

THE SHAKESPEARE CLUB OF STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The 864th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place at Mason Croft on Tuesday 18 October 2011. Mr John Cunnington took the chair and introduced Ewan Fernie, Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the Shakespeare Institute, who spoke on King Lear and the Positivity of Possession.

Professor Fernie's objective was to address the darkest, densest and most opaque passages from *King Lear*. Referring to an essay by Stephen Greenblatt in which he identified Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) as a source of Poor Tom's speeches, he considered whether Edgar as Poor Tom was feigning madness or was mad in reality. Edgar's speeches were dull, clichéd and pedestrian compared to those of Poor Tom whose language often defeated understanding but had an intrinsic meaning. Was A.C. Bradley right in identifying Poor Tom as the most religious person in the play? Fernie compared Poor Tom with Cordelia, the former a lustful demon, the latter a saint without sympathy for sin. The absence of god was symbolised in the play by the failure of both fathers, Lear and Gloucester. Professor Fernie concluded that Bradley, though out of fashion for decades, was right, quoting J.M. Coetzee who wrote of the demonic claim to the sacred.

After questions from the audience the meeting finished at 9pm.