

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jerry Newton Whittle entitled "Shakespeare's 'Poor Old Eyes': Staging, Reinterpretation, and Analysis of the Characters of King Lear, Gloucester, and Nestor." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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SHAKESPEARE'S "POOR OLD EYES": STAGING,
REINTERPRETATION, AND ANALYSIS OF THE
CHARACTERS OF KING LEAR,
GLOUCESTER, AND NESTOR

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Karen.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned primarily with Shakespeare's plays, King Lear and Troilus and Cressida. The physical shortsightedness of King Lear is explored, and an attempt is made to prove that the King manifests signs of weakening physical vision throughout the play rather than at the end of the drama only. Gloucester, in King Lear, is treated primarily from the standpoint of his effectiveness and credibility as a newly blinded person. The character of Nestor, in Troilus and Cressida, is presented in a new way. If Nestor could be portrayed as a weak-sighted character, he could visibly reinforce the thematic and satiric structure of the play. The possibility and plausibility of portraying him with weak eyes is discussed. Hence, the whole purpose of this thesis is to examine the subject of physical blindness in two of Shakespeare's plays while using other weak-sighted characters in some of his other plays to augment the discussion.

An attempt was made to find as many articles and books as possible which would be pertinent to the subject of blindness in Shakespeare's plays. Since there are so many books and articles about the playwright and his works, the articles and books found had to be sifted through in order to locate pertinent material. An attempt was made to find books and treatises on medicine and blindness of which

Shakespeare might have availed himself. In addition, articles and books were sought which treat the subject of physical blindness in Shakespeare, or which offer analyses supportive of the purposes of this thesis.

As a result of this research, it is clear that Shakespeare handles the theme of blindness with facility. His weak-sighted characters and his totally blind character are credible and effective to the balance of his plays. Shakespeare reveals a penchant for the use of blindness in many of his plays. In King Lear, one can find the playwright handling blindness and blind characters with expertise and dramatic power. Both Lear, as a partially sighted, old man, and Gloucester, as his totally blind creation, are effectively delineated. There is evidence that Lear gradually loses some of his visual acuity throughout the course of the drama because of his old age, his changing humors, and his emotional stress. Not only is the King hard pressed to recognize Kent at the end of the play because of his weak eyes, but Lear also demonstrated earlier in the action that he is losing some of his physical sight. The gulling of Gloucester by Edgar during the Earl's attempted suicide is not particularly clumsy. Gloucester's old age, his naïveté, his emotional state, his new sensory world, and Edgar's elaborate deceptions make the attempted suicide believable and plausible. Gloucester reacts to his blindness in a way which is typical of almost anyone who is suddenly blinded in old age.

The thematic structure and satiric tone of Troilus and Cressida could permit the character of old Nestor to be portrayed as weak-sighted and decrepit. The play is replete with references to blindness. Many of the characters such as Troilus and Nestor himself are mentally blind to the folly of their own passions and pretense. With Nestor portrayed as weak-eyed, the aged orator could physically illustrate some of the themes of the play. Nestor could be added to Shakespeare's list of aged, weak-eyed characters such as Lear, Old Gobbo, and Aegeon. With the suggested portrayal of Nestor as weak in vision, the bitterly satiric quality of Troilus and Cressida could be enhanced as well. With Nestor as weak-eyed and decrepit, he might visibly represent the corruption of the society and the self-delusion of that society's leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

A great deal of criticism has been written about Shakespeare's use of blindness in his plays in a metaphorical sense, especially in King Lear; however, very little has been written about Shakespeare's blind and partially sighted characters from the point of view of their effectiveness as physically impaired individuals within the framework of the plays. The purpose of this thesis is to examine his blind characters in a new and different manner. Chapter I is concerned with some new interpretations of King Lear as a partially sighted character, and an attempt is made to prove that Shakespeare intends for him to be portrayed as an aged King with very weak eyes. Chapter II offers an analysis of Gloucester as a blind individual and attempts to show that his reactions are realistic and thus credible for one who has been cruelly blinded. In addition, some staging suggestions are given concerning the attempted suicide. In Chapter III, the character of Nestor is treated primarily from the aspect of staging and artistic effectiveness. Nestor's potential effectiveness as a very nearsighted or "sand-blind" person is delineated, especially from the standpoint of thematic significance. Nestor's scene with Hector is given special emphasis concerning staging problems and satiric effects. It is hoped that this thesis demonstrates that Shakespeare handles blind characters as if he possesses

an intimate knowledge of both the comic and tragic nature of the impairment.

On close reading of Shakespeare's plays, one is cognizant of his use of the eye for dramatic and metaphoric effects. One is also made aware that, in a great number of his plays, he uses references to blindness as well as blind and partially sighted characters on a fairly consistent basis. King Lear, Titus Andronicus, Old Gobbo, Brutus, and Cassius all have weak eyesight; Saunders Simcox is a malingerer who feigns blindness; Gloucester, of course, is Shakespeare's totally blind invention. These are only a few of those portrayed as weak-eyed or completely blind. Given this fact, this thesis examines three of the major characters while bringing in many of the other blind characters to demonstrate Shakespeare's fondness for such persons in his plays. Still, the subject of blindness in Shakespeare could be given a much fuller treatment. A rich body of material concerning blindness remains virtually untouched by critics who, in the past, have directed the greatest part of their attention to the metaphorical aspects of blindness in the plays.

R. R. Simpson, in his book Shakespeare and Medicine, points out that Shakespeare is the only playwright of his time who manifests such a knowledge about eyesight and blindness:

All Shakespeare's references to eyes are, of course, of medical interest, but those of the greatest value--

they are also the most numerous--are the ones which even today have a clinical application. They reveal a power of observation characteristic . . . of Shakespeare. Nothing like them is found in the writings of his contemporaries.¹

¹R. R. Simpson, Shakespeare and Medicine (Edinburgh: Livingstone Ltd., 1959), p. 239.

CHAPTER I

LEAR'S PARTIAL SIGHTEDNESS

The Recognition of Kent

A number of critics, among them J. I. M. Stewart and Robert B. Heilman,¹ have observed that Lear, in Act V, Scene III, fails to recognize the face of Kent because of his poor eyesight. Lear himself says, "Mine eyes are not o' the best."² They perceive that the aged King's eyes have become very weak in the last scene of the play. Heilman observes that "at the end of the play, Lear can hardly recognize Kent physically, as before he could not 'see' Kent's moral quality and ordered him out of his sight."³

The evidence for Lear's physically weak eyes is easily discernible in Act V, Scene III. The King has undergone an exhausting trial of both mind and body; however, the closing scene emphasizes Lear's physical debilitation. We have already seen his erratic mental deterioration. The

¹J. I. M. Stewart, "The Blinding of Gloucester," Review of English Literature, 21 (1945), 264-265; Robert B. Heilman, This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 54.

²William Shakespeare, Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 1183. All subsequent quotations from the plays of Shakespeare are taken from this text.

³Heilman, p. 54.

death of Cordelia leaves him with only a tiny spark of passion remaining. Physical exhaustion now begins to replace his emotional outbursts, although he still has an occasional echo of his former anger:

Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you are men of stones.
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That Heaven's vault should crack. (Lr. V.iii.257-259)

Shakespeare paints a vivid picture of the old King so that we are made aware that Lear is showing his "four score and upward" years. In a sense, Lear's weak eyes become a warning signal to us of his lagging physical strength and old age which have been temporarily overshadowed by his mental duress. Cordelia is dead. Lear's anger and emotional outbursts are waning. Suddenly, Shakespeare makes us aware of Lear's poor vision when the King says to Kent, now undisguised, "Who are you? / Mine eyes are not o' the best. I'll tell you straight" (Lr. V.iii.278-279). Shortly thereafter, the King finally recognizes his old friend and says, "This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?" Immediately following Lear's recognition of his servant, Shakespeare draws our attention to the theme of sight when Lear repeats "I'll see that straight." Shakespeare is clearly emphasizing Lear's lack of physical vision to reinforce the King's mental blindness in the play. J. I. M. Stewart believes that Lear's weak eyesight causes him to misperceive his daughter's true condition. Stewart blames Lear's "dull sight" for the King's mistaken belief that Cordelia's lips move when Lear says, "Do you see this? Look on her, look,

her lips, / Look there, look there!" (Lr. V.iii.310-311).⁴

Indeed, in this final scene, Lear's weak eyes become a multi-faceted symbol for his tragically weak mental perceptions, his lack of insight, as well as reminders of his old age.⁵ John W. Draper has drawn a similar conclusion:

Dotage, then, finally overtakes King Lear, though twenty years or more after its normal time; and its physical effects are amply shown throughout the latter acts.⁶

Lear is aware of his dotage and feebleness when he says, "I have seen the day with my good biting falchion / I would have made them skip. I am old now . . ." (Lr. V.iii.276-277).

If we consider the short span of time covered in the play, then Lear's eyes are probably "not o' the best" from the opening scenes. Draper contends that, "Even in the beginning of the play, Lear should be far gone in dotage."⁷ Lear could possibly be losing his sight from the beginning of the play. Clearly in Act I, the old King is still able to recognize his daughters and servants. He sees fairly well physically; however, early in Act I, Lear begins to undergo a tremendous emotional upheaval caused by Goneril's inhospitality and Oswald's insubordination. Draper

⁴J. I. M. Stewart, loc. cit.

