

act 1 scene 3

» THE DUKE OF ALBANY'S PALACE

Enter GONERIL and her Steward, OSWALD

GONERIL

Did my father strike my gentleman
For chiding of his fool?

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

GONERIL

By day and night he wrongs me. Every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other
That sets us all at odds. I'll not endure it.
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
On every trifle. When he returns from hunting
I will not speak with him. Say I am sick.
If you come slack of former services
You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer.

[Hunting horns within]

OSWALD

He's coming, madam. I hear him.

GONERIL

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellow servants. I'd have it come question.
If he dislike it, let him to our sister,
Whose mind and mine I know in that are one,
Not to be overruled. Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again, and must be used
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused.
Remember what I tell you.

OSWALD

Very well, madam.

GONERIL

And let his knights have colder looks among you.
What grows of it, no matter. Advise your fellows so.
I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall,
That I may speak. I'll write straight to my sister
To hold my very course. Go prepare for dinner.

Exeunt severally.

[Lear is now staying with Goneril. Some time has elapsed since the action of Scene 1.]

1 gentleman: attendant

2 chiding of: rebuking, giving out to

4 *He flashes ... or other:* He suddenly commits some gross offense.

6 *upbraids us: rebukes us* [Note how Goneril has stated to use the royal 'We' to refer to herself.]

5

9 *If you come ... services:* If you give him less attentive service and less respect than you previously did

10 *the fault ... answer:* I'll take responsibility for the reduction of service/respect

10

12 *Put on ... please:* Behave in as wearily neglectful a manner as you want.

14-16 *If he dislike it ... overruled:* If he doesn't like it, let him go and stay with our sister, but she and we are fully agreed on this and won't be overruled.

15

16-18 *Idle old man ... given away:* He's a foolish old man who still wants to exercise the powers that he recently gave away.

19-20 *must be used ... abused:* When old men behave like children and respond disrespectfully to kind treatment, then it's kinder to give them rebukes instead.

20

22 *And let his knights ... among you:* Be less friendly to his knights.

24 *I would breed ... and I shall:* I want to create situation in which I can speak my mind.

25 *straight: straight away*

25

26 *To hold my very course:* To follow the exact same course of action

LOOK BACK AT

act 1 scene 3

First Encounter

1. At the beginning of the scene, what does Oswald report that makes Goneril angry?
2. What had Oswald done to annoy Lear?
3. How does Goneril advise Oswald and her other servants to treat Lear from that point on?
4. Where is Lear at this point? What is he doing?
5. When Lear returns, what does Goneril instruct Oswald to tell him about her?
6. What is the purpose of telling Lear this?
7. Goneril says that Lear is foolish for one of the following reasons. Is he foolish because:
 - a) He won't dress in appropriate clothing for a king?
 - b) He wastes too much of his time on silly hobbies?
 - c) He refuses to eat at the proper times?
 - d) He still wants to hang onto the power he gave away?
8. According to Goneril, what do old men become for a second time?
9. When old men misbehave, how does Goneril say they should they be treated?
10. As the scene closes, Goneril says that she will write to Regan. What does she propose to tell Regan to do?

A Closer Look

1. In this scene, we learn more about Goneril and her opinions. Select three or four lines that in your opinion offer particular insights into her character and behaviour. In your own words, explain what each of your selections tells us about Goneril.
2. Read over the speech (lines 12 to 21) in which Goneril outlines a new plan for how Lear is to be treated while he is staying in her palace. How does that plan require her servants to behave towards Lear? What reasons caused Goneril to decide on this plan?
3. Given what you know about Lear — and about Goneril and Regan — do you think that this plan is a realistic or well-thought-out one? Give reasons for your answer.

Think About Themes

This brief scene is concerned mostly with a developing struggle for authority and control. Pick out some quotations that tell us about the struggle that is going on in the palace. In your own words, explain what each quotation reveals about it.

Goneril speaks with Oswald about Lear



RECAP

In Act 1 Scene 1, we remember, it was decided that Lear would alternate between Goneril's and Regan's households. He would spend the first month of his retirement with Goneril, the second month with Regan, the third with Goneril and so on.

