

The slide features a dark blue background. On the left and right sides, there are decorative geometric patterns consisting of overlapping chevron and arrow shapes in yellow, magenta, and light blue. The main text is centered in white.

Lear's Daughters

The Women's Theatre Group and
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Scene 1 of 14

Characters: Cordelia, Regan, Goneril, The Fool, The Nurse/Nanny

Note that the cast is predominantly female (with the Fool being of ambiguous gender)

The Fool introduces the play.

Scene 1

Fool: forced rhymes, jokes.

The play begins with a turn of blind man's bluff.

Blindness: Ignorance, lack of knowledge and understanding - even among siblings.

Scene 1

Cordelia: Youngest, introduced first. Lover of words. Considers words to be concrete things rather than abstract. Speaks of their 'weight, roughness, smoothness'. Tries to understand the world through words. Cordelia seems to oppose the symbolic nature of words. They are not merely signs for her.

Scene 1

Regan: Wood worker. Tactile description of wood; carving. Speaks about creation of shapes from shapeless wood. She is a sculptor. “I know that one day the shape that appears will be particular - my shape, me.”
Regards carving as an act of self realization, release.

Scene 1

Goneril: Colours. A painter. She too, like Cordelia, is trying to 'get it right'. Some day she wishes to realise/release her potential through painting. Her self portrait has her crowned and seated on the throne. Revels in intense colours - of lightning, raspberry canes and blackberries.

Scene 1

The Fool: The most sparse introduction. Literal and blunt. 'I like money. And myself. And money.' Narcissism, worldliness.

The Fool introduces the next scene: "Three princesses, living in a castle, listening to fairy-tales in the nursery."

Scene 1: Summary

What happens? Self introductions, character sketches, elements from their life.

The Fool breaks the fourth wall and directly talks to the audience, cracks jokes with them.

Scene 2: 3 Sisters, the Nurse together

The Nurse recounts details of the sisters' births. Mythical descriptions. Conspicuous absence of Lear, the father. The Nurse whispers in Cordelia's ear the manner of her birth. According to Cordelia herself, her birth was accompanied by a hurricane and Lear was present.

Scene 2

The Fool tells us about the Nanny.
She came when Goneril was 2. Sought to
make herself indispensable. Became a
substitute/second mother to the 2
princesses. A paid mother.

Scene 2 : What happens?

Introduction to the domestic situation. The Nanny is a dominant/influential presence in their household. Absentee father; sick mother. The nurse is a scheming character; may have ulterior motives.

Scene 3: The Fool is the Queen

Fool - double act. also Queen.

The Queen is sick. Tries inane cures. She is also in charge of the kingdom's budget which is in shambles. The Queen has no time for her children. She wants to go on a holiday with them but the King wouldn't agree.

Scene 3

The sisters “learning about a father, who is also a king”.

Cordelia: Remembers being hoisted aloft by her father; probably in his court; remembers dancing for him and his courtiers.

Scene 3

Regan: Remembers going to her father's chamber while sisters sleep. Sees her father with his courtiers, drunk, singing. He is fondling the Queen. The Queen is expressionless. Regan feels scared.

Scene 3

Goneril: Remembers going into her father's chamber and trying to sit on his throne. She continues to sit on the throne even when her father sees her. Angers him.

Reveals her ambition; as the eldest daughter to inherit the throne.

Scene 3

The Fool: Gives us the layout of the castle, the rooms for each of the characters.

Introduces himself: says that his birth was completely inconsequential.

Scene 4: The Fool and Sisters

The sisters question the Fool. He is 17 years old. He says that being the Fool is about the clothes, the expressions; all of which are inherited.

He performs odd and sundry tasks and tricks for money. S/He doesn't assume a fixed gender identity.

Scene 4

If he wasn't the fool, he would be 'a dog with no masters'.

The Fool is so ambiguous and accomodating because he is paid to be.

Money is the chief mover in his life.

Scene 5: Lear returns triumphant from a sporting tournament.

Lear is 65 but still athletic. Symbol of masculinity. A demi-god.

His return is eagerly awaited by his daughters. The crowd gathers around. But not all of them are here to sing praises.

