

## Interview: Actor Colm Feore on Portraying 'King Lear'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 24, 2015 - 4:59pm

- [Canada](#) [2]
- [Colm Feore](#) [3]
- [Hamlet](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Interview](#) [6]
- [King Lear](#) [7]
- [Macbeth](#) [8]
- [Ontario](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [Richard III](#) [11]
- [Romeo and Juliet](#) [12]
- [Spider Man 2](#) [13]
- [Stratford](#) [14]
- [Stratford Festival HD](#) [15]
- [Thor](#) [16]
- [Toronto](#) [17]
- [William Shakespeare](#) [18]

CHICAGO – “Mend your speech a little, Lest it mar your fortunes...” is a fine piece of advice from the William Shakespeare play, “King Lear,” often cited as one of the greatest English language plays. Actor Colm Feore is the latest to portray the title role, which begins a film series by the Stratford Festival of Canada, to capture all of the Shakespeare plays.

The Stratford Festival is located in the province of Ontario in Canada, slightly south of Toronto, in the the town of Stratford. Under the umbrella Stratford Festival HD, the legendary theater organization aims to record every play by William Shakespeare in the next ten years – with full staging, live audiences, High Definition processing and enhanced sound design. The first play of this project – “King Lear” – screens in several locations around Chicago and North America on Wednesday, February 25th, 2015.



Colm Feore as the Title Character in William Shakespeare's 'King Lear'

*Photo credit: Stratford Festival HD*

Although born in Boston, Colm Feore was raised in Windsor, Ontario. His first Shakespeare role was Pericles, as he studied at the National Theatre School of Canada. His work with the Stratford Festival rivals Christopher Plummer, as the actor who has played the most title roles in the festival's 52 year run, adding “Macbeth,” “Hamlet,” “Coriolanus,” “Romeo and Juliet” and “Richard III” to his amazing roster of portrayals. He also has had key roles in the films “Spider Man 2,” “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit” and “Thor,” and was featured in the seventh season of FOX TV’s “24” and the Showtime miniseries, “The Borgias.”

HollywoodChicago.com talked Shakespeare with Colm Feore, as he expressed his lifetime appreciation for the stage, and his involvement with

the Stratford Festival.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** When you approach one of the most iconic Shakespeare characters in theater history, King Lear, what is the first thing you think about before you delve into the actual script?

**Colm Feore:** Panic. [laughs] It's just that everyone has expectations for the role, and it is widely studied in academia. It's very familiar, basically the reaction is, 'don't wreck it.' There is an enormous responsibility to taking it on, and first I want to figure out the angle, what are we selling with the character? I realized I had nothing to sell, except my experience in other Shakespeare roles. So it's the simpler, the better – make it organic and raw.

The thing about 'King Lear' the play, which makes it different from something like 'Hamlet,' is that there is not a lot of grand, poly-syllabic speeches in Lear. He's not busy asking himself about the inner being, he's just asking, 'What the hell is happening!?' 'What's going on?' 'Why is my world falling apart?' 'Who am I?' 'Who Are you?' So once you're dealing with those issues, you realize that is what Shakespeare is getting at...he is using a quite forceful and rough language to get at the core. The foundational emotion is just pure and simple honesty, and the style of the language maintains its beauty because it is still Shakespeare.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How did you apply that to your interpretation?

**Feore:** I could go to the director and say, 'I'm just going to rip my guts out here, strip it down to the rawest sense, and try to make this journey about discovery.' I'm not going to plan the result, or say it's going to be a particular thing. And I am going to look at all the actors who have played Lear over the years, and read what good things the philosophers and academic papers have said in time. Then I'm going to forget that, and throw myself into the part – after stealing from all those sources.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What makes the theater the art form where stealing other stuff is a virtue?

**Feore:** Because there is a logical extension between me and all the other actors who have played King Lear. Each in their own generation have looked to the one before them to understand the part, and you can draw that line in history straight back. I think that's a great foundation to stand on, I'm on the shoulders of other King Lears. And in the end, we all understand that the character belongs to William Shakespeare. All this is a practical and pragmatic way to find our way through the play, without having to worry about being definitive.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the main emotional problem with Lear? Why do you think he demands love of people, while not trusting that same capacity for love in himself?

**Feore:** We all want to be loved, it tells us what our value is – who loves us, how much they love us, how they love us – those are the questions for our self worth and the ability to move through space on a day-to-day basis, thinking 'I'm awesome!' [laughs] Lear is a guy who has been King for many decades, and we see people loyal to him even as he acts like an a\*shole. He's used to having everyone tell him that everything is fine.

The beginning of the play is a diplomatic situation. He is losing his last daughter as he seeks to marry her off, either to the Duke of Burgundy or the King of France. He sees his retirement articulated in this, and it becomes all about love. He foolishly makes the game about proclaiming love from his daughters, and inevitably that is his tragic failure. And because the youngest daughter rejects that proclamation publicly, she embarrasses him. He can't apologize and he cannot admit he's wrong. He simply cannot cope with not knowing who actually loves him, it becomes a disaster.



The Fool Seeks Solace with William Shakespeare's 'King Lear'

*Photo credit: Stratford Festival HD*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How do you believe that the countries represented by these kingdoms also represent the characters in the play? What do you think Shakespeare was commenting upon in a geopolitical sense?

