

Shakespeare: king lear

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The play king Lear written by William Shakespeare deals with relationships, greed and selfishness as issues. The play is about an aging king and his three daughters to decide how much each daughter gets he asks them all to in turn to put their love for him into words. The most loved daughter and youngest daughter called Cordelia goes last. After Regan and Gonerills speech Cordelia refuses, saying that she cannot ask her love into words. Lear casts her away and as disowns her.

She goes off to marry the king of France, and later returns leading an army. The rest of the play revolves around the consequences of these actions.

Shakespeare would have got the ideas that he put in king Lear from topical gossip and books that were around at the time. One topic of conversation in London around this time was sir William Allen. He suffered a similar state of affairs as King Lear did, because he was also aging and he also decided to give up his estate and split it three ways, only, Lear had one advantage, Lear had Cordelia whereas sir William Allen was mistreated by all three of his daughters.

One winter, his daughters got so sick of looking after him, that they even refused to give him fuel to keep himself warm. Another celebrity from around that time that suffered a similar mistreatment by his daughters was Sir Brian Annesly. Sir Brian was also aging, so he to, as did Lear, decide to split up his kingdom according to his daughters love. However, unlike Sir William, and like Lear, Sir Brian did have a Cordelia. Many parallels can be drawn between the story of King Lear and of Sir Brian, the most obvious one is of the

youngest daughters names. In King Lear it is Cordelia and in the case of Sir Brian Annesly it is Cordell!

Despite that this could have influenced Shakespeare during the production of this play, there are references in King Lear to things that are mentioned in books published almost four hundred years before Shakespeare was born. The first known telling of the story of King Lear was in Geoffrey Manamousts 'History of England', a second telling of King Lear is in Raphael Hollinsheds 'Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande' (1557). Shakespeare made references to other stories in this book in other plays. This version tells of a story very similar to Shakespeare's play but with a different ending. In 'Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande', the ending, King Lear gets to reign again, but he dies two years later. Cordelia succeeds him but she does not reign for very long because her sister's sons revolt. She is imprisoned and in her despair is moved closer to her father. The sons battle for the throne, and one of them wins. In this telling, Regan is called Regan, Cordelia is called Cordelia, but Gonerill is called Gonerill.

Shakespeare added many things to his version. The most prominent of which is the whole Gloucester subplot. He also added the characters Oswald, Kent and the Fool. I feel that the Fools purpose in the play is as some light relief, to the otherwise depressing story line. Shakespeare also added the big storm. This idea is believed to have originated from stage directions of the first production of King Lear, 'The True Chronicles of King Lear'. Lear's madness was also added, but that is because Shakespeare has changed the story from the version in 'Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande'.

The play both begins and ends with the whole royal family before the audience. Gloucester's family members never appear on stage all together at any one time.

Gonerill is the eldest of Lear's daughters and is the first to suggest all of the devious ideas. She is the first to start the disagreements between her and her father. Shakespeare portrays her as evil in many of the same ways as Regan, her sister. At the end of Act I, Gonerill says

“ We must do something, and I'th ' heat”

where as Regan seems to be quite skeptical because she says

“ We shall think further of it”

as if to put it off because she doesn't want to deal with it. Once Gonerill is given land, she has no more need for her father, and so she plans to cast him away. Since she has no need for him he becomes a nuisance and so she again begins to plan with her more reluctant sister Regan. When she loses the need for her father she also loses her love for him, which says a lot about their relationship before. She never really loved him, she cannot have loved him because you don't just switch feelings off, but you are meant to think she has. That is why this play is very contrived.

She is a very cruel, envious woman and selfishness is again portrayed in the fact that she plans to kill her own husband The Duke Of Albany, for another man. While she is with the Duke Of Albany she is very manipulative, because

women has no power in the times of this play she had to bend her husband, which she does. It is her in the diving seat, he just thinks he is.

Cordelia is the daughter that is portrayed by Shakespeare to have the best character. When she refuses to take part in Lears ' Love Test':

“ Lear Speak”

“ Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.”

“ Lear: Nothing?”

“ Cordelia: Nothing.”

“ Lear: Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.”

“ Cordelia: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth.”

Lear disowns her. Unlike her sisters would have reacted, when she is banished with the King of France with now dowry of love she doesn't kick up a fuss and goes quietly. She isn't bitter and greedy. She is however outraged by her sister's mistreatment of her father and only seeks to make amends with him. The sisters deceleration was not of love but of greed. The same can be seen of Edmund, who also lied for more wealth.

She contemplates saying some lie but decides against it

“ Cordelia: What shall Cordelia speak?”

all is right in the end when she is reunited with her father and they go off together. She proves her love to him in the long run by compassion and forgiveness.

Regan is much like her sister Gonerill, exceptionally greedy, however she is portrayed as less eager to get rid of Lear than Gonerill because Gonerill is always the first to come up with all the evil plans that they have.

When her father come to her aid, she turns him away and rejoices in him being out in the storm because she tells Gloucester to close his doors to Lear and the storm, so that he is not at her house or Regans and must stay out in the storm. The storm represents the turmoil going on inside Lears head. He is caught up in his own emotions, just as he is caught up in the storm.

Similarly to her sister she has a very cruel and blood lusty nature, because when her husband is putting out the Earl of Gloucesters eye she cheers and encourages it. The removal of the Earl of Gloucesters eyes is symbolic in the respect that he can see more clearly after his eyes are removed, just the same as Lear can see better when his sanity is removed.

Another of her characteristics that is similar to her sister is her greed and envious nature. Ironically it leads to her demise when Gonerill poisons her!

When her husband, the Duke of Cornwall dies she doesn't seem to care because she seems to have never loves him. She does however quickly go after Edmund. She never is happy with what she has got.

I believe that Shakespeare may have been displaying in the play that Lear's daughters were all of a reflection of him, Gonerill and Regan are his darker characteristics such as cruelty, greed and pride and Cordelia reflect his good characteristics such as purity. He gets madder and madder as these parts of him are removed.

One of the greatest ironies of this tragedy is that the deception is emotionally, not physically, and the people who have no darker quest have to fool people by disguising themselves physically: Kent and Edgar.