

The fool in king lear

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“ The Fool both emphasises and relieves the tragedy of the play. ” Discuss.

The fool is a continual character in the workings of Shakespeare. The Fool is usually a cunning peasant that uses his intellect to outdo people of a higher social status. This is particularly the case in the play King Lear. Lear’s jester, the Fool, is indeed a very strange character. He uses crazy talk and merry songs to give Lear important advice. Not only is he important in the development of the plot but he’s important in the development of Lear’s character and also has an important role in the development of the mood in the play.

The Fool is one of the wiser, if not the wisest, characters in the play and emphasises the tragedy in that his sharp and mocking double-talk and his constant stabs at Lear’s dignity add depth while at the same time entertaining. He somewhat narrates and activates the audiences awareness of important issues in the play. This is especially so at the end of Act III scene ii when the fool addresses the audience. “ This is a brave night to cool a courtezan. I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:...” He is the voice of reason throughout the play which is ironic because of his part as “ the fool”.

Furthermore, the king’s jester has an important part in the development of the king’s character. It seems as if the Fool's purpose is to make Lear see the world as it is and to help him laugh at his horrors. He basically acts and speaks as Lear’s conscience. When Lear is foolish, he bluntly points out the mistakes he has made and tries to help his king see the results of his actions. The fool can get away with pointing out the horrid truth because he is supposedly mad but that means that people don’t always listen to his advice where they should.

However, Lear almost treats his jester like the son he never had and therefore somewhat prioritizes what he says, even if most of the time it is not what he wants to hear. Perhaps the fool of King Lear is different to other Shakespearean fools because he is not the average comic fool. Some of what the fool says is funny, but mostly he emphasizes the horror of the tragedy. It is humor that lets him go further in helping Lear than Kent or Cordelia without being banished.

After Act III scene vi the fool disappears and doesn't return to the stage again; the reason why this happens is debatable. Most agree that this is because he is no longer dramatically useful to Shakespeare but all agree that the fool's absence seems to darken the mood of the play. Once the king has reached his absolute lowest there is nothing more his surrogate son can do for him. He no longer needs to be told the stupidity of his actions because Lear has finally learned to recognize the truth for himself.