

William Shakespeare

The Tragedy of King Lear



King Lear is a tragedy by William Shakespeare. The title character descends into madness after disposing of his estate between two of his three daughters based on their flattery, bringing tragic consequences for all. The play is based on the legend of Leir of Britain, a mythological pre-Roman Celtic king.

After the Restoration, the play was often revised with a happy ending for audiences who disliked its dark and depressing tone, but since the 19th century Shakespeare's original version has been regarded as one of his supreme achievements.



The play was written between 1603 and 1606 and later revised. Shakespeare's earlier version, *The True Chronicle of the History of the Life and Death of King Lear and His Three Daughters*, was published in quarto in 1608. *The Tragedy of King Lear*, a more theatrical version, was included in the 1623 First Folio. Modern editors usually conflate the two, though some insist that each version has its individual integrity that should be preserved.

King Lear, the aging King of Britain, determines to split his domain evenly between his three daughters: Goneril, Regan, and the young Cordelia. Goneril, when asked, gushes her protestations of love for her father; Regan follows with even more flattery. Cordelia, however, is sincere in her love of Lear, and she declines to pander to him—she simply says she loves him the way a daughter should love her father. Lear is put off by this lack of pomp and disinherits her.

Lear is soon to find out how much love Goneril and Regan actually have for him. Both daughters treat him miserably when he stays with them.

It was a wild and stormy night, and he wandered about the heath half mad with misery, and with no companion but the poor Fool.

But presently his servant, the good Earl of Kent, met him, and at last persuaded him to lie down in a wretched little hovel. At daybreak the Earl of Kent removed his royal master to Dover, and hurried to the Court of France to tell Cordelia what had happened.

Cordelia's husband gave her an army and with it she landed at Dover. Here she found poor King Lear, wandering about the fields, wearing a crown of nettles and weeds. They brought him back and fed and clothed him, and Cordelia came to him and kissed him.

And now he knew at last which of his children it was that had loved him best, and who was worthy of his love.

*Thank you
for your attention!*