Regan is pelted with a rotten tomato. The people are booing.

Scene 5

The scene is retold from memory. Each sister (and the Fool) remember the event differently.

Cordelia feels loved; Goneril, neglected and Regan spurned.

The Fool doesn't remember much.

Scene 5

Hints of strained relations b/w the sisters.
The fool suggests that 3 is an unmanageable number. Having 3 successors to the throne (all of them female) is bound to create difficulties.

Scene 6: The Sisters and their Mother

Lack of intimacy b/w mother and daughters.
Their relationship is mediated by the nanny.
The Queen leads a life dominated by her husband.

She resents that her children are not boys.
She feels that she has let her husband down
by having 3 girls.

Scene 6

We see the daughters incessantly questioning the Queen; but there is no reply to any of their questions.

It is evident that the Queen is sick and dying. The children have to confront the fact that their mother is mortal.

Scene 7: The Nurse and the Sisters

The sisters ask the nurse about their childhood. Like when she told them about their births, the nurse creates a fictional narrative about how Lear crossed a bridge to reach the sisters and their mother. The children expand the fiction, creating the myth of a happy family. One that does not exist.

Scene 8: Funeral Preparations

The Queen's Funeral. The sisters show puzzling emotions. They laugh and cry. Goneril is poised to take over Queen's duties. They mock Lear; says he will have to manage on his own. Only Cordelia looks forward to supporting Lear. She does not understand the gravity of death.

Scene 8

Goneril and Regan see Lear having sex with another woman on the day of the Queen's funeral.

They are furious. Goneril is anxious about whether Lear will marry the woman and have a male heir; which will mean that she would not be Queen.

Scene 8

The Fool explains the political situation in the country. Lear becomes more and more unpopular. He avoids crowds and travels through less used roads to avoid angering his citizens. The country is being mismanaged.

Scene 9: The Nurse tells the Fool the story of the Pied Piper

The Fool, who is shunned by all, wants a story in which he is the hero.

The Nanny tells him the story of the pied piper. A kingdom which is being tormented by rats. Instead of the piper, it is the fool who is going to rid the kingdom of rats.

Scene 9

The fool does not like the ending of the story in which he turns the children into rats. The rats kill everyone in the kingdom and then are led away by the fool across the fields.

The story can be understood as a commentary on what is happening with Lear and his children.

Scene 10: Investment

The Fool equates the daughters to an investment.

Lear makes Cordelia dance in front of his courtiers.

The nurse tells Regan the reason why the Queen died.

Scene 10

It was a miscarriage. Caused by Lear's incessant desire for a male child.

Goneril speaks to the Nurse about her experience in the dungeons.

Indirect portrayal of Lear as a petty man.

Scene 11: Fool Introduces Marriage

To counter the rising discontent in the kingdom, Lear decides to marry off his daughters to the dukes of Albany and Cornwall.

Scene 12: Sisters discuss getting married

Goneril has become preoccupied with managing the accounts of the kingdom.

She does not feel anything particular about getting married.

Accepts it as a part of her duty: to marry and breed.

Scene 12

Regan is scared. She reveals that she is pregnant.

When Goneril scolds her for her carelessness, she retorts with the difficulties she has faced as the second daughter.

Scene 12

Goneril shows the ledger to Regan. Shows her that she is merely an investment that Lear is about to sell to Cornwall in return for a grandson.

If Regan has an illegitimate child, her worth is nothing.

Scene 12

We see Regan aborting her baby with the Nurse's help.

Scene 13: The Weddings

The weddings of the two sisters is a cacophony of voices with many characters speaking simultaneously.

We see a tableau like scene in which Goneril is portrayed as trying to stab Lear with a knife.

Scene 14: The Nurse Reveals all

In a monologue the Nurse reacts to her dismissal by revealing that Cordelia is her daughter.

Cordelia is about to be married off.

The fool demonstrates the King's affection for crude jokes. Lear is a man of base tastes.

Scene 14

In an epilogue, we see the 3 sisters again, just like in the beginning.

They discuss their passions: painting for Goneril, carving for Regan and words for Cordelia. They have all learned much and are setting out on their future lives determined not to share their mother's fate.