

AUDIENCE GUIDE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S  
**KING  
LEAR**



DIRECTED BY  
JULIA RODRIGUEZ-ELLIOTT

**FEB. 6—MAY 12, 2017**

 aNoiseWithin <sup>CELEBRATE</sup> 25  
Classic Theatre, Modern Magic

Pictured: Geoff Elliott. Photo by Chloe Bates.



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# Who's Who: The Actors



**King Lear**  
(Geoff Elliott)



**Goneril**  
(Trisha Miller)



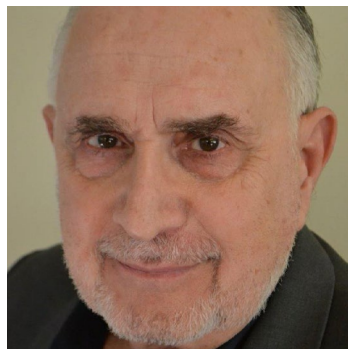
**Regan**  
(Arie Thompson)



**Cordelia**  
(Erika Soto)



**Duke of Cornwall**  
(Jeremy Rabb)



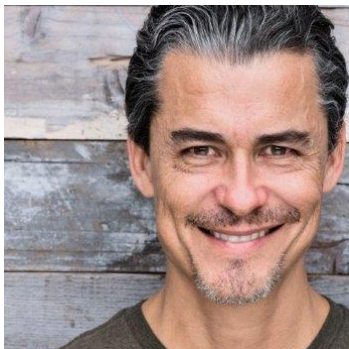
**Earl of Gloucester**  
(Apollo Dukakis)



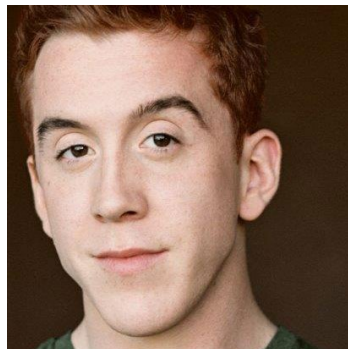
**Earl of Kent**  
(Steve Weingartner)



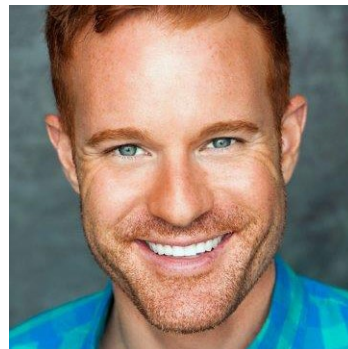
**Edgar**  
(Rafael Goldstein)



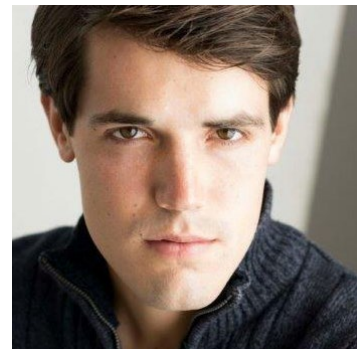
**Edmund**  
(Freddy Douglas)



**Oswald**  
(Craig Brauner)



**Fool**  
(Kasey Mahaffy)



**King of France**  
(Tyler MiClean)



**Duke of Burgundy**  
(Troy Whiteley)



**Ensemble**  
(Jonathon Padron)



# Who's Who: The Characters

**King Lear: King of Britain.** At the opening of the play, Lear decides to divide the lands of his kingdom among his three daughters so he can retire and they can rule together. However, he announces that the portion of land received will be determined by each daughter's public declaration of how much she loves her father. Goneril and Regan flatter their father with insincere words of love, but Cordelia refuses to do the same. Lear, furious, banishes her and divides the country between Goneril and Regan.

**Goneril: Lear's eldest daughter.** She successfully declares her love for her father and gains half of the kingdom. But once in power, she denies her father's right to have attendant knights and to lodge with her. Her actions seem to show a daughter more concerned with power and status than her elderly father's well-being.

**Regan: Lear's middle daughter.** Like Goneril, Regan flatters her father to her advantage in declaring her love for him, and gains the other half of the kingdom. She also denies her father shelter, and she and Goneril abandon him to the storm.

**Cordelia: Lear's youngest daughter.** Too honest to flatter her father at his request, Cordelia voices her love to him as she sees it—and suffers his wrath as a result. He disowns her, and she marries the king of France. Later in the play she brings a French army to try and help Lear regain power.

**Kent: Lear's advisor and friend.** Kent voices his disapproval of Lear's banishment of Cordelia, and as a result is himself banished. Unwilling to abandon his king, Kent disguises himself as a simple servant to Lear, enabling him to stay close by and attempt to help him.

**Gloucester: One of Lear's court companions,** who also falls out of power and encounters betrayal at the hands of his son Edmund, who convinces Gloucester to trust him over Edgar, Gloucester's other son. Gloucester is eventually blinded in a savage act by Regan and Cornwall, and is left to wander in the wilderness like Lear until Edgar rescues him.

**Edmund: the illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester.** He manipulates his father into believing that his other son, Edgar, is out to kill him. Edmund then allies with Goneril and Regan to gain the title of Earl of Gloucester for himself.

**Edgar: The Earl of Gloucester's legitimate and trustworthy son.** Edgar flees the kingdom at his brother Edmund's urging—and thus appears guilty of plotting against his father. Banished from home and family, Edgar seeks refuge by disguising himself as Poor Tom, a beggar and madman. While acting this part, he encounters both Lear and Gloucester wandering in the wild, Lear mad, and his father blinded.

**The Duke of Albany: Husband to Goneril.** Albany eventually separates himself from his wife and tries to aid Lear and Cordelia.

**The Duke of Cornwall: Regan's Husband.** Cornwall is an equal partner in achieving his wife's ambitions. He helps her in the terrible act of blinding Gloucester, and suffers a fatal wound as a result.

**Fool: Lear's court jester,** who remains with Lear even after his kingdom is lost. He continues to entertain the king becoming a companion while also serving as the role of conscience.

**Oswald:** Oswald is steward to Goneril. Oswald is eager to please to get what he wants. Kent perceives him as false, flattering and disrespectful; Kent's outrage at Oswald lands Kent in the stocks.

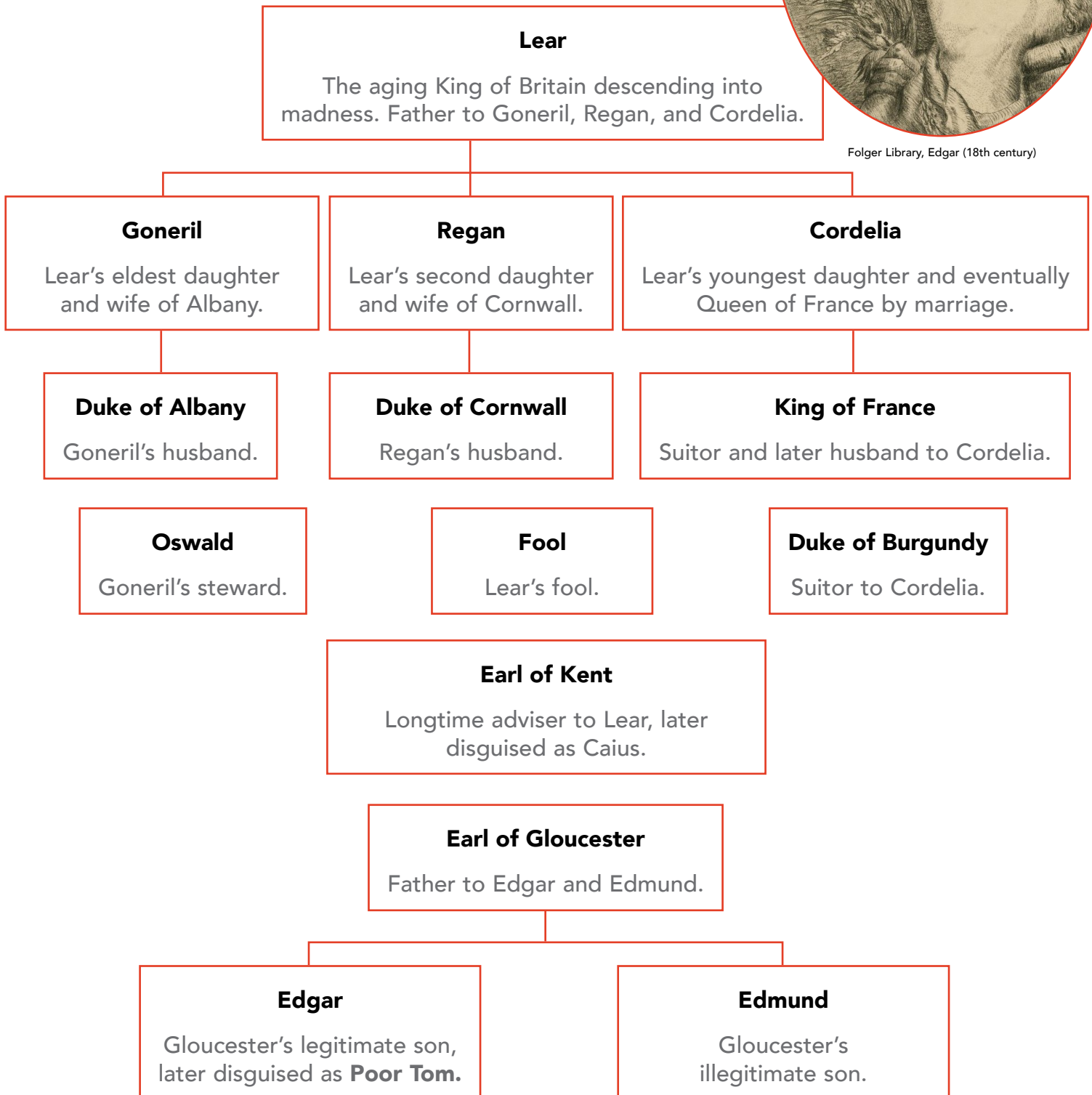
**King of France: A suitor to Cordelia,** the king of France maintains his courting of Cordelia even after her father strips her of her land and inheritance. Impressed by her honesty and integrity, the king marries her and makes her the queen of France. ♦

Source: California Shakespeare Theater [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org)

# Character List



Folger Library, Edgar (18th century)



# Seeing the Play: Before and After

(Singing) Then they for sudden joy did weep, And I for sorrow sung,  
That such a king should play bo-peep And go the fools among.

Fool, Act 1, Scene 4

## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW:

### BEFORE viewing the play:

What to watch for:

- Keep count of how many things Lear loses over the course of the play (his kingdom, his house, his mind)
- How others treat him as an old man, good and bad.
- What Lear says about himself—how does he perceive himself as old, or powerful, or wise?
- Gloucester's problems with his sons and how that compares with Lear's difficulties with his daughters.
- How the theme of war and power influence Lear's decisions.

### AFTER viewing the play:

What do you think of Lear?

