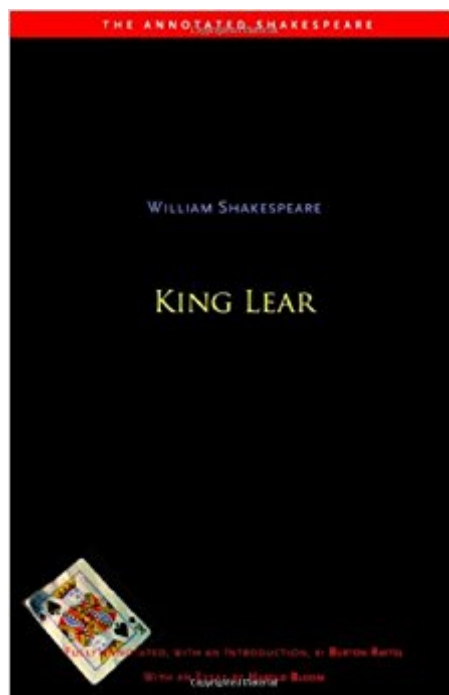


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King Lear (The Annotated Shakespeare)



Synopsis

King Lear, one of Shakespeare's darkest and most savage plays, tells the story of the foolish and Job-like Lear, who divides his kingdom, as he does his affections, according to vanity and whim. Lear's failure as a father engulfs himself and his world in turmoil and tragedy.

Book Information

Series: The Annotated Shakespeare

Paperback: 215 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press; annotated edition edition (May 24, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300122004

ISBN-13: 978-0300122008

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.8 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars See all reviews (199 customer reviews)

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Relationships > Aging Parents #560 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish >

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Customer Reviews

Although RA Foakes' Arden³ edition appeared some years after those of Wells & Taylor (Complete Oxford) and Jay L Halio (Cambridge) it did not follow their precedent of issuing separate texts based on Quarto and Folio originals. These early texts (Q 1608 and F 1623 respectively) occasionally offer quite different versions of the play and reconciling them to form a single, coherent whole is a task that is, arguably, less elegant than the dual edition solution. By comparison, Arden's text looks cumbersome, with numerous Q and F superscripts surrounding passages found exclusively in one or other source. Foakes is well aware that his single, 'conflated' text isn't as fashionable as those of the 'revisionists' mentioned above, who believe that the Folio text of Lear represents Shakespeare's revised and final draft, and that modern editors should not pick and mix between Q and F but respect the integrity of the two early sources. While seemingly reactionary, Foakes is in fact countering the new orthodoxy of Halio et al. In his view, their 'dogmatic and purist stance ... abandons the idea of King Lear as a single work of which we have two versions.' He is cautious and level-headed in his approach, aware of the limitations of scholarly speculation and in presenting both Q and F variants he allows the reader to make up her/his own mind. Aside from this central

controversy, Arden3 Lear has much to offer.

"Nothing will come of nothing" the fatal line Lear utters to Cordelia sums up the entire play. The wizened king believes he is urging Cordelia not to refrain from expressing her love for him when in fact he is unwittingly prompting her to use the same insincere flattery as her sisters. When Cordelia refuses to acquiesce to Lear's wishes, he banishes her from the kingdom and divides it among her nefarious sisters Goneril and Reagan. In doing this Lear accepts their empty flattery instead of Cordelia's austere profession of paternal love. Goneril and Reagan quickly betray Lear and then turn against each other. Thus Lear's preference for empty flattery (nothing) destroys his authority and embroils his kingdom in civil strife (generates nothing). This theme runs like a thread through other parts of the play. Gloucester's blindness toward the nature of his sons results in his literal blindness later in the play. Metaphorical blindness generates physical blindness (nothing comes of nothing). Similarly, after Edgar is banished he avoids further harm by shedding his identity and disguising himself as a vagrant. In the new order of things eliminating one's status results in no harm (another version of nothing coming from nothing). The motif of nothing coming from nothing has psychological and political ramifications for the play. From a psychological point of view Lear fails to realize that the type of adulating love he wants from Cordelia no longer exists because Cordelia is no longer a child. Her refusal to flatter Lear is, in a sense, an act of adolescent rebellion. Lear's failure to recognize the fact that Cordelia still loves him but not with the totality of a child proves to be his undoing.

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