

## **About this pack**

We hope that teachers and students will enjoy our production and use this learning resource pack.

It may be used in advance of seeing the performance – to prepare and inform students about the play; and afterwards – to respond to the play and explore in more depth. Teachers may select, from the broad range of material, which is most suitable for their students.

The first section of this document is a detailed companion to our production: plot synopsis, character breakdown and interviews. It reveals the ways in which our company met with the many challenges of bringing **KING LEAR** to the stage.

The second section examines the background to the play and its history in performance.

The third section offers suggestions for study in English and Drama.

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## INTRODUCTION

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**King Lear** is the story of an ancient, pre-Christian, king of Britain - an old man, who plans to divide his kingdom between his three daughters and their husbands. Having relieved himself of his worldly duties, the king will then place himself in their care for the remainder of his life. In different ways his daughters do not behave according to the script he has written for them, and disaster follows. In an act of foolish pride Lear banishes the youngest, Cordelia, and divides the kingdom between the two elder daughters. He then finds himself at their mercy: constrained, humbled and an object of disdain. In one of the most famous scenes in theatre, Lear is cast out onto a high, barren heath at the height of a raging storm.



Running parallel to Lear's story is that of the Earl of Gloucester who, by contrast, has two sons. Gloucester similarly treats his children unequally – promising a rich inheritance to the legitimate son, while the one born out of wedlock will get nothing. Naturally the illegitimate son has a view on this – and a plan, to oust his brother and gain the inheritance for himself. His actions have appalling consequences for his father and brother and, ultimately, pull down destruction upon himself.

The two plots twine in and out of each other, as the mad King Lear and the blind Earl of Gloucester make their spiritual journeys through suffering to enlightenment.

### DATE

It is not possible to know an exact date for the writing of the play, but academics agree it had to have been between 1603 and 1606 – most likely around 1605.

It's interesting to note that there was a lunar eclipse in September 1605 and a solar eclipse in October 1605; and in Act I, scene ii, Gloucester makes reference to 'These late eclipses of the sun and moon...' It's a strong co-incidence that suggests Shakespeare was writing *King Lear* at the time of these astronomical events - or maybe he couldn't resist adding a couple of lines into a later draft.

### SOURCES

There are a number of potential sources for *King Lear*, whose story appeared in myth and legend for centuries before Shakespeare's time. The most likely and immediate source for the play is Holinshed's *Chronicles* - a collaborative work of British History (first edition 1577). The *Chronicles* account of King Lear is based on an earlier text – *History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (a highly inaccurate chronicle, written around 1135)

There was also a play called *The moste famous Chronicle historye of Leire king of England and his Three Daughters* (or *King Leir*), known to have been performed in 1594 at The Rose, and published in 1604. The author of this play is unknown, but it is highly likely that Shakespeare knew of it – and may have appeared in it as an actor.

It is typical of Shakespeare to be responding to the zeitgeist. The subject matter of the story was highly topical, and one possible contemporary event that may have influenced this play is a lawsuit that occurred not long before *King Lear* was written, in which the eldest of three sisters tried to have her elderly father, Sir Brian Annesley, declared insane so that she could take control of his property. Annesley's youngest daughter successfully defended her father against her sister. Another similar event with which Shakespeare and his audience would have been familiar is the case of William Allen, a mayor of London who was treated very badly by his three daughters after dividing his wealth among them.



*Three Daughters of King Lear* by Gustav Pope

## SECTION ONE

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### The Play

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#### Characters

**King Lear** - Proud and foolish, the King experiences a profound spiritual journey from a position of great power, through poverty, madness and grief to humility, wisdom and enlightenment.

**Goneril** - Manipulative and ambitious, Lear's eldest daughter is trapped in a miserable marriage to a mild, gentle man and susceptible to other men...

**Regan** - Equally ambitious and even more overtly vicious than her elder sister, Lear's middle daughter is more well matched with her cruel husband but, were he to die, would quickly be open to offers...

**Cordelia** - The youngest of the three sisters, and Lear's favourite, Cordelia is her father's daughter and her own woman. Honest and courageous, or obstinate and inflexible?

**Earl of Kent** - Faithful Kent pays the price for seeing the world as it is and expressing his honest opinion. Fortunately he is a master of disguise.



**The Fool** - The King's Jester and one who has licence to 'speak truth to power'. (Disclaimer: the role of the fool is to offer insights, rather than be hilariously funny) He disappears without trace before the end of the play.

**Duke of Albany** - Goneril's husband - a mild and religious man. Nice, but dull.

**Duke of Cornwall** - Regan's husband: a nasty piece of work.

**Earl of Gloucester** - With a legitimate son who will inherit all his wealth and an illegitimate son who will get nothing, Gloucester's ideas on fatherly fairness and marital fidelity seem far from perfect. His credulous and superstitious nature makes him an easy target for a manipulative villain.

**Edmund** - Gloucester's illegitimate son: a manipulative villain.



**Edgar** - Gloucester's legitimate son: gullible, good-natured and - as it turns out - a convincing actor.

**Oswald** - Gloucester's steward: a fop and a spy.

**King of France** - Suitor to Cordelia: sees her worth beyond earthly wealth.

**Duke of Burgundy** - Suitor to Cordelia: but won't marry her without a nice fat dowry.

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## Plot Synopsis

### ACT ONE

#### Scene One

At court the Earls of Kent and Gloucester discuss the imminent division of the Kingdom between the three daughters of the King, and Gloucester introduces his son, Edmund. Edmund is illegitimate and has spent the past nine years abroad. Gloucester plans to send him away again.



The King enters demanding the attendance of the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy who are rival suitors for the hand of his youngest daughter, Cordelia. While they await the arrival of the suitors, Lear announces his intention to divide his kingdom into three parts. However, there is a catch. The King demands that his daughters say who loves him the most in order to win the largest portion of inheritance.

The eldest, Goneril, speaks first and professes her love to be 'dearer than eyesight, space and liberty'. Her land is portioned, and Regan follows with even more indulgent protestations that her father's love is the only thing that makes her happy. She is then given the same share as her elder sister. Cordelia however, says nothing.

The King is deeply disappointed that his favourite daughter – the one with which he hoped to spend his final days – is obstinate in her honesty and will offer him nothing but duty. In his wounded rage he declares Cordelia banished and divides her portion between Goneril and Regan. The Earl of Kent speaks out against this action and, for his honesty and loyalty, also suffers banishment. The King of France and Duke of Burgundy arrive to compete for the hand of Cordelia but now she comes without a rich dowry. Burgundy withdraws his suit, but France considers Cordelia 'herself a dowry' and takes her to be his Queen.





Left alone onstage, Goneril and Regan reveal their true colours and intention to 'do something' about their inconstant father.

### **Scene Two**

Edmund, illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester, now enters to reveal his plans. He refuses to accept his fate and intends to usurp his legitimate brother, Edgar, by devious means. Gloucester, enters and Edmund shows him a forged letter from Edgar in which his brother appears to be plotting the overthrow of their father.

Gloucester is convinced by the letter as it chimes with strange astronomical events which portend disruptions in Nature. He charges Edmund to find his villainous brother. Edmund laughs at his father's foolish beliefs in the stars, and then convinces Edgar that he has inadvertently offended their father and should lie low for a while. Edgar's disappearance will then only fuel Gloucester's belief in the forged letter.

