

The History of King Lear

Sc.1

Enter the Earl of Kent, the Duke of Gloucester, and Edmund the bastard

KENT I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER It did always seem so to us, but now in the division of the kingdoms it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities are so weighed 5 that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.

KENT Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to it. 10

KENT I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER Sir, this young fellow's mother could, whereupon she grew round-wombed and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault? 15

KENT I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

GLOUCESTER But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. Though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged. *(To Edmund)* Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund? 25

EDMUND No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER *(to Edmund)* My lord of Kent. Remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

EDMUND *(to Kent)* My services to your lordship.

KENT I must love you, and sue to know you better. 30

EDMUND Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER *(to Kent)* He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again.

Sound a sennet

The King is coming.

*Enter one bearing a coronet, then King Lear, then
the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall; next Gonoril,
Regan, Cordelia, with followers*

LEAR

Attend my lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester. 35

GLOUCESTER I shall, my liege.

[Exit]

LEAR

Meantime we will express our darker purposes.

The map there. Know we have divided

In three our kingdom, and 'tis our first intent

To shake all cares and business off our state, 40

Confirming them on younger years.

The two great princes, France and Burgundy±±

Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love±±

Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,

And here are to be answered. Tell me, my daughters, 45

Which of you shall we say doth love us most,

That we our largest bounty may extend

Where merit doth most challenge it?

Gonoril, our eldest born, speak first.

GONORIL

Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the

matter; 50

Dearer than eyesight, space, or liberty;

Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;

No less than life; with grace, health, beauty, honour;

As much as child e'er loved, or father, friend;

A love that makes breath poor and speech unable. 55

Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA *(aside)*

What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent.

LEAR *(to Gonoril)*

Of all these bounds even from this line to this,

With shady forests and wide skirted meads,

We make thee lady. To thine and Albany's issue 60

Be this perpetual.±±What says our second daughter?

Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall, speak.

REGAN Sir, I am made

Of the self-same mettle that my sister is,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart 65
I find she names my very deed of love±±
Only she came short, that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys
Which the most precious square of sense possesses,
And find I am alone felicitate 70
In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA (*aside*) Then poor Cordelia±±
And yet not so, since I am sure my love's
More richer than my tongue.

LEAR (*to Regan*)
To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom, 75
No less in space, validity, and pleasure
Than that confirmed on Gonoril. (*To Cordelia*) But
now our joy,
Although the last, not least in our dear love:
What can you say to win a third more opulent
Than your sisters? 80

CORDELIA Nothing, my lord.

LEAR
How? Nothing can come of nothing. Speak again.

CORDELIA
Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond, nor more nor less. 85

LEAR
Go to, go to, mend your speech a little
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me.
I return those duties back as are right fit±±
Obey you, love you, and most honour you. 90
Why have my sisters husbands if they say
They love you all? Haply when I shall wed
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters, 95
To love my father all.

LEAR But goes this with thy heart?

CORDELIA Ay, good my lord.

LEAR So young and so untender?

CORDELIA So young, my lord, and true. 100

LEAR

Well, 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 operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be, 105
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 for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation 110
Messes to gorge his appetite,
Shall be as well neighboured, pitied, and relieved
As thou, my sometime daughter.

KENT Good my liege±±

LEAR

Peace, Kent. Come not between the dragon and his
wrath.
I loved her most, and thought to set my rest 115
On her kind nursery. *[To Cordelia]* Hence, and avoid
my sight!±±
So be my grave my peace as here I give
Her father's heart from her. Call France. Who stirs?
Call Burgundy.
[Exit one or more]

Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest this third. 120
Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
I do invest you jointly in my power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
That troop with majesty. Ourself by monthly course,
With reservation of an hundred knights 125
By you to be sustained, shall our abode
Make with you by due turns. Only we still retain
The name and all the additions to a king.
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,

BeloveÁd sons, be yours; which to confirm, 130
This crownnet part betwixt you.

KENT Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honoured as my king,
Loved as my father, as my master followed,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers±±

LEAR The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft. 135

KENT Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart. Be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad. What wilt thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's
bound 140
When majesty stoops to folly. Reverse thy doom,
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgement,
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound 145
Reverbs no hollowness.

LEAR Kent, on thy life, no more!

KENT My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thy enemies, nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

LEAR Out of my sight!

KENT See better, Lear, and let me still remain 150
The true blank of thine eye.

LEAR Now, by Apollo±±

KENT Now, by Apollo, King, thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

LEAR *[making to strike him]*
Vassal, recreant!

KENT Do, kill thy physician,
And the fee bestow upon the foul disease.
Revoke thy doom, or whilst I can vent clamour 155
From my throat I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

LEAR Hear me; on thy allegiance hear me!

Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
Which we durst never yet, and with strayed pride
To come between our sentence and our power, 160
Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good take thy reward:
Four days we do allot thee for provision
To shield thee from dis-eases of the world,
And on the fifth to turn thy hated back 165
Upon our kingdom. If on the next day following
Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,
This shall not be revoked.

