

King lear flaws



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King Lear Flaws Of all Shakespeare's great tragic heroes, Lear is perhaps the least typical. In the beginning of the play Lear is already an old man; his best days have passed, though doubtless there is still about his person a certain regal carriage. Lears petulant behavior betrays him, and soon, when he engages his three daughters in the dreadful game of flattery, wherein Goneril and Regan swear the whole allegiance of their hearts to a father, leaving nothing for a husband, it becomes clear that Lear is something less than natural. In the first act, Lear assumes one of the least attractive roles in Shakespearean literature, that of a bad father. Lear at first does not realize that his temper and deep seeded need of blandishment leads to the usurpation of his divinity.

Only through rejection and madness is Lear able to understand and change his destructive attitudes and behavior. As a tragedy, King Lear portrays a protagonist whose fortunes are conditioned by his hamartia, or tragic flaw. As defined by Aristotle, " the protagonist of a tragedy should be a person who is not eminently good or just, yet whose fortune is brought about by some error or frailty (Jacobus IIV). This error is not necessarily a flaw in character; hamartia can be an unwitting misstep in definite action or the failure to perform an action (Jacobus IIV)." Lear's hamartia is the capricious division of his powers and kingdom before his death - more specifically, the rejection of Cordelia because she will speak " nothing." Lears flawed character traits that enabled him to make this mistake were his disrespect of the chain of being, his faith in the substance of spoken words, and his rashness. Lear believes himself a great and respected King; Goneril, Regan, and the Fool constantly remind him that he is an old man who has lost his

kingdom, his faithful daughter, and his wits through his own folly. In Lear's whimsical desire to hear how great he is, he trusts the substance of spoken words. He is not concerned with the truth and so he mistakes Cordelia's response for an insult, a non-answer.

She will not give him the words he desires because they do not hold the substance of what she knows to be truth. Through his madness Lear breaks down the false illusions of his courtly world. Where the earlier speech is concerned with power and title (Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage blow!..), the later speech is concerned with humanity and friendship (Poor naked wretches, wheresoer you are..). Lear's madness can be seen both as a result of his arrogance and as a remedy for it: The Fool's statement that "truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out." foreshadows the pain that Lear will have to pass through before attaining enlightenment. Lear's madness is unarguably the ranting of a mad man. However, Lear's ravings contain some method in them.

As a result of Lear's madness, he slowly and methodically realizes his fatal error, and the corresponding personality traits. Lear understands that the consequential suffering of all his subjects is due to his mistakes. In the final scene, Lear asks who and what he is, and he is told (most bluntly by the Fool) that he is nothing. He no longer has importance to the other characters. However, Kent, the Fool, and Cordelia make him more than nothing does by serving faithfully, speaking bluntly, and loving unconditionally.

Though in the end Lear is able to understand his flaws, he is never able to use the knowledge he has attained to emend his destructive attitudes and behavior. That is what makes " King Lear" a tragedy. In conclusion, Lear brought upon himself the ultimate punishment; the comprehension of his personal faults, which led directly to the suffering of all who loved him. Although Lear knows full well the error of his ways, his situation restrains him from accomplishing any sort of change in this respect. As a footnote, it is interesting that " the Bards patron, King James of England was seeking to unite England and Scotland at the same time that Shakespeare was writing King Lear. That Shakespeare chose to show a divided kingdom in King Lear leading to tragedy confirm that Shakespeare was either a significant social and political commentator or simply a royal ass kisser (Martin, Long, and Tichenor, Side 3)." Bibliography Jacobus, Lee. The Bedford introduction to Drama third edition.

Boston: Bedford Books, 1997. Martin, Reed., Long, Adam,. and Tichenor, Austin. The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show [audio recording] 2 cassettes. Laughing Stock Productions, Ltd. 1994.