

KING LEAR TEXT ANALYSIS

ACT 1

SCENE ONE

- Kent and Gloucester discuss the division of the kingdom. As is typical of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, characters set the scene and introduce key themes.
- We learn inheritance issues are at stake (a matter of national concern for Shakespeare's audience as Elizabeth the first was childless and heir-less). Also learn ideas about favouritism. There's also potential hints at feminism as Kent talks about the husbands not the females.
- Gloucester introduces his illegitimate son Edmund (his silence is significant of his position as a bastard son, and keeps his true character concealed) to Kent, but he favours both his sons – a Jacobean audience wouldn't like this statement as he is favouring a bastard son and so seems okay with adultery.
- We don't fully know if Edmund heard his father speaking about him as being an embarrassment. Coleridge says that Edmund 'hears his mother and the circumstances of his birth spoken of with the most degrading and licentious levity'. But Kittredge argues that Edmund is on the stage but doesn't hear the conversation. If he does hear it gives a potential psychological reason for his bitter attitude.
- Gloucester says that Edmund must go away again. Gloucester seals his fate as this is not what Edmund wanted and it fuels his plan.
- By Edmund having been away for nine years it means Gloucester cannot fully know him and yet he is easily taken in and is gullible to believe him about Edgar. He is metaphorically blind.
- The king is getting older and wants to pass the responsibilities of ruling to his daughters and says it's better to do it now than when he is dead as it will prevent 'future strife', and whoever loves him most in the 'love-test' will get the biggest share. (this seems foolish and not the act of a responsible ruler)
- Gonerill and Regan say they really love him in a really over-dramatic way using hyperboles. Even the audience would probably notice this is too exaggerated and unbelievable. Cordelia then says she loves both him and her husband equally.
- Lear loved her most before, but now is pained and humiliated by her. It hits him so hard as she was his favourite and planned to give her the biggest share. He is angry and feels betrayed. He even now characterises himself as a dragon – power, destruction, and shows that 'King Lear' is set in a pagan world (this allows Shakespeare more freedom in dealing with controversial religious issues)
- Cordelia rebels but only because she doesn't want to compromise her honesty.
- Lear is most concerned with appearances and so is fooled by Gonerill and Regan

- Lear banishes Cordelia and his language now becomes very violent and hateful towards her. But all she has done is be honest! In addition, in the film we see him shaking showing potential weakness.
 - Lear calls the two suitors of Cordelia (France and Burgundy) but Burgundy refuses to marry her unless Lear provides the dowry he promised. So France takes her and leads her away. This shows a very business-like view of marriage in which the man has all the say. Women are just a commodity and are very clearly defined by their husbands.
 - Lear says he will split the kingdom in two rather and will give power to Albany (Gonerill's husband) and Cornwall (Regan's husband). And he wants to keep 100 knights in his service who will stay with him as he divides his time between the two daughters.
 - Kent tries to argue with the king warning that Gonerill and Regan are fake. He may mean well and be honest but we can argue that, like Cordelia, he could have handled things better and said how he feels better so as to not upset Lear (we can argue that, like Lear, he cannot see as he should know that since Cordelia was banished he should know how to handle this better).
 - Some critics have suggested that Kent and Cordelia's behaviour here can be read as a warning to James the first not to be taken in by flattering courtiers and advisors. James was to gain a reputation for indulging his favourites.
 - Lear loses control, lays his hand upon his sword (he gets physical when angry) and banishes Kent telling him that if he isn't left or return he will be killed. Again this is a very harsh punishment for someone who has been very loyal and a friend.
 - Cordelia makes her final statement saying that in due time the truths will come out (the way she says this point is very much like an old proverb that states "he that hideth his sins shall not prosper" – this proverb is usually read out on the 26th of December which is ironic as 'King Lear' was first shown in James' court on the 26th of December) and she leaves with France. The sisters tell her she deserves all the same treatment that she has done to Lear.
 - Gonerill and Regan have a discussion in that they have to do something about Lear's rash judgement as they're worried they'll receive unfair treatment. (Showing truths of the real Gonerill and Regan). At this point the audience won't judge them too harshly as we can recognise the truth in what they're saying. When they are speaking they speak in prose (whereas the other characters speak with poetry) and Shakespeare used this for lower class, base characters. Also, here Goneril speaks more than Regan – she is the more dominant sister at this point.
 - With this discussion we can see that the relationship with their father lacks the filial profession which they spoke of in their speeches.
 - Family and national harmony are already destroyed.
-
- Mood of uncertainty (typical of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama)
 - Edmund has a polite exterior – conceals his evil nature – differences between appearance and reality is a key theme.
 - In a way, as we know Cordelia has always been Lear's favourite it might give more reason to Goneril and Regan's actions. Is Lear then more sinned against as sinning?

- Kent addresses Lear as 'thou' – this is the pronoun used to address close friends and children, so Kent is being disrespectful

SCENE TWO

- Edmund offers his view and refuses to submit to patriarchal hierarchy.
- During his soliloquy he speaks directly to the audience and in the film everything is dark except his face, this intensifies the moment.
- In the soliloquy we see the reasoning of the 'discontented malcontent' and this was a character that was established as a theatrical type by John Marston's play 'the malcontent' and the type of character is that of a scornful and mocking outsider.
- Edmund is protesting against the automatic assumption and labelling of him as low and vile just because he is illegitimate – in reality it is not his fault he was born out of wedlock (in addition he is also the youngest brother so, even if he was illegitimate, his father's resources would still go to the elder son Edgar.) Edmund wants to take control of his own destiny.
- With illegitimacy we must remember the audience of the time would react differently as adultery was actually a sin.
- He's written a letter to gain advantage over Edgar. He wants to inherit his brother's land.
- Gloucester comes in speaking in many short sentences and exclamations marks – he is exclaiming, showing shock and questioning of the events he has seen with Lear and his daughter
- Gloucester asks to see the letter which is supposedly from Edgar.
- Gloucester is alarmed as 'Edgar' suggests he is unhappy as he wants to enjoy Gloucester's fortunes now not in the usual Primogeniture nature whereby the first-son gets it when father dies. He argues that by the time sons get their fortune they are too old to relish them. He seems to be suggesting he wants his father dead. It echoes ideas that were about at the time of the traditional audience; of allowing sons to take control.
- Gloucester is outraged and acts rashly calling him a villain (like Lear!). This is ironic and links with the ideas of not seeing yourself clearly as when he enters he seems shocked by Lear's rash actions yet now he seems to have acted similarly.
- Again it seems crazy as Edmund has not been with Gloucester for nine years yet Edgar has, but he instantly is taken in by Edmund and believes him. He is gullible.
- Gloucester also seems to be very superstitious, he blames the events on the sun and moon (Context: There was an eclipse of the moon in September 1606 and the sun October 1606) He believes that we are bound to a certain fate that is out of our control. (This would have been in context for the audience as Elizabeth the 1st was known to consult fortune tellers).
- Here Edmund argues back saying that it is down to choices and people taking responsibility for actions and consequences (because fate has made him the bastard child through no fault of his own so he wants to change that and take control). Edmund must therefore take responsibility for his actions later. (By eliminating the whole idea of fate, Shakespeare is eliminating the idea of God and so he must have set it in a Pagan world).
- Ironically, he realises that Kent was just being honest and that he was right – but with his own circumstances he is blind to the reality.

- Edmund tells him he heard Edgar say fathers should be ward to the son and the son manage his revenue.
- Gloucester demands that Edgar is arrested. Edmund pretends to be concerned and says he should wait to hear Edgar say it out of his own mouth. Context: in Shakespeare others play 'Othello' uses similar tactics when Lago uses the same device in order to convince Othello of his wife's, Desdemona's, infidelity.
- Edmund is alone and then sees Edgar coming. Edmund tells him he has offended his father and tells him to keep out of Gloucester's way until he has calmed down. Edmund is a malcontent and Machiavellian character (these type of characters plot and lie. Machiavelli wrote a book on what made a good leader and some of the ideas horrified some people – one idea was that it doesn't matter what you do during along as the outcome at the end is good. Machiavelli become synonymous with a negative description of someone who is manipulative who will lie so long as his ambition is realised). By keeping Edgar away from Gloucester he is ensuring the father never finds out the truth.
- Edgar is alarmed but Edmund suggests he goes into hiding at his lodgings. Edgar does so. He falls for his lies (this is also a reflection of his good character as he would never dream that someone could do something so bad).
- Edmund also tells him to go armed as, if Gloucester does see him, it will make it all seem more credible if Edgar is armed.
- Both Lear and Gloucester have misjudged their children and being taken in by false words and appearances. Edmunds villainy prepares us for Gonerill and Regan and for both an innocent child is cast off. Lear puts himself in the daughters' powers as Gloucester puts himself in Edmunds'.