- Some people say he's just an old man, so set in his ways that he doesn't realize (even as he is dying) what his actions have cost him.
- Others see Lear as sympathetic: without his family, property, and title of king, he is forced to suffer inhumane conditions that no one should suffer. Would you condemn Lear for his actions?
- Give reasons why or why not. What kind of picture do you think Shakespeare is trying to paint?
- Is Shakespeare telling us that people should be allowed to stay in power even if they are very old?
- Is he saying that people who are old are foolish?
- What is he saying about a family's responsibilities to older people? Or an elderly person's responsibility for himself or herself? ♦

Source: California Shakespeare Theater [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org)

# Synopsis

**LEAR, KING OF ENGLAND**, decides to give us the throne and divide his kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. Before he divides the country, he asks each of his daughters to tell him how much she loves him. The two older daughters flatter Lear, but when Cordelia refuses to make a public declaration of love for her father she is disinherited. She marries the King of France, who accepts her without a dowry (i.e., without money or property). The Earl of Kent is banished by Lear for daring to defend her. The other two daughters, Goneril and Regan, and their husbands, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, inherit the kingdom. The Earl of Gloucester, deceived by his illegitimate son Edmund, disinherits his legitimate son, Edgar, who is forced to go into disguise as a mad beggar to save his life. Lear, now without power, quarrels with Goneril and Regan about the number of attendant knights they allow him to keep. When they ask that he give up all his knights, he goes out in a rage onto a heath (a piece of land, usually level and sometimes considered a wasteland) in a storm. He is accompanied only by his Fool and by his former advisor, the banished Earl of Kent, who is now disguised as a servant. Lear, Kent, and the Fool encounter Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, who is still in disguise as a mad beggar. Gloucester tries to help Lear, but is betrayed by his illegitimate son Edmund and captured by Lear's daughter Regan and her husband, Cornwall. They put out Gloucester's eyes and make Edmund an Earl. Lear is taken secretly to the port town of Dover, where Cordelia has landed with a French army to rescue her father. There, Lear and Cordelia are reconciled but in the ensuing battle are captured by the sisters' forces. Meantime, Edgar encounters his father, Gloucester, and after preventing him from committing suicide, leads him to Dover as well. Goneril and Regan are both in love with Edmund, who commanded their forces in the battle. Discovering this, Goneril's husband Albany forces Edmund to defend himself against the charge of treachery. Edgar arrives, disguised as an anonymous black knight, challenges Edmund to a fight, and fatally wounds his brother. News comes that Goneril has poisoned her sister Regan and then committed suicide. Before dying, Edmund reveals that he has ordered the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Soldiers are sent to rescue them, but arrive too late: Cordelia has been killed. Lear enters carrying her body, and then dies. Albany agrees to give the throne to Edgar. ♦

Source: California Shakespeare Theater [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org)



Folger Library, Lear carrying the dead Cordelia (Act 5, scene 3; 19th century)



# Playwright Biography: William Shakespeare



The Chandos Portrait of William Shakespeare. Artist unknown.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE** (1564-1616), poet, playwright and actor, was born to Mary Arden and John Shakespeare in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England on April 23, 1564.

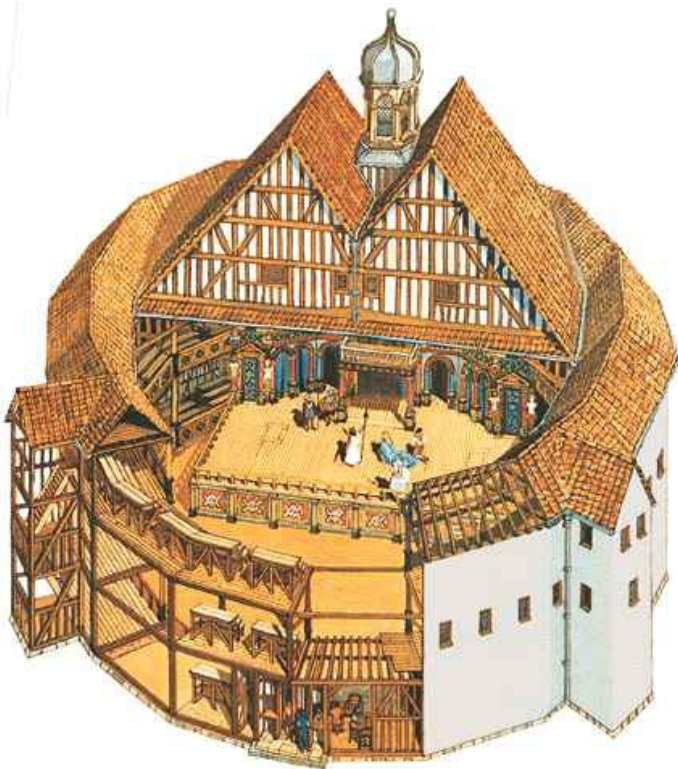
Although much is written about him, very little documentation of his life survives beyond the public records of his birth, death, marriage and financial transactions. Shakespeare probably attended the Edward VI Grammar School, where his studies would have been almost exclusively in Latin.

At age 18, he married Anne Hathaway (age 26), who gave birth to daughter Susanna, just six months after the wedding. In 1585, Anne gave birth to twins Hamnet (who died at the age 11) and Judith. From 1585-1591, not much is known about Shakespeare's life and this period is often referred to as the "lost years." However, it is clear that he moved to London to pursue theatre during this time (probably around 1587).

In 1592, Shakespeare was listed as an actor with the Lord Strange's Players, for whom he wrote his first play, the highly successful *Henry VI, Part 1*, followed immediately by the sequels *Henry VI, Parts 2 & 3* in the same year. He later joined, and became part owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men continuing his career as a playwright. Over the course of twenty years, he wrote 148 sonnets, 3 long poems, and the 37 plays that continued to be performed around the world today. This season A Noise Within is producing Shakespeare's *King Lear* in Spring 2017.

In 1599, Shakespeare bought a share in the newly built outdoor Globe Theatre where his plays were constantly performed. The Globe Theatre was accidentally burned down in 1613 before being quickly rebuilt in 1614. However, the Globe closed in 1642 after all theatres were abolished by England's Puritan administration and was demolished in 1644. Today, visitors flock to London to visit Shakespeare's Globe, a reconstruction of the original theatre, that was opened in 1997.

Between 1610 and 1612, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, where he died in 1616 at the age of 52. He supposedly died on the same day he was born, April 23<sup>rd</sup>. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon. ♦



A Reconstruction of The Globe Theatre.



# Shakespeare Timeline

**April 23, 1564**

**William Shakespeare is born** to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-Upon-Avon.

**November 17, 1558**

## **Accession of Queen Elizabeth**

The daughter of King Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth succeeded her Catholic sister Mary I and re-established the Protestant Anglican Church.

**November 27, 1582**

## **Shakespeare's Marriage License Issued**

The marriage license was issued to William Shakespeare and Anne Whateley (Hathaway) of Temple Grafton, Warwickshire.

**May 26, 1583**

## **The Baptism of Susanna Shakespeare**

Susanna was the Shakespeares' first child, born a mere six months after the wedding of her parents.

**February 2, 1585**

## **The Baptism of Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare**

The twins were named after two very close friends of William: a baker named Hamnet Sadler and his wife, Judith. Tragically, Hamnet Shakespeare died in 1596 at the age of eleven.

**1587**

The Rose Theatre is founded in London. Shakespeare arrives in London to pursue theatre

**1590-1592**

## **Shakespeare Writes Parts 1, 2, and 3 of Henry VI.**

Although we do not know the precise dates of composition, it is generally assumed that the *Henry VI* trilogy was composed by Shakespeare between 1590 and the summer of 1592.

**March 3, 1592**

## **First Production of 1 Henry VI**

Theatre owner Philip Henslowe listed *1 Henry VI* as having been performed by Strange's Men at the Rose

**1594**

Shakespeare is an actor, playwright, and part owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

**1598**

Shakespeare's name begins to appear on the title page of his plays.

**1599**

Shakespeare buys a share in the newly built Globe Theatre.

**May 30, 1593**

## **Christopher Marlowe Dies**

Christopher Marlowe, the great Elizabethan poet and dramatist, was murdered in a tavern brawl.

**March 24, 1603**

## **Queen Elizabeth Dies**

Queen Elizabeth, a generous patron of drama and literature, helped Shakespeare and his contemporary writers and actors flourish.

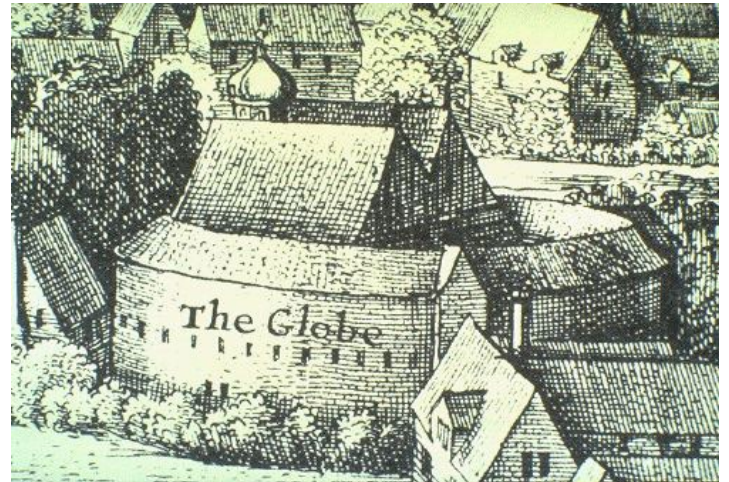
**December 26, 1606**

The first performance of *King Lear* is on Saint Stephen's Day.

**1611**

## **First Recorded Performances of *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline***

Dr. Simon Forman, an English astrologer and doctor, gives detailed accounts of these early performances in his invaluable diary.



The Globe Theatre.

**June 29, 1613**

## **Fire at the Globe Theatre**

The thatched roof of the Globe caught fire in 1613 owing to the discharge of a cannon during a production of *Henry VIII* (the first recorded performance of the play). No one was injured, but the theatre burned to the ground.

**1614**

The Globe Theatre is rebuilt.

**April 23, 1616**

## **William Shakespeare Dies**

William Shakespeare dies at the age of 52 and is buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.

**1623**

The First Folio is published by John Hemminges and Henry Condell.

**1642**

The Globe closes after England's Puritan administration abolishes all theatres.

**1644**

The Globe is demolished.

**1681-1834**

The play, *King Lear*, with Shakespeare's ending is thought to be too tragic to perform and instead Nahum Tate's version is performed, which includes a happy ending where Cordelia and Edgar both survive and get married.

# King Lear: Themes

## MADNESS

**King Lear** centers on the mental decline of its main character, Lear. The play can almost be seen as a case study of mental health. Madness seems in part the catalyst for Lear's initial decision to split up his kingdom prior to his death. We experience his madness in his severe treatment of his favorite daughter and his long-time adviser. The stress on his already frail mind created by his eldest daughters' mistreatment worsens his condition. After taking away his entourage they cast him off to the elements and he laments; "I have full cause of weeping; but this heart Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws, Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!" The literal tempest that follows becomes a metaphor for the chaos raging in Lear's mind. He rails against the storm, talks to furniture, treats another perceived madman (Poor Tom) as a sage, and wanders on a heath in Dover "fantastically dressed with wild flowers." When Lear finally encounters Cordelia, he recognizes that he is "not in his perfect mind." His acknowledgement of his insanity is a moment of regained sanity. However, her execution by Edmund's army irreparably crushes his psyche and he dies.