### **Scene Three**

The King is lodging with his eldest daughter, Goneril, but he has already upset her household with his behavior. She begins the work of undermining his authority by instructing her servants to treat the King's knights with contempt. This will quickly bring matters to a head, no doubt.

### **Scene Four**

The banished Earl of Kent reappears, in disguise. When Lear enters he offers himself in service to the King, who agrees to take him on for a trial period. Lear then calls for Goneril to attend him, but is snubbed by her steward, Oswald. He then receives report of how his daughter's household are treating his knights. When Oswald returns he is once again rude to the King, provoking him and the disguised Kent to strike him.

The King's Fool enters and immediately starts to poke fun at Lear for giving away his kingdom. Goneril arrives, furious at the behavior of her father and his knights in her house. She demands that Lear reduce the number of his followers to men who know how to behave themselves. Lear is furious and curses Goneril. Her husband, Albany, knows nothing of the trouble, but Lear blames him also – and he then discovers that before even asking, his daughter has already sacked half his men. Albany is shocked, but Goneril is contemptuous of her husband's gentle disposition. Her steward, Oswald, will deliver a letter to Regan informing her of recent events. Goneril is in control.



### **Scene Five**

Lear sends Kent ahead with word to Regan and her husband. He plans to join her, but instructs Kent not to tell her of what has passed between him and Goneril. The Fool insinuates that Regan will behave in exactly the same way and Lear begins to see that he has wronged Cordelia.



## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene One**

Edmund receives intelligence that Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, will be staying at Gloucester's castle. He uses this to further alarm his brother, Edgar, that new threats are being made against him. He urges Edgar to fly – which he does. Edmund then wounds himself and pretends to his father that Edgar has attacked him. With this conclusive proof of Edgar's guilt, Gloucester sends out a warrant for his arrest and confers the inheritance of his wealth and lands on Edmund.

Regan and Cornwall arrive to the news of Edgar's disgrace and turn it to their advantage. Regan notes that Edgar kept company with the King's riotous knights. She tells Gloucester that she has received information from her sister regarding their father's behavior, and that should he descend upon her home she intends not to be there to receive him. She and her husband seek Gloucester's hospitality and counsel.

### **Scene Two**

Kent arrives at Gloucester's castle at the same time as Oswald and gives him a beating for his treatment of the King. Cornwall, Gloucester and Regan enter to part the fray. Against Gloucester's judgment Regan and her husband put Kent in the stocks, despite knowing that he is the King's man. Left alone to his punishment, Kent reflects on the situation and reveals that he has received a letter from Cordelia – who now knows that he serves the King incognito.

### **Scene Three**

We leave one man in disguise to meet another. Edgar finds himself hunted like an animal, and has resolved to hide by taking on the character of a mad beggar – Poor Tom.



### **Scene Four**

Lear arrives at Gloucester's castle, having found Regan not at home, to discover his servant in the stocks. Regan refuses to answer his summons, and Gloucester is troubled by the tension in his house. When Cornwall and Regan deign to appear it becomes clear to the King that he cannot rely on them to condemn the actions of Goneril. Regan humiliates her father further and Goneril arrives to complete his degradation – all his men must be sacked. The King leaves the stage in a state of high agitation, as a storm is brewing...

Gloucester is concerned that the King is now leaving the shelter of the castle at night and in very bad weather. The sisters instruct him to let the King go and then close the doors against him.

## **ACT THREE**

### **Scene One**

Kent learns from a knight that the King is cast out in the storm, and himself gives intelligence that Cordelia and the King of France have landed at Dover. He sends the knight to meet with them and then sets out to find the King.

### **Scene Two**

Lear and his Fool are out on the heath in the height of the storm. The King rages against his daughters. Kent discovers them and urges them to take shelter in a nearby hovel. Lear fears that he is beginning to go mad.

### **Scene Three**

Gloucester confides in Edmund, expressing his abhorrence for the way Goneril and Regan have treated their ageing father. They have forbidden him to help the King in any way, but Gloucester intends to bring him relief in his distress. When his father leaves Edmund announces his intention to inform the Duke of Cornwall of this disobedience, and bring himself into favour with those in the ascendency.

### **Scene Four**

Lear, the Fool and the disguised Kent arrive at the hovel, but discover it to be already occupied by Edgar, disguised as 'Poor Tom'. Edgar gives a convincing performance as the Bedlam beggar and the half-mad King is captivated by him. Lear is convinced that Poor Tom must have also had rebellious daughter to send him out of his wits. He identifies with the madness and poverty of Poor Tom and tears at his clothes to become more like him.

Gloucester appears with a torch to take the King to a place where there is food and a warm fire, but Lear follows Poor Tom down into the hovel.

### **Scene Five**

Edmund has betrayed his father to Cornwall and won his favour. Cornwall charges Edmund with the task of finding Gloucester and bringing him to face the consequences of his actions in assisting the King.

### **Scene Six**

Gloucester has succeeded in bringing Lear and his peculiar entourage to a warm, dry outbuilding of the castle. There he leaves them, though the King is now lost in his madness – consulting with Poor Tom as if he were a philosopher.

Gloucester returns quickly with news that there is a plot to kill the King, and that he must fly to Dover where friends await him. Gloucester has provided for this journey and the King is helped away by the Fool and the disguised Kent. Edgar remains behind momentarily to reflect on the events of the night.

### **Scene Seven**

Cornwall has received news that the army of France has landed at Dover. Goneril sets out with Oswald to return to her husband, and Regan and Cornwall begin the trial of their captive, Gloucester.

They tie him up and humiliate him and, in a bloodthirsty frenzy, Cornwall plucks out his eyes. A servant who tries to stand in the way manages to wound Cornwall, but is killed by Regan. The blinded Gloucester cries out for Edmund to defend him, only to be told that it was Edmund who betrayed him. Gloucester realises that he has been deceived and that Edgar was abused.

As Gloucester is cast out into the night Cornwall is led away, mortally wounded.

## **ACT FOUR**

### **Scene One**

Still disguised as Poor Tom, Edgar is shocked to encounter his blind father on the heath. Gloucester does not recognise him and offers Poor Tom money if he will lead him to Dover. There he plans to throw himself from the cliff. A distraught Edgar agrees – ‘Poor Tom shall lead thee.’



### **Scene Two**

Goneril is home, accompanied by Edmund whom she addresses by his new title – Earl of Gloucester. Goneril's dissatisfaction with her 'mild' husband has found solace in the arms of Edmund with whom she is now infatuated.

Albany enters to chide and accuse his wife of most unnatural behavior towards her aged father, but Goneril has nothing but contempt for her husband. A messenger arrives with news of the death of Cornwall. Albany greets this news as evidence of divine justice and resolves to avenge Gloucester and the King, but Goneril is more concerned that the newly widowed Regan may prove an attractive prospect to her Edmund.

### **Scene Three**

Now arrived at Dover, Kent discovers that the French King has returned to France, but Queen Cordelia remains and is moved by her father's plight. Lear is in the town, but too ashamed to see his youngest daughter.

#### **Scene Four**

Cordelia enters with soldiers. Her father has been seen, out of his mind and garlanded with flowers. She sends out a hundred men to seek out the King and bring him to her. A messenger brings the news that her sisters' British powers are marching towards Dover. Cordelia will fight for her father's right.

