

# King Lear and conflict with his daughters essay sample

[Life](#), [Love](#)



The general plot of King Lear revolves mainly around the conflict between the King and his daughters, although there is a definite and distinct sub-plot dealing with the plight and tragedy of Gloucester as well. One of the main themes that Shakespeare chooses to focus on in King Lear is the dysfunctional nature of not only the royal family and Gloucester, but the heartache and emotional strain that goes along with being a parent and having to make a decision that will divide your children. This play focuses on not only the after effects of this decision, but the way in which it affects the King, his children and his subjects as well. King Lear is also a play full of deceit and betrayal. This is clearly seen in the first few lines. We first learn of the empty words of Goneril and Regan as well as their hatred and contempt for their father, King Lear. Their attitudes towards Lear becomes the center of the play and also leads to the madness that the king suffers from.

The first words that Goneril speaks are totally empty and are the opposite of what she really feels. She says, “ Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter; Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;” (I. i. 60-62). The reason there are no words to express her love for her father is that she has no love for him and it does not exist. The same goes for her sister, Regan, who is plotting against her father as well. She says that she feels the same way as her sister and expresses how Goneril has named her very deed of love. Regan adds a little twist to this and professes that she loves Lear more than her sisters and that Goneril’s affection for her father “ comes too short.”(I. i. 71) By uttering these words, Regan shows that her love is even less true than that of her sister’s. She goes even farther to say:

...that I profess

Myself an enemy to all other joys

Which the most precious square of sense possesses,

And find I am alone felicitate

In your dear highness' love. I. i. 79-73

This goes to show that she is more greedy than her sister and her words are more artificial. She wants more than her sister and will do anything to attain her goal. Her ambition to get what she wants is evident in the words that she speaks. She claims herself to be “ an enemy to all other joys” but she is really the enemy to her father.

The next person King Lear calls to speak is his soft-spoken daughter, Cordelia. Lear does not have much respect for her because she does not flatter him and put him on the pedestal that he feels he deserves. This is exactly what his other daughters do and he feels very strongly that Cordelia should do the same. Because of all the flattery that was given him by his other two daughters, he gives them most of his possessions. The first thing that Cordelia says when the King asks her to speak is “ nothing.” The king is enraged by this remark and says that, “ Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.”(I. i. 99) When Cordelia speaks again she says that she does love him but according to their bond, no more no less. The king is also angry by this remark and tells her to “ mend” her speech a little. The king really means that he wants to be flattered more and that she is not doing so by saying:

Good my Lord,

You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me:

I Return those duties back as are right fit

Obey you, love you, and most honour you." I. i. 105-108

This speech professes that she loves him for all that he has done for her including raising her and the bond that they have to each other. It is this bond that keeps them together. Throughout the entire play, this bond is the only thing that helps Lear in the end. Cordelia takes him in and does whatever she can to ease his pain. She does not do this out of sympathy but because of the ties they have as father and daughter. When she says to Lear " So young, my Lord, and true" (I. i. 118) she is saying that the love that she has for the king is true and sincere. She is the only one out of all of her sisters that speaks the truth. Because of her sincerity and her wish not to flatter him like the rest of his daughters, Lear proceeds to ridicule her and then takes away her dowry. This is what she meant when she utters the word " nothing." She has nothing to say that will flatter the king because she is honest. She is not like her sisters who would do anything to get what they want. After he does this, he continues to badger and ridicule her for her lack of affection and love for him. He does this to anyone who does not put him on the pedestal that he feels that he rightfully deserves to be on.

One must note that during this time, women were supposed to be subordinate and obedient to men, Cordelia's position here is a precarious

one, and one that must be backed by firm belief, as she still will not give in to Lear after his threats, which shows us from the very start that she is an extremely strong-willed and determined young woman. The mere existence of this incredibly foolish “ game” illustrates to us Lear’s overwhelming insecurities about his relationship with his three daughters. Cordelia’s refusal angers him, painting a picture of (not for the last time) Lear’s poor capacity for dealing with relationships, father-daughter or otherwise.

The other parent child relationship gone wrong in this play is that of Edmund and his father. He is the bastard-son of Gloucester and wants everything that Edgar, the legitimate son, has. In the beginning of Act 2 he draws his sword on Edgar and tells him to pretend like he is protecting himself because he hears Gloucester coming. Edmund says:

I hear my father coming; pardon me;

In cunning I must draw my sword upon you;

Draw; seem to defend yourself; now quit you well.

Yield; come before my father. Light, ho! here!

Fly, brother. Torches! torches! So, farewell. II. i. 29-35

Edmund wounds himself and tells Gloucester that he was attacked by Edgar and that he even drew blood from Edmund. His motive, like that of Regan and Goneril, is greed and envy. Edmund is envious of the fact that he will not

inherit any title from Gloucester because he is a bastard and not the biological and rightful son that Edgar is. Edmund goes on to tell Gloucester:

.....With his prepared sword he charges home

My unprovided body, lanced mine arm:

And when he saw my best alarumed spirits

Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to th' encounter,

Or whether ghasted by the noise I made,

Full suddenly he fled." II. i. 60-65

He incriminates Edgar for attacking him and gets Gloucester to sympathize with him and send out a warrant for Edmund and the death to anyone who helps to hide him. Edmund is just as bad as Goneril and Regan by what he does and does not win in the end. Gloucester is so taken with the events that have just occurred that he plans to give all of the land that he has to Edmund now because Edgar is no longer considered to be his son. Edmund has the same plan as Regan and Goneril had and has done a good job so far as playing the victim when they are really the victimizers.

Throughout all of King Lear, the children plan to overthrow and get rid of their parents. Their motive for doing this is sheer greed and lack of feeling. In the end, Lear is saved from his insanity because Cordelia, the one that Lear liked most, comes back to take care of him. She was the one thing that really

filled Lear because of her honesty and he did not realize this until she was gone and none of his other daughters would take him in.

They just left him to rot. The real tragedy is that poor Cordelia is hung in the end and suffers the greatest loss. She is killed for being true and sincere. A similar thing happens with Edgar. He comes back disguised as a madman in order to prevent his father from harm and warns him of the evil plans that Edmund has in store for him.

At the end of the play I feel pity for Lear, it is harder, however, to understand why he did what he did. Certainly, at the very least, he was a foolish old man, who thought the idea of dividing his kingdom up among his three daughters according to who said she loved him most would flatter his ego. Ironically it was Gloucester who was blinded physically, when in reality Lear was just as blind figuratively. All around him for the entire play were people who loved him more than life itself, yet his passion and the madness created by that passion would not let him see. Lear's undying love is seen most of all when we are given this extremely vivid mental picture of a despondent father carrying his dead daughter in his arms, tears streaming down his face. At the end both fathers have been destroyed at the hands of their own children.