's preoccupation with the theme of violence, and in a broader context, society and its problems has been recorded in his many prefaces, interviews, essays and letters (Patterson 2003: 138). Bond theorizes on the reasons and motives for violence by saying that aggression is innate in us, human beings, and this occurs when "we are constantly deprived of our physical and emotional needs, or when we are threatened with this" (Bond 1976: vi). Bond's diagnosis of the modern society is further expressed in the following words: "Violence is like pain, not a normal condition but a sign that something is wrong" (Bond, as quoted in Paterson 2003: 138). The playwright's ideology, called "Rational Theatre," could also perfectly explain the tragedy of *King Lear* in Shakespeare's version of the story. Violence in Shakespeare's play stems from the fact that Lear shattered the natural order of things by dividing the kingdom and disinheriting the youngest daughter, Cordelia in a fit of rage. When it comes to Bond's play, "although we are again shocked by the violence, our sense of shock is not due to the enormity of violence, but to the casualness with which it is perpetrated" (Jürgen-Diller 1995: 67). As Paterson notes; "his shocking images of violence have lent Bond a certain notoriety and set him apart from his contemporaries (2003: 8)." And further on, what is quite unique is the relationship of the perpetrators to the act of violence, not the brutal act itself. They treat it as something casual, with emotional detachment and accompanied by baby-talk. In one of numerous passages in the play in which violence is all too evident, Bodice (*Lear's* daughter) knits while her sister tortures Warrington, and finally makes use of her knits to poke into his ears:

Bodice: "I'll just jog these in and out a little. Doodee, doodee, doodee, doo." (Bond 1976: 15).<sup>2</sup>

Fontanelle (*Lear's* other daughter), who has previously had Warrington's tongue cut out so that he could not reveal her letters to him, is also cruel: Fontanelle:

<sup>1</sup> E. Dowden, *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* [1875]. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881, as quoted in Bohnheim 36.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from Bond's play are taken from the following edition: Edward Bond. *Lear*. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd, 1976.

“O let me sit on his lungs” (15). The disturbing detachment of the torturers reflects Bond’s vision of modern society (Patterson 2003: 146).

Howard Barker (1946-) is also noted for the cruelty and arresting images on stage. As Bradley states, “some noted affinities are the following: cruelty, language, extremity; Barker’s inclinations are similar to Bond’s; their strategy is to involve the audience by the usage of arresting images” (2010: 155). In a similar vein, Edgar notes the similarities: “instead of distancing the audience from the occurrences, these writers involve the audience, provoking them into thought by the very surprise and shock of the images.” (as quoted in Bradley 156).

**Violent acts or scenes in Barker’s play include the following:**

- a) Clarissa’s murder of her mother (Fifth Lear)
- b) The death of a soldier (Third Lear): “The terrible soldier enters, dying, enters, falls. Lear turns to the body. Oh, awful face, how fate has made a fool of you.” (Barker 1990: 20)<sup>3</sup>
- c) Clarissa’s giving birth to her child which appears to be a dead cat (Barker 23)
- d) Lear drowning his newly-born daughter, Cordelia in a barrel of gin (Barker 44).

The images are arresting as well, for example when Lear in the Third Lear recalls the deaths of soldiers: “Eyes hopped! Eyes wriggled! Bang! And out came eyes!” (Barker 14). This image refers back to Shakespeare’s original: the blinding of Gloucester in III. 7 and to Bond’s play: the blinding of Lear and the torture of Warrington.