#### **Scene Five**

At Gloucester's castle Regan detains Oswald, who is carrying a letter from Goneril to Edmund. Regan has already secured Edmund as her next husband, but Goneril's interest in the new Earl of Gloucester hasn't gone unnoticed. Regan instructs Oswald to remind her sister that she is still a married woman. She also regrets not killing the blinded Gloucester, and commands Oswald to find and kill him.

#### **Scene Six**

Edgar has led Gloucester to Dover, but deceives the blind man into believing he is at the top of the cliff. Gloucester throws himself down and Edgar greets him anew, as a different person, as if he has landed at the bottom of the cliff but miraculously survived. He tells Gloucester that the beggar who led him to the precipice was in fact a demon, tempting him to despair and suicide. Gloucester believes this story and resolves to endure his afflictions patiently and wait upon his death.



Lear enters, fantastically garlanded with flowers. Gloucester recognises the King, but Lear is in the full flight of his madness. Attendants from Cordelia arrive to escort Lear to his daughter, but he runs away. Upon hearing that armies are assembling, Edgar is about to move to safety when Oswald appears—his intention to slay Gloucester. In the ensuing fight Edgar kills Oswald and discovers the letter from Goneril to Edmund, in which she urges her lover to kill Albany. Edgar resolves to inform the Duke of this treachery, but first leads his father to safety.

#### **Scene Seven**

Cordelia thanks Kent for his loyalty to the King. She urges him to put away his disguise, but Kent prefers to remain hidden for the time being. The King is brought on, sleeping. He awakens in his

daughter's arms and believes he is in heaven. He kneels before her and begs her forgiveness. Father and daughter are joyfully reconciled and walk together, leaving Kent to discuss the imminent military encounter between the French and British armies. He learns that the dead Duke of Cornwall's forces will now be led by Edmund, Earl of Gloucester.

## **ACT FIVE**

### **Scene One**

Edmund and Regan arrive at Dover with their army. Edmund is anxious that the Duke of Albany will not support them but Regan is more preoccupied with the relationship between Edmund and Goneril. He denies an affair, and Regan entreats him not to be familiar with her sister in future.

The intimacy between Edmund and Regan is observed by a jealous Goneril when she arrives with her husband. Albany is concerned to deal with the French invasion, but he fully supports the King. The all agree to meet at Albany's tent to discuss tactics. Goneril tries to hang back, perhaps to speak privately to Edmund, but Regan insists they go together.

Albany is last to leave and is detained by Edgar and handed a letter (the one he took from the body of Oswald), with a cryptic instruction to open the letter at the start of battle. If his army prevail Albany must then sound the trumpet for a champion to appear in proof of what is in the letter. If the British lose, then all is lost anyway.

As Edgar retreats, Edmund returns to urge Albany haste to the battle stations. Edmund is left alone to confess to the audience that he has wooed and won both sisters, and doesn't know which to have... or neither. He expects that Goneril will murder her husband once the battle is won. Moreover, Edmund has no intention of showing mercy to Lear and Cordelia if they are captured.

### **Scene Two**

The battle is over and the French have lost. Edgar leads his father to safety, telling him that Lear and Cordelia are prisoners. Gloucester is once again ready to die, but Edgar insists it is not yet time.

### **Scene Three**

Edmund has Cordelia and Lear captive. Cordelia is defiant, but the King is so transformed that he accepts his fate and views the politics of the world as something distant and meaningless. His realm is the mystery of things. Father and daughter are led away to prison and immediately Edmund sends his Captain to follow them - with a note containing some terrible instruction.



Albany enters with Goneril and Regan. He demands that Edmund hands the captives, Lear and Cordelia, over to him. When Edmund is presumptuous, Albany reminds him that he is a subject and not a brother. Regan pulls rank on Albany to insist that 'brother' may well be Edmund's status as he led her army. She implies that she will marry him – which makes Goneril furious. Regan would take her sister on, but she is feeling unwell...

Albany, who by now has read the contents of Edgar's letter, arrests Edmund on a charge of high treason. He then calls for the Herald and trumpet to sound to for the accuser to appear.

Regan is now very sick, and Goneril is very smug.

Edgar appears, armed – another disguise! The brothers fight and Edmund falls. Albany stays the hand of Edgar, and a desperate Goneril rails at the wounded Edmund for fighting an unknown opponent. Albany shows her the treacherous letter – written in her own hand. She runs off, declaring that the laws are hers and she can do whatever she likes.



The dying Edmund admits his guilt. Edgar reveals his true identity, and tells of his father's final moments. Gloucester died knowing the true identity of his companion in suffering, and reconciled to his legitimate son.

Agentleman enters in distress carrying a knife that he has just plucked from the heart of Goneril, who confessed to the poisoning of her sister, and then killed herself.

Kent enters as the bodies of Goneril and Regan are brought on. Albany demands to know where Lear and Cordelia are being held. With his last breath Edmund decides to try to make amends and bids them hurry for he has sent an assassin to hang Cordelia in her cell and make it look like suicide.

Edmund is carried off as Lear enters, bearing the body of Cordelia. He is ravaged by grief, but through his tears he recognises Kent; although he doesn't appear to comprehend when Kent tells him he has been with him all the time in disguise.

A messenger comes with news that Edmund is dead. Albany dismisses this as a trifle, and begins the process of restoring power and deference to the King – but it's too late. Lear's life ebbs away. In his final moment he thinks he sees a movement on Cordelia's lips. Does he think she is breathing? Perhaps after all his suffering he dies in ecstasy.

Albany, Kent and Edgar are left standing to bear the weight of governance and count the bodies.

**The end**

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## Production

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Meet the team...



**Back row:** Conrad Nelson (MD), Josh Moran, Fine Time Fontayne, Andrew Vincent, Jonathan Miller (Director),  
Barrie Rutter, John Branwell, Andy Cryer

**Middle row:** Jos Vantylar, Catherine Kinsella, Al Bolland, Sean Cernow, Nicola Sanderson, Helen Sheals,  
John Gully

**Front row:** Katie Bevan (SM), Jack Wilkinson, Rikki Hanson-Orr, Beth Sweeney (DSM)

Our company this time includes many artists who have appeared in previous Broadsides productions. If you're a regular audience member you might recognise some of them.

Here's a quick guide to who's who: **OLD STAGERS** and **NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK...**



## OLD STAGERS

### **Barrie Rutter (King Lear)**

Broadsides founder and Artistic Director, who has directed and appeared in many productions throughout the company's 23 year history. First production was *Richard III* in 1992.



### **Fine Time Fontayne (Fool)**

Fine Time (or FT, as everyone calls him) is pictured opposite as *King John* in 2001. FT was also in the companies of *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Medea*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Merry Wives* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

### **John Branwell (Gloucester)**

John, pictured opposite as Bottom The Weaver in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1994, is another longtime Broadside. John also appeared in *The Cracked Pot*, *Oedipus*, *We Are Three Sisters*, and *The Game*.



### **Helen Sheals (Goneril)**

Helen made her Broadsides debut as *Hermia* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1994. Since then she has played leading roles in *Twelfth Night*, *The Wars of The Roses*, and *Macbeth*.

### **Andrew Vincent (Kent)**

Andrew is another company stalwart. He first joined the team as *Harapha* in *Samson Agonistes* and went on to appear in *Alceste*, *King John*, *Merry Wives*, *The Cracked Pot*, *Oedipus*, *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, *Henry V*, *Poetry or Bust*, *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, *Macbeth*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Sweet William* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.