## SIBLING RIVALRY

Sibling rivalry is as old as the human story; the source of this conflict is often jealousy-fueled competition over parental attention and resources. The rivalries between siblings in **King Lear** drives the dual plots of the play. The primary plot involves Lear's three daughters Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia; the secondary plot revolves around Gloucester's sons Edgar and his illegitimate half-brother, Edmund. Both sets of siblings seek to secure the lands, wealth, and position of their fathers. The two plots are interwoven as Lear's daughters vie not only for their father's kingdom but also for the affections of Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund.

Unlike his brother Edgar, Edmund has grown up in a society where he has no expectation of having the affections and inheritance of a legitimate son. The vastly disparate treatment of these two siblings drives Edmund to passionate rebellion; he plots against the "plague of custom" which bars him from any of the wealth or status



King Lear and the Fool in the Storm" by William Dyce (1806-1864)

that his brother Edgar is heir to. He invokes the gods to "stand up for bastards!" In order to disinherit his half-brother, Edmund deviously convinces Gloucester that Edgar is plotting to kill him. Edgar flees and takes on the persona of Poor Tom until he subverts Edmund's plot by revealing his treasonous intentions. Ultimately, their rivalry ends when Edgar kills Edmund in a duel.

Lear's narcissistic manner of dividing his kingdom triggers sibling rivalry among his daughters by pitting each against the other in a test of who loves him most. Goneril answers with a claim of the greatest love. Regan responds with a one-up of Goneril's declaration, stating, "I am made Of the self-same metal that my sister is...Only she comes short." Lear's favoritism of his youngest is apparent when he addresses Cordelia as his "joy" and asks, "what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?" Cordelia refuses to engage in the obvious pandering of her siblings and is consequently rejected entirely by Lear. The continuing rivalry between Goneril and Regan becomes intensified when each realizes that the other has romantic entanglements with Edmund. In the worst imaginable display of sibling rivalry, Goneril murders Regan to have Edmund to herself.





England in Shakespeare's time

## SIGHT & BLINDNESS

Sight and blindness manifest as themes both literally and figuratively throughout *King Lear*. Gloucester's journey through the play from sighted to blind has an inverse relationship with his figurative ability to see. While he is sighted, he cannot see his scheming illegitimate son's machinations; however, upon becoming blind he has the revelation that Edmund has betrayed him. Gloucester finally realizing the uselessness of literal vision where there is no figurative vision says, "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes. I stumbled when I saw." Furthermore, because he has been blinded his servants lead him to Poor Tom, who is actually his true and loyal son, Edgar.

Lear is also blind to the truth about his children at the outset of the play and Kent pleads with him, "See better, Lear; and let me still remain the true blank of thine eye." Lear is forced to see the truth and also recognizes, as does Gloucester, that the perception of truth is not dependent upon literal vision. When talking to the blinded Gloucester on the heath of Dover, Lear explains, "A man may see how this world goes with no eyes."

## NATURE

Throughout *King Lear* "nature," in its varied incarnations, figures prominently. Characters are either natural or unnatural in the way they behave. For example, Lear calls his daughters, Goneril and Regan, "unnatural hags" because of their heartless treatment of him. Their violence and manipulation of their father does not align with a "womanly nature." Women were expected to be kind, nurturing, and loving, as opposed to cruel and violent—qualities which might be expected of a man, but were shameful in a woman. Additionally, a person's "nature" can be judged as predisposed to good or evil. In *King Lear*, Cordelia's nature is seen as good, whereas Edmund's nature is seen as evil.

*Lear* is also set at a time when "Nature" was called upon as a higher power or god. Frequently, deities were thought to manifest themselves through natural phenomena such as eclipses and storms. Often, characters such as Lear, Gloucester, and Edmund, call upon "Nature" in times of crisis to do something on their behalf. Finally, nature also refers to the natural order of things, vis-a-vis the natural rights of inheritance as societally mandated—the legitimate Edgar and the illegitimate Edmund. ♦

# King Lear: The Syntax and Scansion of Insanity | By Brian Staveley

**MAYBE** it's because I have this facial recognition problem that makes it tough for me to tell the difference between Robert De Niro and Al Pacino, but I don't think fictional character is a question of faces. Or bodies. Or clothes. Or even actions, actually. Those things are important, but I've become pretty convinced that the hot beating heart of character is language. If you know how a character talks, you know how she thinks, and if you know how she thinks, you know how she acts.

This isn't my idea. It's the whole premise of theater. A play's script is a record of spoken language. The task of those producing the play is to translate that language into character and scene. Sometimes there are stage directions, but stage directions are secondary. You can imagine performing a play stripped of its stage directions, but cut out the dialogue and you've got nothing.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Shakespeare, who was sparing with his stage directions and brilliant with his language. We can take, as one of the innumerable examples, the case of King Lear. We can look at how this horrible, tragic figure is built up from a series of syllables set on the page, one after the other.

I want to take a look at a series of Lear's speeches, five of them, one from each act of the play. All involve Lear at a moment of extreme rage or sorrow, but his rage and sorrow change dramatically from the first act to the last. **The character is the language, and what we see over the course of the play, is the utter destruction of that character.**

## ACT I

Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower!  
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,  
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,  
By all the operations of the orbs  
From whom we do exist and cease to be,  
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,  
Propinquity, and property of blood,  
And as a stranger to my heart and me  
Hold thee from this forever. The barbarous Scythian,  
Or he that makes his generation messes  
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom  
Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved,  
As thou my sometime daughter.

I.1.109-121

Let's start with a speech from the first scene. Here, Lear is leveling his curse upon his youngest and most loyal daughter, Cordelia, who has failed to play along with the idiotic farce he's hit upon to divide his kingdom. This is, to put it broadly, *royal* speech. Lear's verse is weighed and measured. The pentameter never strays far from the



King Lear and the Fool in the Storm, painting by William Dyce c.1851

iambic, and yet what kind of pentameter are we talking about here? It's not the blunt, sledge-hammer, monosyllabic pentameter we recognize from Tennyson's *Ulysses*, when he declares his final intention "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to fail." If Ulysses' line is one of blunt, military exhortation, Lear's language is the pentameter of legal kingship, strung as it is with polysyllabic Latinate gems like "operations" and "propinquity." His syntax, too, suggests a supple mind. The subject of that second sentence is buried five lines in, behind a prefatory wall of prepositional phrases that evokes both the **rhetoric of ritual and the careful legalistic hedging we might expect from a courtroom**. Lear's demands for praise from his daughters might be crazy, but **his language here indicates a mind that is still fundamentally whole, unbroken.**

## ACT II

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,  
As full of grief as age, wretched in both.  
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts  
Against their father, fool me not so much  
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,  
And let not women's weapons, water drops,  
Stain my man's cheeks.

II.4.272-277

Once again, Lear is angry, angry with his daughters Regan and Goneril this time—they're trying to whittle away his royal entourage—instead of Cordelia. And again, beneath that anger a deep emotional wound is festering, the sorrow of a father who feels (rightly or wrongly) that he has been betrayed by his children. But this speech is obviously different from the first. For starters, there's a change in idiom. The formal invocation of Hecate in Act I, that careful language calling upon the "sacred radiance of the sun"





Cordelia in the Court of King Lear (1873) by Sir John Gilbert

and the “operation of the orbs” has been ground down to simpler, more basic cry for help to “the gods.” In fact, the entire lexicon is starting to shift away from the Latin and toward the Germanic. **The sentences are shorter and the relationship between the clauses clearer, as though he can’t quite sustain the legalistic formulae of the opening act, as though he’s starting to have difficulty keeping track of his ideas. On the flip side, the pentameter is even stronger, more bald, thrown up like a desperate bulwark against his own incipient madness.**

### ACT III

*Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow’st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here’s three on’s are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.*

III.4.103-108

Now we’re out in the storm, wandering on the heath. Lear has just encountered Edgar, who is naked and filthy, cavorting about in the guise of Poor Tom. **The king has abandoned verse**, so we can’t make much of the meter, **although it’s worth noting that the passage is heavily iambic**, at least as much as the one we just looked at from Act II. **Those thudding iambs, however—the beast no hide, the sheep no wool—are a world away from the fluid handling of terms like “propinquity” in the first speech**, and when Lear hits on a word like “unaccommodated” here, it jars, shattering the rhythm of what comes before. He’s relying less on complex syntactical arrangements, too, leaning more eagerly on simple lists—a *poor, bare, forked, animal*—which comprise almost half of the passage. **It’s all made more pathetic by the fact that he’s reaching for high-minded philosophical discourse, a disquisition on the nature of man. Given this language, though, “reaching” isn’t the right word. More like blindly groping.**

### ACT IV

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

I pardon that man’s life. What was thy cause?  
Adultery?  
Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No.  
The wren goes to’t, and the small gilded fly  
Does lecher in my sight.  
Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester’s bastard son  
Was kinder to his father than my daughters  
Got ’tween lawful sheets.  
To’t, luxury, pell-mell, for I lack soldiers.

IV.6.108-117

Lear is talking to the blinded Gloucester here, **and by this point in the play, he’s utterly busted. We’re back in verse, but it’s a mangled, monstrous verse.** Some lines are perfectly iambic but way too short, others run to extra feet, while still others lack any metrical signature at all. If he was aiming for philosophy with his last speech, he’s groping for the language of law here, casting himself as the magistrate, and yet this is a monstrous magistracy, veering between pseudo-proclamation—*Let copulation thrive*—and a sort of bizarre naturalist’s focus on the sexual habits of birds and bugs, as though these could set precedent for human law. **He’s also starting to repeat himself, even within the same line: *Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No.*** Really, you don’t even need to understand this speech (and most of my students find themselves baffled by this entire scene) in order to hear the **mental breakdown in the language.**

### ACT V

And my poor fool is hanged: no, no, no life?  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never.  
Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.  
Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips,  
Look there, look there—

V.3.312-318

We’ve come, finally, to the King’s heart-wrenching final words. What do we find? A fractured, interrupted syntax comprised of questions, exclamations, and fragments. Unlike those that come before, this speech isn’t leaning on any rhetorical tradition: it’s not trying to be regal, or philosophical, or legal. Lear is beyond rhetoric here, beyond any learned forms of language. The only shape we find is a return to the iambic rhythm of his early speeches—lines 313 and 314 are nearly perfect—but then look what happens. Those two rhythmically reassuring lines are only there to set us up for what has to be the most brutal ten syllables in the English language: *Never, never, never, never, never*. It’s a perfect inversion of the natural order, an unrelenting line of trochaic pentameter coupled with an abdication of any attempt at syntax. This line looks like it is comprised of words; it is not. The language breaks here, revealing **something older, darker, mere sound, rage, pain, loss, brute confusion beyond the power of any words to heal.** ♦

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## “EVERY INCH A KING”:

# The Universal and the Human in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*

By Miranda Johnson-Haddad, Ph.D.

