CHAPTER IV

HIS LEAR, HER LEAR

Lear, Bodice and Fontanelle in Edward Bond’s Lear, Royal Court Theatre, 1971.

Hazel Maycock as the androgynous Fool in Lear’s Daughters, WTG, 1987/8
King Lear is to Postmodernism what Hamlet was to Romanticism: the icon of an age.

(Holmberg 12)

King Lear perhaps is the most reworked of all Shakespearean plays in the twentieth century. Twelve mainstream productions in less than ten years, ie, between 1980 and 1990, and that too in Britain alone, is a proof for the significance of the play for the modern spectators. Some of these productions stay "true" to the Shakespeare text. Some others have a radical approach making an attempt at rearticulating the "original" discursive formation. This chapter analyzes two modern rewritings of
King Lear. Edward Bond’s Lear and Women’s Theatre Group’s Lear’s Daughters.

*King Lear* is a heavily-coded play which gives scope for radical or innovative readings. However, Susan Bennett has expressed her doubt about the success of the so-called radical versions. She says:

In the case of radical interpretation, this seems at best dubiously radical since theatre critics, and not only that specific viewing community, are always able to align a particular revision with one which has gone before. Neither is the currency of radical any guarantee of an oppositional or dissident impulse. (46)

David Hare’s *King Lear*, produced by the Royal National Theatre in 1986, is an excellent example of the validity of the doubt voiced by Bennett. In support of her own observation Bennett quotes Isobel Armstrong’s scathing attack on David Hare’s *King Lear*. She says:

Did so-called ‘radical’ Shakespeare productions achieve ‘contestable values’ by releasing ‘the oppressed’ into language or making power relations visible through it? . . . Masquerading as radical, it [Hare’s production] was culturism at its very worst. There were no ‘contestable’ values in an incoherent reading: ‘Family, religion, politics,
madness, sex . . . Take your pick’ (programme notes). The logical end of culturism is consumerist Shakespeare. But if a production is to disclose ‘contestable’ ideology, taking your pick is just what you cannot do. (7)

Even when such scepticisms are there, *King Lear* remains a significant site for the contestation of cultural power. The most famous reinvention of *King Lear* is, perhaps, Bond’s *Lear*. The attempt here is to see whether this production has been able to excel the containing impulses of its source and unsettle its association with power. As Ruby Cohn puts it, “Unshavian . . . Bond does not debate with the Bard. On the contrary, he is often in Shakespeare’s debt” (69).

Bond's claim is that he is rerighting *King Lear* to suit a modern age. But the readers feel that Shakespeare's sway is so much on him that he fails to deviate from the path prescribed by the bard. The Women's Theatre Group, on the other hand, has the proclaimed mission of questioning the canonical norms of oppression in the society and asserting the integrity of women. *Lear's Daughters* is an attempt at exposing the possible reasons behind the “perversion” of the daughters.

Grace Loppolo's analysis of *King Lear* gives us an insight into its popularity as well as its political potential:
Since its composition in 1606, Shakespeare's *King Lear* has 'distressed', 'shocked' and 'horrified' its theatrical and literary audiences. Termed 'unbearable' in the eighteenth century, 'unactable' in the nineteenth century, and 'dangerous', 'misogynistic' and 'unstable' in the twentieth century, the play has nevertheless drawn admiration from critics, scholars, directors and actors as Shakespeare's greatest play and most important 'achievement'. . . . From about 1605, Shakespeare also seemed to have been especially determined to investigate the tragic or tragicomic relationship of fathers (whether absent or present) and daughters. In earlier plays such as The *Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare comically used marriage to reconcile a father's control and a daughter's free will. However, in such later plays as *Hamlet, Othello, Pericles, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest* and especially *King Lear*, Shakespeare seemed to see little that was comical in the nature of this relationship. Instead, he suggested that the bond between father and daughter often bordered on incest or tragedy, threatening the foundations not just of the family but of society itself. According to Shakespeare, the potential marriage of a father's daughter could provoke his
unconscious anger and jealousy. Rather than seeing marriage as the conclusion of the estrangement between warring fathers and daughters, thus removing the possibility of incest, as he did in his early comedies, in King Lear Shakespeare recognizes marriage as the real source of such estrangement. Lear's anger at Cordelia in Act I, Sc. i may have less to do with her response of 'nothing' as her measure of love than with his imminent surrender of her to a husband and rival. . . . Literary and theatrical critics saw King Lear primarily as a cautionary tale about the dangers of royal rule when the confirmed and legitimate monarch abdicates his responsibilities and plunges his kingdom and its subjects into chaos. This monarch plays out the classical Aristotelian concept of a great man's fall through his own actions and faults, thereby taking the audience through a necessary 'catharsis' or purgation of emotion. (1-4)

On the whole, one finds that Shakespeare deals with the outrageous impact of hierarchy on class divisions, patriarchy on the family structure and misogyny on gender relationships.

The post-war British dramatist Edward Bond is chief among those writers who went back to Shakespeare as a springboard for their own works. Bond became noted for the first time in the British theatre world

Shakespeare's cultural and literary legacy is something so deep rooted that even a genuine writer like Bond can neither dismiss it nor whole-heartedly accept it. Bond was born into an English working class family with an agricultural background. He himself discloses how Shakespeare happened to exert a tremendous influence on his growth as a man of letters. He said in an interview:

> My education really consisted of one evening, which was organized by the school. They took us along to a play at the old Bedford Theatre in Camden Town. We saw Donald Wolft in *Macbeth*, and for the very first time in my life — I remember this quite distinctly — I met somebody who was actually talking about my problems, about the life I'd been living, the political society around me. . . . Now it's not true that God is concerned every time a sparrow falls to the ground, because he couldn't bear it, but it is true that Shakespeare cared. Of that I have absolutely no doubt —
even about this man Macbeth who perhaps was like Hitler.

And so I got from that play a sense of human dignity — of the value of human beings. (Bond 5-6)

Though Bond began his creative writing with verse, soon he turned to plays, probably because of his first experience of Shakespeare. In 1971 he staged Lear, a re-view of King Lear. He did not end his penchant for Shakespeare with Lear. In 1974 he staged Bingo, a play about the spiritual and physical death of Shakespeare. In an interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, Bond explained his selection of Shakespeare's King Lear:

There are always complex reasons for writing a play, there were many reasons why I wrote a play about King Lear. One is that in the English theatre King Lear is a sort of archetypal culture figure who lays down certain standards for civilized perception — the way civilized people ought to think and feel — and I thought that should be criticized. He is part of the dead hand of the past which I thought should be removed. That's one reason. Another reason is that Lear, although he belongs to the past, he belongs to it not in terms of solutions, but in terms of problems. He is in many ways a contemporary figure. He deals with the difficulties that human beings have in their society. He articulates important
problems very passionately, often very clearly, so that in that way I'm intrigued by the character. (412)

In the programme note to the 1975 Liverpool Everyman Theatre productions of *Lear*, Bond defends himself about his attempt as follows:

*King Lear* is a play for which (it's a stupid thing to say) I have tremendous admiration, and I've learned more from it than any other play. But the thing is I'm afraid we use the play in the wrong way. And it's for this reason that I would like to rewrite it, so that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our problems. (Hay and Roberts 1980, 105-106)

Bond further explains his reason for choosing *Lear* in particular: "I can only say that Lear was standing in my path and I had to get him out of the way" (75). Bond looked at Lear as the epitome of the best and worst in Western culture. In 1976, in a conversation with Howard Davies Bond said:

We think that two people went up the mountain and got things written on tablets, one was Moses and the other one was Shakespeare. He's the sort of great idol of the humanist West. . . . but as a guide to conduct, or to attitudes to work,
he's not so good for us. I object to the idea of him being for all ages. (Hay and Roberts 1978, 57-59)

These comments make it obvious that Bond had a serious intent to unsettle the canonicity of Shakespeare.

Jenny S. Spencer says:

Unlike his contemporaries, Bond competes with Shakespeare and the Greeks on their own terms to write tragedies of comparable vision for his own country. While others are engaged in ‘theatre of quotation’, usually in a tragic-comic mode, Bond seeks a more profound invitation of his tragic sources — and in doing so, elevates rather than diminishes the tragic stature of his plays. (79)

Bond’s argument does not seem to be with Shakespeare, but rather with the agencies and institutions that determine his cultural value through classrooms, performance etc.

The audience cannot be assumed to be a unified, undifferentiated whole; they vary in nationality, ethnicity, gender etc. over time and across cultures. Bond admired Shakespeare very much, but he did not believe in making a cult hero out of him. He felt that Shakespeare merely portrayed suffering, and that too personal suffering, rather than the suffering of the society. Bond believed that as a writer one must at least hint at a solution.
He believed that society can no longer be expressed politically and morally in terms of the individual and so soliloquies do not work in the same way. The individual is no longer a metaphor for the state and his private feelings can no longer be used to express cause in history or will in politics. Changes in social and political relations make a new drama urgently necessary. Acknowledging his respect for the “great” Bard, Bond tries to “reright” the classic text for his time. Bond was highly influenced by Bertolt Brecht also in this revision. Similarities as well as differences are discernible between *King Lear* and *Lear*. Though *Lear* is a new work, one can feel the shadow of Shakespeare all through it. The new version of Lear is an endeavour by Bond to make a mark of his own in the mainstream of the British literary repertory. Bond presents a Marxist *Lear*, which makes an attempt at redefining the power politics of Shakespeare's text.

