

T H E

H I S T O R Y

O F

K I N G L E A R .

As it is performed at

T H E T H E A T R E R O Y A L

I N

C O V E N T G A R D E N .



L O N D O N ,

Printed for R. BALDWIN, in Pater-noster-Row; and
T. BECKET, and Co. in the Strand.
MDCCLXVIII.

1758

A D V E R T I S E M E N T .

“ T H E Tragedy of Lear is deservedly
 “ celebrated among the dramas of
 “ Shakespeare. There is, perhaps, no play
 “ which keeps the attention so strongly
 “ fixed; which so much agitates our passi-
 “ ons, and interests our curiosity. The art-
 “ ful involutions of distinct interests, the
 “ striking opposition of contrary characters;
 “ the sudden changes of fortune, and the
 “ quick succession of events, fill the mind
 “ with a perpetual tumult of indignation,
 “ pity, and hope. There is no scene which
 “ does not contribute to the aggravation of
 “ the distress, or conduct of the action;
 “ and scarce a line which does not conduce
 “ to the progress of the scene. So power-
 “ ful is the current of the poet’s imagina-
 “ tion, that the mind, which once ventures
 “ within it, is hurried irresistibly along.”

Such is the decision of Dr. Johnson on the
 Lear of Shakespeare. Yet Tate, with all
 this treasure before him, considered it as
 “ a heap of jewels unstrung, and unpo-
 “ lished;” and resolved, “ out of zeal for
 “ all the remains of Shakespeare,” to *re-
 model* the story. Having formed this resolu-
 tion, “ it was my good fortune (says he) to
 “ light on one expedient to rectify what
 “ was wanting in the regularity and proba-
 “ bility of the tale; which was to run
 “ through the whole, a *love* betwixt Edgar
 “ and

A 2

London:
 reprint: Cornmarket Press 1969
 <Sk ZZ 150-34>

“ and Cordelia, that never changed word
 “ with each other in the original. This
 “ renders Cordelia's indifference, and her
 “ father's passion, in the first scene, proba-
 “ ble. It likewise gives countenance to
 “ Edgar's disguise, making that a generous
 “ design, that was before a poor shift to
 “ save his life. The distress of the story is
 “ evidently heightened by it; and it parti-
 “ cularly gave occasion to a new scene or
 “ two, of more success perhaps than merit.”

Now this very expedient of *a love* betwixt Edgar and Cordelia, on which Tate felicitates himself, seemed to me to be one of the capital objections to his alteration: for even supposing that it rendered Cordelia's indifference to her father more probable (an indifference which Shakespeare has no where implied), it assigns a very poor motive for it; so that what Edgar gains, on the side of romantic generosity, Cordelia loses on that of real virtue. The distress of the story is so far from being heightened by it, that it has diffused a languor and insipidity over all the scenes of the play from which Lear is absent; for which I appeal to the sensations of the numerous audiences, with which the play has been honoured; and had the scenes been affectingly written, they would at least have divided our feelings, which Shakespeare has attached almost entirely to Lear and Cordelia, in their parental and filial capacities; thereby producing passages infinitely more tragick than the embraces of
 Cordelia

Cordelia and the ragged Edgar, which would have appeared too ridiculous for representation, had they not been mixed and incorporated with some of the finest scenes of Shakespeare.

Tate, in whose days *love* was the soul of Tragedy as well as Comedy, was, however, so devoted to intrigue, that he has not only given Edmund a passion for Cordelia, but has injudiciously amplified on his criminal commerce with Gonerill and Regan, which is the most disgusting part of the original. The Rev. Dr. Warton has doubted, “ whether the cruelty of the daughters is “ not painted with circumstances too false “ vage and unnatural *,” even by Shakespeare. Still, however, in Shakespeare, some motives for their conduct are assigned; but as Tate has conducted that part of the fable, they are equally cruel and unnatural, without the poet's assigning any motive at all.

