“WHO IS IT who can tell me who I am? Lear’s shadow.”

King Lear

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

edited by Michael R. Best and Alexa Alice Joubin

BROADVIEW SHAKESPEARE
“King Lear is a play for our times. The central characters experience intense suffering in a hostile and unpredictable world. They face domestic cruelty, political defeat, and a stormy external environment that invades them “to the skin.” They constantly question the meaning of their experiences as we watch their emotions range from despair to rage to unexpected tenderness and desperate hope as they are rejected, even tortured. Lear’s daughters, as in a fairy tale, are three strong women. The eldest two vie for sexual and political power, while the youngest, Cordelia, is initially banished because of her plain speaking but then returns in a doomed attempt to restore her father to his throne.

King Lear has an unusual performance history. It was significantly revised, by Shakespeare or others, between its first two publications and was then succeeded by an adaptation that softened the ending so that Lear and Cordelia survived. In our own times King Lear is performed around the world in productions that explore its relevance to contemporary political and environmental challenges. This edition offers a distinctive “extended” text, taking the later Folio as a starting point and adding the lines that appear only in the Quarto, distinguished by a light gray background. Variations in individual words that are of critical interest are recorded in the margin.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Both actors and textual scholars have described *King Lear* as Shakespeare’s Everest. In this current attempt to scale its heights, I have been assisted at every step by colleagues and friends, without whom I would have perished on the lower slopes. In working with *Lear’s* most challenging textual history, Michael Warren and Eric Rasmussen have been unfailing and generous guides; they also provided valuable feedback on my Introduction and notes. Richard Knowles graciously shared a proof of his monumental Variorum edition. I am especially grateful to my collaborator in this edition, Alexa Alice Joubin, for her stimulating and scholarly discussion of *King Lear* in performance and her valuable contributions to the Chronology and Bibliography; she brings a deep understanding of the play, especially as it is being performed before a global audience. Special thanks are also due to Roberta Livingstone, always my first and most stringent editor, and a constant source of encouragement from the very beginning.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND KING LEAR:
A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

c. 1136 Likely date of composition of Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which contains the earliest known version of the story of King Lear.

1509–47 Reign of Henry VIII.

1534 Polydore Vergil’s *Historia Anglica* casts doubt on the veracity of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account; Act of Supremacy, declaring Henry VIII Head of the Church of England.

1547–53 Reign of Edward VI.

1553–58 Reign of Mary I; England returns to Catholicism.

1555 The first version of the *Mirror for Magistrates* published; Shakespeare used the edition of 1575.

1558–1603 Reign of Elizabeth I.

1558 John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstruous Regiment of Women*.

1562 Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc* performed before Queen Elizabeth; it was published in 1565.

1563 Adoption of the Thirty-Nine Articles, establishing Anglicanism as a middle path between Roman Catholicism and more fundamentalist Protestantism.

1564 William Shakespeare baptized 26 April; birthdate unknown, but traditionally celebrated on St. George’s Day, 23 April.

1569 Suppression of Northern Rebellion of Catholic earls.

1576 James Burbage builds The Theatre.

1577 Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* includes the story of Lear and his daughters; it was reprinted in 1587.

1578 John Lyly, *Euphues*.

1579 Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar*; Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defense of Poetry*.

1582 Marriage to Anne Hathaway, November.

1583 Birth of Susanna, 26 May.
1583–84  Plots against Elizabeth on behalf of Mary Queen of Scots.
1584  John Lyly, Galatea.
1585  Births of Hamnet and Judith, February. Earl of Leicester sent to aid the Dutch against the Spanish.
1587  Execution of Mary Queen of Scots, 8 February.
1588  At some point, Shakespeare moves to London; family remains in Stratford.
War with Spain; the Spanish Armada fleet destroyed in July.
1588–94  Shakespeare writes his early comedies and histories and his early tragedy Titus Andronicus.
1590  Sir Philip Sidney, Arcadia; Edmund Spenser, Faerie Queene, Books 1–3; Richard Jones, Book of Honor and Arms.
1592  Shakespeare attacked in print by Robert Greene in Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit.
1593  Venus and Adonis.
1593–1603  The Sonnets. Mostly composed late 1580s–early 1600s; published 1609.
1594  Shakespeare joins the Lord Chamberlain’s Men; The Rape of Lucrece.
Comedy of Errors performed at Gray’s Inn, 28 December.
The anonymous play The Chronicle History of King Leir entered in the Stationers’ Register on 14 May.
Only known performances of The Chronicle History of King Leir at the Rose, 6 and 8 April.
1594–95  A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Richard II, Romeo and Juliet, King John.
1596–98  Henry IV Parts 1 and 2, The Merchant of Venice.
1597  Earl of Essex sent to Ireland to put down a rebellion led by the Earl of Tyrone.
George Chapman, An Humorous Day’s Mirth.
1598  Ben Jonson, Every Man in His Humour.
1599  Shakespeare’s company moves to the Globe; As You Like It, Henry V, Julius Caesar.
*The Passionate Pilgrim*, attributed to Shakespeare, published.
Robert Armin replaces Will Kempe as the company clown.
Prohibition and public burning of satires.