KENT

Why, fare thee well, King; since thus thou wilt
appear, 170
Friendship lives hence, and banishment is here.
(*To Cordelia*) The gods to their protection take thee,
maid,
That rightly thinks, and hast most justly said.
(*To Gonoril and Regan*)
And your large speeches may your deeds approve,
That good effects may spring from words of love. 175
Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
He'll shape his old course in a country new.

Exit

*Enter the King of France and the Duke of
Burgundy, with the Duke of Gloucester*

GLOUCESTER

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

LEAR

My lord of Burgundy,
We first address towards you, who with a king 180
Hath rivalled for our daughter: what in the least
Will you require in present dower with her
Or cease your quest of love?

BURGUNDY

Royal majesty,
I crave no more than what your highness offered;
Nor will you tender less.

LEAR

Right noble Burgundy, 185
When she was dear to us we did hold her so;
But now her price is fallen. Sir, there she stands.

If aught within that little seeming substance,
Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced,
And nothing else, may fitly like your grace, 190
She's there, and she is yours.

BURGUNDY I know no answer.

LEAR

Sir, will you with those infirmities she owes,
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Covered with our curse and strangered with our oath,
Take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY Pardon me, royal sir. 195
Election makes not up on such conditions.

LEAR

Then leave her, sir; for by the power that made me,
I tell you all her wealth. (*To France*) For you, great
King,
I would not from your love make such a stray
To match you where I hate, therefore beseech you 200
To avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed
Almost to acknowledge hers.

FRANCE

This is most strange, that she that even but now
Was your best object, the argument of your praise, 205
Balm of your age, most best, most dearest,
Should in this trice of time commit a thing
So monstrous to dismantle
So many folds of favour. Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree 210
That monsters it, or your fore-vouched affections
Fall'n into taint; which to believe of her
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Could never plant in me.

CORDELIA (*to Lear*)

I yet beseech your majesty, 215
If for I want that glib and oily art
To speak and purpose not~~±±~~since what I well intend,
I'll do't before I speak~~±±~~that you acknow
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unclean action or dishonoured step 220

That hath deprived me of your grace and favour,
But even the want of that for which I am rich±±
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

LEAR Go to, go to. 225
Better thou hadst not been born than not to have
pleased me better.

FRANCE
Is it no more but this±±a tardiness in nature,
That often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do?±±My lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love is not love 230
When it is mingled with respects that stands
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dower.

BURGUNDY Royal Lear,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand, 235
Duchess of Burgundy±±

LEAR Nothing. I have sworn.

BURGUNDY *(to Cordelia)*
I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA
Peace be with Burgundy; since that respects
Of fortune are his love, I shall not be his wife. 240

FRANCE
Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised:
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon.
Be it lawful, I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect 245
My love should kindle to inflamed respect.±±
Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.
Not all the dukes in wat'rish Burgundy
Shall buy this unprized precious maid of me.±± 250
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind.
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

LEAR

Thou hast her, France. Let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. Therefore be gone, 255
Without our grace, our love, our benison.±±
Come, noble Burgundy.

*[Flourish.] Exeunt Lear and Burgundy, then
Albany, Cornwall, Gloucester, [Edmund,]
and followers*

FRANCE *(to Cordelia)* Bid farewell to your sisters.

CORDELIA

Ye jewels of our father, with washed eyes
Cordelia leaves you. I know you what you are,
And like a sister am most loath to call 260
Your faults as they are named. Use well our father.
To your professed bosoms I commit him.
But yet, alas, stood I within his grace
I would prefer him to a better place.
So farewell to you both. 265

GONORIL Prescribe not us our duties.

REGAN Let your study

Be to content your lord, who hath received you
At fortune's alms. You have obedience scanted,
And well are worth the worst that you have wanted. 270

CORDELIA

Time shall unfold what pleated cunning hides.
Who covers faults, at last shame them derides.
Well may you prosper.

FRANCE Come, fair Cordelia.

Exeunt France and Cordelia

GONORIL Sister, it is not a little I have to say of what
most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father 275
will hence tonight.

REGAN That's most certain, and with you. Next month
with us.

GONORIL You see how full of changes his age is. The
observation we have made of it hath not been little. 280
He always loved our sister most, and with what poor
judgement he hath now cast her off appears too gross.

REGAN 'Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but

slenderly known himself.

GONORIL The best and soundest of his time hath been but 285
rash; then must we look to receive from his age not
alone the imperfection of long-engrafted condition, but
therewithal unruly waywardness that infirm and
choleric years bring with them.

REGAN Such unconstant starts are we like to have from 290
him as this of Kent's banishment.

GONORIL There is further compliment of leave-taking
between France and him. Pray, let's hit together. If our
father carry authority with such dispositions as he
bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us. 295

REGAN We shall further think on't.

GONORIL We must do something, and i'th' heat.
Exeunt