### 3. BOND’S *LEAR* AND SHAKESPEARE’S *KING LEAR*

Although Bond’s *Lear* (1971) bears many affinities with the original play, it also differs from it in many aspects. According to Patterson, Bond’s *Lear* is successful mainly for the reason that “his version has little to do with the original” (2003: 4). The plot summary of Bond’s play, however, shows both similarities and differences from the original. Patterson summarizes the play thus:

Lear is a tyrannical king of England and has built a huge wall to keep out his enemies. His daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, grow weary of his despotism and lead armies against him. Lear, now mad, seeks refuge with a gravedigger’s boy. Soldiers arrive, kill the boy and rape his wife, who is called Cordelia. Cordelia leads the fight against Bodice and Fontanelle, proving herself to be as ruthless as her opponents. Lear is captured and blinded, but gains in wisdom. He rejects the temptations offered by the ghost of the gravedigger’s boy to live his life in peaceful isolation. Instead, he returns to the Wall, makes a brave gesture by beginning to dismantle it and is shot (2003: 4).

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Barker’s play are taken from the following edition: Howard Barker. *Seven Lears. Golgo*. London: John Calder; New York: Riverrun Press, 1990.

A brief glance at the above plot summary shows that some of the characters are preserved in Bond's play (e.g. Lear, his daughters), but they are placed in entirely new situations and new contexts. Let me briefly summarize the differences that are also broadly discussed by Patterson (2003). Lear, unlike Shakespearean protagonist, does not wish to abdicate, or resign from his position: It is Warrington's suggestion that the king is old: "We're old, sir. We could retire and let these young men choose what to do with their own lives." (Bond 8). Another parallel with Shakespearean Lear is the character of Warrington, who is to betray Lear and become the head of the army, at the same time sharing the bed with both daughters of Lear. In Shakespearean *Lear* this part was played by Edmund, the bastard son of Gloucester, who shared the conspiracy with Goneril and Regan against Lear (Edmund: "To both these sisters have I sworn my love" – V.1. 40).

Fontanelle and Bodice in Bond's play are Lear's evil daughters and he curses them most severely. In a similar way, in the antecedent play Lear cursed his two evil daughters: Goneril and Regan.

Lear: I knew you were malicious! (...) You talk of marriage? You have murdered your family. There will be no more children. Your husbands are impotent. (...) You have perverted lusts. (Bond 7)

Lear (Shakespeare): "No, you unnatural hags, I will have such revenges on you both/ That all the world shall – I will do such things – What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be/ The terrors of the earth! (II.4. 270)<sup>4</sup>

Lear, in both texts is ashamed of his tears: "I am ashamed of my tears" (Bond), and in Shakespeare: "You think I'll weep; No, I'll not weep," (II.4. 275).

In the same way, in the original text, Lear utters the most crucial words of the play signifying what it means to be a king: "Ay, every inch a king." (IV.5. 103). This speech of Lear evolves into a prose passage in Bond's play, but the affinities are striking:

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! (Bond 7)

Shakespeare's Lear: (he thinks he is everything): "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes" (IV.5. 104).

However, as Patterson argues (2003) – the dropping of 'King' in the title implies that Bond is not at all interested in the royal nature of kingship in the play. Moreover, from the very beginning of the play, he is helpless: his daughters scheme against him by marrying Lear's spies: The Duke of North and The Duke

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<sup>4</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare's *King Lear* are taken from this edition of the play: William Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Edited by Jay L. Halio. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

of Cornwall and Lear's visit at the construction site of the wall ends with the hint at his madness: Bodice: "There, it's happened. Well, the doctors warned us, of course. (Loudly) My father isn't well". (Bond 6)

At the same time Lear's issuing of his "royal" order to shoot the Third Worker becomes unfulfilled and prevented by Bodice from being carried out.

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! (...)

Bodice: If the king will not act reasonably it's your legal duty to disobey him. (Bond 6)

The scene echoes the first act of *King Lear* when Lear's power is first undermined by Kent and later by his daughter, Cordelia, who refuses to flatter the king/ father and gravely disappoints him by that. Lear's first outburst of madness, signalled so early in Bond's play (6), shows his obsession and preoccupation with the themes of justice, ingratitude, tyranny, judgement, death, the idea of being a king and what it entails. But from the very start he is helpless and cannot execute his power. He commanded the workers to work on the wall, but they are slow. The farmers destroy the work by digging up the wall at night. It is Lear's utopia that the Wall will secure his rule and the rule of his daughters. Eventually, Lear shoots the Third Worker himself (towards the end of Scene One). ("He shoots Third Worker and his body slumps forwards on the post in a low bow") (Bond 7). Nobody executes his orders although he is king himself.

