



American Players Theatre  
Presents



William Shakespeare's  
**KING LEAR**  
**2016 STUDY GUIDE**

American Players Theatre / PO Box 819 / Spring Green, WI 53588  
[www.americanplayers.org](http://www.americanplayers.org)

***KING LEAR* BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

**2016 STUDY GUIDE**

Cover photo: Eric Parks, James Ridge and Jonathan Smoots. Photo by Liz Lauren.

All photos by Carissa Dixon & Liz Lauren.

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**If you have any questions or comments regarding the exercises or the information within this study guide, please contact Emily Beck, Education Coordinator, at 608-588-9207, or [ebeck@americanplayers.org](mailto:ebeck@americanplayers.org).**

# Who's Who in *King Lear*

Character descriptions from *The Essential Shakespeare Handbook*



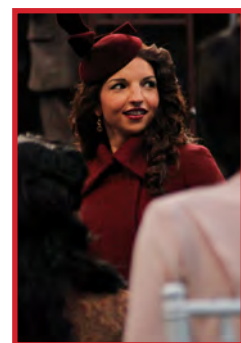
**Lear, King of Britain (Jonathan Smoots)**  
King of Britain, he surrenders his crown to enjoy old age in tranquility, but instead is thrust into a turbulent world to ask; Who is it that can tell me who I am?" He banishes his only true daughter, is abused by his other two and stripped of his entourage.

**Duchess of Kent (Great Oglesby) (Typically the Earl of Kent)** Later disguised as "Caius," she remains loyal to Lear after being banished from Lear's court for defending Cordelia. She continues to serve Lear during his madness.



**Duke of Gloucester (James Ridge)**  
He claims to adore his illegitimate son, Edmund, but is betrayed by him and redeemed by his legitimate son, Edgar, who he banished.

**Goneril, daughter to Lear (Laura Rook)**  
Lear's eldest daughter and Albany's wife, she lusts for Edmund and hopes he will replace her husband.



**Regan, daughter to Lear (Kelsey Brennan)**  
Lear's second daughter and Cornwall's wife, she also lusts for Edmund and rejoices in her husband's death, making her available for remarriage.

**Cordelia, daughter to Lear (Melisa Pereyra)**  
Lear's youngest daughter, she says what she feels rather than what she ought to say, and is stripped of her dowry and banished. She returns with the French army to defend and heal her father.



**Duke of Albany, Goneril's husband (Cedric Mays)**  
Husband to Goneril, he believes Lear has been wronged and eventually opposes his wife's behavior.

**Duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband (Bobby Bowman)**  
Husband to Regan, he blinds Gloucester.



# Who's Who in *King Lear*



## **Duke of Burgundy (William Bolz)**

Suitor to Cordelia until she's disowned. Then he gives up his pursuit.

## **King of France, suitor to Cordelia (Ninos Baba)**

Suitor to Cordelia, he marries her even after Lear strips her of her dowry.



## **Edmund (Marcus Truschinski)**

Bastard son of Gloucester, he vows himself a servant to the laws of Nature. He sets up his brother Edmund, who is banished, and woos both Goneril and Regan.

## **Edgar (Eric Parks)**

Gloucester's legitimate son, after he's banished he disguises himself as "Poor Tom" to avoid capture.



## **Fool, in service to Lear (Cristina Panfilio)**

Lear's Fool, she tells her master "I am a fool; thou art nothing." Devoted to Lear, she always tells him the truth

## **Oswald (Christopher Sheard)**

Goneril's steward, he is insolent to Lear and provokes bad feelings in Goneril's household.



# About the Play



At the beginning of the play, *King Lear*, the aging king of Britain, has made a decision to step down from the throne and divide his kingdom evenly among his three daughters. But first, he subjects his daughters to a test, asking each to express how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan, Lear's older daughters, answer their father's question with insincere flattery. But Cordelia, Lear's youngest and favorite daughter, remains silent. When Lear demands that she answer, Cordelia tells him that she has no words to describe how much she loves her father – that she loves him no more than her station, and that she must save some of her love for her future husband and children.

Lear is not at all happy with this answer, and flies into a rage, disowning Cordelia and splitting his kingdom between Goneril and Regan. The Duchess of Kent, a loyal follower of Lear, admonishes him for his treatment of Cordelia. Lear banishes Kent for her "betrayal." Out of love for her king, Kent decides to ignore her banishment and remain in England.

The King of France, one of the men who has been trying to win Cordelia's hand, says that he still wants to marry her even without her land, and she accompanies him to France.

Things go sour for Lear and his remaining daughters very quickly. First, he takes 100 men and moves into Goneril's home (which you have to admit would be a little disruptive to the household). After an altercation with Goneril's servant, Oswald, Goneril tells Lear to fire 50 of his men, or go live at Regan's house. Lear leaves, embarrassed and angry. However, Regan is not any happier to see her father, and tells him he can stay with her, but he has to release 25 more of his men. Furious, and unable to believe that his daughters are treating him in what he feels is a disrespectful manner, he flees his daughters' houses to wander on a heath during a great thunderstorm, accompanied by his Fool and (unbeknownst to him) by Kent, who is now disguised as a commoner. His sanity begins to slip.

Meanwhile Gloucester, an nobleman, is having some family trouble of his own. His illegitimate son, Edmund, tricks him into believing that his legitimate son, Edgar, is trying to kill him. Fleeing the manhunt that his father has set for him, Edgar disguises himself as a crazy beggar and calls himself "Poor Tom." Like Lear, he heads out onto the heath.

When the loyal Gloucester realizes that Lear's daughters have turned against their father, he decides to help Lear in spite of the danger. Upon discovering that Gloucester is trying to help Lear, Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, accuse him of treason, blind him, and turn him out to wander the countryside (which is all pretty horrific). Edgar, still disguised as "Poor Tom" finds him there, and leads his blind father toward the city of Dover, where Lear is also dwelling in the streets.

But Dover is no peaceful harbor. A French army lands as part of an invasion led by Cordelia, who is trying to save her father. Gloucester's illegitimate son Edmund has become romantically entangled with both Regan and Goneril, while Goneril's husband, the Duke of Albany, is increasingly sympathetic to Lear's cause. So Goneril and Edmund conspire to kill him.

