

## Act IV, Scene iv

The same. A tent.

Enter, with drum and colors, CORDELIA,  
DOCTOR, and soldiers

CORDELIA

Alack, 'tis he. Why, he was met even now  
As mad as the vex'd sea, singing aloud,  
Crown'd with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,  
With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo flowers,  
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow  
In our sustaining corn. A century send forth.  
Search every acre in the high-grown field,  
And bring him to our eye.

Exit an officer

What can man's wisdom  
In the restoring his bereaved sense?  
He that helps him take all my outward worth.

DOCTOR

There is means, madam.  
Our foster nurse of nature is repose,  
The which he lacks, that to provoke in him  
Are many simples operative, whose power  
Will close the eye of anguish.

CORDELIA

All bless'd secrets,  
All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,  
Spring with my tears! Be aidant and remediate  
In the good man's distress! Seek, seek for him,  
Lest his ungovern'd rage dissolve the life  
That wants the means to lead it.

Enter MESSENGER

MESSENGER

News, madam.  
The British powers are marching hitherward.

"'tis he" = *he (Lear) is exactly as he has been described (i.e. mad)*

"he was met even now" = *he was just recently encountered*

"vex'd" = *raging*

"fumiter and furrow-weeds ... sustaining corn" – Lear is said to have fashioned for himself a kind of crown out of weeds—note, *weeds*—noxious plants that grow among, and threaten the health of, good life-supporting plants such as corn. Here, then, we see a significant inversion. Lear has been a normal king—a symbol of order, authority, and nourishment (this, at least, is what a king is *supposed* to represent; Lear, as it happens, was one who had fallen somewhat short of that perfection even before he had conferred his power on his children). After that, he drops down to the level of a mere man, and a "poor naked [wretch]" of a man at that. Now, he is a king again (in his own mind, anyway), but his kingship is the inverse of kingship as it is meant to be. Said to be crowned with weeds, he seems to represent disorder, lack of authority, and enervation (a sapping of vitality). But observe, when we finally encounter for ourselves this silly mock-up of a monarch, that for all of his "inside-out-ness" as a king, he is now closer to essential nature, and we will see that he has acquired some new insights. In some way, he will be seen as closer to the wisdom he ought to have possessed before losing his mind.

"A century send forth" = *send out a group of one hundred soldiers (a "century," which is commanded by a centurion)*

Note that in sending out, for her father's sake, one hundred soldiers Cordelia is symbolically restoring to Lear the number of knights he had earlier been stripped of. Therefore, we may say that she attempts to make something out of the nothing that was made out of him. This act of restoration can also be called redemption—literally, a process of buying back what has been lost, of giving value to something that had no value before. In this action of Cordelia, too, is a suggestion of her character as Christ figure (Christ, incidentally, being often called the "redeemer"). For according to Christian theology, Christ is said to restore corrupted humanity. Where humans had become "barbarous" and "degenerate" following the fall in Eden, they are now saved by the Christ, who becomes the sacrifice that restores their lost value.

"bless'd" = *blessed. (Cordelia invokes the powers of natural or white magic.)*

"unpublish'd virtues" = *unknown powers of goodness*

"aidant and remediate" = *helpful and restorative*

"That wants the means to lead it" = *that lacks the power (i.e. reason) to govern it (i.e. his life)*

CORDELIA

'Tis known before. Our preparation stands  
In expectation of them. O dear father,  
It is thy business that I go about.  
Therefore great France  
My mourning and importun'd 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!

*Exeunt*

"before" = *already*

"preparation" = *armed troops ready to fight*

"importun'd" = *importunate; pleading*

"No blown ... father's right" = *No blossoming ("blown") ambition (i.e. desire to conquer Britain) causes this call to arms. Rather, we are here only for love of my father and to restore to him what he has lost*

"O dear father, / It is thy business that I go about" – i.e. Cordelia speaks in apostrophe to Lear, saying that the work she does is all for him. Her words are a strong allusion to a text in the New Testament—Luke, Chapter 2:

- [42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.
- [43] And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.
- [44] But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey. And they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.
- [45] And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.
- [46] And it came to pass that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.
- [47] And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.
- [48] And when they saw him, they were amazed. And his mother said unto him, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."
- [49] And he said unto them, "How is it that ye sought me? **Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"**