

Relationship between king lear and his fool



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Refer to Act one, scene five Describe the relationship between King Lear and his Fool in this passage. How is the relationship developed in King Lear as a whole? In Shakespeare's "King Lear", the relationship between Lear and the fool is crucial to the development of the character of Lear and also to many themes in the play.

Interweaving insightful commentaries with clever wit and language, the fool, a loyal associate to Lear, offers an insight into Lear's mind. Using juxtaposition with metaphor, symbolism, puns and irony, the fool effectively addresses and understands Lear's motives and offers practical, unpretentious advice. The fool effectively gives to Lear a conscience, and highlights his goodness and self-realization as Lear is persuaded to lower himself to the level of another. The play starts with Lear effectively being the fool but gains wisdom and human experiences with the guidance of the fool and learns humility, remorse and compassion.

With the fool, Lear becomes a sympathetic character, identifiable as a human, and less as an ignorant king. This passage takes place in act one, scene five after Lear's dividing of his land. Conflict between Lear and Goneril has forced Lear to seek the company of Regan, where he hopes he will be treated with better respect. The fool and Lear are alone on stage, and the fool remarks upon Lear's misjudgments. The fool focuses on the strange motion of "a man's brains... in's heels" stating that Lear has misplaced his wits and common sense and has now been infected with "kibes".

This metaphor is symbolic of Lear's plans being infested by unwanted intentions. "thy wit shall not go slipshod." Lear should not visit his second

daughter just as this is an unnecessary action, and for how can your wits be sheltered by “slipshod”? This imagery is significant to mock Lear’s poor logic and ignorance, emphasized by the rhetorical question, as it seems like common knowledge that Lear is walking into inevitable disaster. Goneril and Regan are metaphorically “Crabapples” and cannot be trusted by their approachable appearances.

Similarly in Act III scene VI, the fool once again comments on the false appearance of objects. “He’s mad, that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse’s health, a boy’s love, or a whore’s oath” and urges Lear to reflect on his own actions. Next the Fool comments on Lear’s judgment by metaphorically likening it to his sensory mechanisms. He states that the nose’s job is to “keep one’s eyes on either side” of it, which again highlights Lear’s folly.

Lear’s vision is straight, unyielding, which makes him susceptible to deceptions because he cannot see a wide range of vision that he “cannot smell out.” Intuitively, Lear perceives that he has treated Cordelia wrongly, triggered by the words of the Fool. It is evident that the fool serves as Lear’s reflection. As later mentioned in the play, Lear asks “who am I?” and the fool replies “Lear’s shadow.” Lear is unsure of his own identity because he cannot see himself, for a shadow cannot see itself just as eyes cannot see without being separated by the nose. In both cases, the fool acts as the mediator or helper for Lear’s deeper understanding of himself.

The fool comments on the idea that “a snail has a house... to put’s head in; not to give to daughters.” Again the fool uses effective imagery to highlight

the folly of Lear, and the fool foreshadows Lear's downfall just as a snail without its "house" is more susceptible to discomforts and disasters. Now that Lear has abandoned his crown and left "his horns without a case", he cannot hold on to the power that once sheltered him from others' cruelties and disobedience. Lear, finally realizing the insincerity of his daughters when he divided the land, says "I will forget my nature". Here the imagery of the snail not only signifies helplessness and danger after having the crown taken from him, but it also suggests rebirth and new apprehension; Lear has departed from his "shell" and left his crown behind and is aware of the truths of the world.

These lines spoken by the fool is echoed in the storm scene Act III scene IV. Lear remarks "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal" to address the misfortunes of himself and Edgar. It seems like man's fortune is no better than an animal's. He is stripped of his crown and glorious image, down to the basest form of nothing but instinct as he stands within the storm. Lear is deprived of all protections and false ideas; he has indeed exposed himself to the cruelties of the world.

Just as the fool foreshadowed, all his follies have come back to leave him with nothing, and without his "shell" for protection. Lear contemplates reclaiming the crown "To take't again perforce!" followed by a pause, he says "Monster ingratitude!" These exclamations are contrasted, as Lear first remarks on his reclaiming of the crown and then to the unthankful nature of his daughters. Lear shows sharp abruptness of thought and indecision as these sentences are incomplete, suggesting panic and

onslaught of madness. This supports the thought “ thou would’st make a good fool” as observed by the fool.

This strong contrast between the fluent observant speech of the fool and Lear switches the roles of the wise and the delirious, and signifies the lowering of Lear’s status and mental state. Further more, as the fool addresses Lear as his “ fool”, Lear is dependant on the logic of someone less intelligent, and not his own ideas as seen earlier, as a man who sees himself in full control of the lands: “ Know that we have divided in three our kingdom. While earlier, he addressed himself in third person as a sign of authority, now in the presence of the fool he is lowered to a man with no servants or possessions. Finally, the fool comments, “ thou shouldst not have been old till thou hast been wise. ” Lear says “ O, let me not be mad, not mad sweet heaven! ” This apostrophe addressed to the Gods is an expression of Lear’s caution in regard to his fall into derangement and confusion after having been rejected by Goneril. For the first time Lear acknowledges the dangers of hatred towards another, and tries to restrain immersing himself completely with revengeful thoughts.

The nature of this conversation is repeated in Act II scene IV, the fool comments that the daughters will treat him with neglect for “ Fortune, that arrant whore, Ne’er turns the key to th’poor. ” Lear, feeling his tempers rising and resting on the verge of madness, comments “ Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow. ” In both cases, the fool’s words acts as Lear’s conscience, a force to keep him away from complete loss of reason. The relationship between the fool and Lear highlights many themes within the play “ King Lear”, primarily to the theme of self-awareness and

understanding. The fool is the manifestation of the truth in Lear, while offering himself as a reflection to Lear to aid him for a better understanding of human character; pointing directly and acutely to Lear's weaknesses and ignorances. There is effective use of language techniques to aid the expressive nature of the fool, being explicit yet underlying in his comments to Lear.

Essentially, the fool is Lear's conscience that aids to resolve his internal conflicts throughout the play and becomes Lear's shadow or reflection, which helps the progression of Lear's character.