SCENE THREE

- Lear is staying with Goneril.
- She complains to her steward Oswald about him about Lear hit one of her men because Albany told off his fool – we can already see the conflict and we can see Lear's erratic behaviour and lack of respect; he is determined to continue acting as the king. The fact she is complaining to her servant is not entirely appropriate and would be seen as very wrong by a Jacobean audience as servants aren't really seen as equal.
- She has already shown that she does not fully commit to all she said in the 'love test'.
- At this point Lear is still able, agile, in good health and frail as Goneril states that he is out hunting. It highlights the rapid decline Lear later takes in the play.
- Goneril tells Oswald to not be so kind to Lear; again in terms of the contemporary audience this would have been seen as shocking. People believed in the 'Elizabethan world order' which states that the world order exists as (from highest to lowest) "God -> saints -> king (who they believes was directly appointed by God) -> nobles -> plebs -> animals -> inanimate objects."
- She wants to provoke an argument or discussion with her father and states that if he doesn't like it he can go to her sisters, and she believes her sister will stick with her view. Already

ideas of the sisters colluding together. She is purposely provoking a negative response towards Lear.

- She resents the fact that her father still wants to keep some power.
- She leaves to write a letter to Regan.

SCENE FOUR

- We see Lear is Goneril's house and he is very demanding so we must also see things from Goneril's side as he will be a difficult guest.
- Lear returns to find Kaius (Kent in disguise, Jacobean audiences accepted that character would not be recognised in disguise), who seeks employment as a servant. Kent highlights that he is an honest man who seeks the truth; he is speaking about his actual character not just his character as Kaius.
- He agrees to take him on if he still likes him after dinner.
- Lear has noticed that Goneril's servants have started to treat him unkindly and we see that Oswald says he won't come to him. Lear wants to look into it and asks for his Fool.
- We learn the Fool has been very down since Cordelia went to France.
- Lear snaps, he cannot bear to hear Cordelia mentioned.
- Oswald returns and Lear rages at him, cursing and striking at him especially as he is not happy that he is referred to as his daughters' father – he feels it is degrading of his power. It is the first over denial of his royal authority. Again he refers to rage and anger so rapidly and extremely. This, however is what Goneril wanted to happen, she wanted him to blow up.
- Kent trips him up, earning Lear's praise so he becomes his servant.
- Fool makes his first appearance and suggests that without property Lear is helpless and suggests that he has reversed the natural order.
- The Fool doesn't let Lear or the audience forget Cordelia and his resentment of the treatment of Cordelia expresses itself in savage attacks, songs, rhymes and sarcasm. In many ways the fool can be seen more as a dramatic device than a real vital character. He says that by disinheriting Cordelia he has in fact done her a favour as she is now Queen of France. He states that Lear has 'banished two daughters' – two? He is suggesting that he has driven Goneril and Regan away too by giving them all his power.
- Lear threatens the Fool with whipping; but even after threats the Fool continues to take swipes at Lear – the Fool may believe Lear will threaten and not carry through and so highlights Lear's powerlessness.
- The fool's rhyme states to not show all his wealth, not to believe all he hears, not to bet everything in one go and to keep indoors and then he shall save money. It can be seen as nonsense but it is also a code of behaviour about being sensible.
- The Fool reintroduces the motif of 'nothing' and Lear repeats 'nothing can be made out of nothing' – an echo of his words to Cordelia.
- The Fool is referring to one of Aesop's fables when he speaks about the egg and the crown.
- The relationship between Lear and his Fool is reminiscent of the relationship between Henry the 8th and his Fool.

- Gonerill comes in and it is obvious that she resents the Fool's criticism and we see that Goneril does not really have a sense of humour & doesn't like being made fun of; this is a sign of her growing egotism and sense of power.
- She launches an attack on Lear accusing him of encouraging quarrelsome behaviour in his knights and doing nothing about it.
- She suggests a remedy must be found because if she didn't impose some sort of order on his knights she would be lacking in duty.
- The criticisms Goneril speaks to Lear about are the sorts of criticisms puritans hurled at actors
- Lear curses Gonerill and says he still has another daughter to go to.
- We see that Lear is being less and less powerful and losing his identity as king when he says 'who is it who can tell me who I am' and 'where are his eyes?' (direct linking to moral blindness)
- The Fool answers with 'Lear's shadow' – a shadow is insubstantial, it cannot do anything. He is lacking in power and fading away.
- Goneril threatens Lear telling him if he won't get rid of some of his knights, she will take them from him. She uses 'rule of three' to emphasise how she dislikes the knights because they are 'disorderly' – however so far the audience has never seen the knights being 'disorderly'. So who do we believe? Does Goneril lie and exaggerate? Possibly she is exaggerating as she wants to stir up confrontations. Here we may believe Lear's assessment of the knights not being this bad is more near the truth.
- Lear continues cussing Goneril and reiterates the idea that he must not be his daughter. He says she must be a 'bastard' child as she is so evil – this directly links her to Edmund. He compares her to a monster, comparing her to something unnatural.
- Albany (Gonerill's husband) enters.
- Lear calls Goneril and 'kite' - Armstrong says the kite is symbolic of cowardice, meanness, cruelty and death.
- It is clear from Lear's previous behaviour that this will escalate.
- Goneril's behaviour is making Lear realise that his action towards Cordelia was not appropriate. It is this realisation that will lead to his madness.
- Lear continues, hopes Goneril will either give birth to a thankless child or never give birth. He compares her to a serpent; serpents are associated with the temptation of Adam and Eve and the devil. We have seen Lear's rage before but here it seems to have gone up levels. A number of critics argue that Goneril's savage treatment of Lear later on is motivated by her horror and shock of her father's curse here. Lear then leaves.
- When he briefly returns he finds 50 of his followers have been dismissed. (An inconsistency is found here as later in the scene there is reference to 100 knights). The size of a retinue of a noble was important in both terms of protection and symbolically. It becomes obvious that his threats and curses cannot be followed through as he has no army, no power.
- We realise that Lear's mental faculties, like his verse structure, is beginning to fragment. Here we even see Lear crying.
- He insists Regan will help him (dramatic irony as the audience is aware that Regan feels exactly the same as Goneril). He accuses his daughters of being quite animalistic yet his curses seem animalistic and lacking in humanity too. Lear leaves again.

- Gonerill carry's on complaining about her father's followers but Albany is uneasy and doesn't assert himself. Already we start to see that there is different reaction between Goneril and Albany and so here there is a hint that they will clash later on. Goneril's argument of her behaviour is that Lear cannot be trusted with the knights who give him power as he might use the power to turn on him – she is ensuring that she is able to treat her father how she wants without fear of repercussions.
 - Gonerill sends Oswald to Regan with a letter telling her what has happened.
 - Goneril calls her husband a coward, soft, gentle, weak, wimp.
 - We not don't see Albany again until act 4 scene 2 where he breaks away from Goneril because of his growing realisation of her evil nature.
- Lear's powerlessness is heightened here by his to-ing and fro-ing and by how the Fool continues to take verbal swipes at Lear after he has been threatened.
 - Lear begins to question his own identity
 - He uses 'I' instead of the royal 'we'
 - Even servants disobey him now
 - Lear's number of followers is a symbol of might, importance and fighting power. With less of them he won't be able to assert himself.
 - His threats seem empty and speeches become more disjointed, hinting at the madness to come.

SCENE 5

- Lear sends Kent to deliver a letter to the place Gloucester to Regan announcing his arrival, but he is not to tell Regan anything about the events in the previous scene.
 - Presumably he wants to give his own account of Gonerill's disobedience.
 - Lear says he has wronged Cordelia and fears Gonerill's ingratitude is driving him mad and wonders if he can claim his throne back by violence.
 - It is this realisation which destabilise him.
 - Lear says it is his nature to be a kind father but he must stop now – he is blaming his daughters for changing his nature. He is not taking any responsibility in the tragedy. He can only learn if he acknowledges his mistakes. We know realise Lear's suffering really begins now.
- The scene takes place outside which suggests Lear's growing isolation and fragile mental state. The recognition that he has mistreated Cordelia heightens the sense of isolation.
 - He still, however, does not recognise his faults as a father
 - Lear is so distracted by disturbing thoughts he hardly engages with his Fool. The Fools rhyming couplet that closes the scene offers a moment of light relief.

