Original Article-Open Access: DOI: 10.53057/irls/2020.2.2.2

International Review of Literary Studies
ISSN: (P) 2709-7013, (E) 2709-7021 Vol. 2, Issue 2 July-December 2020 pp. 10-23

Mapping Sight and Blindness in *King Lear(s)* of William Shakespeare and Roberto Ciulli: Towards a Poly-optic Reading

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Abstract

Mapping Sight and Blindness in King Lear demonstrates the ploy-optic nature of Shakespeare's King Lear. The pictorial and metaphorical use of images of sight and blindness and their significance are examined. Lear's blindness is psychogenic expressing his fear of castration. The multitude of gazes in the play: scopophilic, misandric, gynocentric, phallic, and gazes from the margin have allowed us to conceive a new concept called the poly-optic dimension of the text which implies the presence of different perspectives and angles and distorts the idea of a harmonious single gaze. Roberto Ciulli's adaptation of King Lear is another demonstration of the poly-optic dimension of the Shakespearean text. The concept of the transmigratory nature of the text is introduced and defined. This concept allows Roberto Ciulli to experiment with sight and blindness theatrically and create a stage similar to an optical prism where theatrically blinded characters generate visions loaded with possibilities of interpretations independent from the Shakespearean text even while dealing with the very same theme of sight versus blindness. Reading sight and blindness from the lens of language (images) and (psychoanalysis) gazes and performance criticism allows us to prove the poly-optic nature of King Lear.

Keywords: Poly-optic; Transmigratory; Sight and blindness; Gaze, Buffoonic gaze; King Lear;

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Publication Details:
Article Received: August 19, 2020
Article Published: December 15, 2020
Article DOI: 10.53057/irls/2020.2.2.2
Journal DOI: 10.53057/irls

Recommended citation:
Ben Amor, Z. (2020). Mapping Sight and Blindness in the King Lear(s) of William Shakespeare and Roberto Ciulli: Towards a Poly-optic Reading. *International Review of Literary Studies*, *2*(2), 10-23.
Retrieved from https://irlsjournal.com/index.php/Irls

Literature review, literary theories, and theatre criticism have proven the polyphonic dimension at all levels in the plays of William Shakespeare. Political interpretations, questions of power and inheritance, subdued and/or resistant females, souls in dilemmas, tricks and games, stabbings, songs, plays-within-plays, etc. confirm that the theatre of Shakespeare is peopled with voices, resonates with commotion, and is woven by under-currents echoing the noise of the Globe playgoers in the age of Shakespeare and picturing the anxieties and the delights of a whole era. The idea for the present article came from a reflection upon the writing of violence in the plays of William Shakespeare and notably the plucking of the eyes of Gloucester in *King Lear* (1606) that takes place in Act three, scene seven. The scene is of extreme violence and one wonders if the text of the play accentuates or attenuates the cruelty of the horrid deed. At the same time, while watching screen versions and plays of King *Lear*, each time, there is a violent action and notably the stabbing of Gloucester's eyes, I had a kinaesthetic reaction and almost closed my eyes before the obliteration of the eyes as a gesture of anticipation. Some other screen versions and staged performances dealt with violent scenes differently.

The question that I was permanently asking is related to the heteroglossia, dialogic, and polyphonic contexts so to use the words of Mihail Bakhtin[1]: how can one find a place for and detect the voices and the mental constructs of Shakespeare's characters without paying attention to the visual? If texts go beyond as metanarratives show; if theatre craft stages beyond as metatheatre prove it and if meanings are polyphonic, ages are self-fashioning, if hyperreality is a condition in literature if theatrical actions on stage are divided into actions observed and actions executed; what about the mapping of multilayered dimensions through what is seen and observed? What about the visual in a dramatic text and a text performed? Is the dramatic text only polyphonic? All these questions have pushed me to think of the matter of sight and blindness in *King Lear* while considering them.

Tackling sight and blindness in William Shakespeare's *King Lear* is multifold. It could be manifest through the presence of a highly graphic language of the text. It could have to do with the reception[2] of the play and it could be tackled from the perspective of staging and performance[3]. The present article will attempt to show how *King Lear* in text and performance, through the focus on sight and blindness, follows a multi-layered visual optic dimension that I will call poly-optic. Three important areas are going to constitute the skeleton of the future analysis. The first part will be dedicated to the examination of the pictorial and metaphorical use of images, both in the main plot which constitutes a stage, and the subplot which constitutes a stage beyond. A second part will analyze sight and blindness from the lens of psychoanalysis with a focus on concepts like psychogenic blindness, scopophilia, male, female, and marginalized gazes in an attempt to show how the mixture

[1] Bakhtin in his *problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1963) advances the idea that discourse is not monologic and defines dialogic discourse as follows : "to live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire life in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium (293). Also, Bakhtin understands language as a speaking social person. He considers, in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1934-35) that "heteroglossia" is a type of verbal communication that functions "within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged" (354). He also adds that "language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu-languages and with countless pretenders to the status of language which are all more or less successful, depending on their degree of social scope and on the ideological area in which they are employed" (356–57).