We are now part way through Lear's first month of retirement. The retired Lear, along with his retinue of one hundred knights, has been staying in the castle Goneril shares with her husband, the Duke of Albany. Things have not been going well. For the behaviour of Lear and his companions has been rude, obnoxious and disruptive.

LINE BY LINE

Goneril is talking with her servant Oswald. Lear is away from the castle on a hunting trip. But he'll soon be back in time for dinner. Goneril declares that she can't take anymore of Lear's bad behaviour: 'I'll not endure it'. (5)

She's so fed up that she decides to avoid Lear when he returns to the castle: 'When he returns from hunting/ I will not speak with him'. (7-8) Oswald must tell Lear that Goneril is sick and cannot meet with him. (8)

Goneril instructs Oswald to start treating Lear poorly. Oswald and his 'fellow servants' should treat Lear with a 'weary negligence'. (12) They should be neglectful in the service they provide to him and must act as if they're utterly fed up with the old king. Goneril says that Oswald will be rewarded for carrying out these instructions, for

performing services to Lear in a 'slack' or casual manner: 'If you come slack of former services/ You shall do well'. (9-10)

Goneril also instructs Oswald to give 'colder looks' to Lear's retinue of knights. (22) Goneril, it seems, wants her servants to treat the knights in a manner that is cold and contemptuous, if not openly insulting. Lear's knights, as we shall see, are an unruly bunch. Such insulting treatment, then, is likely to make them aggressive, perhaps even violent.

But Goneril tells Oswald not to worry about any consequences of this insulting behaviour: 'What grows of it, no matter'. (23) And Oswald, she says, shouldn't even worry about upsetting the King himself. For Goneril will deal with any complaints that Lear might have: 'the fault of it I'll answer'. (10)

LEAR

▶ ARROGANT AND ENTITLED

Lear, as Goneril presents him, is extremely demanding. He scolds or 'upbraids' Goneril and her staff over every little thing that isn't precisely to his satisfaction. Lear, she says, 'upbraids us/ On every trifle'. (6-7)

Lear is also presented as being impetuous and temperamental. He 'flashes', Goneril claims, from one piece of bad behaviour to the next in an erratic and unpredictable manner. He is even capable of sudden violence, striking one of Goneril's servants: 'Did my father strike my gentleman/ For chiding of his fool?' (1-2) Lear, it seems, didn't like the way this particular gentleman spoke to his fool or court jester. (We will meet the Fool in the next scene).

Lear is also presented as being extremely self-centred. He cares little, it seems, that he's a guest in Goneril's home. We get the impression that Lear's hundred knights are terrible house guests. The knights, Goneril says, 'grow riotous', suggesting that they behave in a drunken and unruly manner. (6) But Lear, it seems, does little or nothing to keep his companions under control.

Lear is also depicted as rude, loud and obnoxious. Lear, we're told, constantly 'wrongs' his host, committing 'gross crimes' against her. (3-4) Goneril doesn't specify what these 'crimes' are. But we imagine they relate to Lear's loud and obnoxious behaviour, which according to Goneril has upset the entire household: 'one gross crime or other/ That sets us all at odds'. (4-5)

▶ FOOLISHNESS

Goneril also highlights what she views as Lear's foolishness. Lear, she points out, 'gave away' his power when he retired, passing his various 'authorities' on to his daughters. (16-17) Now Lear is little more than an ordinary retiree, an 'Idle old man'.

Lear, Goneril suggests, wants to have his cake and eat it. He wants to enjoy a leisurely retirement while continuing to exercise the power of the kingship. Goneril makes the valid point that you can have power or leisure but you can't have both. For with power comes great burdens and responsibility.

