

# What are the most important themes in king lear?

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



What are the most important themes in King Lear? " Different interpretations focus on different themes', this statement is acceptable in the play King Lear. Edwin Sherin's production of King Lear primarily explores the theme of Order and Chaos, as opposed to excerpts by Marilyn Gaull, which focuses on the theme of Love evident in King Lear and an excerpt by Samantha Markham in which focuses on the theme of Insanity. In my opinion these three themes which are focused on through different interpretations of the play, are the most significant in King Lear. In the 1974 Edwin Sherin production of King Lear, we see his directorial decisions on costume choice reflect the nature of the play, as well as the things that have taken place. An example of this is through Edmund's costume in Act 1 and Act 6, as well as Lear's costume in both Act 1 and Act 6. Through the first act, Lear's costume made up of an armoured vest and a big furry robe clearly shows that Lear is the character who is most powerful. In comparison to Lear, Edmund is a character who is lowly ranked in society wears a plain costume. By comparing both character costumes, we as an audience are informed of the order of the kingdom, the social hierarchy in which each character is placed and the divine right of kings. Through Lear's decision to divide his kingdom amongst his daughters causes an uproar of chaos and mayhem that erupts the kingdom. His decision to give Gonerill and Regan his kingdom, his authority, his power, caused confusion on who the country is meant to obey. As a result of Lear's judgment, he is betrayed by his daughters and left on his own in the open plains on the outskirts of the kingdom. With Lear gone, his power diminished, Gonerill and Regan took control of the kingdom. This is seen as wrong and unethical, as women are not meant to lead or rule. As a

result of their husbands being "weak", Gonerill and Regan controlled them and their judgments. Edmund, the illegitimate son of Gloucester, manipulates his way up the hierarchy and slowly take control and gain the power of his father, the sisters, and ultimately Lear's. The storm scene in Act III shows the order and chaos that has manifested upon England. The order has been disrupted, and as a result, chaos brought its way to England. In the storm scene, Lear is in the rain, barely wearing anything, on the ground, nothing protecting him, and the storm raging on around him. Whilst Lear is suffering in the storm, we see Edmund, Gonerill and Regan tucked safely within the kingdom walls, protected, sheltered. This shows the shift in the order and the Divine Right of Kings. In Act V, we see Edmund dressed leather and armour, this reveals that Edmund has gained power and status through his actions, and Lear dressed in bare, thin, simple, disheveled clothing, which reveals that he has lost his power and authority through his actions. As shown above, through Sherin's directorial decisions, primarily on the costume decisions, the theme of Order and Chaos was depicted and the implication and the power shift in the play. Marilyn Gaull states that "King Lear is set in an intellectual climate in which the play was conceived, where one finds a conflict on the thematic level between two kinds of love: divine love, expressed in an ordered cosmic, social, and spiritual hierarchy, and erotic love, a kind of subterranean energy which is the source of chaos, disorder, and destruction. Specifically, when King Lear assumed he could divest himself of responsibility, retiring as any lesser mortal to the obscurity of an "unburdened" old age, he committed an offense against universal order and thereby denied divine love". Through this excerpt, the theme of

Love is clearly shown in her interpretation of King Lear. King Lear is a play focused on two families, the main plot and the subplot, Lear's family, of him and his three daughters and Gloucester's family, of him and his two sons. Both Lear and Gloucester expects love and respect from their children, and they should get it as they are the parent, it is ethically right. Where in the play, Gonerill and Regan in Act I Scene 1, falsely declare their love for Lear, when he demanded his daughters to tell him how much they love him, Cordelia said aside, " Then poor Cordelia! And yet not so, since I am sure my love's more ponderous than my tongue. ", where she states that her love, is stronger than words. With the beginning of the play, it is shown that Cordelia expresses divine love towards Lear, whilst Gonerill and Regan expresses erotic love. This is shown more in depth as the play goes on. Because Lear was unable to see whose love was more truthful, he chose to ignore the daughter he loves most and banish her. Due to his judgements, he was able to learn from his experiences, and was then able to recognise Cordelia's love for him. Through Marilyn Gaull's interpretation of the theme Love in King Lear, we are able to see the important and effect love has on people, primarily families and their judgements. " The opening scene of King Lear is a fascinating exploration of flattery, self-love and the relationship between father and daughters. It seems absurd that a king would divide his kingdom according to professions of love, but it is worth considering that a long reigning king is accustomed to exercising irresponsible power. ", stated by Samantha Markham, an excerpt in an interpretation focusing on the theme of Insanity in King Lear. This theme I believe is the most important theme of King Lear, as it revolves around a central place in the play. Lear's decision to

divide his kingdom up in the beginning of the play, gives evidence of senility. Both his daughters, Gonerill and Regan discussed his rash behavior in Act I Sc. 1 " The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash" Gonerill, states that because of his old age, he is becoming more senile and rasher in his decisions. Throughout the play, the Fool offers Lear insights through complete babble. The audience was able to see an ironic humourous scene, where they see, Lear as someone who was strong and defiant lose his sanity and Edgar who's lost and confused, pretend that he's insane. Through this scene, the audience can see the contrast in madness between Lear's real madness and Edgar's feigned madness. Through many of Lear's dialogue, the audience can already see that he is on the edge of sanity. " We are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body" Lear, states that it is because nature that he is losing his mind, that his mind his suffering because of it. As shown above, Marilyn Gaull's interpretation of King Lear, based on the theme Insanity, reveals that she it is because he has had the power for too long, he abuses it by recklessly dividing his kingdom, believing that he is mad.