### **John Gully (Albany)**

John has played heroes and villains for Northern Broadsides - appearing in *Richard III*, *The Merry Wives*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet* (pictured opposite), *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, *The Mysteries*, *The Blood of Dracula*, *Henry V*, *A Woman Killed With Kindness* and *Wars of the Roses*.

### **Josh Moran (Burgundy/Old Man)**

Josh is the only company member (apart from Barrie) to have appeared in Broadsides' previous production of *King Lear* - 16 years ago. He also appeared in the 1998 production of *Richard III*.

### **Andy Cryer (Cornwall)**

Andy's association with Broadsides goes right back to the 1994 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when he played Puck - pictured opposite. Between that performance and this one as the Duke of Cornwall, he has appeared in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Alcestis*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Sweet William*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Passion*, *The Mysteries*, *The Wars of The Roses*, *School for Scandal*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Hamlet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Government Inspector*,



### **Jos Vantylar (Oswald)**

Jos made his mark in *The Game* in 2010 and returned to the company in 2012 for *Love's Labour's Lost*. He's sure to be back again.

### **Catherine Kinsella (Cordelia)**

Cath has played many roles for the company in *Macbeth*, *The Bells*, *School For Scandal*, *The Tempest*, *The Game*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *We Are Three Sisters*. Cath won the award for Best Actress in a visiting production at Manchester Theatre Awards for her performance as Mary in *Rutherford and Son*.

### **Nicola Sanderson (Regan)**

Nicola joined Broadsides for *A Woman Killed With Kindness* and *Henry V*, and went on to appear in *The Man With Two Gaffers* in 2007 (pictured here with Barrie).





### **Conrad Nelson (Musical Director)**

Broadsides Resident Director and Musical Director, as an actor Conrad has appeared in many productions for the company – including his acclaimed performance as Iago, alongside Lenny Henry's *Othello* in 2009. Conrad has also directed many of his own productions for the company – in particular new adaptations of classic foreign language plays. Later this year he will direct Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

## **NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK**



### **Jack Wilkinson**

Jack is a graduate of Drama Centre, London. His theatre work includes a Manchester Theatre Awards nomination for his performance in *David Copperfield* at Oldham Coliseum. Stoke born, Jack's TV credits include appearing in Tiger Aspect's heartwarming TV special, *Marvellous*.

### **Sean Cernow**

Manchester actor, Sean started his career at Contact Theatre and has a varied CV, including theatre, TV and film. Sean's experience of performing Shakespeare includes an appearance in *The Hollow Crown II: Henry VI part 1* for the BBC. Look out for it in 2016.

### **Al Bollands and Rikki Hanson-Orr**

Al and Rikki both graduated from ALRA last year (2014). They are making their professional debuts in this production for Northern Broadsides – lucky them!



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## IN DEPTH...



### In conversation with director, **Jonathan Miller**

Jonathan Miller was born in July 1934 and grew up in St John's Wood, London in an influential Jewish family, though he is himself an outspoken atheist.

Jonathan studied medicine at Cambridge University, where he became involved in the Cambridge Footlights – the university's dramatics club. During his time there in the late 1950s the

Footlights became a creative hotbed for a new kind of comedy and satire.

This generation of undergraduates from Cambridge and Oxford produced some great comic talent, and in the early 1960s Jonathan teamed up with Peter Cook, Dudley Moore and Alan Bennett to create a comedy review called *Beyond The Fringe*. This hugely successful show is regarded as seminal in the rise of satirical comedy and catapulted all four writer/performers to stardom.

For Jonathan the opportunities were endless and he went on to be a television presenter, editor, writer and director. He has also directed countless theatre productions and is an acclaimed opera director. Jonathan has authored a number of books on theatre, and others relating to his lifelong fascination with biology and the human mind. In 2002 he received a Knighthood for services to music and the arts.

Jonathan took a break during rehearsals to talk about Shakespeare's masterpiece – **King Lear**

*As with all Shakespeare, the only ones I really like doing are plausible stories. **King Lear** and **Hamlet** are two of the plays that I've enjoyed doing several times precisely because it's possible to do them without being poetic and simply being realistic.*

*The King Lear plot is very real – just the stupid behaviour of a man who scarcely knows what his relationship to his children is, and he ends up having lost all three of them. He is a king who virtually doesn't deserve to be a king. He has none of the personal character you would expect of a monarch. He messes up his family and to that extent probably messes up the state of which he is the monarch. So it's about the relationship between monarch and his subjects, and his children as well. They are parallel failures of his. As the girls say – 'he has ever but slenderly known himself'.*



**Thelma Ruby as Goneril**  
Nottingham Playhouse 1969

*I think I first did this play in Nottingham about 40 years ago. Then I later went on to do two television versions of it when I ran the BBC Shakespeare. I also did it with Christopher Plummer and with people in amateur collections – and now with Barrie – so it's been something I've done for the long time.*

*I've never changed much in my approach. I've always set it in the period in which it was written. I don't have pre-Christian England. I make it look as though it takes place in 1605 – and here's a king dividing his kingdom in the same year that James I is uniting the kingdoms of England and Scotland.*

*It changes to some extent mainly because it's being done with slightly different people.*

*I've done operas, plays, television and film – but there's nothing in particular about my process in approaching Shakespeare. I like King Lear and Hamlet particularly because it's possible to do them very naturally – without doing what people did up to the 1960s, which is a lot of poetry.*

*I was taught as a doctor to look at what people do and to observe the small details of behaviour, how people move their hands as they talk etc... My directing approach has always been looking at these small, often too frequently unnoticed, aspects of ordinary action. That's what's always concerned me – with plays and operas. Most operas I wouldn't dream of doing because they're so stupid the stories, and spuriously dramatic in ways I just don't believe.*



**Michael Hordern as King Lear**  
BBC Shakespeare 1982

*I'm only interested in the details of commonplace behaviour: what people do, how people talk to each other and the nonverbal expressions they make. That's the thing I've always been interested in.*





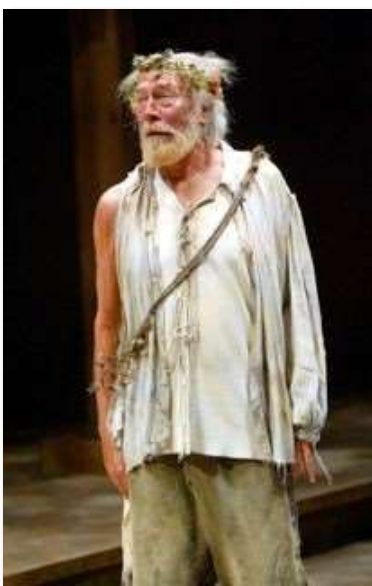
*The speech 'Blow winds and crack your cheeks...' is usually done as if he's relishing the storm. But it's the first time he's ever been alone, unaccompanied by servants, colleagues, equals, shelter – and so he's in a state of depression. This is how I have directed Barrie to play the speech.*

*Barrie and I worked together many years ago – up in Nottingham I think – and then we didn't see each other for a long time and then, in 2013, he asked me to direct **Rutherford and Son** by Githa Sowerby.*

*That production was very successful, but it's much harder to make a success of this play. With **King Lear** people have seen it many many times – whereas with **Rutherford and Son** here was this play written by this woman in 1912 with which very few people were acquainted and so we disclosed aspects of the drama that had never been recognised before.*

Catherine Kinsella as Mary Rutherford  
**Rutherford and Son** in 2013.