*Lear* opens with the accidental death of a worker on the wall which the king, Lear, is constructing very arduously around the country. Lear has arrived at the spot to inspect the work in progress. He outrightly decides to execute the man who is suspected to be responsible for this act of "political sabotage". Both his daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, oppose this very strange death sentence made by Lear. Neither do they find any sense in the construction of the wall. Moreover, they openly announce their decision to get married respectively to the Duke of North and the
Duke of Cornwall, Lear's sworn enemies. Lear is shocked and shattered at this revelation which is an open challenge to his autocratic authority. The situation finally gets intensified to the declaration of an open war between Lear and his army on one side and the daughters and their husbands’ army on the other side. What is portrayed afterwards are situations of the perverted lusts and cruelty of the two daughters. Bodice and Fontanelle are Shakespeare's Goneril and Regan, and the situation is very much similar to the opening scene of *King Lear*, where the division of Lear’s kingdom reveals the scheming nature of the two daughters, Goneril and Regan. A very radical change that Bond has made from Shakespeare is the absence of the loving daughter Cordelia to save Lear. Cordelia is there in the play, but she is the wife of the Gravedigger's Boy. He is the one good character in the play who is friendly with Lear. Lear lives in the myth that enclosing his country with a wall can protect it from enemies. But he fails to see that such an endeavour deprives his subjects of their welfare.

The daughters come into power after ousting the father from his position. They imprison him and prove him to be insane. Madness is proved by a pseudo-trial as in the case of the mad King Lear in Act III Sc. vi of Shakespeare’s play. Like Shakespeare's Lear, Bond’s Lear too shows much wisdom when he is being tried like a mad man. The daughters who turned against their father very soon turn against their husbands as well as
against each other. Each invents plans to do away with their husbands and marry Warrington who was Lear's adjutant. Finding that their plans do not work out as expected, they cruelly get Warrington maimed under their supervision. Fontanelle is lustfully vibrant and it is she who orders very weird torture on him. Meanwhile Bodice just sits knitting in a very poised mood.

Lear escapes from prison. Though his daughters’ men are hunting for him, he is given shelter by the Gravedigger's Boy, a naive good fellow. Lear's presence brings tragedy to him also. The daughters’ army murder him and rape his pregnant wife, Cordelia. Lear alone is left unharmed. John, a village carpenter who is in love with Cordelia, attacks the soldiers, and the third phase of the play is centred around them. They overturn the daughters’ government and form a new government and once again Lear is imprisoned. Both Bodice and Fontanelle are executed on stage. Lear, however, is not killed. He is blinded and thus made politically inefficient. He is let free. Now that he has lost his eye sight he begins to “see” clearly. He understands his folly in constructing the wall. Also he realizes that it is he who is the root cause for his daughters’ ruin.

Soon after Cordelia assumes power, she resumes the work on the wall. Lear, who has now got a profound insight, tries to warn her against it. He preaches against the new government. He turns into a Christ-like figure who talks to the people through parables about freedom. Cordelia
orders him to stop provoking people against her and to keep silent. Towards the end of the play Lear is shown trying to pull down the wall using a shovel. However, he is not allowed to fulfil his mission. He is shot to death by a farmer's son who is now a soldier appointed by Cordelia to ensure the smooth construction of the wall. The same Lear who in the beginning took off one man's life for the construction of the wall sacrifices his own life in an attempt to pull it down.

New governments come into power declaring novel goals. But the frames of oppression remain the same. On the whole, what is portrayed in Lear is a society trapped in a pattern of excessive aggression. In Bond's opinion, they change the left boot for the right boot and call it revolution.

Both Lear and King Lear portray extreme cruelty and suffering. Shakespeare presents Lear's suffering through a very powerful language. With a difference Bond openly visualizes the physical torture on stage. For example, Shakespeare's cracks of thunder become rifle shots and the natural storm is turned to modern warfare. King Lear complains that his daughters have created an "engine beating at my head" which wrenches and tortures the mind. Bond presents an actual instrument of torture which can wrench out the eyes and make the victim blind. King Lear expresses a desire to "anatomize" the soul of Regan. Bond's Fontanelle actually undergoes an autopsy.
Bond claims that his concern is for the society and not for the individual. That is, he is against the concept of tragedy which is centered on the predicament of a single male protagonist. He wants to depict the fate of the common people who are nullified by the governing machinery. The post-war period was in need of a play which could portray the disillusionment of the age. With this aim in his mind Bond begins the play by presenting Lear in a very negative light as an insensitive dictator who is not supported even by his own children. Bond himself says that Act I of the play is dominated by a myth. The myth is the belief of Lear that the construction of the wall can be a safeguard for his country. But in materializing his dream, he does not care for the hardships of his subjects. Here, one feels that the focus of the play is on the lot of the people and not on Lear. But, as the play proceeds, it takes a very different course which is against Bond’s original intention. The play seems to have gone out of his revolutionizing purpose. Once the daughters turn against Lear, our sympathy is surely with him and there onwards Bond's Lear resembles Shakespeare's King Lear very much. As Ruby Cohn has remarked: "Bond manages to retain a certain Shakespearean texture by incorporating Shakespeare's grand metaphors and recycling many recognizably tragic themes and patterns of imagery — blindness and insight, madness and sanity, suffering and negation most notable among them" (96). King Lear's foolish division of his kingdom is replaced by Lear's equally
foolish wall-building project. The wall acts as a grim physical reminder of the connections between irrational public policy and social injustice. Bond reclaims Shakespeare's animal imagery also. In *King Lear* the images of tigers, wolves, vultures and serpents emphasize the unnatural evil of Goneril and Regan. Bond’s Lear refers to his people as cattle and sheep. After being imprisoned by his daughters, he refers to himself as a caged and broken animal.

In Act I of the play Lear lives in a myth of his own righteousness. He is a prisoner of his own wilfulness very much similar to his Shakespearean precursor. When King Lear abdicates and is rejected by his daughters, he moves out on to the heath. When Lear is expelled from power, he moves into the countryside. Both Lears fail to sit back and analyze the reason for their set back in life. It takes a long time before they can relate causes to effects. Commenting on Bond's indebtedness to Shakespeare, Ruby Cohn remarks:

> Grotesque humor, tragic conception and dramatic structure are Bond's largest debts to Shakespeare. Other reminiscences are less important, and yet they cause the play to achieve resonance. The partition of the kingdom, the mock-trial in the hovel, the blinding of Gloucester, and the father-daughter imprisonment are incorporated into Bond's scenes.
Towards the end Lear is presented as a Christ-like figure who gives up his life for the well-being of his people and he becomes noble through his suffering. Though there is an antipathy towards him in the beginning, soon it turns to sympathy and even empathy towards the end. He is the memorable domineering character in the play. Lear dies, but his death is a sacrifice. Before his death he makes an attempt to rectify his folly: he tries to pull down the wall by digging up a shovel of earth. Bond claims that he has no intention to bring about an Aristotelian catharsis. But one may have serious doubts about this claim. What one sees is a protagonist progressing from blindness to insight and a comprehensive vision of life. One cannot ignore the purification effect of the play. In Bond's notes for *Lear* one can see a deep-felt admiration for *King Lear* along with a yearning to apply the Lear story for our own times. For example, both portray a king and father acting arbitrarily and being opposed by two daughters whose sole concern is to acquire power. Both Lears depict a transition from an autocratic attitude into a state of insanity, and towards the end both acquire some kind of understanding and pity. Shakespeare’s Lear undergoes a spiritual regeneration, but Bond pins down his Lear to be a social man. His intention was to do away with the grand monologues. However, the Christ-like Lear's sermons are visibly contrary. The content of the sermon apparently is in support of the common man. But the very
fact of Lear's sermonising elevates his status. On finding that he is not able to bring about any change, he bursts out:

What can I do? I left my prison, pulled it down, broke the key, and still I'm a prisoner. I hit my head against a wall all the time. There's a wall everywhere. I'm buried alive in a wall. Does this suffering and misery last for ever? Do we work to build ruins, waste all these lives to make a desert no one could live in? There's no one to explain it to me, no one I can go to for justice. I'm old, I should know how to live by now, but I know nothing, I can do nothing, I am nothing.

(80)

What one finds here is the process of Lear's gaining insight. The repetition of the word “nothing” once again confirms the link to the Shakespearean theme of sight versus insight. In *King Lear* when the king disowns Cordelia in favour of Goneril and Regan, Kent warns him "See better,Lear", and the entire play has its crux on Lear's gaining insight. Bond's Lear also moves from a state of blindness to one of vision. We know very well that this insight is the insight of an individual, which can be of little use to the society. Lear's attempt at rectification is a futile one. The governing machinery still retains its crushing nature. Thus, though *Lear* starts from a progressive stand point, it ends up reinstating a frankly
conventional viewpoint. There is a noticeable gap between the initial intention and the finished product.

