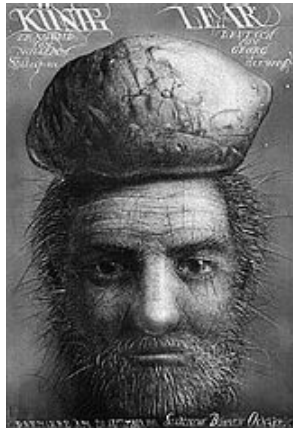




Krol Lear
King Lear
W. Shakespeare
Wieslaw Walkuski
theater; 1992; size B1



König Lear
King Lear
Shakespeare
Jerzy Czerniawski
theater; 1981; size A1



Krol Lear
King Lear
Shakespeare
Rafal Olbinski
theater; 2000; size B1

Polish Poster Gallery Shakespeare posters <http://www.poster.com.pl/shakespeare-2.htm>

I. Preliminaries: practical matters

- A. Office & office hours
 - 144 Krieger Hall: Mon.: 1:30-2:30; Thurs.: 10:30-11:30
- B. Forum: Friday, Oct. 7, Time TBA
- C. Lecture slides
 - 1. --provide an outline of the lecture.
 - 2. --allow you to wonder about & anticipate the lecture.
 - 3. --allow you to learn to take good notes.
 - 4. --are available in 2 formats.
 - 5. Please note: 1) References to the play include act, scene, line, and page numbers. 2) In order to guide you in your reading, I provide more textual evidence than we will examine in lecture.

#2

II. Preliminaries: conceptual matters

- **A. Locating King Lear historically**
 - 1. 800 BC or BCE: a mythical past, “time out of mind,” “time immemorial”
 - 2. 1066 . . . : England’s feudal past
 - 3. 1558-1603 & 1603 . . . : Elizabethan & Jacobean England

#3

II. Preliminaries: conceptual matters (cont.)

- **B. Elaboration: England’s feudal past**
 - 1. Feudalism: definition
 - 2. Political and social relationships are land-based.
They depend on:
 - a) authority & protection
 - b) service & gratitude
 - 3. Discovery of feudalism

#4

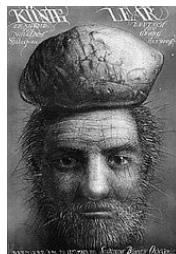
II. Preliminaries: conceptual matters (cont.)

C. Elaboration: Elizabethan & Jacobean England

1. Some dates that may be helpful to you
2. First performance of *King Lear*: King James's court in 1606.

#5

III. Transition: Immense suffering



- Whatever else we say about King Lear, we will be working with the recognition that the play confronts us with almost unendurable suffering.

#6

Scene from *King Lear*

#7

IV. Thesis #1:

King Lear dramatizes the tragic discovery that the traditional structures of society—marked by codes of deference—cannot hold the social group together, either at the level of the family or at the level of the state.

A. Key terms

B. Useful Metaphor: Social glue

#8

IV. Thesis #1 (cont.)

- **C. To restate & elaborate: These traditional structures are no longer adequate (or are no longer sufficiently enacted) to balance competing interests and satisfy competing needs/demands.**

#9

IV Thesis #1 (cont.)

D. What is deference and how does it work?

- 1. Definition**
- 2. Importance of social hierarchy**
- 3. Forms of deference, by encoding respect, both recognize and soften relations of power.**
- 4. Key question: What happens to competing interests?**

#10

IV. Thesis #1 (cont.)

E. Shakespeare's play shows both the beauty of idealized deferential relations and the limitations of the ideal.

1. Kent: a model of deference.

"Good my liege" (I, i, 117; p. 7)

"Royal Lear . . ." (I, i, 136 ff. p. 8).

"Be Kent unmannerly" (I, I, 142-3, p. 8)

"What wouldst thou?" (I, iv, 19 ff., p. 22).



#11

IV. Thesis #1

E. Beauty & Limitations (cont.)

● 2. Edmund: False model of deference

- Talented at the language of deference.
- Contests the idea that birth = worth.
- Competes—by whatever means—for his own interests.

• "Well, then, / legitimate Edgar, I must have your land" (I, ii, 15-16, p. 14).

• "Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit" (I, ii, 168, p. 20).



<http://shakespeare-art-museum.com/Rummy/Rummy05.htm>

#12

IV. Thesis #1

E. Beauty and Limitations (cont.)

3. Goneril & Regan: a failure of deference

a) EXAMPLES

Goneril instructs Oswald to be "slack" (I, iii, 10 ff., p. 20).

Their attitude toward Lear is marked by ingratitude: the failure to be grateful for benefits received.

Compare Lear's expectations: "No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse" (II, iv, 167 ff. p. 54).

Compare Lear's statement: "Filial ingratitude!" (III, iv, 14-16, p. 67).



#13

http://www.cas.buffalo.edu/classes/eng/willbern/Shakespeare/plays/Lear/images/Lear_12.jpg

Major example: The blinding of Gloucester

"Wherefore to Dover?"

(III, vii, 57 ff., p. 81)



A world wholly without gratitude: Here, Gloucester is, as he often is in the play, a "double" for Lear.

#14

http://appserver.pads.arts.gla.ac.uk/PAD/S/DesSha/KingLear/KL97PHC_001.jpg

3. Goneril & Regan: a failure of deference (cont.)

- b) The result of their failure: Lear begins not to know who he is.

Who Lear is is incomprehensible when his social, familial, and political position no longer elicits customary forms of deference.

The word daughter has become a mystery to him. He tries to re-figure his world by exploring the fundamental meaning of a word he used to know.

- Examples: I, iv, 208-214, pp. 28-29.
III, iv, 47-8, p. 68
III, iv, 60ff., p. 69.

#15

Failure of deference (cont.)

c) Goneril & Regan become monsters because of their ingratitude

- In response to what is, to him, their incomprehensible ingratitude, Lear stretches toward ever more violent metaphor and then into a literalizing metaphor—stretching the power of language:
- “Then let them anatomize Regan . . .” (III, vi, 71 ff., p. 77).



<http://shakespeare-art-museum.com/Rummy/Rummy13.html>

#16

V. Reflections on the thesis

A. Does Unaccommodated man exist?

- III, iv, 93 ff., p. 70
- In what sense is Edgar "accommodated"?



<http://members.aol.com/actorsite/citz/jhindex.htm>

#17

V. Reflections on the thesis

B. Does single combat solve the problem of competition in family or state?



V, iii, 125 ff, pp. 120-121

#18

<http://www.theatre.sbc.edu/archives/KingLear/LearPhotos/Lear9.jpg>

V. Reflections on the thesis

C. Does Cordelia's being a model of deference make a difference?

"How does my royal lord? How fares your Majesty?" (IV, vii, 44, p. 109)



<http://users.cwnet.com/phelps/4con.htm>

#19

VI. Conclusions

The plot of the play depends on competition:

- the competition set up by Lear's love contest
- the competition of the illegitimate son with the legitimate.

Yet, the play delineates a system of family and state value that cannot accommodate competing interests.

The competition at the heart of the play causes the society to become "unglued" in both family and state.

The play leaves its audience not with resolution but with the problem.

#20