Similarly to Shakespearean protagonist, Lear is blind and gains insight in the course of the play. As Bond (1976) explains in the Preface: "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.)" (xiii).

Certainly, a **totally new element** that appears in Bond's play and remains in the focus of the play's action is the **Wall** – a central symbol of rule and safety, but for the common people, forced to work on the Wall, it is a symbol of oppression.

Boy: The king was mad. He took all the men from this village. But I hid. They'd worked with their hands all their lives but when they started on the wall their hands bled for a week." (25). (...) 'Wall death'. Their feet used to swell with the mud. The stink of it even when you were asleep!

The wall offers a potent central image, even though it is physically present in the last scene of the play, when Lear comes to demolish the wall which he himself ordained to be built. The most obvious parallel here is to a politically overt context

of nuclear armaments which were stockpiled by western and eastern nations to keep the enemies out. Bond wrote *Passion*, a piece for the Campaign of Nuclear Disarmament when he was in the middle of his work on *Lear*. So the wall “comes to represent the perverse logic of the oppressive regime that considers that it must defend its ‘stability’ and ‘freedom’ by sacrificing both to the policy of national defence” (Patterson 2003: 148).

Ultimately, Bond's *Lear* has to choose between retreat/ withdrawal into himself and being an activist – he chooses the latter option. He refuses to make a retreat and become a hippy. Instead, he dies on the Wall, shot by the Farmer's son: “Lear is killed instantly and falls down the wall” (Bond 88). Shakespeare's *King Lear* also dies at the end, endeavouring to save his daughter, Cordelia, from imminent death, however he arrives too late to save her. Both characters end tragically, failing in their power as kings and fathers: in Bond's play the focus is more on Lear's failure as king/ ruler on the site of the wall where he tries to dismantle it, but is ineffective. Even “the tool's got no edge. No one cares for it” (Bond 87). One can recall at this point a familiar scene from *King Lear* on the heath when mad Lear evokes the storm (III. 3). Here Lear climbs the wall and notices: “It's built to last. So steep and my breath's short. (He reaches the top.) The wind's cold, I must be quick. (He digs the shovel in.) Work soon warms you up. (87) Lear in this scene is short of breath, exhausted by physical effort and painfully admits: “I am not as fit as I was” (87). Lear in the mad scene on the heath is also old, exhausted, and mentally shattered; however he still wants to execute power by calling forth the elements of the storm. Both *Lears* fall at the end, but their fall happens at different stages of the plot.

### 3.1. SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR* AND BOND'S *LEAR*: SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT/ TIME-SCHEME

On the level of the dramatic plot we can observe the frequent shifting of locales and spaces in the play and these are different. *King Lear*, in fact, is a play which is known for its multiple settings: both indoors and outdoors, capacious “geographically, generically and symbolically” (Young 1990: 7). Enlarged by multiple settings, the play expands in space and time; however curiously enough, this tragedy is “disconnected from chronicled time,” [...] it has no historical past as such, “and the present is what matters in the action” (Foakes 2002: 12-13). Geographically, the play expands to comprise the whole of England, represented through a metonymic shortcut as a map of England in the opening scene; Lear's castle where the abdication ceremony takes place, Goneril's and Regan's castles, Gloucester's castle, the Poor Tom's hovel, the desolate heath, the pastoral setting in which Gloucester and Lear meet in the great synthesis scene, the Dover cliff, the battlefield, the prison where Cordelia and Lear are detained. Some of the locales are obscurely defined as for example the place “Somewhere”, where Edgar

transforms himself to a Mad Tom in II. 3 (“I heard myself proclaimed/ And by the happy hollow of a tree/ Escaped the hunt” (172-174)). The locales are sometimes depicted in intra-dialogic or extra-dialogic mode, however the dimensions of space in the former type are always clearly articulated: for example, the scene in which the blinded Gloucester is led by his son (IV. 6) is the one in which all proper dimensions of space are provided in intra-dialogic stage directions. Furthermore, the geography of space in the play is expanded also vertically in Lear’s frequent apostrophes to Nature, gods, deities, which evokes a schematic pattern of the world suggested by the Great Chain of Being.