Unlike Shakespeare, Bond makes use of the techniques of Epic Theatre in Lear. Lear was his first epic play. It has a vast scope, as its reference to Shakespeare’s tragedy implies, a matching cost: over eighty speaking parts, played in the first production by a group of twenty three actors. The play’s theme is essentially political. It deals with the evolution of society and the heavy compromises that are made in forging a new state. Bond admired the artist in Brecht, and his Lear follows Brecht in its subject matter as well as dramatic technique. David L. Hirst quotes Bond’s comment made in “A note To Young Writers” included in The Activist’s Papers:

The form of the new drama will be epic . . . the essence of epic theatre is the way it selects, connects and judges. Even when it deals with two people quarrelling in a kitchen, it draws its method and values from the understanding of the history of all men. How else should you judge between right and wrong . . . the broad structure of history must be understood before the incidents in it can be given meaning. (127)
According to Bond, theatre must explore the causes of human misery and sources of human strength. His demand is for a “rational theatre” which in effect has to be epic because it sees beyond individual psychological issues to social and political truths. Brecht differentiates between epic theatre and dramatic theatre. For him, dramatic theatre thrives on plot which implicates the spectator in a stage situation and wears down his power of action. Epic theatre, on the contrary, is concerned with narrative, thereby turning the spectator into an observer and arousing his power of action. In dramatic theatre, the human being, taken for granted, is unalterable, whereas in epic he is the object of the enquiry and able to alter. In Lear Bond’s intention is to deliberately unsettle the audience rather than live in the illusionistic world of drama. The shocking sound of rifle shot accompanying the opening execution, the murder of the Gravedigger’s Boy, the wounded soldier's last words, the deaths of the two daughters etc. make the audience "witness" and "suffer" the effects of the characters’ actions. Bond believes that one must personally feel the situation before wishing to change it. The play could be appealing to an audience who had witnessed the Holocaust, the arms race etc. Bond employs extreme violence in the play to make it meaningful to the post-World War II scenario. He is obviously trying to present the absurdity of the post-war period. But one must probe into whether Bond has been able to concentrate on the problems of the society by moulding his play in the
epic mode. As noted earlier, the ultimate focus of the play happens to be
on the individual tragedy itself.

As noted in the beginning Bond wrote Lear with an obvious
intention to reright the archetypal cultural notions associated with Lear.
On a close analysis one finds that though Lear is a little bit modernized,
his daughters follow the pattern prescribed for them by Shakespeare
himself. In the beginning of the play Bond presents the daughters as
reasonable characters who are able to see through the injustice of their
father's deeds. One gets a feeling that after all some one has made a
change in their character. The impression created is that Bond is
questioning Shakespeare's portrayal of the daughters as innately wicked.
Even the subordinate officers convey the idea that Lear is unjust. But very
soon our hopes are shattered. Both Bodice and Fontanelle soon turn out
to be disgusting monsters. The word "bodice" stands for something which
covers the heart and "fontanelle" is something that provides an outlet for
secretions. Their very names that Bond gives them are suggestive of their
hypocrisy and vulgarity. They seem to have inherited their vileness from
Lear himself.

In fact, Shakespeare's play had its origin in an anonymous play
King Leir which presented a fairy-tale model story: A king had three
daughters. Only the youngest was fair, loving and good. However, the
king favoured his bad children and ill-treated the good one. Towards the
end the King realized his folly, accepted the good child and everything ended happily. Shakespeare individualizes the characters of this story. He turns the ending into a tragic one, where a particular family meets with its end with the death of Lear and his daughters. There is no clue to the cause of this tragedy and no possibility of a recovery is there. The only possible conclusion appears to be sympathy for an ill-treated father and assertion of the traditional concept that if daughters try to go out of the roles stipulated for them by convention they will perish because of their deviancy. *King Lear* gives room for an investigation of patriarchal constraints, given the ways in which authority is figured in the play. Kathleen McLuskie's analysis of the power structures in *King Lear* seems a relevant one for our discussion. She explains:

The action of the play, the organization of its point of view and the theatrical dynamic of its central scenes all depend upon an audience accepting an equation between 'human nature' and male power. In order to experience the proper pleasures of pity and fear, they must accept that fathers are owed particular duties by their daughters and will be appalled by the chaos which ensues when those primal links are broken. . . . the narrative, language and dramatic organization all define the sisters' resistance to their father in terms of their gender, sexuality and position within the
family. Family relations in this play are seen as fixed and determined, and any movement within them is portrayed as a destructive reversal of rightful order (I. iv). Goneril's and Regan's treatment of their father merely reverses existing patterns of rule and is seen not simply as cruel and selfish but as a fundamental violation of human nature – as is made powerfully explicit in the speeches which condemn them (III. vii. 101-3; IV. ii. 32-50). Moreover, when Lear in his madness fantasizes about the collapse of law and the destruction of ordered social control, women's lust is vividly represented as the centre and source of the ensuing corruption (IV. vi. 110-28). The generalised character of Lear's and Albany's vision of chaos, and the poetic force with which it is expressed, create the appearance of truthful universality which is an important part of the play's claim to greatness. However, that generalised vision of chaos is present in gendered terms in which patriarchy, the institution of male power in the family and the State, is seen as the only form of social organisation strong enough to hold chaos at bay. (98-99)

In his notes for Lear, Bond expressed his sympathy with the three daughters as much as with Lear. He felt that all of them suffer as much
and die like Lear. They can no more be accused than Lear himself. He also felt that the play should not be dominated by Lear's speeches and tantrums. The same Bond who expressed such concerns seemingly has failed in putting them into practice in his own Lear. All the three women characters are portrayed negatively. Without adequate reason they are outrageously cruel towards their father and are repulsively lustful. In Act I. Sc.iii. we see Bodice, Fontanelle and their husbands North and Cornwall making plans about a war with Lear.

FONTANELLE (aside). I'm bitterly disappointed in my husband. How dare he! A civil servant wrote his letters and an actor posed for his photographs. When he gets on top of me I'm so angry I have to count to ten. That's long enough. Then I wait till he's asleep and work myself off. I'm not making do with that for long. I've written to Warrington and told him to use all his men against Bodice and leave my army alone – that'll finish her — and then I paid a young blond lieutenant on my husband's staff to shoot him while they're busy fighting. Then I'll marry Warrington and let him run the country for me.

BODICE (aside). I'm not disappointed in my husband. I expected nothing. There is some satisfaction in listening to him squeak on top of me while he tries to get his little paddle in. I lie still and tell myself while he whines, you'll pay for this, my lad. He sees me smiling and contented and thinks it's his virility. Virility! It'd
be easier to get blood out of a stone, and far more probable. I’ve bribed a major on his staff to shoot him in the battle — they're all corrupt — and I’ve written to Warrington and told him to use all his force against hers. She'll be crushed and then I'll marry Warrington and run the country through him. So I shall have three countries: My father's my husband's and my sister and brother-in-law’s. (10-11)

When soldier A is torturing Warrington, Fontanelle keeps shouting violently:

FONTANELLE: O yes, tears and blood. I wish my father was here. I wish he could see him. Look at his hands! Look at them going! What's he praying or clutching? Smash his hands!

SOLDIER A and FONTANELLE jump on WARRINGTON'S hands.

Kill his hands! Kill his feet! Jump on it — all of it! He can't hit us now. Look at his hands like boiling crabs! Kill it! Kill all of it! Kill him inside! Make him dead! Father! Father! I want to sit on his lungs! (14)

Bond presents both Bodice and Fontanelle as having perverted lust, never satisfied with their husbands. They are presented like she-wolves, blood-thirsty and power-hungry — the female figures patriarchy abhors.

Bond himself has said in the Theatre Quarterly: "Cordelia in Shakespeare’s play is an absolute menace. I mean, she is a very dangerous
type of person, and I thought that the other daughters, though I'm not excusing them, were very unfairly treated and misunderstood” (8). Ruby Cohn feels that Bond found Cordelia dangerous because she translated her wrongs into an avenging army. Though Bond has expressed such sentiments in favour of Cordelia, by making her a guerilla leader he moulds her also into a violent character as cruel as Lear was in the beginning. In the initial portrayal of Cordelia Bond has made a change. Shakespeare's Cordelia is a tender woman of very few words. Bond alters her into a sulking woman who moans most of the time, a feeble character craving to be cared for. Her characterization is as the wife of the Gravedigger’s Boy who gives asylum to Lear when he escapes from prison. The following conversation between the Gravedigger's Boy and Cordelia will serve to give a character sketch of the latter:

WIFE (crying). Hold me. Stop me crying.

Boy (holding her). You must take things easy now. You work too hard.

WIFE. Don't say that! It's not true!

Boy. All right, I won't.

WIFE. But you don't believe me.

Boy. Yes I do.

WIFE. You don't. I can see you don't. Why can't I make you happy?
Boy. I am happy.

WIFE. You are not. I know you're not. You make me happy — my father said I'd be unhappy here, but I'm not, you've made me so happy — why can't I make you happy? . . . (20-21)

We understand that the Cordelia here is a woman who has chosen her husband against the wish of her father, that is, a daughter who disobeyed her father like Shakespeare's Cordelia. The future of a daughter who questions patriarchy can never be a happy one. She is gang-raped by the soldiers when she is pregnant and the baby gets miscarried. A rape, conventionally for a woman, is equivalent to death. Also, her husband is murdered by the soldiers. Later on, she becomes the commanding leader of the guerilla force. In these two contrasting portrayals of Cordelia, as a sulking woman and as a guerilla leader, what is seen is the patriarch in Bond sticking to the stereotypical idea of women as either feeble or demonic. Our expectation of the subversion of patriarchal norms through Cordelia is shattered with a shock when the Gravedigger's Boy's wife's name is revealed as Cordelia. The name is made known to us only after the rape.

When the daughters come into power, hope is generated about a radical takeover of the patriarchal set up. In King Lear the transfer of power to the daughters is a wilful one necessitated by the lack of a male successor. But in Lear the daughters cunningly plan the expulsion of their
father without any compunctions. There is no display of filial attachment. On gaining power they behave as wickedly and vulgarly as possible. Even Cordelia does not invite our sympathy. Once she is in power she too acts tyrannically. The qualifications which Bond attributes to the women characters are hunger for power, lack of domesticity, lecherousness, crookedness, cunningness etc.

