

King Lear: synopsis

But by this time Lear's sufferings have driven him mad. He is led to a place of safety by the old Earl of Gloucester, and for some time withdraws from the action. Gloucester, however, is arrested and charged, on the evidence of his son, with aiding and abetting a known traitor—King Lear. The Duke of Cornwall tears out Gloucester's eyes, and the blind old man, expelled from his castle, is put into the care of 'Poor Tom'—who is actually, of course, the loving son (i.e. Edgar) whom Gloucester had once rejected and outlawed. Edgar leads his father towards Dover, where he plans to take his own life. Cornwall dies, wounded by one of his own servants who was outraged by his cruelty.

Lear's elder daughters have both fallen in love with Edmund, and are jealous of each other. Regan is now a widow, and Goneril has begun to despise her husband, Albany, who is horrified by the way that the two sisters have treated their father. Cordelia arrives in England and finds her father. She asks for the Doctor's help to cure his madness, and prepares to do battle with the armies of her sisters.

Edgar leads his father in the direction of Dover, but frustrates his suicide attempt; he then saves his father's life for a second time when Goneril's messenger, Oswald, carrying a letter from Goneril to Edmund, recognizes Gloucester and tries to kill him. Edgar kills Oswald, and reads the letter he is carrying. From this, Edgar learns that Goneril wants Edmund to kill her husband so that she and Edmund can be married. Edgar gives the letter to Albany.

Lear recovers from his madness sufficiently to recognize Cordelia, but their joy at their reunion is shortlived. The battle is fought between the invading French forces (who are fighting for the rights of Cordelia and her father) and the English armies, defending the kingdom of Goneril and Regan. The French army is defeated; Cordelia and Lear are taken to prison. Edmund arranges for Cordelia to be murdered.

Albany denounces Edmund, and Edgar (in another disguise) challenges his brother to a duel. Edmund is fatally wounded, but before he dies he learns of his father's death and of the deaths of Goneril and Regan (Goneril poisoned her sister, and then stabbed herself). Edmund makes a last-minute attempt to save Cordelia's life, but it is too late: she was hanged on the instructions he had given earlier. Lear carries in the body of his youngest daughter. His grief is extreme, and shortly he is dead too. Albany yields the kingdom to Edgar, who has the last words of the play.

* encourage or assist

Regan's husband

1st time was when

prevent/stop

beaten
(lost the battle)

publicly (announce)
declare to be
wrong or evil
(condemn)

provide
sworn