Frequent shifting of the locales in the play creates the effect of stretching and expansiveness. Together with Lear, Edgar disguised as a Poor Tom, Gloucester and other characters, the readers/ audience journey across the country of Lear, across space and time witnessing the national upheavals leading to the war with France at the end of the play. This journey and the distance covered are referred to in the utterances of the figures and the scope of it can be finally appreciated through dramatic imagination of the audience.

While *King Lear* extends over several months and across Britain (the map serves here as a symbol), in Bond’s play each scene stands on its own (in the Brechtian sense). Within reasonable limits it would be possible to change the order of many scenes without destroying the narrative thrust of the play (Patterson 2003: 143). Another thing is that Bond’s *Lear* deliberately thwarts any attempts to place it historically by frequent use of anachronisms (there are guns, photographs, knitting, etc.); however the period setting is arbitrary. *Lear* reveals some vagueness about its geographical setting; however there is one location that is certain: **the Wall**. “Given that the wall is such a central image in the play, one might expect a certain geographical logic to reinforce its meaning” (Patterson 2003: 151). The play escapes any geographical and historical accuracy mainly for the reason that it is part of Bond’s style. Bond’s theatre is a theatre that dispenses with facts and cannot be evaluated on the grounds of authenticity. Bond’s major strength is in his being a myth maker: “Bond makes a dream world in which the reality of rifles jostles a Shakespearian myth” (Patterson 2003: 152).

#### 4. SHAKESPEARE’S *KING LEAR* AND BARKER’S *SEVEN LEARS* (1989)

In *Seven Lears* (1989) Barker constructs a prequel to *King Lear* and starts with the remark that the figure of mother is “absent” from *King Lear*. In the Introduction he states that:

The Mother is denied existence in *King Lear*.  
She is barely quoted even in the depths of rage and pity.

She was therefore expunged from memory.  
 This extinction can be only interpreted as repression.  
 She was therefore the subject of unjust hatred.  
 This hatred was shared by Lear and all his daughters.  
 This hatred, while unjust, may have been necessary. (Barker's *Seven Lears* 1990)

Our natural inclination after reading this introduction is that the playwright will amend the shortcomings of the informing source by introducing the Mother figure, absent from Shakespeare's narrative. Yet nothing like that happens: the role of the mother figure is taken over by Prudentia; however she is not at the centre of attention. Her daughter, Clarissa (16 years old) is Lear's wife and the mother of Goneril and Regan.

Regan: Why is our mother's mother here? (thinking of Prudentia)  
 Goneril/ Regan: What is our mother's mother doing here? (thinking of Prudentia, who is part of the scene) (Barker 36)

The affinities between the source text and its appropriation are scarce and few; yet one cannot resist the temptation to search them in the hypotext (the earlier text). For example in the Fourth Lear, Lear, the monarch says: "Kiss me all those who loved me and the rest pretend" (28). This short statement calls forth the scene of dishonest flattery at the beginning of *King Lear*. Or Goneril and Regan are Lear's children yet to be born – 4<sup>th</sup> Lear (this is completely dissonant from Shakespeare's play). However they both feel admiration for their father: "Oh, Dad, our hearts ache for you" (Barker 35). In Fifth Lear they are both grown up:

Lear (to his daughters): Leave us now. You've grown, that's obvious. Whether you're beautiful, is for other men to judge, and whether you're intelligent is insignificant, for if you are not, others will be." (36)

*Seven Lears* (1989), Barker's appropriation of Shakespearean text, is "shattered beyond hope" (Bradley 2010: 153). Barker incorporated in the text some basic features of his style – episodic narrative, the evasions and elisions of language, the occasional flashes of satire. What is new are the choric interjections, and the introduction of more formal physical geography conditioned by the text. Barker creates dissonance between the original and its adaptation – there is no possibility of reconciliation: "Barker rejects reconciliation and shuns meaning altogether" (153). Instead of a coherent narrative and story line we are offered a shattered and dissonant story line, with fragmentation and dismemberment.