Although *King Lear* has historically been regarded as Shakespeare’s masterpiece, it has also endured an extremely vexed reception down the ages, seemingly because of its profoundly tragic vision. At one time the play appears to have been considered too depressing even to be performed, and for over 150 years the only version seen on the English stage was the infamous 1681 re-write by the Irish poet Nahum Tate, which omits the Fool and, through the addition of several new characters and musical numbers (among other questionable emendations), ultimately results in a happy ending. While the mere idea of “improving” Shakespeare in this way may be appalling to some twenty-first century theatre-goers, many of Tate’s contemporaries and later critics approved of the changes because the events as presented in Shakespeare’s original were perceived as so unjustly tragic as to be downright offensive. Even Samuel Johnson endorsed the so-called “Tatification” of *Lear*, noting in the preface to the play in his 1765 edition of Shakespeare’s dramatic works that “I was many years ago so shocked by [the original ending of the play], that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes... till I undertook to revise them as an editor.”

*King Lear* was entered in the London Stationers’ Register in late 1607, and it thus dates from the same period as Shakespeare’s other major tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. The storyline of *Lear* would have been familiar to Shakespeare’s audiences, for its many sources were familiar and varied, encompassing everything from Holinshed’s historical *Chronicles* (1577) to well-known fairy tales. Not present in Shakespeare’s historical sources is the subplot involving Gloucester and his sons, “legitimate” Edgar and the bastard son, Edmund. This subplot serves to underscore one of the central psychological themes of the play, which many scholars have described as being about the fury of the neglected child. Shakespeare’s brilliance in depicting that fury as it plays out in the characters of Goneril, Regan and Edmund ultimately prevents them from devolving into stock villains. Goneril’s pained acknowledgment to Regan that Lear “always loved our sister most”; Regan’s sharp retort to Lear’s claim that he gave her “all”—“And in good time you gave it”; Edmund’s poignant deathbed assertion, “Yet Edmund was below’d!”; and many similarly revealing lines fully render these flawed but human characters in all their psychological complexity. They commit unspeakably evil acts; and yet a modern audience will readily comprehend that unspeakable psychological evil was also visited upon them and that actions have consequences. As Edmund himself acknowledges at the end of the play, “The wheel has come full circle. I am here.”

*King Lear* is both a domestic family drama and a timeless, universal tragedy because it operates simultaneously on both a local and a global level. The play depicts the unravelling of a family when its patriarch slides into the merciless ravages

of dementia, and decades of family dysfunction and anger are consequently revealed. But because that patriarch is also a king, and his daughters are the rulers of powerful realms themselves, the consequences of the family breakdown extend far beyond the immediate domestic arena. The inexorable quality of Lear’s horrifying descent into madness, and the resulting implosion of his family and then his kingdom, resonate today as powerfully as they must have done in the seventeenth century, when the political was also fundamentally personal (as Shakespeare’s audience had good reason to know). Theatrically speaking, Lear’s decline also remains one of the towering challenges confronting any actor; yet despite its formidable physical and emotional challenges, the role often proves irresistible, with the result that recent years have seen many well-known figures, from Ian Holm to Ian McKellen to Glenda Jackson, tackle this Everest of roles.

The powerful themes and the vivid imagery of the play have influenced many artists and authors over the centuries and continue to do so today. Many viewers (fans of Shakespeare and J.R.R. Tolkien alike) noted that in Peter Jackson’s 2002 film *The Two Towers* (the second installment of his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy), the moving scene of King Theoden’s awakening from the spell cast upon him by Saruman, and his subsequent recognition of his beloved niece, Eowyn, recalls Lear’s awakening and recognition of Cordelia late in the play. Jane Smiley’s mesmerizing novel *A Thousand Acres* (written in 1991 and made into a film in 1997) set the play on a large Iowa farm in late twentieth-century America. And outside of the realm of art, the very real risks faced by those who attempt—as do Cordelia, Kent and the Fool—to speak truth to power remain all too apparent to this day.

If it is hard to believe that *King Lear* was written by the same author who penned the delightful comedies of the 1590’s that can still make audiences laugh today, it is in some ways even more difficult to believe that this same author would go on to compose the Romance plays, such as *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*, with their emphasis on compassion and forgiveness. There is nothing uplifting or redemptive about the ending of *Lear*; all is darkness, and as Edgar observes, “we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long.” Our only consolation—and it is a poor one—lies in our ability to accept the inevitable, and if there is any glimmer of hope in this most tragic of plays, it centers around whether we can manage to resign ourselves to endure whatever we must. “Ripeness is all,” as Edgar reminds Gloucester, who is forced to agree: “And that’s true too.” But regardless of our individual success in achieving such perspective, we are certainly all capable of experiencing the redemptive power that genius and art bestow; and that power is what Shakespeare offers us with this enduring, and enduringly moving, play.



# DIAGNOSING *KING LEAR*: THEN AND NOW

## Renaissance Views of Madness

By Adrian Ingham

**SAMUEL JOHNSON** describes the age of Shakespeare as a time when “speculation had not yet attempted to analyze the mind” (118), but there was a range of theories and opinions regarding madness. And although it has been demonstrated that Shakespeare’s portrayal of madness parallels Bright’s *A Treatise of Melancholie* (Wilson 309-20), that medical model alone is insufficient to describe the madness of King Lear. Shakespeare was not limited to a single book in his understanding of madness; he had at his disposal the sum total of his society’s understanding of the issue. Since Lear’s madness is derived from a mixture of sources, it can only be effectively described in this larger context.

Because much of Renaissance medical theory was based on premises from the Middle Ages, a starting point for our understanding of Lear’s madness can be found in the 1535 translation of *De Propriatibus Rerum* by the thirteenth century monk Batholomaeus Anglicus. This work is based entirely on the traditional model of illness as an imbalance of the four humours: melancholy (or black bile), choler (or yellow bile), blood, and phlegm. Batholomaeus classifies melancholy and madness separately, attributing them to different humours and different areas of the brain (1-4). ... [Lear] is choleric by nature and it is likely that his madness is caused by an excess of that humour. Goneril describes his choler and foreshadows his madness in an early attempt to discredit him:

The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash;  
then must we look from his age to receive, not alone the  
imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal  
the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring  
with them. (1.2.294-298)

In Bartholomeus’ model madness caused by an excess of choler is called “the frenesie”. Its signs are “woodnes and contynual wakyng, mevyng and castyng aboute the eyen, ragynge...” (3). It is caused by the red choler “made lyght with heate of it self... ravysshed upwarde by veynes, synewes, wosen and pypes” (2). The cure involves bleeding the patient, shaving his head and applying vinegar and ointment to the head. However it also recommends creating a calm environment for the patient, feeding him a sparse simple diet, and “above all things... men shall labour to bringe hym a slepe” (3-4). Kent seems to be aware of this most important part of the cure, and through him we realize that Lear’s madness may have been shortlived had he been able to rest before fleeing to Dover:



Folger Library, Johann Ramberg painting of Lear and the Fool in the storm (Act 3, scene 2; 1829)

Oppressed nature sleeps.

This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken sinews,  
Which, if convenience will not allow,  
Stand in hard cure. (3.6.94-98)

However, not all contemporary models of madness relied solely on humours. Timothy Bright’s model simplifies Bartholomeus’ categorization of madness by calling all madness melancholy, but diversifies it by distinguishing two separate types of melancholy. In Bright’s words: “the difference is betwixt natural melancholie, and that heavy hande of God upon the afflicted conscience, tormented with remorse of sinne, & fear of his judgement” (37). Natural melancholy resembles Bartholomeus’ model in that it has humoreal origins and in its extreme manifestation the melancholy humour can cause “stormes of outrageous love, hatred, hope or feare, wherewith bodies so passionate are here and there, tossed with disquiet...” (Bright 38). But unnatural melancholy has no parallel in the medieval model. Natural melancholy can be recognized from the general symptoms of madness occurring in a stable person in a stress free environment. In this case the madness can only be attributed to physical imbalances (38), while unnatural melancholy, ironically, can be recognized by its occurrence in situations when it seems more natural to go mad: situations in which the mind is tormented by worry and stress (37). The natural/unnatural distinction should not be taken to imply rarity or probability but rather physical or non-physical causes. In Bright’s model, like Bartholomeus’, Lear would probably not be diagnosed with natural melancholy. We have seen that he is naturally choleric rather than melancholic, and he certainly has recognizable cause to go mad from mental stress and guilt, as Kent, once again, recognizes:

A sovereign shame so elbows him: his own unkindness  
That stripped her from his benediction, turned her To  
foreign casualties, gave her dear rights To his dog-hearted  
daughters—these things sting His mind so venomously...  
(4.3.44-49) and because Lear is suffering from unnatural  
melancholy, his prognosis is not good in Bright's model:  
"Here no medicine, no purgation, no cordiall, no tryacle or  
balme are able to assure the afflicted soule and trembling  
heart, now panting under the terrors of God" (39-40). So  
we see that mere rest may not have been enough to cure  
Lear's condition. Upon his reconciliation with Cordelia  
it is rest which calms his anger, but it is her forgiveness  
which brings him out of his depression. Had Lear not been  
parted from her again through her death he may well have  
survived his madness.

[...] Lear's madness can be seen both as a result of his  
arrogance and as a remedy for it: "Lear's experience is  
purgatorial; madness is both punishment and insight" (Byrd  
7). The Fool's statement that "truth's a dog must to kennel;  
he must be whipped out" (1.4.111-12) foreshadows the  
pain that Lear will have to pass through before attaining  
enlightenment. This vision of madness is characteristic of  
Shakespeare's era. The Renaissance held the Aristotelian  
view that there is a fine line between madness and divine  
inspiration (Skultans 20), but by the eighteenth century  
madness was viewed as no more than degradation and  
shame. In testimony to this, the eighteenth century's  
favorite version of King Lear was a version rewritten by  
Nahum Tate to include a happy ending (Byrd 7-8). In this  
version Lear recovers from his illness, wins the battle and  
reigns again: by suffering madness Lear pays for his sins  
and is returned to health and prosperity. In contrast to  
this, Lear's transformation in the original play leaves him so  
guileless that it is unlikely that he would survive long with  
the intrigues of running a kingdom even if he had won the  
war. When Lear dies it is because he has finally learned to  
love; and when the one he loves dies, the intensity of his  
sorrow kills him. "His death is a release from suffering, but  
also a testimony to what he has become" (Byrd 8).

Thus Lear's madness transcends a purely medical model.  
Lear is a fusion of not only Bright and his predecessors, but  
also of Renaissance feelings towards madness. The medical  
model had not changed significantly by the eighteenth  
century, but common opinions about madness had. The  
fact that Tate's maudlin happy ending was ever preferred  
to Shakespeare's original is testimony to the difference that  
such attitudes can make. While the similarities between  
Shakespeare's mad men and Timothy Bright's *A Treatise  
of Melancholie* are evident, it would be a mistake to infer  
from these parallels that the characters are based solely on  
that model. They are, instead, derived from both medical  
and non-medical sources, and they can be most effectively  
analyzed using a similar variety of sources. ♦

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# King Lear: Dementia, Ageism, Stigma

“Dementia is a major cause of disability amongst older people and constitutes one of the most serious challenges facing the older population, their families and health and social care services in the developed world (Care Services Improvement Partnership, 2005).”

