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Shakespeare's Dramatic Language
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Passage: King Lear, 3.2.1-9, 14-24

KING LEAR

' Bl^{^^}ow, winds, and crack your ^{^^} cheeks! rage! bl^{^^}ow!
' You cataracts and ^{^^} hurrica^{^^}noes, [^] spout
Till you ^{^^} have dren^{^^} ch'd our [^] steeples, [^] drown'd the cocks!
' You [^] sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to ^{^^} oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
[^] Sin^{^^}ge my white ^{^^} head! ' And thou, all- ^{^^} shaking thunder,
[^] Smite flat the thick r^{^^}otundity ^{^^} o' the world!
' Crack nature's moulds, an [^] germens [^] spill at once,
That make ingrateful man!

Fool
[...]

KING LEAR

' Rumble thy bellyful! [^] Spit, fire! [^] spout, rain!
' Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
' I never gave you kingdom, call'd you ^{^^} children,
You ^{^^} owe me ^{^^} no [^] subscription: ' then let fall
Your ^{^^} horrible pleasure: ^{^^} here I [^] stand, your [^] slave,
' A poor, infirm, weak, and despised ^{^^} old man:
' But yet I call you [^] servile ministers,
' That ^{^^} have with two perni^{^^}cious daughters join'd
Your ^{^^} high engender'd battles 'gainst a ^{^^} head
[^] So ^{^^} old and white as this. ' ^{^^} O! ^{^^} O! 'tis foul!

Commentary:

I was particularly interested in Johnson's descriptions of "background disappearance" (3), especially the way he focuses on bodily processes that occur on small scales – both "fine adjustments" (3) of muscle as in the cup example and various "visceral processes" (4) that operate subconsciously. His argument seems to be that these processes belie the macro-level functions that seem to be driven by conscious intention – that the existence of subconscious processes challenges the idea that the mind "directs" the body. However, several of the visceral processes he lists seem to me to occupy something of an intermediate space, because while they normally take place in the background, they also can be consciously directed – for example, the respiratory system can be deliberately controlled through focused breathing or holding one's breath, while both the respiratory and cardiovascular systems can be controlled through one layer of abstraction, such as by running. Speech is related to focused breathing, as the normal cadences of speech can be altered to incorporate different levels of airflow to produce different aural effects; to me, this is a process analogous to playing a wind instrument or whistling, where one must inhale at very specific times, and through controlling the rate and speech exhalation produce different musical effects such as dynamics and pitch.

As with other physical exertions, proper exercise and training can strengthen one's respiratory control as well as one's lung capacity; one such exercise that I have encountered in the marching band context (which adds an additional demand on one's lungs since they have to power both the wind instrument and the physical exertion of running around on a field) is called breathing gym, where one inhales and exhales in time for various amounts of beats, as to a metronome. I have translated this exercise into Lear's passage shouting at the storm in the beginning of 3.2 (although I have removed the time element). For the marked passage, the breath marks represent inhalations, which should be quick and inhale as much air as possible (to simulate the quick breaths one must take between playing musical phrases), and then I have chosen certain phonemes that can sound in an air-intensive manner for forceful exhalation, marked by either one or two carets, depending on the relative intensity. For the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /ch/ ⟨tʃ⟩, the voiceless palato-alveolar sibilant /sh/ ⟨ʃ⟩, I have used two carets. For the voiceless alveolar sibilant /s/, I have used one caret when the phoneme begins a word, since it doesn't make sense to forcefully sound out an ending /s/ in normal pronunciation of a word; the glottal /h/ also has one caret. The only vowel sound I have chosen to emphasize is the O, which, following from Bruch Smith (226), is the loudest phoneme. Thus, to perform the exercise, one breathes in at the breath marks, and in that one breath breathes out the words until the next breath mark, being sure to emphasize the sounds marked with carets as appropriate.

First, by incorporating such controlled breathing into the speech of the text, I want to draw attention to the intentionality of speech as a forceful and controlled physical act; because of the possibility for force and control, I want to demonstrate that the same semantic meaning can be embodied in many different physical expressions. What this seems to show, to me, is evidence that the embodied theory of meaning and denial of radical freedom that Johnson expresses (9) is an insufficient explanation of the relationship between body and mind. In particular, I want to associate language with reason – and although we think in some language or other, an unsounded speech in our minds, we are not constrained to think in only one language or one set of speech patterns – and there is something very symmetric between the entirely silent and undetectable

patterns of thought (since EEGs, to the best of my knowledge, cannot tell its reader what precise thoughts one is having) and the mutability of speech as a physical vehicle for conveying meaning.

Finally, for our interest in Shakespeare's language, what this phonemic-physiological reading shows is the phonemic intensity of the passage, mirroring the content of Lear's speech itself regarding the storm. It is therefore interesting to consider lines 15-16, which are not marked with any of my chosen air-intensive phonemes – and I want to suggest in this reading that the association of daughters and unkindness in these lines representing something interior in Lear, almost an eye of the storm, that turns his sound as well as his mind inward rather than merely reflecting the storms of the outer world.