⁵Heilman, op. cit., p. 55.

⁶John W. Draper, "The Old Age of King Lear," Journal of English and German Philology, 39 (1940), 534.

⁷Ibid.

points out that the Elizabethans believed that extreme emotional turmoil could bring about immediate physical changes such as the almost instantaneous whitening of hair.⁸ Perhaps as the play progresses, Shakespeare intends for Lear's extreme mental duress to bring about a gradual loss of physical sight. Certainly, his anger and emotional upheaval overshadow all his physical weakness and old age; however, there are many instances through the course of the play that seem to imply a gradual loss of physical sight taking place as a result of his anger and his mental stress. Even Lear, in Act III, Scene IV, is aware of the fact that his mental strife has been overshadowing his other discomforts when he says the following:

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin. So 'tis to thee,
But where the greater malady is fixed
The lesser is scarce felt. (Lr. III.iv.6-9)

The Evidence for Lear's Weakening Eyes

Lear's anger is kindled early in the play. His ire toward Cordelia's reply is soon replaced by even greater anger toward Goneril. Throughout Act I, Scene IV, Goneril refers to Lear's "dotage," his physical, and mental incapacitation. Lear himself, after learning of Goneril's contempt for his band of followers, becomes visibly upset. His

⁸John W. Draper, The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1945), pp. 106-115.

kindled anger is accompanied by early signs of an encroaching madness. Lear is aware that he has made a foolish mistake. He is also aware of his own "dotage":

Doth any here know me? This is not Lear.
Doth Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied--Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am? (Lr. I.iv.246-250)

Certainly, one should recognize that Shakespeare allows Lear to refer to his lack of insight about the true nature of the situation in which he finds himself; however, written into the passage is the dual message of his weakening physical condition. Lear is growing more and more cognizant of his mental enervation, his physical debilitation, his lack of insight, and his growing lack of physical sight. He walks both as a former king made ridiculous by his own folly and the treachery of his daughters, and he walks with the faltering steps of an old man. He fails to see the significance of the error he has committed in banishing Kent and rejecting Cordelia, and his eyesight could be dimming as well. In essence, he has become a transformed person, "Lear's shadow," both physically and mentally.

Later in Act I, Scene IV, Lear's consternation soars to new heights. He has decided to leave Goneril and go to Regan. Lear's inner turmoil becomes evident to him. He blames Goneril for his womanish tears, and his shame at his lack of control is evident:

I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,

That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
 Should make thee worth them.
 Blasts and fogs upon thee!
 The untented wounding of a father's curse
 Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
 Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out
 And cast you with the waters that you lose
 To temper clay. (Lr. I.iv.317-326)

These lines reveal Lear's tendency to try to hold his emotions in check. He is obviously under a great deal of emotional turmoil; however, he attempts to hold the "hot tears" in abeyance. Perhaps Shakespeare uses these lines to signal to his audience the effects that Lear's stress will have on his eyesight later in the play. His anger and burgeoning insanity take precedence over his physical condition; nonetheless, the kindling emotions rob his "fond old eyes" of some of their acuity.

In Act III, Gloucester repeats the notion that anger and intense emotion could rob Lear of his physical sight as well as his sanity. Gloucester refers to Lear's "poor old eyes" in a way that infers they are already weak. The Earl cautions Regan against her base treatment of her father. Gloucester implies in his admonition to her that Lear's emotions are not only eroding his mental stability but his physical sight as well:

Because I would not see thy cruel nails
 Pluck out his poor old eyes, nor thy fierce sister
 In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.
 The sea, with such a storm as his bare head
 In hell-black night endured, would have buoyed up,
 And quenched the stellèd fires. (Lr. III.vii.56-61)

Gloucester draws our attention to the fact that Regan and Goneril are preying upon an aged father with numerous

physical ailments. The image of the sea putting out or quenching "stellèd fires" could imply Lear's emotional upheaval and its potential effects on his vision, as well as the potential danger to the King's sanity at the instigation of his cruel daughters. According to Sanford V. Larkey, the medical experts of the time believed that changes in the four humors brought on by old age could cause blindness, usually in the form of cataracts.⁹ Lear clearly is undergoing a change in his mental and emotional make-up in the play. Also, as stated earlier, according to Draper, the Elizabethans believed that excessive stress could induce changes in the humors resulting in blindness and other physical changes.¹⁰ Hence, the reference to the sea and its quenching of the "stellèd fires" could imply that Regan and Goneril are placing their father under extreme duress which could further deprive him of his vision as well as his mental powers. Lear's hardships, his mental anguish, his physical incapacitation, and his anger threaten to plunge his mind and vision into darkness. This belief in the effects of stress and changes in the humors could explain why Lear undergoes a rapid change in his visual acuity by the latter stages of the play. Evidence can also be found

⁹Sanford V. Larkey, Introd. A Discourse of the Preservation of Sight: Shakespeare Association Facsimilies, No. 15, by M. Andreas Laurentius, trans. Richard Surphlet (1599, rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. xxiii-xv.

¹⁰John W. Draper, The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters, pp. 106-115.

that Lear begins to lose some of his sight by Act III rather than in the final scene. Perhaps Shakespeare intends for Lear to manifest signs of weakening sight before the final reunion with Kent.

The Heath and the Hovel Scenes

Act III, Scene II offers some interesting evidence about Lear's failing eyesight. Before Kent joins the Fool and Lear on the heath, Lear makes a statement that implies the Fool might be leading the aged King through the stormy night:

My wits begin to turn.
Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.
(Lr. III.ii.67-71)

Immediately following the Fool's song, Lear repeats his command to the Fool when he says, "Come, bring us to this hovel." Lear, early in this scene, appears to be under the guidance of the Fool. Lear does not know his way to the hovel and must rely on the Fool's aid; however, perhaps Lear is already unable to find his way in the night because of failing eyesight brought on by his rage. Early in the scene, he undergoes another bout of tremendous emotional turmoil. Now, he must rely on the Fool to guide him to the hovel.

The action continues in Act III, Scene IV when Kent joins the Fool and Lear near the hovel. Throughout this

scene, Kent tries to lead Lear into the shelter with verbal commands. The opening speech of Scene IV is a verbal request from Kent. The tenor of the speech could imply that Lear is having trouble finding his way through the dark night; however, Lear is growing more and more angry and headstrong:

Kent. Here is the place, my lord. Good my lord, enter.
The tyranny of the open night's too rough
For nature to endure.

Lear. Let me alone. (Lr. III.iv.1-4)

Kent continues to repeat his request for Lear to "enter." Clearly, in this scene, Kent is concerned for his King's welfare and Lear's renewing anger; however, the repeated verbal commands convey the sense that Lear cannot find his own way in the dark night and needs assistance to the hovel. Kent's repeated requests also could signify that Lear is standing about, confused and undecided as to which direction to take. According to Marvin Rosenberg, some productions of King Lear allow Kent to lead the aged King by the hand through the storm.¹¹ Other productions portray Lear leading the Fool behind him with Kent advancing ahead of them toward the hovel.¹² However, each of these interpretations seems unlikely if we assume that Lear's eyesight is probably already beginning to dim. Also in Act III, Scene II, Lear obviously must rely on the Fool for guidance

¹¹Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of King Lear (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1972), pp. 201-204.

¹²Ibid.

to the shelter because Lear does not know the way. In Act III, Scene IV, they have already reached the hovel. Kent appears to be calling the agitated King into the shelter in order to get out of the stormy night. The speeches of Lear imply a great deal of agitation on his part. The King, nervous and erratic, appears to be moving back and forth alone. Both the Fool and Kent, at this point, are probably standing off from Lear and watching the progress of his kindling anger. Lear appears torn between wishing to return to his daughters and desiring to reject everyone and remain in the storm alone. He makes the following speech more to himself than to anyone else:

When the mind's free
The body's delicate. The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to 't? But I will punish home.
No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure.
In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril!
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all----
Oh, that way madness lies, let me shun that,
No more of that. (Lr. III.iv.11-22)

Again, Kent asks Lear to "enter here." Kent's verbal request appears to be a passive one. Kent is not in physical contact with the King. Instead, he is standing near the door of the hovel beckoning Lear forward. It is unclear exactly where the Fool is standing at this point in the action. Presumably he lingers close by his master because of a set of actions which indicate that this proximity is likely.

There is evidence in this same scene that Lear is still being aided by the Fool part of the time. When Lear decides to go into the hovel, he tells Kent to enter first. Then, as if the Fool has taken hold of him, Lear tells the Fool to go in before him:

In, boy, go first. You houseless poverty----
 Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.
 (Lr. III.iv.26-27)

Lear's use of the word "Nay" implies that he has pulled himself free from the Fool's grasp. Earlier, Lear performed a similar action when he told Kent, "Let me alone"; however, this rebuke of Kent follows the servant's verbal request instead of a physical gesture. His refusal of the Fool must follow some physical action. Possibly, the Fool takes Lear by the hand to lead him into the hovel. If he had to request the Fool's guidance in Act III, Scene II, chances are he must rely on the Fool for help in this scene as well. It does not seem likely that Lear would lead the Fool if the King does not know his way to the refuge. With this fact in mind, the Fool, at this point in Act III, Scene IV, is assuming the task of leading the weak-eyed King to the hovel. Lear has been ranting somewhat; however, at this point, he is lucid and aware of the situation as evidenced by his concern for the Fool's welfare. He does not need guidance because of mental imbalance; hence, he must be visually impaired. At this point in the action, perhaps Lear's weakening eyes are made evident to the audience. The Fool recognizes Lear's failing physical

vision and offers him assistance into the interior of the hovel which Lear refuses.

