

'50s costumes jarring in well-acted 'Lear'

By Michael Grossberg

Dispatch Theater Critic

Two cheers for the acting and a Bronx cheer for the garish design of Otterbein College Theatre's *King Lear*.

Ed Vaughan's commanding performance in the difficult title role gives the necessary weight, heights and depths to Shakespeare's masterly tragedy, which opened last night.

Director Christina Kirk has elicited several fine performances from the large student cast, dramatizing the seismic conflicts that shake a kingdom when its leading family is torn apart by deception, greed, a lust for power and an old man's foolish vanity.

When Keith Lorcan Weirich's valiant Earl of Gloucester acknowledges that "we have seen the best of our times," his loyal words sum up the atmosphere of mournful nostalgia. *King Lear*, one of the Bard's most mature texts, resonates with the haunting, rueful perspective of old age.

Vaughan, an Otterbein professor and Equity actor, deftly charts the aging king's descent from blind vanity, pompous posturing and childlike lunacy to bitter oblivion.

He is very funny in his increasingly senile poses, as his booming voice fades into a quavering rasp, but the effect of his performance is sobering.

Jason Ripley's Edgar could be stronger, showing some of the passion that Robert Behrens gave the choice role during the summer in German Village's Schiller Park. Yet, as Edgar's alter

THEATER REVIEW

King Lear, Otterbein College Theatre's student production of Shakespeare's tragedy. Directed by Christina Kirk.

King Lear.....	Ed Vaughan
Fool.....	Katherine Smart
Cordelia.....	Tess Hartman
Earl of Gloucester.....	Keith Lorcan Weirich
Goneril.....	Tirzah Wise
Regan.....	Laurie Green
Edgar.....	Jason Ripley

You'll leer at the costumes.

Performances will be at 8 tonight and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and Thursday to March 12 — in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville.
Tickets: \$8-\$9.50. Call 823-1109.

ego, Tom O'Bedlam, Ripley's madness is rightly suffused with angry self-awareness.

At Wednesday's preview, other solid work came from Tess Hartman's true-blue Cordelia, Mark Van Oesen's virile Edmund, J.W. Morrisette's Kent, Tom Sheridan's Cornwall, Adam Donmoyer's Albany, and Brett Sullivan Santry, Andrew Hanson, Peter Dean and Rodney Cross in multiple bit roles.

Imagine Demi Moore striding around in a lavish Hollywood period epic, and you get the

picture of Tirzah Wise's Goneril. Laurie Green's Regan is equally pretty and superficial. Both actresses seem ripe for a catty role in *The Women*, but a deeper portrait of betrayal is needed for Lear's elder daughters.

Far more satisfying and intriguing is Katherine Smart's impish Fool. Smart adds a flirtatious edge to Lear's cautionary sidekick — a role almost always played by a male.

Otherwise, Otterbein's staging is a traditional revival with suspenseful fight choreography and neat lightning, thunder and cloud effects. Perhaps too traditional: Otterbein's gaudy, ahistoric robes and tunics might have been recycled from a college *Lear* of the 1940s or '50s.

Guest costume designer Lauren Lambie's royal reds, greens, aquas and golds are surprisingly flamboyant for a dark tragedy. Under Vaughan's robe of gold lame is a grotesque outfit in bright lavender and orange-red. Is Otterbein suggesting that Lear, so foolish in how he divides his land, is just as foolish in his choice of tailors?

Kirk says her design concept, worked out with Lambie, is a loose period interpretation colored by Lear's shifting status. By making Lear's initial appearance golden, Otterbein's production underlines the wealth that Lear will lose.

Reasonable enough, but do the other clothes have to look as if they were created by a 1950s costumer? At any moment, one fears that a young Tony Curtis will emerge from the wings to intone these immortal words in a Bronx accent: "Yondah is da castle of my fahdah."

entertainment/arts

Otterbein's 'Lear' climbs impressive mountain

By Dennis Thompson
SNP Theater Critic

The critic Jan Kott has referred to Shakespeare's *King Lear* as "a high mountain that everyone admires, yet no one particularly wishes to climb."

Otterbein College Theatre has taken on the daunting task of climbing that mountain and the result is impressive.

Lear, by general consensus, ranks among Shakespeare's greatest tragedies with *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*. Of the four, *Lear* may be the least familiar to most audiences. Yet it soars grandly through its world of decay, touching us with a theme still timely.

As a tragic hero, the character of Lear appears ridiculously naive when he divides his kingdom based on the depths of his daughter's expressions of love.



review

He thus subjects them to an embarrassing display of verbal gymnastics, all the while blinded to the falsities behind Regan and Goneril's flowery phrases and to the simple truth of Cordelia's love.

