Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 1

Summary

The scene opens in King Lear's palace. A conversation between Kent, Gloucester, and Gloucester's son Edmund introduces the play's primary plot: The king is planning to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. The audience also learns that Gloucester has two sons. The older, Edgar, is his legitimate heir, and the younger, Edmund, is illegitimate; however, Gloucester loves both sons equally. This information provides the subplot.

King Lear enters to a fanfare of trumpets, followed by his two sons-in-law — Albany and Cornwall — and his three daughters — Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. Lear announces that he has divided his kingdom into three shares to be given to his daughters as determined by their declarations of love for him. Goneril, as the eldest, speaks first. She tells her father that her love for him is boundless. Regan, as the middle child, speaks next. Her love, she says, is even greater than Goneril's.

Finally, it is Cordelia's turn to express the depth of her love for her royal father. But when queried by Lear, Cordelia replies that she loves him as a daughter should love a father, no more and no less. She reminds her father that she also will owe devotion to a husband when she marries, and therefore cannot honestly tender all her love toward her father. Lear sees Cordelia's reply as rejection; in turn, he disowns Cordelia, saying that she will now be "a stranger to my heart and me" (I.1.114). King Lear then divides his kingdom between Goneril and Regan, giving each an equal share.

Kent interferes by asking Lear to reconsider his rash action. Lear is not swayed, and in anger, he banishes Kent for defending Cordelia and for confronting the king.

At Kent's departure, the King of France and Duke of Burgundy enter, both of whom are suitors for Cordelia's hand in marriage. They are told that Cordelia will not receive a dowry or inheritance from her father. The Duke withdraws his suit, because a wife without a dowry is of no use to him. In contrast, the King of France claims that Cordelia is a prize, even without her share of Lear's kingdom, and announces his intent to marry Cordelia.

Cordelia bids her sisters farewell, and leaves with the King of France. When Goneril and Regan are left alone, the two sisters reveal their plan to discredit the king.

Analysis

The play opens with a scene that introduces most of the primary characters and establishes both the main plot and a subplot. This first scene also is important because it provides the audience with an introduction to the character of Kent before he is banished and before he reappears disguised as Caius in Scene 4.

In the opening conversation, Gloucester speaks of Edmund's illegitimate birth in what can be described aptly as Elizabethan locker-room talk. Although Gloucester loves his illegitimate son Edmund and his legitimate son Edgar equally, Elizabethan society does not regard the two men as equals. Edmund realizes that his chances of a prosperous future are limited because he was born second to Gloucester from an unholy union. Edmund will not receive an equal inheritance under laws of primogeniture, which name the eldest son heir to his father's possessions. Gloucester relates to Kent that Edmund has been away seeking his fortune, but now he has returned — perhaps believing that he can find his fortune at home.

Initially, Lear appears to be a strong ruler, a monarch who has decided to divide his kingdom. Lear's choice will provide one clear benefit: Albany and Cornwall will be in charge of the outlying areas of his kingdom, which have not been easily governed. Lear plans to place Cordelia, with himself as her guest, in the center section. Lear recognizes that he is growing older and explains his decision to divide his kingdom by saying:

'tis our fast intent  
To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we

Unburden'd crawl toward death. (I.1.37-40)

But the one benefit derived from this division creates many problems. By delegating his royal authority to his daughters, Lear creates chaos within his family and his kingdom not unlike the civil distress experienced by Shakespeare's audience. At the time Shakespeare penned *King Lear*, the English had survived years of civil war and division. Thus, Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience would have been horrified at Lear's decision to divide his kingdom. The audience also would have questioned Shakespeare's inclusion of the French suitor, especially since Lear intends for Cordelia and her new husband to oversee the choice center section of his kingdom.

The fear that a foreign king might weaken England (and a Catholic monarch made it worse) would have made Lear's actions seem even more irresponsible to the audience. But Lear is doing more than creating political and social chaos; he is also giving his daughters complete responsibility for his happiness, and he will blame them later when he is not happy.

Moreover, the test that Lear devises to measure his daughters' love is a huge mistake. Lear is depicted as a wise ruler — he has, after all, held the country together successfully for many years. Yet he lacks the common sense or the ability to detect his older daughters' falseness. This flaw in Lear leads the audience to think him either mad or stupid.