Later in the scene, more interesting possibilities arise. After the Fool enters the hovel and Edgar scares him, he runs out crying, "Help me, help me!" (Lr. III.iv. 40). Kent appears to comfort the Fool by saying, "Give me thy hand. Who's there?" (Lr. III.iv.41). This line causes a problem in interpretation. It is possible that Kent takes the hand of Lear instead of the Fool. This interpretation is feasible if Lear blindly moves toward the hovel after the Fool has run out. Lear, concerned for his companion's safety, could instinctively walk toward the darkened hovel in order to protect his "boy." Hence, we hear the Fool say to Lear:

Come not in here, Nuncle, here's a spirit.
(Lr. III.iv.39)

If Lear does begin to move toward the hovel (perhaps to help the frightened Fool), Kent could reach out and take the hand of Lear to stop him. The passage runs thus:

Fool. Come not in here, Nuncle, here's a spirit.
Help me, help me!
Kent. Give me thy hand. Who's there?
(Lr. III.iv.39-41)

Throughout the preceding action, we have seen both Kent's and the Fool's concern for Lear's welfare. Kent and the Fool repeat this tendency at this point in the action. Lear moves toward the hovel and Kent takes his hand to stop him in much the same way that the Fool tries to help Lear into the hovel just prior to this action. At the end of

Act III, Scene IV, Lear appears to leave off being led by the Fool to aid Edgar, who is disguised as Poor Tom. At this point in the action, Kent and Gloucester are content to humor Lear in order to get him into the shelter and out of the storm. The Fool no longer appears to be aiding Lear. The King chooses to remain with his "philosopher"; however, Lear is still under the close supervision of both Kent and Gloucester:

Kent. This way, my lord.
Lear. With him,
I will keep still with my philosopher.
Kent. Good my lord, soothe him, let him take the
 fellow.
Glo. Take him you on.
Kent. Sirrah, come on, go along with us.
Lear. Come, good Athenian. (Lr. III.iv.179-185)

The Fool no longer accompanies Lear. Kent's statement, "Sirrah, come on, go along with us," appears to be directed to the Fool as Lear joins up with Edgar for the first time. Both Edgar and the Fool serve as guides to the aged King; however, Edgar's guidance is purely of a cerebral quality.

The Fool, in a sense, aids Lear in a dual manner. Not only does he care for the King's welfare as a guide for his weakening eyes, but also he tries to help Lear understand himself. The Fool strives to help Lear see the enormity of his own mental blindness. For example, as he and Lear venture forth in search of a new home, the Fool constantly attempts to help Lear grasp the seriousness of his daughter's cruelty and the foolishness of his own rash mistakes:

Fool. "That lord that counseled thee
 To give away thy land,

Come place him here by me,
 Do thou for him stand.
 The sweet and bitter fool
 Will presently appear----
 The one in motley here,
 The other found out there."
 Lear. Dost thou call me fool, boy?
 Fool. All thy other titles thou hast given away.
 That thou was born with. (Lr. I.iv.154-164)

Although he makes some piercing observations about Lear's predicament, the Fool might be considered as a madman. According to A. C. Bradley, he is "touched in the brain."¹³ He manifests instances of both voluntary and involuntary idiocy; however, like Edgar with his blind father, the Fool is able to aid the partially sighted and unstable Lear under the close supervision of Kent. The Fool as a type of madman or idiot tries to open Lear's eyes to the seriousness and tragedy of his lack of insight. He also helps the aged King during the night storm. In a close parallel, Edgar, a disguised madman, does succeed in helping Gloucester understand the true nature of his own mental and spiritual confusion. Edgar, like the Fool, leads his blind father through his new-found, darkened world. Each guide uses seemingly ridiculous gibes and gibberish to bring his companion sparks of enlightenment. Each guide serves as a type of grotesque angel who crazily oversees the total mental, spiritual, and physical health of his tormented consort. Edgar leads Gloucester through the maze of the

¹³A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 311.

father's tortured spirit and into clarity and understanding while feigning madness. Lear is led into a dawning awareness of his error by a truly insane companion who has enough competency to be a guide for his waning vision. When the Fool tries to help Lear into the hovel, this action is a close parallel to the events in Act IV, Scene I when Edgar, as a madman, leads his blind father and Gloucester makes this comment:

'Tis the times' plague when madmen lead
the blind. (Lr. IV.i.48)

Although the Fool is a competent sighted guide, he fails to penetrate Lear's mental blindness. Edgar serves in a dual capacity too as a mental guide to both Gloucester and Lear. Perhaps the Fool prepares the way for Edgar's successful penetration of Lear's clouded sensibilities. Both the Fool and Edgar are able to work in tandem in aiding Lear into some insights about the world around him. Edgar begins to replace the Fool in his role as "philosopher." They comprise a tragicomic trio of seekers. G. Wilson Knight makes a pertinent observation about their relationship in Act III, Scene IV and thereafter:

Edgar now succeeds the Fool as the counterpart to the breaking sanity of Lear; and where the humor of the Fool made no contact with Lear's mind, the fantastic appearance and incoherent words of Edgar are immediately assimilated, as glasses correctly focused to the sight of oncoming madness.¹⁴

¹⁴Knight, op. cit., p. 166.

Mad Lear and Blind Gloucester

The action of Act IV, Scene VI presents a perplexing confrontation between Lear and Gloucester. In the encounter between them in the fields near Dover, Lear is clearly insane and rambling. Gloucester, newly blinded, asks the King the same question that Kent asks Lear in Act V, Scene III when the Earl queries, "Dost thou know me?" (Lr. IV.vi.138). Lear, although it is not clear, appears to recognize Gloucester and replies, "I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me?" (Lr. IV.vi.139). Lear is unable to discern that Gloucester's eyes have been plucked out. The King seems to recognize Gloucester; however, he does not realize that Gloucester is now totally blinded. Perhaps Lear's eyes have grown dimmer due to his mental torment. He has already undergone the extreme bout of insanity in the mock trial scene of Act III, Scene VI in which he hallucinates. The extreme mental anguish of Lear continues in the fields near Dover. The King, not realizing that the Earl is blind, asks him to read a "challenge." Gloucester replies, "What, with the case of eyes?" (Lr. IV.vi.147). Then, Lear makes an interesting retort:

Oh ho, are you there with me? No eyes
in your head, nor no money in your purse?
Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a
light. Yet you see how this world goes.
(Lr. IV.vi.148-150)

Perhaps at this point in the play, Lear's own eyes have grown so dim that he fails to perceive Gloucester's empty

sockets because Lear's eyes are "not o' the best" any longer. The tremendous strain upon his mind, the fits of anger, and his physical hardship may have taken their toll upon his "poor old eyes." Clearly, Lear is mad at this point in the action; nevertheless, one must consider the belief of the Elizabethans in the effects of stress and old age on one's body. Perhaps Shakespeare is drawing the audience's attention to this fact in order to set the stage for Lear's reunion with Cordelia later in Act IV and his eventual recognition of Kent in Act V.

Lear even tells Gloucester to, "Get thee glass eyes / And, like a scurvy politician, seem / To see the things thou dost not" (Lr. IV.vi.174-176). The King never does perceive that Gloucester's eyes are gone. He does, however, admit that he recognizes Gloucester soon after these comments:

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
I know thee well enough. Thy name is Gloucester.
(Lr. IV.vi.180-181)

Perhaps this statement is meant to be ironic because the King's "eyes are not o' the best" at this point in the action. Since Lear soon will be unable to recognize Kent when he meets his servant, it seems logical that his weakening vision along with his madness make it difficult for him to observe Gloucester's blindness in Act IV. After Lear runs away in madness, Edgar (perhaps with a pun on Lear's weakened vision intended) says, "A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch, / Past speaking of in a king!" (Lr. IV.vi.208-209). Lear has become a totally "ruined piece of

nature." His choler and madness, coupled with his old age, have produced the gradually diminishing vision in his "fond old eyes" that is so evident in the final scene of the play. His madness supersedes his physical deterioration; nevertheless, the references to his own eyes must be considered from the physical standpoint as well as in a metaphorical sense. His mental blindness and madness are obvious; his gradually dimming vision throughout the play is plausible. Even in Act III, Scene VI, we can see the possible effects of his anger on his physical sight when Edgar says, "Look where he stands and glares! Want'st thou eyes at trial, madam?" (Lr. III.vi.26).