Gloucester has reached the end of his rope, and attempts to commit suicide. In order to save him, Edgar (still disguised as Poor Tom) pretends to lead him off a cliff, whereupon Gloucester passes out. When he comes to, Edgar (no longer disguised as Poor Tom, and acting sane again, but still not telling his father who he is) tells Gloucester that he watched him fall from a cliff and it's a miracle that he's still alive. Gloucester believes the gods have decided that he should live, and gives up his suicidal tendencies.

Back in Dover, the English troops, led by the deceitful Edmund, have reached the city and quickly defeat the French army. Lear and Cordelia are captured.

Edgar reaches the city as well, and duels with and kills his half-brother, Edmund. Before dying, Edmund has a change of heart, and tells the group that he has arranged for Cordelia's murder, but they can save her if they hurry.

Edgar then sadly declares that when he finally revealed his true identity to Gloucester, the shock and joy of the moment killed him. Lear's family is not faring much better – it seems that Goneril has poisoned Regan out of jealousy over Edmund, and then kills herself when her treachery was revealed to her husband.

Edmund's warning has come too late, and Cordelia has been executed in prison. Lear, carrying the body of his youngest and favorite daughter, dies of grief. Albany, Edgar and the elderly Kent (who claims that now that she has no king to care for, she'll be dying soon, as well) are left to rebuild of the country under a cloud of sorrow and regret.



# American Players Theatre's King Lear



In APT's 2016 production, the royal unravelling begins with a press conference.

*King Lear* is widely considered Shakespeare's greatest play, and even one of the greatest plays in the English language. It's on the long side for Shakespeare, at 3,499 lines (somewhat shorter than Shakespeare's longest play, *Hamlet*, which weighs in at 4,024 lines). *Lear's* rich language (75% of the play is in verse) and exploration of family relationships makes it beautiful and heartbreaking, as well as relatable. It's a play that changes meaning as we gain new life experiences. So students' takeaways and sympathies will likely be different from what resonates with them as adults, and from what might resonate with their teachers.

Staging an iconic play like *King Lear* is challenging in the best possible way. It has undergone many productions, both on stage and on film, including Peter Brook's 1971

film based on the groundbreaking stage production at the Royal Shakespeare Company and Akira Kurasawa's acclaimed 1985 film *Ran* which combines *Lear* with legends of a real-life Japanese warlord.

## A Modern Telling

For APT's production, director William Brown chose to set the play in modern times. He and his artistic partners, including scenic, sound costume designers (along with many assistants and artisans) created a world that feels very like what a royal family would look like today. As William says in his director's notes, "What astounds me about *King Lear* is how psychologically adept, how truthful, how *modern* it is." In other words, it lends itself to being set in contemporary times because the same issues continue to take place in our society – both in families and in politics. And Melisa Pereyra, who plays Cordelia in this production, calls it "a modern day *Game of Thrones*."

Changing the play to modern dress helps illustrate that the ego and cruelty; loyalty and love that are at the very soul of this play still apply to today's world. Jonathan Smoots, who plays Lear in this production, says, "Modern dress will prevent audience members from sitting back and imagining that this story of cruelty, selfishness and a consequently imploding family can be relegated to some safely distant past. God knows in our political climate today, the ugly politics in this play do not seem remote at all."

## The Royal Family

That cruelty and selfishness Jonathan mentions comes up pretty quickly. The play has barely begun when Lear asks his daughters to describe how much they love him. When preparing for the play, Director William Brown wanted to make sure that this family began the journey as any family that's constantly in the public eye would. That is, the two older sisters - Goneril (played by Laura Rook) and Regan (played by Kelsey Brennan) know how to play the political game, and give their father flowery answers that will play well for the people attending the King's press conference. But Cordelia says that she loves him no more than is appropriate. As you most likely know by now, that doesn't play well with the King. Melisa says she doesn't think Cordelia was trying to push her father's buttons. "I am not a political human being in the play, at least in the very beginning," says Melisa. "And the way that I handle politics is with truth. I think it resonates on so many different levels. The final line of the play is 'speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.' And I think that's Cordelia's thesis statement from the very beginning of the play, and that, unfortunately, has dire consequences for her."



Lear's daughters are shocked, but some are more upset than others.

Jonathan agrees that Cordelia is being honest (though he added “It’s funny that Cordelia doesn’t read the situation with more sophistication. But she’s just being true to her own beliefs. And I shouldn’t fault her for that...But I do.”)

He also believes that Lear massively overreacts. But maybe that shouldn’t be so unexpected coming from a person in a position of ultimate power, in the very public setting of a press conference (at least in APT’s production). Jonathan says “She was my favorite daughter, and I thought she was going to take care of me in my old age. And I think I was so hurt and stunned by her response, and her stubbornness – I wonder who she gets that from? – and then to be so

humiliated in public adds another layer to it. I know how that can ramp up emotion really quickly. I have a theory that all anger is born out of hurt feelings. I think that people always get angry because they’re hurt or diminished in some way.”

### The Fool

While we’re on the topic of honesty, the Fool (played by Cristina Panfilio) is the voice of honesty for Lear after Cordelia has been banished. She has to translate her truth into songs and riddles, maybe because that’s the only way for Lear to safely hear it. Jonathan says of the Fool: “Flattery was a dirty word in Shakespeare’s time. It was one of the worst things you could be. We would call it a “suck up”. And she is the anti-flatterer. And in this production she also serves as a surrogate daughter. She even says I wish I could lie. And I say if you lie, and you’ll be whipped. Because I need her to keep telling me the truth. Because she’s the one person I can count on.”

### The Duchess of Kent

Kent (in APT’s production, the Duchess of Kent, played by Greta Oglesby) is one of the characters hardest hit by how quickly the first scene spins out of control. In fact, she’s banished so quickly, it may be hard to even determine what her relationship to Lear is. Jonathan says that she’s his best friend and confidante, and banishing her is a huge mistake not just personally but politically.