ACT 2

SCENE ONE

- ✿ In the hall of Gloucester's castle, Curan informs Edmund that Regan and her husband Cornwall are expected soon. Curan is bringing the gossip and the rumours about a civil war and the likely war between Cornwall and Albany, suggesting further strife between brothers. The fact that there are rumours (even if they don't actually happen in the end) are symbolic of the breakdown in law order and civilised relationships.
- ✿ All this chaos and uncertainty can, in some ways, be attributed to Lear for dividing his kingdom.
- ✿ Edmund calls Edgar down from his hiding place and says he must escape at once. Edmund speaks with short quick phrases, questions, commands – he does this on purpose to prevent Edgar from thinking things through as he just wants him to react without thought.
- ✿ He asks Edgar whether he has spoken against Cornwall, implying that they are also enraged with him - he creates the sense that Edgar has three enemies in the household.
- ✿ Edgar denies it but is drawn into a mock fight with Edmund then flees.
- ✿ Edgar here is presented as being an extremely gullible man who is completely taken in and does not use his intelligence and rationale in the situation.
- ✿ Edmund deliberately wounds himself (pretending it was Edgar) and cries out, Gloucester rushes in, Edmund acts as the innocent child. Gloucester is fooled and sends his servants to get Edgar saying he will be executed when found because his son is now 'strange' (meaning unnatural). His rash harshness mirrors, and possibly goes beyond, Lear's (it possibly goes beyond due to the fact what Edgar supposedly did was harsher than what Cordelia did). Lear and Gloucester act on emotions and it is also possible to say Gloucester is even more blind than Lear as with Lear he has physically seen what he felt was wrong in his daughter but Gloucester is only relying on hearsay.
- ✿ Edmund then adds and says he remembers a (fictitious) conversation where Edgar mocked his bastardy. Edmund is very ironic by saying that Edgar accused him of being the one behind this all but that he is not capable of doing such a thing - and so he is further manipulating Gloucester.
- ✿ In this subplot the illegitimate child turns on his parent and in the main plot the legitimate children turn on their father – Shakespeare used this to show that the turning on parents by children is not that uncommon.
- ✿ Gloucester then promises Edmund he will ensure that legal arrangements will be made to ensure Edmund is able to inherit all from Gloucester even though he is the illegitimate son – Edmund is succeeding now.
- ✿ Cornwall and Regan then arrive and have already been told the news of Edgar's treachery.
- ✿ Regan wonders whether Edgar was egged on by Lear's knights – further emphasising her own ideas that his knights are a bad influence.
- ✿ Gloucester's answers here are short; he is in shock, he cannot express himself.
- ✿ Regan has received Gonerill's letter about Lear's knights and she too has no intention of giving them house room. This is the reason they're in Gloucester's castle as by being there she is denying her father shelter and avoiding having Lear there. There is a huge contrast between this action and her comforting words to Gloucester at the end of the same speech; this is a woman who cannot be trusted.

- ✿ Cornwall praises Edmund and says “you shall be ours” and Edmund promises to serve Cornwall. Plot and subplot become intertwined and the evil characters are linking.
- ✿ We see the evil characters begin to gain ground and run riot in the kingdom
- Edmunds short, sharp sentences and statements here are suggestive of his command of circumstances.
- Gloucester, like Lear, seems vulnerable and isolated.

SCENE 2

- ✿ Kent (as Caius) and Oswald meet outside Gloucester’s castle.
- ✿ They quarrel as Kent accuses him of being a coward (behind his insults lies the serious point; the danger of bad servants. ‘King Lear’ is full of bad servants) Oswald is puzzled by his aggression.
- ✿ The insults Kent hurls at Oswald can provide slight comic relief – however, it is also a serious dramatic moment because by attacking Oswald Kent is striking a metaphorically blow against the forces of evil. Here there is a glimpse of good in the play as good seems to be fighting evil.
- ✿ Here might be an example when Kent is letting his emotions get the better of him as he is angry due to Oswald being rude to Lear; however he is only getting into trouble because he is being loyal and defending Lear.
- ✿ Kent challenges him to a fight, Oswald backs away and yells out – he is a coward. He also states the old reason he didn’t kill him was because he’s old; he is trying to come out as brave and capable.
- ✿ Kent speaks of the “holy-cords” which can refer to different types of bonds – it can be the bond between parent and child or the bond between marriage. There might be a hint here of an inappropriate relationship between Goneril and Oswald – they do indeed seem very close.
- ✿ But Kent is still keen to fight saying his reason for not liking him is because he does not like how he looks (Kent sees people for who they really are) and because he is coward. Cornwall comes and stops it.
- ✿ Kent then mocks the accent of Cornwall – perhaps this is mocking the pretence that people put on to conceal who they really are.
- ✿ Kent is placed in the stocks. Again Kent is punished for his goodness and honesty, like Cordelia and Edgar.
- ✿ Cornwall true nature emerges in this scene; he supports Oswald, he insults Lear’s age and he places Kent in the stocks with no regard to the fact that he is Lear’s representative. Our dislike of him is intensified when he refuses to listen to Gloucester and usurps Gloucester’s position in his own household. Here we also see Regan coming across as malevolent by enjoying and even doubling Kent’s punishment, just because she can – cruelty without reason. Her last speech before she exits makes us realise that it is now the sisters that are in control and not Lear (this is even further emphasised by Cornwall saying it is more important to listen to Regan than Gloucester) – the old patriarchy and power structure is being reversed.

- ✿ Gloucester tries to plead for him and stays to offer his condolences. Shakespeare is creating sympathy for Gloucester.
- ✿ Alone, Kent reveals he has a letter from Cordelia saying she intends to put right all the wrongs that have been done to Lear. The hint that she will return offers us some hope. (In the film this is shown with Kent looking directly at the camera and thus speaking directly to the audience).
- ✿ It is clear now in this scene that power is in new hands; Gloucester is ineffectual and Lear's representative (Kent) is treated badly.

SCENE 3

- ✿ In some versions of the play there is no scene break for this scene and so both Edgar turning into a beggar and Kent being put in the stocks may be happening in the stocks – this emphasises the effects of Lear's division of the kingdom.
 - ✿ Edgar is alone in the countryside and has concealed himself in a tree
 - ✿ He is in a desperate condition; he cannot flee England as all the ports are watched and his father's men are hunting him down.
 - ✿ He therefore disguises himself as a 'Bedlam beggar' named Poor Tom. (He will blend in as there were many Beggars around in Elizabethan times due to lots of poverty during that era because of the loss of 'common ground'). The fact he chooses to highlight himself as a social outcast highlights how desperate and afraid he is.
 - ✿ He chooses to disguise himself as a social outcast, showing his desperation and the danger he's in
 - ✿ Edgar's situation mirrors Lear's. Edgar is now reliant on charity and assumed madness gives a glimpse of what Lear will be reduced to.
- 'Bedlam' (Bethlehem) hospital housed the mentally ill and when released inmates were allowed to go begging for survival. This is what Edgar had been reduced to; again goodness is punished.

SCENE 4

- ✿ Lear arrives at Gloucester's castle.
- ✿ Seeing Kent in the stock upsets him as Kent's punishment is a reflection on him.
- ✿ The Fool mocks Kent while Lear refuses to believe that Cornwall and Regan are responsible. He is still not seeing.
- ✿ The Fool continues and suggests that children are kind to their parents only due to self-interest and self-preservation.
- ✿ Lear is concerned with his mental state and fears he is becoming hysterical with sorrow.
- ✿ He wants to know where Regan is and decides to look for her (instead of sending a servant – powerlessness)

