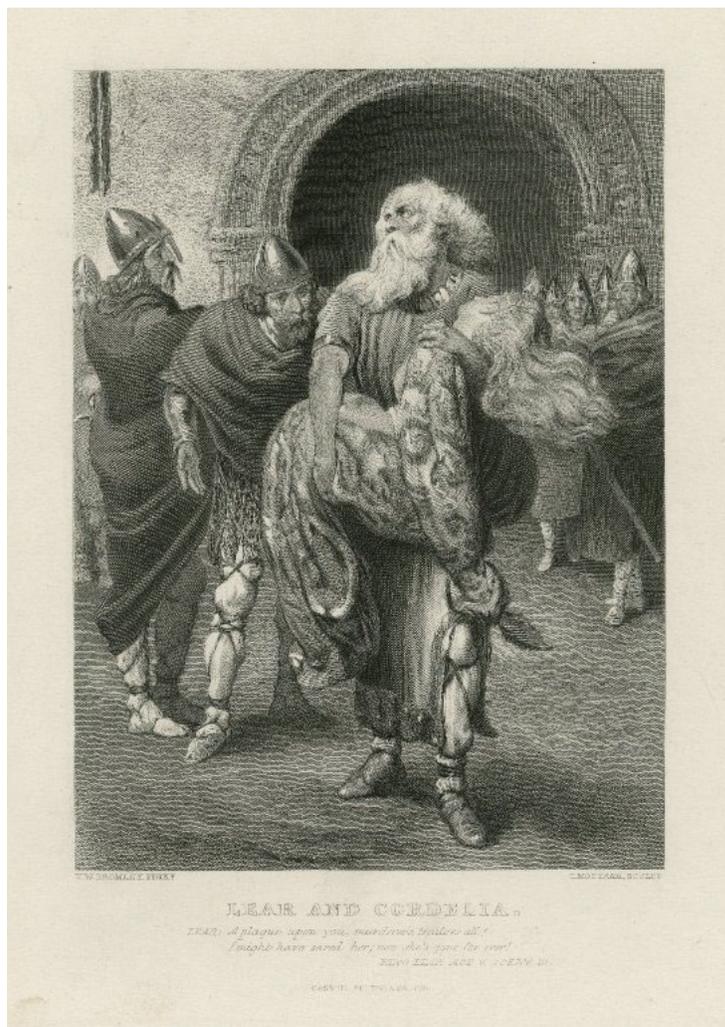


Synopsis

LEAR, KING OF ENGLAND, decides to give us the throne and divide his kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. Before he divides the country, he asks each of his daughters to tell him how much she loves him. The two older daughters flatter Lear, but when Cordelia refuses to make a public declaration of love for her father she is disinherited. She marries the King of France, who accepts her without a dowry (i.e., without money or property). The Earl of Kent is banished by Lear for daring to defend her. The other two daughters, Goneril and Regan, and their husbands, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, inherit the kingdom. The Earl of Gloucester, deceived by his illegitimate son Edmund, disinherits his legitimate son, Edgar, who is forced to go into disguise as a mad beggar to save his life. Lear, now without power, quarrels with Goneril and Regan about the number of attendant knights they allow him to keep. When they ask that he give up all his knights, he goes out in a rage onto a heath (a piece of land, usually level and sometimes considered a wasteland) in a storm. He is accompanied only by his Fool and by his former advisor, the banished Earl of Kent, who is now disguised as a servant. Lear, Kent, and the Fool encounter Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, who is still in disguise as a mad beggar. Gloucester tries to help Lear, but is betrayed by his illegitimate son Edmund and captured by Lear's daughter Regan and her husband, Cornwall. They put out Gloucester's eyes and make Edmund an Earl. Lear is taken secretly to the port town of Dover, where Cordelia has landed with a French army to rescue her father. There, Lear and Cordelia are reconciled but in the ensuing battle are captured by the sisters' forces. Meantime, Edgar encounters his father, Gloucester, and after preventing him from committing suicide, leads him to Dover as well. Goneril and Regan are both in love with Edmund, who commanded their forces in the battle. Discovering this, Goneril's husband Albany forces Edmund to defend himself against the charge of treachery. Edgar arrives, disguised as an anonymous black knight, challenges Edmund to a fight, and fatally wounds his brother. News comes that Goneril has poisoned her sister Regan and then committed suicide. Before dying, Edmund reveals that he has ordered the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Soldiers are sent to rescue them, but arrive too late: Cordelia has been killed. Lear enters carrying her body, and then dies. Albany agrees to give the throne to Edgar. ♦

Source: California Shakespeare Theater www.calshakes.org



Folger Library, Lear carrying the dead Cordelia (Act 5, scene 3; 19th century)