

How is the fool presented in 'king lear'? essay



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What is the Significance of the role of the Fool in ' King Lear'? `The role of the Fool in ' King Lear' is essential to the cause of expressing knowledge and understanding of the plot, and the themes and ideas which Shakespeare used to express his views on the context and nature of the whole idea of rebellion to the laws of primogeniture, and how it related to the present world in which he lived.

The Fool helps to develop and expand on theoretical and philosophical meanings of the situations on which he issues a commentary indirectly to the audience. The play, ' King Lear' addresses and considers many different themes which would have been relevant to both everyday life and the isolated lives of the royal or wealthy, at the time of the play's creation, and would probably apply to the lives of the people who lived in the time of the play's setting. Themes such as the controversy around primogeniture, illegitimacy, sight and blindness, foolishness, and the struggle power total power over others and the desire to take control over others to do their bidding, which stands out well among others in this particular plot, and frequently in other Shakespearean plots. In addition to adding a comic sense to the play, as the name suggests, the Fool helps to involve the audience more, as his speeches reflect a narration, which naturally give the audience more information about the nature of the plot. The Fool appears to be a more abstract character, having little physical involvement in the play, and no effect on the plot's outcome, and he doesn't express emotions or any personal relationships with other characters.

Instead, the Fool is symbolic of morality and decision-making; the Fool takes note of characters' actions and decisions, analysing and criticising other

characters, such as Kent and Lear. The Fool is significant, as Shakespeare has used the Fool to represent the reality of the play, interpreting situations in a true light, and foreshadowing events. Despite the Fool's relatively short life-span in the play, he has an impact upon the play far beyond his status as a character. In the Fool's appearance in the play, in Albany's palace, he establishes himself as a quick-witted and comic character as he makes his first comment to Kent, ' Let me hire him too: here's my coxcomb. ' Implying to Kent that he is a fool for following Lear and offering him service, reinforced by the line, ' of thou follow him thou must needs to wear my coxcomb'.

This demonstrates the Fool's ability to deliver penetrating comments, shrouded by a thin cloud of humour to hide the sincerity of the lines he delivers. An example of the Fool's foreshadowing of events arises when talking to Kent, ' Why, this fellow has banish'd two on's daughters, and third a blessing against his will'- this shows the Fool's ability to predict; he tells Kent that Lear has ' banish'd' Regan and Goneril by giving them land, and blessed Cordelia by sending her away; the complete opposite of how others would interpret the situation. The Fool predicts that giving Goneril and Regan land will actually distance them so far away from Lear that he will never have a close relationship with them again, and the Fool knows that they have no intention of returning to Lear's side. However, the fact that the Fool believes Cordelia has been blessed by being sent away against her will as it means she will be away from danger of the imminent conflict between Lear and his other daughters.

Even at this stage, the Fool has predicted the chaos that will overcome the kingdom as a consequence of Lear's division of the land. It is ironic that the Fool can refer to Lear as a fool so comfortably, ' All other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with. '(responding to Lear's question, ' Dost thou call me fool, boy? ') He tells Lear he was born a fool, equipping the point that Lear is more a fool than the Fool and has been one for much longer. After the Fool's apparently pointless piece of poetry, which does in fact have wisdom buried within it, Kent's remark that the Fool's advice is ' nothing' leads the Fool back to the topic of Lear's division of the Kingdom, where he points out that Lear is now landless and without income, skillfully using the ' nothing will come of nothing' maxim that Lear himself used against Cordelia earlier. In this act the Fool serves as an advisor or narrator, explaining the king's Foolishness and the mistakes he has made to date. It would be accurate to say that the Fool has a close relationship with Lear; he seems to know much about Lear's behaviour, criticising Lear for his stupidity with ease.

Although the Fool is threatened with the whip for his jests, which have gone too far (the ' cloud of humour' has become too thin momentarily) in Lear's opinion, he persists in making these jokes, which have become increasingly bitter towards Lear. The intelligence and wit behind the Fool's words lead the audience to question whether the Fool is really the real fool, and if not, which person really deserves the title of the ' Fool'. The extent to which the Fool is really a fool is limited as his intelligence hovers untouched above the heads of so many characters in this play. The relationship between the Fool and Lear appears to be one involving a clash of opposites; the Fool shows he is

mindful of the future and the consequences of certain actions, where Lear is wreckless and his actions are unpredictable and have no structure or organization to them. The Fool's actions seem to be predetermined as he is consistent and immediate with his detailed responses, and he has a much deeper insight into the personalities of the characters with whom Lear encounters.