“You get the idea that they’re very close,” says Jonathan. “So he’s having a pretty bad day - first he banishes his favorite daughter, and then he banishes his best friend and closest political ally. But Kent stays supremely loyal, even disguising herself to stay close to him.”

### Lear

Lear himself is a complex, nuanced character that’s been played as many ways as there are productions of the play. Jonathan says he watched nine different film versions of *King Lear* in preparation for the role. But in the end, he had to make the character his own. So here’s a little about the method to Lear’s madness (so to speak) straight from Jonathan Smoots.

**APT:** How did watching all those *King Lear* films affect your interpretation of Lear?

**Jonathan Smoots:** It was entirely liberating. Because I saw so many different attacks and tactics, that I knew I could do anything under the sun. I could try anything. And I did. We just kind of went at it. And I didn’t have any preconceptions of how I



The Duchess of Kent disguises herself as “Caius” to stay near the King.





Lear engages with the storm.

was going to play it. Lear is sometimes played as a military man. And I'm glad we didn't do it that way. He's commander-in-chief, but nothing about him says military to me. And Bill (Director William Brown) agreed.

**APT:** Is Lear's behavior due to some illness, mental or otherwise?

**JS:** I didn't want to play around with the notion of Alzheimer's or dementia. I don't think he's diseased at all. Though late in the game we added this notion of possibly having a heart problem. Even though we're taking this at face value, there's got to be a reason he wants to retire. And Bill and I were talking and I says what if he'd just had a physical and he says you have the beginnings of heart failure? So we sort of folded that in, and that helps with moments of, he's fuming, and suddenly he regroups; those moments of transition. Like 'Oh I don't feel good. Ok. Take it easy. Calm down.' To get himself under control both emotionally *and* physically."

**APT:** How do you memorize your lines. It's a lot of lines!

**JS:** I took an hour every day and just read the part. And anybody could do it. If you took your favorite speech from *King Lear* and read it five times every day, in three or four weeks you'll be able to recite it. But I'm probably as well memorized for this play as I've been for anything.

**APT:** What happens to Lear in the storm scene?

**JS:** That's interesting, because we cut a bit of the storm scene that substantially changes what happens in the storm scene. We cut the part where Lear suddenly turns on the storm; where in the original version he says to the storm, 'What am I saying? You're fighting me. You're my enemy.' And without that part of the dialogue, I'm actually in cahoots with the storm. I'm calling on the storm to punish the world for all the hatefulness and horror of mankind. Just keep raining until everything's gone. And I think the storm is a cleansing, purging force. Especially without that turn against it that's originally in the play.

So I really just get out all of my anger. And then I sit down and say no, 'I will be the pattern of all patience.' I will say nothing. But it's the beginning of his descent into madness, I think. He purges his anger, and he puts his mind into a more open, contemplative, thoughtful place where he starts trying to figure out where to go from here. And the next time you see him he says I'll pray. I'll sleep. And then the next thing he says is that he was a bad king because he didn't give enough thought to the poor. So he's already beginning his reformation. And the storm scene is the catalyst for that.

**APT:** Why does Lear attach to Poor Tom so quickly?

**JS:** Poor Tom comes in and Lear lets himself go. And I think essentially he lets himself drift into madness. It's almost like a semi-conscious deliberate act. He's putting his mind into kind of a safe place. And still his subconscious is trying to figure this all out. Like dreaming. And he comes out if it before the end, but then drifts back into it before the end. He knows he's done. Cordelia is gone. All his fault. And he wants to drift, and he drifts away with that.

*King Lear* is a complex play. It's layered with the best and worst of human actions and reactions. And the most eye-opening thing about it may be how easily people go from loving family to murderous enemies and, in some cases, back to loving family. As Director William Brown concludes "This is an epic tale, some of it nearly unbearable in its dark humanity. But the great beauty of this play, what brings me to tears, is the way love still finds a toehold."



A costume rendering of Lear by Designer Rachel Anne Healy.

### The Production Process and Designing for the Outdoors

At APT, the productions begin more than a year in advance with directors discussing the plays with APT staff and designers. Ideas evolve during collaborative meetings where the people involved balance what they want to do with what is possible.

As King Lear’s director, William Brown notes: “A good play is a good play. But there is a certain amount of perspective to directing outdoors,” William says. “The architecture has to be a little harder outside. And I’m not just saying the sets and costumes. That says, Shakespeare was originally done outside at the Globe, so it feels right. But Americans love Shakespeare outdoors. And Shakespeare does so much of the heavy lifting, you know? That language can make you believe you’re anywhere, any time.”

Nathan Stuber, APT’s Assistant Technical Director, is an expert in the architecture of outdoor design that William Brown mentioned. According to Nate, designing and building for an outdoor stage can be complicated. “The biggest challenge is obviously the weather, as far as keeping things waterproof (water makes wood expand and contract and makes metal rust), so sometimes you have to overbuild. A lot of the time, the designs might not balance because at the matinees you have to consider the bright light coming down on the set, so anything white or light-colored can blind the audience or the actors. At the same time, you don’t want a lot of black things up there that absorb heat. So, it’s a delicate process.”

Weather plays a role in costume design, too. APT has heat and cold plans that include pockets for ice and heat packs built into the costumes, as well as layers that can be shed or added depending on the weather. But for all the thought that goes into how everything functions, it’s incredibly important that the costumes are also visually appealing, and serve their purpose within the story.

### Scenic and Costume Design

All of these ideas and technical realities come together to influence the design. But how does it all work?

*King Lear*’s artistic crew made the decision to set this production in contemporary times. In addition to bringing new and different meaning to some of the language, it also has an effect on the costume design. After extensive research on the looks they were hoping to achieve (much of the research on the British Royal Family), Costume Designer Rachel Anne Healy and Assistant Costume Designer Ren LaDassor spent a lot of time shopping for clothes, and returning the ones that didn’t quite fit with their vision. APT sometimes buys or rents costumes from other theaters, and Rachel and Ren have designed some glorious costumes for past productions. With *King Lear*, they’ve proved that they’re equally effective shoppers, though plenty of the costumes were Rachel’s original design, and were built by the artisans in APT’s Costume Shop. That said, you may see some of the dresses the princesses are wearing on stage at regional clothing stores.

