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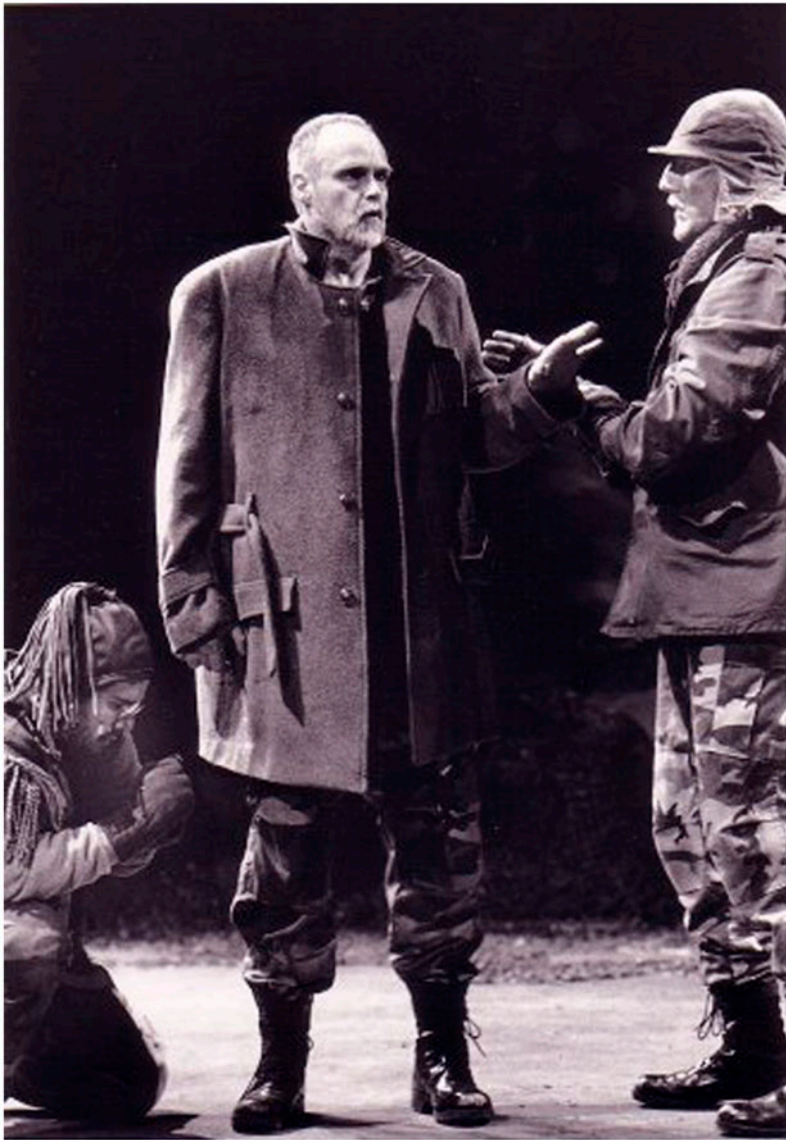
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Dudley Knight as Lear in *King Lear*, UC Irvine 1989

Credit: Phil Channing

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Dear Dudley,

I'm sitting backstage at tech for *King Lear*, trying to write something to be read out at [the] VASTA [conference]. It's a distracting place to be doing this sort of thing because, of course, you were supposed to be playing Lear in this very production, and every detail of the play, the theatre, the cool California night strikes me hard in the heart, and makes your absence very, very present.

I do encounter you quite a bit as I trudge through my day: I'll think of some detail of planning for future workshops that I want to discuss with you, or I'll run across an email, or document from you and you're suddenly right there. Just yesterday a Google search led me to Emil Sutro's obituary and I wanted to call you and read it to you. Although these memories carry pain with them, that's by no means all they bring. You are the funniest, driest, most unflagging wit that it has ever been my pleasure to know, and I'm lucky enough to have known you long enough that I have been able to thread a little of that brilliance into the weave of my own thoughts. However imperfectly, I can call you up into active life in my mind, and the joy of that still far outweighs the pain I feel in knowing that you are gone.

I want to keep this short, but there is one more thing I want to say in the hearing of your VASTA colleagues. You'd probably object to this sort of sustained praise, but I do have the advantage. In fact, I'm sure this is the longest I've been able to go on without you finishing my sentences for me.

Nonetheless, I'll be brief:

Of the many things I regret in this life, I most profoundly regret that I never fully expressed to you how entirely you made me who I am. It's easy to see that I learned about voice and speech out of the storehouse of your knowledge, and that I have made teaching your work, and teaching it by your side, the center of my professional identity. But there is something I learned from you that goes deeper than all that, and that is a habit of mind. I hesitate to call it skepticism. It's too easily heard as a synonym for cynicism. That's what I thought it meant when I was a grad student and you mentioned that you had a subscription to *Skeptic Magazine*. I couldn't reconcile my assumptions about what "skepticism" meant with my experience of you as a gentle, encouraging teacher. But I can see now, and I've learned it from watching you for the past 25 years, that skepticism is not inconsistent with humor and bonhomie. A skeptical mind merely subjects all propositions to the same careful scrutiny—particularly its own. You have always taken pains to interrogate your own assumptions and through that rigorous, brave, process you have built a system of teaching, even a way of thinking about speech that is clear, and egoless, and simultaneously fun, funny, and attentive to what is beautiful in spoken language.

We will try to emulate you in wit, and erudition, and we will certainly fall short, but if we can also try to match your rigorous intellectual honesty, we will be alright.

Thank You Dudley, my teacher, my friend, my brother.

I love you and I will miss you.

Phil

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