


**King lear pdf text**

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You would be forgiven for thinking, in the early scenes of King Lear, that Albany and Cornwall appear to be little more than extras. Initially acting as little more than consorts to their wives, each soon comes into his own as the plot evolves. Goneril's husband Albany seems oblivious to her cruelty and does not appear to be party to her plans to oust her father; "My lord I am guiltless, as I am ignorant of what hath moved you" (Act 1 Scene 4) In his case, I think that love has clearly blinded him to his wife's despicable nature. Albany appears weak and ineffective but this is essential to the plot; if Albany intervened earlier it would interfere with the deterioration of Lear's relationship with his daughters. Albany's warning to Goneril at the beginning of the play does suggest that he might be more interested in peace than in power: "How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell. Striving to better, oft we mar what's well" (Act 1 Scene 4) He recognizes his wife's ambition here and there is a hint that he thinks that in her efforts to 'improve' things she may damage the status quo - this is a massive understatement but he is currently unaware of the depths she will sink to. Albany becomes wise to Goneril's evil ways and his character gains momentum and strength as he becomes reproachful of his wife and her actions. In Act 4 Scene 2 he challenges her and makes it known that he is ashamed of her; "O Goneril, You are not worth the dust which the rude wind blows in your face." She gives back as good as she gets but he holds his own and we now know that he is a trustworthy character. Albany is fully redeemed later in Act 5 Scene 3 when he arrests Edmund denouncing his behavior and presides over a fight between Gloucester's sons. He has finally gained back his authority and masculinity. He invites Edgar to tell his story which enlightens the audience about Gloucester's death. Albany's response to Regan and Goneril's death shows us he has no sympathy with their evil cause and finally demonstrates that he is on the side of justice; "This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble, Touches us not with pity." (Act 5 Scene 3) Conversely, Cornwall becomes increasingly ruthless as the plot progresses. In Act 2 Scene 1, Cornwall is drawn to Edmund demonstrating his questionable morality. "For you, Edmund, Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant so much commend itself, you shall be ours. Natures of such deep trust we shall much need" (Act 2 Scene 1) Cornwall is keen to be involved with his wife and sister-in-law in their plans to usurp Lear's power. Cornwall announces Kent's punishment after he investigates the altercation between him and Oswald. He is increasingly authoritarian allowing power to go to his head but harbors contempt for the authority of others. Cornwall's ambition for ultimate control is clear. "Fetch forth the stocks! As I have life and honour, there shall he sit till noon" (Act 2 Scene 2) Cornwall is responsible for the most repugnant act of the play - the blinding of Gloucester. He does it, having been encouraged to by Goneril. This demonstrates his character; he is easily led and hideously violent. "Turn out that eyeless villain. Throw this slave upon the dunghill." (Act 3 Scene 7) Poetic justice is realized when Cornwall's servant turns on him; as Cornwall has turned on his host and his King, Cornwall is no longer needed in the plot and his death allows Regan to pursue Edmund. Lear appears at the end of the play and Albany resigns his rule over the British forces that he has briefly assumed and respectfully defers to Lear. Albany was never a strong contender for a leadership position but acts as a pawn in the unraveling of the plot and as a foil to Cornwall. One of William Shakespeare's most famous plays, King Lear is the story of a legendary king who bequeaths his kingdom to two of his three daughters, based on how well they flatter him. The following key quotes highlight the play's focus on the ability to trust one's own senses, the divide between nature and culture, and the often fraught relationship between truth and language. "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise." (Act 1, Scene 5) Lear's fool, speaking here in a scene largely concerned with Lear's failing powers of perception, chastises the old man for his stupidity despite his old age in giving away his land to his obviously disingenuous daughters and sending the only one who loves him away. He parrots Goneril's earlier line in Scene 3, in which she attempts to explain why she does not want to house his one hundred knights anymore and tells him: "As you are old and reverend, you should be wise" (Act 1, Scene 5). Both point out the tension between Lear's supposedly wise old age and his foolish actions on account of his failing mental health. "O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven; Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!" (Act 1, Scene 5) Lear, speaking here, admits for the first time he has made a mistake in sending Cordelia away and bequeathing his kingdom on his remaining two daughters, and fears for his own sanity. In this scene he has been kicked out of Goneril's house and must hope that Regan will house him and his unruly knights. Slowly, the Fool's warnings about the shortsightedness of his actions begin to sink in, and Lear must grapple with why he did it. In this scene he also suggests, "I did her wrong," presumably realizing the cruelty of his disowning of Cordelia. Lear's language here suggests his sense of powerlessness as he gives himself over to the kindness of "heaven." His powerlessness is reflected, too, in his two elder daughters' relation to him, as he realizes he has no power over their actions and will soon be turned out of any place to stay. "Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law My services are bound. Wherefore should I Stand in the plague of custom, and permit The curiosity of nations to deprive me, For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base? When my dimensions are as well compact, My mind as generous, and my shape as true, As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us With base? With baseness? bastards? base, base? Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take More composition and fierce quality Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed, Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops, Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well, then, Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land! Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund, As to the legitimate: fine word - legitimate! Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed, And my invention thrive, Edmund the base Shall to the legitimate, I grow; I prosper: Now, gods, stand up for bastards!" (Act 1, scene 2) Edmund, speaking here, affiliates himself with nature in opposition to "the plague of custom," or in other words, the social constructs which he finds so repellent. He does so in order to reject the social structures that label him "illegitimate." He suggests that his conception, though out of wedlock, was the product of natural human desire rather than of the social norms of marriage, and is in fact the more natural and therefore legitimate. However, Edmund's language is complex. He questions the meaning of "baseness" and "legitimacy," suggesting that once he takes the land of "Legitimate Edgar," he can become the legitimate son: "Edmund the base / Shall to the legitimate!" Instead of doing away with the concept of legitimacy, he simply aims to fit himself into its parameters, into the more favorable position within the hierarchy. Moreover, Edmund's ensuing actions are decidedly unnatural, despite his affiliation with nature as declared here; instead, he betrays his father and his brother in a distinctly non-familial manner in the hopes of achieving a title that has inherently social, not natural, value. Significantly, Edmund proves himself not to be as "generous" or "true" as his brother, the legitimate heir, Edgar. Instead, Edmund acts basely, betraying his father and brother, as if accepting and acting on the stunted relationship that the titles "illegitimate son" or "half-brother" may suggest and failing to move beyond the constructs built by language. He fails to go beyond the persona that the word "bastard" connotes, acting as malevolently and unfairly as the stereotype would suggest. "Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters: I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness: I never gave you kingdom, called you children, You owe me no subscription: then, let fall Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave, A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man." (Act 3, Scene 2) Lear, speaking here, rages on the heath against his daughters, who have turned him out of their homes despite the agreement they made that suggested Lear would give them his kingdom so long as they left him some authority and respect. Again we see his growing awareness of his own powerlessness. In this case, he orders around nature: "Spout, rain!" Although the rain "obeys," perhaps, it is clear Lear is only ordering it to do that which it already was doing. Indeed, Lear calls himself the "slave" of the storm, acknowledging the ingratitude of his daughters that has cost him his comfort and his authority. Although for much of the play before this Lear insists on his title as "king," here he notably calls himself an "old man." In this way, Lear comes into an awareness of his own natural manhood, moving away from societal constructs like kingship; in the same way, he begins to understand the truth of Cordelia's love for him despite Regan and Goneril's clever flattery. "If for I want that glib and oily art, To speak and purpose not, since what I well intend I'll do't before I speak." (Act 1, scene 1) Cordelia here asserts that she loves Lear the most and yet cannot use language for any other purpose but stating the truth. She points out that before she speaks she will do that which she intends; in other words, before she proclaims her love, she will have already proven her love through her actions. This quotation also depicts a subtle critique of her sisters, as Cordelia calls their empty flattery a "glib and oily art," the word "art" emphasizing in particular their artificiality. Although Cordelia's intentions seem pure, she also underscores the importance of advocating for oneself. After all, she could speak truly about her love for him and have that love retain its authentic character despite her use of it as some form of flattery. Cordelia's pureness of intention and yet failure to assure her father of her love demonstrates the terrible culture of Lear's court, in which language is used to lie so often that even speaking about something true seems to make it false. "The weight of this sad time we must obey; Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." (Act 5, scene 3) Edgar, speaking here in the last lines of the play, underscores the theme of language and action. Throughout the play, as he suggests, much of the tragedy has revolved on a culture that misuses language; the primary example is, of course, Regan and Goneril's deceitful flattery of their father in an effort to gain his land. This culture keeps Lear from believing Cordelia's love for him is true, as he only hears rejection in her words and does not pay attention to her actions. In the same way, Edgar's quotation recalls the tragedy of Edmund, who is the victim as well as the antagonist of language used as we think we ought to use it. In his case, he is dubbed "illegitimate" and "bastard," a demarcation that clearly has wounded him deeply and made him a cruel son. At the same time, he embraces his "baseness" and status as "illegitimate" family member, attempting to kill his father and brother. Instead, Edgar demands here that we not only act but speak truly; in this way, much of the tragedy of the play could have been avoided.



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