

King lear essay, exploring the notion of hope

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In the world of King Lear, being a Shakespearean tragedy, suffering, loss, and injustice are all factors often expected before an audience enters the bottomless pit of complicated characters, varying agendas, and Shakespearean English these productions usually employed. However, despite its melancholy undertone and lack of warmer lighting gels on stage, King Lear is not without hope. Shakespeare in Lear, presents the notion that characters in great authority force suffering upon others in an effort to retain power, admiration, and status.

Initially, Lear himself demonstrates this, appallingly treating Cordelia with an irrational snap judgement when he is embarrassed in court by his youngest daughter's silence and lack of praise; "Here I disclaim all my parental care." (1: 1: 107) This unjust sentence is highly ironic, especially for the audience, as dramatically we see transparent farce of Gonerill and Regan's dedications of love, and the total truth of Cordelia's.

Due to the "infirmity of his age" (1: 1: 284) (Lear) the unjust pain Cordelia endures for his mistake is heightened, and due to this dramatic irony the audience is forever hopeful for some form of justice and resolution to come. Hope comes in many forms in King Lear, and at first arrives in the character of Kent. Like the audience, Kent is able to see the mistaken ways of Lear, and is the first to step in and address Cordelia's suffering. "See better, Lear... Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least." (1: 1: 146-153)

In one dramatic interpretation of the play, Kent is positioned between Lear and Cordelia, symbolizing perhaps, a link between the mistaken mind of an old King, and the "more ponderous" (1: 1: 73) love of a young heir,

furthermore acting as “the true blank of thine eye” (1: 1: 153) for his decrepit King. Kent brings the hope for justice to a tantalizingly close reality, however through Lear’s blind desire for admiration and respect of status, the audience is left with an even greater sense of bathos, and desire for resolution, when yet again our hopes are berried by more pain and disappointment.

This again portrays the notion that authority and all that follows leads to the lower statured characters enduring unjust suffering, and that “nothing comes from nothing” (1: 1: 85) linking back to the notion that suffering can’t come from nothing. Hope can also be presented in King Lear, in the way in which directors stage the characters on set. In one dramatic interpretation of the play, in act 1 scene 1, Lear is sat down solitary with Gonerill and Regan at his side. This not only portrays the King’s increasing age, but also the manipulative power Gonerill and Regan initially have over him.

During this first scene we see the gap between Cordelia and Lear increase progressively, again portraying a physical representation for their relationship and love for one another growing further and further apart. After this distancing, Cordelia, positioned front stage right, has both Kent, The Fool, and towards the end of the scene, France. The dramatic effect of this is clear to the audience; it physically highlights the allegiances of the characters, and is used also to portray other various notions in a more physical manner, one of which is hope.

Hope is presented in the way in which The Fool, Kent, and France side with Cordelia, implying to the audience she is not alone in her banishment, and that perhaps these characters may have a role in returning Cordelia later in

the play. This idea is further backed up in act 1 scene 5 upon where we see The Fool speak the truth to the king; "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise" (1: 5: 36) presenting hope in that the king might listen.

The allegiances formed in this scene contrast one another, clearly demonstrating to the audience their various agendas, and allows the audience to understand the alliances of characters without any dialogue required. Following on from this notion of unspoken alliances, characters relationships inspire hope in the audience as well. While Lear is initially the main spark of suffering for the other characters, and despite the fact that his own suffering is self inflicted, the audience does sympathize for his position amongst the rest.

The "infirmity of his age" (1: 1: 284) results in his malicious, self satisfying, daughters manipulating him with ease, and abusing the power he entrusts onto them. But in the same way we see Kent step in for Cordelia, we see him return to aid Lear at this stage in the play as well. The strength of there relationship is seen in Kent's unfaltering loyalty for his King: "If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned, so may it come thy master, whom thou lov'st, shall find thee full of labours." (1: 4: 6) and as a result does instill hope into the hearts of the audience that Kent may in fact put things right.

Suffering comes in many forms during King Lear, however despite the darkly lit stage, black costumes of the characters, and general tragic story Lear follows - hope is always a present emotion amongst the audience. Dramatic irony, stage setting, character relationships and proxemics are all dramatic

devices employed by the director of one particular dramatic interpretation of the play. They contrast the darker elements of Lear and without them, the play would lose the very key to its brilliance.

That key, that unlocks the particularly controversial entertainment value, being hope within the audience. Without the subtle hope Shakespeare and modern directors try and install into the very weave of King Lear, the audience would find themselves simply enduring this seemingly deepening pit of death, despair, and disappointment. This is why I am able to conclude that by considering a few of the dramatic effects used in King Lear, despite the ever present tone of suffering, hope is always ingrained within the audience. Forever seeking resolution to the slope on which they travel down.