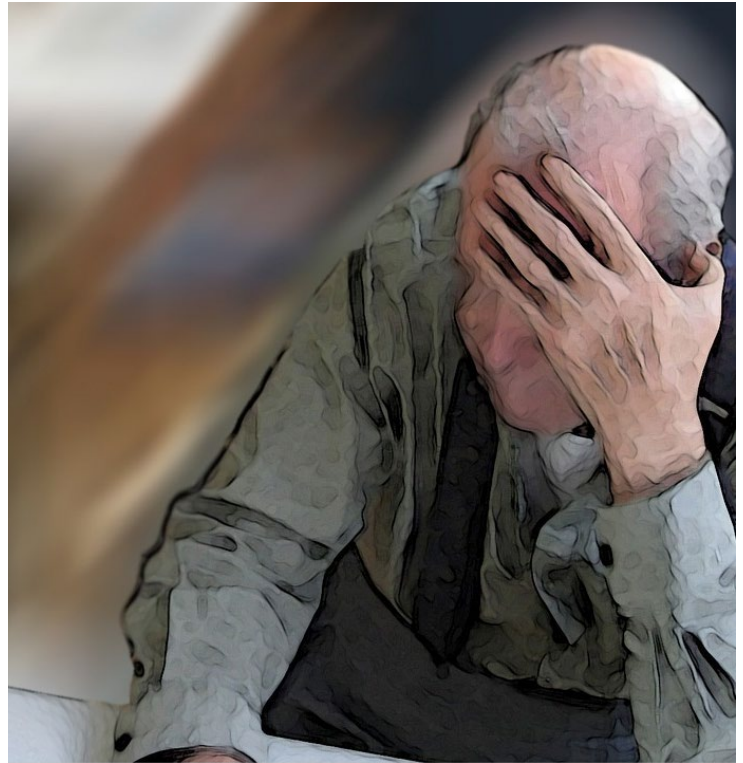
Although *King Lear* is not specifically diagnosed with dementia in the play, many mental health professionals suggest that the symptoms of his “madness” point to a form of dementia.

“The combined impact of the dementing illness itself—cognitive decline and memory loss—and the negative responses to diagnosis and symptoms, profoundly undermine psycho-social well being and quality of life. Loss of independence, roles and identity, and feelings of low self esteem, value and worth are widely noted in research with people with dementia (Husband, 1999).”

Can you find specific examples throughout the text of *King Lear* that might suggest he is suffering from dementia? How does his cognitive functioning and memory decline throughout the play? Try tracking how the quality of his life changes from the beginning of the play to the end.

“As an age-related disorder older people with dementia are thus exposed not only to the stigma associated with mental illness but to age discrimination as well—the so-called “double whammy” (Godfrey et al., 2005). Age discrimination represents an important element of the way in which older people experience later life and gain access to socially-valued roles and resources. It functions to reinforce age-related norms and perpetuate assumptions about old age and ageing as a process. (Bytheway, 1995). Old age stereotypes are almost universally negative and are associated with dependency, limited social and sexual lives, and incapacity to exercise autonomy and self determination (Victor, 2005).”

Find places in the text where people treat King Lear differently because of his perceived madness or because of his age. Do you think Goneril and Regan would have been so keen to take advantage of him if he were younger? How do the stereotypes imposed on Lear reinforce his own perception of himself or influence his behavior?



“Recent attempts to re-conceptualize dementia as a disability and to locate it inside the social model of disability has helped to provide a “new” way of understanding the condition and challenge stigma (Gilliard et al., 2005). As a framework, this is wholly consistent with the promotion of personhood and acceptance that it is our approach to people with dementia—the language we use to describe the condition and people with it, and the service environments we create for them, that disempower, dehumanize, marginalize and ultimately stigmatize, not the condition itself (Cantley & Bowes, 2004).”

If Lear were treated differently throughout the course of the play, how do you think his personal progression would be different? How much of Lear's deterioration is worsened by his mistreatment? ♦

**QUOTES SOURCE:** The ‘D’ word: Reflections on the relationship between stigma, discrimination, and dementia by Alison Milne. Publication: Journal of Mental Health, 2010.

# What Alzheimer's Caregivers Can Learn From *King Lear*

**WATCHING KING LEAR** through the lens of an Alzheimer's professional is a curious experience. From the very first scene when the aging monarch—the King of all Britain—decides to step down from the throne and divide his kingdom among his three daughters by testing their love for him, I knew something was very wrong. Who in their right mind would put their children in that situation?

The answer, of course, is no one. As I watched the performance earlier this summer in Central Park's Delacorte Theater, I thought, *The poor man is demented*. And I braced myself for disaster.

Goneril, the eldest daughter, went first: "Sir, I do love you more than word can wield the matter..."

*It rang false. But, right answer*, I thought.

Regan, up next, one-upped her sister, saying that Goneril "comes too short, I profess myself an enemy to all other joys..."

*Good girl, I thought, play along with him. That's what he needs to hear.*

Lear, now very pleased, turns to his youngest and most beloved child and chides her, "A third more opulent than your sister? Speak."

Cordelia, angered by the game and by her duplicitous, scheming sisters said, "Nothing, my lord... Nothing."

My heart stopped. I wanted to stand up, right there in front of John Lithgow, Annette Bening and the entire magnificent cast and yell, "1-800-272-3900! Call the Alzheimer's Association 24-hour Helpline. We can help you."

What ailed King Lear has been the subject of scholarly debate for centuries. As far back as 1866, author A.O. Kellogg in his book *Shakespeare's Delineations of Insanity, Imbecility and Suicide*, opined that Lear's behavior could be attributed to senile dementia. H. Somerville, in *Madness and Shakespeare* (Richards Press: London, 1929) wrote that Lear showed "signs of mental deterioration due to old age." And as recently as February, British actor Simon Russell Beale said that medical research he did in preparation to play Lear suggested that the monarch could have been suffering from Lewy Body dementia.

Regardless of a specific diagnosis, if my 10 years at the New York City Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association has taught me anything, it's that communication and planning are key to helping a family deal with dementia.

The problem, in Lear's case, is not that he is asking the wrong question—because there is no right or wrong question for a person with dementia. It's that Cordelia is not able or willing to see the question for what it is: the product of her father's demented mind.

Before Act 1, Scene 1 is over, with Cordelia now



disinherited by a furious Lear, even the evil sisters recognize that their father is no longer their father.

Goneril says, "You see how full of changes his age is... He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly."

Regan responds, "'Tis the infirmity of his age, yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself."

In professing their love as they did, Goneril and Regan were far more effective in controlling the situation than Cordelia, their underlying motivations notwithstanding.

As in any great Shakespearean tragedy, the consequences of Cordelia's words and Lear's reaction are devastating. At the end, the family members are all dead and the kingdom lies in ruin. And while today, such a dysfunctional family dynamic would not end in a tragedy of such global proportions, Alzheimer's can have an equally devastating impact on the personal lives of family members.

King Lear has many valuable lessons for family caregivers. Let's start with communication. One of the fundamental lessons that families must learn is: don't fight the reality of the person who is living with Alzheimer's—even though their words can be hurtful.

Without warning, one day, my mother who was in the late stages of dementia, looked at me angrily and demanded to know who I was. I was stunned by her harsh tone.

"I'm your daughter," I replied.

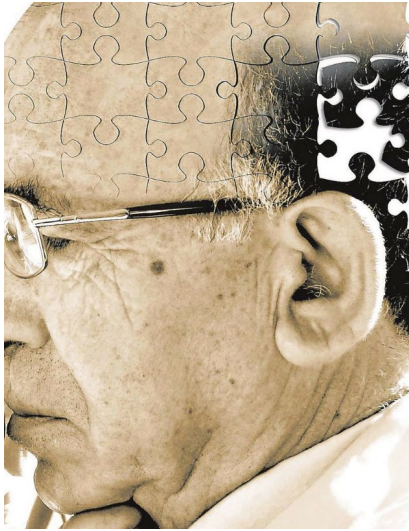
Her voice was cold. "Impossible."

"Who do you think I am?"

"I have no idea." She raised her voice. "Where is my daughter?"

I could have yelled and said, *What do you mean? Who am I? I have been your daughter for more than six decades. I*





*have been breaking my back taking care of you for years. But I didn't. Social workers had taught me not to argue. So I calmly said, "Your daughter is close by. You'll see her soon."*

The lesson here, as it should have been for Cordelia is: put yourself in the mind of the other individual, however hurtful or crazy they may seem. Part of your job as a caregiver is to create moments of

peace when there is agitation.

A second key lesson is: you must be prepared. Every day, I hear stories about children fighting over what dad would want. Who's in charge of his care? What do we do with his

finances? Do we take extraordinary measures at the end to extend his life? How are his assets to be divided?

At the beginning of every family's Alzheimer's journey there should be a planning process. Key legal documents must be in place.

Oh, if King Lear only had a Durable Power of Attorney authorizing someone he trusted to make legal and financial decisions. Also critical is a Health Care Proxy giving one person legal authority to make important medical decisions. A Living Will is a good supplement to the Proxy. Signed while the person is still of sound mind, it allows a person with dementia to clearly communicate wishes regarding end of life care. And finally, a Will can help you divide the kingdom without bloodshed.

With help and information from the Alzheimer's Association, communicating with someone who has dementia and planning for the inevitable end can be a smoother process—and one that avoids tragedy of Shakespearean proportions. ♦

**SOURCE:** Lou-Ellen Barkan, President & CEO of CaringKind 360 Lexington Ave NYC, NY 10017

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# The Wig Design Process for *King Lear*

**MY FIRST STEP** when I am designing any show is to read the script thoroughly. I want to get a feeling for who these characters are and see if there is any mention of business with wigs, hair, facial hair, or make-up. After reading the script I then begin researching images. I like to get any ideas out of my head and onto my desktop or in my hands. The library's books, catalogues, magazines and Pinterest aid my research process. If I am working on a production, which takes place in 1955, I tend to stick to around that year or a little before. Sometimes I will even use a modern image if it is the right feeling for the character. I usually like to do this even before I collaborate with any of the other designers or even the director. Certain characters are sometimes in a similar grouping or pairing. In *Lear*, for instance, the two sisters remind me of the evil stepsisters in *Cinderella*. I think they should be portrayed as such so that the audience can grasp the same sense of character.

I then look at the actors' headshots to see what canvas I am working with. Are they able to grow a beard, or can we use their own hair instead of a wig? With any company, along with design you have to think about budget. Wigs and facial hair, if they are human, aren't cheap. The goal is to be able to tell the story in the best way possible without breaking the bank.

Once I have all of my ideas and research in a presentable format I then like to meet with the director and other

designers. Many times we have production meetings as a group to exchange thoughts, ideas, or even problems that need to be solved. Collaborating is one of my favorite parts of design. Sometimes the director might not agree with what I have designed for a character and that is fine. I then make adjustments find a new image and move forward.

