

## Fred Wills King Lear Part I

Now, suppose now somebody gave you a play written by *Schiller, Heine, Goethe, Marlowe*, or anybody? The way you approach it, because you've been brought up in schools in this country, in the Northeast, you'll buy the book and go straight to the play and hope to get the idea of the play in the words spoken by the actors. That's what you do because you're an empiricist. What you do is, get to know about the play. You have to learn the events, which the play is going to describe, and the history of the actual writing of the play. Those are the two things you got to know, before you start to read it. Or you'll miss the whole thing. The events of which the play is concerned and the history of the actual writing of the play. What questions. Was he writing from jail? Was he in the *Bastille*? Was he released by *Castro*, and came in a boat, whatever? Whatever it is, the history of the play is very good to know before you start reading.

I found that the problem with the (*NJ Labor Committee*) *Local* and *Shakespeare* is that people don't know the universal history behind the plays, you were just told to read it. As you go along and meet a problem, you explain it. Which is the way we fight wars, those who bumble through, and hope for the best. *Shakespeare* never staged a play which the audience didn't know the story of. Every play he staged; they knew the story. If the story wasn't as popular as other stories, advanced publicity told you what the story line was. The reason was simple: he didn't want you to go to his plays to pick up the story line, "What happens next? Who's going to screw whom? Who is going to kill whom?" If that's the level you're at, well then, you can't form hypothesis. Still watch soap operas? "Will Luke marry Jane?" or, "Da da duh dum!", or the shadow, Gloria, whatever? And this is no exception.

There was a book came out in 1603, '*The Chronicle History of King Leir*.' Lear was a King of Britain. And in 1603, a book came out, *Chronicle History of King Leir*, and was read by those who could read. One of the fantastic things about *Elizabethan Era*, which I think was the best, the most important era, I think, in British history, certainly, you know, it was *Elizabethan*, not the *Victorian*, decadent, ahem - is how many people could read. Do you know the settlers left at this time to come over here, did you stop to ask yourself: what kind of people the settlers of *America* were, who came here in 1608 on, that you could move them by writing pamphlets? You got to be literate. Have you read *Thomas Paine*? Did that move people? You couldn't go into *New York* [now] with *Thomas Paine*, or an updated version of *Thomas Paine*, you know. They can't even read! We have this stupid concept of functional illiterates, you know it. All it means, you can take the cocaine, you can screw, that's what it means.

That's what a functional illiterate does. I taught them at *Rutgers*. This is a very literate population, we have here, [in *Shakespeare's* time] schooled in the *Bible, Milton, Shakespeare*, that's the basis of their education. Now, 200 years later, people think *Shakespeare* is the name of a band! Yeah, there are people who believe that. "*Shakespeare* - what band is that?"

So, this play was, this book came out in 1603, it's popular. Secondly, another book that came out, 1605 the book came out, 1603 what came out was a book by (*Samuel*) *Harsnett*, and you guys never had to study comparative religion, so you don't know this. *Harsnett* wrote a book, '*Popish Impostures*.' An 'imposture' means 'dissembling, lying, seeding deception,' and '*Popish Imposture*' means *Roman Catholic Pope's* deception. And in this book, he's really stating that *Puritan* and *Protestant* - you see, *Puritan* comes from 'purify,' and the idea is to purify the Catholic religion. Get all the ideas that have no causes, get rid of all the cult trappings, 'high mass' and 'incense' and all that weird smell, you know? Giving wine and giving bits and pieces of potato chips and saying it's the body and soul of *Christ* and all that, all that purified. Above all, to get rid of all those deacons and archbishops. You know what happened? Religion never had that; you know. The Roman religion had that. The Roman mystery religions and the *Pontifex Maximus* had a sort of feudal system, *Pontifex* in the top, and who is second in command, and you go down, you see, and what *Constantine* did is, take that system, and put in the new Christian religion, so you can control it. Hence, when you ordain an *Archbishop O'Connor*, and then Bishop Somebody in Philadelphia, Bishop Somebody in Boston, and that idiot in Newark, you know? And underneath them you have -- I don't know, deacons, I don't even know the Catholic hierarchy anymore. But that's what people [*Puritans*] reversed, the feudal system.

From this book by *Harsnett*, the '*Popish Impostures*,' *Shakespeare* got all this business of Edmund, bastardy, and the themes he saw. There was also a hospital famous at the time, in London, called the *Hospital of St. Bartholomew*.