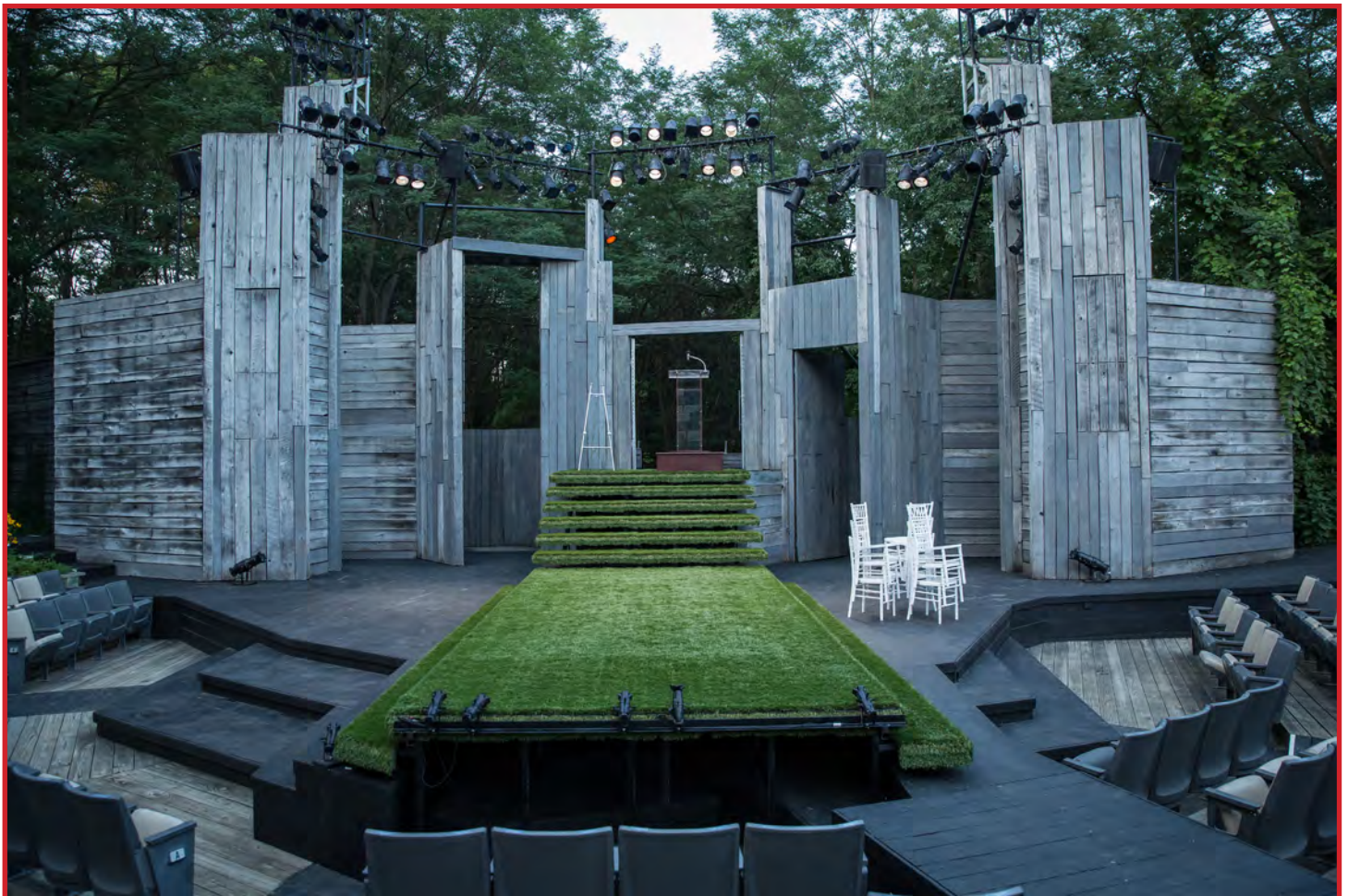


An overhead view of the stage model, designed by Kevin Depinet.

Jonathan says that acting in contemporized classics brings new challenges, as well as new freedoms. When you set a Shakespeare in modern dress, you as the actor need to embrace that world. Even though certain things may seem a little strange. Like why are you sending a letter when you could send a text, you know?” But maybe even that is not so strange. As Melisa notes, maybe electronic correspondence isn’t the most secure way to get information out, and there’s precedent for it even now. “The Supreme Court still hands down their decisions on paper,” Melisa commented. ‘And then there’s the “running of the interns’ to get the decision to the press.”

In the end, choosing to shift the time period to contemporary gives the actors, the artistic staff and even the audience a new freedom, and a new read on a play that’s been around for centuries. Jonathan says, “It gives you a kind of a freedom to go places that you wouldn’t expect to go. It’s still set in England, but it’s fresh and new. And maybe some members of our audience will prefer it in traditional dress, but what does that mean, really? When Shakespeare produced his plays they were wearing Elizabethan costumes no matter what era. If it was *Julius Caesar*, they were wearing Elizabethan costumes with a sash over it to represent Rome.”

It would be remiss to not talk a little about that amazing set. Director William Brown has a group of artists that he regularly works with (Costume Designer Rachel Anne Healy, Scenic Designer Kevin Depinet and Sound Designer/Composer Andrew Hansen), and they have outdone themselves with this design. Jonathan says of the set, “The set design is pretty incredible. Kevin has done something that nobody’s ever done up there before. We call the upper level of the stage “the bridge,” and there’s stairs coming off the bridge. Which we do fairly frequently. But at the bottom of that staircase there’s a 12-foot ramp covered in grass that goes out almost over the first row in the audience. And it’s this grand, long-playing space that I’ve really enjoyed, it’s like a playground



# King Lear Photo Summary

1. The play begins with a gathering of the British elite. King Lear is announcing that he is about to retire and leave 1/3 of his kingdom to each of his daughters. But he asks each of them to first tell him how much they love him, and claims the one who loves him most will get the best area of the kingdom.