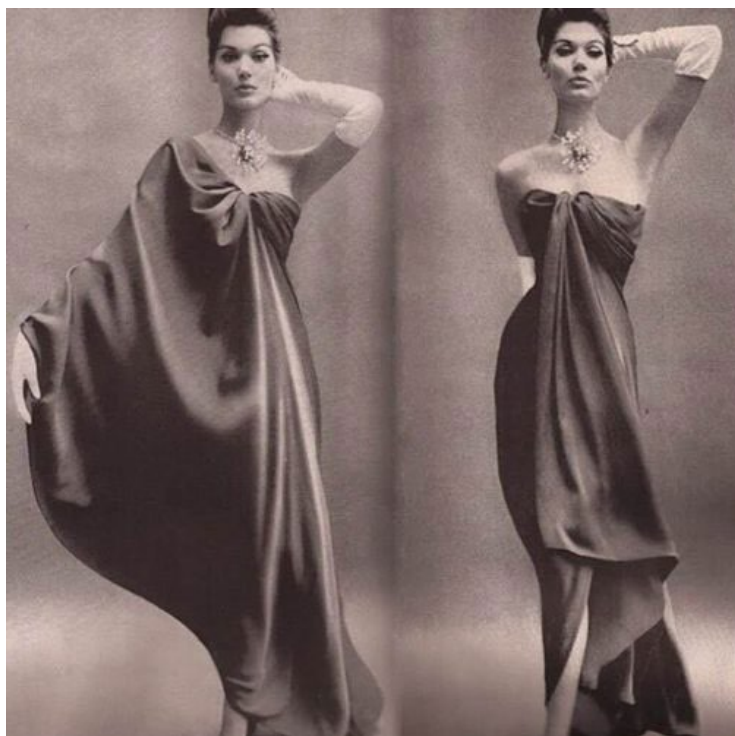
After designs have been finalized, it is then time for me to come and get head wraps of the actors. These are very specific measurements I use to make sure the wig fits. This process is a great way for me to take their head molds and face tracings so that I can make sure and build a custom wig or facial hair. After I have this information I don't need to see the actors again until fittings or a costume parade, but this is when I go to work. I go back to my research images, then roller set and or style the wig as close to this image as possible. This is when the director will be able to see the design come to life on the actor's head. At this point the design process is still being tweaked. There could be notes such as "soften the hairline" or "this color doesn't work". If this is the case I then find a substitute and fix the problem. Once we go into first dress, we can then see all the aspects of design come together.

Seeing it all come together like this is why I love design. Theatre is an ever-changing growing work of art. That is what makes wig designing so challenging yet so beautiful. ♦



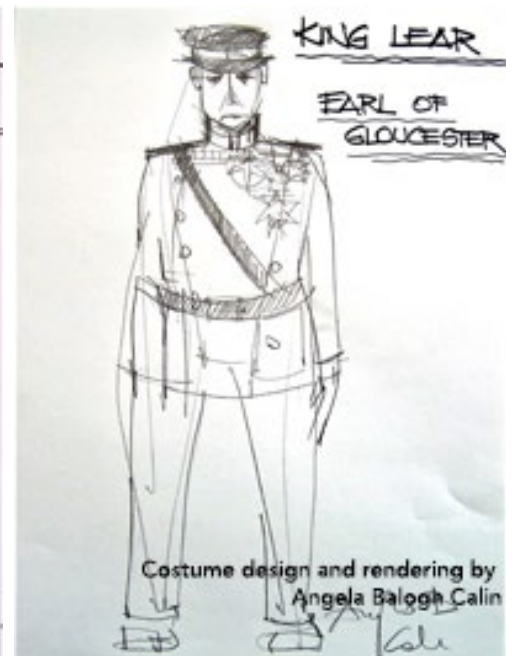
# Costume Research for *King Lear*

Costume design by Angela Balogh Calin.  
Photos are for research purposes only.



# Costume Renderings for *King Lear*

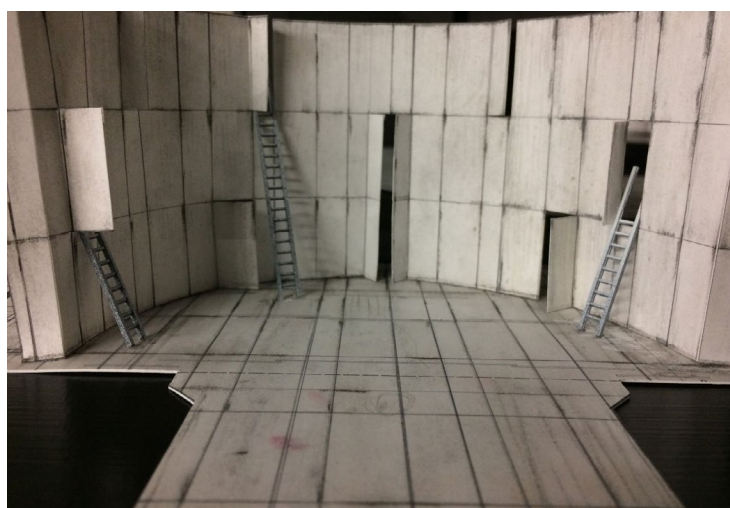
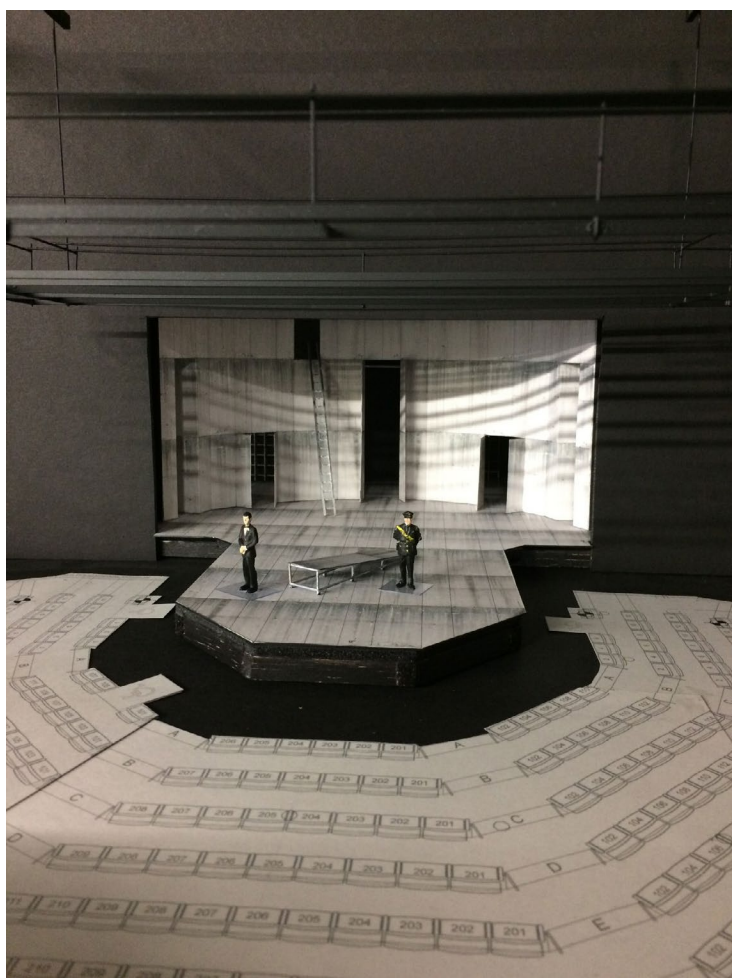
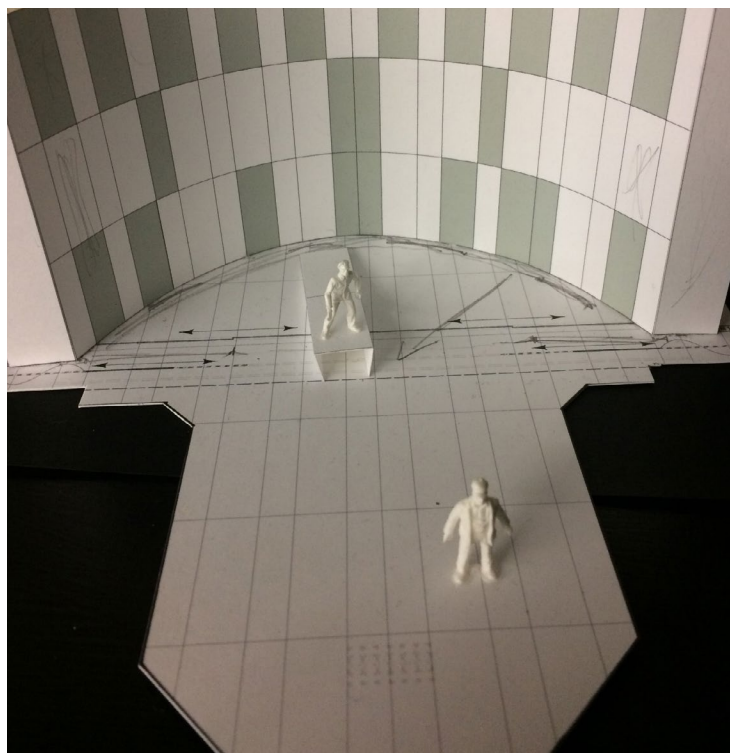
Costume design by  
Angela Balogh Calin.