- ✿ Kent asks the Fool why Lear has so few followers but doesn't get a direct answer except he says not to follow a master whose power is waning. The Fool doesn't follow his own advice, but we see his loyalty and determination to protect Lear. It could be argued that both Kent and the Fool are loyal fools.
- ✿ The irony is he goes to Regan's because he wants to keep all his knights but all he does is keep losing them.
- ✿ Lear is angry when he returns with Gloucester as Cornwall and Regan said they are sick and cannot speak to him. Lear thinks they are tricking him. His powerlessness is emphasised as he cannot do anything about their excuses.
- ✿ Lear feels himself becoming hysterical and tries to control himself.
- ✿ He starts to rethink believing that maybe they genuinely are not unwell; he is trying to make excuses and calm himself. However almost immediately after his rage is once again ignited when he looks again at Kent in the stocks.
- ✿ He now refers to Regan as "the Duke and her".
- ✿ The stress of what's happening is having a physical toll on him at this point as he says "oh my rising heart".
- ✿ Cornwall and Regan arrive and Kent is freed
- ✿ Lear pleads suffering yet Regan refers to him using the cold word "sir" rather than being warm and referring to him as "father".
- ✿ Regan tells Lear he should accept his age (calling him old is disrespectful – old age seems to be synonymous with not being able to make sensible decisions) and be led by others and return to Goneril and beg her pardon.
- ✿ Lear is astonished (perhaps because, once again he has misread his daughters, he thought he could stay with Regan) He goes down on his knees (emphasises his weakness) into a self-parody, however, this parody reflects his daughters' actual opinion of how he should behave.
- ✿ Lear continues to refuse and insists he can stay with Regan and all his knights (they are so important to him as they show his power, dignity and status), this is such a foolish belief. He is still clinging to the myth of Regan's womanly/gentle nature. The insistence to stay with the daughter who allows him to keep the most knights remind us the dangers of measuring love in words and numbers.
- ✿ Regan's answers back are cold – she is refusing to pander to him.
- ✿ Lear shifts his attention as to who put Kent in the stocks as it is disrespectful and humiliating to him. His questions are ignored again showing loss of power.
- ✿ At this moment the only two people Lear has with him are a Fool and his stockinged servant – it does not portray a good image.
- ✿ Goneril arrives and Cornwall admits it was him.
- ✿ Lear is shocked; he does not want to accept the reality of what is happening.
- ✿ Regan's tone becomes harsher and she tells Lear to go back to Goneril and dismiss half his followers. There is a complete lack of concern or care from Regan.
- ✿ Lear says he would rather do anything than return to Goneril. He still thinks at this point that he can stay with Regan – he has not learned anything.
- ✿ Gradually both daughters argue him out of all his knights. He is forced to swallow his pride and say that he will go with Goneril. His insistence that he will go with the daughter that will

allow him to retain the greatest number of followers is as blind and foolish as the love test. His bargaining is as desperate and impotent as his curses and threats of revenge.

- ❄ Lear finally bursts. He discusses and makes references to relative needs. This speech is important as later it will be linked to his idea of an 'unaccommodated man' when he later sees Edgar stripped down.
 - ❄ Pathetic fallacy here – storm symbolises what is happening in terms of tension and the 'storm' in Lear's mind. The storm is in the distance – Lear is building up to madness.
 - ❄ Regan before had called Lear 'sir'. She has now progressed to insulting him calling him 'Old Man'.
 - ❄ Both the sisters are completely unmoved by Lear's show of passion and emotion and still refuse to keep one follower. They come across as completely cold.
 - ❄ Lear threatens them that he will revenge them, and rushes out into the storm
 - ❄ The sisters justify themselves saying their home is too small for all his train. It is clear that this is just an excuse of them as Lear has no more followers with him; he only has the Fool and Kent.
 - ❄ In the beginning it is Goneril who takes control, but now it is beginning to seem that Regan is the main instigator.
 - ❄ Gloucester follows Lear and returns with news that the king is high with rage and alone, but they still refuse to let him in and tell everyone to close their doors, they are cruel and are unmoved by Lear's agonised final speech
- Lear's power and self-possession are stripped away when he is rejected. His changes of mood and tone show increasing mental instability.
 - The pattern of entry and exits mirror that of ACT 1, SCENE 4 and so hints at the chaos to come.
 - We also see the sisters cutting off Lear when he is speaking and Lear's incomplete threats show his decline of status.
 - Lear calls Goneril a disease and uses animal imagery – shows how he is being assaulted by his own flesh and blood.

ACT 3

SCENE 1

- ❖ Lear is out on the heath (country land with no shelter) with only the Fool
- ❖ We get a description here from the gentleman of a mad and majestic Lear raging against the elements in futile defiance.
- ❖ Kent searches for Lear. He speaks of the division between Albany and Cornwall (This allows the audience to see that there are cracks in the ranks of Lear's opponents) and explains that Cordelia wants to come and help, however with this France comes and there is going to be

an invasion of the French. This is a hard situation for the audience as they do not want France to come to England, but they do want Cordelia to win.

- ❖ Kent gives the Gentleman a ring and tells him to deliver it to Cordelia along with news of the king. Cordelia is with the French forces in Dover (Dover is the shortest place between England and France. It becomes a symbol of new hope and redemption.)
- ❖ Kent continues searching.
- This who act is made of short swift scenes to show Lear's dramatic descent into madness.

SCENE 2

- ❖ Lear rants at the storm (the violent imagery and properties of the storm reflect Lear's state of mind) and ignores the Fool (showing increasing isolation) when he says they should return and ask his daughters for shelter (showing things really must be desperate). The Fool states that a man who favours a useless part of the body over what is really worth cherishing shall suffer lasting harm -> an analogy for favouring Goneril and Regan and not Cordelia.
- ❖ Lear is preoccupied with thoughts of the ingratitude of Gonerill and Regan and accuses the storm of being in league with them.
- ❖ He wants revenge on the world. He wants to destroy mankind and punish ingratitude by making sure that procreation cannot take place. Lear's speeches are full of verbs of violence and the nouns and adjectives add to this effect.
- ❖ The storm is raging and Lear is caught in his own inner storm of violent passion.
- ❖ He exclaims that he doesn't blame the elements for the way they are treating him but he does accuse them of being "servile ministers" to his daughters.
- ❖ He calls himself a "poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man"
- ❖ Kent catches up but is concerned with how Lear is. Having the Fool and Kent stick by their master offers a glimmer of hope.
- ❖ We now see Lear moving away from being solely obsessed and focused on the ingratitude of his daughters to considering sin in general.
- ❖ By saying "I am a man more sinn'd against than sinning" he takes some responsibility – he acknowledges that he has sinned, he just argues not so much.
- ❖ Although this is being performed to a post-reformation audience some will have still been aware of the catholic sacrament of confession. The first step in confession is acknowledging your sins – this offers hopes, as maybe from here Lear will go up.
- ❖ Kent sees a hovel nearby and tries to get Lear to go there with the intention to return him to Gloucester's castle.
- ❖ Lear expresses concern for the Fool and identifies with his suffering.

- ❖ The Fool's song is an adaptation of feste's song of 12 night – the audience would have recognised the song.
 - ❖ Lear now recognises how precious things like shelter are and agrees to go to the hovel.
 - ❖ We see Lear becoming conscious of the plight of the poor and the outcasts. Ironically, now that he is on the verge of madness, he can see more clearly.
 - ❖ The Fool's final prophecy is not entirely original, it is based on George Puttenham's "Art of English Poesie" (they are pseudo-Chaucerian verses – they're imitating Chaucer).
 - ❖ The Fool speaks of Merlin - Merlin is supposed to have lived a 1000 years after Lear (so the Fool mentioning it gives it an element of magic – he is like a prophet who can see into the future. He becomes almost timeless and very closely linked to the Fool of the tarot cards) and 1000 years before Shakespeare. So essentially, the prophecy is still unfulfilled after 2000 years. Leo Tolstoy, who hated the Fool, believed this was "still more senseless words".
 - ❖ The injustice, decline of faith and corruption seen in the play was still present in 17 century England and the audience of that time and is also present in us today – nothing has changed in the human condition. Filial ingratitude, sexual greed and manipulation, violence and lack of respect are still seen in our society today.
- Lear's words are full of self-pity. He makes a reference to himself as a slave which is significant as in ACT 2 SCENE 4 he says he would rather work as Oswald's slave than return to Goneril.
 - Lear runs around 'unbonneted' – he is both mentally and physically exposed.

SCENE 3

- ❖ Gloucester frets about Cornwall, Regan and Goneril and, believing Edmund shares this view, he tells Edmund that Albany and Cornwall are set to clash and that France has begun his invasion to restore Lear.
- ❖ This rings alarm bells for the audience as Gloucester is talking badly about those in power to his son, the traitor.
- ❖ Gloucester says Edmund should assist Lear and act as a decoy while he goes to find Lear. He decides to defend Lear and mistakenly takes Edmund into his confidence. Gloucester is being even more metaphorically blind.
- ❖ Gloucester leaves and Edmund announces his plans to betray his father. There is no hesitation about betraying his own father. He is opportunistic and Machiavellian.
- ❖ The final couplet in his speech stresses inter-generational rivalry. Edmund sets his eyes on his father's title.

