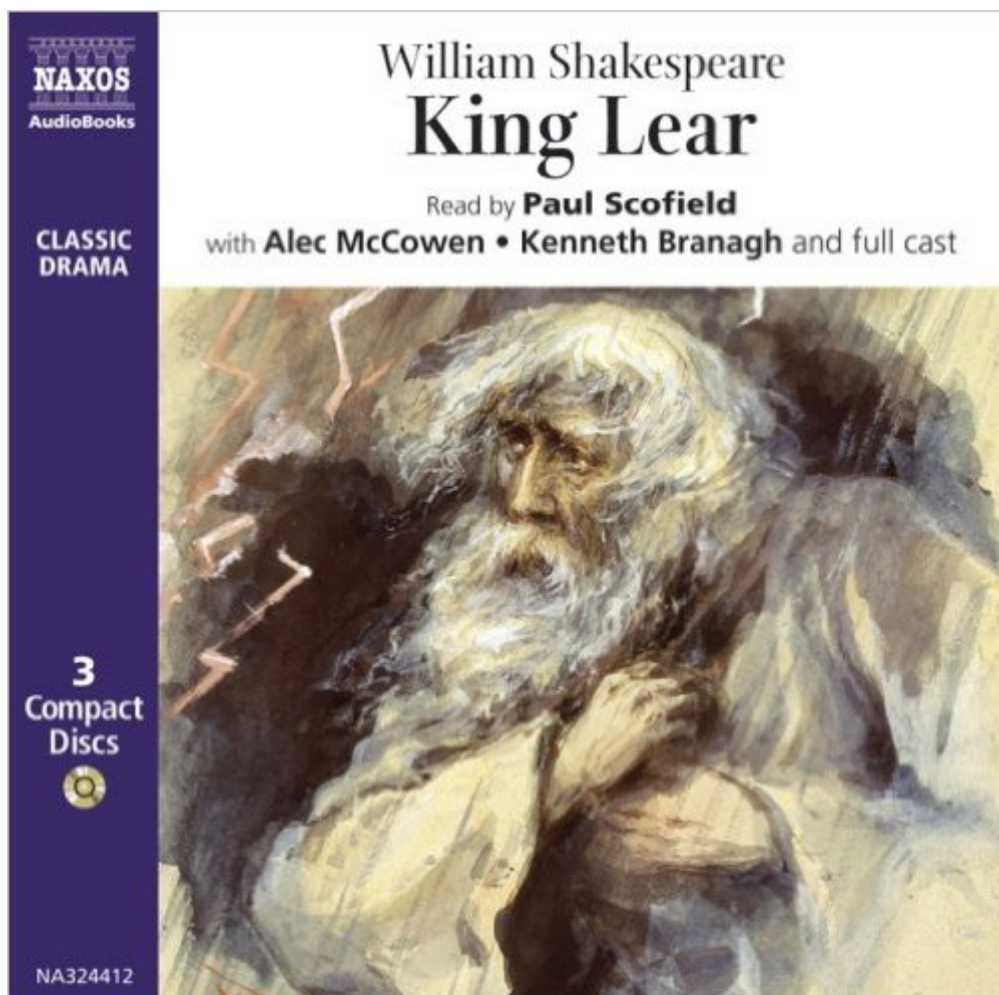


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King Lear (Naxos AudioBooks)



Synopsis

The third of Shakespeare's great tragedies, *King Lear*, written in 1605, is a tale of vanity, lust and betrayal. Using complete text of *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, this full cast performance features Paul Scofield, Britain's senior classical actor, in the title role. *King Lear* is the ninth recording in Naxos AudioBooks' series of unabridged dramatizations of Shakespeare plays.

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Naxos Audiobooks; Unabridged edition (January 1, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9789626342442

ISBN-13: 978-9626342442

ASIN: 9626342447

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1 x 5.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Is there a need for yet another recording of "King Lear"? If it is a superlative reading, then one would quote "Reason not the need" and accept it for a great addition to a swelling library of complete Shakespeare on recordings. We still have available on Caedmon audio tapes the 1965 "Lear" with Paul Scofield in the title role with Pamela Brown and Rachel Roberts as that particularly nasty pair of sisters, Goneril and Regan. 1988 brought out the BBC Audio Book (Modern Library) with Alec Guinness, Jill Bennett and Eileen Atkins in those roles. In 1994 there was a BBC Radio set with John Gielgud, Judi Dench and Eileen Atkins (again) in those three roles; while a late addition to the Arkangel Complete Shakespeare series gave us Trevor Peacock, Penny Downie and Samantha Bond, Peacock giving a more domestic, less grand reading of the role. Now Naxos Audiobooks has released on tape and CD yet another version with Paul Scofield again, Harriet Walter (Goneril, as it is spelled on this set), Sara Kestelman (Regan), Emilia Fox (Cordelia), Peter Blythe (Albany), and Jack Klaff (Cornwall) as the dysfunctional royal family. As the parallel set, we have Alec McCowen (Gloucester), Richard McCabe (Edgar), and Toby Stephens (Edmond). While Kenneth Branagh

played the villainous brother in the Gielgud set, he is assigned the Fool in this production with David Burke (Kent) and Matthew Morgan (Oswald). The reading in the Caedmon recording is in the grand manner, more poetical than is the most recent; but this Naxos effort seems to move faster, is more dramatic (as should be no surprise) in our sense of the word in that it is more realistic, more "modern" sounding. But I would not dismiss the older set by any means.

The received text of King Lear, Shakespeare's greatest play for our times, comes as always in various versions and editions. There is the original Quarto version, and a later Folio version. Most modern editions of the play lean towards one or the other, or wisely combine the two. Particularly helpful is the old, faithful The Tragedy Of King Lear (The Yale Shakespeare) done a half century ago by Professor Tucker Brooke, I believe is the name, shortly before his death, which includes all lines from both Folio and Quarto, distinguishing what appears in one but not in the other by the clear use of parentheses or brackets. I find this much more useful than the squiggly band of ants and mites which normally indicate variant readings in the middle of the pages of the current respected critical editions, including the traditional King Lear (Arden Shakespeare). Amazingly we receive Lear at all, considering its history and the fact that for two hundred years a false and unfortunate and unauthentic "happy" Hollywood ending was imposed upon its productions, as if MacBeth and MacDuff embrace at the end of the Scots tragedy. We are fortunate in our times to find the massive and meticulous scholarship which has gone into the integral restoration of Lear, combining the two versions and smoothing over disagreements. It is amazing in how much the two versions agree, and yet each has a good chunk of play which the other does not, such as the Quarto's mock trial of the fox daughters.

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