Lear and Cordelia Reunited

The reunion between Lear and Cordelia closely parallels the recognition scene between Lear and Kent in Act V, Scene III. In this scene, Lear begins to wake after a long sleep following his bout of insanity in the fields near Dover. Shakespeare places a great deal of emphasis on the movement of Lear's hands. As Lear awakes, Cordelia asks, "Sir, do you know me?" This query is an echo of Gloucester's and Kent's question to Lear. The King, in all three encounters, has great difficulty identifying his daughter, servant, and friend. Presumably the confused King, though growing more coherent by the moment, sits up and looks at Cordelia and the setting about him. He is confused and apprehensive because he cannot recognize the woman before him or his

environment. He imagines himself to be in heaven; but he is constantly moving toward an understanding of his true situation. His first reference to his hands is spoken in this manner:

I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands. (Lr. IV.vii.53-55)

Evidently, Lear has held his hands before his face in a somewhat confused state; however, in contrast to his scene with Gloucester, he is not at all incoherent or crazed. Cordelia directs Lear to look toward her and not at his hands in hope that he will be able to recognize her. Again, attention is placed by the playwright upon the movement of Lear's hands:

Oh, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.
(Lr. IV.vii.57-58)

Lear, still uncertain who she is, appears to slide from the bed in order to kneel before her as we hear Cordelia plead, "No, sir, you must not kneel."

Lear stands close to Cordelia, studying her. The dialogue between them proceeds in this fashion:

Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.
Cor. And so I am, I am.
Lear. Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray weep
not. (Lr. IV.vii.67-71)

As he stands before Cordelia, he reaches out and touches her face which brings him to a full recognition of who she is. Clearly, Lear has touched or is touching her face when

he says, "Be your tears wet? Yes, faith." By touching her, he has confirmed to himself that she is not a "spirit" as he assumed earlier in the scene. Now the action of touching her helps his weak eyesight in perceiving who she actually is. Lear takes a long time in recognizing Kent and Cordelia. It is as if the King must use all of his senses--ears, weak eyes, and hands--to help him gather enough sensory data to identify them.

This action of touching his beloved daughter after a long absence coincides with Gloucester's own desire earlier in Act IV, Scene I:

Ah, dear Son Edgar,
The food to thy abusèd father's wrath,
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again! (Lr. IV.i.23-26)

Could it be that Shakespeare intends this parallel of both old men, one purblind and one partially sighted, to take place? Lear's statement to Cordelia that he is "four-score and upward" implies more than mental debility; it implies also physical incapacities such as "poor old eyes." The symmetry of the matching plots becomes even more striking when we are aware of Lear's emerging partial sightedness. Ironically, Lear's wish in Act I to have Kent and Cordelia out of his sight becomes true. His gradually dimming eyes are unable to see them truly without great difficulty.

"Have I Caught Thee?"

In Act V, Scene III, there is some evidence that Lear's vision has grown much worse. This action in Act V follows Lear's enormous bout with insanity at both the mock trial and on the fields near Dover. Perhaps the emotional torment which he has undergone has robbed him of enough of his sight that he must rely on others to lead him even in the daylight. At least his eyesight is so dim that he has trouble seeing whom he grasps. One should remember that this scene shows Lear's inability to recognize Kent because of his weak eyes. Lear has been talking to Cordelia about their life together in prison. Edmund is anxious to send them to their "cage." There appear to be a great many people standing about the King, mostly Edmund's troops. The following dialogue occurs:

Edm. Take them away.
Lear. Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from Heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes. (Lr. V.iii.19-23)

The question, "Have I caught thee?" presents an interesting possibility. The King has reached out and taken hold of Cordelia; however, he is uncertain about whether he has taken hold of her or someone else. Lear desires to keep in her company. He reaches out for her in order to prevent the guards from separating them. Hence, Lear says, "He that parts us shall bring a brand from Heaven, / And fire us hence like foxes." The aged king demands both to walk

to prison with his daughter and be locked up with her in the same cell. He cannot see well enough to determine with any certainty whom he grasps. Later in this same scene he cannot see well enough to recognize Kent, hence his weak eyesight at present demands that he take hold of Cordelia for aid. He prefers being led by his own daughter rather than being placed under the supervision of a guard.

Concluding Remarks

Lear has not suddenly become dull sighted at the end of the play. The playwright intends for him to manifest signs of weak sight and general physical decay very early in the tragedy. Lear's plight is both a physical and mental groping toward truth and death. When Gloucester refers to him as a "ruined piece of nature," he is referring to both physical and mental impairment in the superannuated king. Lear suffers mentally and physically to the very limits of human endurance.¹⁵ Lear's enormous mental stress brings about the changes in his nature and the eventual "dull sight." His tremendous anger speeds up his physical deterioration and robs him of much of his remaining strength.¹⁶ In a heroic manner Lear copes with the cruel and relentless vicissitudes of Fortune. Ultimately, Lear

¹⁵Reginald A. Saner, "'Gemless Rings' in Purgatorio XXIII and Lear," Romance Notes, 10 (1968-1969), 163-167).

¹⁶Draper, "The Old Age of King Lear," pp. 530-532.

freely accepts his fate and vows to ride out the cruel storms of his life until the bitter end.¹⁷ Lear's mental torture supersedes his feebleness and physical deterioration. It is clear, however, that the King suffers both physical and mental impairment. The actions and dialogue of Lear point to his lack of vision at intervals throughout the play.

In King Lear, the theme of blindness is fully developed. Lear's steadily growing lack of vision becomes an integral part of his personality and an important ingredient in his suffering. He is not a mere caricature of an aged man. He is complete. His emerging partial sightedness becomes an essential facet of his overall character. We see him reduced to a pathetic old man, weak-eyed and mad; yet, in his superannuated figure, we can see a kind of triumph--the triumph of all humanity to endure.

¹⁷Russell A. Fraser, Shakespeare's Poetics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 50.

CHAPTER II

GLOUCESTER'S CREDIBILITY AS A BLIND PERSON

The Blinding of Gloucester and the Aftermath

The character of Gloucester in King Lear presents an interesting study in Shakespeare's knowledge about the nature of blindness. Although A. C. Bradley observes that Gloucester is an indistinct and sketchily wrought character in the play, the Earl's eventual blinding at the hands of Cornwall and Regan does leave us with a sense of great empathy for him.¹ We may be contemptuous towards Gloucester's gullibility in Act I when Edmund tricks him into believing that Edgar wrote the letter; however, when Gloucester begins to defy Cornwall's and Regan's authority by helping Lear, our feelings toward him begin to change. Gloucester at this point has "thrown off his old character."² He has taken great risks to help the King and his small band of followers. Here Shakespeare carefully allows the emotions of the audience to change toward Gloucester from a feeling of mild contempt for his naïveté and inertia to one of burgeoning admiration.³

¹Bradley, op. cit., p. 295.

²Heilman, op. cit., p. 49.

³Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 244.

The extreme cruelty of the way in which Gloucester is blinded by Cornwall and Regan cements Gloucester into our hearts and into our memories. Perhaps Gloucester's character becomes overshadowed by the ferocity of his blinding which leaves him somewhat indistinct to us. We are almost blinded to his true personality by the dire act; nonetheless, the plucking out of his eyes and the mortal wounding of Cornwall help to drain off some of the emotional intensity of the play.⁴ Act III, Scene VII rivets Gloucester in our memories as Shakespeare's cruelly blinded old man who loses his sight and gains his son all at the same time:

Glo. All dark and comfortless. Where's my son Edmund?

Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature,
To quit this horrid act.

Reg. Out, treacherous villain!
Thou call'st on him that hates thee. It was he
That made the overture of thy treasons to us,
Who is too good to pity thee.

Glo. Oh, my follies! Then Edgar was abused.
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

Reg. Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover. (Lr. III.vii.85-93)

Shakespeare gives Gloucester a reason for hope to offset the cruelty of his blinding. The playwright also makes the audience aware of Gloucester's new world of sensory impressions since he can no longer rely on his vision. Regan's snide remark to "let him smell his way to Dover" sets the stage for Gloucester's gulling by Edgar later in Act IV. Also, one is reminded that Gloucester has now

⁴Stewart, op. cit., p. 264.

become an entirely new person in the sense that he must adapt himself to a whole new world of darkness, strange voices, smells, and sounds. Perhaps the Earl could not have borne up under the extreme cruelty of his blinding had he not learned of Edgar's innocence. Regan, unwittingly, gives him something to cling to as he makes his way toward Dover. Shakespeare displays an innate sense of what is needed to hold mind and body together when a whole new world of darkness is thrust upon his blinded characters.

