

NAHUM TATE'S *KING LEAR*

Nahum Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* debuted in 1681. In a dedicatory epistle to the published play, Tate says: "I found the whole [of Shakespeare's *King Lear*] ... a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished; yet so dazzling in their disorder, that I soon perceived I had seized a treasure. 'Twas my good fortune to light on one expedient to rectify what was wanting in the regularity and probability of the tale, which was to run through the whole a love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia."

Tate's adaptation also cut the original substantially, revised the language throughout, and added several new scenes; it eliminated the character of the Fool and — most notoriously — added a happy ending.

Tate's happy-ending version of *King Lear* was so popular that no performance of Shakespeare's text appeared on stage until 1838, an impressive 157 year run.

Here are the final moments of Tate's *King Lear* (5.3.378–451):

ALBANY The troops by Edmund raised, I have disbanded;
Those that remain are under my command.
What comfort may be brought to cheer your age 380
And heal your savage wrongs, shall be applied;
For to your majesty we do resign
Your kingdom, save what part your self conferred
On us in marriage.

KENT Hear you that, my liege? 385

CORDELIA Then there are gods, and virtue is their care.

LEAR Is't possible?
Let the spheres stop their course, the sun make halt,
The winds be hushed, the seas and fountains rest;
All nature pause, and listen to the change. 390
Where is my Kent, my Caius?

KENT Here, my liege.

LEAR Why I have news that will recall thy youth;
Ha! Didst thou hear 't, or did th' inspiring gods
Whisper to me alone? Old Lear shall be 395
A king again.

KENT The prince, that like a god has power, has said it.

LEAR Cordelia then shall be a queen, mark that:
Cordelia shall be queen; winds catch the sound
And bear it on your rosy wings to heaven. 400
Cordelia is a queen.

Re-enter Edgar with Gloster.

ALBANY Look, sir, where pious Edgar comes
Leading his eyeless father: O my liege!
His wondrous story will deserve your leisure:
What he has done and suffered for your sake, 405
What for the fair Cordelia's.

GLOSTER Where is my liege? Conduct me to his knees to hail
 His second birth of empire; my dear Edgar
 Has, with himself, revealed the King's blest restoration.

LEAR My poor dark Gloster. 410

GLOSTER O let me kiss that once more sceptered hand!

LEAR Hold, Thou mistak'st the majesty, kneel here;
 Cordelia has our power, Cordelia's queen.
 Speak, is not that the noble suffering Edgar?

GLOSTER My pious son, more dear than my lost eyes. 415

LEAR I wronged him too, but here's the fair amends.

EDGAR Your leave, my liege, for an unwelcome message.
 Edmund (but that's a trifle) is expired;
 What more will touch you, your imperious daughters
 Goneril and haughty Regan, both are dead, 420
 Each by the other poisoned at a banquet;
 This, dying, they confessed.

CORDELIA O fatal period of ill-governed life!

LEAR Ingrateful as they were, my heart feels yet
 A pang of nature for their wretched fall; — 425
 But, Edgar, I defer thy joys too long:
 Thou serv'dst distressed Cordelia; take her crowned:
 Th' imperial grace fresh blooming on her brow;
 Nay, Gloster, thou hast here a father's right;
 Thy helping hand t' heap blessings on their head. 430

KENT Old Kent throws in his hearty wishes too.

EDGAR The gods and you too largely recompense
 What I have done; the gift strikes merit dumb.

CORDELIA Nor do I blush to own my self o'er-paid
 For all my sufferings past. 435

GLOSTER Now, gentle gods, give Gloster his discharge.

LEAR No, Gloster, Thou hast business yet for life;
 Thou, Kent and I, retired to some cool cell
 Will gently pass our short reserves of time
 In calm reflections on our fortunes past, 440
 Cheered with relation of the prosperous reign
 Of this celestial pair; thus our remains
 Shall in an even course of thought be past,
 Enjoy the present hour, nor fear the last.

EDGAR Our drooping country now erects her head, 445
 Peace spreads her balmy wings, and plenty blooms.
 Divine Cordelia, all the gods can witness
 How much thy love to empire I prefer!
 Thy bright example shall convince the world
 (Whatever storms of fortune are decreed) 450
 That truth and virtue shall at last succeed.

Exeunt Omnes.