Played as a realistic character, Lear runs the risk of seeming more foolish than tragic. When he goes mad, we feel compassion more than the pity and terror of

tragedy. Yet, ultimately, in his madness he becomes wise, just as Gloucester in his blindness can finally see.

Ed Vaughan's depiction of Lear is monumental in its power and range. He rages and blusters with a voice of gravelly thunder and a hint of humor, gradually succumbing to frustration and pitiful disbelief. His descent into madness is achieved with subtle care and dignity.

As Gloucester, Keith Weirich displays an elegance and depth of performance from dignity to pathos. He shows signs of an ability to tackle the title role in the future.

In his best Otterbein performance to date, Jason Morrissette plays Kent with intensity and noble rage. As the Fool, Katherine Smart is more successful in her childlike dependence than as the king's caustic conscience.

The pivotal siblings are played with mixed results.

Tess Hartman carries the role of Cordelia with grace and quiet strength. The reconciliation with her father is a touching moment played with tenderness by both Hartman and Vaughan.

Tirzah Wise's Goneril is authoritative in her cold, haughty rigidity. However, as Regan, Laurie Green

lacks the vocal power and stage presence to achieve the same effect.

The portrayal of Gloucester's sons offers a similar contrast. As Edmund, Mark Von Oesen is a formidable villain with a sordid, yet commanding, demeanor. But while Jason Ripley's Edgar succeeds in moments of compassion, he recited with stilted speech and a weak presence.

Director Christina Kirk has mounted a handsome production, particularly in her creation of stage pictures and effective management of technical elements. She elicits many strong performances from her student cast, although clarity remains a problem in cavernous Cowan Hall.

Kirk creates powerful dramatic moments. Two in particular, are the final appearance of the Fool, stranded in fading light, and the death of Lear, neatly turned into a dreamlike flash of the supernatural, a bonding of heaven and earth.

Rob Shaffer's multi-leveled Elizabethan design of gray stone is stunning, particularly when matched with the background of a seemingly endless dark sky. When this sky turns threat-

ening, the effect of swirling clouds and lightening is gripping in its recreation of natural power.

At over three hours, *Lear* is guilty of the bulky length that scares some from attending Shakespeare. Several members of the opening night audience left at intermission, not, seemingly, from dissatisfaction with the production, but from the weight of it all.

They missed a striking storm scene and a rousing final half hour. But there is

truth in the saying about too much of a good thing, and this production is wearing.

Still, the mere attempt was courageous and for a college production — an unnecessary qualifier when it comes to Otterbein — the results are magnificent.

Otterbein College Theatre's *King Lear* continues Thursday through Saturday, March 12 at 8 p.m. in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. For more information, call 823-1109.

At last: A perfect portrayal of King Lear

By Richard Ades

Princess Cordelia is such a nice daughter. So what if she doesn't kiss up as well as her sisters. Is that any reason to disinherit her?

Of course, that's just what the title character does at the beginning of Shakespeare's **King Lear**. His action creates myriad problems for himself and his country. About three hours' worth, by my watch.

It also creates a huge problem for the actor playing Lear. Namely, how do you make the audience care about a character who's such an egotistical ass?

Equity actor James Harbour couldn't pull it off in Actors' Theatre's production of *Lear* last summer. His king was a foolish old man who became a churlish old man as his troubles mounted. The portrayal made sense psychologically, but dramatically it cut the production off at the knees.

Fellow Equity actor Ed Vaughan gets it right in the current Otterbein version. His king is not a fool, but simply a man who has acted foolishly.

By the time he realizes he's given away his kingdom to the wrong daughters, it's too late. Cordelia's off in France, and he's forced to rely on the charity of her ambitious sisters, Goneril and Regan. And they have no charity to give.

Vaughan and director Christina Kirk handle several scenes skillfully, particularly in the first act. Most poignant is the moment when Lear realizes the size of his blunder. Told by Goneril and Regan that he must give up the last trappings of royalty, he finally puts his foot down.

Thunder signals an approaching storm as Lear warns the daughters they will be sorry for their disloyalty. Then he hobbles away, suddenly an old man, and we realize he's past being a threat to anyone.

Although Vaughan's portrayal remains on target during Act II, other problems surface.

Not all the college actors are equally adept at making Shakespearean dialogue understandable. The noisy storm at the beginning of the act makes understanding all the more difficult.