GONERIL

▶ CONNING AND MANIPULATIVE

In this scene Goneril shows herself to be conniving and manipulative. She seems eager to provoke her father into some kind of confrontation about his unruly conduct: 'I'd have it come question.' (13) This is why she instructs her servants to treat Lear in a cold or disrespectful manner. Lear, she knows, will respond furiously to such treatment. There will be a frank exchange of views, which will give Goneril the 'occasion' to voice her concerns about her father's unruliness: 'I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall, / That I may speak'. (24-25)

Goneril's calculating side is also evident when she decides to write to Regan. The two sisters, it seems, have already been in touch regarding Lear's problematic behaviour. (15-16) Now she's going to advise Regan that she too should treat Lear and his knights in a cold and disrespectful manner: 'I'll write straight to my sister/ To hold my very course'. (25-26)

▶ CRUEL AND CALLOUS

It's easy to have some sympathy for Goneril in this scene. Lear and his knights, after all, seem to be the guests from hell. For weeks now they've been upsetting her entire household, their loud and obnoxious behaviour going on both day and night. Small wonder, then, that Goneril has had enough: 'I'll not endure it'. (5)

And yet her attitude to her father could only be described as cold and cruel.

- We see this when she instructs her servants to treat him coldly and disrespectfully.
- We see this when she declares that if Lear doesn't like such treatment he can simply leave and go stay at Regan's instead: 'If he dislike it, let him to our sister'. (14)
- We see this when she rather disrespectfully describes Lear as a child. She claims 'old fools' such as Lear need to be treated like toddlers; you need to rebuke them and flatter them in order to coax them into behaving well. (19-20)

Goneril's attitude is striking in its callousness. For Lear, we must remember, may be a difficult guest, but he is still Goneril's father and only recently gifted her with half of the Kingdom of Britain.

king lear

INTRODUCTION

THE PRIVILEGE AND PITFALLS OF POWER

Lear is a king in his eighties. His rule of Britain, we sense, has extended over many decades. Lear, as King, has absolute power. He has the power to grant extraordinary rewards to those he favours. Those who displease him, meanwhile, can be punished by exile or even death.

And when he gives an order, he expects it to be carried out immediately. We see this, for instance, when he asks for France to be brought back into the throne room: 'Call France! Who stirs?! Call Burgundy'. (1.1.110-111) Lear seems irate that his subordinates aren't stirring to carry out his instructions the very second that he issues them.

Such absolute rulers, of course, are a magnet for flattery. Indeed, we get a sense that Lear has become almost addicted to flattery and devises the 'love test' in order to coax further public praise from his daughters. The winner of this strange flattery contest will, he declares, be endowed with the choicest portions of Britain: 'Tell me, my daughters/ Which of you shall we say doth love us most [?]'. (1.1.37-38) Goneril and Regan both oblige, the former winning 'shady forests and wide-skirted meads', the latter gaining an 'ample third of our fair kingdom'. (1.1.51-52, 67)

Indeed, Lear has become so used to flattery that Cordelia's refusal to flatter him feels like the gravest of insults. He is shocked when Cordelia replies that she has 'nothing' to say in response to the love test: 'How? Nothing can come of nothing. Speak again'. (1.1.74) He warns her that her lack of flattery will 'mar' or damage her prospects: 'Go to, go to, mend your speech a little/ Lest it may mar your fortunes'. (1.1.78-79)

Then, when Cordelia still refuses to play his stupid game, he punishes her most aggressively:

- The third of the kingdom intended for Cordelia will now be divided between her sisters and their husbands: 'Cornwall and Albany, With



my two daughters' dowers digest this third'. (1.1.111)

- Indeed Cordelia will be given no dowry at all: 'Thy truth then be thy dower'. (1.1.93)
- He disowns Cordelia on the spot, denying her all 'paternal care' and 'property of blood'.
- From now on she will be a stranger to him: 'And as a stranger to my heart and me/ Hold thee from this for ever'. (1.1.100-101)
- Indeed a cannibalistic 'Scythian' would be more welcome in Lear's home than Cordelia.

Lear, then, has been exposed to so much flattery that he mistakes it for genuine affection. Cordelia, he feels, must be 'untender' given her failure to indulge his love test.

