

Reeducating king lear's self awareness

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RE-EDUCATING A KING: KING LEAR'S SELF-AWARENESS

Halfway down Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade! Methinks he seems no bigger than his head: The fisherman that walk along the beach Appear like mice. Although this quote from Shakespeare's King Lear is made by Poor Tom to his unknowing father Gloucester about the terrain far below them, it accurately summarizes the plight of the mad king.

Lear is out of touch with his surroundings, riding high upon the wave of power associated with the monarchy: even those closest to him are out of reach, viewed with a distorted lens. It is through this lens of madness that Lear views his friends and family, and thus he is stripped of everything before he can realize the folly of his judgment. Reduced to a simple man, Lear is forced to learn the lessons that God's anointed is already supposed to know.

This is the purpose of the secondary characters of King Lear; they serve to show the many complex facets of Lear's complex personality, as they force him to finally get in touch with his self-conscious.

For example, the Fool, oddly enough, acts as the voice of reason for the out-of-touch King. He views events critically and thus seems to foreshadow situations that an ignorant Lear is completely oblivious to. This is evident in act 1, scene 1, when a prodding Fool asks the king if he knows the difference between a bitter fool and a sweet fool. When Lear admits that he does not, the Fool attempts to lay it all out in front of him: That lord which counselled thee To give away thy land, Come place him here by me; Do thou for him stand. The sweet and bitter fool Will presently appear; The one in motley

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here, The other found out there. The Fool attempts to show the king the folly of his ways. He is essentially calling Lear a bitter fool, insinuating that his foolishness will be the cause of such bitterness. This comment is taken lightly, but only because the Fool is a satire of the king himself, and thus is the only one allowed to criticize him. Lear has a preconceived notion that he will be able to give up all of his land and his throne, and yet still somehow hold on to the power that he is so accustomed to. Alas, the king does not listen. He continues to believe he still has the power that he has long since conceded. He does not believe that by deviding the kingdom he has lost both his political and personal power in one fell swoop. It is not until he is thrown out into the storm that Lear comes in touch with reality: he realizes the poetic justice of his words “ Nothing will come of nothing”, for now he has nothing; he has systemically been stripped of his power. Read aboutforeshadowing in King Lear essay

GLOUCESTER: O, let me kiss that hand! LEAR: Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality. It is apparent that Lear is no longer king. He has abandoned logic, thus he can no longer consider himself God's anointed. He has finally given up on his hopes for a world in which he will still be respected after giving away his money and power; a world where everyone would continue to admire and obey him as Gloucester does, simply due to the authority that is prevalent in Lear himself, and not his crown. Cordelia serves as a reminder to Lear of true love. She takes the abuse of her shallow father, who banishes her for not being able to flatter him as her sisters do. It is quite obvious that Lear is most fond of Cordelia, yet he seems shocked when she cannot speak as daintily as Goneril and Regan. Had Lear been in a proper state of mind, he

would have known that Cordelia would answer as she did, yet when she cannot elevate him upon a platform for all the others to see, he banishes her out of humiliation. Nonetheless, she stays true to her father, not once denouncing him for his foolish actions. Even though she is somewhat aware of her sisters' intentions, she wishes them well, without incident.

Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides Who covers faults at last with shame derides. Well may you prosper. Cordelia hints at the true nature of her sisters' motivation, especially after her dowry is split between them, yet she does not confront them in the presence of her father, for fear of breaking her poor father's heart. This is yet another example of the paternal love embedded within Cordeila's soul, yet the lunatic king is unable to see the truth within Cordelia's soul. Once Lear realizes that the love he once held for his daughters has been debased and twisted, he is too ashamed to speak with his daughter in Dover. Yet even after this terrible ordeal, Cordelia dismisses the king's actions, for she truly does love him. Finally Lear can see clearly, and even though he has no money or power, Lear does not care; he is content to rot in a jail cell with his daughter. Although her execution seems unnecessary, she has devoted her life to her father, thus fulfilling her moira.

It has taken the death of his beloved daughter to make Lear realize the truth to her love, of whom he now says " Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman" . Ironically, this is the quality that he reputed previously in his statement " Nothing will come of nothing" ; Lear, who had previously viewed Cordelia's silence with disdain, now has learned the difference between words and deeds, and considers it to be her greatest feature of all. This is

merely a sampling of characters who represent the many facets of Lear's personality; it is by no means exhaustive. While Cordelia teaches her father a kingly lesson of unconditional and paternal love, one cannot forget his other daughters, Regan and Goneril, who teach Lear another very lesson about greed and the hunger for power.

The Fool acts as the prodding, intuitive voice of reason, sparking the king to think critically of his own actions; yet the lessons Gloucester gives of pride quite closely parallel the problems Lear has. Kent also plays a vital role in educating this former king in the disciplines of loyalty and respect, for he is the only character to stay by Lear's side, even if it means by death. These lessons are not new to Lear; it is obvious that these qualities have escaped him only after many years of rule. Nonetheless, Lear finds himself reduced to a mere man and must now somehow get back in touch with his sanity. It is the subordinate characters in King Lear that help Lear to break the distorted lens of madness with which he has viewed the world, thereby re-establishing his link to God, logic, and the throne.