[2] To cite, but very few interpretations of the play, one can mention the feminist perception by Coppelia Kahn who believes that the collapse of Lear stems from his refusal to accept female authority. From a New Historicist perspective, critics like Leonard Tennenhouse, emphasize the conservative impulse of the play meanwhile others, like Jonathan Dollimore, believe that the play is not about a hero or a man but rather about social constructs related to questions of power and property.

[3] The analysis of the play from the perspective of performance could trace, through the study of the different performances and film versions of the play, its transition, thus, its journey, from page to stage. In this context, the concept of the transmigratory nature of the dramatic text will be introduced later in the article to show how it reinforces both the malleable and the multidimensional perception of the play.

of gazes enables us to build a definition of the poly-optic nature of the text. A final part will show how Roberto Ciulli's adaptation of *King Lear*, and precisely his treatment of sight and blindness, is another demonstration of the poly-optic dimension of the play. Thanks to the transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean text which will be explained in my final part, Ciulli's stage will be compared to an optical prism generating different optical beams and visions pointing to sight and blindness.

Metaphorical uses of sight and blindness in plays like *Othello* (1603) and *Hamlet* (1601) occur sporadically. In *Othello*, for example, Desdemona's angered father, insinuating that Othello is blinded by his daughter's beauty, warns the Moor: "[l]ook to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see./ She has deceived her father and may thee" (1.3. 289-90). Meanwhile, in the closet scene of *Hamlet*, the prince of Denmark incessantly heckles his mother: "have your eyes?" (3.4. 66) and accuses her to have "eyes without feeling, feeling without sight" (3.4.79). As for *King Lear*, allusions of sight and blindness pervade. From the first scene of the play where Lear announces "his darker purpose" (1.1.35) to the storm scene on the heath to the sweet-bitter encounter between the mad Lear and the blind Gloucester to the final frontal shock between the breathless Lear and the dying Cordelia, sight, whether it is physical or figurative, infuses the play and carries its themes and scopes. It stands for political and moral insight and is closely associated with other metaphorical meanings related to darkness, anarchy, and violence. Moreover, Shakespeare stages the paradox of physically blind but morally seeing characters and organically sound characters but blind to show the discrepancy between appearance and reality and to emphasize the tragic consequences of the inability to distinguish between "true" and "fake" matters.

Shakespeare in *King Lear* has worked on the spectacle of blindness from a multitude of perspectives: blindness holds a political dimension, a semantic one; it is also detectable at the level of a well-constructed lexical register and careful use of metaphors and images; it is finally staged and theatricalized in a way to show the illusory dimension of theatre but also to accentuate the absurdity of the king's behavior. At the beginning of the play, the denotative and the connotative dimensions of sight and blindness are obvious. Lear's elder daughter claims misleadingly and ironically that her father is "dearer than her eyesight" (1.1.56). Her statement announces, from the outset, that Shakespeare is keen on experimenting with the matter of sight and blindness through the injection of rhetoric and jargon ranging from anatomic details about eyes to the physiological and kinetic exercise of sight, to the metaphorical allusions of perception and reason. Sight and blindness are also associated with the changing mood of a fragile king who needs to be reassured in front of a whole court. In that vein, when Cordelia does not sing the same tune as her father with her staccato responses that spoiled the "love test" staged by Lear, the latter, blinded by his arrogance and anger chastises Kent "Out of my sight" (1.1.156) the same way he has just done with Cordelia: "avoid my sight" (1.1.24).

Also, the weight of the tragedy comes from the breach of the Platonic, Medieval, and Renaissance philosophical precept of the Great chain of being (*The Scala Naturae*). According to the Chain of Being, the king is the closest creature to God, his representative on Earth, and the guarantee of stability; the break of the Chain brings chaos and disaster with it. The Fool, on the heath, mourns the chaotic darkness of the kingdom: "So out went the candle and we were left darkling" (1.4.213). The image of the candle is indeed pictorial and graphic; it however alludes to the fact that the "darker purpose" which is the abdication of the kingdom has left the whole universe without light and guidance. Things are upside down and "the time's plague when madmen lead the blind" (4.1.47).