Tell me, my daughters, since now we will divest us both of rule,  
interest of territory, cares of state,  
which of you shall we say doth love us most?  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
where nature doth with merit challenge.

- Lear, Act I scene 1

3. Lear is furious and banishes Cordelia from England without a dowry. The King of France offers to marry her even so, and they depart. Lear also banishes his good friend the Duchess of Kent for defending Cordelia.



2. His older daughters, Goneril and Regan, stand and give him flowery answers about how they love him more than anyone else on earth. But his youngest (and favorite) daughter, Cordelia, tells him she loves him no more than her station, and that she must save some of her love for her future husband.



Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter; dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty; beyond what can be valued, rich or rare; No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour; As much as child e'er loved, or father found; A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable; Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

- Goneril, Act I, scene 1



Peace, Kent! Come not between the dragon and his wrath. I loved her most, and thought to set my rest on her kind nursery. Hence, and avoid my sight! So be my grave my peace, as here I give her father's heart from her!

- Lear, Act I scene 1

4. The Earl of Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund, (who he claims to love as much as his son Edgar, but his actions don't seem to follow suit) plots the downfall of his father and brother and seize the family estate.



Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land: Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund as to the legitimate: fine word, legitimate! Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed, and my invention thrive, Edmund the base shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper: Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

- Edmund, Act I scene 2

5. Kent returns, now disguised as a commoner named Caius, so that she can keep an eye on Lear without his realizing.



If but as well I other accents borrow, that can my speech defuse, my good intent may carry through itself to that full issue for which I razed my likeness. Now, banish'd Kent, If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd, So may it come, thy master, whom thou lovest, Shall find thee full of labours.

- Kent, Act I scene 4

6. Accompanied by 100 knights, Lear first goes to Goneril and her husband, Albany's home. After an altercation with Goneril's servant, Oswald, she becomes angry and tells him he must fire half his men or leave. He says horrible things to her, and leaves to go live with Regan and her husband, Cornwall.



Blasts and fogs upon thee! The untented woundings of a father's curse pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes, bewep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out, and cast you, with the waters that you lose, to temper clay. Yea, it is come to this? Let it be so: yet have I left a daughter, who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable: When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails she'll flay thy wolfish visage. Thou shalt find that I'll resume the shape which thou dost think I have cast off for ever: thou shalt, I warrant thee.

- Lear Act I scene 4



7. Edmund tricks Edgar into fleeing and frames him for a murder plot against their father, Gloucester. Gloucester exiles Edgar.

My father watches: O sir, fly this place;  
 Intelligence is given where you are hid;  
 You have now the good advantage of the night:  
 Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?  
 He's coming hither: now, i' the night, i' the haste,  
 And Regan with him: have you nothing said  
 Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?  
 Advise yourself.

- Edmund, Act II scene 1

8. Oswald runs into Kent (disguised as Caius) and they fight. Cornwall puts Kent in stocks at Gloucester's home, even though he knows she serves the king, and that this is a huge insult to Lear.

Draw, you rascal: you come with letters against the king; and take vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father: draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado your shanks: draw, you rascal; come your ways.

- Kent (Caius), Act II scene 2



9. Nearby, Edgar disguises himself as a lunatic beggar named Poor Tom to avoid capture.



The country gives me proof and precedent of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices, strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary; And with this horrible object, from low farms, poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills, sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers, enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod! poor Tom! that's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.

- Edgar, Act II scene 3

10. After Lear discovers that Regan isn't at home, he arrives at Gloucester's castle and finds Kent in stocks. He is furious, and more furious still because Regan refuses to even see him.



Deny to speak with me? They are sick?  
They are weary? They have travell'd all the  
night? Mere fetches; The images of revolt  
and flying off. Fetch me a better answer.

Act II scene 4

11. Regan, who is a guest of Gloucester's, finally consents to see her father, and he complains to her about Goneril. Goneril arrives herself, and the two daughters gang up on him, with Regan saying he only needs 25 knights, and then questioning why he needs any knights at all?



Goneril: What need you five and  
twenty, ten, or five, to follow in a  
house where twice so many have a  
command to tend you?

Regan: What need one?  
Act II scene 4

12. Lear departs in a fury as a storm begins to rage. Gloucester appears to tell Regan of her father's departure and she insists he bar the doors against him to teach him a lesson.

Gloucester: Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak  
winds do sorely ruffle; for many miles a bout there's  
scarce a bush.

Regan: O, sir, to wilful men, the injuries that they  
themselves procure must be their schoolmasters. Shut  
up your doors: He is attended with a desperate train;  
And what they may incense him to, being apt  
To have his ear abused, wisdom bids fear.

Act II scene 4





13. Kent learns Lear is out in the storm, and that the Cordelia and the King of France are preparing to wage war against England. Meanwhile, Lear asks the storm to destroy his enemies and to fill the world with water, ending everything.

❖ Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks! You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts, singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world! Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once, that make ingrateful man!

- Lear Act III scene 2

14. As Lear begins to go mad, the Fool sings a prophesy about how everything will change.

I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:  
 When priests are more in word than matter;  
 When brewers mar their malt with water;  
 When nobles are their tailors' tutors;  
 No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;  
 When every case in law is right;  
 No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;  
 When slanders do not live in tongues;  
 Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;  
 When usurers tell their gold i' the field;  
 And bawds and whores do churches build;  
 Then shall the realm of Albion  
 Come to great confusion:  
 Then comes the time, who lives to see't,  
 That going shall be used with feet.  
 This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time.

- The Fool, Act III scene 2



15. Gloucester, still believing Edmund is his loyal son, confides that he received a letter explaining that Lear was wronged and that France is preparing for war. Edmund plans to use the letter to destroy Gloucester.

❖ This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke instantly know; and of that letter too: This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me that which my father loses; no less than all: The younger rises when the old doth fall.

- Edmund, Act III scene 3







16. Still in the storm, Lear laments that he was a bad king for not taking better care of the poor. So when he encounters Edgar disguised as Poor Tom, he bonds with him against the wishes of the Fool and Kent.

