

Accession number: 1992-24/9s

Description: Large sheet of paper, written on both sides. Scribal manuscript of Prologue to King Lear. N.d.

Transcript: Prologue to King Lear spoken by L[iutenan]t Yate?

Of't on the Man of Sentiment hath stole
A soft delicious Agony of Soul,
A pleasure by the Vulgar sought in vain,
The nice concurrence of delight & pain,
When spotless minds in conscious Honor great
Dare to be Good & stand the Frowns of Fate:
Or rudely tost [tossed] on Life's tempestuous Wave
Maintain the glorious struggle to the grave.
Virtue thus tried, exclaim'd the moral Sage,
Might well the pitying gods engage.
Where can this Virtue more sublime appear
Where meet severer Trials than in Lear?
See nature all her ills exhaust to sting
The Bosom of the Parent and the King:
Beyond the Verge of Sense see Passion wrought,
See Frenzy riot in the spoils of Thought.
No low buffoons pathetic Scenes disgrace
With half a laughing, half a mourning face:
No easy Fair by ill-tim'd Love is won,
No fine Idea murder'd by a Pun
But noblest sentiments & language join'd
Command the Feelings, & improve the Mind.
Who then shall blush the Godlike Part 'tassume
And bid new Flow'rs in Virtues Path to bloom?
If You have Hearts, prepare them now for Woe: —
If You have Tears, indulge them now to flow —
What? — could you sigh when only Tybalt groan'd,
And moan in Sympathy when Juliet moan'd
Could glist'ning Eyes the drops of Pity shed
When Romeo fainted, or when Paris bled?
Lo! — here is Lear — Grief-stricken Lear appears
Can Lear demand & You withhold Your tears?
Monarch of Misery! — His pangs control
Each stubborn feeling of the struggling Soul!
He speaks — Attention tow'rds each accent bends:-
He stops — Compassion ev'ry Period ends—
But vain Ye strive your heart's big throes to paint:

Reverse

Tears are too weak, & Strongest Words to faint. —
Well may your curdled blood with horror creep
To hear him execrate — to see him weep —
Who but a Garrick could so far supply
The mighty Pow'rs of sensibility?
Start from Himself — o'erleap the human pale,
And act the Being of a higher Scale? —

Yet the true critic may attack me here
And cry, "What's Lear to Us, or we to Lear?
"Shall our touch'd hearts with real Anguish throb
"When mock Distresses counterfeit a Sob?
"Can Gloster's unblind Eyes our Pity win?
"Can we forget Cordelia's bearded Chin?"

Oh! Cautious, narrow Souls! Of Fancy cool!
Who feel by Precept, & who praise by Rule!
Lear asks not Your vain Tears, nor Your applause:
'Tis to Humanity He pleads his Cause:
But yet, suppress your Passions, if Ye can,
Critics! Ye must be more or less than Man.

Notes: Aileen Osborn, 'The Literary Material in the Hereford Garrick Papers', M. Phil thesis, University of Birmingham, 1999, 202-6. Previously unknown and unattributed.

pp.204-5 refers to Garrick's playing of Lear, one of his best loved roles. 'He first played it in 1742 at Drury lane and continued to develop it until his last performance in 1776, gradually adding more of Shakespeare's lines and dispensing with Nahum Tate's, in the version which was then current ... It has not been possible to ascribe authorship of this poem. The tribute to Garrick suggests that it might have been written around the time of his retirement or his death ... Professor Pierre Danchin ... suggests that the reference to "Cordelia's bearded Chin" in line 50 may indicate that it was composed for a school production'.

p. 206 **NB** Osborn did not decipher the name of the speaker, suggesting the reading 'Lyall'. It really appears to read 'L^t Yate', hence my reading 'Lieutenant Yate', perhaps for Richard Yates, though he usually played comic roles [I. McIntyre, *Garrick*, 199, 174n). Osborn says 'It is not clear who the undecipherable speaker of this prologue may be. It is unlikely to be Lydall, Garrick's early stage name, although he did play Lear at Drury Lane on 28 May 1742, six months after revealing his true identity'.