The action following the blinding scene, Act IV, Scene I, again displays Shakespeare's seemingly innate understanding of the human creature in every degree of degradation and exaltation. The playwright portrays the blinded Earl in a way that is both realistic and poignant. His understanding of the psychology of one who has undergone sudden blindness is correct if we examine his treatment of Gloucester from a modern, psychological point of view. First, the sightless person exhibits a tendency toward verbalized feelings of "worthlessness" and "lowered self-esteem."⁵ One instance of such a feeling is reflected in Gloucester when he says of himself to the Old Man: "I have no way and therefore want no eyes. / I stumbled when I saw" (Lr. IV.i.20-21). Later in the scene, Gloucester reiterates

⁵Judith Beebe Inabinet, "A Study of the Reactions of Blinding Among Persons Who Lost Their Sight After Age Fifty," Master's thesis Univ. of Tenn.--Knoxville 1958, p. 49.

his feelings of deep depression and worthlessness when he utters the following request to Edgar:

There is a cliff whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.
Bring me but to the very brim of it,
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
With something rich about me. From that place
I shall no leading need. (Lr. IV.i.76-81)

Second, a tendency toward paranoia emerges if the person feels that he has been mistreated or misused. Of course, Gloucester has been cruelly misused and he conveys this when he says, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport" (Lr. IV.i.38-39). Gloucester blames the gods for his fate rather than Cornwall and Regan. He reveals in this statement his feeling of being cruelly treated by an unseen power rather than his fellow man. His paranoia extends beyond his own world into the realms of the supernatural and reveals the enormity of his anguish.

Finally, many blind persons reveal a need for independence, a straining movement toward self-reliance.⁶ Clearly, Gloucester displays this characteristic when he pridefully refuses the aid of the Old Man by telling him, "Away, get thee away. Good Friend, be gone. / Thy comforts can do me no good at all, / Thee they may hurt" (Lr. IV.i.16-18). These lines reveal Gloucester's wish not to be a burden to anyone. He fears the Old Man may be in jeopardy for helping

⁶Ibid.

him. After the mock suicide, the Earl reveals a sort of stoic independence and resignation to endure:

I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
"Enough, enough," and die. (Lr. IV.vi.75-77)

The Attempted Suicide

G. Wilson Knight, in an essay in his book The Wheel of Fire, calls the attempted suicide in Act IV, Scene VI, the furtherest extreme of incongruity and grotesqueness.⁷ Admittedly, the scene is clumsy to some extent;⁸ however, if one keeps in mind the personality of the aging Earl, his superstitious temperament, the extreme stress which he has endured throughout the play, and the fact that he is being led about by what he thinks is a madman, then one must concede that Gloucester is susceptible to almost anything which Edgar might devise. Gloucester treads through a new and different world which is totally alien to him. He is obviously, and rightfully, disoriented and confused as he and Edgar march toward Dover. This blindness makes him easily susceptible to Poor Tom's wiles. Obviously, too, his mind must be in a state of extreme torment. He has one hope to which he clings--that Edgar yet lives. This possibility alone brings him some comfort.

⁷Knight, "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque," pp. 169-172.

⁸G. Wilson Knight, "Gloucester's Leap," Essays in Criticism, 22 (1972), 279.

Perhaps the suicide scene is not so clumsy when one considers the elaborately organized plan of attack with which Edgar carries out the purging of his father's despair.⁹ Edgar's expertise at trickery, his understanding of his father's personality and vulnerabilities, and Gloucester's confused state all coalesce to create a believable episode in the play. First, Edgar, as Poor Tom, enjoys the unusual affection of Gloucester because, as Gloucester tells the Old Man of his encounter with the beggar in the hovel, "My son / Came then into my mind" (Lr. IV.1.35-36). Second, Edgar intentionally gets Gloucester to rely on his son's perceptions and mistrust his own. This feat is consistent with the earlier episode between Edmund and Gloucester when his bastard son caused him to rely on his knowledge of Edgar's handwriting. Third, Gloucester's tendency to mistrust his own judgment is an innate characteristic of his on which Edgar clearly capitalizes. This mistrust by the Earl of his own judgment is probably intensified by his blindness. Gloucester, confused and depressed, has little recourse but to rely on his guide to lead him to his eventual attempted suicide.

In Act IV, Scene VII, Edgar begins his plan to gull Gloucester into thinking they are laboring up a steep hill and to the appointed precipice:

⁹Knight, "Gloucester's Leap," p. 279.

Glo. When shall we come to the top of that same hill?
 Edg. You do climb up it now. Look how we labor.
 (Lr. IV.vi.1-2)

Although there are no specific stage directions, perhaps Edgar tugs on Gloucester's hand, or lifts the Earl's hand higher than usual to convey a sense of climbing a steep hill. This action could follow Gloucester's correct assumption that "the ground is even" (Lr. IV.vi.3). This suggestion is a logical way to help convince Gloucester of the steepness of the hill. Also, Edgar might slow his pace in order to help convey the impression of arduous climbing. In addition, another suggested means of convincing Gloucester is for Edgar to breathe heavily. Edgar does use the words, "Look how we labor," to remind his father that he is blind and, therefore, must rely on Edgar's honesty about the terrain about them. Edgar cunningly switches Gloucester's attention to another sensory impression when he says, "Horrible steep. / Hark, do you not hear the sea?" When Gloucester correctly admits he cannot hear the ocean, Edgar, like Edmund in Act I, quickly makes his father concede to the son's points of view:

Edg. Why then your other senses grow imperfect
 By your eyes' anguish.
 Glo. So may it be, indeed. (Lr. IV.vi.4-6)

Gloucester, as in Act I, Scene II, readily adopts the viewpoint of his other son. Edgar capitalizes on his father's tendency to be easily convinced by a positive-sounding statement despite the illogical nature of the conclusion.

Gloucester's hearing probably has grown keener; however, he immediately accepts his son's lie.

When Gloucester begins to recognize Edgar's voice, the son deftly avoids his father's growing suspicion by saying, "Come on, sir, here's the place. Stand still" (Lr. IV.vi. 11). Again, Edgar eludes Gloucester's correct assumptions by quickly switching the Earl's attention to another area. All of Edgar's adroit ploys and his elaborate use of different sensory impressions help to set up Gloucester for the attempted suicide. Edgar's breath-taking description of the sights below them certainly is an elaborately wrought and convincing ruse. The images are exact and realistic. Gloucester, confused, tired, and old, is easily taken in by his son's word pictures:

How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice, and yond tall anchoring bark
Diminished to her cock--her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
That on the unnumbered idle pebbles chafes
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong. (Lr. IV.vi.12-25)

Edgar's descriptive power is coupled with his realistic assumption of feeling dizzy at so great a height. The scene does not seem so clumsy if we consider the elaborate plan of attack that is used by Edgar to gull his father. After Gloucester says, "Bid me farewell and let me hear

thee going," Edgar presumably walks away and leaves his father standing on what the Earl believes is a dizzying height. Edgar could stoop down to help convey to his father the impression that he stands on a high cliff. Edgar could also lower his voice to a whisper when he tells his father, "Gone, sir, Farewell." The stooping and whispering are merely suggestions to help the scene appear less clumsy and more convincing. Gloucester, after the description, is clearly convinced of the height.

After the supposed fall, Edgar returns to his old ploys of vivid images and changed voice. Edgar tells Gloucester to "Look up a-height, the shrill-gorged lark so far / Cannot be seen or heard. Do but look up" (Lr. IV.vi.58-59). These lines make Gloucester feel even more dependent on Edgar's sight.

After Edgar conveys to his father that he has survived the fall because of a "miracle," Edgar plays upon his knowledge of Gloucester's special vulnerabilities. Elton points out that, during the Elizabethan period, the superstitious man--one who exhibits certain pagan tendencies or one who has a belief in destiny--also tends to believe in fairies and demons.¹⁰ Edgar realizes his father's susceptibility to supersititious beliefs. One of his tactics to convince Gloucester that a miracle has happened to him is to employ

¹⁰William R. Elton, King Lear and the Gods (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1966), pp. 148-149.

this knowledge about his father. He changes his voice again in order to carry off his elaborate plan and tells Gloucester of the strange creature which he left behind when he jumped from the steep cliff:

As I stood here below, methought his eyes
 Were too full moons, he had a thousand noses,
 Horns whelked and waved like the enridgèd sea.
 It was some fiend, therefore, thou happy father,
 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors
 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.
 (Lr. IV.vi.69-74)

Gloucester is convinced by this strong appeal to his sense of wonderment at the strange universe of ill portents. This gulling is aided by his strong sense of imagination borne out of his paganistic tendencies as well as his newly disoriented sensory world. His old age, too, adds to the plausibility of his gulling by such a talented deceiver as his son appears to be.¹¹

Although the attempted suicide by Gloucester is somewhat ludicrous, we can see how Gloucester's cruel blinding, his age, his emotional turmoil, his fatigue, and Edgar's carefully worked ruse could make the scene entirely plausible. Gloucester's trusting nature and his characteristic naïveté also play an important part in his gulling. Shakespeare uses an innate knowledge about blindness to help make Gloucester a memorable and believable character in King Lear.

¹¹Rosenberg, op. cit., pp. 265-268.

CHAPTER III

NESTOR'S WEAK EYES: A NEW INTERPRETATION

The Satirical Reasons

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a new suggestion for playing Nestor in Troilus and Cressida as an aged and decrepit person with very weak eyes. If we accept Nestor as potentially shortsighted, his character could become more important to the overall balance of the play. Nestor's near blindness might help reinforce many of the themes and conflicts. Although there is no evidence that Nestor is weak in vision, the manner in which Shakespeare delineates him could allow this suggested interpretation without any great breach from the playwright's original intentions. Also, with Nestor as supposedly dull sighted, this new interpretation of his character could blend in smoothly with the thematic structure and overall satiric tone of the play. For example, Troilus and Cressida is replete with references to blindness. The theme of appearance and reality is examined from many different aspects within the drama. In addition, Troilus is mentally blind to the evanescence of intense passion and the destructive force of time. With Nestor portrayed as a blind, old man, we are given a physical and tangible representation of all of these elements and themes working within the play. His

suggested poor vision and decrepit body could add to the satiric aspects as well.

