

Welcome to our *King Lear*.

In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin writes, “The person who distrusts himself has no touchstone for reality—for this touchstone can be only oneself.” Almost 400 years earlier, William Shakespeare prefigured Baldwin’s observation with *King Lear*, the story of an autocratic monarch who has “ever but slenderly known himself.” Lear’s power shields him from self knowledge. It is only through loss—of his land, his power, and his mind—that he gains, eventually, insight.

Compagnia de’ Colombari’s production of *King Lear* embodies these parallel processes of loss and gain. The play begins not with one Lear, but with ten, each bedecked in a paper crown: ten very different actors who, together, play the titular king. Quickly, this unity fragments. Other characters appear, vying for influence, diminishing Lear by their very presence.

Such attrition brings clarity. Refined to his barest essentials, Lear attains, for the first time, true understanding. But in this tragic universe, wisdom comes at unendurable cost. By blurring the boundaries between performance space and audience space, between king and subject, between perpetrator and witness, between character and spectator, this *King Lear* renders this cost inescapable. We lose, as Lear, together. As Lear, we meet ourselves. And as Lear sees, terribly and miraculously, we, too, see.

—Gabrielle Hoyt, Production Dramaturg