Decay, corruption, chaos, and the absence of landmarks are staged by Shakespeare to convey the acute degree of darkness in the play. Staging blindness is not only a mental or a psychological process; it is not either lexical or allegorical. Shakespeare is keen on dealing with the matter by creating a stage and a stage beyond, a theatre and a theatre beyond to experiment with the idea of blindness on multiple stages. Not only, reflexivity is narrative since there are a plot and a sub-plot, it is also theatrical since there are a play and a sub-play; there are real trials and mock trials, true blind characters and fake ones, true fools and fake ones, many stories, soliloquies, confessions, and even songs. Hence, the playwright does not limit himself to weaving the story of Lear and his daughters; he has indeed conceived sub-stages to explore the concept of blindness among other ones. Lear's fear to lose his lands, to lose his sight, and thus to lose his masculinity is echoed by Gloucester, another

misguided father who is unable to see clearly and who judges his children hastily. While being utterly deceived by his bastard son Edmund, Gloucester boastingly claims that he "shall need spectacles" (1.2.37) to perceive and cogitate on the forged letter of Edmund. Paradoxically, the man who, in reality, needs spectacles to realize that the letter is a forged one, pretends that his eyesight is intact: "let's see" (1.2.43).

There is an oxymoronic parallel in the philosophical attitudes of both Lear and Gloucester at the beginning of the play: madness in reason and blind insight. What sounds reasonable to both of them is utter madness and what they believe they see is metaphorical blindness. Shakespeare, in the first part of the play, associates Lear and Gloucester's use of vocabulary about sight in a literal way. The workings of irony and the buffoonic portrayal of over-confident homosocial parents push audiences to believe that the vision of Lear and Gloucester is distorted, short-sighted, and biased. The oxymoronic denotation of the vocabulary about sight is very ironic since Lear and Gloucester cannot recognize nor use in a subtle way expressions like "see" or "sight". There is, at this level, superficiality as for the use of language which points to the mental superficiality of the patriarchs. Hence, when the tyrannical Lear asks for the map in the opening scene "Give me the map there" (1.1.38), he believes he knows; however, and despite his minute scrutiny of the map, he does not perceive that a king without land is undoubtedly a king without a crown. Paradoxically, what pushes Lear and Gloucester to act, is what they hear and not what they see.

Sight and blindness are interesting sites of investigation when studied from the perspective of psychoanalysis and precisely by reference to the notion of the gaze. The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary explains that to gaze is "to fix the eyes in a steady intent look often with eagerness or studious attention" (Merriam-webster.com, 2011). From the perspective of literary theory, the gaze is associated with a standpoint; it could be loaded with meanings and it shapes relationships between the observer and the observed. The gaze, then, bears awareness, perception, and power as the works of Jacques Lacan or Michel Foucault demonstrate. The concept of gaze has been a focus of analysis in different areas including phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and sociology. A plethora of gazes were then explored such as the male gaze by Laura Mulvey, the feminine gaze by Judith Butler, the white gaze, the postcolonial gaze by Edward Said, the imperial gaze by E. Ann Kaplan among many others[4]. In the world of visual media, film theory, and criticism the concept of gaze has also been used. All the theories agree on the idea that the gaze implies an intellectual dimension for the desired end or as an expression of an attitude or a view about the world. In my analysis, I will resort to concepts related to male gazes, scopophilia, phallic women gazes and I will define a new type of gaze which is the buffoonic gaze: the gaze of the marginalized. Moreover, I will take into consideration the literal meaning of the gaze like a physical phenomenon that happens on stage and is enacted by actors covering with their sight different areas of the stage. Indeed, one should permanently remember that the characters of *King Lear* are also present on stage which imposes their awareness of the other characters mixed with their awareness of themselves.

When dealing with sight and blindness concerning the old King, we notice the presence of antagonistic sides proper to his behavior. On the one hand, he adapts a voyeuristic gaze of a tyrant male who wants to control and punish. On the other, Lear suffers from psychogenic blindness, a kind of psychological blindness from within that stems from his refusal to see the world around him. Dutta et al. define psychogenic blindness as "a type of dissociative sensory loss which is characterized by unilateral or bilateral loss of vision in the absence of any organic cause" (49). Lear's refusal to see is so alarming to the point that Kent, disillusioned, asks him to: "see better" and proposes to be "the true blank" of his eye (1.1.157-58). It is possible to state that the androcentric Lear is so overwhelmed by his two misandric and phallic elder daughters so to use the term of Lacan to the point that he becomes

[4] Lacan, while working on the concept of the mirror stage develops the notion of the gaze and links it to self-awareness and anxiety; he focuses on the developing aspect of the gaze. Lura Mulvey has introduced the concept of "male gaze" in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema" (1975) insisting on the idea that females are objectified by the view of the patriarchal male who controls the camera and shows voyeurism. Judith Butler, in the same vein, introduces the feminine gaze as "a pervasive heterosexism in feminist theory" emphasizing the idea of men performing their heterosexual masculinity. The post-colonial, the imperial and the white gazes follow the same pattern with assumptions that colonial powers keep their controlling sense of superiority over their ex-colonised countries and vehicle stereotyping images about them. For the white gaze, the generators of discourse over blacks are white people.

