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ENG523
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Week Ten Exercise: Choreographing *King Lear*'s Prison

King Lear, Sc. 24: 8-19 in *OUP* [*Arden Shakespeare*: 5.3.8-19]

Lear

8 No, no. Come, let's away to prison.
9 We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage.
10 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
11 And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
12 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
13 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
14 Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too —
15 Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out,
16 And take upon 's the mystery of things
17 As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
18 In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones
19 That ebb and flow by th' moon.

Lear's imagined prison is relatively paratactic, but it nonetheless also exhibits a polysyndetic form. This choreographic exercise illustrates the "ebb and flow" (19) that Lear's stylistic choices exude: a flowing, running style that manifests in a list form. Yet, this style is somewhat rigid insofar as it is linguistically, syntactically, and alliteratively *repetitious*. Attention is subtly brought to a form that threatens to recede into the imperceptible background under a continuous flow. Thus, this passage reflects what Shaun Gallagher identifies as a "body image" and a "body schema" when choreographed.

This concept is demonstrated in the attached diagrams. Fig. 1 features a dot to indicate each of the dancers who collectively make up Lear's prison's walls. Each performer begins stationary. Two dots, one for Lear, and another for Cordelia, appear outside of the circle. Cordelia's and Lear's arms are interlocked, and they slowly spin in a clockwise circle as Lear says, "Come, let's away to prison. / We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage. / When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask thee of forgiveness" (8-11). They spin in a circle to demonstrate the reciprocity in both the rhyme ("me," "thee") and in Cordelia's and Lear's dual acts of subordination to one another.

From this smaller, internal circle they form with one another, they breach the broader prison circle that has begun to move clockwise and unlink arms as Lear utters, "And ask thee of forgiveness." See Fig. 2. The prison circle spins clockwise to reflect Lear and Cordelia moments before. The prison walls move to reflect the flowing style of the passage's remaining lines. Lear has entered the prison walls and has joined his left arm with the performer on his left to indicate that *he* is the one narrating this image and imagining the prison when he says, "and so we'll live" (11). This begins the paratactic, polysyndetic list that follows.

"And pray" (12) Lear utters, as the prison circle continues to rhythmically move clockwise. As he does so, Cordelia in Fig. 3 — keeping the rhythm with the circle, since she is

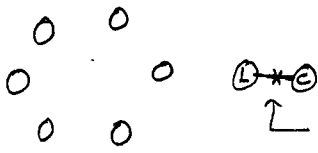
within Lear's prison's walls — links the arm of the next player on the left, but does not herself become linked. She does the same thing for each successive clause that Lear says: “and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh / At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues / Talk of court news” (12-14).

In Fig. 4, upon hitting the clause “and we'll talk with them too” (14), Lear in a sense ends the series in which we as listeners need to fill in the “we'll” within each clause. Cordelia built each above syntactic unit to demonstrate the dialogic nature of parataxis: the reader, or listener, is expected to fill in gaps left by the lack of coordinating words (“we'll,” although “and” indicates polysyndeton). The contracted pronoun and auxiliary verb (“we'll”) closes the first list form, but nonetheless opens the second half of the passage. Therefore, Lear links arms with the final unlinked performer on his *right* this time. Everyone continues to move clockwise. Continuously moving while retaining the same circular shape explores Mark Johnson's “linearity” qualitative dimension of movement: Lear's passage polysyndetically runs, but nonetheless retains a firm structure. Lear formally envelops himself and Cordelia.

In Fig. 5, as Lear begins to utter the repeated forms of “who” (15), Cordelia begins to unlink the performers' arms on each successive “who.” The remaining links are unlinked by Cordelia to fill out the remainder of the lines until “God's spies.” The aim of this penultimate sequence is to demonstrate the looser nature of the structure as it continues to move forward by repetitively looking back on itself and by indiscriminately referring to persons as “who.” It is ambiguous and *open*, and leaves interpretive gaps, gaps that manifest between the unlinked performers.

Finally, the performance concludes in Fig. 6 with all players stamping their left foot into the circle while continuing to move on each alliterated “w” beat, then their right foot in the circle for each alliterated “p” beat as Lear says, “and we'll wear out / In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones / That ebb and flow by th' moon” (17-19). While they are stamping, the performers move into a broader, wider circle to anticipate Lear's “ebb and flow” and to mimic Cordelia's alliteration just before Lear's prison passage. (“false fortune's frown”). Cordelia, meanwhile, claps for each beat while continuing to spin clockwise with the circle's movement. The moving structure is maintained, but the stamping and clapping indicates an alliterative beat rather than syntactical linkage. Outward, circular movement continues until Lear's final word, which is the cue for the performers to halt. Lear's prison is firm but flows, and brings in those around it as much as it keeps them out.