In all these circumstances, it is generally agreed, that Tate's alteration is for the worse; and his King Lear would probably have quitted the stage long ago, had not the poet made “ the tale conclude in a success to the innocent distressed persons.” Even in the catastrophe he has incurred the censure of Addison: but “ in the present

* *Advertiser*, No. 122.

“ safe, says Dr. Johnson, the publick has decided, and Cordelia, from the time of “ Tate, has always retired with victory and “ felicity.”

To reconcile the catastrophe of Tate to the story of Shakspeare, was the first grand object which I proposed to myself in this alteration; thinking it one of the principal duties of my situation, to render every drama submitted to the Publick, as consistent and rational an entertainment as possible. In this kind of employment, one person cannot do a great deal; yet if every Director of the Theatre will endeavour to do a little, the Stage will every day be improved, and become more worthy attention and encouragement. Romeo, Cymbeline, Every Man in his Humour, have long been refined from the dross that hindered them from being current with the Publick; and I have now endeavoured to purge the tragedy of Lear of the alloy of Tate, which has so long been suffered to debase it.

“ The utter improbability of Gloucester’s “ imagining, though blind, that he had “ leaped down Dover Cliff,” has been justly censured by Dr. Warton *; and in the representation it is still more liable to objection than in print. I have therefore, without scruple, omitted it, preserving, however, at the same time, that celebrated

description of the Cliff in the mouth of Edgar. The putting out Gloucester’s eyes is also so unpleasing a circumstance, that I would have altered it, if possible; but, upon examination, it appeared to be so closely interwoven with the fable, that I durst not venture to change it. I had once some idea of retaining the character of *the fool*; but though Dr. Warton has very truly observed †, that the poet “ has so well conducted even “ the natural jargon of the beggar, and the “ jestings of the fool, which in other hands “ must have sunk into burlesque, that they “ contribute to heighten the pathetic;” yet, after the most serious consideration, I was convinced that such a scene “ would “ sink into burlesque” in the representation, and would not be endured on the modern stage.

GEORGE COLMAN.

† Adventurer, No. 116.

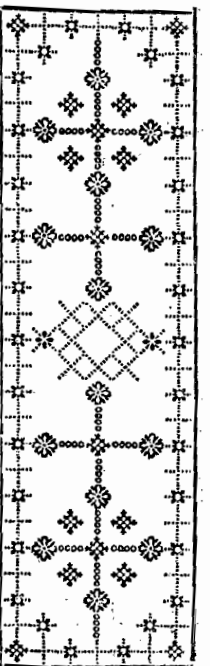
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

LEAR, King of Britain,	Mr. Powell.
King of France,	Mr. Davis.
Duke of Burgundy,	Mr. Lewis.
Duke of Cornwall,	Mr. Gardner.
Duke of Albany,	Mr. Hull.
Earl of Gloucester,	Mr. Gibbon.
Earl of Kent,	Mr. Clarke.
Edgar, son to Gloucester,	Mr. Smith.
Edmund, bastard son to Gloucester,	Mr. Bentley.
Doctor,	Mr. Redman.
Steward to Gonerill,	Mr. Cushing.
Captain,	Mr. Wignell.
Old Man, tenant to Gloucester,	Mr. Hallam.
Herald,	Mr. Holton.
Servant to Cornwall,	Mr. T. Smith.

Gonerill,	Mrs. Stephens.
Regan, } daughters to Lear,	Mrs. Du-Bellamy.
Cordelia,	Mrs. Yates.

Knights attending on the King, Officers, Messengers, Soldiers,
and Attendants.

SCENE, BRITAIN.



KING LEAR.



A C T I.

SCENE, The King's Palace.

Enter Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund the Bastard.

Kent.

Thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Glo. It did always seem so to us: but now in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most.

Kent. Is not this your son, my lord?

Glo. His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge.

Kent. I cannot conceive you.

Glo. Sir, this young fellow's mother had, indeed, a son for her cradle, ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?

Kent. I cannot with the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

B

Glo.