Oscar James Campbell correctly points out that Troilus and Cressida is saturated "with a spirit of derision."¹ Campbell goes on to observe that, by Shakespeare's time, the Greeks and Trojans of Homer's day were seen in less than a favorable light:

In short, by Shakespeare's time these Heromic heroes, no longer a band of youth fighting joyously in the sunlight on the plains of Troy, appeared as a group of undisciplined individuals acting at cross-purposes. They were often driven to action by evil passion, and frequently revealed conduct that would seem base to all those gentlemen of the time who still retained some of the generous impulses of chivalry. The tale of Troy, therefore, had become a story well suited to serve as a picture of social disintegration, which Shakespeare decided to paint in dark colors.²

With Nestor portrayed as weak-sighted, he could visibly illustrate this bitterly satiric representation of the Homeric heroes' deterioration, corruptness, and blindness. With Nestor portrayed as decrepit and dull sighted, the audience could visibly discern that these former heroes are "no longer a band of youths fighting joyously in the sunlight on the plains of Troy." With Nestor characterized as weak-sighted, a great deal more bitterly satirical substance could be added to the play in addition to the thematic reinforcement mentioned earlier.

¹Oscar James Campbell, Comicall Satyre and Troilus and Cressida (Los Angeles: Adcraft Press, 1938), p. 185.

²Ibid.

The evidence for Nestor's old age and decrepit condition within Troilus and Cressida is fairly obvious. In Act I, Scene III, Achilles asks Patroclus to imitate Nestor arming for battle at night while Achilles narrates Patroclus' mimicry in this manner:

"Excellent!
'Tis Nestor right. Now play him me, Patroclus,
Arming to answer in a night alarm."
And then, forsooth, the faint defects of age
Must be the scene of mirth, to cough and spit
And, with a palsy fumbling on his gorget,
Shake in and out the rivet. (Tro. I.iii.170-175)

Since the pantomimed action is suppose to take place at night, this fact allows the possibility of portraying Nestor as fumbling about blindly in the dark searching for his armor. Not only could he be played as palsied, but he could be weak-sighted as well. Nestor's poor vision could add another element to his panoply of ills enumerated in this scene.

John W. Draper speculates that Nestor's age approaches the eighties:

Of Nestor's many years, however, there cannot be a doubt: He is "old" and "venerable" and was a man when Hector's "grandsire suck'd"; in short, he must be eighty.³

Draper goes on to point out that Nestor probably does have very weak eyes.⁴ The Elizabethan audiences believed that the frailties of old age were contemptible.⁵ Draper

³John W. Draper, "Shakespeare's Attitude toward Old Age," Journal of Gerontology, 1 (1946), 122.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

observes that anyone living to an excessive old age, meaning eighty or more years, was an unusual person:

Great age was certainly unusual among the Elizabethans; and when it occurred, its weaknesses were much in evidence.⁶

If Draper is correct in his assumption that Elizabethan audiences were contemptuous of the maladies of old age, Nestor could become an important element in the satiric make-up of the play; however, his suggested poor eyesight could also become an important ingredient in the thematic structure as well. In his essay entitled "Shakespeare's Attitude toward Old Age," Draper discusses many of Shakespeare's aged characters who show signs of physical debilitation, among them Lear, Justice Shallow, and Falstaff; however, in listing some of their infirmities, he fails to explore the possible significance of Nestor's supposed poor vision though admitting he has weak eyes.⁷ There does not appear to be any clear-cut evidence that Nestor has physically weak eyes; nonetheless, if Draper can perceive Nestor as weak-eyed, it seems plausible that this aged Greek could be portrayed as weak-sighted to enhance the appearance-reality and blindness themes. Shakespeare has used other aged characters who possess weak vision. Draper does note that Shakespeare in his portrayal of aged characters often includes many physical weaknesses such as deafness and blindness:

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

In short, Shakespeare portrays both the physique and mentality of age: among its less attractive qualities, a broken voice, white hair and wrinkles, weakness of limb and sense, various diseases, ugliness of face and crookedness of stature, talkativeness, lack of friends, and, above all, illustrated in King Lear, its failing mental powers.⁸

If Nestor is portrayed as dull sighted, it would not be a great deviation from Shakespeare's own use of such characters in his plays. Indeed, throughout Shakespeare's career, the playwright displays a penchant for portraying his aged characters with very weak vision. As early as Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare uses this characteristic. Titus, presumably an aging noble, admits to his weakening vision when he says the following:

Come, take away. Lavinia, go with me.
I'll to thy closet, and go read with thee
Sad stories chanced in the times of old.
Come, boy, and go with me. Thy sight is young,
And thou shalt read when mine begins to dazzle.
(Tit. III.ii.81-85)

Titus's weak eyes are only one element of blindness explored in the play. The gruesomeness of the tragedy often leaves Titus and Lavinia blind with tears or with shock. Shakespeare capitalizes on both aspects of the theme of blindness. Much like Lear, Titus fails to perceive his enemies' evil intents and he is physically weak-sighted. In addition, the playwright uses the more conventional treatment of being blinded by sorrow, as Titus states in the following manner:

Killed her, for whom my tears have made me blind.
I am as woeful as Virginius was,

⁸Ibid.

And have a thousand times more cause than he
 To do this outrage; and it now is done.
 (Tit. V.iii.49-52)

In much the same way, Nestor's suggested weak eyes could convey more than the usual physical handicap. As we will see later, Nestor's infirmities, including the possibility of weak sight, can become an integral part of the whole structure of the play.

In The Comedy of Errors, Aegeon is another example of an aged, comical character who possesses many of the frailties of old age, including weak vision. He laments his debilitation with great self-pity:

Not know my voice! Oh Time's extremity,
 Hast thou so cracked and splittèd my poor tongue
 In seven short years that here my only son
 Knows not my feeble key of untuned cares?
 Though now this grainèd face of mine be hid
 In sap-consuming winter's drizzled snow,
 And all the conduits of my blood froze up,
 Yet hath my night of life some memory,
 My wasting lamps some fading glimmer left,
 My dull deaf ears a little use to hear.
 (Err. V.i.307-316)

In The Merchant of Venice, Old Gobbo, in his encounter with his son Launcelot, admits his own poor vision when he says, "Alack, sir, I am sand-blind. I know you not" (MV. II.ii.77). According to G. B. Harrison, the term "sand-blind" means nearsightedness.⁹ Perhaps the term is a sort of take-off on the old expression of "being stone blind." The sand implies that Old Gobbo still has some vision left,

⁹G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: The Complete Works (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 590.

although seemingly very little. His vision is so bad that he cannot recognize his own son, much as Lear fails to recognize Kent. The scene between Old Gobbo and his son also helps to illustrate some of the themes being examined in The Merchant of Venice. Fortune, portrayed as blind, is an element treated briefly in the play. The suitors of Portia must risk a great deal to chance in order to win her hand. The Prince of Morocco recognizes this risk when he says the following:

If Hercules and Lichas play at dice
Which is the better man, the greater throw
May turn by fortune from the weaker hand.
So is Alcides beaten by his page,
And so may I, blind fortune leading me,
Miss that which one unworthier may attain,
And die with grieving. (MV. II.1.32-38)

Also, the traditional use of love being blind is developed as well as the appearance-reality theme. Jessica descends to Lorenzo disguised as a boy. She makes the following observation about the nature of love:

Here, catch this casket, it is worth the pains.
I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me,
For I am much ashamed of my exchange.
But love is blind, and lovers cannot see
The pretty follies that themselves commit,
For if they could, Cupid himself would blush
To see me thus transformèd to a boy. (MV. II.vi.33-39)

Portia and Nerissa are able to conceal their true identities from the court and their lovers, Bassanio and Gratiano. Launcelot fools his nearsighted father without the aid of disguise; nevertheless, the old man's gulling does help reinforce the element of deceit worked into the play. Although the uses of fortune, love, and disguise are not

major themes in the play, Old Gobbo's blindness does help strengthen their effects in The Merchant of Venice.

In Julius Caesar, Cassius displays another instance of nearsightedness when he says, "Go, Pindarus, get higher on that hill-- / My sight was ever thick. Regard Titinius, / And tell me what thou notest about the field" (JC. V.iii.20-22). According to Harrison, the word "thick" means "short."¹⁰ Here, we can witness Shakespeare using this form of myopia in order that Pindarus might narrate the action of the battle. Without having to stage the ensuing fight, Shakespeare achieves a more compact scene and maintains a full narration of all the events taking place at the same time.

