

# Tragedy of Lear (Folio)

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## INTRODUCTION

THE text of *King Lear* given here represents the revision made probably two or three years after the first version had been written and performed; it is based on the text printed in the 1623 Folio. This is a more obviously theatrical text. It makes a number of significant cuts, amounting to some 300 lines. The most conspicuous ones are the dialogue in which Lear's Fool implicitly calls his master a fool (Quarto Sc. 4, 136±±51); Kent's account of the French invasion of England (Quarto Sc. 8, 21±±33); Lear's mock-trial, in his madness, of his daughters (Quarto Sc. 13, 13±±52); Edgar's generalizing couplets at the end of that scene (Quarto Sc. 13, 97±±110); the brief, compassionate dialogue of two of Gloucester's servants after his blinding (Quarto Sc. 14, 97±±106); parts of Albany's protest to Goneril about the sisters' treatment of Lear (in Quarto Sc. 16); the entire scene (Quarto Sc. 17) in which a Gentleman tells Kent of Cordelia's grief on hearing of her father's condition; the presence of the Doctor and the musical accompaniment to the reunion of Lear and Cordelia (Quarto Sc. 21); and Edgar's account of his meeting with Kent in which Kent's 'strings of life w Began to crack' (Quarto Sc. 24, 201±±18). The Folio also adds about 100 lines that are not in the Quarto±±mostly in short passages, including Kent's statement that Albany and Cornwall have servants who are in the pay of France (3.1.13±±20), Merlin's prophecy spoken by the Fool at the end of 3.2, and the last lines of both the Fool and Lear. In addition, several speeches are differently assigned, and there are many variations in wording.

The reasons for these variations, and their effect on the play, are to some extent matters of speculation and of individual interpretation. Certainly they streamline the play's action, removing some reflective passages, particularly at the ends of scenes. They affect the characterization of, especially, Edgar, Albany, and Kent, and there are significant differences in the play's closing passages. Structurally the principal differences lie in the presentation of the military actions in the later

part of the play; in the Folio-based text Cordelia is more clearly in charge of the forces that come to Lear's assistance, and they are less clearly a French invasion force. The absence from this text of passages that appeared in the 1608 text implies no criticism of them in themselves. The play's revision may have been dictated in whole or in part by theatrical exigencies, or it may have emerged from Shakespeare's own dissatisfaction with what he had first written. Each version has its own integrity, which is distorted by the practice, traditional since the early eighteenth century, of conflation.