**Feore:** The King at the time was James, and he was talking about dividing the kingdom of England. People knew this was a bad idea at the time, and throughout history it has always been a bad idea – do you remember 1939? It was contemporary for Shakespeare’s audience, and he knew what they would have been aware of, in those allusions. And since history repeats itself, the lessons live on.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What is the philosophy of the Stratford Festival when it comes to truncating a long play like King Lear, to fit a director’s vision and make it sparkle for the audience?

**Feore:** Well, mostly it has to do with length, because if we go past 11pm we have to pay everybody more. [laughs] It’s practical, because today there is only so long that people will stay cramped up in a theater as an audience. The quality of their attention is paramount, and you can’t outstay your welcome with that attention. There are scenes in every one of Shakespeare’s plays that are difficult and don’t move the story along. The actors need to know them for character purposes, but it doesn’t necessarily need to be played for the audience.

We want to make it simple and understandable, first and foremost, because if an audience member loses it for a second, then they are a second behind where I’m going. I need to understand that the audience knows what I’m thinking, and to who I am saying it to, and why.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Did filming the stage play help in this interpretation?

**Feore:** Yes, we could then give a close-up to the person who is being talked to, and see their reaction, which makes it more understandable. We can actually help the audience in these filmed plays by focusing on the clarity of Shakespeare’s intention. The worst thing that a person can take away from Shakespeare is [in a grand voice] ‘and now shall I most royally to bed, to sleep off all the nonsense I’ve just said.’ [laughs] In order to make it the best evening possible, a director and his company will trim it as to say, ‘let’s get on with this.’



Colm Feore in Chicago, February 18th, 2015

*Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Give me an example of a character you’ve played that is completely opposite to a Shakespeare character, and what roots of Shakespeare do you actually find in that character?

**Feore:** That’s not too hard. For director Sir Kenneth Branagh, I portrayed ‘The King of the Frost Giants’ in the movie ‘Thor.’ Branagh had taken great pains to make the ‘Thor’ script classical in its resonance. If it was a father figure, it’s Lear, and if a child acts a certain way, it’s Hamlet. So he created a script where we all go to say heightened things in an heroic way. It was the self possession and confidence of our mutual understanding of Shakespeare. It was a short hand, but we brought it to bear in every frame of this regal face-off between kings. When you do that in a superhero movie, something extra happens.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** This rendering of the play will live forever, and is part of the Stratford Fest’s effort to similar renderings to all of Shakespeare’s plays. How important is this for the future culture, as a contribution?

**Feore:** It’s terrifyingly important. There is less Shakespeare being taught in schools today, and there are not the kind of instructors out there who are inspired enough to communicate to go through the sometimes unrewarding task of bashing people through this stuff. My former literature instructor was so enthusiastic about the readings, that I changed my career from law enforcement to actor.

One of the ambitions of doing the whole canon, in North American voices and cadences, is to give kids, libraries and everyone around the world to grab their screens and show people scenes that reflect their experience. We are providing a resource to help schools and to build a future audience.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Modern audiences, even educated ones, still are intimidated when faced with a Shakespeare play. What advice would you give these potential audience members that will mollify these fears, and which play would you recommend as a starting point?

**Feore:** Start with the great plays like ‘King Lear,’ which is regarded as the greatest of English language plays. I do understand being intimidated and frightened by the language in Shakespeare. I never really understood a Shakespeare play until the first rehearsal, when I see

the actors bring the characters to life. William Shakespeare never intended his plays just to be read, he just wanted to create a blueprint for actors, and retire into the country. It was pragmatic.

He wanted to be understood, because that keeps audiences coming back. So he himself was absolutely about not making it fancy or complicated. He was just an intuitive artist who knew humanity on an essential level, so you cannot help but recognize yourself in it. So take a deep breathe and come along with me, I'll take you through this.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Which eternal truth, found in the works of Shakespeare, has resonated with you, and has become a part of the philosophy of your life?

**Feore:** There is a piece of ‘Hamlet’ that I like very much. It is toward the end, when he’s thinking things are working themselves out, and his stepfather invites him into a fencing match with Laertes. It’s a bad time – his friend Horatio thinks it’s a set up. Hamlet basically replies, ‘don’t worry about it...’

‘If it be now, tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet, it will come. The readiness is all. Let be.’

That is a heartbreakingly straightforward philosophy on how to live.

*Stratford Festival HD presents “King Lear” at the following theater locations in and around Chicago on Wednesday, February 25th, 2015. CHICAGO: Showplace ICON, Regal City North. CHICAGOLAND SUBURBS: Cinemark Evanston, Niles 12, Chicago Heights, Lincolnshire 21, Addison 21 and Cinemark Woodridge. See local listings for theater location and show times. Featuring Colm Feore, Maev Beaty, Evan Buliung, Sara Farb, Liisa Repo-Martell and Scott Wentworth. Written by William Shakespeare. Directed for the stage by Antoni Cimolino. Directed for Film by Joan Tosoni. Not Rated.*



[19]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [20]

Writer, Editorial Coordinator

HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [19]

© 2015 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 6:55am):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/25209/interview-actor-colt-feore-on-portraying-king-lear>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/canada>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/colm-feore>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hamlet>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/king-lear>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/macbeth>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/ontario>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/richard-iii>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/romeo-and-juliet>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/spider-man-2-0>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/stratford>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/stratford-festival-hd>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/thor>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/toronto>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/william-shakespeare>
- [19] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>