Catherine plays Cordelia in this production of **King Lear**



*I'm 80 now and the most important thing about being an old man is that you have surveyed human nature, and you see how much it fails and how fallible we are as a species.*

*I think I look at **Lear** with more understanding and depression.*

*He learns that he is part of a community of other people – just like him*

Christopher Plummer as **King Lear**  
New York and Stratford 2004

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## IN DEPTH...

### Acting The Fool

Q & A with Fine Time Fontayne



Fine Time Fontayne (that's not his real name) is an actor, writer and director with over 40 years experience in show business. He has tackled roles in theatre, television, film and radio - from the dark and murderous Claudius in Hamlet to regularly appearing as a Dame in pantomime. No surprise then that he was cast as the 'bitter fool' – a role that draws on these extreme ends of his acting range.



Fine Time as Pantomime Dame

#### Tell us what you know about comedy...

*In typical fashion I used being funny to make friends and avoid conflict as a child - I pulled faces, told jokes and recited cheeky songs. This was a social way of being, but since working as a professional actor/performer I've become less entertaining to my friends and, I think, quieter when out and about socially.*

*Making an audience laugh indicates immediately that they understand what you're talking about. If they don't understand what you're saying they can't laugh. This is very useful with obscure or arcane text, in that laughter gives you a clue that you're communicating.*

#### Some skills I've picked up - or tips to be funny on stage are:

- If you're feeding a joke your diction has to be spot on.
- Comedy timing should be called comedy waiting.
- Don't move on your punch line.
- Always make the joke against yourself.



**Can you remember the first time you came across King Lear, and what do you think of the Fool?**

*I first came across Lear in 1970 in Scarborough. I went to see the Black and White film in the cinema that's now the Stephen Joseph theatre - I walked out I was bored stiff. Years later I saw a Nottingham Playhouse production with our very own John Branwell (Gloucester) playing Edmund - now we're talking - some rubbish in it but - I like!*

*I never thought the Fool was funny - but felt, and still do, that he loves Lear and is confused, angry and scared. He's basically fighting for his life. Some in the court hate him and, as the power base shifts, his world spins out of control. His rock has been Lear, and as the King crumbles the fool knows he's in real trouble.*

*Jonathan Miller in rehearsals was fascinating. His medical background, both professional and personal, drew him to encourage an idea of Lear as an ordinary man falling to pieces due to age related degeneration and illness. This I think helped the production.*

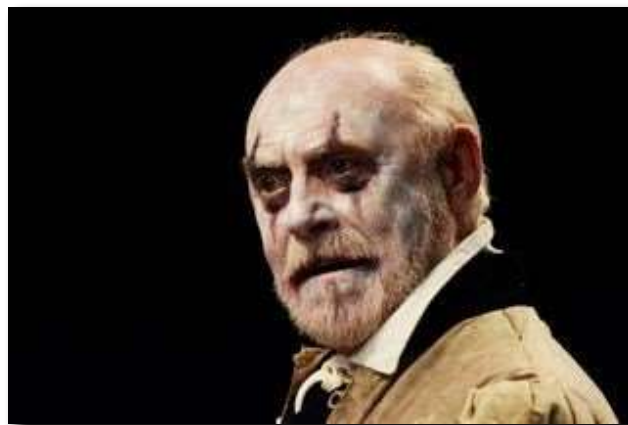
*The making of theatre is a process, and in this case that continuing process has produced a good show built from the creative talents of the whole group - which I think Jonathan would welcome and encourage.*

**Do you think the notion of an 'allowed fool' is still present anywhere in Britain today**

*It's said that dictators suppress comedy – and if this is true, it's a clue that comedy has a function. A society that can transmit programmes like 'That Was The Week That Was' or 'Mock The Week' is probably doing ok-ish.*

*The term 'Allowed Fool' makes me think of the political cartoonist Gerald Scarfe and his wonderful image from 1972 of US President Nixon's face drawn as a B52 bomber plane, dropping a bomb on Vietnam. That's the kind of place where the Allowed Fool existed in the 60s 70s.*

*I live in hope that a good joke can bring down governments.*



## SECTION TWO

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### ‘A foolish, fond old man...’

#### *King Lear in performance*

Although the actual date of composition is not known, a little detective work can discover that the first performance of **King Lear** is a matter of record.

The title page of the first publication of the play in 1608 (called The First Quarto) states that this text is of **King Lear**...

*As it was played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall on S. Stephan's night in Christmas Hollidayer.*

In the Stationer's Register—an official record book of printed works—it is noted that on 26 November 1607 the stationers John Busby and Nathaniel Butter claimed the right to print *A booke called Master William Shakespeare his historye of Kinge Lear, as yt was played before the Kinges maiestie at Whitehall vppon Sainct Stephens night at Christmas Last, by his maiesties seruantes playinge vsually at the Globe on the Banksyde.*

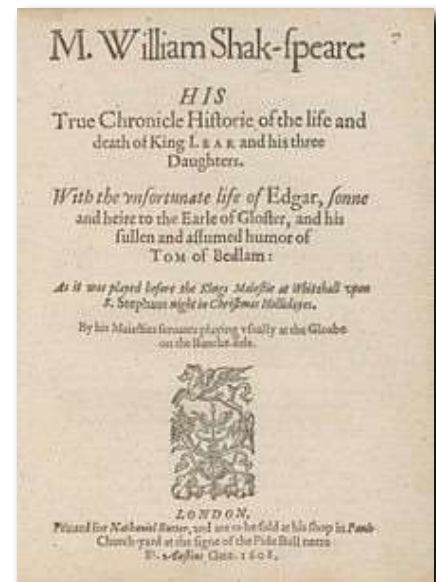
So—this ‘First Quarto’ of 1608 was granted permission for publication in 1607, and is based on a text that was performed at The Globe Theatre on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1606.

Since this first performance the play *King Lear* has been performed regularly right until the present day. There have been modified and translated texts and many interpretations, varying according to popular taste and political context.

It is often said that an actor should play the role of Lear twice in his career—once when he can, and once when he should. This refers to the great physical demands of such a role, which are more suited to a younger man—and an actor who is the right age to play the part may find it too exhausting.

Barrie Rutter has played the role before, in 1999, when he was 52 years old—pictured opposite with Duggie Brown as The Fool. Now he tackles the role again at 68 it is quite a different proposition.

But who else has worn Lear's crown over the centuries?



## INTERPRETATIONS OF KING LEAR

### 17<sup>th</sup> Century

There is no doubt that the first actor to play King Lear was **Richard Burbage** – Shakespeare's friend and contemporary who first performed many of the greatest roles created by the playwright, including Richard III, Othello and Hamlet.

On his death a funeral elegy, praising Burbage's countless performances included a reference to his performance as King Lear:

*Thy stature small, but every thought and mood  
Might thoroughly from thy face be understood;  
And his whole action he could change with ease  
From ancient Lear to youthful Pericles.*



Richard Burbage was born into a theatrical family in January 1567. Son of theatrical impresario James Burbage, young Richard was almost certainly destined for a life on the stage. Not much is known of his early career but he shot to fame as the star of William Shakespeare's company The Lord Chamberlain's Men, which became The King's Men on the accession of James I in 1603.