hysterical and falls prey to psychogenic blindness. Sigmund Freud in *The Uncanny* delivers a tale by E.T.A Hoffmann about a "Sand-Man" tearing the eyes of young children and how the fear of this Sand-man has turned the protagonist of the story mad (135-38). Freud concludes from the story that children are afraid of losing their eyes which is a substitute for a fear of castration when they grow adults (139). Freud insists on the male's fear of losing their "sexual organ" (140) and advances the idea of "the castration complex" (140). Lear, a child-like figure who needs a "love test" seems to be permanently afraid to lose his eyes and, thus, to become castrated. It is this fear of castration that has created hysteria within him and might have pushed the old King to reach a state of psychogenic blindness. In Act two, Scene four Lear passionately exclaims: O! how this mother swells upward toward my heart!/ Hysterica passio! down, thou climbing sorrow! (2.4.56-57). He, thus, qualifies his sorrow as hysteria and equates it with femaleness.

The idea that blindness is associated with the psychological has been displayed indirectly a long time before the appearance of psychoanalysis. William Hazlitt accentuates the idea that Lear is blind because of his emotionally excessive behavior and whimsical passion: "It is his rash haste, his violent impetuously, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes" (Hazlitt. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. Gutenberg.org).

It is passion mixed with fear that contributes to worsening the psychological status of King Lear. Shakespeare combines the psychological, the metaphorical, and the pictorial to convey the notion of blindness in his play. King Lear's political blindness is paralleled with the absence of sight and darkness; the king announces, at the beginning of the play, "a darker purpose" of a voyeuristic and fetishistic dimension (1.1.36) which will echo the obscurity and the violence of the storm on the heath later and point towards the complexity of Lear's psyche. Lear's love test is of a scopophilic dimension where he needs to summon a court and place his daughters in the center of it to exercise an aesthetic erotic pleasure. Lear is like a child with a voyeuristic drive who seeks to find pleasure in the private and the forbidden. The aim of his "love test" is to subject his daughters and control them via a curious and scopophilic gaze. Sigmund Freud dwells on the erotic scopophilic behavior as follows:

> Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused […] The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted ('sublimated') in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the genitals to the shape of the body as a whole. usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it; indeed, this offers them a possibility of directing some proportion of their libido on to higher artistic aims (156-57).

In *King Lear* sight and blindness are discursive; they are constructed upon a mixture of antagonistic gazes: the gazes of females, the gazes of males, the gazes of parents, the gazes of the buffoons, and the low comical characters, etc. Hence, the dramatic text is peopled with a poly-optic dimension. Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) claims that "truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of a person; it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (110). Bakhtin insists on the necessity of hearing all the voices, but that is not enough. The present analysis attempts to show that texts are not only polyphonic but also poly-optic. Indeed, the trajectory of different gazes within the space of a dramatic text and its performances is to be outlined to prove the poly-optic nature of the text. The poly-optic dimension of the dramatic text implies the presence of different gazes that are independent of the author's. Each of these gazes has its perspective and its narrative input within the play. Instead of a single united world, the different gazes convey plural consciousnesses which are anxious, hesitant, disturbed, and shaken. Audiences, through the different gazes of the different characters, do not see one stage but a multitude of stages shaped according to the way the characters of Lear see the world. The poly-optic dimension of the dramatic text enables the different characters to see the world from their perspectives against the perspective of one author. Power is, then, not monopolized the way the stage is liberated and its different angles are spotted. The poly-optic nature of the text, with the variety of gazes, distorts the idea of a harmonious single gaze and injects eyeful trajectories with gazes

looking in different directions. Consequently, the stage, through the different gazes, becomes like an optical prism dispersing light with no parallel surfaces and different paintings of questions related to power, patriarchy, dominance, and impotence.

Goneril and Regan see the world from the perspective of a phallic paradigm; they consider males as entities to be castrated. Their gaze is to strip males from their power and confiscate their eyes literally and metaphorically to deny them the powerful sensation of the phallus. The gaze the two daughters project is different from the voyeuristic one expressed by a fetishist father who needs his daughters to perform a ritual of submission. McLaughlin believes that "Much of the behavior of Goneril and Regan can be explained by what Adler called the "masculine protest, a refusal by women to accept the weakness of the feminine role. Where the masculine protest is in evidence, women construct a wide variety of strategies for reversing their subordinate feminine roles" (41). When the elder daughters meet, in Act two, Scene four, they shake hands and make it clear to Lear that he is not anymore the alpha male. Reducing the number of Lear's followers is stripping him of his masculinity. "What need one?" (2.4.258) states Regan insinuating that her father does not need any tool or instrument of any phallic nature to control the world. It is from there that the process of Lear's gaze is going to be altered and his psychogenic blindness starts to take a form as a protection mechanism against the threatening castrating plotting of the two daughters: "I prythee, daughter, do not make me mad" (2.4.212). Act two, Scene four presents an opposition between two sets of gazes. On the one hand, there is an androcentric gaze with a Lear empowered by his followers and soldiers and who is struggling to keep the supremacy of his gaze "That thou hast power to shake my manhood" (1.4. 95). On the other, a gynocentric gaze creeps dominantly and reduces the androcentric one into impotence. Males with their debauch and conquering sexuality are not welcome in a world governed by gynocentric and misandric gazes:

> Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
> Men so disordered, so debauched, and bold
> That this our court, infected with their manners,
> Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust
> Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
> Then a graced palace. The shame itself doth speak
> For instant remedy. Be then desired
> By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
> A little to disquantity your train,
> And the remainder that shall still depend
> To be such men as may best your age, (1.4.237-47)

The triumph of the gynocentric gaze takes place in Act three, Scene seven when the two sisters order, comment on, watch and participate in the horrific performance of the plucking of Gloucester's eyes which is a sheer act of castration where they obliterate his sight, neutralize his gaze and confiscate his phallic power to empower theirs: "REGAN: Hang him instantly! /GONERIL: Pluck out his eyes!' (3.7.4-5). Gloucester, sacrifices his eyesight, accepts impotence in a vain attempt to prevent the "candle" of masculinity to fade. K. G. Hunter believes that the "blinding of Gloucester is the climax to the great series of comments on eyes and seeing that the play contains" (529). In the blinding scene, Gloucester loses his eyesight but discovers Edmund's treachery and Edgar's loyalty. His eyes are plucked, his masculinity has been shaken but his eyes are metaphorically open.

Cordelia, though she has a different gaze from her sisters, is the one who has proceeded in the exercise of the emasculation of the father figure. In her refusal to comply and subdue, she rejects the role of the submissive obedient female. Cordelia's gaze challenges her father's; her protest to take part in the "love test" is a witness of a character whose gaze goes in a different direction and who sees the world from a different angle and who refuses the scopophilic gaze of the father procreator. The "nothing" she utters stands like a gaze to a different horizon, a different site of resistance that goes beyond the space of the court and the control of the father. There is an opposition between Cordelia's gaze and her father's at the beginning of the play. Meanwhile, Lear strangely commands affection from his daughter as a token of authority; Cordelia's gaze announces the beginning of the collapse of her father's authority and power. It is because Cordelia does not share the same gaze as

her father that the latter articulates his anxiety and expresses his fear of losing his sexual hierarchy. The gaze of Ophelia is very destabilizing to the king who spends the great bulk of the play searching for the sight of his daughter. Lear observes Cordelia and his daughters as subjects of mortification to satisfy his ego. Hence, he sees a pattern not with his eyes but from the perspective of his potency. There is even a fetishistic eroticist dimension in the gaze of Lear. His proclamation of a "love test" is an avowal of a repressed incestuous desire but the resistant gaze of Ophelia puts an end to the mono-optic view of the dominant father and challenges the hierarchy that it is is implied.

John J. McLaughlin, commenting on *King Lear*, states that it "is the tragedy that is immersed most deeply in the psychology of power. Not only Lear, but also his three daughters and Edmund are driven by the need to achieve social, personal, and sexual power" (37). Indeed, the unraveling of sight and blindness is also of moral, philosophical, and ethical dimensions. The play is about anxieties related to the fear of an unstable country and the worry of the absence of a wise ruler. It is about power and empowerment. Hence, ethical dynamics are present and necessary for a full understanding of the question of sight and blindness. If Lear and Gloucester are blinded by flattery, their respective children are blinded by greed and lust for power. As for Goneril and Regan, who have seized power mischievously, they unscrupulously ill-treat the whole world to keep their possession of power intact. Surprisingly, it is a gaze from the margin, a gaze which is normally ignored, that, mockingly and disturbingly via a poignant discourse, portrays a thorough reading of the two daughters' psychology:

> Fathers that wear rags
> Do make their children blind,
> But fathers that bear bags
> Shall see their children kind. (2.4.46-51)

The Fool, in the above lines, highlights an opposition between dynamics of kindness and ones of blindness. However, his sarcastic comment alludes to the hypocrisy of the ruling class since he links between kindness and "bags" which means wealth. The Fool, a voice from the margin, is aware of the huge mistake of the King. He describes with acute precision the catastrophic reversal of a situation caused by the blinded behavior of parents and the filial ingratitude. The gaze of the Fool is the gaze of an oppressed directed to figures of authority; it comes as a backlash against the gaze of the crowned heads and is empowered by the carnivalesque "I am a fool, thou art nothing" (1.4.79). At the same time, the Fool's stinging words point towards the main reason leading the King towards psychogenic blindness which is the loss of his masculinity. The crown then is conditioned by the availability of eggs that stand metaphorically for male genitalia: "Give me an egg, nuncle, and I'll give thee two crowns" (1.4.39-40). The Fool mentions clearly that Lear has been unmanned from the very moment when his gaze towards his daughters has become of a scopophilic dimension:

> I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou madest
> thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gavest
> them the rod and puttest down thine own breaches (1.4.58-60).