Barker's appropriation of Lear's myth is compared to evoking the story of Shakespearean Lear only to reject the story altogether. "What makes the adaptation striking, however, is not its collaboration with Shakespeare's story, but its intentional destruction of the story" (168). Everything in the play is disintegrated: space, time,

character, narrative and language until the original becomes unrecognizable. It is very difficult to find chronological links between the stages in Lear's development, for example:

- 1) First Lear – Lear as a child who is to be raised by the Bishop. Lear's thoughts are not yet formed, are not completed; e.g. "If people were good, punishment would be unnecessary, therefore –" (2). The Bishop personifies Education.
- 2) Second Lear – he is a youth entangled in love obsession with Prudentia, but he is confused and this is stated in his language: "Next meeting? No sooner has she. No sooner have we than." (4) Later on he falls in love with Clarissa, Prudentia's daughter (16-year old). From this affair Goneril and Regan are born and we find out about it from their words anticipating the future: Goneril/Regan: "**We are going to be born! We are going to be born! Insist on it!**" (Pause) (13)

Moreover, in this part of the play, Horbling appears (a Minister for ten years). He wants to play the part of Lear's advisor (in Bond's *Lear* a similar role was played by Warrington). Here the efforts of Horbling to mobilize Lear to act are in vain; he shows Lear a sheaf of papers with a plan of government for the following ten years, but Lear is disinterested. Lear's distanciation from Horbling's words is evident in "I think – ." (9).

Further incongruities in the play arise as the plot unfolds. Whereas in the Second Lear we hear the voices of the children yet to be born, in the Third Lear, Goneril speaks of her birth: "My birth! My birth was far from easy!" (22), and in the next lines Clarissa gives birth to a child, Goneril.

Clarissa: My child comes!

Goneril: I was reluctant. No, that's understatement. I was recalcitrant. Even that won't do! I fixed my heels in her belly and stuck!" (22)

The time schemes are intertwined and shattered: the present time scheme ("my child comes") is preceded by Goneril's remark in the past tense: "my birth was far from easy." As a result, we are disoriented in the time scheme and the further disorientation comes from the fact that first it is a dead cat which appears on Clarissa's belly: Surgeon: "A dead cat on her stomach" (22), and again we hear Goneril's voice, and her words are illogical and incoherent: "I clung – and yet – hearing my father, though – how kind his voice is ..." (23). Eventually, a child comes out of Clarissa's bosom: "(Clarissa and Prudentia deliver the child. It gives a first cry)" (23). Lear's words at this moment are also illogical and the stream of his thoughts runs from the idea of remarriage ("Obviously I can remarry ... An Asian Princess, possibly ...") to the search for self-knowledge ("**What is to be done with me? I think I am evil!**"<sup>5</sup>). And further on Lear notices: "Evil because ... Evil accommodates every idea ..." (23). His reconsiderations on the theme of

<sup>5</sup> The bold is retained from the original text.

evil remain unfinished and incomplete and only when Lear looks at his new-born child, he starts on a new theme: "How beautiful it is! But only beautiful because it owes its life to me ... The nature of beauty, as of goodness, rests in its power to substantiate the self ... Which is not goodness at all, is it? (He wanders off, thinking, still holding the child)" (23). Here, Lear appears to us as a philosopher, a thinker, a father to a new born child – he fulfills all these roles with inconsistency and lack of progression and development. In the Fourth Lear, Lear is again placed in a new context and a new role, and obsessed with a new idea:

Lear: If we control the river, we shall control the lake. If we control the lake we shall control the weather. If we control the weather we shall abolish rain, for no one likes to get his head wet. Then we shall starve. No, it's better we endure floods. (26)

This only shows the incoherence in Lear's development as a character, his shattered thoughts, and one can hardly find any connection between Barker's *Lear* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

## 5. BOND'S *LEAR* AND BARKER'S *SEVEN LEARS*

As stated in section 1 of the paper, there are some noted **affinities** between Bond and Barker in the sense that both plays create their own *intertexts*. In the following examples both Lear figures present themselves as devoted father figures, fulfilling their daughters' childlike wishes. In both cases the daughters (Fontanelle in Bond's play and Goneril in Barker's play) reminisce about the pleasant events in the past and a close relationship with their fathers. They are both nostalgic about the past and the little moments they shared with their fathers. The daughters display childlike eagerness to learn new things and childlike wonder at the sights they discover with their fathers. Thus both scenes create a sense of intimacy and personal affection in the world full of cruelty and atrocity.

### **Bond**

Fontanelle: Father, once you found a white horse on a battlefield. You gave it to me and it broke its leg on the ice. They tied it to a tree and shot it. Poor little Fontanelle cried.

Lear: Poor horse.

Fontanelle: Another time I asked you how high the wall would be. You held me over your head and said you still couldn't see over the top.

Lear: I was always exact. (Bond 33)

### **Barker**

Goneril: You once ran with me the length of the sea shore. I've never forgotten that. Lear: I loved you insanely. But in loving you insanely, I only loved myself (36).

In contrast, intimacy is laced over with terror and death. For example, The Third Lear is a soldier who likes to kill: “Hang all the citizens! Are the prisoners dead yet? (...) I love to kill. Throat high in killing.” (Barker 13) They help him onto a tarpaulin (13) – the scene recalls Bond’s *Lear* from Act One, Scene 1 when the worker’s body is covered with a tarpaulin (the same stage prop is used). Also, the Third Lear is a commander, an army leader who destroys the countryside and kills the peasants. “this is only the first of my many victories.” (14) “Pity the dead, though ... pity the common and the uncommon also ... .” Lear shows his regret for the deaths of so many: “I saw so many eyes.” (Barker 14).

Bond’s Lear is also a merciless killer who dutifully wants to exact punishment on the Third Worker:

Lear. Court martial him. Fetch a firing squad. A drumhead trial for sabotage. (Bond 3)  
Lear (takes pistol from the Officer and threatens the firing squad). Shoot him! (Bond 6)

## CONCLUSION

It seems from the above discussion that both playwrights are skillful adaptors and imitators of Shakespeare’s version of King Lear’s story. What the three playwrights have in common is definitely the ability to create unforgettable and powerful stage imagery. Although the words below concern only one of the playwrights, they can be used to include Shakespeare and Barker as well. As Patterson notes:

This ability to create arresting images, through the use of compassionate characterization and minimal, poetic dialogue has made Bond one of the most important political playwrights of the second half of the twentieth century; not by the exercise of reason, but by the painstaking construction of pictures. (153)

Furthermore, both Bond’s and Barker’s intention is to show that violence is an indispensable element of a human’s life. However they lead their audience to see that through the contradictory ways of artistic expression: correct analysis (traditional) (Bond) and disintegration of formal structures (Barker).

To conclude, Bond’s writing is encompassed within traditional structures: there are right and wrong actions in his plays, there is good government and bad, there is a balanced understanding of reason and imagination, there is coherent language and recognizable dramatic forms. Above all, there is correct analysis (Bradley 157). Barker’s strategy is infinitely different: he escapes structure of any kind, disintegrating narrative, character, setting and language along with larger ideologies like morality and politics (Bradley 158). Barker’s experimental plays (both in content and form) include *Seven Lears* (1989). His goal is to dismantle linear narratives and traditional dramatic forms and return authority to the audience (Bradley 159).

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