The extent of Lear's anger is really apparent during his conversation with Burgundy. Cordelia's prospective husbands thought she'd be coming with one third of Britain. But now, as Lear puts it, 'her price is fallen'. (1.1.179) Lear stubbornly refuses to grant Cordelia even a single penny in terms of dowry: 'Nothing. I have sworn'. (1.1.128) Naturally, this makes her extremely unattractive to any potential suitors. But Lear is adamant that they can 'Take her or leave her'. (1.1.187)

KING LEAR'S TIMELINE

1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.3
Appears			Appears				
2.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7
Appears		Appears		Appears		Appears	
4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	5.1
					Appears	Appears	
5.2	5.3	Dies					
Appears	Dies						

KEY

- Appears
- Dies

Leaders in Lear's situation, who have so much power concentrated in their hands, tend to be insulated from negative feedback. No one wants to give such a leader bad news. And who would risk telling such an absolute ruler that he's behaving inappropriately? You could find yourself in a dungeon by the end of the day.

Lear, then, has grown so unused to criticism that even sensible, well-intentioned feedback strikes him as the gravest insult. We see this when Kent criticises his treatment of Cordelia and his decision to divide the kingdom. Lear is outraged. Kent is eventually sentenced to permanent exile and is given four days to get his affairs in order before he must leave the kingdom for good. If he's seen in Britain after this day he will be killed instantly. Lear, then, is presented as the ultimate in entitled and arrogant rulers, exhibiting all the pitfalls and privileges of power.

DESCENT INTO MADNESS

Is Lear simply a cranky old tyrant, who, after decades in power, can't handle truth or criticism? Or is he beginning to display signs of mental decline? We might argue for instance that Lear, when he strikes Kent, displays some of the mental

volatility that will characterise his behaviour in subsequent scenes. After all, a King striking one of his own servants during a state occasion doesn't suggest mental stability!

And is Lear's decision-making, as Kent suggests, so impulsive that it may as well be 'mad'? Kent, for instance, argues that Lear is displaying a 'hideous rashness' in disowning Cordelia and dividing the kingdom. (1.1.135) Gloucester, in Act 1 Scene 2, also criticises Lear's impulsiveness, suggesting that these decisions are all made 'on the gad', without planning or forethought.

Goneril and Regan, at the end of Act 1 Scene 1, suggest that Lear has become increasingly volatile. He is full of 'changes', of 'unconstant starts' and 'poor judgement'. (1.1.275) Lear, they suggest, is acting in a careless and volatile manner, citing the banishment of Kent and the disowning of Cordelia. Goneril and Regan put this down to senility: "'Tis the infirmity of his age'. (1.1.269) And they expect further 'unruly waywardness' as Lear lives out his retirement. But perhaps Lear's volatile behaviour presages not only senility but also the madness that will soon overcome him.

edmund

Edmund is the Earl of Gloucester's second son, having been born about a year after his older brother Edgar. (Edmund says that his birth 'lags' behind that of Edgar by 'twelve or fourteen' months or 'moonshines'). (1.2.5-6)

Edmund is what was known as an 'illegitimate' child because Gloucester and Edmund's mother weren't married. Edmund's mother, it seems, was a prostitute that Gloucester slept with and accidentally got pregnant. Gloucester crudely refers to this in Act 1 Scene 1, describing Edmund as a 'whoreson'. (1.1.17)

Gloucester regards Edmund as a source of shame. Gloucester, it seems, only reluctantly acknowledges Edmund as his son. And doing so, he says, has often caused him embarrassment in the past: 'I have so often blushed to acknowledge him'. (1.1.7-8) Gloucester, no doubt, views Edmund as a reminder of his own misdeeds, of how he betrayed his wife by sleeping with a prostitute.

Edmund, at the beginning of the play, has just returned to Britain after an absence of ten years: 'He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again'. (1.1.25) We never learn where he was or what he was doing. It seems, however, that Gloucester sent Edmund abroad in order to get his embarrassing illegitimate son out of the way. And Gloucester stresses that Edmund will soon be sent overseas again.

