

King Lear

By William Shakespeare

Directed Maureen Shea

The Company of Women, resident at Goucher College summer-fall 1996
"Lear" performance at Wellesley College

Reviewed by G.L. Horton

If The Company of Women's "King Lear" is kind of contemporary test case for whether it is possible for women to play Shakespeare's tragic heroes, then on the basis of Kristin Linklater's performance of the title character, the experiment is a success. Linklater is well known for her teaching of vocal technique, and the author of what is probably the most respected text in the field, "Freeing the Natural Voice", is co-founder of the Company, along with psychologist Carol Gilligan. Linklater is a convincing, and convincingly male, Lear, the kingly father of daughters. Her Lear is irascible, irrational, vainglorious, possibly incestuous-- but still, more sinned against than sinning. This is a Lear whose foolishness is laughable, whose rage is terrible, whose sexual obsession is creepy, and whose physical frailty is the remains of a once daunting strength -- a bully brought low, and as good a Lear as I have ever seen.

I would hazard a guess that Linklater has wanted to play Lear since the first time she read or saw the tragedy. Every phrase in her performance has a depth of feeling, a subtlety of thought, that is earnest of a lifetime of study and practice. Linklater's voice is in the baritone range, with occasional tenor and bass notes. Her body places Lear in the androgyny of old age. Many of Linklater's line readings, and some of her physicalizations, will live in my memory as defining interpretations of that particular moment.