

SYNOPSIS OF *KING LEAR*

In Britain, King Lear, in old age, chooses to retire and divide up Britain between his three daughters. However, he declares that they must first be wed before being given the land. He asks his daughters the extent of their love for him. The two oldest, Goneril and Regan, both flatter him with praise and are rewarded generously with land and marriage to the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall, respectively. Lear's youngest and most beloved daughter, Cordelia, refuses to flatter her father, going only so far as to say that she loves him as much as a daughter should. Lear, unjustly enraged, gives her no land. The Earl of Kent tries to convince Lear to reconsider, but Lear refuses then banishes Kent for acting traitorously by supporting Cordelia. Gloucester then brings the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy in and Lear offers Cordelia to Burgundy, though without a dowry of land, contrary to a previous agreement. Burgundy declines, but the French King, impressed by Cordelia's steadfastness, takes her as Queen of France. Next, Lear passes all powers and governance of Britain down to Albany and Cornwall.

Edmund, bastard son of Gloucester, vows to himself to reclaim land his father has given to his "legitimate" son Edgar. Edmund does this by showing his father a letter he (Edmund) forged, which makes it seem that Edgar wants to take over his father's lands and revenues jointly with Edmund. Gloucester is enraged, but Edmund calms him. Later, Edmund warns Edward that he is in trouble with his father, pretending to help him.

Goneril instructs her steward, Oswald, to act coldly to King Lear and his knights, in efforts to chide him since he continues to grow more unruly. Kent arrives, disguised as a servant, and offers his services to Lear, who accepts. However, as a result of the servants' lack of respect for Lear, his own fool's derisions of him, and Goneril's ill respect toward him, Lear storms out of Goneril's home, never to look on her again. Lear goes next to Regan's house. While leaving, the fool again criticizes Lear for giving his lands to his daughters. Lear fears he (himself) is becoming insane.

At Gloucester's castle, Edmund convinces Edgar to flee, then wounds himself to make it look like Edgar attacked him. Gloucester, thankful for Edmund's support of him, vows to capture Edgar and reward Edmund. Regan and Cornwall arrive to discuss with Albany their ensuing war against Lear. Kent arrives at Gloucester's with a message from Lear and meets Oswald (whom Kent dislikes and mistrusts) with a message from Goneril. Kent attacks Oswald, but Cornwall and Regan break up the fight, after which Kent is put in the stocks for 24 hours. Edgar, still running, tells himself he must disguise himself as a beggar. King Lear arrives, finding Kent in the stocks. At first, Regan and Cornwall refuse to see Lear, further enraging him, but then they allow him to enter. Oswald and Goneril arrive, and Lear becomes further enraged. After Regan and Goneril chide Lear to the brink, he leaves Gloucester's castle, entering a storm. The daughters and Cornwall are glad he leaves, though Gloucester is privately concerned for his health.

In the storm, Kent sends a man to Dover to get Cordelia and her French forces to rescue Lear and help him fight Albany and Cornwall. Lear stands in the storm swearing at it and his daughters, but Kent convinces him to hide in a cave. Gloucester tells Edmund of the French forces and departs for Lear, but Edmund plans to betray his father and inform Cornwall of the proceedings. Kent finds Lear, nearly delirious, in the storm, and tries to take him into the cave. Just then, Edgar emerges from the cave, pretending to be a madman. Lear likes him and refuses to go into the cave. Gloucester arrives (not recognizing Edgar), and convinces them all to go to a farmhouse of his. Edmund, as promised, informs Cornwall of Gloucester's dealings with the French army. Cornwall vows to arrest Gloucester and name Edmund the new Duke of Gloucester.

At the farmhouse, Lear, growing more insane, pretends his two eldest daughters are on trial for betraying him. Edgar laments that the King's predicament makes it difficult to keep up his (Edgar's) charade, out of sympathy for the King's madness. Gloucester returns and convinces Lear, Kent, and the fool to flee because Cornwall plans to kill him. Cornwall captures Gloucester and with Regan cheering him on, plucks out Gloucester's eyeballs with his bare fingers. During the torture, Gloucester's servant rescues his master from Cornwall and they flee to Dover to meet the French. On the way there, Gloucester and the servant meet Edgar (still a madman, named Poor Tom), who leads his father (Gloucester) the rest of the way.

At Albany's palace, Goneril promises her love to Edmund, since her husband (Albany) refuses to fight the French. Albany believes that the daughters mistreated their father (Lear). A messenger brings news that Cornwall is dead, from a fatal jab he received when a servant attacked him while he was plucking out Gloucester's eyeballs. Albany, feeling sorry for Gloucester and learning of Edmund's treachery with his wife, vows revenge.

