



Performing King Lear: Gielgud to Russell Beale

Jonathan Croall

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King Lear is arguably the most complex and demanding play in the whole of Shakespeare. Once thought impossible to stage, today it is performed with increasing frequency, both in Britain and America. It has been staged more often in the last fifty years than in the previous 350 years of its performance history, its bleak message clearly chiming in with the growing harshness, cruelty and violence of the modern world.

Performing King Lear offers a very different and practical perspective from most studies of the play, being centred firmly on the reality of creation and performance. The book is based on Jonathan Croall's unique interviews with twenty of the most distinguished actors to have undertaken this daunting role during the last forty years, including Donald Sinden, Tim Pigott-Smith, Timothy West, Julian Glover, Oliver Ford Davies, Derek Jacobi, Christopher Plummer, Michael Pennington, Brian Cox and Simon Russell Beale.

He has also talked to two dozen leading directors who have staged the play in London, Stratford and elsewhere. Among them are Nicholas Hytner, David Hare, Kenneth Branagh, Adrian Noble, Deborah Warner, Jonathan Miller and Dominic Dromgoole. Each reveals in precise and absorbing detail how they have dealt with the formidable challenge of interpreting and staging Shakespeare's great tragedy.

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