Jacques' famous speech in As You Like It reveals Shakespeare's view of old age with all its infirmities, including dimming vision:

The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered Pantaloon
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and more oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.
(AYL. II.vii.157-166)

Indeed, Gloucester could be placed in Jacques' "sixth age," with Titus and Cassius. Lear, Nestor, Aegeon, and Old Gobbo belong in the final age. These numerous partially-

¹⁰Ibid.

sighted characters reveal Shakespeare's penchant for the subject of blindness. His extremely old characters--Lear, Aegeon, and Old Gobbo--possess more than one infirmity. Shakespeare equips them with enough feebleness to delineate them clearly in our memories and to graphically illustrate his ideas in the plays. With all these examples of weak-sighted and aged men in mind, perhaps Nestor's character in Troilus and Cressida could be used in much the same way visibly to illustrate and develop some of the themes of the drama. If Old Gobbo's sand-blindness augments the different schemes of blindness in The Merchant of Venice, then, old Nestor, as possibly "sand-blind," could add greatly to the developed uses of blindness and other themes in Troilus and Cressida.

Nestor's aged and decrepit body, like Lear's, possesses many of the signs of old age characterized by Draper as cited earlier. He has a "whited beard." He is prone to talkativeness as evidenced by many of his lengthy speeches with all their pomposity. Commenting on Agamemnon's and Nestor's speeches in Act I, Scene III, Albert Gerard makes the following observation:

Agamemnon's speeches are ludicrously echoed in
Nestor's garrulous, redundant and senile oratory.¹¹

In addition to his propensity for bombast, Nestor admits to his own weak vision in a way that carries a dual meaning,

¹¹Albert Gerard, "Meaning and Structure in Troilus and Cressida," English Studies, 40 (1959), 150.

as he tells Ulysses at one point, "I see them not with my old eyes. What are they?" (Tro. I.iii.366). Nestor's confession of failing to perceive both Ulysses' plan and his conception of Achilles' vulnerabilities could be used to tie in with the whole theme of blindness in all its forms.

Nestor's reference to his "old eyes" could be used as a means to portray his character as physically weak-sighted. He could become an even more important element in the structure of the play if he is portrayed in this manner.

His weak eyesight, his "bellicose" spirit in a decrepit body, and his fame as an orator could be treated in a satiric manner.¹² Equally, Nestor's suggested nearsightedness could be used as a means of binding together all the different forms of blindness that Shakespeare works into the play. Nestor, then, could become more than a bit player. As a very nearsighted character, Nestor would be a glaring and tangible reminder to the audience of just how self-deluded almost everyone in the play has become.

Nestor's Blindness and Its Thematic Significance

Shakespeare's continual references to blindness and sight and the characters, blind themselves in many ways, help reflect the corrupted aspects of society which the

¹²David Charles Kaula, "Will and Reason in Troilus and Cressida," Shakespeare Quarterly, 12 (1961), 280.

playwright treats in Troilus and Cressida. Almost every character, in one way or another, is self-deceived or mentally blind about the true nature of love, war, honor, and themselves. Nestor's proposed weak eyes, his doddering character, and his tendencies toward bombast and choler could become part of the harsh quality of the play. For example, one of the themes in the play is Troilus' mental blindness to the true nature of time and its effects on love and passion. When Cressida is returned to the Greeks, Nestor, Achilles and some others greet her with kisses. This scene would be part of the way in which Nestor's old age could be used to illustrate the themes of the evanescence of passion and time:

Nest. Our General doth salute you with a kiss.
 Ulyss. Yet is the kindness but particular,
 'Twere better she were kissed in general.
 Nest. And very courtly counsel. I'll begin.
 So much for Nestor.
 Achil. I'll take that winter from your lips, fair
 lady. (Tro. IV.v.19-23)

Nestor's wintry kiss could be contrasted with the intense passion of Troilus on the Trojan side and Achilles in the Greek camp. His decrepit state could represent tangible evidence of the ephemeral quality of passion and the ravages of time.

With Nestor's physical condition treated satirically, the character of the old orator can become somewhat contemptible and ridiculous as well. Usually, old age is not particularly humorous; however, Shakespeare appears to leave very little unscathed in this drama. Arlin J. Hiken

comments on the unique quality of Troilus and Cressida in the following manner:

The play is sometimes funny and sometimes moving; its situations are sometimes ridiculous and sometimes terrifying; its characters are sometimes absurd and sometimes noble; and in these very paradoxes lies a rich texture of repeated patterns that is the play's strength.¹³

One of the "repeated patterns," of course, is the contrast between appearance and reality. Man's inability to see things as they really are and his refusal to accept reality cause his downfall and reveal a basic flaw in many of the characters. Troilus and Cressida reflects a world of sham and hypocrisy, a world of inconstancy and vice.¹⁴ A major factor in the play is Shakespeare's use of blindness to help reveal his world of pretense. John D. Cox recognizes this important aspect of the play when he writes:

For if Troilus and Cressida is a play whose modus operandi on every level is the failure of vision, we should note that action tends to induce not only a view of the fallen world, as in the history play, but a fallen view of the world, a perspective itself distorted.¹⁵

Nestor, then, with his weak eyes, could help develop this concept of a fallen world that is out of focus. Nestor, if portrayed as very shortsighted, would become our physical

¹³Arlin J. Hiken, "Texture in Troilus and Cressida," Educational Theatre Journal, 19 (1967), 367.

¹⁴J. Oates Smith, "Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida," Philological Quarterly, 46 (1967), 169-172.

¹⁵John D. Cox, "The Error of Our Eye in Troilus and Cressida," Comparative Drama, 10 (1976-1977), 154.

evidence of a world gone sour, a society both outmoded and infected. His once famed oratory could fade into bathos; his once famed strength in battle could wither into dulled memories; his once keen, perceptive mind, like his eyes, could become blurred. Portrayed this way when he appears before us--palsied, possibly half-blind, and rambling, we could wonder if he ever could have been strong, perceptive, and eloquent. This interpretation of Nestor as weak-sighted and ridiculous would help to delineate the hypocrisy, sham, and mental blindness of the younger characters of the play. Their flaws, their speeches, and their naïveté would loom even clearer before us. The satiric aspects of the play would also become more intensified. The other characters' long speeches, mental blindness, and frailties could become heightened because of Nestor's physical embodiment of them. Their empty words are only a degree above Nestor's rambles; their shortsightedness, their self-delusion is far worse than Nestor's myopia; their corruption and weaknesses appear far more ominous than the physical debilitation of Nestor.

The Mentally Blind Characters

The conflict between the opposing camps in the play reveals a type of self-deception or imposed mental blindness on the part of both the Greeks and the Trojans. Rather than accept the true nature of their corrupt motives, both sides suffer from a reliance, a self-imposed one, on the pretense of high ideals. The Trojans speak of honor with

high and glowing words. Troilus in Act II extols the virtues of honor to Hector in order to persuade his older brother of their duty to be upholders of honor and beauty:

If you'll avouch 'twas wisdom Paris went--
 As you must needs, for you all cried "Go, go"--
 If you'll confess he brought home noble prize--
 As you must needs, for you all clapped your hands
 And cried "Inestimable!"--Why do you now
 The issue of your proper wisdom rate,
 And do a deed that Fortune never did,
 Beggar the estimation which you prized
 Richer than sea and land? Oh, theft most base,
 That we have stol'n what we do fear to keep!
 (Tro. II.ii.84-93)

Troilus' speech turns out to be an appeal to pride and vanity. Hector clearly sees the true nature of the situation and the cost of such a defense of Helen when he says, "Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost" (Tro. II.ii.51). Nevertheless, he allows Paris and Troilus to change his mind. Troilus reveals his true reasons for wanting to defend Helen. His self-delusion about honor is merely a cover-up for his wish for fame and glory:

She is a theme of honor and renown,
 A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds
 Whose present courage may beat down our foes,
 And fame is time to come canónize us.
 (Tro. II.ii.199-202)

Hector is blind to the consequences of his concession to his brothers. Troilus and Paris are self-deluded about their true motives. Their quest for honor is actually a quest for acclaim and for their egos.¹⁶ Troilus enters

¹⁶Alice Shalvi, "'Honor' in Troilus and Cressida," Studies in English Literature, 5 (1965), 283-284.

the battle only after his eyes are opened to the reality of Cressida's inconstancy. His "spur" is not "beauty" or "valor," but wounded vanity and revenge:

Hark, Greek. As much as I do Cressid love,
 So much by weight hate I her Diomed.
 That sleeve is mine that he'll bear on his helm.
 Were it a casque composed by Vulcan's skill,
 My sword should bite it. (Tro. V.ii.167-171)

A similar situation can be discerned with the Greek camp. For all their oratory and debate, they are blind to their own motivations. Camille Slights observes that "In the world of Troilus and Cressida, men are motivated by selfish appetites for sex and power, yet pride themselves on the beauty of their emotions and the subtlety of their wisdom."¹⁷ The Greeks operate in a world of rhetoric only. The Greeks' actions certainly do not reflect any semblance of decency or fair play. Ulysses' long speeches on order and leadership are undercut by his trickery and hypocrisy. Achilles, treacherous and vain, is motivated ultimately by pure rage rather than the subtle ploys of Ulysses. The audience is able to penetrate this wall of sham and pretense, partly through the aid of Nestor's empty words and self-delusion. Nestor's overall dilapidated physical condition, including the proposed weak sight, could become an important ingredient in the satire's complexity. His physical deterioration would then be a visible symbol of a corrupted,