... *Hospital of St. Bartholomew*, this is a hospital for the insane, in London, at the time. And the Cockneys, people who live in London are called Cockneys, right? They speak a funny way. "Aye, mate!"... "Gor Blimey!" Well, they contract '*St. Bartholomew*' to '*Bedlam*,' [a contraction of '*Bethlehem*'] that's the origin of the word 'bedlam.' Means either 'an insane place' or 'insane person.' *Bartholomew* contracted in *Old English*. When you use the word: It's all bedlam in here, you really mean, at this time, *St. Bartholomew's Hospital* in London. And '*Tom O'Bedlam*' was a lunatic. *Bedlam* is a madhouse, insane asylum. That's the original meaning. Words change later on, you know, but that's the origin of bedlam: madness, confusion, yeah? A *Tower of Babel* situation. Hence, what *Shakespeare* is going to do is going to incorporate madness as a theme. He's going also to deal with filial piety, a long Latin phrase meaning 'duties owed by children to parents.'

Now, what? *Henry VII*, as you know by now, beat up *Richard III* and took the throne, in 1485, and he had two sons: Arthur and Henry. Arthur was the elder of the two. He arranged a marriage. In those days, it's not as now - you meet a girl, you eye her up, she eyes you up, you meet her Mother, what have you they used to arrange marriage. It used to work, *mariage de convenance*. It used to work. Unlike you guys, leaving tomorrow morning, you know. Honor and duty was involved. I often believed that's how I got married, they set me up and I didn't know. The thing is, Arthur died. 'Cause he was... *primogeniture*, meaning the eldest son must rule.

The eldest son died, *Henry VII's* eldest son died. And his youngest son, *Henry VIII*, will take the throne. He took the man's (Arthur's) bride. He married *Catherine of Aragon*. Aragon is a province of Spain. It was an arranged marriage. And she gave him two children, Edward and Mary, and she brought them up to be Catholics, they're ambivalent. She taught them Catholicism and the King taught them Protestantism. See, so they have a foot in each camp.

Elizabeth, youngest of the three, and she is the daughter of '*Anne of The Thousand Days*' (1969 film), *Anne Boleyn*. Biographers said she got venereal disease, couldn't have any more children, that's what he died from, that's what you heard. Anyway, so, well, this *Henry VIII* is a Catholic at heart. He defended the Catholic religion, once, I told you this before, in such a way, that the Pope gave him the title '*Fidei Defensor*,' I told you that... '*Defender of the Faith*.' But when he wants a divorce, in those days, if you wanted a divorce the Pope had to do something. There's a fiction that they used to use to give you validity to say you never were married. Some error, some defect existed at the time of marriage, non-consummation, whatever, and how you couldn't get [couldn't have been validly] married. Anyway, the Pope refuses to exercise it... This is a man married to a Spanish Lady, Aragon, and Castile and Aragon were the big provinces of Spain, "Ole!" stuff, hmmm? Big, you know, *Catherine of Aragon*? So, Henry said well, can't marry in law so let this damn Catholic stupidity, do your *Protestant* thing, so he jumped on the bandwagon. His motives were personal, had nothing to do with high theology. He was railroaded into becoming, to leading the Protestant Revolution because he wanted a divorce. The rebels, others, were serious in a doctrinal way. Anyway, got rid of *Catherine of Aragon*, he married Anne Boleyn, and she gave him Elizabeth, that's the quarrel here.

Edward VI, *primogeniture* means 'sons first.' Primus, *genit* to born, be born, who was born first, first son. So, when he (Henry VIII) died 1547, his son *Edward VI* took over. But he was consumptive and weak. He had a chance to implant Catholicism, but a lot of Puritans left and went to Holland, had a big movement. When the Catholics, or semi-Catholics are prominent in Britain, radical Puritans would go to Holland. When the Puritans in Cromwell's time took over, the Catholics would go to France. So incidentally you might know, later on, when Cromwell came to power, Hobbes, who was Royalist, he went to the Continent, France. And when the King came back, *Charles the Second*, Locke went to Holland. Locke was a Puritan. The point is, this is the background to this play.

Thesis: If you have order and harmony, and if power is transferred to the wicked, morally diseased, irrational, if power is transferred to them, you get chaos. Succession is an important aspect of power. Who succeeds must be known, and what principles of succession you are having, and who will succeed, and that person should be trained as a kind of philosopher king. If you don't have that, you have propitiousness, whimsy, foibles, idiosyncrasies, and you know, you get this kind of event, this tragedy.

Because Mary took over from *Edward VI*, 1547-1553, *Edward the Sixth*, 1553-1558 Mary, a Catholic, then she died. Great day, Elizabeth took over, and that's when you have all this

*Renaissance* and they beat the *Armada* in 1588, thirty years after that. And *Shakespeare* was born in 1564, Marlowe is around, huh?... and all the great events happen during her reign, *Dudley of Leicester* is her man, later on it's going to be Essex, you know. It's a great time. And she's the boss, and then she dies, and they bring this lunatic from Scotland this man, who believes in demonology, *James VI of Scotland*, son of Mary, *Queen of Scots*, his father was a Yorkshire Catholic, named Darnley.