SCENE 4

- ❖ Lear, Kent and the Fool reach the hovel.
- ❖ Kent suggests they take shelter but Lear demurs and speaks about the relative nature of suffering -he says the storm does not affect him because he is suffering from inner torment.

He himself links the storm with his mental state and turns again to the theme that torments him; filial ingratitude. He argues that mental suffering numbs the body to pain. Lear knows that if he carries on focusing on what his daughters have done he will go mad.

- ❖ Lear tells the Fool to take shelter (He is putting the Fool above himself) whilst he seeks isolation to pray in the storm. He is praying, not to the gods, but to the 'poor naked wretches' which he ignored when he held power. We see Lear learning compassion through his devastation and suffering. (This idea of sharing wealth is later echoed by Gloucester when he gives his purse to Poor Tom).
- ❖ The Fool rushes out the hovel, scared by the 'creature' he has found there.
- ❖ Edgar then appears as Poor Tom
- ❖ Lear recognises himself in Tom and asks Tom to recount his history. Lear assumes that his daughters must have done this to him as he feels only unkind daughters can lead to this madness. He curses Poor Tom's daughters (even though Kent then confirms that he has no daughters.) Lear is projecting his suffering on Poor Tom. It is ironic that he assumes Poor Tom is mad because of his 'daughters' when actually he is like that because of what his father has done.
- ❖ Edgar is mimicking being someone who is possessed by demons. Even though the audience knew Edgar was imitating it would still have struck an element of horror as 17th century England was very superstitious.
- ❖ Edgar conducts an account of himself as a servant. (The account of his life as a corrupt servant can be read as a comment on Oswald's career, others see it as a parody of the seven deadly sins.) It contains reference to the dangers of female sexuality, a theme Lear later dwells on.
- ❖ Lear is concerned about Poor Tom – we see him looking outward and thinking of others. "unaccommodated man (mankind in its most natural form) is no more than a poor, bare, forked animal". Shakespeare wants to highlight that humans are the same and equally vulnerable to the forces of nature and fate regardless of status. **HAROLD BLOOM** believed "the descent from Monarch to 'unaccommodated man' thus conveys most potently man's fragility, fallibility and fatality"
- ❖ Lear wants to know what it means to have nothing and tries to undress (he has learn the need to look beyond appearances). Kent and the Fool stop him.
- ❖ Gloucester appears (he comes in with a torch. The light is a symbol of salvation and safety) and is dismayed to see the king in such poor company but Lear fails to recognise him.
- ❖ Edgar mentions the name of a devil (he mentions several in the play) – these names were probably taken by Shakespeare from "a declaration from Egregious popish imposters" written by Samuel Harsnett in 1603 (the Bishop of London. He wrote scathingly about fraudulent exorcisms carried out by catholic priests). Edgar's language as Poor Tom reflects the language used by these exorcisms in Harsnett's book. (The contemporary audience would have known these books and been aware of exorcisms).
- ❖ Kent wants to know who Gloucester is and why he has come. Kent urges him to leave but Gloucester tells him that he has come to take Lear to shelter as Gonerill and Regan seek Lear's death. He also speaks of his own sufferings, saying his own child has turned against him; he is also preoccupied by thoughts of filial ingratitude.

- ❖ Lear first G. S Gordon, in Shakespearean comedy, points out that Lear mistakes Edgar for a professional wise man acquainted with the secrets of nature, such that were formally kept by all kings.
 - ❖ Edmund Blunden in 'Shakespeare's significant' states that the madness is not meaningfully, and that the Devil "Modo" made Shakespeare remember a line from 'Horris's Epistles' (the play of Roman writer) that says "Modo me Thebis, Modo ponnet Athenis" (this means 'set me down either in Thebes or in Athens'). Blunden argues that this line prompted Shakespeare to make Lear refer to Poor Tom as his "learned Theban" and his "good Athenian" and so Lear's madness thus had Shakespeare's method in it. Even in the madness of Lear and Poor Tom, the lines are carefully crafted by Shakespeare and include lots of contextual context.
 - ❖ All characters enter the hovel
- In the scene each character is oppressed by their own concerns but do sympathise with each other
 - Lear's concern for Kent, the Fool and Poor Tom suggest he is learning compassion and the pity we feel for him increases as he learns to pity others.

SCENE 5

- ❖ Cornwall has received the letter with the information about the French invasion and he intends to punish Gloucester for his treachery.
- ❖ He sends Edmund to find his father.
- ❖ Edmund's plans are going ahead – he is close to becoming earl; he has got rid of his brother and now he just needs to get his father.
- ❖ Edmund pretends to be torn between being loyal to Cornwall and faithful to his father, but hopes he'll find his father with Lear.
- ❖ This will make Cornwall even more suspicious and we are left in no doubt that he seeks Gloucester's death.

SCENE 6

- ❖ Gloucester leaves the hovel
- ❖ Lear is in a mad world of his own thinking about vengeance and decides to 'try' his daughters. We have a movement away from a Lear who wants violence to a Lear who has a desire for justice and although the whole scene illustrates his madness, at the same time, we can see him trying to move towards a society where the rule of law is important.

- ❖ He calls Poor Tom and the Fool to assist him on the bench and thinks his eldest daughter has escaped from the 'courtroom' (this mock trial is a parody of the 'love test', however here his judgment is not faulty, his madness has helped him to see his daughters clearly). The trial scene is not in the folio edition of the play.
- ❖ In the mock trial, pieces of furniture become representative of the people in the trial. Wooden stools represent the sister, the wood is described as 'warped' – this works on a literal level and also a metaphorical level as the daughters have an unnatural, twisted and perverse nature.
- ❖ Lear opens up a discussion on the nature of evil as he wants to find what made his daughters have such a hard heart
- ❖ The trial is seen like the form of plays named "the absurd". "The absurd refers to the conflict between the quest to find some meaning to human life and the inability to do so". Absurdist's believe that since no meaning to life is obvious the question is that once individuals become conscious of the absurd how should they react to it? Gloucester felt the way to help this was through suicide but, like Edgar and Kent, the majority of people, place the blame of life on higher Gods and, lastly, the ones like the Fool use humour to help them.
- ❖ Edgar is in tears listening to Lear's lunatic agony
- ❖ The king agrees to rest
- ❖ Gloucester returns and says Lear must be moved to safety as there is a plot to kill him
- ❖ He has prepared a coach to transport him to Dover which he will be met by the French Forces.

SCENE 7

- ❖ Cornwall tells Gonerill to return to Albany and show him Gloucester's letter with the news about the French invasion as he expects Albany to join forces with him.
- ❖ Cornwall sends people to search for Gloucester. Regan wants him handed but Gonerill prefers plucking out his eyes.
- ❖ The punishment Gloucester receives is very irrational and extreme for the "crime" he has committed by assisting the former king. Gloucester is taken in as guests but then this horrible act is done to him. Very disrespectful
- ❖ Edmund is sent to accompany Gonerill on her way home.
- ❖ Edmund leaved on Cornwall's command without any resistance or hesitation, although he know what his father is about to endure.
- ❖ Oswald brings news that Gloucester has helped Lear escape to Dover and so Cornwall decides pass his sentence without trial (like Kent, Gloucester will suffer because he has tried to help Lear)
- ❖ Gloucester is brought in and tied to a chair and Cornwall gouges out one of his eyes whilst Regan urges him to pull out the other. She is clearly enjoying the violence. A number of directors present Regan as deriving some sort of perverse sexual satisfaction from the torture scene to highlight her unnaturalness and depravity. Before this it seemed to be Gonerill that was the instigator but Regan as an independent character is fully developed here and, in some ways, is more unpleasant than her sister. Regan's language is particularly

chilling and even calls Lear the “lunatic king” and it is sadistic that she is plucking Gloucester’s eyes out just because he was helping her father.

