

How language is used in king lear essay



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The language used in the tragedy of King Lear encompasses the development of plot and the definition of the characters in the play. The literal and figurative meanings of the language reflect the inner workings of the characters and enhance the subtlety of the tragic tone that the playwright is trying to achieve. At the beginning of the play, language is inflated by Goneril and Regan who strive to outdo each other in flattering their father for the vain attempt of winning the love-test devised by Lear. Both of them eventually succeed in the competition when Lear is taken in by their declaration of love towards him. However, the value of the language is also deflated at the same time when Goneril and Regan abuse it to exaggerate on their love for their father. The hyperbolic use of language is observed when Goneril states that she loves her father "more than word can wield the matter"; the love that she has for her father is also "dearer than eyesight, space and liberty"; and it is also a love "that makes breath poor, and speech unable" (Act I Scene i).

Regan is also no less pompous when she says, "Myself an enemy to all other joys which the most precious spirit of sense possesses, and find I am alone felicitate in your dear Highness' love." The words the two daughters use to profess their love carry no worth as love cannot be measured against eyesight, space and liberty; furthermore, it is truth to be known that these three items have no numerical values of their own. Besides, a sense of irony is detected in Goneril's speech when she states that her love makes speech unable when all she does is verbalizing her love all along. The value of language in Goneril and Regan's profession of love is further devalued as the audience discovers how the two mistreated their father as the play develops.