Following Shakespeare, Bond also does not mention anything about the mother of the daughters. Shakespeare cleverly makes the mothers absent in most of his plays. No male successor of Shakespeare, including Bond, is bothered about this significant absence. We always hear the story from the point of view of the father. The mother’s side of the story is completely obliterated, most probably for the validity of the version presented. King Lear's suffering is highlighted. But what about his wife? What happened to her? Shakespeare's silence on this matter is conveniently copied by Bond too. When we come to the discussion of Lear's Daughters, we will see that the play has as its crux the Shakespearean absence of the mother and its effect on the daughters.

Bond's Lear gains insight. But what about Cordelia? She too undergoes bitter experiences, but she does not gain any nobility. It is as if only Siddharthas are allowed to have visions. None of the women folk are entitled to mind-opening revelations. They merely exist without knowing what they are and why they are there. Lear is succeeded by two
governments, both headed by women. Both of them prove to be cruel, totalitarian and inefficient. Bond seems to adhere to the popular notion that it is “unnatural” for women to hold power which is the monopoly of men. Also, the play seems to hint at a connection between evil women and a chaotic world. Thus, by the end of the play we are left with noble feelings towards Lear and aversion towards all the prominent female characters.

Bond tries to give a Marxist reading of King Lear. However, even Marxism, which advocates equality, is silent on the issues of women. Women still remain decentralized. Gayle Rubin discusses the failure of classical Marxism to fully express or conceptualize sex oppression: "This failure results from the fact that Marxism, as a theory of social life, is relatively unconcerned with sex. In Marx's map of the social world, human beings are workers, peasants, or capitalists; that they are also men and women is not seen as very significant” (534).

Also, the genuinely noble Gravedigger's Boy is ignored just like Kent and the Fool in King Lear. He is only a supplementary character who caters to the elevated status of the protagonist. If it is a truly Marxist reading it is he who should have got prominence. As he himself says, he knew how to live. When he dug a grave he found water, the source of life, there. But he is brutally murdered and is turned into a withered ghost who
fades from the play as well as from the attention of the audience without leaving any lasting effect.

*King Lear* is accepted as a site for the contestation of cultural power. It is about power concentrated. By "rereading" Lear, Bond tries to offer a new narrative with contemporary relevance. However, common consensus is that Bond is most himself in this play when he is most like Shakespeare. It is notable that the Royal Shakespeare Company staged Bond's *Lear* concurrently with Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Whatever his claims be, what happens in the play is a reaffirmation of the age-old order of class, patriarchy, gender etc. and their constraints on individuals getting handed over to one more generation. In effect, though the play has an explicitly political content, it does not effectively criticize the ideological system in which it is embedded. Moreover, it reinforces the very ideas it sets out to denounce and gets caught in the system it wishes to break down. King Lear still towers above all tragic characters. Goneril and Regan retain their wickedness in the guise of Bodice and Fontanelle. Bond makes Cordelia wield power, but she is only a gendered link to partriarchal oppression. She too follows violent oppression as any father or son.

Rosalind Carne comments on *Lear*, “Edward Bond’s savage anatomy of power politics, with its terrifying violence and huge cast . . . in Barry Kyle’s masterly production has convinced me that it is a truly great
play” (392). Bennett says that when Carne praises Bond’s work she does it in such terms that she is in fact describing Shakespeare’s *King Lear* itself because she calls *Lear* a great play with reference to its depth of feeling, cruel suffering, quasi-religious moments etc. for which bond is undoubtedly indebted to Shakespeare. Bennett again says, “Bond’s *Lear* tests what a reader/spectator will allow to happen to Shakespeare as an interpretive act, but it is as carefully and easily contained within the frame of a mainstream cultural concept identified as theatre” (49). Thus the assertion seems to be that *Lear* has achieved a status of its own and in its turn has reiterated the position of *King Lear* in the literary and theatrical world.

Whether Bond’s *Lear* has succeeded in rerighting *King Lear* or not, whether we accuse it of implicitly perpetrating the same ideology or not, it is one of the texts that contend for the credit and designation of a modern classic. It is at present an oft-taught play in courses on post-war dramatic literature. It has also occupied a prominent place in many critical surveys of post-war literature. Above all, it appears frequently on the stages of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Critics qualify it with adjectives like "a truly great play", "a modern masterpiece" etc. These comments point to the unchallengeable canonical status that *Lear* has attained. The final test of a literary work is survival. Bond's *Lear* has of
course survived. But the survival has been made possible only because of its corroborating of the ideological structures of Shakespeare’s text.

Here, it seems worthwhile to make a reference to another male recreation of *King Lear*, which is *Seven Lears* by Howard Barker, staged in the year 1989. The sense of plurality in the title appears as a promising strategy to proliferate the tragic hero, King Lear. The title also hints at a destabilizing attempt on the concept of a single and exemplary male character embodied by Shakespeare’s Lear. Susan Bennett quotes Barker’s introduction to his text:

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is a family tragedy with a significant absence. The Mother is denied existence in *King Lear*. She is barely quoted even in the depths of rage or pity. She was therefore expunged from memory. This extinction can only be interpreted as repression. She was therefore the subject of an unjust hatred. This hatred was shared by Lear and all his daughters. This hatred, while unjust, may have been necessary. (50)

But in *Seven Lears*, there is no such attempt to retrieve the Mother. Like any other patriarch he too insists on the mother’s discipline and punishment. His play, ultimately, turns out to be a highly misogynistic one. This shows that, like Bond, he too is conscious of the elements of
oppression in *King Lear*, but does not stick to his declared aim of challenging them because he has merely adopted the Shakespearean antecedent as a marketable device and nothing more than that.

Having seen the discursive formation of patriarchal notions and how they get perpetuated in the continuing canonicity of the Shakespeare legacy, focus may now be shifted to a woman’s eye view of the same. The textual platform for the move is *Lear’s Daughters*. In Shakespeare's *Measure for measure* Angelo tells Isabella:

Be that you are

That is, a woman; if you be more; you're none;

If you be one, as you are well expressed

By all external warrants, show it now,

By putting on the destined livery. (II. iv. 134-7)

This is the injunction that has been given to women in society by the patriarchal order. We have already had the examples of Gertrude, Ophelia, Desdemona, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia as proof for this imposition. They were created by the "male" bard Shakespeare and recreated by "male" writers like Stoppard, Jayaraj, Bond and many others. Now it is time to see how women rework this ideological framework. Before analyzing *Lear's Daughters* in detail it seems worthwhile to go
back a little in history to get familiar with the circumstances that led to the creation of such a play.

Woman has traditionally been pictured as silent in opposition to the linguistically adept man. It is in his language that the key to authority and knowledge is situated. Since women have always been denied the right to speak, their right to own a history has also been jettisoned.

Thus, history is in fact “his” story and not “her” story. Recent feminisms are trying to “write” the women “back” into history. This is done mainly in two ways: one is by reviving and giving prominence to the work of women writers, and the other is by trying to give a radical interpretation to the traditional canonical texts. Since the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, women have been making serious attempts to enter the maps of the world. Adrienne Rich observes on the motive behind this endeavour by women:

Re-vision — the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction — is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity; it is part of our refusal of the self-
destructiveness of male dominated society . . . we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (35)

In feminist theories and practices what has been at issue is the rewriting of patriarchal knowledges. The linguistic and structuralist contexts in which the production and reception of texts have been understood have always been patriarchal in nature. Here the question "what is a text" becomes very pertinent. There have arisen a variety of theories about the subjects who read and write. As seen in the introduction, the idea of the humanist knowing subject is already deconstructed. Thus, borrowing Terry Threadgold's terms, the “subject” in language refers to two concepts: (1) The subject who writes (the ‘I’ of discourse) and (2) The subject who is written (the 'he'/'she' of history and narrative). She continues:

The verb 'to write' is a problematic verb. Whenever the subject writes, the subject is 'written' even when the apparent object of writing (history) bears no signs of the writing 'I'. Speech (understood as discourse, text in relation to context) is always implicated in writing. The writer is always written, made in language. There is no fixed reality to which the one who writes can refer. (30).
Threadgold holds the conviction that many modern women writers feel that by critically reading a text, new texts can be created. To substantiate this point she quotes B. Caine, E.A Grosz and M.de Lepervanche thus: “It is now both a feminist and a post-structuralist/post modernist catch cry, in some places, that one does not analyze texts, one rewrites them, one does not have an objective metalanguage, one does not use a theory, one performs a critique. Critique is itself a poeisis, a making” (Threadgold 1).

All texts are constructed of stories told by someone's vested interest. Almost all stories and narratives of the world are those of patriarchy. They can be rewritten tremendously to reveal the gaps and fissures which are there in the structure itself. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, revisioning the texts of history “enables the reinstatement of interest groups who have been left out of the official records because they were victims of prejudice or punishment, or because they were denied an opportunity to speak. The recuperation of women's histories has been a fundamental task for women all over the world" (118). Story-telling is a process which gives the power of construction to the one “who tells it”. Thus women have taken up the task of telling stories in order to represent themselves from their own perspective which in turn would invest them with status and authority. The category of woman is often created through discourse which is masculine by its nature. A discourse not only
categorises and limits but also produces the objects of which it speaks. Women have to intrude into this discourse as story-tellers.