When they bring him, the Puritans say, "To hell with this, we ain't sticking around!" The next thing you know, people are going, looking for Virginia but ending up in *Massachusetts*, *Plymouth Rock*. They left. It's one of the impetus, one of the reasons that they left is because this Catholic guy, who's going to pretend, this isn't the divine right of kings. He believes that God chose him to rule, and you can't do a thing about it, no consent of the governed, he's chosen by God, direct descendent of Adam, to rule mankind. And to, if necessary, accommodate the Catholic religion, and he trains his son in that. And his son, Charles, you know, eventually, lost his head, literally. They cut off his head. So, this play is about that, this play.

*King Lear*, an old British King, before the *Norman Conquest*, the *Norman Conquest* is 1066. It's long before that. At a time when Britain was not Christian before Christianity happened to Britain. Don't forget *Caesar* is 55 BC, *St. Patrick* brought it into Ireland much longer, later than that. He's a pagan and this play's about paganism, infidels and pagans, and you find *Apollo*, *Jupiter*, and *Hecate* and references of that kind of thing in the play. A British King, not some *Moor*, it's an English King. I always wondered whether there wasn't some joke by *Shakespeare*, named this eldest girl *Goneril*. Of course, I have a different understanding of the word *Goneril* than you guys. I never understood that I think he's telling us something. The thing is, *Lear* decided that he's going to make a gift '*inter vivos*,' of power. Normally, power descends in death. If I can give a gift '*inter vivos*,' it happens today, if I want to escape estate duty and estate taxes. Suppose I'm a rich man, you guys are my children. I feel that I will die, I give all the gifts '*inter vivos*,' now, so when I die, I'd have very little, to pay estate duty on, the government gets nothing at all, or very little. The problem is, how are you going to behave, if I make my right gifts to you?

See, this is an important thing, I'll tell you one legal fact finding. In Britain, the owner of land could not, the word is '*alienate*,' it means transfer land, couldn't *alienate* land, give away land. Right until 1873, a *Judicature Act*, you couldn't alienate land. So, If I own land and I had a son, he knows he must get it, he's the heir. So, he will abuse me, he will raise money on it, they call it a futurity, when you go to a money lender, give me a couple of bucks, I'll inherit someday, you know. And you can do nothing! Because you can't dispossess him. And you can't give away the land to somebody else by will. Can give chattels, horses, in the old days.

And when the *American Revolution* occurred, the first thing they did, was to make sure, that in America they could give away land by will. It wasn't until 1837, that the first move was made, in Britain, by a thing called, and don't, I'm not being funny, called *The Wills Act*.

Different meaning, it means about wills, testaments, 1837, which made a partial attempt to allow to give away land by will, then 1873, as they do now, you can say now, "All right, I don't give you my land, I give a home for the cats and dogs, and they do, give cats and dogs land. The thing I'm trying to get at is people used to give power away '*inter vivos*,' but you couldn't give land like that. *Primogeniture* meant eldest son, if he dies, next son, if there are no sons, sisters in *coparceny*, equally. But you must take account of all sisters. They didn't have the same strict rule over girls, as they have (for boys).

What does this guy do? He divides his kingdom, the *Anglo-Saxon* kingdom, before the *Normans* come in. See, *Normans* brought in *primogeniture*, in 1066. They brought it in because it's Germanic tradition from *Brittany, Normandy*. He says, look, you three girls come here. I won't give you the crown. I keep the crown, I remain king. But I'm going to divide my realm into three, and give each of you and your men: you married, *Goneril*, you're married to *Albany*, and *Regan* (nothing to do with Donald Regan), you're married to *Cornwall*, and *Cordelia*, you've got two men, you're lucky, you've got the *Duke of Burgundy* and the *King of France* - you've got a royal flush. You have this, but I'm dividing up the thing. But! I want you to tell me how much you love me.

Well, the first thing is, that's an invitation to manipulation. And you've got to remember this there are many people out there who will tell you, what you want to hear. They're the most dangerous people in the world. They know what you want to hear, and they will tell you that. You put on your new blue dress, that you bought on *42nd Street* or *Fifth Avenue* someplace and spent a few bucks on. How do I look?" "You look beautiful! Perhaps you look stupid and ugly, but they won't tell you that, you know? Or you're at a party, and you're dancing with a girl, and you're hungry. And you're thinking that you've got a hamburger in your refrigerator when you get home and a beer. And she says, "Darling, what are you thinking of?" "I'm thinking about your eyes. You tell her what she wants to hear. You will always find people who will tell you what you want to hear. Now, I crack a few jokes about it... .end