Theater Review



14 The Other Paper, March 10 - 16, 1994



The foolish and the Fool: Ed Vaughan and Katherine Smart in Otterbein's production of *King Lear*

Another weakness is the parallel subplot involving the Earl of Gloucester (Keith Lorcan Weirich) and his estrangement from son Edgar (Jason Ripley). The bond between them is not well established, so it's hard to care when it's broken.

As often happens, the evil characters are among the most effective. Mark Von Oesen is delightfully conniving as Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmond. Tirzah Wise makes a coldly bitchy Goneril, and Laurie Green is almost as frosty as Regan.

Among those faithful to Lear, Jason W. Morrisette makes a heroic Kent, and Katherine Smart is entertaining as the Fool.

King Lear is said to be one of the hardest of the Shakespearean tragedies to do right. This production has its flaws, but it's hard to imagine a more perfect portrayal of the title role.

Drama students tackle Shakespearean tragedy

By Allcia Caudill
and Nichole Powell
Arts Reporters

Tragedy comes to the Cowan Hall stage when the Otterbein Theatre Department presents the classic Shakespearean masterpiece "King Lear."

"King Lear," one of the greatest tragedies in stage literature, is the story of a king who wishes to divide his kingdom between his three daughters upon his retirement. To satisfy his ego, the king asks each daughter to publicly proclaim her love for him in order to receive the inheritance.

The two older daughters, Regan, played by Laurie Green, and Goneril, played by Tirzah Wise, coldly flatter the king and greedily accept his offer. The youngest daughter, Cordelia, who is played by Tess Hartman, refuses to obey her father and is banned from the kingdom.

Lear later realizes his mistake after Regan and Goneril plot to strip him of his power. Cordelia, on the other hand, proves her true love and loyalty as she tries to save her father from self-destruction.

"King Lear" not only deals with greed and manipulation, but also shows the eternal conflict between good and evil. This, in combination with the underlying theme of discord between the young and the old, makes this play one of the most difficult to produce.

"The play is so rich you can never capture it all. It is a challenge to produce," said Ed Vaughan, who plays King Lear.

Vaughan, an Equity Guest Artist and associate professor in Otterbein's Department of Theatre and Dance, has appeared in and directed many plays during his 12 years at Otterbein. These include "Move Over," "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" and "The Passion of Dracula."

Vaughan said he enjoys working with the students in productions like "King Lear" because it gives him "the best of both worlds."

Vaughan believes that working in productions with students gives him more credibility as an acting teacher. He is able to put into practice the theories he has taught his students.

"Working with the students humanizes the acting process. It is important for students to see what you talk about in the

classroom," Vaughan said.

The Otterbein cast has been rehearsing for this production of "King Lear" an average of six days a week since mid-January. The nature and difficulty of the play call for intensive rehearsals and extreme dedication from the actors.

"All acting takes tremendous commitment, but 'Lear' takes more than that," Vaughan said.

The fight scenes were some of the most difficult to perfect. The actors use broadswords, which are medieval weapons 33 inches long with a three-and-a-half inch thick tempered steel blade. Though the edges have been dulled, the weapons are considered combat ready.

"The fights have their own rhythm and their own flow. They require precision of movement and the precise ability to repeat those movements. They do have the potential to be dangerous," said Sharilynn Shaw,

fight choreographer. Shaw is certified in combat choreography.

Otterbein's production of "King Lear"



Ed Vaughn, theatre professor and Equity actor, is pictured with Junior Katherine Smart in the opening scenes of 'King Lear.' Vaughn is in the title role and Smart plays the Fool. Photo courtesy of College Relations

Lear: No, I will be the pattern of all patience; I will say nothing.

Kent: Who's there?

Fool: Marry, here's grace and a codpiece; that's a wise man and [pointing at Lear] a fool.

*Kent: Alas, sir, are you here? Things that love night
Love not such nights as these. The wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark
And make them keep their caves.*

*Since I was a man,
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard. Man's nature cannot carry
Th' affliction nor the fear.*

*Lear: Let the great gods,
That keep this dreadful pudden o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipped of justice. Hide thee, thou*

*bloody hand,
Thou perjured, and thou similar of virtue
That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
Hast practised on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace.
I am a man
More sinned against than sinning.*

'King Lear,' (3:2:42-59).

is directed by Christina Kirk, a theatre professor who made her directing debut with last year's "The Royal Family."

The actors said they hope to make the writings of Shakespeare come to life and to make the story of King Lear's struggle understandable to those who are apprehensive about seeing it.

"King Lear" was difficult to read, but I am looking forward to seeing it actually produced," junior Maya Gangadharan said.

Vaughan advises audience members to "keep an open mind and get ready to go on a journey."