The love test is derived from Shakespeare's source and so it is included. Shakespeare's primary source is an anonymous play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, in which the love test is used to trick Cordelia into marriage. Consequently, the test of love is only a device to further the plot, which Shakespeare plucked from his source. It is important to remember that *King Lear* is not historically based, although sources state that the story was based on events occurring at about 800 B.C. *King Lear* should more accurately be regarded as a sort of fairy tale. In many ways, Goneril and Regan are similar to Cinderella's evil older sisters.

Goneril and Regan's expressions of love are so extreme that they are questionable as rational responses to Lear's test. Cordelia's reply is honest, but Lear cannot recognize honesty amid the flattery, which he craves. Of course, Lear is not being honest either when he asks Cordelia, "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?" (I.1.84-85). Lear plans to reward Cordelia's expected exaltation with a larger portion of his kingdom than that allotted to her sisters. The shares should be equal, but Lear clearly loves Cordelia more. Cordelia's reply, "Nothing," is a word that will reappear throughout the play — with disastrous connotations. "Nothing" is a key word that is repeated several times in the play, thus emphasizing the word's importance. Cordelia's uttering of "nothing" is echoed at the end of the play when she is dead, and "nothing" remains of her. But it is also important to remember that Lear really understands "nothing" about his daughters, just as Gloucester knows "nothing" about his sons. When Gloucester sees "nothing," he is finally able to see the truth, and when Lear emerges from the "nothingness" of his mental decline, it is to finally know that Cordelia has always loved him.

Cordelia loves Lear according to the bonds of a blood relationship, as paternity demands. Her response is in keeping with Elizabethan social norms, which expect a daughter to love her father because that is the law of nature. According to nature, man is part of a hierarchy, from God to king to father to child. The love between each of these parties is reciprocal, and Cordelia's love for her father is what she owes him.

Cordelia tempers her love test reply with reason — a simple, unembellished statement of the honor due a father from his daughter. Lear irrationally responds by denying Cordelia all affection and paternal care.

Kent's interference on Cordelia's behalf leads to another outburst from Lear. Like Cordelia, Kent is honest with the king, providing a voice of reason. Kent sees Lear making a mistake and tells him so. The depth of Lear's anger toward Kent suggests excessive pride — Lear cannot be wrong. Cordelia's answer injures Lear's pride; he needs her excessive protestations of love to justify giving her the choicer parcel of land. Lear's intense anger toward Kent also suggests the fragility of the king's emotional state.

Cordelia's two suitors provide more drama in this initial scene. The Duke of Burgundy cannot love Cordelia without her dowry, but the King of France points out that she is a prize as great as any dowry and correctly recognizes that Burgundy is guilty of selfish self-interest. France's reply to Cordelia reveals that he is, indeed, worthy of Cordelia's love:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor,  
Most choice, forsaken, and most lov'd, despis'd!  
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,  
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away. (I.1.249-252)

The final section of this scene reveals that Cordelia knows that her sisters are liars, and so informs the audience of their dishonesty. Goneril replies that Cordelia deserves to be banished. This heated exchange foreshadows the feud that develops over the course of the next acts. Additional foreshadowing is supplied by Goneril and Regan's promise that if Lear becomes too much of a nuisance, they will have to deal with him accordingly. The first scene ends with Regan acknowledging that Lear isn't just weak because of old age, but that he has never really known himself — or his daughters. Regan's complaint reveals much about the relationship that Lear has with his daughters. His obvious preference for Cordelia has come at the expense of losing touch with his older daughters. Lear cannot recognize Goneril and Regan's deceit because he does not know them well enough to recognize when they are being dishonest. Lear's privileging of Cordelia prevents him from forming the kind of relationship with his older daughters that might have resulted in genuine love.

Scene 1 establishes a plot and subplot that will focus on a set of fathers and their relationships with their children. The audience will be privy to the conflict between father and child, and to fathers easily fooled by their children. Each father demonstrates poor judgment by rejecting a good child and trusting a dishonest child(ren). The actions that follow illustrate just how correct Regan's words will prove to be. It will soon be obvious how little Lear knows and understands his daughters as Goneril and Regan move to restrict both the size of his retinue and his power.

## Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 2

Summary

Edmund enters the scene — set in the Earl of Gloucester's house — talking out loud to himself. In this soliloquy, Edmund figuratively asks Nature why society sees him as inferior to his brother Edgar simply because he is not his father's legitimate firstborn. Edmund's soliloquy reveals his plan to undermine his brother's position by tricking his father with a forged letter, which he presents to Gloucester in this scene.

Edmund also succeeds in convincing Edgar that he's looking out for his brother's safety when he suggests that Edgar carry a weapon as protection from their father's anger — a wrath, Edmund intimates, that's directed toward Edmund.

Analysis

Edmund's musings offer insight into his unhappiness. Edmund feels that each brother, equally loved, should share equally in his father's bounty. But there is no equality under the current law, and Edmund's ideal is not reality. Edmund asks why he is not as respected as his brother:

When my dimensions are as well compact,  
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,  
An honest madam's issue? Why brand they us  
With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base, base? (I.2.7-10)

Edmund rejects the laws of state and society in favor of the laws he sees as eminently more practical and useful — the laws of superior cunning and strength. Edmund's willingness to seize what he wants invokes laws of nature, although not the natural laws familiar to Elizabethan audiences in a class-defined society. Instead, Edmund supports survival of the fittest, an animalistic nature not based on human morality and common decency. Edmund says that he will take what he deserves through wit, even if he is not entitled by birth. This resolve is an affront to the nature that Edgar addresses in his opening soliloquy; underestimating the force of nature will also prove critical to Edmund's downfall.

Edmund appears to be a villain without a conscience, selfishly driven to secure his own needs. Still, Edmund lacks the ill will of another of Shakespeare's villains, Iago, with whom Edmund is most often compared. In *Othello*, Iago acts without clear reason, since none of his suggested motives withstand a close examination. In contrast, Edmund has solid economic and emotional reasons for his actions. Edmund may also have overheard his father describe the "good sport at his making" (I.1.22). If so, Edmund's actions reveal a desire for personal revenge.

The cavalier attitude with which Gloucester dismisses Edmund's paternity further reinforces the difference between Edmund and Edgar. Where Edgar is entitled to his father's name, his title, and his property, Edmund is entitled to nothing but the coarse jesting that accompanied his conception.

Gloucester ignores any possibility that his youngest son may resent this easy dismissal of both Edmund's birth and his future prospects, but Edmund finds in his father's thoughtless words a reason to destroy Gloucester. In plotting his revenge, Edmund reveals that he is a worthy opponent, even though much of his desire for revenge is an emotional response to Gloucester's words. In Shakespeare's *Othello,*Iago makes sport of his actions while proving himself superior intellectually to those around him. In comparison, Edmund reacts to his situation with seriousness and reason, but his actions never stem from a need to make sport.

Language is particularly noteworthy in this scene. Shakespeare weaves in much talk of seeing, although Gloucester does not truly see until he is blinded later in the play. Gloucester says that if Edmund's letter contains nothing significant, then "I shall not need my spectacles" (I.2.35). But, of course, even with spectacles, he cannot see that Edmund is deceiving him. After exclaiming "let's see, let's see" (I.2.42), he shows that he can neither recognize the dishonestly in what he reads nor see that Edmund is lying. In mistaking Edmund's motives, Gloucester is already blind to the evil events unfolding around him.

Edmund condemns his father's age in the forged letter by suggesting that old men should step down and give control to those who are younger. Gloucester is referred to as an aged tyrant who desires to maintain control in order to keep his sons from receiving their inheritances.

This brief exchange reminds the audience of Goneril and Regan's dismissal of Lear's actions as those of an old man, unable to decipher or understand the actions around him. And just as Lear condemned the guiltless Cordelia, Gloucester now condemns the innocent Edgar, who has no knowledge of the false letter. The irony of the letter's message — that the old should be displaced — proves true for Gloucester. Clearly, he is not intuitive or quick enough to understand the plotting or undercurrents present around him. Gloucester buys into Edmund's trickery.