It appears that Shakespeare's great tragic roles were written for Richard Burbage, and that these characters aged along with the actor who played them. It's worth noting that when Burbage first played King Lear he would have only been in his late 30s – but people probably looked older in those days!

Unlike Shakespeare who retired from London and showbiz some years before his death, Burbage carried on working right until the end. His death in 1619 was widely mourned by friends and fans. He was buried close to the theatre, at St Leonards in Shoreditch, although the exact location of his grave is not known.



### Dark days for theatre...

In 1642 at the start of the English Civil War the Puritan Parliament, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, issued an ordinance suppressing all stage plays. Theatres were closed and in 1644 The Globe was demolished altogether.

Theatres reopened upon the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, and in 1681 a new version of King Lear appeared on the English stage. **The History of King Lear** was an adaptation by Nahum Tate of Shakespeare's play, in which the eponymous king does not die but regains his throne. Furthermore, Cordelia isn't hanged, but lives to marry Edgar. Some of

Shakespeare's text remains, but there is much addition and omission – including the complete absence of The Fool

Although critics considered Tate's to be an inferior, sentimental version it made good political sense at the time. The newly restored Monarchy and Monarchists did not want to watch a play about a deposed King ending in tragedy. England's story was one of Restoration, and so the theatre responded accordingly. Tate's version was immensely popular with audiences and remained the preferred text for around 1650 years. Famous actors of the day performed Tate's Lear, not Shakespeare's – and the first of these was **Thomas Betterton**.



Thomas Betterton was the first great actor manager of the Restoration and the first to play **King Lear** in the newly opened theatres. He performed Nahum Tate's version to great acclaim.

Born in London c1635, young Betterton was apprenticed to a publisher, and possibly later to a bookseller named Rhodes, who had been wardrobe-keeper to the theatre in Blackfriars.

In 1659 Rhodes obtained a license to set up a company of players at the Cockpit in Drury Lane; and on the reopening of this theatre in 1660, Betterton made his debut on the stage.

His talents at once brought him into prominence, and he was given leading parts - appearing at the opening of the new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1661. Besides being a public favourite Betterton was held in high esteem by King Charles II himself, and the diarist Samuel Pepys was also a big fan.

*In his production of **King Lear** Betterton was joined by the first women to perform on the English stage. The great Elizabeth Barry took the revised and more romantic role of Cordelia – to great acclaim.*

Until the Restoration women did not appear in plays at all. The King's famous mistress, Nell Gwyn was among these first English actresses, and Betterton was married to another – Mary Saunderson – who appeared with him in many plays, including those of William Shakespeare's.



Then, as now, the theatre was a risky business but 1693, with the aid of friends, he erected the New Playhouse in the tennis court in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This theatre was opened in 1695, but in just a few years was in financial trouble, and an ageing and infirm Betterton, decided to quit the stage.

In 1710 he made his last appearance as Melantius in *The Maid's Tragedy*; he died on the 28th of April, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

## 18<sup>th</sup> Century



**David Garrick** is one of the most famous actors who ever lived. He was also a highly successful theatre manager and producer, and a lesser playwright.

Born into a French Huguenot family in Hereford, Garrick was educated at Lichfield Grammar school and at the age of 19 enrolled in the Edial Hall School, Lichfield.

Clearly a natural actor, young David caught the eye of the theatre world in amateur performances – notably of Richard III. He made his professional acting debut in 1741 and never looked back. In 1742 he was engaged at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and in 1747 he took over the running of that theatre, where he was manager until his retirement in 1776.

Garrick's very natural style of acting, compared with the declamatory style of his predecessors proved very popular and influential. Theatrical performances had moved 'indoors' during the 200 years since the plays of Shakespeare were first performed and a new style was needed for these more flexible and sensitive acoustic spaces. However, some contemporary descriptions of Garrick's performances still sound very heightened and exaggerated compared to the prevalent acting style of today.

Garrick's interpretation of **King Lear** – using Tate's version – was very popular. He revised this edition, restoring some of Shakespeare's original text but kept the 'happy ending'.

This engraving of 1761 by James McArdell is entitled 'Mr Garrick in the character of King Lear'



Indulging his lifelong passion for the Stratford Bard, Garrick built a 'Temple To Shakespeare' on the banks of the Thames at Hampton in 1756 – where he kept Shakespearean relics and memorabilia and entertained family and friends. Garrick died in 1779 and was the first actor to be granted the honour of being buried in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey – right next to the monument to William Shakespeare.

In 1831 a The Garrick Club was founded by a group of literary gentlemen under the patronage of the King's brother, the Duke of Sussex. Named after the 18th Century actor, this Club still exists today – a place where 'actors and men of refinement and education might meet on equal terms'.



## 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the actors **Edmund Kean** and **Henry Irving** dominated the English and international stage.



Kean came first, born in the 1780s he caught the attention of the theatre establishment as a teenager, and played before the court of George III. But his big break came in 1814 as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* at Drury Lane Theatre. The huge success of this production, and Kean's performance turned the fortunes of the theatre and he followed with equal success *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and **King Lear**.

Kean had previously acted Tate's *Lear*, but the great Tragedian is reported to have told his wife that the London audience "have no notion of what I can do till they see me over the dead body of Cordelia." He was the first to restore the tragic ending to the play, but this was not well received by audiences. Despite one critic describing his dying scene as "deeply affecting" the tragedy was played for just a few performances and, with regret, Kean reverted to Tate.

A reckless and extravagant lifestyle eventually caught up with Kean and he died in May 1833, aged just 48. He is buried in St Mary Magdalene Church, Richmond. His last words were alleged to be "dying is easy; comedy is hard."



Henry Irving was the first actor to receive a Knighthood—a remarkable accolade, and one which demonstrated the growing respectability of the theatre.

Born John Brodribb in 1838 in Somerset, he changed his name to Henry Irving and first impressed the London theatre-going public in the 1860s in comic parts: by the 1890s he was the most eminent Tragedian of his age.

He died in 1905 and his ashes were interred at Westminster Abbey. A statue of him stands in London, behind the National Portrait Gallery. A lasting memorial to this highly influential actor.

Irving tackled all the great Shakespearean roles, including **King Lear**. His performance in the role at The Lyceum Theatre was recorded in this painting by Bernard Partridge (1892).



## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

New forms such as film, radio and television presented new opportunities for exploring the potential of drama for entertainment, education and propaganda.

The popularity of **King Lear** only increased, and now there were many different ways of presenting the play. Shakespeare's original text was fully restored to mainstream use, although Tate's version is still occasionally produced. Here's a quick round up of just a few of the most famous versions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century...

- Actor Manager **Donald Woolfit's** Shakespearean production during WW1 proved an effective propaganda tool in boosting morale and stirring national pride. His performance as King Lear inspired Ronald Harwood to write his popular play *The Dresser* (1980), based on his own experiences as Woolfit's dresser during the 1940s.
- **Paul Scofield** took the title role in Peter Brook's famous production at the RSC in 1962 – pictured here with Diana Rigg as Cordelia. A film followed the stage production in setting Lear's kingdom as a cross between pre-Christian paganism and post-nuclear holocaust.
- The great 20<sup>th</sup> Century actor, **Laurence Olivier**, was directed in the role in 1938 by Tyrone Guthrie - when he was just 31 years old. He reprised the role for Granada Television in 1983.