The Fool's songs, riddles, blunt sarcasm, and epigrams, distressing and hard-hitting the way they are, represent a counterattacking gaze with harping drives. In the play, different gazes looking in different directions, each holds a containing power, clash against each other to create a poly-optic stage but no gaze could fashion the stage on its own; the only thing that happens is a sight of a spectacle where hierarchies collapse and sight and blindness does not function mono-optically. The discourse of Bakhtin in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986) about polyphonic voices could be applied easily to the poly-optic gazes:

There is neither a first nor last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) - they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and reinvigorated in the renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival (170).

In the play, Gazes and looks are simultaneous; they go in different directions, they focus on different spots and they are of a boundless reach. The gaze of the male, the gaze of the phallic female, and the gaze of the oppressed, among other ones, bear cultural, social, and ethical roots and experiences. The realm of the play is by no means, then, a matter of one look but of an infinity of beams, holograms where the eyesight dwells metaphorically and symbolically, and scenes are far from being mono-optic spots. None of the characters in *King Lear* holds the monopoly of sight and power.

The poly-optic nature of *King Lear* is not only about a text suggesting different characters with different gazes; it is neither about characters looking at different directions; it also resides in the transmigratory nature of the text itself during the passage from page to stage. Performances of the play by different directors could disclose new areas and new angles. The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines the verb "transmigrate" as **"**to cause to go from one state of existence or place to another" or "to pass at death from one body or being to another" (Merriam-webster.com, 2011). In other words, the term transmigration denotes a process allowing an ethereal or a subtle migration from one entity to another; it is then an entrance from one stage to another with re-birth and a new life as a result. The concept of transmigration is widely used in social anthropology through the works of Edward Taylor, cross-culture studies, and religion. I am intending humbly to re-adapt this concept and retrace it to prove its appropriation and legitimacy as for the dramatic texts of William Shakespeare. Indeed, it is from the physical body of Shakespeare's text of *King Lear* that emanates a plethora of visions like non-physical entities that create new worlds, new visions and bring a new life to the text. It is from the above perspective that the last part of the analysis will show how the transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean dramatic text enhances the poly-optic dimension of *King Lear*.

One of the most interesting staged performances of *King Lear* was the one directed by Roberto Ciulli and produced by *Theater a der Ruhr* in Germany in 2006. Ciulli worked minutely on the notion of sight and blindness in the play from a purely theatrical angle. I had the opportunity to watch Ciulli's *King Lear* in 2010 in Tunis during a workshop ran by Roberto Ciulli himself and organized by the Tunisian National Theatre under the auspices of Mohamed Driss[5], within the framework of a project called *l'Ecole des Maîtres* bringing together, in one workshop, actors, directors, theatre critics, and scholars. A prismatic poly-optic dimension has been employed while dealing with sight and blindness in Ciulli's *King Lear*. The actors of Ciulli occupy the bare stage with

[5] Mohamed Driss is among the most eminent Tunisian actors, directors and playwrights. He won many national and international awards for his prolific career both in the fields of cinema and theatre. He was at the head of the National Tunisian Theatre from 1988 to 2012.

almost no props and no camouflage surrounding the old king from beginning to end without entrances or exits.

Fig. 1. An overall view of Ciulli's stage with characters looking to different angles. *King Lear* (2006), dir. Roberto Ciulli. The photo was taken by F. Maron from < theater-an-der-ruhr.de/repertoire/koenig-lear/>

Another important opportunity the bare stage offers is the creation, on stage, of an expressionistic imaginary demarcation line or wall by the play director. Audiences discover this imaginary transparent wall through the movements of characters who collide each time they try to trespass it. This expressionistic wall is a demonstration that the stage of Ciulli is comparable to an optical prism with different rays, beams, lines some of them are visible and others are not. It is within this prism-like stage that characters express their poly-optic gazes and perform. The actors of Ciulli are staged as if they come from a different matrix; each of them seems locked in a bubble and traveling via beams. Actors are staged as blind and eyeless beings moving nonchalantly on stage. Volker Roosthe (King Lear), for example, moves incessantly from a tape recorder, producing diegetic sounds and utterances replayed and mimed by actors, to the rocking chair and sometimes climbs the ladder to deliver ardent tirades with a motionless head always fixing a unilateral line like a ray of light.

Fig. 2. Simone Thoma (Cordelia), Volker Roos (Lear) on the ladder. *King Lear* (2006), dir. Roberto Ciulli. The photo was taken by F. Maron from < theater-an-der-ruhr.de/repertoire/koenig-lear/>

It is through the timid and hesitant movements of actors and their unblinking motionless eyes, accompanied by their airy mysterious gestures, that audiences can understand that the actors of Ciulli do not see. As for Klaus Herzog, the actor performing Gloucester, he wears dark sunglasses; meanwhile the two elder sisters, Goneril and Regan stand, almost all along with the play motionless, next to their respective husbands. Actors are motionless and when they speak, they do not look at each other nor at the audience, their looks go to an infinite space like a beam of light reaching the infinite universe. Each of the characters covers a direction of the stage; the cosmogony of the stage becomes full of invisible beams, each going in a different direction, each holding a story, a noise, a

view, and an experience.