Gloucester asserts that the sun and moon play a role in current events. Gloucester absolves himself of any responsibility for his actions by giving power to the stars. Relying on astrological signs makes it easier to accept that Edgar might betray his father: "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us" (I.2.100-101). This reflection echoes Lear's earlier statement about the astrological influences on man's life: "By all the operation of the orbs / From whom we do exist and cease to be" (I.1.110-111). Both fathers count on the stars to provide an excuse for their children's actions. But Edmund has his own opinion of these astrological signs, of which he says:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and teachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars and adulterers by an enforc'd obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! (I.2.115-125).

Edmund acknowledges that man is ultimately responsible for his actions. This passage also reveals how effectively Edmund is able to work the audience. He succeeds in making his father's beliefs and actions appear foolish. Gloucester's reliance on the stars appears to support Edmund's contention that his father is a witless old man.

Edmund also easily fools Edgar, but not because of any misguided reliance upon astrological signs. Edgar's innate honesty and dignity make accepting Edmund's duplicity easy and prevents any questioning of Edmund's lies. Edgar cannot imagine that his brother would lie to him since Edgar would not lie to his brother. Edmund easily convinces Edgar that he should arm himself against their father, a man whom Edgar loves.

The double plot is an important literary device in this play. With two plots, perfectly intertwined and yet offering parallel lessons, Shakespeare is able to demonstrate the tragic consequences that result when man's law is given precedence over natural law. Eventually, Gloucester and Lear learn the importance of natural law when they recognize that they have violated these basic tenets, with both finally turning to nature to find answers for why their children have betrayed them. Their counterparts, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall, represent the evil that functions in violation of natural law.

The double plot serves an important function, emphasizing natural law as an essential facet of both plots. Shakespeare then uses the two plots to point to how essential an acknowledgment of natural law is in a moral society. In both plots the absence of natural law is destructive, and ultimately even those who are good cannot act to save Cordelia or the other good characters from the ravages of evil and tyranny.

## Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 3

Summary

Set in the palace of Goneril and the Duke of Albany, this scene opens with Goneril asking her steward, Oswald, if Lear struck him for making fun of the king's Fool. Oswald confirms the encounter. Goneril, enraged, instructs Oswald to keep Lear waiting when he needs something, and if the king is unhappy with this treatment, he should be told to move to Regan's palace. Goneril then commands her servants to treat the king's company with coldness since the knights' lewd behavior is creating a disturbance in her household.

Analysis

Goneril promises at the end of Scene 1 that if her father proves to be a nuisance, she will deal with him accordingly. In Scene 3, Goneril does just that by refusing to respond to the needs of the king and his entourage. She is calling the shots now, and Lear is never to regain control again. He may see himself as king, but Goneril views him as a doddering old fool, one she refers to as an "Idle old man" (I.3.17). Goneril treats her father with particular cruelty and callousness, not with the love and adoration she professed in order to gain control of half of his kingdom.

In this scene, as later in Scene 4, Goneril reveals her true character. She defies the hierarchy of nature, which calls for daughters to respect and honor their fathers, and lays the groundwork for the torment she sets in motion for the remainder of her father's life. In Goneril's defense, Lear is a poor guest. Goneril protests that his knights are riotous and that Lear complains constantly. By instructing her steward, Oswald, to make himself less accommodating, she is punishing her unruly guests. At this juncture, both father and daughter bear some fault, but Goneril has led her father to believe that her love for him extends beyond any evidence of bad behavior, and so ultimately, she is responsible for Lear's actions, having earlier endorsed them.

This scene introduces Oswald, who is clearly more familiar with Goneril than customary in a lady/steward association. Because Goneril gives Oswald the authority to treat the king rudely, it is apparent that the steward's position is not simply that of a servant. The scene opens with Goneril's reference to Oswald's chiding of the king's Fool, conduct not expected from an ordinary servant. The steward obviously runs the household, wielding a significant amount of authority over other servants. Still, Goneril expresses her desire for Oswald to act on her authority; she will answer for any problems caused by his actions.