**1600–02**  
*Twelfth Night*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

1601  
Shakespeare’s father dies.
Essex’s abortive rebellion and subsequent execution;  

1602  
First recorded performance of *Twelfth Night*, Middle Temple Hall, 2 February.

1603  
Death of Elizabeth I; coronation of James I, 24 March.  
Shakespeare’s company the Lord Chamberlain’s Men is renamed the King’s Men.  
Samuel Harsnett’s *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* published.  
John Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Essais* published.

1603–04  
*Measure for Measure*, *Othello*.

1604  
James’s confrontation of the Puritans at the Hampton Court Conference.  
Peace with Spain.

1605  
The Gunpowder Plot foiled, 5 November.  
In the months of September and October there were eclipses of the sun and moon within a few weeks of each other, an occurrence which may lie behind Gloucester’s reference to eclipses of the sun and moon in *King Lear*.  
*The Chronicle History of King Leir* entered again in the Stationers’ Register on 8 May, published later that year.

1605–06  
*King Lear*.

1606–07  
*Macbeth*, *Timon of Athens*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Pericles*.

1606  
*King Lear* acted at court on 16 December, the first recorded performance.

1608  
Publication of the Quarto version (Q1) of *King Lear*.  
*Coriolanus*; Thomas Dekker’s *The Bellman of London*.  

*KING LEAR*  95
1608–10  Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Philaster.*
1613–14  Shakespeare in retirement, living in Stratford. 
          *Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen*; the Globe burns down, soon rebuilt “in far fairer manner than before.” 
          In collaboration with John Fletcher, *Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen,* and the lost play *Cardenio.*
1616  Death of Shakespeare, 23 April; buried 25 April.
1619  Publication of *Q2.*
1623  Publication of the First Folio (F).
1681  Nahum Tate publishes a version of the play in which the good characters survive and Cordelia marries Edgar. 
      This version holds the stage for 150 years.
1725  Alexander Pope’s edition of Shakespeare offers the first conflated text of the play.
1838  William Charles Macready restores Shakespeare’s text to the stage.
1859  Ira Aldridge plays King Lear in St. Petersburg, Russia.
1904  A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy.*
1909  *King Lear,* directed by William V. Ranous (Vitograph).
1964  Jan Kott’s “King Lear or Endgame” in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary.*
1969  Stanley Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear.*”
1971  Grigori Kozintsev’s film *Korol Lir,* Peter Brook’s film *King Lear,* Edward Bond’s Lear; Francis Ford Coppola’s *Godfather.*
1976  Trevor Nunn directs *King Lear,* Royal Shakespeare Company.
1983  Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of “King Lear.”* 
      Laurence Olivier plays Lear in Michael Elliott’s film.
1985  Akira Kurosawa’s Samurai film *Ran* adapts the Lear story. 
      Kathleen McCluskie, “The Patriarchal Bard.”
1986  The Oxford University Press edition of the *Complete Works* prints both Q and F. 
      Coppélia Kahn, “The Absent Mother in *King Lear.*”
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Jean-Luc Godard’s film <em>King Lear</em>.</td>
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Ong Keng Sen directs *Lear* (TheatreWorks, Singapore) at the Festival of Perth, Australia. |
| 2000 | *The King Is Alive*, directed Kristian Levring (Newmarket Capital Group, Denmark). |
| 2001 | Wu Hsing-kuo directs and performs *Lear Is Here* (Contemporary Legend Theatre, Taiwan), Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York. |
| 2004 | Kim Myung-gon’s *King Uru* stages in Seoul, South Korea. |
| 2006 | *Slings and Arrows*, Canadian television series. |
| 2009 | Sangeeta Datta’s film *Life Goes On*. |
| 2018 | Richard Eyre’s film *King Lear* (BBC and Amazon). |
| 2019 | Glenda Jackson plays Lear in Sam Gold’s Broadway production. |

—Michael Best and Alexa Alice Joubin
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*MIT Global Shakespeares.* “Study Plan for Lear is Here.” https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/modules/module/lear-is-here/.


**Anthologies of Criticism**


**Editions of King Lear Cited**

Best, Michael, editor. *King Lear (Modern, Extended Folio)*. Internet Shakespeare Editions, University of Victoria, 2019.


—Michael Best and Alexa Alice Joubin
FROM THE PUBLISHER

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