It was in the 1970s that women started making their presence felt in the arena of British Theatre. Controversial ideas about the relationship between art and society were being widely discussed at that time. Many women playwrights argued for a transformation in the gender balance and perspectives of theatre. They argued that the theatre industry was dominated by men. The accepted canon of plays were written from a male-centred point of view, which was considered normative. Journalistic reviewing and academic criticism too was predominantly male. The time was ripe for a new critical approach to the understanding of the function of gender in the theatrical imagination. Following this awakening, four feminist companies came into being: Women’s Theatre Group, Monstrous Regiment, Gay Sweatshop and Siren. They were all founded in the 1970s by women who had been active in the theatre and politics of the late 1960s. All four groups are still in operation, though all have been threatened by cuts in funding. These four companies have contributed significantly to the development of feminist theatre as an active movement, facing all the challenges.

Shakespeare's works have been vehemently attacked by modern women writers. They find his works to be the embodiment of patriarchal abjection. They feel that the stories told by him are framed within
structures of patriarchy. Kathleen McLuskie's opinion fairly summarises modern women writers' attitude to Shakespeare. She says, "Shakespeare gave voice to the social views of his age. His thoughts on women were necessarily bounded by the parameters of hagiography and misogyny" (33-40). Kate Chedgzoy is of the view that the dispossessed and marginalized sections in the society, like women, can derive immense pleasure and empowerment from the appropriation of Shakespeare since he is always hailed as the cultural father. As it is quite obvious, there is no such comparable mother figure. In fact, Shakespeare's plays are mostly centred round the absence of a mother. The famous Shakespearean actress Ellen Terry finds it very odd that though Shakespeare has drawn a large number of fathers and daughters, he has never drawn mothers and daughters.

Traditional critics look at Shakespeare's plays as embodiments of universal human emotions. Coppélia Kahn comments on the general attitude towards Shakespeare: "Shakespeare and Freud deal with the same subject: the expressed and hidden feelings in the human heart. They are both psychologists" (1). But modern feminists do not agree with such an argument. They analyze the political strategies behind the plays, the performance and the production of meaning. They do not consider the plays to be neutral. Their attitude towards the plays is evident in McLuskie’s comment:
Shakespeare's plays are not primarily explorations of 'the real nature of women' or even the hidden feelings in the human heart. They were the products of an entertainment industry which, as far as we know, had no women shareholders, actors, writers, or stage hands. His women characters were played by boys and, far from his plays being an expression of his idiosyncratic views, they all built on and adapted earlier stories. (92)

The Renaissance women were strictly restricted to be both chaste and silent. Bold speech would be taken as equivalent to illicit sexuality and loss of reputation. This double injunction to silence and chastity enabled patriarchy to consider the female body as a sign and seal of property.

When we consider the field of creative writing, we find that there is a long and complex tradition of male writers claiming an Oedipal affiliation to Shakespeare. But there are few such female writers. In the book *Man to Man* Olive Schreiner speaks about the deprivation and sufferings endured by women, which blunted their creativity and which in turn is a loss to the culture as a whole. Chedgzoy quotes her thus:

We have had Shakespeare, but what of the possible Shakespeares we might have had, who passed their life from youth upward brewing currant wine and making pastries for
fat country squires to eat, with no glimpse of the freedom of life and action, necessary even to poach on deer in the green forests, stifled out without one line written, simply because, being of the weaker sex, life gave no room for action. . . ?

(Chedgzoy 17-27)

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf presents Judith, an imaginary sister to Shakespeare, as a representative of all those women who had genuine creativity but were ruined by the patriarchal constrictions.

Many male writers claim to suffer from Oedipal anxieties in relation to Shakespeare, may be in order to establish their literary sonship. The actor-manager and playwright Sir William Davenant found it highly prestigious to call himself Shakespeare's illegitimate son. For this purpose he did not even bother to stamp his mother as a whore. He degraded his mother so as to idealize his father and thus gain literary reputation.

Women writers entrust themselves with the duty of appropriating Shakespeare, to serve a feminist critique of patriarchy. They analyze the relations between Shakespearean fathers and daughters. They also make an attempt to retrieve the absent or abject Shakespearean mother. Julia Kristeva speaks of the abject as "the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost" (135). It refers to the looming figure of the pre-Oedipal mother, who has often been culturally significant in so far
as she is absent or degraded in relation to the father. As far as a child is concerned, the mother is apparently omnipotent, but at the same time socially powerless and marginalized in relation to men. Kristeva's theorisation of abjection focuses on this ambivalent status of the maternal presence: its key themes are the construction of subjectivity over and against the desired and feared maternal body which can never be fully repressed, but always returns to haunt the fragile, vulnerable subject; and the subject’s experience, consequent on this inadequately achieved repression, of those liminal states in which the boundaries of the body and the self are blurred, transgressed and refigured. Kristeva offers an account of the construction of desiring subjectivity which stresses the faultlines, tensions, and difficulties of achieving a stable identity as the embodied subject of an unproblematic desire, and her descriptions of the world of abjection sounds uncanny like the characteristic Shakespearean scenario.

Feminist revisions of Shakespeare aim at restoring long-silent voices and making them heard. Other than Shakespeare rewritings, there have also been much creative writing which re-evaluate the past and reinvent the present from a female perspective. In the 1980s the Women's Theatre Group (WTG) took up this re-creation of culture as their mission in the theatre. According to the feminist historian Joan Kelly, "Their aim was to restore women to history and our history to women" (1). The WTG
had produced a number of plays which dealt with highly revolutionary themes. In 1975 they produced the play *My Mother Says I Never Should*, which dealt with teenagers, sex and contraception. In 1978 *In Our Way* was staged. It was about sexual discrimination. Their other notable productions were *Work To Role* (1976) dealing with the discrimination against women in the workplace, *Pretty Ugly* (1977) presenting the effects of advertising and fashions on teenage girls and *Holding The Reins* (1987) which was about the decision to have or not to have children. WTG was one of the first groups to identify feminist issues as appropriate for representation in the theatre. It was also one of the first companies to include lesbian plays in its feminist repertoire.

“Appropriation” can be a suitable term for such endeavours as *Lear’s Daughters*. Comparing the terms “appropriation” and “accommodation” Jonathan Bate states that he prefers the former because it suggests greater activity on the part of the appropriator and because it has stronger political overtones than “accommodation”. He believes that appropriation is a self-conscious activity with at least an implied political purpose. It is done with a desire for possession. As Jean I. Marsden says, "Appropriation is neither dispassionate nor disinterested; it has connotations of usurpation, of seizure for one's own uses" (1991, 1). Feminist critics show that women are fundamental to the patriarchal world which Shakespeare draws and look at them from a new angle. They try to
expose how Shakespeare's texts direct the male gaze and thereby attempt to co-opt female audiences. The texts themselves construct the spectator's attention as male. The introduction to *The Woman's Part*, a collection of feminist essays on Shakespeare, reveals the nature of the mission shouldered by feminist critics:

The critics in this volume liberate Shakespeare's women from the stereotypes to which they have too often been confined; they examine women's relations to each other; they analyze the nature and effects of patriarchal structures; and they explore the influence of genre on the portrayal of women. (Lenz, Greene, and Neely 4)

The WTG attempted a translation of the Shakespearean plot and characters into contemporary terms. The play they chose for their purpose was *King Lear* because, as pointed out in the earlier part of this chapter, it is a highly suggestive text which allows for an investigation of patriarchal constraints, particularly the ways in which authority is displayed in the play. Emphasizing the women characters, the new play was titled *Lear's Daughters*. Male writers like Bond only asserted patriarchal notions in their re-creation. Bond’s play is in fact a modern “master-piece” with the obvious emphasis on the “master”. Only women could attempt at producing radical Lears. For example, Mabou Mines has produced a cross gender as well as cross-cultural *Lear*, in which Ruth Maleczech was
cast as Lear. Holmberg quotes what she once said about the gendered history of Lear's Production: “Peter Brook said Lear (sic) was a mountain impossible to climb, and on the way up you trip over the corpses of Charles Laughton here, Gielgud there, over yonder Olivier. Women don't tackle this part, so I'm not likely to stumble over the corpse of Eleanora Duse" (Holmberg 16). She also commented about the denial to women of the right to enact Shakespearean characters: "Lear's language seduces me. Why should I, a woman, be denied access to such beautiful language? I wanted to prove to myself that I could say those words out there in the world" (Holmberg 16). In Mabou Mines's Lear a woman takes the place of the King. The play is set in contemporary America. The roles are reversed in gender. The verse and the text are intact. King Lear, the ultimate drama of power, politics and morality, is turned to the story of a matriarch in a modern world.

A conventional reader associates King Lear with the greatness of the text of Shakespeare and its mainstream productions. Conventional assessment of Lear was as "a man more sinned against than sinning". The play was thought to be a very good illustration of the containing impulses of Shakespeare as cultural heritage. Women's reception of the Shakespearean text was never given authenticity. It was in such a context that the WTG came forward with their path breaking and radical Lear's Daughters (1987). It is a 90 minute prequel to King Lear and tries to fill
in the absences of Shakespeare's text as well as of its adaptations by male writers. It also attempts at feminising the patriarchal canon and its overarching influence. The play questions the idea of authorship and the aura associated with the individuality of the author. Shakespeare is no doubt the apt author for such an endeavour. The play questions the authority of Shakespeare and the power of mainstream production.