Also noteworthy is the fact that Lear has been hunting, as the sounds of the hunting horns in the distance indicate. The king may be an old man, as Goneril states, but he is not infirm; nor is he idle, as she accuses him of being. Lear is obviously in good physical shape, even if not as mentally alert as he might have been in his younger years.

## Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 4

Summary

The setting is a hall in Goneril's palace. Kent, earlier banished by Lear, reappears in disguise as Caius. Lear enters and begins asking Kent questions about his identity and his intent. Kent's responses are vague, but he asserts his loyalty and willingness to serve the king. Kent's obvious admiration impresses Lear.

When the king asks to see Goneril, Oswald leaves without responding to the request. A knight reports that Goneril is unwell and unavailable. The knight also tells Lear that all the members of Goneril's household are treating the king's entourage rudely.

Goneril enters, complaining about the king's Fool and his unruly knights. Goneril demands that Lear reduce the number of knights in his service. In anger, the king declares that he will pack up his people and move to Regan's palace, where he is sure to receive a warmer reception.

Analysis

In this scene, the audience sees how erratically Lear deals with problems. When Oswald ignores the king, Lear is shocked: "he would not!" (I.4.54). Lear is king, and he expects to be obeyed. Nevertheless, when he learns of the poor service afforded his knights and recalls how he, too, has been neglected by Goneril's staff, Lear says, "I will look further into't" (I.4.69). But in the next line, Lear asks, "But where's my Fool?" (I.4.69). Lear looks to the Fool to distract him with entertainment, to help him forget his problems.

Although the lack of attention and service is insulting and demeaning, the king is not prepared to confront Goneril and her steward. At other times, Lear responds to problems with outbursts of cursing, even a physical attack when provoked. The audience saw an angry Lear disown his youngest daughter in Scene 1. In this scene, Lear is almost out of control when he answers Oswald's insulting address: "My Lady's father! My lord's knave, you whoreson dog you slave, you cur!" (I.4.79-80).

Lear is helpless, at the mercy of his daughter and her servants. The once-omnipotent king has no effective means of dealing with these events, except with anger. Kings are used to making rules, not following them. And thus, Lear responds to Oswald's insults with swearing and by striking him. Another response to his dilemma is expressed in self-pity. As he finally recognizes the precariousness of his new position, Lear strikes his own head and curses his misfortune (I.4.268-270).

Lear succumbs to despair. As the play progresses, the king will lapse into other fits of self-pity and fury, and he will discover different means of dealing with the realities of the mistakes he has made. As the depth of his tragedy grows deeper, Lear will react with denial, with helplessness, with regret and apathy, and with a growing compassion for those around him.

Kent reappears, disguised in this scene. He is truly selfless, devoted to the king who earlier banished him. When queried by Lear as to his identity, Kent replies that he is "a man" (I.4.10). Thus, he is no one special, and yet, he stands apart from other men. Kent's response distinguishes him from animals, because he is not defined by desires, needs, and a willingness to simply seize whatever he wants — as animals do to survive. This characteristic sets him apart from other characters, such as Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund, all of whom are willing to behave as beasts, taking what they want. Instead, Kent is a man defined by honesty and love for his king.

The Fool enters the play for the first time in this scene. He functions much as a Chorus would in a Greek tragedy: His role is to comment on events and the king's actions, serving in some respects as the king's conscience. The Fool requires a careful study, because he often sounds cruel as he addresses the king with sarcasm and irony. Sometimes, the Fool seems to be rubbing salt in Lear's wounds, rather than acting as the king's advocate. However, as the play progresses, the audience begins to sense how much the Fool loves the king; he will try to protect and care for Lear just as Cordelia attempts to do when she returns.

The Fool's initial address to Kent makes clear that he sees Kent as the king's ally; thus he asks if Kent is in need of a fool's coxcomb (I.4.94). These lines, which focus on the coxcomb, indicate that the Fool needs a fool, and clearly Kent is one, since he seeks to follow Lear, who has neither a kingdom nor even a home. The Fool is loyal and honest, a good match for Kent, but he is also able to point out the king's faults, as no one else can. The king may threaten to have the Fool whipped (it was not unusual for the king's jester to be beaten), but the audience never regards this as a viable threat. The Fool's use of irony, sarcasm, and humor helps to ease the truth and allows him to moderate Lear's behavior as no other character can. In Scene 1, Kent's attempts to restrain Lear's actions earn banishment, but the Fool can bridle the king's unpredictable disposition more successfully.