- ❖ Gloucester wants Edmund to pay back the horrid act. This is ironic as Edmund was part of it and would be one of the last to help him. Regan shows this clearly by saying “thou call’st on him that hates thee”
- ❖ Gloucester says “I would not see” – foreshadowing his punishment and also is metaphorical for his and Lear’s blindness. Gloucester then realises that he has been deceived now and taken in by outward appearances. He acknowledges that he has wronged Edgar. It can be seen, perhaps, that through suffering Gloucester has now, metaphorically, achieved better vision. Now that he is blind he can see the truth of his children.
- ❖ Gloucester comes across as brave and determined and becomes the voice of the audience, voicing their outrage.
- ❖ One of Cornwall’s servants bids him to stop (a miscarriage of justice; a servant turns on his master. Prepares is for the kindness the servants show Gloucester). The two men fight and Cornwall is wounded (though he still finds the strength to pull out the other eye). The physical torture here matches the mental agony. In Brook’s 1970 film, the moment when his other eye is gauged out, the frame goes black, giving a sense that we are seeing the scene from his perspective.
- ❖ Regan taunts Gloucester, informing him that Edmund hates him. Gloucester recognises he has been deceived now and taken in by outward appearances. Even though he was foolish before he has now achieved heroism through suffering.
- ❖ Two servants go to help Gloucester and want to take him to Poor Tom. This perhaps shows that there is some kind of justice at work, there is a glimmer of hope.
- ❖ This scene contrasts greatly with the previous of the mock trial as there we see Lear moving away from revenge and wanting justice but here we see barbarous and cruel torture.

ACT 4

SCENE 1

- ★ Gloucester is led on by an old man to see Poor Tom and tells the man to leave before he gets punished.
- ★ Gloucester wishes to ‘see’ Edgar so he can ask for forgiveness and offers a dark view of the world. In some way perhaps he recognises Edgar in Poor Tom as it provoked him to think of Edgar.
- ★ This moves Edgar and he is distressed to see his father in such a state; he is now torn between his disguise and revealing his identity.
- ★ Gloucester asks Tom to lead him to Dover.
- ★ Gloucester is preoccupied with thoughts of justice and suggests that man needs to be stripped of his excess wealth in order to see clearly. His interest in social justice reflects Lear’s and his want to help the poor.

- ★ For Gloucester, clarity of vision brings despair. He says “I stumbled when I saw”
- ★ He conveys his desire to die and tells Edgar he will be financially rewarded if he takes him to the cliff. He has been pushed to the limit of endurance. Now that he has lost his vision he can see the truth of his sons and cannot bare it to know that. He believes there is no goodness or order in the universe, only cruelty. He says he “has no way” – everything in his life has been destroyed. His suicide plan is set in motion.

SCENE 2

- ★ Gonerill and Edmund return from Gloucester’s castle.
- ★ Oswald tells Gonerill that Albany has undergone a change of heart and that he is glad of the French invasion and appalled by Edmund’s treachery to his father. This change suggests that the evil characters will no longer go unchecked. Albany becomes a figure of justice. We are presented with a clash between good (Albany) and evil (Gonerill) which points towards the battle between the French and British forces.
- ★ Gonerill says Albany, her husband, is a coward. She says since he is not manly enough, she must take over his role. Some critics argue that her attack on Albany has some justification, and her patriotic speech can be regarded as a proper condemnation of Albany’s spinelessness. Others however argue that Albany’s reluctance to fight is not due to physical cowardice, but rather to the realisation that his wife and others are behaving immorally.
- ★ She then tells Edmund to return to Cornwall to help with battle preparation.
- ★ Gonerill offers herself to Edmund. Edmund pledges his loyalty to her.
- ★ Goneril, in this scene, is presented as being sexually aggressive – there is lots on innuendos and she is the one that actually kisses Edmund. It is clear she has no respect for her husband.
- ★ Albany appears and insults Gonerill, but she disregards them. Albany’s language becomes more violent. He says someone who cannot control themselves and protect their family is someone who should be feared. He condemns Goneril as being heartless and unnatural.
- ★ The Albany now is not a coward as Goneril just said him to be. He has become a man of inner strength and integrity.
- ★ Gonerils excuse is that they are at war and so they need to rally the country and protect themselves against the enemy.
- ★ Messenger arrives with news that Cornwall has died. Albany says this is fair and shows sympathy for Gloucester, who he has just found had his eyes out. He sees his death as retribution for what he has done – however if this was the case, surely Goneril and Regan would have been reattributed too.
- ★ The messenger presents a letter to Gonerill from Regan. Gonerill is suspicious of her sister and is concerned that she will seek to marry Edmund.
- ★ Albany decides to take revenge for Gloucester’s treatment to support Lear’s cause.

SCENE 3

- ★ In this scene, Kent meets the gentleman who was sent to meet Cordelia who has now returned.
- ★ The first sentence Kent says is that the king of France has left – this is important as it would have been unacceptable for the audience to have France fighting England on British soil.
- ★ This scene is used to remind the audience of Cordelia as Kent asks the Gentleman how Cordelia reacted when she read his letters describing Lear’s treatment at the hands of her sisters.
- ★ We learn that she cried. The description of her emphasises her “holy nature”. She is even described as having “shook the holy water from her heavenly eyes”. Some critics, however, condemn the description as being sentimental, stylised and overdone. Yet for others it forms an essential counter balance to the violence of the language and the actions of the previous scenes and Cordelia perhaps can be seen as the epitome of Christian femininity; compassionate and loving.
- ★ Kent reports Lear’s arrival in Dover.
- ★ The king is so ashamed of his unkindness that he will not see Cordelia. As Lear has begun to regain his wits, the clarity of vision has brought with it distress and regret. Father and daughter now share the same emotion: sorrow.

SCENE 4

- ★ It is the first time since act 1 scene 1 that we see Cordelia again.
- ★ Cordelia sends out 100 soldiers to find Lear.
- ★ In contrast we have the presence of the doctor with her – this shows she is aware of his madness and shows her caring and nurturing side because she has come to save him even though he rejected her.
- ★ She expresses deep concern for her father, to emphasises her Christ-likeness, her words here echo Christ’s in Luke 2:49 – ‘O dear father, it is thy business I go about’. She insists she is motivated by passion for her father and not political gain. This would allay the audience’s fears of a foreign invasion, which was a reality to be feared at the time.
- ★ Lear is wearing a crown of weeds; the king is now associated with nature rather than the world of the court, which is fitting given his interest in justice and the human condition/nature. We also have the contrast with the king no longer wearing a crown of gold.

SCENE 5

- ★ This scene shows a strong contrast between Cordelia in the previous scene and Goneril and Regan in this one. They are presented as evil and full of lust.
- ★ Regan asks Oswald why Gonerill has written to Edmund and tries to persuade him to show her the letter. She is jealous of a potential affair between Goneril and Edmund. Regans overt sexuality becomes more and more apparent, this is especially seen in Trevor Nunn’s film.

- ★ She tells Oswald that Edmund has ridden away to finish off Gloucester and admits that it was a mistake to let Gloucester live as now people could find out and turn against her.
- ★ She tries to stop Oswald leaving
- ★ She tells him that she and Edmund have talked and agreed on marriage as it is best for him to get with her and not her sister because she's a widow and so Gonerill must be warned off. The materialistic desires of the evil characters are emphasised as she says she is more 'convenient' for Edmund than Gonerill. We know that it is inevitable that their desire for Edmund will split both sisters up.
- ★ Regan gives Oswald a letter or gift for Edmund
- ★ She mentions that there is a reward for anyone who can kill Gloucester. She practically orders Oswald to kill him if he comes across him.

SCENE 6

- ★ Gloucester's "suicide" scene.
- ★ The Gloucester sub-plot was probably added into the play to highlight the idea that filial ingratitude is not only found in isolated cases but is in fact much more common than we care to admit. His desire to kill himself highlights how far this filial ingratitude can push a person.
- ★ Shakespeare chose to set it in a pagan world again as suicide in Christianity was a sin – no one could take away life but God. Furthermore, despairing was also a sin, as it means you've given up all hope in God.
- ★ Edgar leads Gloucester to Dover and pretends they are going up a steep hill and describes the view from the top.
- ★ Gloucester says Poor Tom's voice seems different – the irony that now he is blind, he is more perceptive of everything around him.
- ★ Kneeling, Gloucester announces to the gods that he intends to kill himself and his final thoughts are of Edgar and the beggar who helped him
- ★ He then throws himself off the imaginary cliff.
- ★ Edgar says he is tricking him in the hope to cure him of his despair.
- ★ When he revives he is still suicidal
- ★ Edgar pretends to be passer-by on the beach below and tries to make his father feel better by telling him his life must have been preserved by a miracle. He describes the strange creature on the cliff top, implying the devil drove him to kill himself. He tries to persuade him the kind gods saved him. Edgar says "thy life is a miracle" – this is often taken as evidence of the importance of accepting Christian orthodoxy.
- ★ This seemed to lead to a change of heart in Gloucester who now declares that he will endure life until the end. However, Gloucester's change of heart does not last very long, after seeing

Lear in his madness and seeing himself after Oswald's assassination attempt, he reverts to his pessimistic views. It is ironic that his change of heart is brought around by deceit and that both sons lie to their father; Edgar to protect and save him, Edmund for his own self gain. We also realise that in the play morality appears to be mercurial (constantly changing), this is contrasting to the morality for Christian Orthodox.