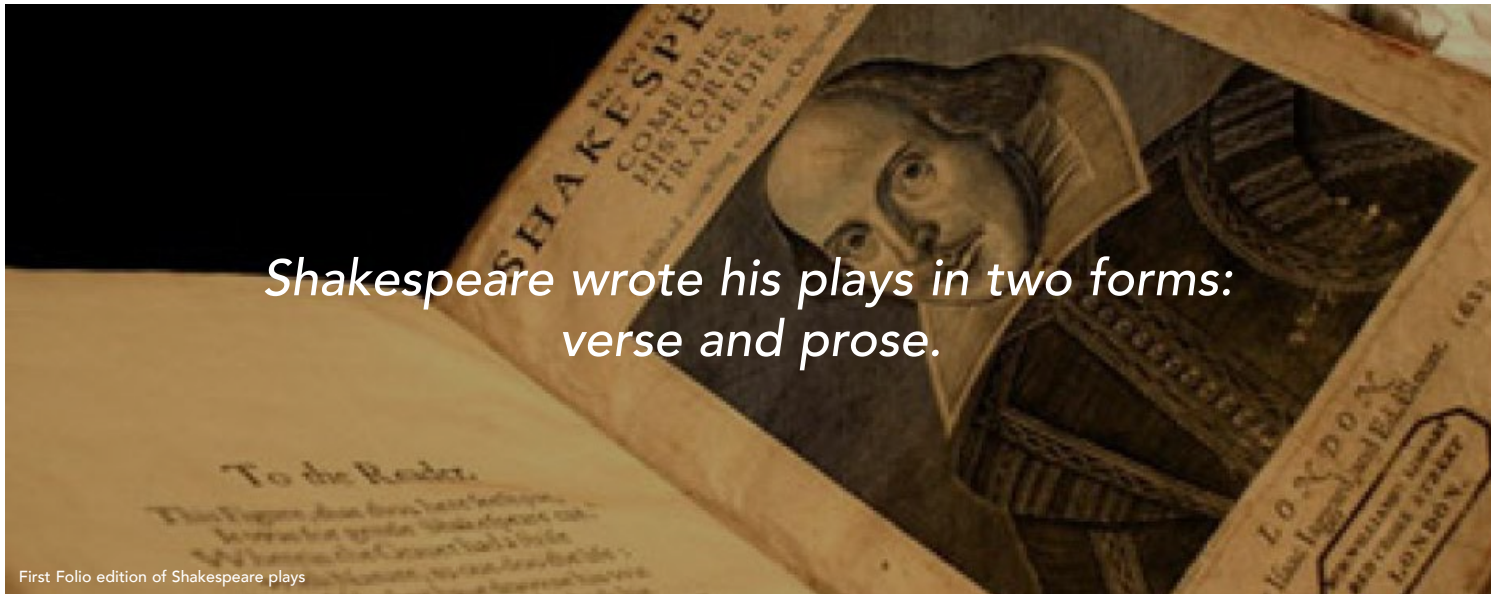


# Scenic Design for *King Lear* | Fred Kinney

Generally, when I am asked about how or why I designed a set in a specific way, I respond to it by saying: "An artist cannot speak about his art any more than a plant can discuss horticulture." This is a quote by Jean Cocteau. But, when asked to provide context for this study guide, it made me sit down and give this some thought. Ultimately, I would say that designing a set comes down to figuring out a machine that is going to help the director tell the story of the play. This machine is composed of three important elements: 1) the shape 2) the color and 3) the movement. The shape, in the case of *King Lear*, is a large semi-circular wall which allows the director to create many locations on one set, i.e. Interior spaces, exterior spaces, small spaces or even wide open spaces. The color we've done here emulates the look and feel of concrete. It is cold, unrelenting and unforgiving. The movement is created when we move the scenery. The furniture changes in unique ways, again to help set the scene. For example, an actor might set a chair on top of a table and this creates a whole different space than just placing a table at a chair. Ultimately, my design helps the director create unique and surprising ways to help show the audience the various settings in the play.



# Shakespeare's Verse and Prose



Shakespeare wrote his plays in two forms:  
verse and prose.

First Folio edition of Shakespeare plays

## VERSE

is language with a set rhythm.

The majority of Shakespeare's plays are written in verse for two primary reasons: tradition and memorization. Since the beginning of theatre, plays had been written in verse, and verse is easier to memorize than prose. Shakespeare was one of the first playwrights to use both prose and verse when it suited him. Shakespeare used verse to denote members of the nobility and the upper class.

While Romeo & Juliet is 90% verse, King Lear is only 76% verse. Why do you think that is?

Shakespeare used a verse form called **blank verse**. While blank verse does not contain rhyme, each line has an internal rhythm and a regular rhyme pattern, like a heartbeat.

Shakespeare is known for utilizing **iambic pentameter**. An iamb is a poetic foot with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. A pentameter means that there are five feet in a line. An iambic pentameter is then five iambs, forming a ten syllable line with a total of five stressed and five unstressed syllables per line.

### Example:

The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,  
That justly think'st and hast most rightly said  
— *King Lear, Act I, Scene I (Kent to Cordelia)*.

That **justly** think'st, and **hast** most **rightly** said!

dah-DŪM, dah-DŪM, dah-DŪM, dah-DŪM, dah-DŪM

## PROSE

is language without a set rhythm  
or structure.

Prose is the form used by the common citizens in Shakespearean drama. There is no rhythm or meter in the line. It is everyday language that Shakespeare's audience would recognize as their own language. In Shakespeare's plays prose is rarely used by nobility or members of the royal family. Prose is what someone speaks when they are reading aloud or when they are crazy or acting crazy.

Why is Edgar, as Poor Tom, speaking in prose here?

### Example:

A servingman, proud in heart and mind, that curled  
my hair, wore gloves in my cap, served the lust of  
my mistress' heart and did the act of darkness with  
her, swore as many oaths as I spake words and  
broke them in the sweet face of heaven

— *Edgar, Act III, Scene IV*



Three daughters of King Lear by Gustav Pope



# Verse-Speaking Activities



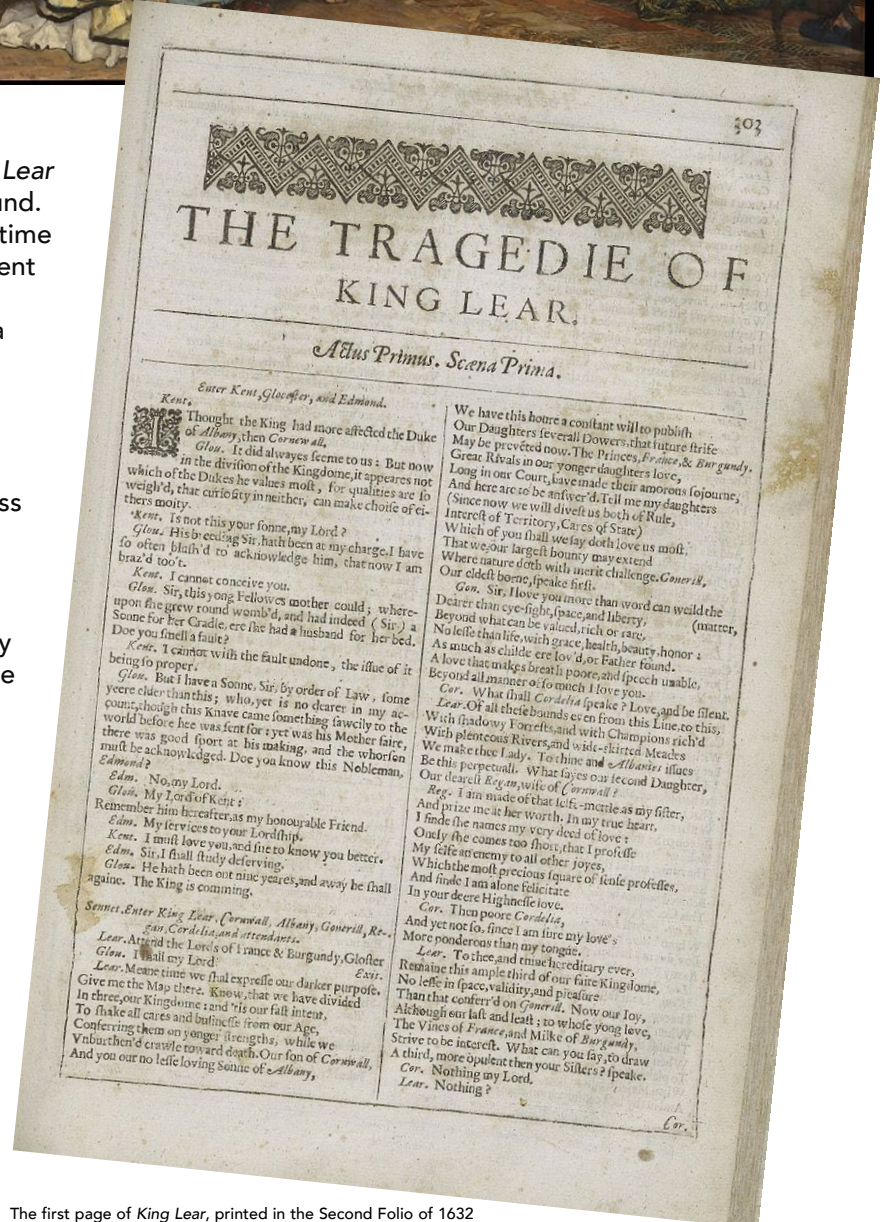
King Lear: Cordelia's Farewell by Edwin Austin Abbey

Choose a lengthy speech by any character in *King Lear* and have students read it aloud while walking around. Students should physically change direction every time they reach a comma, colon, or full stop. This frequent change in direction will illustrate how each clause in a sentence suggests a new thought or idea for a character.

Repeat this exercise, but instead of changing direction, have students say the words "comma" and "full stop" out loud when they encounter punctuation. This exercise helps heighten awareness of where punctuation is in our speech and what its purpose is.

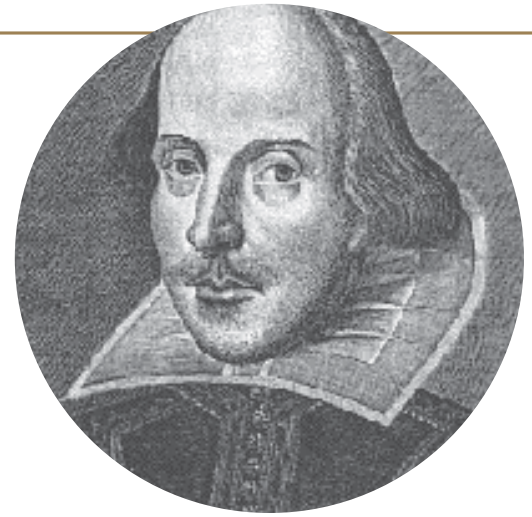
Using the same speech, have students underline what they think are the natural stress words. If they spot an often repeated word, they should underline that as well. Students can then practice speaking the text with an emphasis on these key stress words.

Have students speak the same speech aloud, forcing themselves to make a physical gesture on every single word. This gesture can be clearly connected to the word (for example, a finger point on "him") or can be more abstract. This exercise helps students to value every word in the text. Students will prioritize the correct stresses because they will naturally gesture more when saying key words.



The first page of *King Lear*, printed in the Second Folio of 1632

# Try Your Hand At Shakespeare



The following expressions are a result of William Shakespeare's creativity with words. You may have heard some of them used. Or perhaps you have used them yourself.

Try your hand at using some of these phrases to create your own short story or poem.

as luck would have it  
 green-eyed monster  
 not slept one wink  
 as white as driven snow  
 give the devil his due  
 one fell swoop  
 bag and baggage  
 hold a candle to  
 seen better days  
 be all and end all  
 in a pickle

sharper than a serpent's tooth  
 blinking idiot  
 it smells to heaven  
 stood on ceremony  
 budge an inch  
 laugh yourself into stitches  
 the more fool you  
 but me no buts  
 laughing stock  
 too much of a good thing  
 dead as a doornail

make a virtue of necessity  
 tower of strength  
 elbow room  
 merry as the day is long  
 vanish into thin air  
 for goodness sake  
 my own flesh and blood  
 what the dickens  
 foul play  
 not a mouse stirring  
 without rhyme or reason

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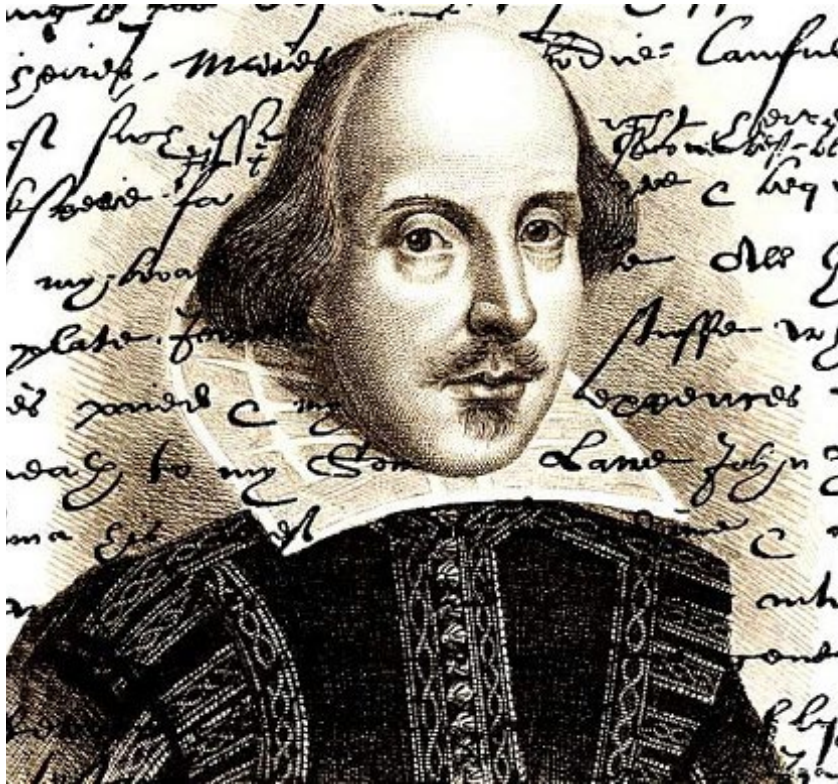
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# Words coined by Shakespeare