The journey begins tonight at 7:30 p.m. in Cowan Hall. Performances run tonight through Sunday and next Thursday through Sunday at 8 p.m. The Sunday matinee is at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$9.50 for Friday and Saturday shows and \$8 for Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday. Performances are free for students with I.D. Tickets can be reserved by calling X1109.

'Best' in theater simply a matter of taste

Heraclitus, one of the ancient Greek philosophers, said you can never step into the same river twice. In much the same way, you can never see the same play twice.

Nor do any two people see the same play in precisely the same way. Theater is gloriously, seductively, defiantly subjective.

Like any live arts event, theater changes nightly — and not just because an actor can have an off-night, miss a cue or stumble over a prop.

The shifting chemistry among actors colors each performance with subtly distinctive hues.

Much also depends on the intangible but very real energy that flows among performers and involves the audience on a good night — and that sputters out on a bad night.

For these reasons, what critics see on opening night may be quite different from what people see on another night — especially weeks later during a long, tiring run.

Yet, at the same time, theater is surprisingly objective. When a show works, people usually know it. When a show doesn't work, people sense that, too — although they may not be able to

ONSTAGE



MICHAEL GROSSBERG

but consider the results of a recent poll of central Ohio's theater critics about the just-ended 1993-94 season. I asked my peers to reflect on the theater they saw between July 1, 1993, and July 1 of this year and choose their favorites in four

articulate exactly why.

Of course, people can disagree about a playwright's intentions, a director's interpretations and actors' performances. But that's part of a good theater experience: to talk about it, and perhaps argue about it, with friends who saw the same thing.

Critics can disagree, too. No surprise there, but consider the results of a recent poll of central Ohio's theater critics about the just-ended 1993-94 season. I asked my peers to reflect on the theater they saw between July 1, 1993, and July 1 of this year and choose their favorites in four

categories: best productions of a play and musical and best performances by an actress and actor.

At first glance, the critics disagree on everything: with a partial exception, no choices overlapped. (Unlike my colleague, *Dispatch* Film Critic Frank Gabrenya, who reports a similar year-end poll of local film critics that always manages to wind up with only one vote per film, I imposed no similar restrictions on this poll.)

Like the theater they are designed to honor, theater awards are subjective — as this year's poll underscores. Yet, I dare say that many of the selected shows and performers ranked highly with each of the critics — which reflects the underlying objectivity of art as well.

Most of the choices rank high on my more-extensive season's best list, which will be published next Sunday.

Good theater embodies universal truths with artistry, insight and emotion. That's why it has the power to touch so many in the same way.

Michael Grossberg is Dispatch theater critic.

THEATER CRITICS' PICKS

Best of the 1993-94 theater season:

■ Michael Grossberg, *The Dispatch*

Best play: *The Imaginary Invalid*, Ohio State University.

Best musical: *Crazy for You*, Broadway Series.

Best actress: A tie between Ellen Newman, for OSU Theatre Company's *Reckless*; and Lynn Wilde, for New World Theatre's *Dear Liar* and *Death and the Maiden*.

Best actor: Geoffrey Nelson, Otterbein College Theatre's *The Brothers Karamazov*.

■ Richard Ades, *The Other Paper*
Best play: *The Good Times Are Killing Me*, Contemporary American Theatre Company.

Best musical: *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Broadway Series.

Best actress: Donna Edmond, Ohio State University's *Zora Neale Hurston*

Best actor: Ed Vaughan, Otterbein College's *King Lear*.

■ Doug Hoehn, *Columbus Alive*
Best play: *Some Things You Need To Know Before the World Ends*, New World

Theatre.

Best musical: *Six Women With Brain Death*, Reality Theatre.

Best actress: Jane Mowder, CATCO's *Marvin's Room*.

Best actor: Michael Mauldin, *The Imaginary Invalid*, Ohio State University.

■ Dennis Thompson, *Suburban News Publications*

Best play: *Top Girls*, Otterbein College.

Best musical: *Pippin*, Otterbein College.

Best actor: Ron Thomas, Otterbein's *The Boys Next Door*.

Best actress: A tie between Tirzah Wize, Otterbein's *Top Girls*, and Deborah Colvin-Tener, CATCO's *The Good Times Are Killing Me*.

■ Jay Weitz, *The Guardian*
Best musical: *The Good Times Are Killing Me*, CATCO.

Best play: *The Story of My Life, Part I: The End*, New Venture Theatre.

Best actor: Jim Zvanut, New World Theatre's *Dear Liar*.

Best actress: Lori Cannon, for several performances at New Venture, Reality Theatre and The Theatre Project.