O, I have ta'en  
 Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;  
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,  
 And show the heavens more just.  
 - Lear Act III scene 4

17. Gloucester finds the King with the Fool and his disguised compatriots, and wonders why he's keeping such company. He leads them to shelter and explains that Regan and Goneril are plotting against him, but that he'll be safe in nearby Dover.

His daughters seek his death: ah, that good Kent!  
 He said it would be thus, poor banish'd man!  
 Thou say'st the king grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend,  
 I am almost mad myself.  
 - Gloucester, Act III scene 4



18. Gloucester returns home to confront Regan and Cornwall and avenge the king. But they gouge out his eyes and turn him out, blind, into the elements. His former servants plan to help him survive. Cornwall is stabbed by a guard who was defending Gloucester and dies,

Regan: Wherefore to Dover, sir?  
 Gloucester: Because I would not see thy cruel nails pluck  
 out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister in his anointed  
 flesh stick boarish fangs. The sea, with such a storm as his  
 bare head In hell-black night endured, would have buoy'd  
 up, and quench'd the stelled fires: Yet, poor old heart, he  
 help the heavens to rain. If wolves had at thy gate howl'd  
 that stern time, thou shouldst have said 'Good porter,  
 turn the key;' All cruels else subscribed: but I shall see the  
 winged vengeance overtake such children.

Act III scene 7



19. Edgar discovers his blinded father and, still disguised as Poor Tom, learns what happened and that his father intends to commit suicide. He asks "Poor Tom" to lead him to the edge of a cliff so he can jump.

❖ But who comes here?  
 My father, poorly led? World, world, O world!  
 But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,  
 Lie would not yield to age.  
 - Edgar, Act IV scene 1

20. Goneril's husband, Albany, has also had a change of heart, and disagrees with his wife's scheming. Goneril says he's weak, but when he receives word of Gloucester's blinding, Albany vows to avenge him.

❖ Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame,  
 be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness to let  
 these hands obey my blood, they are apt enough to  
 dislocate and tear thy flesh and bones: howe'er thou  
 art a fiend, a woman's shape doth shield thee.  
 - Albany, Act IV scene 2



21. Meanwhile, Cordelia is searching for her father to try to help him. As the English troops advance, she says she returns to England for the love of her father.



❖ O dear father, it is thy business that I go  
 about; therefore great France my  
 mourning and important tears hath pitied.  
 No blown ambition doth our arms incite,  
 But love, dear love, and our aged father's  
 right: Soon may I hear and see him!  
 - Cordelia, Act IV scene 4



22. Oswald, who is carrying a love letter to Edmund from Goneril, is intercepted by Regan, who wants Edmund for herself. She wants her sister to stop pursuing him.

Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you  
 Transport her purposes by word? Belike,  
 ❖ Something--I know not what: I'll love thee much,  
 Let me unseal the letter.  
 - Regan, Act IV scene 5

23. Edgar, still in disguise, leads his father to a heath and pretends it's a cliff. Gloucester prays in preparation for his suicide and throws himself forward, passing out. Edgar then greets his father (still not revealing who he is, but no longer playing the part of Old Tom) says he saw Gloucester jump off the cliff. Gloucester decides the gods must want him to live, and decides not to kill himself.

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,  
 So many fathom down precipitating,  
 Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg; but thou dost breathe;  
 Hast heavy substance; bleed'st not; speak'st; art sound.  
 Ten masts at each make not the altitude  
 Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:  
 Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.  
 - Edgar, Act IV scene 6



24. Lear, now "fantastically dressed with wild flowers" forgives Gloucester his adultery. Cordelia's attendants attempt to bring Lear to her, but he runs off.



Gentleman: O, here he is: lay hand upon  
 him. Sir, your most dear daughter--  
 Lear: No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am  
 even the natural fool of fortune. Use me  
 well; You shall have ransom. Let me have  
 surgeons; I am cut to the brains.  
 Act IV scene 6

25. Cordelia and Lear are finally reunited. Lear recognizes his daughter and asks her to kill him, but she says she forgives him and they reconcile.



26. As war breaks out between France and England, Edgar gives Albany the letter Goneril wrote to Edmund asking for her husband to be murdered.



Pray, do not mock me: I am a very foolish fond old man, fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less; And, to deal plainly, I fear I am not in my perfect mind. methinks I should know you, and know this man; Yet I am doubtful for I am mainly ignorant what place this is; and all the skill

I have remembers not these garments; nor I know not where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me; for, as I am a man, I think this lady to be my child Cordelia.

- Lear, Act IV scene 7



Before you fight the battle, ope this letter. If you have victory, let the trumpet sound or him that brought it: wretched though I seem, I can produce a champion that will prove what is avouched there. If you miscarry, your business of the world hath so an end, and machination ceases. Fortune love you.

- Edgar, Act V scene 2



27. Lear and Cordelia have been captured by England and are POWs. Edmund plans to have them both murdered, starting with Cordelia. Albany wants to have Edmund and Goneril arrested for refusing to turn the prisoners over. Regan feels suddenly ill, and it becomes apparent that Goneril has poisoned her as the next step in their feud over Edmund.

Stay yet; hear reason. Edmund, I arrest thee on capital treason; and, in thine attaint, this gilded serpent or your claim, fair sister, I bar it in the interest of my wife: 'Tis she is sub-contracted to this lord, And I, her husband, contradict your bans. If you will marry, make your loves to me, my lady is bespoken.  
- Albany, Act V scene 3

28. Edgar challenges his half brother to combat. Edgar wins and Goneril, now disgusted with both men, leaves. Edmund, who's been gravely injured, admits to everything and tells his brother and Albany of the plan to murder Cordelia in prison.

I pant for life: some good I mean to do, despite of mine own nature. Quickly send, be brief in it, to the castle; for my writ is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia: Nay, send in time.  
- Edmund, Act V scene 3



29. But it's too late. Lear enters carrying Cordelia's body, and his mind has once again let go. He dies. It's revealed that Gloucester has also died when Edgar revealed himself to him, and that Regan died from the poisoning and Goneril committed suicide. Edgar asks Albany and Kent to rule England with him, but Kent says she must follow her king into death, leaving Edgar to make sad plans for the future.



