



King Lear, the Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director

Grigori Kozintsev

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Of all Shakespeare's tragedies, "King Lear" is the darkest and most spiritually profound. Grigori Kozintsev's powerful film of "Lear", first shown in the West in 1972, made a profound impression on all those who saw it, casting a new light on many facets of the play.

"King Lear: The Space of Tragedy" is the diary Kozintsev kept during the shooting of the film, describing the chronological thought process behind the production. There are three strands running through the book. Firstly, there is the theme of "Lear" and the author's day-to-day meditations on the characters and the play. Secondly, there are the author's reminiscences of the early days of the cinema in Russia in the twenties and Sergei Eisenstein, with constant reference to the development of European theatre and the influence of Meyerhold, Artaud, Gordon Craig and Peter Brook. Finally, there is the story of how the film was actually made, with all the adverse weather conditions, and, last but not least, how Dmitri Shostakovich collaborated to compose the music.

There is no single correct interpretation of the play, Kozintsev asserts; each realization must be colored by personal feelings and traditions. His own is deeply Russian, influenced as it is by the legacy of the nineteenth century -- Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. For him, the play symbolizes man on the edge of catastrophe. Lear, the emotionless despot, renounces his power, and in so doing, becomes a human being. In his wanderings he joins the ranks of humanity, the tramps and beggars, who are caught up on the tide of events which sweeps them inevitably towards ruin and destruction. It is the ultimate irony that Lear, having become human in his poverty, eventually finds happiness in his reunion with Cordelia, only to have it snatched away from him almost immediately.

This book will be of great interest to all those concerned with Shakespeare criticism and also to...

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