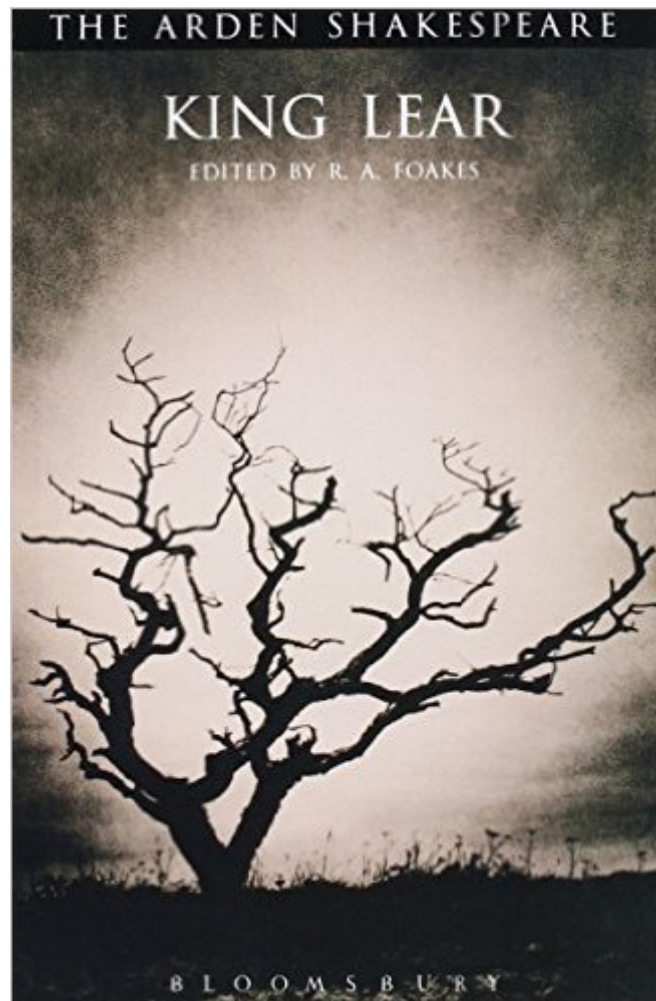


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King Lear (Arden Shakespeare: Third Series)



Synopsis

In the first part of Foakes's introduction, the editor examines King Lear as it is read in the mind versus how it is performed on the stage, analyzing historical productions and certain elements of the play that shine in performance but not in text, and vice versa. This section also explores how and why the play has invited so many interpretations, in reading and performance, since its inception. The next part of the introduction considers trends in the criticism and staging of the play, such as the recent shift of favor from redemptive to bleak readings. Foakes then addresses the dating of the play, the differences among the Quarto and Folio texts, and whether these changes are mere discrepancies or intentional revisions. Finally, the editor discusses the casting of the play and explains notable usages in his edition. There are two appendices that follow the play: the first examines two textual problems that are particularly difficult to interpret, and the second explains differences in lineation between the Quarto and Folio editions, which resulted from confusion whether certain lines were in prose or verse. This edition also includes lists of illustrations, abbreviations, and references, as well as a general editors' preface and an index. The Arden Shakespeare has developed a reputation as the pre-eminent critical edition of Shakespeare for its exceptional scholarship, reflected in the thoroughness of each volume. An introduction comprehensively contextualizes the play, chronicling the history and culture that surrounded and influenced Shakespeare at the time of its writing and performance, and closely surveying critical approaches to the work. Detailed appendices address problems like dating and casting, and analyze the differing Quarto and Folio sources. A full commentary by one or more of the play's foremost contemporary scholars illuminates the text, glossing unfamiliar terms and drawing from an abundance of research and expertise to explain allusions and significant background information. Highly informative and accessible, Arden offers the fullest experience of Shakespeare available to a reader.

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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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