¹⁷Camille Slights, "The Parrallel Structure of Troilus and Cressida," Shakespeare Quarterly, 25 (1974), 46.

dying, and self-deluded society. This interpretation of Nestor as weak-sighted could fit in with the tone of the whole play. Slights points out that "the audience is made to see not only that the Greek forces are morally diseased, but also that the men who diagnose these ills most acutely are themselves infected."¹⁸ Nestor remains blind to his own true nature. He could comically reinforce the blindness motif interwoven into the play by forgetting, at times, that he is no longer an able-bodied man. His decrepitude might turn all of his fierce talk into foolish palaver:

With due observance of thy godlike seat,
Great Agamemnon, Nestor shall apply
Thy latest words. In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men. The sea being smooth,
How many shallow dauble boats dare sail
Upon her patient breast, making their way
With those of nobler bulk!
But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
The strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains cut,
Bounding between the two moist elements
Like Perseus' horse. Where's then the saucy boat,
Whose weak untimbered sides but even now
Corivaied greatness? Either to harbor fled,
Or made a toast for Neptune. Even so
Doth valor's show and valor's worth divide
In storms of Fortune. For in her ray and brightness
The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger. But when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
And flies fled under shade, why then the thing of
courage
As roused with rage with rage doth sympathize,
And with an accent tuned in selfsame key
Retorts to chiding Fortune. (Tro. I.iii.31-54)

One should remember that all Nestor's talk of "stronged-ribbed bark" emanates from a shipwreck of an old man upwards

¹⁸Ibid.

of eighty years old. The mention of "the splitting wind" reminds the audience how overblown the oration has become. In a sense, Nestor's penchant for strong talk, in spite of his superannuated condition, could become a reminder to the audience of just how "windy" the rest of the orators in the play are. Not only could his suggested blindness reinforce the mental blindness of the Greeks and Trojans, but his hard talk and decrepit state could serve to alert the audience to the ridiculousness of all the other orators and their empty words.

Troilus, of all the characters in the play, remains the most deceived and blind to reality. He cannot apprehend the true nature of Cressida's personality. Unlike Romeo, Troilus places a great deal of trust in the concept of time. Romeo is blinded by his love for Juliet in the sense that he lacks patience and acts rashly. Time is also Troilus' adversary because he cannot see how time corrupts and erodes the intense passions of love. He is unaware of love's evanescence.

Troilus is oblivious to Cressida's infidelity. His passion blinds him to Cressida's immorality whereas Ulysses, being more rational, perceives her true personality after only a brief encounter:

Fie, Fie upon her!
 There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip--
 Nay, her foot speaks, her wanton spirits look out
 At every joint and motive of her body.
 Oh, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
 That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
 And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts

To every ticklish reader! Set them down
 For sluttish spoils of opportunity,
 And daughters of the game. (Tro. IV.v.54-63)

Even after Troilus witnesses Cressida's and Diomed's rendezvous in Act V, Scene II, he refuses to accept the tangible evidence of his senses. For a long time, Troilus clings to the old appearance of their relationship. He refuses to accept the reality which his eyesight confirms. John D. Cox points out that "Troilus represents another kind of myopia. He is, in fact, the lover with the seething brain ('mad Cressid's love')." ¹⁹ In Act V, Scene II, Troilus verbalizes the conflict he is experiencing between his own blind passion and the perceptible truth of the meeting between Cressida and Diomed:

Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?
 Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
 An esperance so obstinately strong
 That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,
 As if those organs had deceptious functions,
 Created only to caluminate.
 Was Cressid here? (Tro. V.ii.119-124)

We can discern the multi-layered treatment of appearance and reality which is augmented by the use of references to blindness and eyesight. It has been demonstrated how Shakespeare often uses blindness in his characters, as in King Lear, to drive home his ideas and to solidify the unity of his plays. Nestor, if portrayed as another of Shakespeare's weak-eyed characters in Troilus and Cressida, might serve in a similar function. He could be played as

¹⁹Ibid.

physically shortsighted to reinforce Troilus' own forced blindness.

Hector and Nestor

In Act IV, Scene V, Nestor's proposed weak vision might be used to full advantage in order to illustrate the theme of appearance and reality working on a different level. Hector confronts the Greek camp after his encounter with Ajax. This scene offers a wonderful opportunity for Nestor's suggested weak eyes to play an important part in physically illustrating the whole theme of appearance-reality. The Greeks gather around Hector to admire and praise his great prowess in battle. After Hector has apologized to Menelaus for not recognizing him, Nestor confronts the Trojan hero. In this scene, Shakespeare places a great deal of emphasis on Nestor's repetition of the word "seen." With Nestor's part being that of a very short-sighted old man, this encounter with Hector could become an even more comical and satirical episode. Nestor's use of "seen" could imply that he can now barely see, or has not seen clearly for a long time. The long speech of Nestor might be enacted with this interpretation. Nestor's weak eyes cannot really see anyone or anything too clearly. Although he is anxious for a fight, his aged body cannot respond. We are also reminded of just how ridiculous and senseless war can be. One must remember Nestor's feeble condition in order to comprehend the full satiric

possibilities of his lengthy praise. It is conceivable that Nestor could be a means of reinforcing visibly many of the playwright's ideas concerning the fallibility of man's senses in recognizing another person's worth. If portrayed as weak-sighted, Nestor would utter the following praise in a highly comical manner:

I have, thou gallant Trojan, seen thee oft,
 Laboring for destiny, make cruel way
 Through ranks of Greekish youth. And I have seen thee,
 As hot as Perseus, spur thy Phrygian steed,
 Despising many forfeits and subduements,
 When thou hast hung thy advanced sword i' the air,
 Not letting it decline on the declined,
 That I have said to some my standers-by
 "Lo, Jupiter is yonder, dealing life!"
 And I have seen thee pause and take thy breath
 When that a ring of Greeks have hemmed thee in,
 Like an Olympian wrestling. This have I seen.
 But this thy countenance, still locked in steel,
 I never saw till now. (Tro. IV.v.183-196)

This praise could be an exceedingly humorous speech if old Nestor, nearsighted and longwinded, should be standing about an inch away from the face of Hector in order to see his countenance. With Nestor as weak-eyed, the irony could become heightened. Nestor really does correctly see the quality of Hector. Of all the characters in the play, Hector symbolizes most a genuine man of honor and courage. Nestor's proposed half-blind eyes would be able to look upon his true mettle, whereas Hector, later in the scene, fails to perceive the true treachery of Achilles.

When Achilles enters and repeats some of Nestor's pleasure in being able to behold his renowned adversary, the whole purpose of portraying Nestor as weak-sighted

becomes more evident. Both Hector and Achilles try to glean the true substance of each other. Achilles enters and greets Hector in this fashion:

I shall forestall thee, Lord Ulysses, thou!
 Now, Hector, I have fed mine eyes on thee,
 I have with exact view perused thee, Hector,
 And quoted joint by joint. (Tro. IV.v.230-233)

With Nestor's part being that of a weak-sighted old man, he might point the way for the two warriors' ensuing encounter. The old orator tries to see in Hector what Hector fails to see in Achilles--his true substance. The whole scene could be tied together with the help of Nestor's suggested weak eyes. Hector and Achilles exchange verbal taunts and earnest looks, trying to size one another up. Hector makes the most ironical observation of them both when he chides Achilles by saying, "Oh, like a book of sport thou'lt read me o'er, / But there's more in me than thou understand'st" (Tro. IV.v.239-240). Hector's sense of honor is alien to Achilles' experience. Equally, Hector cannot discern the treachery and brutality of Achilles' nature, an oversight that proves fateful later in Act V when Achilles murders him.

The whole scene could be set up and solidified by Nestor's proposed partial sightedness. His weak eyes could add a touch of satire to the scene; however, Nestor could also be used to render a graphic, tangible example of "old eyes" that can barely perceive Hector's actual face.

Shakespeare's propensity for and facility with old, blind characters is quite obvious. He avails himself of many opportunities to embellish the tragic, comic, and thematic aspects of many of his plays through the use of such characters. Nestor could be added to this list of superannuated, half-blind men. The structure of Troilus and Cressida could be enhanced with Nestor's manifestation of physical blindness in order to unify the divergent thematic patterns.

CONCLUSION

King Lear possesses two characters who manifest different forms of physical blindness. Lear's partial sightedness increases throughout the course of the drama until his vision becomes so poor that he is unable to recognize Kent without great difficulty. His dimming sight is brought on by his great ire and emotional turmoil. The King's extreme old age plays an important part in the changes in his visual acuity. Gloucester, of course, is totally blind. Both characters present interesting subjects and physically blind characters. Shakespeare reveals his dexterity with the subject of blindness in this play. Both Lear and Gloucester reflect realistic aspects of the true nature of physical blindness in each of its forms--the totally blind person and the partially sighted individual.

In Troilus and Cressida, the references to blindness are numerous. The character of Nestor, superannuated and comical, offers an opportunity for this character to be played as partially sighted. With this proposed interpretation in mind, the satire would not have to be greatly altered. In fact, the play's thematic structure could allow this interpretation with only a minimal alteration of the dialogue and action.

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