

Lesson 6



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Key Question 6 a) The opening Act of King Lear evidently portrays Lear's downward movement as it coincides with Aristotle's structure of Greek tragedy. The play begins with Lear, a hero of noble birth and ruler of Britain, in an ordered society soon to be disrupted by a fatal flaw that is the result of his excessive pride. His journey from the ordered to the disordered world becomes apparent after he hands his land over to his two elder daughters and banishes his youngest daughter Cordelia from the kingdom.

The initial situation began when Lear asks Cordelia, "What can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?" (I i 87-88), in which she answers "Nothing, my lord" (I i 89). This demonstrates Lear's arrogance and triggers the rash decision he makes that would greatly impact the tragic events that follow. At the end of the scene, his two elder daughters immediately work to conspire against him so that he would be left with no power at all. Goneril says to Regan that they "must do something, and i' th' heat" (I ii 311).

This foreshadows Lear's impending downward movement and begins the reversal of his fortunes as things go from bad to worse. Lear's recognition of the truth and the existence of his tragic circumstance becomes slightly clear to him when he wonders whether he has lost his mind and cries out "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (I v 46). Act I leaves off at this stage where Lear is about to suffer tremendously before further stages of recognition, retribution, and restitution occur later in the play.) In Act I of King Lear, references to the principle motifs of nature and the unnatural, sanity/madness, and "nothing" all reinforce the downward movement of Lear's perception of his own identity. Lear's Fool constantly tries to warn him

of his mistake in a series of riddles, puns, and songs: “ The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long / That it had it head bit off by it young” (I iv 221-222). Referencing the nature of animals in that song, the Fool is telling Lear that his two daughters resemble a traitorous “ cuckoo” who betrays the one who raised them.

This emphasizes the eventual downward movement of Lear’ perception of his own identity as a father who is so “ loved” by his daughters. When Lear leaves Goneril’s castle and is preparing to visit his other daughter Regan, he prayed to heaven that he would not go crazy: “ O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! Keep me in temper, I would not be mad! ” (I v 46-47). Lear’s fear of going insane from his daughter’s betrayal demonstrates another downward movement of Lear’s perception of his own identity.

Also, references to the motif of nothingness occur when the Fool is speaking to Lear in the presence of Kent. The Fool asks Lear, “ Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle? ” (I iv 133-134), in which Lear responds, “ Why, no boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing” (I iv 135-136). This is foreshadowing Lear’s inevitable downfall because he would soon have nothing to make use of since he has chosen to hand all of his formal authority over to his two daughters who do not actually love him.

It appears that Lear’s perception of his positive, all-powerful identity is about to lead him into a tragic breakdown in the way the three motifs of nature and the unnatural, sanity/madness, and “ nothing” are referenced throughout the first Act of the play. c) Lear calls upon his three daughters and announces that he intends to divide his kingdom among them, promising the greatest share to the daughter who declares that she loves him the most.

Goneril begins with her speech telling Lear that she loves him “ more than words can wield” (I i 57) and Regan makes a request to receive the same value of fortunes as her sister, telling Lear, “ I am made of that same mettle as my sister, / And prize me at her worth. In my true heart / I find she names my very deed of love” (I i 71-73). Both daughters’ speeches, filled with exaggerated flattery and blatant lies, earn each one a generous portion of the kingdom, while Lear decides to banish his youngest daughter Cordelia for not flattering him as the sisters did.

As a result, Kent intercepts to warn Lear, “ Reserve thy state, / And in thy best consideration check / This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment” (I i 151-153). Kent stakes his life on his opinion that Cordelia is actually the most loyal of the three daughters and begs for Lear to reconsider his rash decision, but he too gets banished by Lear, showing us how Lear is causing his own downward movement due to his excessive pride. Goneril later insults the foolishness of Lear giving away his powers, when she tells Oswald “ let him to my sister, / Whose mind and mine I know in that are one, / Not to be overruled.

Idle old man, / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away” (I iii 15-19). This shows Lear’s downward movement as Goneril treats him poorly and is certain her sister will treat him the same way. The Fool also reminds Lear of his terrible decision in handing his fortunes over to his daughters. When Lear begins to realize his own mistake, the Fool tells him in a riddle that a snail has a house “ to put ‘ s head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case” (I v 31-32).

All of these situations demonstrate the inevitable downfall of the noble King Lear as his two daughters conspire to strip him of all his remaining power and fortunes. Key Question 9 In an ordered society, both justice and mercy are fundamental. However, in many circumstances they cannot be simultaneously applied. On its own, justice is more essential than mercy in order to maintain a civilized society. With a system of justice, we could prevent future crimes from taking place, maintain people's rights and freedom, as well as prevent society from plunging into a state of destruction.

With a justice system in place we could take preventive measures against future crimes and laws being broken. If people are punished for the crimes they commit, there would be fewer crimes and less mayhem in the world. People who demonstrate no mercy or remorse for the harm they inflict upon others deserve to be punished, otherwise they will continue their wrongdoings. In Act IV of King Lear, when Cornwall dies from the injuries inflicted by the servant during Gloucester's blinding, Albany interprets his death as divine retribution.

He cries out " This shows you are above, / You justicers, that these our nether crimes / So speedily can venge" (Iv ii 79-80). Since Cornwall has been punished for blinding Gloucester he can no longer harm other characters. Cornwall carried on with his evil intentions until he received his punishment (his own death) which finally put an end to his actions. Society requires a justice system in order to maintain people's rights, freedom, and equality. In the play, Edgar, Cordelia, and Kent are three characters who have been treated unfairly and were left with no opportunity to prove themselves innocent. Cordelia is fortunate to have her own freedom after leaving the

kingdom and marrying the Duke of France. However, Edgar and Kent were left to fend for themselves in order to survive and be accepted by others. When Edgar runs into his father Gloucester, he cries, “ Who is ‘ t can say ‘ I am at the worst? ’ / I am worse than e’er I was” (Iv i 24-26). Edgar, who must disguise himself as “ poor mad Tom” (IV i 27) in order to be accepted, considers the condition he is in as being the worst ever, compared to anyone else.

These characters should be able to stand up for themselves and voice their opinions without being wrongly punished when it is not what other people want to hear. Edgar and Kent are left to suffer from other people’s mistakes because there is no righteousness in the way they were treated. In an ordered society, everyone deserves to have their own freedom of speech and be treated as equal, regardless of their opinions on different matters. Social justice can ensure that every individual receives the same treatment.

An all-merciful society would lead the world to a state of ultimate chaos and destruction. Human existence would constantly be threatened by the dangers of society without a proper system of justice. Regan and Goneril continue to pose as a threat towards Lear and those who are on his side. When arguing with his wife, Albany points out that “ If the heavens do not their visible spirits / Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses, / It will come, / Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep. (iv ii 46-49). Albany implies that if the gods do not quickly bring justice everyone will eventually turn against each other, so without someone serving justice to all the evil people, humanity would be threatened by our own human race. Justice would prevail over mercy. In order to maintain a

civilized society, people should receive proper punishment and suffer the consequences for their crimes so that we can prevent further crimes in the world, promote freedom and equality, and prevent tyranny in the world.

If the Lear universe had a system of justice in place much like in our world today, many of the events leading to the tragic ending could have been avoided. Justice, in all aspects, makes a better resolution than mercy and will continue to serve to make society safe and secure. Works Cited Shakespeare, William. King Lear. Toronto: Signet Classic Shakespeare, 1998.

Well expressed but a bit overstated! Justice involves more than punishment so the concept of justice that you were working from is skewed. 45/50