## WORDS AND PHRASES SEEN IN KING LEAR:

Darker purpose

Felicitate

Fortune's alms

"I can keep honest counsel."—Kent

Football player

Monopoly

Fond eyes

Lily-livered

Hot-blooded

Flibbertigibbet

Scurvy politician

"Fie, foh, and fum, I smell the blood of a British man."—Edgar (as Poor Tom)

Fool of fortune

## Accused—*Richard II*, Act I, Scene I

*How Shakespeare used it:* To describe the person being charged with a crime or offense. This is the word's first known use as a noun. In this case Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray are the accuser and the accused—Bolingbroke (the accuser) argues that Thomas Mowbray (the accused) is "a traitor and a miscreant".

"Then call them to our presence; face to face,  
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear  
The accuser and the **accused** freely speak:  
High-stomach'd are they both, and full of ire,  
In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire."—King Richard II

*Modern Definition:* someone charged with a crime or offense (particularly relating to a criminal case).

## Addiction—*Othello*, Act II, Scene II

*How Shakespeare used it:* meaning a strong preference for or inclination towards something. The herald encourages everyone to take pleasure in whatever most delights them or in whatever they are most inclined towards (their *addictions*).

"It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man

to what sport and revels his **addiction** leads him."—Herald  
*Modern definition:* noun—an intense and destructive need to have or do something excessively.

## Assassination—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene VII

*How Shakespeare used it:* The word assassin was already known, but Shakespeare used assassination to describe a murder, or deed done by an assassin. In this soliloquy, Macbeth contemplates the murder or *assassination* of Duncan.

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly. If the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come.—Macbeth

*Modern Definition:* The act of assassinating someone, where assassinate means to kill someone who is usually famous or important, often for political reasons.

## Bedazzled—*The Taming of the Shrew*, Act IV, Scene V

"Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes, that have been so bedazzled with the sun that everything I look on seemeth green." —Kate



### **Dexterously—*Twelfth Night, Act I, Scene V***

How Shakespeare used it: In this scene from *Twelfth Night*, Olivia gets angry at Feste and asks for him to be taken away. Feste, however, challenges Olivia saying she is in fact the fool and that he can prove it *dexterously*. The word used in this sense most likely means something close to *easily*, as taken in context. Alternatively, the root of the word is “dexter”, the Latin word for “right”, so translated directly it would be *rightly*. Therefore, Feste is probably saying he can rightly, or correctly, prove Olivia is a fool.

#### **Feste**

Misprision in the highest degree! Lady, cucullus non facit monachum; that’s as much to say as I wear not motley in my brain. Good madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool.

#### **Olivia**

Can you do it?

#### **Feste**

Dexterously, good madonna.

Modern definition: To do something incredibly skillfully or cleverly.

### **Dwindle—*Macbeth, Act I, Scene III***

How Shakespeare used it: In this scene from *Macbeth*, the First witch tells the other two witches that she has been torturing a sailor whose wife was rude to her and explains to them how she will “drain him dry as hay” until he “dwindle, peak and pine”. Dwindle in this sense is used to mean waste away.

#### **FIRST WITCH**

I myself have all the other,  
And the very ports they blow,  
All the quarters that they know  
I’ th’ shipman’s card.  
I’ll drain him dry as hay.  
Sleep shall neither night nor day  
Hang upon his penthouse lid.  
He shall live a man forbid.  
Weary sev’n nights nine times nine  
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine.

Modern Definition: to gradually become smaller

### **Fashionable—*Troilus and Cressida, Act III, Scene III***

How Shakespeare used it: Ulysses describes time through a series of metaphors and similes. One of the comparisons he makes is with a *fashionable* host. In this context, fashionable means a host who abides by the most current etiquette—who follows customs that are of the current fashion.

“For time is like a fashionable host that slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, and with his arms outstretch’d, as he would fly, grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing.”—Ulysses

Modern definition: Representing a popular or trend or influence, particularly regarding personal styles.

### **Inaudible—*All’s Well That Ends Well, Act V, Scene III***

“Let’s take the instant by the forward top; for we are old, and on our quick’st decrees the inaudible and noiseless foot of Time steals ere we can effect them.”—King of France

### **Manager—*A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act V, Scene I***

### **Multitudinous—*Macbeth, Act II, Scene II***

### **Sanctimonious**

### **Scuffle—*Antony and Cleopatra, Act I, Scene I***

### **Swagger—*Henry V, Act II, Scene IV & A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act II, Scene I***

### **Uncomfortable—*Romeo and Juliet, Act IV, Scene V***



Inside an Elizabethan theatre

# The Art of the Shakespearean Insult



The exterior of the Globe Theatre

When we think of Shakespeare, we usually think of plays and poetry. However, Shakespeare has also penned some of the most amazing insults. Far more interesting and colorful than the curse words we usually hear in modern conversation, the witty and acerbic Shakespearean insult is truly an art form. So next time you feel some added color is required in your conversation, try reaching for something Shakespearean! Go ahead! "Thou art a boil, a plague sore, an embossed carbuncle in my corrupted blood." Below are a few choice insulting options taken from *King Lear*.

Brazen-faced varlet	Beggar
Lily-livered	Thou art a boil, a plague sore
Glass-gazing	Shallow
Super-serviceable finical rogue	Epileptic visage
Unbolted villain	Barber-monger
Wagtail	Three-suited
Blasts and fogs upon thee	Worsted-stocking knave
Toad-spotted traitor	One-trunk-inheriting slave
Fen-suck'd fogs	Detested kite
Wolfish visage	Eater of broken meats
Cowardly rasca	

## Make Your Own Insult

Combine one word from each of the three columns below, prefaced with "Thou" to create your own Shakespearean Insult

### Column 1

Artless  
Bawdy  
Bootless  
Churlish  
Clouted  
Craven  
Currish  
Dankish  
Dissembling  
Droning  
Errant  
Fawning  
Fobbing  
Forward  
Frothy  
Gleeking  
Goatish  
Gorbellied  
Infectious  
Jarring  
Loggerheaded  
Lumpish  
Mammering  
Mangled  
Mewling  
Paunchy  
Pribbling  
Puking  
Puny  
Qualling  
Rank  
Reeky  
Roguish  
Ruttiesh  
Saucy  
Spleeny  
Spongy  
Surly  
Tottering  
Unmuzzled  
Vain  
Venomed  
Villainous  
Warped  
Wayward

### Column 2

Base-court  
Bat-fowling  
Beef-witted  
Beetle-headed  
Boil-brained  
Clapper-clawed  
Clay-brained  
Common-kissing  
Crook-pated  
Dismal-dreaming  
Dizzy-eyed  
Doghearted  
Dread-bolted  
Earth-vexing  
Fat-kidneyed  
Fen-sucked  
Flap-mouthed  
Fly-bitten  
Folly-fallen  
Fool-born  
Full-gorged  
Guts-gripping  
Half-faced  
Hasty-witted  
Hedge-born  
Hell-hated  
Idle-headed  
Ill-breeding  
Ill-nurtured  
Knotty-pated  
Milk-livered  
Mortley-minded  
Onion-eyed  
Pottle-deep  
Pox-marked  
Reeling-ripe  
Rough-hewn  
Rude-growing  
Shard-borne  
Sheep-biting  
Spur-galled  
Swag-bellied  
Tardy-gaited  
Tickle-brained  
Toad-spotted  
Urchin-snouted

### Column 3

Apple-john  
Baggage  
Barnacle  
Bladder  
Boar-pig  
Bugbear  
Bum-bailey  
Canker-blossom  
Clack-dish  
Clotpole  
Coxcomb  
Codpiece  
Death-token  
Dewberry  
Flap-dragon  
Flax-wench  
Flirt-gill  
Foot-licker  
Fustilarian  
Giglet  
Gudgeon  
Haggard  
Harpy  
Hedge-pic  
Horn-beast  
Hugger-mugger  
Lewdster  
Lout  
Maggot-pie  
Malt-worm  
Mammet  
Measle  
Minnow  
Miscreant  
Moldwarp  
Mumble-news  
Nut-hook  
Pigeon-egg  
Pignut  
Puttock  
Pumpion  
Ratsbane  
Scut  
Skainsmate  
Vassal  
Whey-face

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# Resources and Suggestions for Further Reading

## ARTICLES

"King Lear" *Wikipedia*

Article Link: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_Lear](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Lear)

Truskinovsky, Alexander M. "Literary Psychiatric Observation and Diagnosis Through the Ages: King Lear Revisited" (*South Med J.* 2002;95(3))

Staveley, Brian. "King Lear: The Syntax and Scansion of Insanity"

Article Link: <http://www.tor.com/2015/04/13/king-lear-the-syntax-and-scansion-of-insanity/>

Bonnet, N. (2012). "Shakespeare's King Lear: The Promised End ." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 4(09).

Article Link: <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=690>

Plunkett, Adam. "Keats and *King Lear*"

Article Link: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/features/articles/detail/70201>



London in Shakespeare's time

Maclean, Norman. "Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear" *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*, 1952, edited by R.S. Crane.

"'Allows itself to anything:' Poor Tom Familiarizing and Enacting Chaos in King Lear." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 1(10).

Article Link: <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=20>

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## BOOKS

***The Year of Lear*** by James Shapiro. 2015.

***Performing King Lear: Gielgud to Russell Beale*** by Jonathan Croall. 2015.

***Everybody's Shakespeare: Reflections Chiefly on the Tragedies*** by Maynard Mack. 1994.

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## WEB VIDEOS

Harvard Lecture (Engl E-129) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgRH2vpTZUU>

King Lear (Shakespeare)—Thug Notes Summary & Analysis - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g17ziHN59tg>

Talking Lear: Simon Russell Beale on King Lear - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgXM0b6PaHw>

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgXM0b6PaHw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgXM0b6PaHw)

Ian McKellen: Understanding King Lear, the Character - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahFtoCq6CHw>

Insults by Shakespeare - April Gudenrath - <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/insults-by-shakespeare>



# About A Noise Within

**A NOISE WITHIN** A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 25 year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 40,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 15,000 student participants to its arts education program, *Classics Live!* Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides. ♦

## Audience Guide Credits

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