

# King lear – denial, rage, and isolation

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Throughout Shakespeare's play, King Lear, the audience is subject to differing emotions and sentiments for the main character. The changes in King Lear's demeanor, state of mind and even beliefs throughout the play are constantly changing and subject to so many different factors that the audience cannot help but be swept up in the transformations. The contradictions and inconsistencies in the play have frustrated some and intrigued others. (Lynch, 2007) Despite this, King Lear continues to stand as one of the greatest literary pieces to have been written up to this very day.

The aim of this essay is to examine the transformation in King Lear's demeanor and person throughout the course of the second act. It is here where the audience can find a seemingly assorted array of emotions as caused by the unexpected circumstances faced by the king. It is this essay's purpose to define and discuss the transition of the king from denial to rage and then to complete isolation all of which occurred within the p of a single act. The events, characters and development that transpires in the said act will be used as instruments to analyze the king's steady transition in character.

In Lear's first appearance during the second act, he finds one of his servants in the stocks. His disbelief at discovering that someone could treat one of his own so badly is compounded by his discovery that it was in fact Regan, his daughter, who ordered it done. This is the onset of Lear's phase of denial. It is unbelievable to him that his own daughter would show disrespect for him in such a manner as evidenced by the following lines:

King Lear: What's he that hath so much thy place mistook to set thee here?

Kent: It is both he and she; Your son and daughter.

King Lear: No.

Kent: Yes.

King Lear: No, I say.

Kent: I say, yea.

: No, no, they would not.

Kent: Yes, they have.

King Lear: By Jupiter, I swear, no. (Shakespeare, 1986)

The king's continuous refusal to Kent's assertions is a clear indicator of his denial of the truth.

King Lear's denial is stressed even more with the news that his daughter and son-in law refuse to talk to him even upon his request. This was unheard of to the king and despite the obvious, he denies himself the realization that his daughter has betrayed him. His words show this denial clearly when he exclaims, " Deny to speak with me? They are sick? They are weary? They have travell'd all the night? Mere fetches; The images of revolt and flying off. Fetch me a better answer." (Shakespeare, 1986)

The king's phase of denial turns to anger, however, when Regan comes to talk to him. She stresses Lear's impotence as a leader and father with her continuous repetition of his being old as seen in Regan's comment, " O, sir, you are old. Nature in you stands on the very verge Of her confine: you should be ruled and led." (Shakespeare, 1986) She also says he is weak and tries to convince him to return to Goneril and stay there.

This reaction to the king's arrival as well as the earlier incident of finding his servant in the stocks fuels King Lear's rage. This is seen with his exclamation of curses on Goneril, who maltreated him during the first act of the play.

King Lear: Never, Regan: She hath abated me of half my train; Look'd black upon me; struck me with her tongue, Most serpent-like, upon the very heart:  
All the stored vengeance of heaven fall  
On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones, You taking airs, with lameness!

Cornwall: Fie, sir, fie!

King Lear: You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty, You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the powerful sun, To fall and blast her pride! (Shakespeare, 1986)

Despite the many words of protest from Regan, the king continues to pour out his anger for his other daughter not knowing that Regan is in fact of like mind as Goneril and is already awaiting the latter's arrival.

Anger turns to isolation, however, when King Lear is confronted by both Regan and Goneril, who has just arrived. It is now clear to Lear that the two have betrayed him. They abuse their newfound power by requiring him to give up half of his knights, which was then lessened until it was required that he give up all of his knights. (Dominic, 1997) Unless he agreed, he would not be allowed to stay with them. This indicated Lear's complete loss of authority as king and also as father to both his daughters.

When the two daughters become of one mind in their demands from their father, King Lear is isolated emotionally and in power. He can no longer fight

the demands of his daughters as he has bequeathed all he had to them and as such is empty-handed by himself. Also, the demand of withdrawal of all his knights indicates a future isolation even if the king does agree to the conditions of his daughters. He is isolated from them because of their betrayal and agreeing to their demands will yield only a life of another kind of isolation, isolation from those loyal to him.

The phase of isolation is final when the king runs out into the storm. Instead of looking for him, the two daughters order the door to be shut, leaving their father to fend for himself in the dark rainy night. Thus the transition from denial to rage and finally to isolation is made complete in the setting of the second act.

## References

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