- ★ Lear enters, speaking disjointedly about money and justice. His mad speeches do tend to have an undertone of true meaning, there is a subconscious connection of words in his mind. This connections of words and ideas in his mind shows that there is some sort of coherence and perhaps some hope of him regaining his sanity. In his madness he realises his daughters were flattering him and did not mean a word they said as he says "they told me I was everything; tis a lie".
- ★ He is dressed with wild flowers. This is significant as we are seeing the disintegration of his mind in a physical portrayal.
- ★ Edgar's aside emphasises the pathos (evoking pity) between the exchange between Lear and Gloucester.
- ★ Lear mistakes Gloucester for Gonerill 'with a white beard' and launches into a tirade about female sexuality which leads him to introduce the topic of Gloucester's adultery. His talk about adultery might be read as an attempt to come to terms with his own sexual union with his daughters' mother. Feminist critics take offense of this speech as he is stating that women are animals and fiends. He is condemning female sexuality. Feminists argue that these are Shakespeare's own views on women. However, in the theatre, the insults shock but they are relevant as we can relate them directly to Goneril and Regan's behaviour and link it directly to them rather than women in general, perhaps making it less shocking. (This is also a prose speech, representing Lear's fragmented mind.)
- ★ There is irony as he talks about Gloucester 'kind' bastard son. He still does not know about Edmund's treachery.
- ★ There is a sense of pathos in seeing both these betrayed fathers together trying to make sense of their lives.
- ★ Edgar's says in an aside that if he were told of this exchange between the fathers and the suffering they had undergone to have placed them in such a degrading position, he would not have believed it. Shakespeare opens up for discussion the fact that our lives are never secure. However, we must note that they may, in some part, be responsible for their own problems in life and their own fate– it could be Gloucester's fault for committing adultery and having a bastard son and Lear's fault for being so foolish.
- ★ Gloucester responds with pity. He states that even though he has no eyes he can sense and see the world "feelingly".
- ★ In madness comes wisdom. This is particularly seen as Lear now believes that rich, powerful men can hide their sins and that an outer show of authority can conceal a façade of which evil can hide. We also see that through his madness Lear has learned patience in the face of a human condition that is absurd.
- ★ Lear seems to see hypocrites appearing before him and decides that he wants to defend the poor and give them power. His words seem almost incoherent.
- ★ Cordelia's attendants arrive for Lear. Lear runs off but they go to get him. In his madness there is an element of cunning. He says "sa, sa, sa" which was used as a hunting cry.
- ★ Edgar asks the Gentleman for news on the battle

- ★ It also appears that seeing Lear worse off than him has driven off Gloucester's suicidal thoughts (he says he will not take matters into his own hands but he is asking for the God's to take it for him) and Edgar says he will lead him to a safe place.
- ★ Oswald then enters and is happy as he will be able to claim Regan's reward. The fact he is so keen to attack Gloucester just for a reward shows him to be an immoral coward as he attacking a frail, blind old man.
- ★ Edgar protects his father and challenges Oswald and wounds and kills Oswald. Edgar again here is like Kent (when he was hired by Lear in disguise) for protecting someone who has done him wrong.
- ★ As he is dying Oswald tells Edgar to take his letters to Edmund.
- ★ As Oswald is dying Edgar sums up the self-serving Oswald as the corrupt follower of an evil mistress. His death gives the audience hope that evil will be defeated.
- ★ Edgar also says he is not sorry for Oswald death, but he is sorry that he was the one that caused it – again highlighting his good nature. The Edgar here has developed from how he was at the beginning of the play when he was 'bookish', confused and ran away from the situation. Like the other characters, adversity has strengthen him and developed his good qualities. We see him now as an honest man of action who will stand up for what he believes in. It is fitting for Shakespeare to present him to the audience as having good qualities as it is only him and Albany left in the end to rule England.
- ★ Edgar reads the letters and discovers Goneril's wants Edmund to kill Albany so she and Edmund can have an affair.
- ★ The letter presents Goneril as a morally corrupt person. If Edgar has not intercepted and Killed Oswald, maybe Goneril would have succeeded.
- ★ Edgar decides to go an inform Albany.
- ★ Meanwhile Gloucester is thinking of Lear's lunacy and wishes he too could be mad as he thinks it will distract him from his reality. It be in a position that you will welcome madness to stop his despair shows how Gloucester has almost been destroyed by the events that have unfolded.
- ★ A drum is heard afar – this signifies the upcoming war.
- ★ Edgar returns to take him to safety at the French camp.

SCENE 7

- ★ This is a scene of pathos and renewal. It opens with Cordelia thanking Kent for his loyalty and telling him to remove his disguise but he argues that the time is not yet right.
- ★ Lear is brought to the French camp near Dover, he is asleep.
- ★ The doctor then says it is time to wake him. (Sleep is seen as healing and restoring). The fact that Cordelia asks the doctor to speak to him first shows her modesty. She seems as reluctant to speak now as she did in act 1, perhaps she finds it hard to express her love.
- ★ Lear is brought in on a chair (and our sense of restoration is heightened when the words addressed to him are respectful) and Cordelia kneels by his chair. In Oliver 1980 film, when Lear is asleep his beard is shaved off – perhaps allying him with the beard plucked Gloucester.

- ★ Cordelia is well informed of the evils that her sisters inflicted on her father and she argues that his age alone should have prevented them from doing what they did.
- ★ He wakes thinking he is in hell because he believes he has to pay for his sins. He doesn't seem to recognise Cordelia and falls on his knees kneeling (this sense of begging for forgiveness and the use of first person pronouns suggests Lear has accepted his diminished status and has come far in his realisation) showing her that he regrets wronging Cordelia (however he doesn't accept responsibility for Goneril and Regan) the tragedy of this play is that wisdom comes too late.
- ★ Lear has finally given in to weeping, perhaps he has learned the lesson that Cordelia was trying to say in act 1, that language cannot truly express emotion. He argues that Cordelia cannot love him because he has treated her so badly – through suffering comes insight.
- ★ In this scene we have the idea of Lear as a victim being developed. It is a very clear change in our perception from act one- people seem to see now maybe he was “more sinned against than sinning”.
- ★ Cordelia says she has no reason to feel bitterly towards Lear and asks if he wants to walk with her. Cordelia acknowledges that Goneril and Regan are the main cause for Lear's suffering; he is now seen as a victim. He certainly sees himself as one. Both Cordelia and Lear feel the same emotions; pain, humility, concern. Their mutual caring is shown by the way they finish off each other's sentences and leave the stage together.
- ★ Kent and the Gentleman remain and speak about the battle - Edmund has been put in charge of Cornwall's men. This shows that the harmony achieved here is under threat.

ACT 5

SCENE 1

- Regan fears that something has happened to Oswald
- Regan asks Edmund if he loves Goneril. She is obsessed over knowing whether her sister has slept with Edmund or not. She interrogates Edmund about this 6 times in this scene.
- Regan is being presented as being desperate and demeaning herself – being so needy, desperate and lustful.
- Albany and Goneril arrives with Albany's forces
- Seeing Regan and Edmund together, Goneril says she'd rather lose the battle than lose Edmund and so insists that they unite together.
- Both sisters are equally as obsessed with winning Edmund and are in clear competition with each other.
- Albany says that he has mixed feelings – he wants to help Lear and believes he hasn't been treated right but he can't be seen to support a French invasion and therefore it is his duty to remove the French invaders. Edmund's response to this is “sir you speak nobly” – in most productions this would have been said in a sneering tone.
- Edmund agrees to discuss strategies in the tent (Edmund is lower in ranking than Albany yet this suggests he is saying that he will come to attend to him when he wants.)

