

# How does shakespeare's king lear hold its appeal to a modern audience?

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



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King Lear, a play by William Shakespeare has held its appeal for modern audiences as it explores the universal ideas and timeless themes of Power and Loyalty communicated through characterisation, language techniques and representations that parallel the context of the time in which they are produced. In the opening scene of the 'love test' Lear is offering his kingdom to his daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Much havoc and arguing occurs, leaving Cordelia banished and Goneril and Regan in full control of the kingdom. The concept of power is present as Shakespeare examines the importance of relationships where a hierarchy is in order. After withdrawing himself as king, Lear's eldest two daughters Goneril and Regan strip him of his supremacy and force him to reduce the number of knights in his service, demonstrating his loss of authority as a King and a man. Shakespeare uses the simile comparison of Lear to animals to clearly depict his fading worth and power. "O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous. Allow not nature more than nature needs, man's life as cheap as beast's..." The underlying theme of power is consistent throughout 'King Lear' and is also present in today's society. Goneril and Regan believe that by possessing Lear's kingdom they have power over everything, paralleling that of modern day society — materialism is power. The theme of loyalty is apparent in the 'Storm scene'. Lear is demonstrated as a flawed individual whose arrogance has caused him to make mistakes. This scene acts as a catalyst, a turning point, as Shakespeare symbolises a 'cleansing period' for Lear. His diminishing sanity is represented through the personification of the storm "rumble thy bellyful; spit, fire, spout, rain!"

Despite the harsh storm, Lear's Fool stands with him in his period of despair and rage demonstrating his loyalty towards his king. This scene is the first time in which Lear reveals his true emotions, ones which Elizabethan and contemporary audiences can relate to. Shakespeare has presented the consequences of disloyalty, and the betrayal of fathers and siblings is an underlying theme. However, the loyalty of Cordelia to her father is maintained, if not strengthened throughout the entire play. " O my dear father, restoration hang thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss repair those violent harms that my two sisters have in they reverence made. " The love that Cordelia holds for her father is symbolised through the gentle nature of her tone and language. The ' reconciliation' scene of Cordelia and Lear expresses the devotion felt by both father and daughter, as well as the connection they share when united emphasises the faith and unconditional love between them, despite previous disagreements. This element of the play is relevant to all audiences. Lear undergoes rapid character development and by the end of the play is able to recognise the more important, intangible aspects of life; a loving daughter and loyal friends. This is comparable to the lives of modern audiences as the important things in life are often taken for granted. Shakespeare's King Lear offers timeless and universal themes of Power and Loyalty that are portrayed through differing literary and dramatic techniques. The character development of Lear also allows for the audience to connect and better understand the play as the transformation of a man unfolds, whose life is not dissimilar to one in contemporary society. These aspects of the play have allowed for King Lear to hold its appeal for audiences of the present and future.