*Lear's Daughters* is the co-creation of Elaine Feinstein and the WTG. Feinstein is an English novelist, poet and translator. She was born in 1930. The WTG is "one of the first and most enduring of Britain's feminist companies" (S. Bennett 51). It is noted for its innovative ideas. Their decision to "avoid working in the hierarchical, competitive structures which characterise the male dominated establishment theatre and media" (Itzin 230) was a characteristic one. They tried their hands at group writing techniques, focusing on feminist themes and practices, multi-racial casting, the exclusion of men etc. Loren Kruger writes: "There is a saying that women have always made spectacles of themselves. However, it has been only recently, and intermittently, that women have made spectacles themselves. On this difference turns the ambiguous identity of a feminist theatre" (27). The WTG’s beginnings coincided with and were part of the growing Women's Liberation Movement in Britain. The leading feminists of the day realized the need for establishing links between the outside and the inside of the home,
between the world of politics “out there” and what was happening in relationships, friendships, families and so on. The works of WTG attempted to explore these links in terms of the concept “the personal is political”. According to Gilbert and Tompkins:

... [T]exts that emphasise what is loosely termed ‘female experience’ can also act counter-discursively by challenging the notion that history is necessarily the record of signal events initiated by prominent men. The well-worn feminist slogan that 'the personal is political' is particularly relevant here since gender-related oppression, although often experienced in domestic spaces, is deeply infected by the structural hierarchies of imperialism. A focus on women's experiences illustrates a different historical trajectory and, in performative contexts, allows the presentation of an embodied subjectivity and the demarcation of a place/space from which women can speak. The insertion of their histories into the larger discourse of the past broadens the ambit of history to dismantle further the authoritarian and imperialist claims of a univocal historical record. (126)

In The subject of Tragedy, Catherine Belsey also talks about the position of women in Renaissance discourse: “While the autonomous subject of liberalism was in the making, women had no single or stable
place from which to define themselves as independent beings. In this sense they both were and were not subjects" (150). She adds that in tragedy, women's "subject-positions are radically discontinuous" (164). Even in comedy, where women often are autonomous subjects, one can discover the disruption of sexual difference, the representation of female characters who occupy "a place which is not precisely masculine or feminine" (Belsey 1985a, 180-187).

The WTG is highly performative and resistant. Judith Butler has emphasized the importance of gendered performance as a counter-discursive practice. The WTG practises this to the fullest extent. Women themselves perform on stage, thus making a different discourse through their performing bodies. Bulman’s comment on the role of performance criticism is relevant here:

Performance criticism has challenged traditional assumptions about textual authority and the production of meaning. It has interrogated the nature of the evidence we use to reconstruct performances and to assess audience response. It has raised questions about representation, made problematic the status of the actor's body, and alerted us to ways in which performances of Shakespeare may reproduce established aesthetic and political formations or serve as sites of cultural contestation (8).
Hence appropriations can act as defences and challenges to authority. Lentricchia observes: "... [I]t is the task of the oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalised voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed and excluded" (15).

There are five characters in *Lear’s Daughters*: the three daughters, the Nanny (the nurse who looks after the girls after the mother’s death) and the Fool (an androgynous character). The most notable thing is the absence of King Lear onstage. The play employed a multi-racial cast. The cast was a fluid one which changed with every production and thus rendered the possibility of different readings for the play. In the first production Regan and Goneril were played by black women and Cordelia by a white woman. In the second, all three sisters were represented by black women while the Fool and the Nanny were white. Bennett remarks:

Assumptions about a received interpretation of the play, as well as about strategies for counter interpretation(s), are called into question, and perhaps most importantly, are not replaced with an obvious and single set of assumptions or skills. That King Lear is rendered only as absence foregrounds the absence of his wife (or even an elaborated reference to his wife) in the source text. (52)
Lizbeth Goodman suggests that *Lear’s Daughters* questions the mainstream casting of Shakespeare as the “fit father” of the literary-dramatic canon. The WTG recently changed its name to *The Sphynx*. The sphynx, as we know, has a lion's body and a woman's head, ie, a creature with all the masculine physical power combined with the intellectual power of a woman. According to Goodman, the company brochure explains the new name as follows. The Sphynx is:

FEMALE — placing women’s experience centre-stage;

CLASSICAL — proud of her past, developing the canon of women’s writing;

STORY-TELLING — producing original, spectacular, high-quality theatre;

MULTIFORM — reflecting women in all their diversity and subjectivity;

DANGEROUS — challenging and risk-taking theatre;

ORGANIC — nurturing the development of women’s writing.

She has:

A WOMAN’S HEAD — to be a leading voice in addressing the cultural disenfranchisement of women;

A LION’S BODY — to fight for the creative freedom of women artists. (68).
The WTG members also stress the integrity of “collective authorship” which in fact is a cancellation of the hitherto unchallenged authority of individual authorship. *Lear's Daughters*, as seen earlier, was co-authored. It was an attempt at reviving the notion of communal authorship of the text.

The nature of the authorship of the play was highly problematic. The first tour of the play listed Feinstein as the author.

*Lear's Daughters*  
*by Elaine Feinstein*  
*Women's Theatre Group.*  
In its second run Feinstein's name was dropped and the authorship was given to

*Women's Theatre Group.*  
*Lear's Daughters*  
*by Women's Theatre Group.*  

Officially the play's script credits authorship in the following way.

*Lear's Daughters*  
*by The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein*  
*Copyright 1988 The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein*
Critical responses to these different versions of the credits reveal an underlying discomfort with the notion of devised work. This discomfort may be related to the lack of an individual author, a situation which eliminates the identifiable “subject” (or individual) to be criticized in relation to the “object” which is the play. The shows the WTG devised were rarely published, which is an evidence of the politics behind the operation of the market place where a single author sells better.

The play shows what had happened to Lear's daughters before Act I of the Shakespearean tragedy. One can call it a "dysfunctional family backstory". The "daughters' stories are re-told by the androgynous Fool" (Griffin and Aston 11), contrary to the traditional notion of a man narrating the story. In the performance of the play the Fool was played by Hazel Maycock. The character had a clown make-up and a costume which combined an evening gown, a man's dinner suit, and a grotesque pair of false breasts. The Fool’s sexual identity is made ambiguous in the play's dialogue also.

CORDELIA. Are you a man or a woman?

FOOL. Depends who's asking.

REGAN. Well, which?

FOOL. Which would you rather? It's all the same to me.
GONERIL. How can you? (Fool looks at her) How can you be so... accommodating?

FOOL. It's what I'm paid for. (32-33)

Again, during the course of the play the Nurse says, “No-one knows whether this is a woman or a man, for it has a woman's voice, but walks with the carriage and stature of a man" (48). Thus the Fool can be taken to be a parallel to the Sphynx. On one occasion the Nurse refers to the Fool as “it”, thus objectifying the Fool and denying the subjectivity of the narrator. Griffin and Aston comment about the function of the Fool that s/he "details the fictions, myths and structures which are deployed by men to imprison women in patriarchal ideology, to separate them from themselves, their bodies and their desires so that they are only ever daughters, wives or others " (11-12).

Gilbert and Tompkins expostulate on the powerful role of narrator in a play:

Adapted for theatre, story-telling can form the structural and — metaphorically — the epistemological framework of the whole performance event (which thus unfolds at the behest of the story-teller), or it can be incorporated into a more conventional play, often through one (or more) of the characters. The story-teller’s dramatic function varies considerably: s/he can take on the role of master of
ceremonies, impartial narrator, social commentator, antagonist, or adjudicator. Whatever the choice of mediating role, the story–teller eschews naturalistic dialogue in favour of direct address that generally historicises the action, calling for an intellectual response rather than merely an aesthetic appreciation. That the story-teller's narrative is generally distinct from — but interactive with — the play’s dialogue reinforces the point that the past is always mediated through the present. While propelling the story forward — and sometimes participating in its enactment — the story-teller gauges his/her performance by the reactions of the audience and elaborates and/or improvises accordingly. This licence to alter the story necessarily challenges the assumption that history is closed or immutable suggesting instead that the 'truth', if any, is in the telling. (127)

This is exactly what Lear’s Daughters is doing. The introduction of the narrator, identified as the stereotypical fool, whose identity goes on changing implies that truth, if there is any, is in the telling. The Fool even gives the impression that he is not the same Fool who was there during the daughters’ childhood.

FOOL. That was some other Fool.

GONERIL. That fool looked exactly like you.
FOOL. It's the clothes, they come with the job. And the expression. It's a tradition, there's always been a Fool.

(32)

So one can have genuine doubt about the credibility of the story that the Fool tells about the girls. The girls in a sequestered tower, in the absence of the parents, are taken care of by a Nanny. She feeds them with myths which serve to give them a sense of security. Gilbert and Tompkins’ view of the need for this mythification may be brought in here to substantiate this idea:

Some women's histories attempt to bypass the entrenched 'factuality' of the past by deliberately mythologising events or characters in ways which draw attention to the 'fictions' thus constructed. Rather than masquerading as fact, however locally relevant, the fictions delight in fancy. They destabilise the epistemological category of history itself by suggesting that exaggeration and fabrication are inevitably functions of historicity. (123)

Nanny’s narration also serves a similar purpose. She tells them stories of a lost past, of a happy family set up which serve to erase the fact of the disorderly family.

*Lear's Daughters* subverts the myth of the great male bard. In *King Lear* Shakespeare presents father-son relationships and the reason for
their hatred in the Gloucester subplot. But he does not satisfactorily explain the hatred of Regan and Goneril towards their father and also the reason for their becoming women of cruelty and violence. *King Lear* is based on a fairy-tale involving the three princesses and the youngest daughter's love for the father. But the new play deconstructs this underpinning structure. The director’s note claims that the play aims to de-throne Lear as the centre of the play and as the representative of supposedly universal human experience. In *King Lear* the daughters are mere objects, the possessions of the patriarchy. *Lear's Daughters* reviews their problems, thus showing the readers that the three of them are imprisoned in the role of “a daughter”. Griffin and Aston describe how vividly the play has portrayed this imprisonment:

> At the level of the stage image this was reinforced in the original production through a set which consisted of a partial representation of a phallic fairy-tale-type tower, the grey/mauve colouring of which filtered through gauze and cast an imprisoning shadow over the three princesses dressed in primary colours (Goneril/blue, Regan/red, Cordelia/Yellow). (11)

McLuskie argues that the narrative and its dramatization in *King Lear* “Present a connection between sexual insubordination and anarchy, and the connection is given an explicitly misogynist emphasis" (98). Lear’s
Daughters subverts its essential misogyny and foregrounds the feminine experience by focusing attention on the gaps left out in the original.