- Regan asks Goneril to come, Goneril refuses realising that Regan is concerned with leaving Goneril alone with Edmund. She goes with them in the end though.
- Edgar (still disguised) asks to speak to Albany and gives him the letter he found on Oswald and tells him to sound the trumpet if Britain wins so that a champion can appear to prove the letter right. This adds tension and suspense as the audience knows what's in this letter (Goneril wanting Edmund to kill Albany) and so it will confirm Albany's suspicions and lead to some kind of action.
- Edmund returns saying the French are approaching.
- Alone on stage Edmund reveals that he has sworn his love to both Goneril and Regan and cannot decide between them. He is only loyal to himself.
- His complete indifference of both sisters are very clear (he calls them "these sisters") – to him they are interchangeable and are just pawns to be used and sacrificed as and when is necessary. He compares them both to an 'adder' (a snake) and of course snakes are shown in literature to be evil and concerned with the devil's temptation.
- However this should not come as a surprise as Edmund has treated his father and brother badly. Anything he does is to advance himself.
- He thinks one will have to die for him to 'enjoy' the other. He waits to see what happens in battle. He knows that Goneril will want to kill Albany in battle and he hopes that they will kill each other off and he won't have to make a choice as he can just keep whichever sister is left.
- He informs us that Albany intends to show mercy to Lear and Cordelia if the British win. Edmund however, says they must die. He resolves to kill both Lear and Cordelia if the British win.

SCENE 2

- It is interesting to note that the battle takes place off stage, even though the whole play was building up to it. Why? It would have made the play a lot longer and it would have made the duel between Edgar and Edmund anti-climactic. Furthermore, what is important is not the actual battle but rather the outcome and who wins.
- Cordelia, Lear and the French Forces march across the stage while Edgar leads Gloucester in.
- He leaves and returns with the news that the French have lost.
- Lear and Cordelia have been captured.
- Gloucester refuses to leave with Edgar, but allows himself to be led away.
- Edgar telling Gloucester to not still be feeling suicidal seems to highlight that patience and endurance seems to be the human qualities most valuable in the world of King Lear. It shows that the one most thing important in death is that we should be ready for it.

SCENE 3

- We learn that England (basically Regan and Goneril) have won the battle that happened offstage.

- Edmund orders officers to take Lear and Cordelia away.
- Cordelia expresses her dismay and asks Edmund whether she will see Gonerill and Regan. (she refers to them as ‘these sisters’ – like Edmund she does not name them) Cordelia’s rhyming couplets remind us of her speech in the first scene and creates this image of a woman struggling for control.
- Lear cannot bear to think about setting his eyes on them. Instead he says he would be pleased to go to prison with Cordelia and so they go. He describes prison as a way to spend more time with Cordelia and is actually quite positive about it. The audience realises that he does not fully grasp the fragility and seriousness of their situation. He speaks of sacrifices and incense which reminds us of the Judeo Christian religion as especially in the Old Testament there were lots of references to sacrifices. Thus their deaths could be seen perhaps as sacrifices. Again by ‘sacrificing’ Cordelia it further highlights the link between her as a Christ-like figure. Indeed there are also several allusions to biblical stories – the phrase ‘brand from heaven’ reminds us of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and ‘fire us hence like foxes’ reminds us of the story of Sandsten and the Foxes and ‘the good years shall devour us’ reminds us of Joseph’s interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dream of the Good and Bad years. Lear then seems to give a threat to anyone who will depart him from Cordelia and as he is led away he is, in behaviour and in voice, resembling an Old Testament Prophet.
- Edmund seems to be after the crown and we know he wants to kill them both and so the audience will fear for their safety – we know Lear’s description of prison will not be as jolly as he describes. Edmund gives a death warrant of Lear and Cordelia and convinces the officer to take it through by bribery and threat.
- The officer justifies what he is about to do because he is following orders– this links with the idea as to what extent do we condone someone for carrying out orders? He says it’s “man’s work” but if man’s work is killing people, what does that say about mankind?
- Albany enters with Gonerill, Regan and officers and Albany demands to see the prisoners. We see Albany taking the lead.
- Edmund says they will only be ready to see in two or three days, arguing that because the battle has just happened and people’s passions are roused they would not get a fair trial.
- Albany is infuriated and is quick to reprimand Edmund saying that he is not his equal and is not that powerful.
- Regan springs to Edmund’s defence and declares that she plans to marry Edmund. The sisters start to squabble over Edmund.
- Gonerill tells Regan that he cannot marry her and he does not need any title Regan can offer him – he is already worthy enough she believes. Regan then says she’ll give Edmund full control over everything.
- Albany is now much more assertive and decides to arrest Edmund for treason and challenges him to defend his charge.
- We now learn that Gonerill has poisoned Regan and she is carried away sick
- Edgar then appears (still disguised) and accuses Edmund of betraying Albany. He challenges Edmund. Edmund agrees to fight and is wounded. This duel is one of the climaxes of the play (and is, to some extent, why the battle earlier was off-stage so to allow this to be more focused).
- Albany then confronts Gonerill with her letter to Edmund but she just tries to tear it up and claims that she is above the law (this shows the extent of her immorality) and runs off. This

is the last time we see her alive – and, as we gather from Albany, she is going to commit suicide – she could either be seen to die defiantly (she refuses to be taken by the others) or dejectedly and desperately

- Edgar says “the gods are just” and “make instruments to plague us” – he says the gods use the sins against you, to plague you.
- We see the brothers exchanging forgiveness, however, it takes 37 lines and this would make the audience feel anxious as it’s taking too long and people will begin to worry about the death warrant that’s looming over Cordelia and Lear.
- As he lies dying, Edmund confesses to his crimes and Edgar puts aside his disguise and judges his father and Edmund harshly
- Albany embraces Edgar whilst Edgar recounts his history since the play began and regrets remaining in disguise for so long.
- He describes Gloucester’s death, making it seem like his heart ‘burst’ as his reunion with Edgar was too much so, torn between joy and grief, he died. The tension is increasing.
- Goneril enters saying Goneril has killed (stabbed) herself and Regan is also dead as Goneril poisoned her. The audience then hopes that there is time for Cordelia and Lear to be saved.
- Kent enters and Albany is reminded about Lear – he quickly asks Edmund where he sent Lear and Cordelia.
- Edmund determines to do good before he dies (he says “this speech of yours hath mov’d me”) and tells them he ordered that Cordelia be hanged. He sends a messenger to intervene. This sense of good not flourishing in time shows the symbolism of thwarted intentions and shows human weaknesses, pride and confusion and portrays how humans need to really strive and make an effort to be good; it doesn’t seem to come naturally. Right until the end of the play there is a tension for the audience as to whether it they will be saved in time.
- However it is too late.
- Cordelia has to die as, much like Christ, she needs to die to save the country. Additionally, she also has to die because, if she lived, she would be the queen of England however she is married to France and the husband tended to take control so in essence England would be subjected to France’s wishes and this couldn’t work on a political level.
- Edmund is carried off to die and Lear enters with Cordelia in his arms. This entrance is the tragic climax of the play.
- Kent says “is this the promised end?” then says “all’s cheerless, dark and deadly” – is this perhaps posing the questions of what is life about and making religious references? Is he questioning established religion?
- Lear is distraught. He was given one glimpse of happiness and now this happens. We learn that he committed one last act of heroism; he killed her hangman. He then tumbles into madness again.
- Lear is told of Goneril and Regan’s death but it has no effect on him.
- A messenger brings news that Edmund has died. His death does not seem important to what has happened here because he was not valued, no one will really mourn him.
- Albany states that he intends to resign his power to Lear and that Edgar and Kent will receive back their rights as earls. Society seems restored; the worth are rewarded and the unworthy are punished.

- Lear says “and my poor fool is hanged” – who is he referring to, Cordelia or the fool? There was some debate that Cordelia and the Fool were played by the same actor however, that was disproved and does not appear to be the case as Perrett states that “when Cordelia is away her place as the representative of utter truthfulness is taken by the Fool. In this respect, the two characters are”. A.C Bradley argues that Lear’s mind has wondered so much and was so broken that he can no longer distinguish between the 2 people he cherished the most.
- Lear continues grieving and, choking, he asks someone to undo his button
- Edgar rushes to help but Kent tells him to let be; Lear will welcome death after his sufferings. Kent uses a metaphor as he compares the world to a torture instrument. Living without Cordelia and the realisation of what his actions have caused would be painful.
- Lear dies, perhaps believing that Cordelia still lives and A.C Bradley argues this makes Lear die joyfully. Like Gloucester he dies feeling both joy and pain
- Kent says he has a journey that he must not say no – this implies that he is going to die and follow Lear; is he going to die naturally or by suicide? We don’t know.
- Edgar speaks the closing lines, shakespeare’s plays usually the highest ranking surviving figure speaks them so if it is Edgar (and not Albany who has the highest rank theoretically) then there is a sense that there has been a shift in power and that Edgar is the new generation and the new way forward; the hope for the future.
- In this scene it seems possible that Edmund is responsible for the deaths of the whole royal father as well as his father’s fate