At Dover, Cordelia sends a sentry out to find her estranged father. Regan instructs Oswald (Goneril's servant) to tell Edmund that she (Regan_ wants to marry him, since Cornwall is dead. Edgar pretends to let Gloucester jump off a cliff (Gloucester believes it truly happened), then Edgar pretends to be a different man and continues to help his father. Lear, fully mad now, approaches and speaks to them. Cordelia's men arrive and take Lear to her. Oswald comes across Edgar and Gloucester, threatening to kill them. Edgar, though, kills Oswald, and discovers by letter that Goneril plants to murder Albany and marry Edmund. At Cordelia's camp, King Lear awakes, more sane than before, and recognizes Cordelia.

At her camp, Goneril, while arguing with Albany, states to herself that she would rather lose the battle than let Regan marry Edmund. Edgar, disguised, brings warning of ill plots (by Goneril) to Albany. Lear and Cordelia are captured in battle by Edmund. Edmund sends them to jail and instructs a Captain to kill them. Edgar arrives and fights and wounds Edmund, who admits his treacheries to all. Goneril mortally poisons Regan, then stabs herself. Edmund reveals that he and Regan ordered the Captain to hang Cordelia and kill Lear. Lear then emerges with dead Cordelia, and tells all he killed the Captain that hung her. Edmund dies and King Lear, in grief over Cordelia, dies.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (baptised April 26, 1564 – died April 23, 1616) was an English poet and playwright widely regarded as the greatest writer of the English language, and the world's preeminent dramatist. He wrote about 38 plays and 154 sonnets, as well as a variety of other poems. Already a popular writer in his own lifetime, Shakespeare became increasingly celebrated after his death and his work adulated by numerous prominent cultural figures through the centuries. In addition, Shakespeare is the most quoted writer in the literature and history of the English-speaking world. He is often considered to be England's national poet and is sometimes referred to as the "Bard of Avon" (or simply "The Bard") or the "Swan of Avon".

Orthodox scholars believe Shakespeare produced most of his work between 1586 and 1612, although the exact dates and chronology of the plays attributed to him are under considerable debate. He is counted among the very few playwrights who have excelled in both tragedy and comedy, and his plays combine popular appeal with complex characterization, poetic grandeur and philosophical depth.

Shakespeare's works have been translated into every major living language, and his plays are continually performed all around the world. In addition, his many quotations and neologisms have passed into everyday usage in English and other languages. Over the years, many people have speculated about Shakespeare's life, raising questions about his sexuality, religious affiliation, and the authorship of his works.

In his early life William Shakespeare (also spelled Shakspeare, Shakspear, Shakespere, Shaksper, Shaxper, and Shake-speare, since in Elizabethan times spelling was not fixed and absolute) was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1564, the son of John Shakespeare, a successful glover and alderman from Snitterfield, and of Mary Arden, a daughter of the gentry. His birth is assumed to have occurred at the family house on Henley Street. Shakespeare's christening record dates to April 26 of that year. Because christenings were performed within a few days of birth, tradition has settled on April 23 as his birthday. This date provides a convenient symmetry because Shakespeare died on the same day, April 23 (May 3 on the Gregorian calendar), in 1616.

Shakespeare is believed to have attended King Edward VI Grammar School in central Stratford, since as the son of a prominent town official he was entitled to do so for free; however, the records that would confirm this no longer exist.

By 1596, Shakespeare had moved to the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, and by 1598 he appeared at the top of a list of actors in *Every Man in His Humour* written by Ben Jonson. Also by 1598, his name began to appear on the title pages of his plays, presumably as a selling point.

There is a tradition that Shakespeare, in addition to writing many of the plays his company enacted, and being concerned as part-owner of the company with business and financial details, continued to act in various parts, such as the ghost of Hamlet's father, Adam in *As You Like It*, and the Chorus in *Henry V*. [citation needed]

He appears to have moved across the Thames River to Southwark sometime around 1599. By 1604, he had moved again, north of the river, where he lodged just north of St Paul's Cathedral with a Huguenot family named Mountjoy. His residence there is worth

noting because he helped arrange a marriage between the Mountjoys' daughter and their apprentice Stephen Bellott. Bellott later sued his father-in-law for defaulting on part of the promised dowry, and Shakespeare was called as a witness.

Various documents recording legal affairs and commercial transactions show that Shakespeare grew rich enough during his stay in London to buy a property in Blackfriars, London and own the second-largest house in Stratford, New Place.

During the later years of his life Shakespeare's last two plays were written in 1613, after which he appears to have retired to Stratford. He died on April 23, 1616, at the age of 52, on the same date (though not same day, since England was still functioning under the Julian calendar) as Spanish writer and poet Miguel de Cervantes. He also died on his birthday, if the tradition that he was born on April 23 is correct. He was married to Hathaway until his death and was survived by his two daughters, Susanna and Judith. Susanna married Dr John Hall, but there are no direct descendants of the poet and playwright alive today.

Shakespeare is buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was granted the honour of burial in the chancel not on account of his fame as a playwright but for purchasing a share of the tithe of the church for £440 (a considerable sum of money at the time). A monument placed by his family on the wall nearest his grave features a bust of him posed in the act of writing. Each year on his claimed birthday, a new quill pen is placed in the writing hand of the bust. He is believed to have written the epitaph on his tombstone:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.