**King Lear Critical Essay**

On the 24th of April 2018, at the Stone theatre at Louisiana Tech University, I attended the Department of Theatre’s production of *King Lear*. King Lear was written in 1606 by William Shakespeare, and, like many of his other works, has been constantly reproduced over the years. These reproductions can never be the same as the originals done by Shakespeare’s crew, and probably never match the expectations that he had for this piece of art, be it for better or for worse. The production that I attended was no different from all the others in that it contained its fair share of personality to make the play more interesting or relatable, and that this inevitably brings both positive and negative consequences on its presentation. I would like to share and discuss one of those consequences that caught my notice and has remained at the front of my mind, until now.

For me, the moment in the play that caught my attention was the big fight scene towards the end of the production. The pacing of the dialogue and the plot through the play was a little fast for me to understand, but from what I was able to gather, this scene is a clash between the forces of the kingdom of France who are fighting for Cordelia and King Lear, and the combined British forces that had once been under the direct rule of King Lear but are now fighting under Edmund’s orders. There were several pairs of British and French soldiers engaged in light combat choreography littered throughout the set. This fighting went on for a while until Cordelia is knocked out and carried off-stage. The reason this moment stood out to me is because it was particularly convoluted and very hard to understand the progression of. For this reason, I declare the moment: *ineffective*.

There are two reasons for why I feel this moment is ineffective in progressing the plot of the play. The first reason is because the setting does not line up with the script or the choreography of the scene. This notice can be extended to the whole production of the play. The way the entire setting was cast for this play clearly sets it in a present-day United States, as is made evident through the choice of technology, the general color scheme, the political theme, and most importantly the maps. I would assume that these choices were implemented by the scenic designer, Dr. Jeremy Reynolds. The script, however, was almost completely unchanged. There are a few things wrong with the way this was handled that I would to present. Firstly, there is no reason for why at the beginning of the play, all the documents that were passed around were done so on an iPad, and then for about the other sixty percent of the play, they were represented by used folded pieces of brown and brittle parchment carefully tucked into their costumes; even for “newly” written delivered messages. Secondly, all the soldiers in this scene were fighting with what I like to call “kitchen knives.” This makes no sense because there were secret service members following the king around in the earliest scenes of the play, and again: this is supposed to be a present-day setting. Where are the guns? Lastly, if we ignore the location as detailed in the script used and we derive that information from the theme, we arrive to the conclusion that these events take place in what we know as the United States. If this is the case, then for what reason do we have armies of France invading the mainland United States. How is the kitchen-knife-wielding infantry of that army supposed to reach the mainland? It would have made more sense, while keeping close similarity to the original script, to make the invading party something much closer to the United States, like Canada for example. The main idea in all these points is that the use of the mostly original script does not line up with the physical setting or the theme of the moment, or the play, at all, and only served to confuse the audience, especially experiencing King Lear for the first time.

The other reason for why I feel the moment is ineffective is because of the choice in costumes for the two factions hashing it out in this scene. The soldiers participating in this scene were dressed in identical outfits and were only distinguishable to a faction by the armbands that they wore. This decision would be credited to the costume designer, Dr. Michele Dormaier. As stated before, the information I could grasp from the sequence of events in the play led me to believe that the two sides engaged in combat in this scene are France and the United States or Britain depending on what you derive the setting from. However, the soldiers in this scene looked completely identical to me, especially as so many figures were moving around the set, that the armbands did very little in helping me to visualize which side was “winning.” On top of this, the fact that princess Cordelia entered the fray completely slipped my notice, and I didn’t notice that she was unconscious and being carried out until the last moment. This is because the black commandant uniform that she was wearing blended in with the grunt uniforms being worn by the other participating cast members. Again, these design decisions let to overall confusion about the events taking place in the moment, and I found myself not understanding exactly what happened until the outcome was dictated a few minutes later into the play.

In conclusion, it was a college student play, but the moment really revealed a lot of holes that were missed during the development of the play. The ineffectiveness of this moment was brought about by a lack of visualization on the part of the designers from the perspective of the audience. While the acting was great, and the play flowed nicely at an even tempo, these issues were hard to ignore. These issues and others did not seem like entirely conscious decisions in the sense that these problems were not considered. Overall, a slight shift in the viewports on behalf of the production team would have made this play quite the grand presentation.