- **James Earl Jones** (pictured below) was a critically acclaimed Lear in the 1974 New York Shakespeare Festival. This production was broadcast on television in America.



- Two film adaptations appeared very close together in the 1980s: Akira Kurosawa's outstanding adaptation, *Ran*, won the BAFTA award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1987. In the same year, Jean Luc Godard directed a highly original adaptation set in a post-Chernobyl world. This *King Lear* features performances from Woody Allen, Molly Ringwald and opera director Peter Sellars as William Shakespeare Junior the Fifth.



### And finally...

The first 15 years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have seen *King Lear* as popular as ever. The audience of Trevor Nunn's 2007 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company could expect to get rained on during this loud and stormy interpretation.

**Ian McKellen** played the role of Lear against the backdrop of a tumble-down theatre auditorium with rich velvet drapes matching the ornate scarlet military uniforms of the actors.



Notable details from this production are that Sir Ian infamously stripped completely naked during Lear's madness, and the Fool (played by Sylvester McCoy) was hanged on-stage.

This production was filmed at Pinewood Studios in 2008 and broadcast by the BBC.

2008 also saw **Pete Postlethwaite's** performance in his native Liverpool at the Everyman Theatre. The director was Rupert Goold, who is famed for his imaginative, modern stagings of classic plays. It was later revealed that this popular actor was suffering from cancer during this production, and he died in January 2011.



Most recently, **Simon Russell Beale** has added *Lear* to his long list of Shakespearean titles; directed by Sam Mendes for the National Theatre.

You can see him talking about the role and the production here:

<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/talking-lear-simon-russell-beale-on-king-lear>

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## 'Hey, ho – the wind and the rain...'

### *Shakespeare's Fools*

The character of a **Fool** recurs several times in Shakespeare's plays – there are roles for clowns, such as The Gravediggers in *Hamlet*, The Porter in *Macbeth*, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Trinculo in *The Tempest* – and then there are the more classic Fool roles such as Feste in *Twelfth Night*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and The Fool in *King Lear*.

In writing these roles Shakespeare was drawing on an ancient tradition of comedy. A talent to amuse is one of the keys to his success as a playwright. He was also writing roles to exploit the strengths of actors in his company – some of whom were gifted clowns.

Shakespeare's development as a writer appears to progress closely with the changes in the acting company – and this is particularly noticeable in the comic roles. Until around 1600, the star comedy turn at The Curtain theatre (home of Shakespeare's company The Lord Chamberlain's men) was an actor named **Will Kemp** (or Kempe).

Kemp had made his name as a comedy performer before he joined Shakespeare's company, around 1594. He was famous for dancing, a broad, physical kind of comedy and earthy characters. It's likely he played Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and created the role of Falstaff in *Henry IV parts 1 and 2*.



In 1598 Kemp was one of the 5 shareholders in the planned Globe Theatre – along with Richard Burbage and Shakespeare himself – but he suddenly, and mysteriously, left the company and never appeared on the new Globe stage when it opened in 1599.

Though shrouded in mystery, Kempe's departure may have had something to do with the rise of a new star...

**Robert Armin** was a comedy actor, and protégé of Queen Elizabeth's favourite clown, Richard Tarleton. With the arrival of Robert Armin in his company of actors, Shakespeare's 'Fools' became more complex and quite a bit darker in tone.

Before Lear's Fool, Armin appeared as Feste in Twelfth Night – the jester to Lady Olivia's dead father – Feste is more like an outsider, who comments on the action more than he participates. He also has several songs, including 'Come Away Death' and one that turns up as a snatch in King Lear:

*When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
A foolish thing was but a toy,  
For the rain it raineth every day.*

*But when I came to man's estate,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,  
For the rain, it raineth every day.*

*But when I came, alas! to wive,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
By swaggering could I never thrive,  
For the rain, it raineth every day.*

*But when I came unto my beds,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
With toss-pots still had drunken heads,  
For the rain, it raineth every day.*

*A great while ago the world begun,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.  
But that's all one, our play is done,  
And we'll strive to please you every day.*

Out in the storm Lear's Fool sings the following...

*He that has and a little tiny wit,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
Must make content with his fortunes fit,  
For the rain it raineth every day.*

If, as it is believed, Robert Armin played both roles, no doubt the contemporary audience would have spotted the reference.

There is a popular theory that Cordelia and The Fool was a doubled part, played by the same young male actor. This idea – first proposed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century is chiefly founded on the fact that the two characters never share the stage. In fact the fool doesn't appear until Cordelia has gone to France, and once she returns he does not appear again. Shakespeare has also given the Fool an

emotional bond with Cordelia, as one of the Knights informs Lear, "Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away." Then there is also the potentially double meaning to Lear's line, "And my poor fool is hanged" as he cradles the dead body of Cordelia.

This debate is unlikely to ever be proven either way; however, though the doubling of parts did happen in Shakespeare's time, it was not the financial necessity it often is today. In Robert Armin Shakespeare had a comedic actor with the skill to play a range of emotion and attitudes, and he was clearly able to develop his fools to be more sophisticated in their character and function. Having already played Feste and Touchstone it seems unlikely therefore that Armin would not play Lear's Fool also.

In *Twelfth Night* Olivia states that that Feste is "an allowed fool" – meaning he is licensed and privileged critic to speak the truth about those around him, including his masters. Feste certainly seems to be the most perceptive character in the play, and this notion of the jester being the sage is perfectly expressed in Viola's remark, "This fellow's wise enough to play the fool".

In *King Lear* we see the most clear example of a character appearing as an 'allowed fool' – that is a character with very low status that has license to 'speak truth to power'. This is something that The Fool does constantly, though he faithfully follows Lear through the trials that beset him – a loyal fool. He is also one that has already seen the worth in Cordelia, when her own father did not – a wise fool.

In Shakespeare's great exploration of the human condition, this 'wise fool' is just one paradox of many that find 'reason in madness', blindness in sighted men 'I stumbled when I saw'. When Lear says that 'Nothing will come of nothing' he is wrong. For it is only through his journey into absolute poverty, when he ultimately is not in possession even of his own mind, that he attains enlightenment and redemption. Perhaps the 'bitter' Fool just disappears from the play because when Lear can see the true nature of things for himself, neither he nor Shakespeare have need of an him anymore.



## SECTION THREE

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### Study

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#### English

##### *King Lear as inspiration for creative writing*

In **King Lear** we find major themes recurring through the main plot and sub plot. These are big, universal ideas that are just as much a part of our world as they were of Shakespeare's. Here are some quotes related to the main themes of the play:

**Appearance and reality** - *Get thee glass eyes and, like a scurvypolitician, seem to see the things thou dost not.*

**Justice –** *Plate sin with gold  
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks*

**Reconciliation** *Come, let's away to prison.  
We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage.  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down  
And ask of thee forgiveness.*

**Order and chaos** *These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend  
no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can  
reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself  
scourged by the sequent effects: love cools,  
friendship falls off, brothers divide: in  
cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in  
palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son  
and father.*

**Betrayal -** *All dark and comfortless! Where's my son Edmund?  
Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature To quit this horrid act.*

## **Creative Writing Exercise 1 – VARIATIONS ON A THEME**

**TASK:** Taking one of these quotes as your inspiration, **write a short story or play** exploring the ideas within it. Shakespeare's themes are universal so your story can have a modern setting.