Edmund, much to his chagrin, is not in line to inherit any of his father's lands and titles: Law and custom dictate that Edgar, as eldest son, will inherit Gloucester's title and the vast bulk of his estates. Edmund, as a second son, would stand to inherit relatively little of his father's wealth.

But to make matters worse Edmund's status as an illegitimate child makes him incapable of inheritance. For such 'bastards', according to custom and tradition, had no right to any of their parents' property. Small wonder, then, that Edmund describes custom and tradition as a 'plague'. (1.2.3)



edmund

OCCUPATION:

Earl's illegitimate son

RELATIONSHIPS:

Edgar (half-brother), Gloucester (father)

TALENTS:

Manipulation, deceit

Edmund, however, isn't prepared to accept the fate that society has in store for him. He isn't prepared to spend the rest of his days as the landless, penniless bastard son of Gloucester. Nor is he prepared to oblige his father by conveniently disappearing abroad once more.

Instead, he sets out to plot and scheme his way up the ladder of the British state. And in his plotting he shows himself to be utterly ruthless. He will destroy anyone or anything that stands in his way, including members of his own family.

Edmund, we note, has no assets of his own. He possesses no lands, administers no castles and commands no armies. His status as Gloucester's illegitimate son makes him little better than a peasant in the eyes of the aristocrats that run British society.

He must therefore rely on his wits to advance his cause: 'Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit'. (1.2.146) His cleverness or 'invention' will have to 'thrive' if he is to advance within the kingdom's power structure. (1.2.19) He is convinced, however, that such advancement will be his, that he will prosper and that his status within the kingdom will increase: 'I grow, I prosper'. (1.2.21)

EDMUND'S TIMELINE

1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.3
Appears					Appears		
2.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7
			Appears			Appears	
4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	5.1
	Appears						Appears
5.2	5.3	Dies					
	Dies						

KEY

- Appears
- Dies

Scheme 1. The Forged Letter

Edmund's initial goal is to replace Edgar as Gloucester's heir. He wants to inherit the land that, according to custom, should go to his elder legitimate brother: 'Well then, / Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land'. (1.2.15-16)

To accomplish this he forges a letter that seems to be from his brother Edgar. But in reality Edmund has written the letter himself, mimicking his brother's handwriting.

- Edgar, in the letter, seems to be saying that he's had enough of living under his father's thumb, of living in his father's house and following his father's tyrannical rules. (1.2.43-45)
- Edgar seems to suggest that he wants his inheritance now, rather than waiting until Gloucester is dead.
- Edgar, therefore, seems to be planning to murder his father. (1.2.47-48)
- Edgar seems to ask Edmund to join in this plot, offering Edmund half their father's 'revenue' if he does so: 'Come to me, that of this I may speak more'. (1.2.46-47)

Two things must happen if Edmund is to replace Edgar as Gloucester's heir. First, he must get Edgar out of the way. Second, he must win Gloucester's favour so that Gloucester has him legally declared legitimate: 'Edmund the base shall to th' legitimate'. (20) The forged letter serves both these aims.

It discredits Edgar, depicting him as conspiring to murder his own father. Meanwhile, Edmund, as the discoverer of this alleged 'conspiracy' is bound to win Gloucester's favour.

Edmund, we realise, is gifted in the arts of deception and manipulation. He uses feigned reluctance and reverse psychology to persuade Gloucester that the letter's contents might be true, preying on Gloucester's worries and insecurities as he does so. A fuller description of this process can be found in the scene analysis for Act 1 Scene 2.

Edmund's ruthlessness comes across when he declares his intention to cynically exploit what he describes as his father's 'credulous' or gullible nature. (1.2.143) Edmund, we quickly sense, is the kind of cold-blooded operator who will exploit the weaknesses, or perceived weaknesses, of anyone that stands in his way.

Edmund's first scheme, then, meets with success. By the end of their conversation Gloucester is convinced – or almost convinced – that the letter's contents reflect reality and that his beloved son Edgar is conspiring against him. And Edmund, as discoverer of this apparent conspiracy, has begun to meet with his father's favour: 'Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing'. (1.2.93-94)