The weight of this sad time we must obey;  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young shall never see so much,  
nor live so long.  
- Edgar, Act V scene 3

# Exercises & Activities

APT education exercises are designed as follow-ups and introductions to the themes and ideas of the play. Character introductions and plot summaries can be found easily on sites such as The Folger Theatre, The RSC, The Restored Globe, The Utah and Oregon Shakespeare Festivals, and dozens of others. Rather than teaching the play specifically (characters and plot), APT Education looks to craft experiences (physical and verbal) that help facilitate a classroom's exploration of the ideas within the play. We welcome your feedback as we continue to explore what APT has have to offer and how we can best support our educators.

## King Lear Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. Being that Edmund was Gloucester's illegitimate son and cut off from legal inheritance, was he justified in taking the measures he took to achieve what he wanted? Would he have been justified in taking those actions if he had not been related to Gloucester?
2. Lear put himself into the care of his children after his "retirement". He disagreed with them on the quality of his care and the attention he received. Who has the final word when parents are in the care of their adult children?
3. Madness is often a theme in literature when "good" characters are confronted with stark truths. Having been accused of crimes and abandoned by his father, hunted by the authorities; Edgar grimes his face with filth and changes his name. How far into madness does he fall? Fully? Just at the edge? In and out? Just faking it as a disguise?
4. Lear curses his daughter Goneril that she may be barren or if she does produce children, that they be children of spleen. What does it mean for one person to curse another? What is the function/benefit of a curse both for the receiver and the giver? What does it mean for a father to curse a child?

### **Create your own curse**

Following Lear's model, create a parallel curse for an athlete, a gamer, an ex-, a teacher, or a sibling.

### **What Does Truth Wear**

"Plate sin with gold", Lear says at one point. This exercise focuses on the power of personification. Various themes will be personified and 'clothed' and then compared and discussed in class.

1. Break into small groups
2. Ask the class what personification means, how it's used, and why it's used.
3. From the "Fashion Quotations" sheet, choose three or four quotes that members of the group agree with.
4. Collect three or four quotes from King Lear that touch on clothing.
5. Choose one quote from King Lear and discuss its meaning(s).
6. Does this meaning stand true in today's world? Members of the group may disagree on interpretations. No consensus is needed.
7. Each group will now choose a theme. Possible themes include: Truth, Fear, Family, Power, Revenge, Madness, etc.
8. Given the previous discussions of fashion and the play's language about fashion, each group will now personify a theme. Detail is important.
9. Here are some questions to provoke discussion. As these questions are presented, the teacher can model the process with a secondary or tertiary theme:

What gender is your theme? Why that gender? If it doesn't matter, why doesn't it matter?

How old does your theme look? Not the actual age on the driver's license but a stranger looking at them would guess their age to be what? Why not ten years younger or twenty years older?

Hairstyle?

What kind of shoes does your theme wear and why? Sandals, bare feet, boots, etc.

What is the outfit as a whole?

Is this a new outfit (they never wear the same thing twice) or is it the same outfit they wear day in and day out? Is it clean? Who cleans it? Themselves or do they have someone else do it for them?

Does your theme wear glasses? Are they pierced? Where? Why?

Does your theme have a tattoo? Can it be seen or is it hidden?

Where does your theme eat lunch? Do they make it at home, eat at the drive-thru, sit down at a table with wait staff, five star restaurants only? Are the vegetarian? Why or why not?

Do they have a favorite Netflix show? Why that one? How many times have they seen it?

10. When complete, have each group compare their personification with another.
11. Facilitate an open class discussion on the value of personification, its dangers and over simplifications.
12. How do people who are routinely viewed in the media present themselves? How does their fashion speak for them? Politicians, music stars, and YouTube stars- what themes or ideas do their fashion personify or communicate ?
13. In *King Lear*, Truth, its revelation, and its communication is prevalent throughout the play. In APT's production, how does a character's costume reflect not only who they are but their level of truth?

## King Lear Pre-Show Exercises

### Where Do You Stand

Where Do You Stand is a standard "pre-read" workshop that APT uses for most of its Shakespeare educational offerings. Although the questions vary widely to fit each play and each specific production, the use and format of the workshop remains the same.

In a nutshell-

Place a sign or verbally identify four sections of the classroom. One wall being "I agree", another being "I disagree", a third is "I don't know" and the last is "I'd rather not say." A statement will be presented to the class. After hearing the statement, the class moves and "stands" near the wall that signifies their belief in the statement. As statements progress, the class will find itself dividing into different groups throughout. This serves as both an introduction to the themes and ideas of the play, as well as an opportunity for the teacher to better understand the personal beliefs of each student. A theme like "family" carries a WIDE association within a classroom. Knowing who will be hearing these ideas and how they will be hearing them can help facilitate richer discussions.

The specifics-

When a student “stands by what they believe” they are also agreeing to speak to why they choose to stand there. A simple, “Why do you agree/disagree/idk with that statement” will be asked of them. This is not a drill or an inquisition, but an inquiry into their belief. The teacher should strive at all times to create an atmosphere of listening. Nodding along as a student answers, helps to relieve any defensiveness or judgment they may be feeling- helps, but does not entirely relieve it. If a student does not feel comfortable sharing their belief for whatever reason, they simply stand by the “I’d rather not say” wall. Students standing here will never be asked to comment on a statement.

A student may at any time and for any reason move to a different wall. Although these questions can be asked and responded to while seated without any movement at all, having students stand for what they believe and the opportunity for them to watch the physical shifting of positions that the exercise provides, creates a rich and useful layer of understanding.

All statements will be addressed to the teacher only. This is not a moderated discussion. A student is allowed to speak without comment or rebuttal from other students. A teacher may follow up with more questions for the student, but only as a means to clarify the belief-- no judgment. Depending on the class and the statement, the teacher may need to be ready to prevent a discussion. Discussions can follow after with peers and teachers if a student would like but this exercise serves only to identify where students stand on themes and ideas within the play. Careful- a casual, funny remark can be easily perceived as judgment and leads to shut down all around.