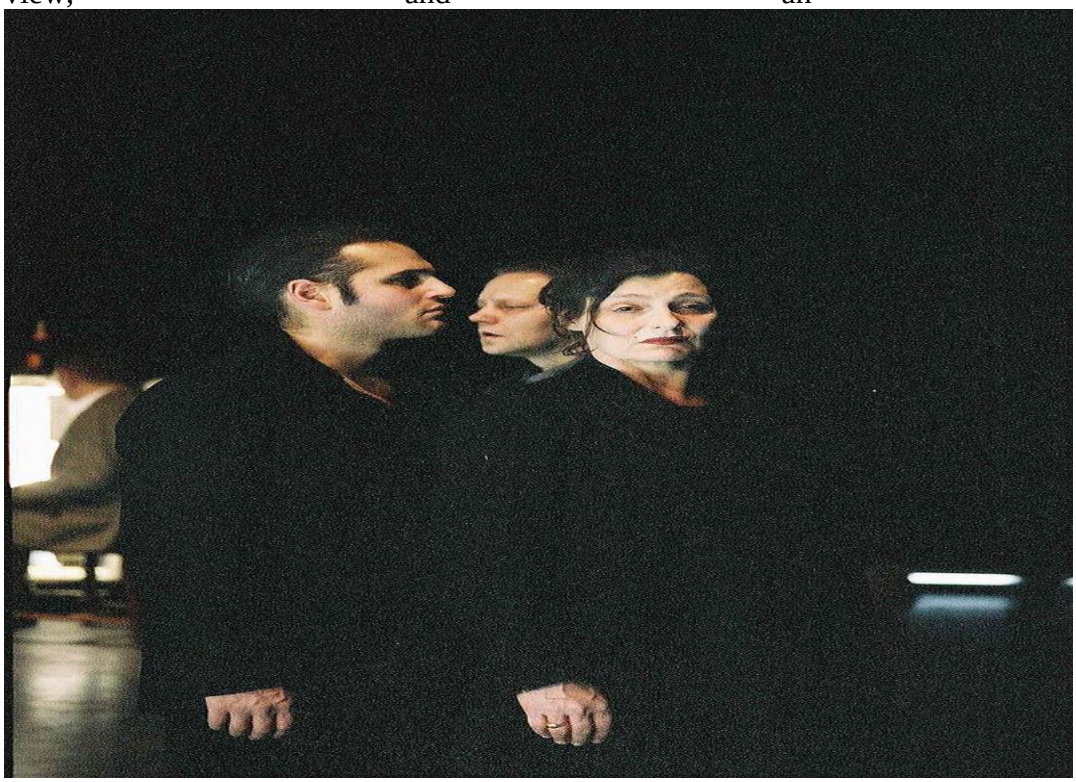

Fig.3. Blinded characters each fixating a stage spot: Edmund (Fabio Menéndez), Duke of Albany (Albert Bork), and Goneril (Petra von der Beek). *King Lear* (2006), dir. Roberto Ciulli. The photo was taken by F. Maron from <theater-an-der-ruhr.de/repertoire/koenig-lear/>

It is also important to mention that the actors in Ciulli's play are not only sticking to the roles initiated by the Shakespearean text; they, each, perform an extra-metatheatrical role in a way we have, on the one hand, the actor performer who is the physical person on stage with an allotted role, and the metatheatrical actor who is the creation of the previously mentioned actor performer, on the other. It is the poly-optic representation of characters with physical actors on stage doubled by holographic metatheatrical performers that explains Ciulli's choice of casting blind characters. His characters, indeed, do not only belong to the physical and temporal realm of the stage to remain confined in it. The actors are rather placed, like Russian dolls, in a multitude of boxes which are unraveled by Ciulli who uses a *mise en abyme* technique to work on the matter of sight and blindness from an expressionistic perspective almost Beckettian in spirit and postmodern in style.

What accentuates the idea of the prism-like stage and the holographic nature of performers is the fact that actors tend to inter-react with the tape recorder producing intra-diegetic utterances in a way that what unites these characters on stage is the voice of the tape recorder playing fragments from the original Shakespearean text and not their physical presence on stage. This situation accentuates the idea that sight takes a dimension that goes beyond a physical presence on stage. The sound of the tape recorder is like an infra-red beam or an ultraviolet one; it cannot be captured by the audiences separated from the actors by imaginary light and imaginary walls; however, the holographic characters, unlike the audience, can detect those poly-optic beams emanating from the tape recorder.

