

Human nature in king lear



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One of the most moving and painful Shakespeare's plays King Lear explores the human nature and condition through the portrayal of characters by depicting the good sides and evil sides of human nature as well as affirming personal transformation through the protagonist of the play, King Lear. The good in human nature is represented by means of characters such as Cordelia, Edgar, Albany whereas the evil in human nature is projected on the reader through the characters such as Edmund, Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Oswald.

At the beginning of the play, Lear, the King of Britain, who decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters depending on how much love they would proclaim for him, is the embodiment of the weakness of human nature. He asks each to tell him how much she loves him in Act I, Scene I: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most? (1. 1. 49). These lines suggest that he is vain just like other humans in real life because he is measuring his daughters' love for him with land.

His two daughters whose evil characters are revealed later in the play express their love which is completely flattering not real love. Goneril answers: "A love that makes speech unable/ Beyond all manner of so much I love you" (1. 1.

59). Her sister Regan does not differ from her in the way she tells her love as she says under false pretences "I find she names my very deed of love: Only she comes too short" (1. 1. 70). Unlike her sisters, Cordelia, who is in fact King Lear's favorite daughter, says she cannot "heave her heart into her

mouth” and rejects flattering, but rather she is so filial that she says she loves him in the way a daughter should love her father: “ I love you majesty . According to my bond; no more or less” (1. 1. 90-91). Lear is so vain that he does not realize the truth and rejecting Cordelia, divides his kingdom among his two sisters, Goneril and Regan.

In this scene, the weakness of human nature is portrayed as Lear gives importance to show off and flattery more than real love which is his tragic flaw in the play. Another significant relevancy of the play to the human nature is the subplot of Edmund’s betrayal of his father and brother. His betrayal of his father and his plans about his brother bring to light just how evil his character is; however, at the beginning of the play we see that he is not ultimately driven by his ambition for power or wealth, but instead his principal goal is to be respected and accepted by society as he says “ Now gods, stand up for bastards” (1. 2. 22) because he is even mocked and insulted by his father for being illegitimate and is deprived of his father’s love.

At the close of the play, his weakness is recognized no matter how evil he is. Wounded in combat by his brother, Edgar and about to die, he whispers “ Yet Edmund was beloved” (5. 3. 238). Apart from Edmund’s character and the depiction of Lear at the beginning of the play, what humans need is reflected in Act 2 Scene 4 when Lear answers Regan’s question asking why he needs his knights: “ O, reason not the need;” and he continues “ Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous: Allow not nature more than nature needs, Man’s life’s as cheap as beast’s” (2.

4-259-262). Within these lines, it is clear that the knights symbolize more than authority. What is important to human nature is and what is the difference between humans and animals are clarified. Human nature needs much more than fundamental necessities, so this is what makes humans different from animals. He needs them not because of their service but because of his identity. Throughout the course of the play, we see that Lear is the one who suffers a lot and his suffering brings about his madness.

Turned away and betrayed by his ruthless daughters, as a father, Lear is obsessed with their “ filial ingratitude” (3. 4. 15). The cruelty of his treacherous daughters and his sanity result in his personal transformation in sensitivity to other people. Kneeling, he does not pray for himself, but he wants help for “ poor, naked wretches, whereso’er you are/ That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm” (3. 4.

29-30). We see that he becomes humanistic and sympathetic when he puts himself into poor people’s shoes: “ expose thyself to feel what they feel” (3. 4. 35).

As a result of this transformation, he now sees and understands everything clearly as he says about his two daughters: “ They flattered me like a dA±g ... To say “ aye” and “ no” to everything I said! ”(4. 6. 95-98). When he finally meets Cordelia, he admits that “ he is a very foolish old man” (4. 7.

76). It seems that even if you are a king, it is in human’s nature to make mistakes. In a nutshell, in King Lear, we see that Shakespeare has developed the characters so meticulously that they are like mirrors reflecting the realities relevant to human nature and transformation. Cordelia, who has

never lost her innocence throughout the play as she forgives her father even if he disowns her, symbolizes the good sides of humankind. Edmund who desperately needs to be recognized by society proves the utter evil in his character.

King Lear, who makes mistakes in the beginning, but then learns from his mistakes, has gone through a personal transformation.