

British Theatre Guide

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King Lear

William Shakespeare

Yard Players

The Jack Studio Theatre

19–30 March 2019

New company [Yard Players](#) has reworked Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear* to be in line with its policy of bringing classic works within the reach of everyone.

This means cutting the text to a running time of something over two hours, using a modern-day, criminal world setting and using an assortment of classical and pop music.

It also includes adopting the currently popular device of gender reversal, making Gloucester's treacherous, bastard son Edmund into illegitimate daughter, Ada.

This adds a hint of lesbian-eroticism into the action via the would-be affairs between Ada and Goneril and Ada and Regan, but also puts more power into the hands of women, not shying away from making them much darker than their male counterparts.

The criminal world setting isn't very noticeably inferred or played but the contemporary setting allows the women to be active combatants in the battle scene in a way that they wouldn't have been in a more traditional one.

Regan's particular bloodlust is revealed when she follows her husband's action and takes out Gloucester's second eye, in a scene that loses its shock value for being followed cartoonishly by Manfred Mann's "Blinded by the Light".

This is not only a crass choice but a pointless one. What is to be gained by diminishing the Cornwalls' vengeful cruelty? Christopher Poke, who warms up to play Gloucester well, deserves better than to have the seriousness of his affliction reduced in the coming scenes.

It is also self-defeating, as the ongoing themes of actual blindness and figurative blindness are then not well served and the production generally struggles to recover its proper gravitas, making Alan Booty's thoughtful Lear the more sinned against.

There is strong support from Daniel McCaully as Edgar, Evangeline Beaven as Ada and Pete Picton as Kent.

Also from Jess Kinsey as Cordelia, though her portrayal of Fool which she doubles on becomes less clearly spoken as the pressure mounts, and the Chaplinesque shuffling quickly starts to be annoying.

Director James Eley keeps the action moving along and the fight in which the disguised Edgar kills the conniving Ada is well staged.

Using a blackboard to give the scene locations provides a clarity that would otherwise be missing in this largely unfussy production which virtually does away with scenery.

It all comes together to make Eley's *King Lear* a strange beast. It comes across as a lot more about sibling relationships than about parents and children, relegating Lear and Gloucester's losses.

Yard Players has put a *King Lear* 'within the reach of everyone', but perhaps not *the King Lear*.

Reviewer: [Sandra Giorgetti](#)