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KING LEAR IN OUR TIME II

Maynard Mack on *King Lear*

by Fuku Ikawa

The twentieth century, especially after 30's, has been "rich in notable Lears", and the generations who have known Hiroshima seem to have attuned to the casualness and miscellaneousness of death in *King Lear*. But the performance of *King Lear* has been and is a 'problem' ever since the time of Garrick who enacted the king as 'a poor tottering parent', through the 19th century when Lear was played rather for passion than for pathos, down to the modern era when the eminent actors have tried numerous contrivances of presenting Lear, one as a poor old father, another as a great image of authority, and another as an emblem of human spirit.

Professor Maynard Mack, in his scholastic research entitled *KING LEAR in Our Time* (1964), proposes that the play is more based upon the literary modes of the time, such as Romance, Morality play, and Vision rather than upon a psychological and realistic drama, with which it has very little in common. Together with acute realism here and there, the play abounds in homiletic implication which holds an iron grip over the plot and characters. The characters act as the *exempla* of the significance the play is to reveal. They are not concerned with the 'motivations' that precede an action. The action in *King Lear* is free from both cause and effect and this makes the play mythic. Lear is, therefore, simultaneously a poor tottering parent and an emblem

of human spirit.

The play is full of questions, but they are more direct and painful than in *Hamlet*, and there is none of the doubt pervading in *Hamlet*. The play's mood, according to Prof. Mack, is imperative.

The moral foundation of human society is questioned in Lear's 'sermon', and social wrongs hidden under the robes of authority are exposed, but the central theme of the play is the tragedy of 'existence', that is, the tragedy of being born to the world of human 'relation'. Lear's 'patience', says Prof. Mack, does not mean only the capacity of enduring the wrongs and pains brought upon him by his cruel daughters, but of accepting the fate of being born as a man, and through suffering attaining a 'ripeness' though death takes all when his eyes are opened to what is true in life.

The Part I of my study about *King Lear* in the present time has discussed Jan Kott, a Polish writer, who saw *King Lear* in the light of the Theatre of the Absurd. From Mack's stand-point, Mr. Kott may be one of those sentimental existentialists who see only the imbecile world in the play, emphasizing a part and rationalizing what cannot be rationalized. But interesting enough, both the critics refer to something in common in spite of the decided difference in the approaches they make. They are conscious of a kind of dualism in *King Lear*, the co-existence of the homiletic and the dramatic in Mack's term, and the Job's stage and Macbeth's stage in Kott's. Both of them contend that the essence of *King Lear* cannot be grasped with the dramatic conception of modern realism. Both are deeply concerned with the problem of 'existence' as the central theme of the play.

Of course the basic point is different, as Prof. Mack sees the play in the tradition of a 'tragedy', while Mr. Kott suggests that the play be acted in the form of a 'grotesque.' To Prof. Mack, the ending of Lear is not a total defeat, but one of those tragic moments when victory and defeat is one. Mr. Kott sees the decay

and fall of the world in *King Lear*, and thinks that an only way for a man to keep from being the victim of the fate is to become a clown and mock at the fate. Some will find this a distortion, while others will face a difficulty with Prof. Mack's 'subtext' in bringing it onto the stage. Both the scholars deepen the mystery of the most profound of Shakespeare's, and at the same time reflect a critical problem of our time, the very concept of 'man' as well as that of the 'theatre' in the mid-twentieth.

ON PRINCE HAL OF *1 HENRY IV*

Seiki Kinjo

This paper discusses *King Henry IV, Part 1* expanding the brief but judicious comment made by Donald A. Stauffer in his *Shakespeare's World of Images*. If we see the play as "a portrait of the prince as a young man" we should accord due attention to Stauffer who pointed out that a synthesis of admirable qualities of Henry IV, Hotspur, and Falstaff is accomplished in Prince Hal. Hal takes the positive qualities found in each of the three supporting characters while rejecting their characteristics not desirable in making an ideal ruler.

The King is a shrewd politician and a competent ruler, but he lacks in human warmth. Shrewdness and competency required in carrying out political responsibilities are no less impressive features of his son. Hal's soliloquy in I,ii and his brilliant success in "glitt'ring o'er my fault" confirm him to be the politician's true son. Hotspur is a brave young man dedicated to military honor, yet the glory of this "sweet Fortune's minion" functions to glorify Hal's valor all the more in their combat at Shrewsbury. This "King of honour" is incapable of cool calculation required of a military leader. Falstaff is an embodiment of merriment and sharp insight, transcending political responsibilities and military glories. Though a "misleader of youth," he nevertheless plays an indispensable role in humanizing the Prince. Irresponsibility to be rejected ultimately, Falstaff represents human warmth in Prince Hal.

Thus, Henry IV, Hotspur, and Falstaff represent the qualities, good and necessary but inadequate as found in each of the three, which are to be complimented each other and unified harmoniously in Prince Hal. The Prince grows an ideal ruler taking the best from each of the three.

THE IDEA OF LOVE AS SEEN IN IRIS
MURDOCH'S *THE BELL*

Yasuko Iwasaki

A prolific writer, Iris Murdoch is one of the most promising woman novelists in England after Virginia Woolf. Of about a dozen of her novels, *The Bell* is the most controversial. In it are embodied her deep philosophical existentialist thought and complex fictional technique. I would like to consider the novel with special reference to the idea of love embodied in the novel.

Murdoch tries to vindicate what true love is, mainly through Michael and Dora, two of the principal characters in the novel. Michael, a self-centered homosexual, eventually fails to grasp love, even though he devoutly seeks God, while Dora, a rather irresponsible, fickle and adulterous woman, attains spiritual salvation — because she is self-effacing.

To Murdoch "Love... is the discovery of reality." These words epitomize her existentialist standpoint, while at the same time reveals her inclination toward the ethical. Why the ethical? Because she juxtaposes the idea of love to the idea of good. Through her characters Murdoch seems to assert that love, good and even the enjoyment of beauty can be attained only through revelation.

One conspicuous aspect of Murdoch's novels is abnormal sexuality, such as incest, bigamy and homosexuality. In *The Bell* homosexuality is given prominence, being instrumental in Michael's ultimate failure to attain love.

Why does she play up such abnormal sexual relations? It may be said that she is trying to approach the fundamental problems

of human existence — love, God, death, freedom and sex — by looking steadily at such abnormalities. This attitude of hers undoubtedly stems from her belief in Existentialism, and moreover, as she has the ingredients of a novelist of manners, she would willy-nilly be brought face to face with such abnormalities, if she wants truly to portray the decadent postwar society where such abnormalities are rampant.

From a fictional technical point of view, it may be said that she is applying a sort of “shock treatment.” Abnormal sexuality, particularly homosexuality, has long been taboo in European society, so that reference to it naturally gives a great shock to the reader and stimulates his imagination, which in turn would contribute toward impressing the theme of her fiction more clearly on his mind.

Murdoch’s intellectual standpoint is existentialist, from which she tries to portray human existence — its complexity, unreasonableness, loneliness and despair, and she tries to show that the way to truth can be attained not by rationalistic idealism but through intuition, revelation and love.

From what we have seen, it may be said that in her mind, Christian thought abides side by side with Existentialism. Her apathy toward rationalism and intellectualism is also apparent, so that it may be predicted that she will lean more and more heavily toward the religious and ethical as did some notable twentieth century literary figures in England such as T. S. Eliot and Christopher Isherwood.