This suggests that Lear would be a much more suitable 'Fool' and demonstrates the clash between their personalities. The opposing relationship between Lear and the Fool provokes the belief that perhaps the Fool is another side to Lear's personality, where Lear's absence of intelligence, reason, sight and understanding all reside within the Fool; a side of his personality which he cannot currently access as it is almost physically detached from him. This could prove a valid explanation for the absence of the Fool in the final Acts of the play, as Lear's personalities have merged again, showing that his sanity has returned to him for his final moments before his death. The fact that the Fool does not make an appearance without King Lear also reinforces this argument.

Other sources also suggest that Cordelia has links to the Fool, and her absence of the majority of the play is filled in by the Fool, which could also be the reason why the Fool does not appear in the final stage of the play, where Cordelia has returned. Upon Cordelia's death Lear refers to her as a fool. In consideration of the play's context, many conclusions have been drawn involving links between Cordelia and the Fool, many of which use the idea that the Fool and Cordelia directly reflect each other, in their shared perspectives and close relationship to Lear. It has also been common for the <https://assignbuster.com/how-is-the-fool-presented-in-king-lear-essay/>

roles of the Fool and Cordelia to be shared by the same actor in the stage productions of King Lear, emphasizing the points made by this theory and making the theory obvious to the audience by making the link not only theoretical and abstract, but physical also.

And my poor fool is hang'd! ' Here Lear refers to Cordelia as a ' fool', further suggesting a connection. In addition, there is no mention of the Fool's real name, and the fact that he is only referred to as the Fool, leads us to believe that none of the characters even knew his title, re-establishing the theory that he and Cordelia are linked as it leaves his character open for comparison with others, and the role of the Fool open for any other character to instantly undertake throughout the duration of the plot, where various characters frequently become host to the title of the Fool. Apart from the Fool being significant in his mysterious role as a character and his links with other characters, his significance is displayed through his importance to the development of Lear's character and his realisation of his mistakes and lack of sense and understanding. The theme of ' sight' is presented in, and is reinforced countless times throughout ' King Lear'. The theme of ' sight' links strongly to the Fool as he is one of the only characters who have perfect and unimpaired vision for the entire duration of his appearances in the play. The Fool sees things which other characters do not, and it is not until Gloucester's eyes are removed and his sight ironically becomes much clearer, that the Fool's insight and understanding of characters and situations can be seriously challenged.

Sight is explored thoroughly and is linked closely to the Fool, making his role all the more significant. The Fool's role is also that of an observer and

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analyst of the sinister occurrences in the plot, suggesting that his role could be linked to God; a conclusion that could be drawn from the fact that the Fool sees all and has infinite or at least extensive knowledge and understanding of life. The Fool's final appearance is with Lear in the ' storm scenes' of Act III. He is genuinely concerned for Lear, and tries to get him to shelter in a hut on the heath. So far, the Fool has been trying to get Lear to realise his mistake, and acknowledge his foolishness. At this point, reality begins to dawn on Lear, and he begins to slip into madness.

Is the Fool surprised at the severity of the effect that this acceptance is having on Lear, and perhaps feeling a little guilty at having brought it on by constantly reminding the King of his mistake in previous scenes? At the end of Act III, Scene II, the Fool makes his greatest prediction and reiterates the play's message that defying Nature only causes chaos and suffering. Upon meeting Edgar again, Lear is becoming more incoherent, with a mixture of emotions; betrayal, anger, revenge, acceptance and loss. The roles have been reversed: the Fool is now Lear's serious guard, while Lear has started to talk nonsense, dream and act bizarrely. As Lear degenerates into madness, and Gloucester arrives to take him to Dover, the Fool is no longer needed and can disappear from the plot.

We have seen the Fool's part in the play, and it can be concluded that the Fool serves a definite purpose, in that he is the King's closest friend and sharpest critic. His position and personal qualities enable him to speak bluntly and assertively to everyone he encounters, with a sort of ' humorous immunity' from the punishments that Kent and Cordelia have to endure, emphasising his individuality from other characters. Perhaps it is the high

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level of Lear's admiration for the Fool that allows the Fool to speak so bluntly to him. The Fool is able to tell the King uncomfortable home truths partly because of his ability to run rings around Lear intellectually.

It seems the Fool must also have a genuine affection for his 'nuncle' as he follows him even when base and degraded and in the early stages of insanity. The Fool is a 'jumpy' character in many ways; at times he has incredible confidence in himself and his message and is able to express himself dexterously, but when he becomes frightened by Lear's spectacular reaction to his daughters' rejection, his jokes lose their impact, and he becomes the King's nervous companion, and when linked to the theory of the Fool being another side to Lear's personality, this shows that Lear's side of the personality emerges stronger at this point and dwarfs the Fool's side of the personality. Throughout the play, we are never quite sure who the real fool is.