Goneril's confrontation with her father initially invites the audience's sympathy. The king's retinue have been rude, demanding, and unappreciative guests.

Goneril accuses Lear of not only failing to control his men but also encouraging their disruptive behavior. No doubt Goneril has suffered from this misconduct, which the king refuses to address. Instead of responding to these concerns, Lear replies by asking, "Are you our daughter?" (I.4.216). The king is, after all, the king, accustomed to having his own way and behaving any way that pleases him. He does not yet acknowledge his role of guest or his diminished control under a new order. Lear doesn't grasp that a king without a kingdom has little to distinguish him from any other man. But when Goneril abruptly dismisses half his men, Lear is forced to admit that he is no longer in control.

However, any sympathy the audience might muster for Goneril dissipates when she sends Oswald to deliver a letter warning Regan of their father's pending visit. She instructs Oswald to add his own embellishments and warnings about Lear's conduct.

As the conflict between father and daughter escalates, Lear turns inward and questions who he is (I.4.223-227). Can Lear be king when he has given away his kingdom? What Lear has relied upon as truth is no longer trustworthy; his reality has changed. His daughter is not obedient, nor does she treat him with the respect due a father and a king. Even her servants deny him the high regard generally granted to a sovereign.

In conversation with the Fool, Lear echoes Cordelia's words from Scene 1 — "Nothing, my lord" (I.1.86) — with his own — "nothing can be made of nothing" (I.4.130). Kent began this exchange with his own "nothing" (I.4.126) in response to the Fool's bit of verse. Again, "nothing" is a word with significant meaning, since already nothing has resulted in the growing tragedy. From nothing emerges the beginnings of a family tragedy, as Lear is displaced. Lear finally realizes he has treated Cordelia poorly (I.4.265) and admits his mistake.

Although he was present in Scene 1, Albany has no real role in the disbursement of the king's property. Nonetheless, the conversation in Scene 1 between Kent and Gloucester reveals that the king prefers Albany to his other son-in-law, Cornwall. In this scene, Albany attempts to calm the king, but Lear is beyond patience and refuses to listen to Albany, although he has admired him in the past. Albany obviously is concerned for the king's welfare, but he lacks the strength to stand up to his wife, Goneril, and thus, he cannot control her. Albany is Goneril's opposite, gentle and kind as compared with his wife's cruel and self-serving demeanor.

## Summary and Analysis Act I: Scene 5

Summary

The setting for this brief scene is outside Goneril's palace. Lear instructs Kent to go at once to Regan's palace and deliver a letter. As Kent leaves, the Fool attempts to distract the king with silly remarks, but their content points ironically to Lear's actions. The torment of the king is obvious as he laments his treatment of Cordelia.

Lear expresses his first concerns, a premonition, for his sanity. Soon the horses are ready, and the king begins his journey to his second daughter's palace.

Analysis

In Scene 5, the king is clearly frightened and apprehensive for his future, although he continues to hope that Regan can be counted upon to provide him with sanctuary. Lear also expresses fear for his sanity: "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad. Keep me in temper, I would not be mad" (I.5.43-44).

This appeal foreshadows events that will occur later in the play. This brief plea also contains a prayer to a divinity. Although the setting of *King Lear* predates Christianity, Lear still relies upon a god to guide and protect him. The Fool does not give Lear any respite in this scene, as he continues to remind the king of the mistakes he has made and the precarious position in which he has placed himself. The Fool appears cruel once again, but Lear finally begins to understand that his foolishness has led to this current state of affairs.

The king's thoughts once again turn to remorse for his behavior toward Cordelia: "I did her wrong" (I.5.24). Because this comment is offered without context, it reveals that Lear has noted a flash of insight into his own conduct, actions that he has come to regret. This brief mention of Cordelia also reminds the audience that she continues to have an important role in the play, although she will not reappear for some time.