

## PRÉFACE

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To start, a personal note. How old was I? Sixteen maybe, seventeen at the most. I was a devoted Beatles fan at the time of the Fab Four's revival in the mid-seventies (as could be deduced from, among other things, the White Album silhouettes I drew on the back of my denim jacket). My high school popbands dilettantish yet diligently performed much of The Beatles' well-known repertoire. We played the recordings on our tape cassettes over and over again until we grasped the harmonic changes, George's cute guitar solos, the background vocals and the lyrics (which we usually imitated no better than as onomatopoeias).

There was, however, one song that I could not really fathom: 'I am the Walrus', especially when it came an extra-dimension in this 1967 song. First there is this snatch 'Now, good sir'... at about 2:25 of the song in the rendition of the *Magical Mystery Tour* album. Somewhat later in the song, a fuzzy, etheric whistle of a radio that is being tuned into a perceptible station can be heard. The broadcast that's picked up, seemingly at random, subsequently offers a comprehensible diegetic conversation shortly dominating the soundtrack of the song. 'Slave, thou hast slain me', one hears: 'Villain, take my purse'. And: 'As badness would desire'.... 'What, is he dead?'

Nowadays, many years of study and stage experiences later, I know what most readers may have already distinguished: this almost aleatoric scene from 'I am the Walrus' quotes Shakespeare's *King Lear* - the British king to which this issue of *Le Paon d'Héra* is fully devoted. In The Beatles' song we hear fragments of Act IV, Scene 6, most typically the part where Edgar, the son of the Earl of Gloucester knocks down Oswald (Lear's daughter Goneril's steward). Oswald, in a short operatic sequence, offers his purse; in it they find Goneril's poisonous letter. He then dies.

Much can be disputed about this fairly cryptic example of 'creative reception' of *King Lear* within popular culture, or the intertextual, additional layers of meaning these lines implicate within this specific song. I cite this passage however, to illustrate the extensive reach and presence of Shakespeare's tragic play. It breaks through barriers of high and low art, as well as through different art forms (from theatrical and musical stages to literature and painting,

up and including various screen formats). Lear through every day and all ages; occasionally we even find traces of him in the most unexpected corners of allusions. Many of these will be addressed in the current issue of *Le Paon d'Héra*.

Over time, *King Lear* has had a complicated performance history, one which already commenced with the different versions of the texts and their subsequent plot types and (sub-plot) narratives, inspiring an enormous rich number of stage adaptations, each with their specific character interpretations. This issue studies the Lear reception, from the first literary appearance of Lear in the *Historia Regum Britannie*, to psychoanalytical and theological readings of the characters; from cross-cultural cinematic, literary and musical reception to challenges caused by sensory deprivation and its meaning for life.

In short, a very rich volume that touches upon a sweeping amount of topics surrounding one of - if not the best - tragedy ever written. So to simply paraphrase Edgar, as The Beatles already did: 'Sit you down [...], rest you'. And read.

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As to Verdi:

Shakespeare was a leitmotif – if I am allowed to use that qualification here – within Verdi's career: *Macbeth* (1847/1865), *Otello* (1887), *Falstaff* (1893) and of course the play is thematized in this issue of *Le Paon d'Héra: King Lear*. Fifteen years and two librettists (Salvadore Cammarano, Antonio Somma) it took to finally not complete an opera on the intriguing topic on this British ruler.