In Lear’s Daughters both the parents are physically absent on stage. But their presence is very much experienced through the conversations. The mother is forever sick because of repeated pregnancy and the lecherous father keeps travelling around the countryside on the sporting circuit. The absentee parents barely interact with the girls. Their characters are portrayed by broomstick puppets wearing bejeweled crowns, controlled and spoken for by the Fool. We comprehend these characters through the narrations on stage. The play is very relevant to the social and economic situation of the time. Men stray, women are married off for political reasons and nurses replace mothers. The mother is dead at the beginning of the play and, without her the family is dysfunctional. The father is materially absent on stage. But his looming presence is always there. The play projects the myth of the father who is the ultimate all-powerful male. The Fool describes the King: "At sixty-five he is still the most agile horse man and best archer. The title 'king' demeans his status — he is a demi-god. He has competed against the best and won. His countrymen weep with pride, and disbelief" (33). The play's world is one where men fail to create a feasible world order. Though the men are failures, the women hide male incompetence from the next generation of women because it is the only way they can survive. The Nurse gives an
idyllic picture of family life through her elaborate stories. The daughters may be tempted to believe in the fairy tale of a “happy ever after of marriage”. But their own experience teaches them that reality is quite the contrary. Through the window of the tower, which is the only outlet to the external world, they get a peep into the reality outside the make-believe idyll: they see their father making love to another woman on the day of their mother's funeral.

GONERIL. How can he? Today?

REGAN. He's disgusting.

GONERIL. He's got his hand right up her skirt.

REGAN. Anyone can see him. Not just us. Doesn't he care?

GONERIL. He's unbuttoning himself.

REGAN. Come away.

GONERIL. He's so . . . . How dare he?

REGAN. Who is she?

GONERIL. I don't know.

REGAN. Doesn't she mind him pawing her like that?

They turn away from the window.

GONERIL. What will happen now? Do you think he will marry her?

REGAN. I don’t know.
GONERIL. If he does, he will have a son. I know it. He will try until he does. I will never be Queen. (44-45)

Lear is presented as a bruising, abusing patriarch, desperate for a son. The mother's death is explained as a result of the attempt to produce a male child, which is symbolic of the process by which the propagation of male culture entails the subordination of female bodies and female images. A link is made between Lear's tyranny and the sexual exploitation of women. The only means by which a mother can gain power in the family is by giving birth to a male child. A failure in this is equivalent to death for the Queen.

There is an event in scene 5 of the play where Lear returns triumphant from a sporting tournament. The three daughters are presented to have different memories of the same event. Nanny has yet another version of the story. She retells the story and the sisters reconstruct their memories and hers in order to achieve a version which they can all share. (Scene 7, 'The Nurse and the sisters', 40-42). The building up of the story goes like this:

REGAN. Tell us about when we were little.

GONERIL Cordelia's still little.

NURSE. You are still small.

REGAN. Smaller then.
NURSE. When Goneril was very small you weren't there.
(looks at CORDELIA) and neither were you.

REGAN. No, do when we were all three there?

NURSE. Even Lear?

REGAN. (Pause) Yes.

NURSE. Once Lear had not been there, and then suddenly he was. It rained for forty days and nights, before he came home and when he did, the Sun came out. The king walked over the water to meet us.

CORDELIA. Over the water?

GONERIL. (to CORDELIA) Over a bridge.

NURSE. Yes. That's better. Over a bridge. We had to build a bridge to get to him. The Queen crossed the bridge and everybody had to cheer.

GONERIL. Had to?

NURSE. Yes (smoothly). Because it was important to see the Queen at Lear's side.

CORDELIA. Then did we cross over?

NURSE. I think so, yes.

REGAN. Who went first?

NURSE. I can't remember.

REGAN. I bet I did.
GONERIL. In order of age.

CORDELIA. Youngest first.

REGAN. We went across the bridge together. Everybody cheered. Nanny went quite deaf with the cheering.

NURSE. Did I?

REGAN. Daddy gave you a present.

NURSE. (laughing) Did he?

CORDELIA. It was a cake.

REGAN. You went there.

NURSE. Was I? (pause) If you want me there.

GONERIL. No. (slowly, concentrating. She moves to NANNY). Nanny stayed on this side of the bridge.

NURSE. That is my place (curtsies to GONERIL)

Silence.

GONERIL (measured). I stayed with Nanny (smiles at NANNY)

REGAN. So did I.

COREDELIA. And so did the Queen. So Daddy must have come to us.

NURSE. Yes, he must have come to us.

CORDELIA. (satisfied) One big happy family.
The history of a family is a narrative, a story which its members tell themselves; but real-life family romances rarely conclude with the happy endings characteristic of the fairy-tales which Lear's Daughters self-consciously recalls and the women of Lear's family can only construct a version of the past which is acceptable to all of them at the cost of denying and distorting their own experiences.

Of the three daughters, Goneril is the single-minded leader, Cordelia, the daddy's girl and Regan, the sad middle child overpowered by Goneril. The ambiguous and mysterious androgynous Fool and the Nurse offer an insight into the character of the mysterious queen. A lot of scandal exists about the queen's death. She is buried and Lear plans to marry off the elder daughters, keeping the youngest for himself. Goneril is the detested eldest and a frustrated painter.

GONERIL. When I look, the world breaks into colours. When I was small — finding paints and brushes in the chest, opening tiny pots and setting them out, taking water — I couldn't believe how the colours sharpened under the wet brush! And now I paint all the time, every minute, big canvas big strokes, getting it right. Self portrait . . . on a throne . . . scarlet, gold, black it's outside . . . Trees cracked by lightning a knot of raspberry canes and black berries . . . And my sisters, beside me, our faces upward, smiling — sky full of stars. My painting. And one day, I'll get it right. (23)
On the mother’s death Goneril is forced to assume state responsibility. Regan has a talent for carving. But she is the completely neglected middle one.

REGAN. I love the feel of wood, of bark cracked and mutilated by lightning or curves smooth and worn by wind and rain. I love the musty smell of old wood decaying, or of new wood freshly cut out. Sometimes when I touch it, I can almost feel the wood breathing still, its breath, my breath. When I carve, it is as if there is a shape lying within the wood already, waiting to be released, moving my knife independent of the hand that holds it. So on some days I carve slowly, carefully holding my breath, frightened of what I might create, whilst on other days I carve passionately, wanting to release this shape, this being, because I know that one day the shape that appears will be particular—my shape, me.(23)

Cordelia, unlike Shakespeare's silent youngest daughter, is presented as a woman who delights in words.

CORDELIA. I like words. Words are like stones, heavy and solid and every one different, you can feel their shape and their weight on your tongue. I like their roughness and their smoothness, and when I am silent, I am trying to get them right. Not just for beautiful things, like the feel of old lace, but for the smell of wet soil, or the tug of the brush through my hair. I learnt to read by myself. The first thing I ever did on my own. And the voices
were so rich and strong that now, I read all through the summer in a garden den of raspberry canes and blackberries, and I look up at the sky, and it's full of words. (22)

Unlike the Shakespearean daughters of Lear, who are either monstrous or silent, each of these daughters has her own aspirations and engagements. Goneril wishes to establish her identity as a painter, Regan as a sculptor and Cordelia as a writer — all the three are traditional masculine arts. However, though the three daughters have their own separate individualities, these are never allowed to materialize and are all subsumed by their identity as daughters. Humanist subjectivity is implicitly accepted to be male. It is the mind and reason which are given prominence in opposition to the traditionally “female” body and passion. The subject is male and hence the female is the object. A woman is denied the right to agency – ie, speaking in or acting upon the objectified public world. It is the sole prerogative of the male subject. Disqualified materially and ideologically from the subjects’ mastery of the public world and herself the object of male mastery in the private realm, the female subject, if not oxymoron, is severely circumscribed, and the private becomes less her domain than her prison. Thus we come to know that woman is a "subject" who is constructed by the specific cultural positioning of her femininity at particular historical moments.
Early in the play when the girls meet their mother, who is busy with the accounts of the kingdom and who is sick all the time, they pester her with so many questions so that Nanny as well as the Queen ask them to keep their voices down because the king won't like their boys’ manners. Then the Queen asserts that she too does not like it. Here she colludes with the patriarchal injunction of female silence. When asked about the sex of the baby in her womb, the re-iterated answer is "you are not a boy", making clear that their not being a boy is a defect on their part.

FOOL (Queen). Stop these boy's manners!

CORDELIA. Are you going to have a baby?

NANNY. You are not a boy.

GONERIL. Why does he want a boy?

FOOL (Queen). You are not a boy.

GONERIL. Why do you want a boy?