**Some ideas to get you started:**

### **Content**

Consider the main components of any story: characters, setting and plot. Remember that, as in *King Lear* itself, the journey of a story is often one of transformation: i.e. at the end of the story people and situations are not the same as at the beginning. This transformation can be seen as a being caused by characters encountering a central 'problem' and how they respond. So...

- Who are your characters?
- Who is your main character (Protagonist)?
- What is the creating the 'problem' of the story? Sometimes this is a person (Antagonist).
- Where are your characters? Country, city, town, village, house, school, café...? Are they indoors or outdoors? In a building, is it a particular room – kitchen, bedroom etc...?
- When is the story set? Is it modern or historical? Is it day or night? Is it a particular time of year?
- What is the 'problem' of the story: that must be solved or overcome – or not?
- What happens? What's the action of the story?

### **Construction**

*Always think about a beginning, middle and end. You can think of these terms, if it helps:*

<b>Beginning</b>	<b>'SET IT UP'</b>	Introduce your characters, the situation, the 'problem'
<b>Middle</b>	<b>'SHAKE IT UP'</b>	The main events in your story, building to a climax.
<b>End</b>	<b>'SORT IT OUT'</b>	The consequences of the main action, and the conclusion of the story.

*In a prose story you also need to consider who is telling the story. Here are some options:*

- You, the writer (narrator) tell the story.
  - Generally an objective observer, but may still show a viewpoint or bias.
- The main character tells their story.
  - This is often called **first person narrative**.
- Another character tells the story.
  - A viewpoint on the protagonist from inside the story, which can be written from a subjective position.

## **Creative Writing Exercise 2 - ADAPTATION**

Some of Shakespeare's plays have been adapted for film and television, and updated to a modern setting. Eg – ***Macbeth*** was set in a restaurant, with Macbeth himself as an ambitious young chef; and ***Much Ado About Nothing*** was set around a team in a regional television newsroom.

Could you adapt ***King Lear*** to a modern setting? What would that be?

**TASK:** Write a drama script for Stage, Television, Film or Radio which takes the basic story of King Lear and places it in a contemporary (or futuristic) setting.

**Here are some suggestions to get you thinking:**

Who might the character of King Lear be in a modern world?

- The Chief Executive of a multi-million pound business.
- The owner / manager of a massive football club.
- A powerful politician, landowner or Royal.

What might the initial setting be?

- A palace or mansion?
- The skyscraper offices of a huge business.
- A football ground?
- On board a luxury yacht?

What might the 'heath' be in an adaptation?

- The backstreets of a city: a 'cardboard city' where the homeless live.
- In a tiny boat, far out at sea; or washed up on a vast, cold beach.
- On a stretch of urban wasteland, such as a derelict factory.

You don't have to adapt the whole play. You might want to concentrate on the main plot of Lear and his daughters, or you might want to just tell the story of Gloucester and his sons.

Or you could follow the line of one character and do more of a 'spin off' story.

E.g. Dramatise the whole thing from the point of view of Cordelia. Follow her when she leaves the story of the play and dramatise what happens to her, and then how she finds things on her return.

E.g. Imagine the journey of The Fool and dramatise this. As with Cordelia, you should consider those times when he is not on stage. Where is he at the start of the story? What happens to him at the end?





## Drama

### *King Lear as inspiration for drama*

#### **Drama Exercise 1 – OFFSTAGE ACTION**

In **King Lear**, as in any play, there are scenes that we do not see. There are many reasons why playwright may not dramatise key moments in a story. Sometimes these reasons are practical, sometimes we just don't need to see them, and sometimes these omissions heighten the drama: e.g. it is more dramatic to not stage the death of Cordelia, but to see Lear bring on her body just at the moment when we think there is a chance she might be saved. In fact Shakespeare chooses to set most of the deaths in this play offstage, including those of Cornwall, Gloucester, Edgar, Regan and Goneril.

Sometimes, in exploring characters and relationships, actors will improvise scenes that are skipped over in the action of a play, or key moments and relationships that have occurred before the play's point of entry into the story.

**TASK:** Imagine scenes and situations between characters in **King Lear** that do not appear in the play. Here are some ideas to get you started.

#### **Before the first scene of the play**

- Lear and Cordelia on good terms, enjoying each other's company.
  - *I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest  
On her kind nursery.*
- Goneril and Regan discussing the favouritism their father shows to his youngest daughter.
  - *He always lov'd our sister most,*
- France and Burgundy presenting their initial suits for Cordelia's hand—before she falls out of favour.
  - *The 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 answer'd.*
- Edmund returning to Gloucester's castle again and meeting his half brother, Edgar, again after 9 years away.
  - *He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again*

## During the play

- The Fool, pining for Cordelia
    - *Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away.*
  - Cordelia, Queen of France, receiving word of her father's situation, and proposing military action to her husband.
    - *Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,  
That by thy comfortable beams I may  
Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles  
But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,  
Who hath most fortunately been inform'd  
Of my obscured course*
  - Regan proposing to Edmund.
    - *Now, sweet lord,  
You know the goodness I intend upon you.*
- 

## Drama Exercise 2 – CLIMATE CHANGE

The storm in King Lear is an example of the **Pathetic Fallacy** – an idea that the natural world, or the environment, acts in sympathy with human emotions and situations. In the play the storm is an outward manifestation of Lear's mental state, and this chaos in Nature also reflects the social chaos created by the King in reversing the human power structure and putting his children in charge.

Weather can be a key feature in drama, on stage, screen and in radio drama too.

**TASK:** Improvise an outdoor scene around any stimuli you choose. It can be simply meeting your friends on the street, or on a beach or up a mountain... Repeat the scene, but now change the weather. Try the scene in various weather conditions:

- Warm, pleasant sunshine
- A heat wave
- Drizzling rain
- Driving rain
- Fog
- Snow
- Gale

...or any combination of the above.

- What does it do to the scene?
  - Does it make you want to change the dynamic of the drama?
  - Could weather itself be an inspiration for a play?
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## **Credits and links**

### **Production and rehearsal shots © Nobby Clark**

Other images and content sourced at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/king-lear-54933>

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com>

<http://www.thelmaruby.com/2078.html>

<https://argumentativeoldgit.wordpress.com/2013/06/12/the-bbc-shakespeare-king-lear-1982/>

<http://www.christopherplummer.eu/Photographs.php?view=preview&q=&category=5&image=1454&ImageGalleryPage=48>

<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/ians-fine-old-time-oldham-8068357>

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1157982/mr-garrick-in-the-character-print-mcardell-james/>

[http://shakespeare.berkeley.edu/gallery2/main.php?g2\\_itemId=19058](http://shakespeare.berkeley.edu/gallery2/main.php?g2_itemId=19058)

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/gallery/2012/jul/04/northern-broadsides-20-in-pictures>

<http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/19thcentury.html>

<https://www.msu.edu/~tetenskr/KingLear.htm>

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=6952054&PIpi=1712078>

<http://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk>

<http://collation.folger.edu/2012/12/a-geek-peek-at-folger-art-file-and-art-box-classification/>

<http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/shakespeare/plays/king-lear/1962-photo-gallery.aspx>

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