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ENG 523  
28 November 2017

Exercise #9: *King Lear*

**Original Passage:**

The body's delicate: this tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,  
Save what beats there, filial ingratitude.  
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand  
For lifting food to't? But I will punish home;  
No, I will weep no more. In such a night  
To shut me out? Pour on, I will endure.  
In such a night as this? O, Regan, Goneril,  
Your old, kind father, whose frank heart gave all—  
O, that way madness lies, let me shun that;  
No more of that. (3.4.12-22)

**Tap Dance Script (and see video attached):**

The body's delicate: this tempest in my mind  
SINGLE TIMES STEP (R) / SINGLE TIMES STEP (L)

Doth from my senses take all feeling else,  
BALL CHANGE (R) / SHUFFLE (R) BALL CHANGE / SHUFFLE (R) BALL CHANGE

Save what beats there, filial ingratitude.  
HEEL DIG (R) - SPANK (R) - HEEL DROP (L) - TOE TAP (R) / TOE (R)-HEEL (R)-HEEL  
DROP (L)-HEEL DIG (R)-BALL DROP (R)-HEEL DROP (R)

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand  
SHUFFLE CHANGE (L) / SHUFFLE CHANGE (R) / SHUFFLE (L) BALL CHANGE

For lifting food to't? But I will punish home;  
SINGLE TIMES STEP (L) / SINGLE TIMES STEP (R)

No, I will weep no more. In such a night  
HEEL DIG (L) - STEP (L) - SHUFFLE (R) - TOE HEEL (R) / CRAMP ROLL (R→L)

To shut me out? Pour on, I will endure.  
CRAMP ROLL (R→L) / SHUFFLE (R) / CRAMP ROLL (R→L)

In such a night as this? O, Regan, Goneril,

CRAMP ROLL (R→L) - HALF CRAMP ROLL (R→L) / HEEL DROP (R&L) / SLAP (R) -  
HEEL DROP (R) - BALL CHANGE (L)

Your old, kind father, whose frank heart gave all—

TOE (L)-HEEL (L)-HEEL DROP (R)-HEEL DIG (L)-BALL DROP (L) / TOE (R)-HEEL (R)-  
HEEL DROP (L)-HEEL DIG (R)-BALL DROP (R)

O, that way madness lies, let me shun that;

HEEL DIG (L) / (RAISE LEFT FOOT) BUFFALO [FLAP (L) - SHUFFLE (R) /-HOP (R)] /  
CRAMP ROLL (L→R)

No more of that.

CRAMP ROLL (L→R)

### **Commentary:**

This week I decided to draw on my very rudimentary and long-since abandoned dance background to tap out ten lines of *Lear*. My intent was to inhabit the space between the pure theoretical prosody of the page and the choices of cadence and intonation an actor might make in his performance (I was particularly inspired by the Sir John Gielgud version from BBC 3 Radio (1994)). The result is a metrical interpretation of the irregular lines above, and an imperfect one at that. But attempting to use my feet to tap out the lines' (*ahem*) feet puts our regularized methods of scansion in tension with the irregularity that governs our intentional bodily movements, particularly when we try to execute repetitive motions; that is, bodies do not have the mechanical precision of machines, so no two iambs in my interpretation sound quite the same.

Rather, my choreography is comprised of a spectrum of emphasized and unemphasized steps. These are determined by weight changes from foot to foot and the length of time between steps, as well as the relative loudness of the sounds produced (though my lack of tap shoes makes this last quality difficult to analyze). The range of rhythms the feet can create are considerably larger than those you can tap out with, say, your hand, the standard pedagogical practice for teaching metrical feet. I was guided by Johnson's discussion of the temporal dimension of movement: "Marching, skipping, and tiptoeing give us three qualitatively different experiences of the passage of time. Time can move resolutely along in measured beats; it can skip along with exaggerated rhythms; or it can pass us with the caution and high tension associated with tiptoeing" (17). This concept of temporal difference led me to consider the qualitative differences of various tap steps, and how these might capture the rhythms of *Lear*'s lines.

I tried to capture the cantering fluidity of some lines (e.g., "Doth from my senses take all feeling else") by employing simple, regular steps without substantial pauses between them. In other phrasal units that have more semantic weight, such as "Save what beats there," or "O, that way madness lies," I chose more staccato steps like digs and toe taps, or I exaggerated more complex steps, to slow down the speed of the line. Generally, I choreographed according to what I thought of as semantic units, within *and* across the line as a unit. I tried to mark caesuras temporally with a pause, but also by making the caesuras correspond with the completion of a step (marked /). For harder caesuras, I tried to end with both feet on the floor.

I also tried to make certain step “motifs” recur at various places, according to their structural and syllabic similarity, in a way that was intentional but not too forced. “Filial ingratitude” is, I think, the most important and syncopated phrase in the entire excerpt, and I repeated this step (minus the final heel drop) in the line that seems to pick up this charge most keenly: “Your old, kind father, whose frank heart gave all.” I used single times steps for both of the hypermetrical lines, heel digs for the opening “Save,” “No,” and “O,” and cramp rolls for the succession of four syllable phrasal units in the latter half of the excerpt (“In such a night / To shut me out?...I will endure” and “let me shun that; / No more of that”). Even though I used the same step for these last examples, I tried to vary the rhythm of the cramp rolls according to the reading the phrase seems to call for in context (e.g., emphasizing “shun”). The result, I hope, allows you to see and hear structurally analogous units, as well as the punctuated moments of heightened drama and difference.