Another interesting area of investigation is to compare the original Shakespearean metaphors and connotations related to sight and blindness with the production of Roberto Ciulli. The cruel unplugging of the eyes of Gloucester in the Shakespearean text which is likely to create a reactive kinaesthetic response on the part of audiences takes a new dimension in Ciulli's performance. The episode starts with a static sequence where Steffen Reuber, playing the role of Gloucester, turns his back on the audience upstage opposite the fridge. A second sequence follows with Dagmar Geppert, playing the role of Regan, going to the fridge, and getting a bottle of Champagne and some oysters. After that, she pricks an oyster and drinks Champagne and it is at that moment that Gloucester loses

one eye. A repetition of the same gesture by Regan makes Gloucester lose the other eye. One common thing between the Shakespearean text and the performance of Ciulli, here, is the erotic and sexual connotation of eyes. Meanwhile, a Freudian reading, as the early part of the analysis has suggested, proposes that the obliterated eyes could stand for masculine genitalia; the eaten oysters could represent female genitalia. The Ciulli scene suggests an act of transformation of Regan from a gynocentric female to a phallic being. Other than that, and from the perspective of theatre criticism, the director uses a visual narrative technique that transforms the original violent episode into almost a lyrical moment.

The carefully staged *mise en abyme* here is an act of romanticization of a cruel act. Ciulli through the dramaturgy of this episode uses a technique commonly followed in the cinema when classical music accompanies, in a versatile way, violent scenes to create a contrast, to cast a flash of distance, a touch of a Brechtian distanciation allowing audiences to see the whole situation instead of reacting emphatically. Scully thus creates an anti-cathartic effect in this episode to subvert a grand narrative representation of theatre, to undermine the mono-optic dimension of the stage, and to show that the space of the theatre is not monologic. What proves this idea is the fact that Gloucester does not show any reaction or feeling of pain during the devouring of the oysters by Regan.

Some other interesting moments where Ciulli plays on the theme of sight and blindness is when he stages Lear trying to read with his ears alluding to the fact that what interests Lear more than anything is what he wants to hear. Ciulli reminds us, in that instance, of the Lear of Shakespeare: "nothing will come of nothing. Speak again" (1.1.90) or when he says to Regan: "Is this well spoken?" (2.4.231). Also, when the Fool of Ciulli lights a candle and places it Downstage Left opposite to Lear, there is intertextuality with Shakespeare's Fool when he says "So out went the candle and we were left darkling" (1.4.203). What happens with Ciulli's production of *King Lear* is his awareness of the potentialities of the text as for the problem of sight and blindness. However, and thanks to the transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean text, Ciulli has transformed the gazes of the characters on pages by transforming the stage into an optical prism where theatrically blinded characters generate, each, optic rays loaded with possibilities of interpretations independent from the Shakespearean text, even while dealing with the very same theme of sight versus blindness.

The actors of Ciulli are, in many ways, reminders of the strange universe created by Maurice Maeterlinck's characters in his play *The Blind* (1890), where blind prison inmates are hopelessly lost in a forest. The end of Ciulli's play is, however, very different from Shakespeare's since the gaze of Lear goes nowhere as he finishes like any Beckettian character wrapped in tapes, symbolic of sounds from his memory, with a saucepan in his head bending down on a chair, while Gloucester is feeding him porridge. Roberto Ciulli stated repeatedly, during the workshop I had with him in 2010, that he does not need to understand the verbal language of a play to make sure it is a good one, and that some of the best performances he had seen were in languages he does not understand. That is another proof of Ciulli's reliance and theatricalization to offer a poly-optic vision of the world it creates.

Fig. 4. Lear (Volker Roos) wrapped in tapes and characters looking endlessly nowhere. *King Lear* (2006), dir. Roberto Ciulli. The photo was taken by F. Maron from <theater-an-der-ruhr.de/repertoire/koenig-lear/>

Conclusion

Sight and blindness in *King Lear* are not only present through a careful staging of images, metaphors, and allusions which are of a graphic and a visual dimension. Shakespeare problematizes them by creating a stage and a stage beyond (the subplot) and by inventing metaphors for sight and blindness (moral and political blindness). From the lens of psychoanalysis, Lear's blindness is psychogenic; it expresses his fear of castration. The multitude of gazes in the play: scopophilic, misandric, gynocentric, phallic, and even gazes from the marginal has allowed us to reach a new concept that the paper calls the poly-optic dimension of the text. The poly-optic dimension implies the presence of different gazes, perspectives, and angles. The poly-optic nature of the text distorts the idea of a harmonious single gaze and injects eyeful trajectories with perspectives looking into different directions. Consequently, as the case study of Roberto Ciulli's adaptation of *King Lear* has proven, the stage becomes like an optical prism where theatrically blinded characters generate, each, optic rays loaded with possibilities of interpretations, independent from the Shakespearean text even while dealing with the very same theme of sight versus blindness.

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