The questions are presented in “a” order and not “the” order. As you become more familiar with the exercise, feel free to rearrange, cut and add to the questions.

- If what is yours is taken from you, you have every right to take it back.
- Real friendship means helping friends even when they say not to.
- If you can’t fight for it, you don’t deserve it.
- You cannot change your destiny.
- There should be a cut off age for old drivers.
- There is an age where you’re too old to fool around.
- Regardless of how you feel about your family, it will be your job to care for them when they are older.
- In love, the biggest gestures mean the most.
- In politics, people who donate the most in time and money deserve the most in return.
- The MOST important goal in life is to help others.
- Parents should give their stuff (cars, house, money) to their kids as soon as they can so the kids can have a better start on life.
- A family must always do its best to help its own.
- A woman has to fight to get what she deserves.
- Telling someone the truth is easy.
- Survival of the fittest.
- Once a child becomes an adult, parents should have no say over their lives.
- Evil people are genetically predisposed to behave that way. It’s not their fault they were born like that.

The next statement is a bit different logistically from the previous ones. You can designate the areas as you see fit- signs, pointing, etc. The next statement, in addition to “I’d rather not say” and “idk”, has six options. The options should be presented right down the list as quickly and clearly as possible.

- Move to what you stand for:
- Me first
- Family first



- Friends first
- Others first
- Country first
- God first
- I don't know
- I'd rather not say

Although APT uses the exercises for pre-reading, it is also a wonderful follow up to the play itself. How were these statements presented in the play? Did they alter or confirm your own beliefs? etc.

## Fashion Quotations

Fashions fade, style is eternal.

YVES SAINT LAURENT, Reader's Digest, volume 118, 1980

Fashion, n. A despot whom the wise ridicule and obey.

AMBROSE BIERCE, The Devil's Dictionary

Do not conceive that fine clothes make fine men any more than fine feathers make fine birds.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, letter to Bushrod Washington, Jan. 15, 1783

We are living in such a troubled world that fashion seems completely irrelevant. Yet ... it's a very, very mysterious thing. Why all of a sudden do people like yellow? Why all of a sudden do people wear combat boots?

DIANE VON FURSTENBERG, Newsweek, Aug. 7, 2006

An air of fashion, which is but a badge of slavery ... proves that the soul has not a strong individual character.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, A Vindication of the Rights of Women

Feminist readings of fashion have often portrayed it as a kind of conspiracy to distract women from the real affairs of society, namely economics and politics. Fashion has been seen as a device for confining women to an inferior social order, largely because it demands an unequal expenditure of time and money by women on activities which do not attract the professional attention and efforts of men. Fashion works to intensify self-absorption and thereby reduces the social, cultural and intellectual horizons of women.

JOANNE FINKELSTEIN, After a Fashion

He who goes against the fashion is himself a slave.

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH, All Trivia

Fashion is one of the great living arts of civilisation and self-decoration one of the fundamental human urges.

JANEY IRONSIDE, A Fashion Alphabet

Fashion is conceived as irrational because it changes constantly, has no content, works as an external decoration, and carries no intellectual elements.

YUNIYA KAWAMURA, Fashion-ology

Fashion never happens at any fixed point in time or space--that is, individuals and groups are never fully fashionable but are always in the process of becoming fashionable or descending into unfashionability, and, in all probability, doing both at the same time.

MICHAEL CARTER, Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes

The fashion wears out more apparel than the man.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, Much Ado About Nothing

In hindsight, my initial love for fashion was about hope and evolving to become the type of woman I wanted to be: strong, confident and feminine. I always loved the idea of dressing up--my wardrobe and how I present myself reflecting how I feel on the inside. That is what I do for other people now. I give women the means to express themselves and be who they are and who they aspire to be, and I think there is a real beauty in this.

RACHEL ROY, Newsweek, Oct. 15, 2007

Ten years before its time, a fashion is indecent; ten years after, it is hideous; but a century after, it is romantic.

JAMES LAVER, attributed, Business Wit & Wisdom

Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear.

OSCAR WILDE, An Ideal Husband

Every generation laughs at the old fashions, but follows religiously the new.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU, Walden

The last person to adopt a ridiculous fashion suffers more derision than the one who first adopted it.

LEWIS F. KORNS, Thoughts

I don't do fashion, I AM fashion.

COCO CHANEL, attributed, The Gospel According to Coco Chanel

The irrational aspect of fashion is very important; fashion provides a field for the expression of fetishistic and magical impulses and beliefs.

ELIZABETH WILSON, "Fashion and Modernity"

Fashion is a state of mind. A spirit, an extension of one's self. Fashion talks, it can be an understated whisper, a high-energy scream or an all knowing wink and a smile. Most of all fashion is about being comfortable with yourself, translating self-esteem into a personal style.

CYNTHIA DURCANIN, What Is Fashion?, PBS.org

The apparel oft proclaims the man.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, Hamlet

A respectable appearance is sufficient to make people more interested in your soul.

KARL LAGERFELD, attributed, Change Your Clothes, Change Your Life

Fashion is a sieve, and money spent on it as dust.

EDWARD COUNSEL, Maxims

“Through tattered clothes great vices do appear”, while “robes and furred gowns hide all.”

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Lear*

The fashion industry is not interested in making women feel better about themselves. Fashion is about making people want something they are unlikely to get ... and any satisfaction achieved is fleeting and faintly disappointing.

HADLEY FREEMAN, *Guardian*, Sep. 9, 2009

Fashion is a tyrant from which nothing frees us. We must suit ourselves to its fantastic tastes. But, being compelled to live under its foolish laws, the wise man is never the first to follow, nor the last to keep them.

ETIENNE PAVILLON, attributed, *Other Men's Minds*

Fashion is the science of appearances, and it inspires one with the desire to seem rather than to be.

E. H. CHAPIN, *Living Words*

We are but a day in this world, and in that day the fashion is changed a thousand times: all seek liberty, yet all deprive themselves of it.

DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Divine Comedy*