FOOL (Queen). You are not a boy. (38-39)

Cordelia, though a woman of words, is forced to play daddy's darling even doing Salome-like dances for him. Goneril is a victim of parental abuse and Regan is a victim of an abortion before marrying Cornwall. Shakespeare has portrayed the two as born monsters with no excuse behind their monstrosity. Lear's Daughters attributes their monstrosity to paternal rage and possibly even sexual abuse. In the case
of Cordelia one can even feel a hint of incest from Lear's part. Griffin and
Aston have analyzed the character of Cordelia thus:

The articulation of her desire as *logos* rather than as shapes, 
colours, textures etc., is significant in terms of the play's 
representation of the youngest daughter archetype. The 
desire for *logos* identifies her with the male/father figure, 
while the woman is locked inside silenced, but turns over 
words to find another voice, *her* voice. This deconstructive 
discourse surrounding the mythology of the special 
relationship between father and youngest daughter is 
reinforced by the switch of focus to Goneril and Regan. 
Their bonding, both with each other and with the nurse, 
positioned Cordelia as an outsider. (12)

A hint at an incestuous relationship between Cordelia and King Lear can 
be traced in *King Lear* itself. Cordelia's answer “nothing" is a much 
discussed and complex one. The word has sexual connotations. Grace 
Loppolo's opinion on this may corroborate this point:

Although the word may not have that direct meaning here, 
Lear is clearly perturbed about Cordelia’s honesty (meaning 
both ‘truthfulness’ and ‘ chastity ’) and divorces himself from 
her, as if she were his wife, rather than his daughter. Some
critics have suggested that Lear's irrational anger derives
from his fear of his incestuous feelings for his daughters.
Unlike the author of the source play, who portrays Lear
mourning his late, beloved wife, Shakespeare provides no
information about the absent mother of Lear's daughters or
the state of his relationship with or his treatment of them
before Act I Scene i. Instead, Shakespeare leaves us to draw
our own conclusions about whether such division between
father and daughter, and such collusion between sisters,
stands from their innate evil natures or from their nurture by
him thus far. (106)

Generations of Shakespearean interpreters have ignored this suggestion
and concentrated only on the wickedness of the daughters. Even Edward
Bond, who initially sympathised with them, could do no justice to the
daughters. But the WTG has skilfully culled out and projected this aspect
of the play. In Lear's Daughters Cordelia’s memory about her first
meeting with her Daddy is this way:

. . . There are too many lights and too many faces. And then
the one face, clear and sharp, stooping right down and
swinging me high above the floor, up to the ceiling, up to the
rafters. In a giant’s arms, my feet are touching the sky and then . . . down. The smell of a breath, warm and sweet, soft
lips wet on my cheek, bristles scratching my chin and neck,
and down on to the table, and I turn, holding my skirt, round and round. Look, Daddy, look, Daddy, look, look, look.

(29)

When the Queen dies, rather than being upset about the mother Cordelia is upset about the father.

CORDELIA. He said I'm his special girl and I've got to look after him. I'm not going with you, I've got to hold his hand. (GONERIL goes to trunk. REGAN slumps on bench.) Nanny! (NURSE enters) Daddy says Mummy’s gone to live with God and I can wear a long black dress with gloves. Get me ready.

NURSE. Turn around.

CORDELIA. He said Mummy would be pleased to know she’d left everything in such good hands. Do you think she can see us now?

NURSE. Keep your head still.

CORDELIA. He said when we come out of the church all the people will cheer when I stand next to him because I will be so brave. Do you think they will?

NURSE. There you are. You'll do.

CORDELIA. (turns to look in mirror) Oh. Look, Nanny, look. I look really grown up. Just like a Queen. (43-44).
There is even room for a suspicion that the Nurse is Cordelia's real mother. On the death of the Queen the nurse abandons her own child to own Lear's daughters. A subversive idea is communicated that Cordelia is her own child whom she had placed in the position of Lear's third child which was in fact a boy. Kate Chedgzoy elaborates on the role of the Nurse in the play:

The enigmatic uncontrollability of female sexuality which always threatens to undermine the fiction of paternity and which shapes the rhetoric of Lear's rage in Shakespeare's play is here literalised by the Nurse's presence on stage, as she refuses to confirm whether this claim is true; maternity, the reason that the Nurse is as trapped at court as any of Lear's daughters, also provides her only means of resistance. She concludes the soliloquy in which her enigmatic revelation is offered with a shout of defiance — ‘Lear! There are rats gnawing at your throne and I will not be in it but I will watch the spectacle from afar, smiling, knowing it is what I’ve always wanted to happen’ — before marching off-stage and exiting through the audience. (62-63)

Regan becomes pregnant, but decides to abort the pregnancy because a child must be legitimate in order to inherit the male line. Goneril believes that the only way to save the kingdom is, for the sisters
to marry wealthy lords. There, marriage is another form of patriarchal imprisonment, but it is a way out of the father/tower. The daughters spend their entire life in a tower, which is also a phallic symbol. This shows the extent of their containment in the patriarchal ideology. Cordelia is too very confused to express herself. This prequel thus gets the situation ready for Shakespeare's opening. King Lear demands to know in open court which one of the three daughters loves him the most. Goneril and Regan speak out very eloquently whereas Cordelia puts up a very miserable performance. Generations of readers have accepted this depiction without any compunction. They keep on sympathising with King Lear and denigrating the daughters. The WTG has made a very serious attempt to counter this presentation.

Michael Ryan explains the circumstances which lead to a resistance from the side of the women writers towards male narrations:

Male accounts of women may be indices of male fears regarding a loss of boundaries, an initial dependence on the mother's body, and the like, rather than an accurate account of what women are or have been. The male tradition could thus be turned inside out, examined for what it flees and in fleeing, misrepresents. Feminist critics could also begin now to understand why women were always calumniated by men. And from beneath the ample heaps of contempt and
calumny foisted on women by men, they could begin to ferret out signs of feared female potentials and strengths.

(103-104)

One may say that the effort taken up by the WTG was to give shape to a counter-narrative. Luce Irigaray argues that Cordelia's death is a necessity for Lear's tragic redemption — because male subjectivity is constituted through the rejection of the maternal and of everything associated with the maternal body, from matter to psychological fluidity or procreativity. The WTG offers a resistance to this objectification of women for the sake of men. In the final image of Lear's Daughters, the crown is thrown into the air and caught by all the three daughters at once. The concluding part of the play is as follows:

*Lights up centre stage. GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA stand in line, GONERIL in middle.*

GONERIL. Looking up, I can't see the sky. There's too much red. Red in my eyes. Red on my hands. They touched and felt but I cannot recognize them. My father's daughter, and still he gives me stop and start. Controlling by my hatred, the order of my life. Lear's daughter. Blood in my eyes and lost to heaven.

REGAN. I used to carve with my knife, create beauty from distortion, soft curves from the knottiest, most gnarled woods. When life was at its dullest, most suffocating, I
would be full of energy, curiosity. And then ‘Get rid of it’, she said, 'Get rid of it’, and that was all. The veil was pulled away from my eyes and I could see what he had done to her, had done to me. And so I shall set my face to a new game which will not be beautiful, but there'll be a passion still and I will be there with it till the end, my end, carved out at her hands — and I would not have it any other way.

CORDELIA. Words are like stones, heavy and solid and every one different. I hold two in my hands, testing their weight 'Yes', to please, ‘no’; to please myself, 'yes', I shall and 'no', I will not. 'Yes', for you and 'no' for me. I love words. I like their roughness and their smoothness, and when I am silent I'm trying to get them right. I shall be silent now, weighing these words, and when I choose to speak, I shall choose the right one.

*Lights on FOOL on its spot. Bows to audience.*

FOOL. An ending. A beginning (*throws crown into circle, the sisters all reach up and catch it. Freeze.*)

Time's up.

*(Holds out hand for money)*

*Blackout. (68-69)*

The three daughters realize their potential and decide to act accordingly. The united grasping of the crown is a symbol of the solidarity and empowerment that can be achieved by women. The crown
that they capture is the crown of the cultural legacy. The Fool says "an ending " and "a beginning" which may be interpreted as a farewell to the days of subservience and a welcome note to those of power and assertion.

Though a prequel, *Lear’s Daughters* is surely a radical remake of Shakespeare. It invites us to consider narrative alternatives that disrupt the sedimentation of convention gathered round its source. Comparing *Lear* and *Lear's Daughters*, on the basis of the discussions in the earlier chapters, one may easily surmise that the rerightings by men retain the politics of Shakespearean plays, whether they are white or coloured, European or third world. One major aspect of this project is an exposition of the canonization process. The adaptations by male writers easily get canonized. On the other hand, the work of the Women's Theatre Group, existing on the fringes of mainstream culture and operating as an oppositional force in relation to a dominant male-centred ideology, has suffered the fate women always seem to have had in history. WTG's *Lear's Daughters* disappears as it appears resulting in a perpetual silencing. The ideological apparatuses functioning in the society are so potent that rebellions will soon be hushed out. *Lear's Daughters*, however, has made its appearance in the *Herstory* volume which is an attempt at opposing the silencing project for women in the society. It has not yet entered into the critical repertoire because the dominant
ideological apparatuses which make the canon could not digest the deviant voices the play expostulates.

The comparison between Lear and Lear's Daughters enables us to probe deep into the “political” nature of literature, into the improbable designs that it enforces upon the readers. Power is the issue behind this politics. The woman reader experiences a particular form of powerlessness because of the endless construction of her identity as “female”. It results in a division of self against self. As noted earlier, the language and culture of the Shakespearean world depend on the death or absence of the mother. It is as if the men are more powerful and comfortable in this absence. Similar is the predicament of women’s writings. The predominantly male society is comfortable only when the powerful voice of women is exterminated. This is the controlling factor behind the canonization process too.