

# King lear vs the stone angel blindness



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It was once said, " What you lose in blindness is the space around you, the place where you are, and without that you might not exist. You could be nowhere at all. "(Kingslover) This is a quote that can relate the characters in The Stone Angel and King Lear. In the tragedy King Lear, written by William Shakespeare and in the novel The Stone Angel, written by Margaret Laurence, the term blindness has an entirely different meaning. It is not a physical flaw, but the inability of the characters to use their thoughts and emotions to see a person for whom they truly are. King Lear, Gloucester, and Hagar are prime examples of characters that suffered most by having this flaw.

Nevertheless, from this blindness leads a feeling of loneliness and hopelessness, isolation. Once this isolation has overcome them, the characters finally gain the insight that has long flawed them and indulge in self-discovery. Although these characters share these traits, it is clear that a critical difference between the two books exists in the character's ability to redeem themselves after the epiphany. Blindness gives moral insight.

The most blind of all is without a doubt King Lear, because of his high position in society. Lear is supposed to be able to distinguish the good from the bad; unfortunately, his lack of " mind" sight prevented him from doing so. Lear's best exemplification of his blindness occurs at the beginning of the play. First, he was easily deceived by the lies of his two greedy daughters who readily told him what he wanted to hear. Then, he was unable to see the reality of Cornelia's love for him.

Lear's last words to the only daughter that truly loved him were; " ....

or we/ have no such daughter, nor shall we ever see/ that face of hers again. Therefore be gone/ without our grace, our love, our benison. ” (Shakespeare I. i 262-265). Gloucester too, has lack of insight. He cannot see the goodness of his son Edgar, and the wickedness of Edmund.

A forged letter is the only evidence needed to convince Gloucester that Edgar is plotting to kill him. Immediately after reading the letter Gloucester screams in a rage; O villain, villain! His very opinion in the/ letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, delected, brutish/ villain! Worse than brutish! Go, sirrah, seek im; I'll/ apprehend him. Abominable villain! Where is he? (I. ii 75-78)

Hagar is blinded by her pride, and from this she has a great stubbornness to show emotion. Just as she had done at the death of both her brothers and her father, Hagar remains stone-faced at the death of Bram. Perhaps she is too proud, or perhaps she has not loved him, but when Brampton Shipley passed away “ it was John who cried, not I” (Laurence 184).

In an incident where she takes a fall, Hagar actually shows emotion and starts to cry in front of Doris, in response to these tears she states, “ They are no tears of mine, in front of her. I dismiss them, blaspheme against them – let them be gone. ” (31). Even when she does show emotion, her pride causes her to dismiss it and to restore confidence in herself. From the characters blindness, it eventually leads them to isolation Lear is isolated from everyone that truly cares for him. After banishing Cordelia and Kent, only Regan and Gonerail remain.

Lear believes his daughters are true to him, but in fact they are not and greatly offend him. Hear me, my lord/What you need five-and-twenty, ten,

five, /to follow in the house where twice so many/have a command to tend you/What need one? Shakespeare II. iv 260-264) Regan and Gonerail deny Lear any of his knights to stay with him, and in doing so isolate him from his power. Furthermore, Regan and Gonerail lock Lear out of their castle during a fierce storm. Alone, Lear is isolated from his family, his power and starts to go mad.

Gloucester, much like Lear is isolated from the only son that truly loves him, the legitimate Edgar. In addition Gloucester is isolated from the truth, which Edmund hides. Edmund manipulates Gloucester to believe " It is in his hands my lord, but I hope his heart is not in the contents"(I. ii. 7-68), Edgar's hands that is, that wrote a letter plotting to kill Gloucester.

Edmund also convinces Gloucester to leave the castle, and when Gloucester does leave he too is alone and isolated. After John dies, Hagar once again does not cry. She feels she must not only bear the pain alone, but that she cannot allow herself to be comforted by others. A matron puts her arm around her and says, " Cry.

Let yourself. It's the best thing. " In response, Hagar remembers, I shoved her arm away. I straightened my spine and that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my entire life, to stand straight then. I wouldn't cry in front of strangers, whatever it might cost me (Laurence 242) When she got home, Hagar found that she was not able to cry. " The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all" (243).

Her pride leads her to become isolated, she never wants anyone to comfort, or help her. In addition, in the hospital Doris tells Hagar about an old friend  
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and " I never realized until this moment how cut off I am. " (294), is the response from Hagar. She realizes how her stubbornness isolates her from almost everyone around her. As the play progresses Lear's sanity goes downhill, but his vision becomes clearer. When Lear is outside during a furious storm he literally tears his clothes off and reaches his epiphany.

He finally gains insight from this. He realizes that Goneril and Regan are the daughters who did not love him. He also begins to understand the words of Cordelia, " Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth/I love your majesty/ According to my bond; no more nor less. "(Shakespeare I.

i 93-95. Lear realizes that she loved him too much to put into words. When Lear and Cordelia are finally reunited towards the end of the play, Lear expresses his sorrow, " You must bear with me, I pray you now, forget and forgive:/ I am old and foolish. " (IV.

vii 82). Ironically, it is not until Gloucester loses his physical sight, when his vision becomes clear. He finds out that it was really Edmund who was after his earldom. Gloucester feels guilty for the way that he treated Edgar, which is obvious when he says; I have no way and therefore I want no eyes;/ I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen, our means secure us, and our mere defects. Prove our commodities.

Ah! dear son Edgar;/ The food of thy abused father's wrath;/ Might I but live to see thee in my touch, / I'd say I had eyes again. ( IV. i 18-24) Hagar is finally able to reach insight on her deathbed and is able to open up to someone. Hagar reveals her feelings to Marvin with extraordinary honesty: " " I'm - frightened.

Marvin, I'm so frightened-' ... I think it's the first time in my life I've ever said such a thing" (Laurence 303). In addition, Hagar also " lifts the weight" off her chest and gives Marvin redemption when she tells him, " Marvin.

You've been good to me, always. A better son than John " (304).

Furthermore, Hagar reflects back on her life as Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead.

Dead by your own hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years" (292) This is Hagar's Epiphany, where she finally gains insight on whom she really is. Still, after everything she has been through, even on her deathbed, a stubborn old woman's ways never change. " I only defeat myself by not accepting her (Doris). I know this- I know it very well.

But I can't help it, it's my nature. I'll drink from this glass or spill it just as I choose " (p. 308). In conclusion, blindness gives moral insight. Blindness is not a physical flaw, but the inability of the characters to use their thoughts and emotions to see a person for whom they truly are.

Nevertheless, from this blindness leads a feeling of loneliness and hopelessness, isolation. Once this isolation has occurred, the characters finally gain the insight that has long flawed them and indulge in self-discovery, and although this discovery is made, in the end some people never change.