FIGURE 1 "No, no. Come, let's away to prison. / We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage. / When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness..."



Interlocked arms. Slowly turning in a full circle around each other. Moving toward the bigger prison circle simultaneously to anticipate entering it.

FIGURE 2 "...so we'll live,"

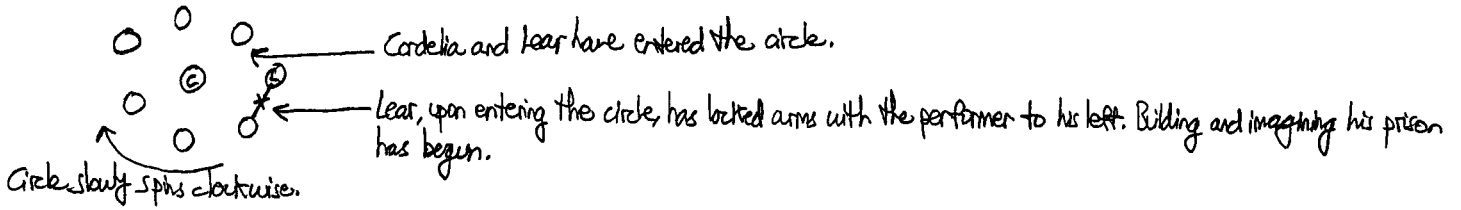


FIGURE 3 "... and pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh / At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues / Talk of court news..."

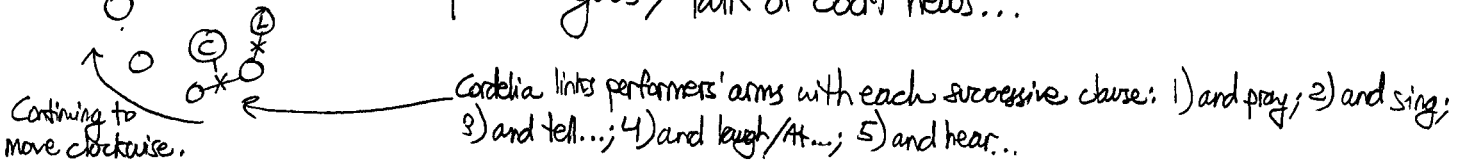


FIGURE 4 "... and we'll talk with them too —"

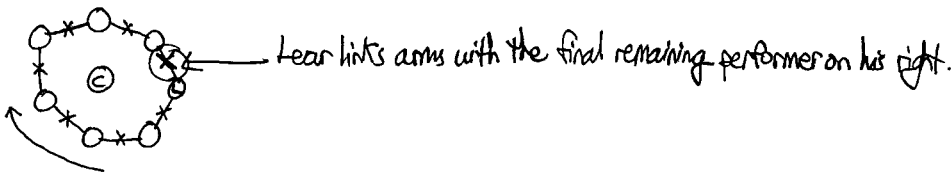


FIGURE 5 "Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out, / And take upon 's the mystery of things / As if we were God's spies..."

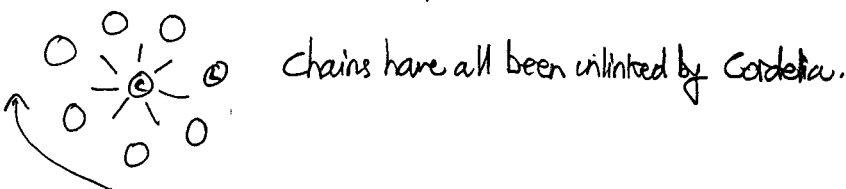
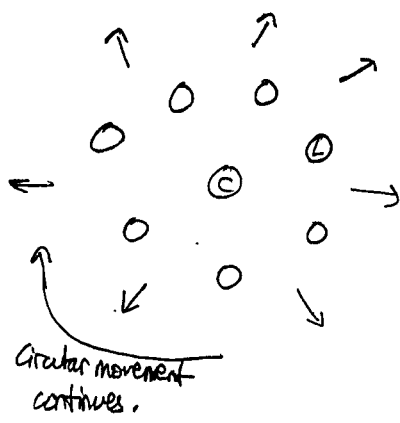


FIGURE 6 "... and we'll wear out / In a walled prison facts and sects of great ones / That ebb and flow by th' moon."





Stamping on alliterated beats, Coelia clipping, and moving outward to ebb, flow, and demonstrate an open-yet-contained structure.