

# King lear hamartia

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King Lear The definition of tragedy in the Oxford dictionary is, “ drama of elevated theme and diction and with unhappy ending; sad event, serious accident, calamity.” However, the application of this terminology in Shakespearean Tragedy is more expressive. Tragedy does not only mean death or calamity, but in fact, it refers to a series of steps which leads to the downfall of the tragic hero and eventually to his tragic death.

Lear, the main character in King Lear was affirmed as the tragic hero because the play meets all the requirements of a tragedy. In order for a character to be qualified as a tragic hero, he must be in a high status on the social chain and the hero also possesses a tragic flaw which initiates the tragedy. The fall of the hero is not felt by him alone but creates a chain reaction which affects everyone around him.

Besides, the hero must experience suffering and calamity slowly which would contrast his happier times. The suffering and calamity instantaneously caused chaos in his life and eventually leads to his death. Finally, the sense of fear and pity to the tragic hero must appear in the play as well. This makes men scared of blindness to truths which prevents them from knowing when fortune or something else would happen on them. Lear, the king of England would be the tragic hero because he held the highest position in the social chain at the very beginning of the play. His social position gave him pride as he remarked himself as “ Jupiter” and “ Apollo”. Lear out of pride and anger has banished Cordelia and Kent and divided his Kingdom in halves to Goneril and Regan. Lear’s hamartia which is his obstinate pride and anger overrides his judgment, thus, prevents him to see the true faces of people. As in Act One, although Cordelia said “ nothing”, she really means

everything she loves to his father. However, Lear only believed in the beautiful words said by Regan and Goneril. Although Kent, his loyal advisor begged Lear to see closer to the true faces of his daughters, he ignored him and became even more angry because Kent hurt Lear's pride by disobeying his order to stay out of his and Cordelia's way Lear had already warned him, "The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft." ( I, I, 145). Kent still disobeys Lear and hurts his pride further as he said, "Now by Apollo, King, thos swearest thy gods in vain.". Finally, Kent is banished. Because of the flaw of pride, Lear has initiated the tragedy by perturbing the order in the chain of being as he gives up his throne, divides the kingdom and banishes his loyalist servant and loveliest daughter. The downfall of Lear is not just the suffering of him alone but the suffering of everyone down the chain of being. For instance, Lear's pride and anger caused Cordelia and Kent to be banished, and Gloucester loses his position and eyes. Everything that happened to these characters are in a chain of reaction and affected by Lear's tragic flaw. If Lear did not lack of personal insight and if he did not have such an obstinate pride, he would not have banished Cordelia and Kent, then Goneril and Regan would not be able to conspire against Lear. Without the plot of Goneril and Regan, Gloucester would not have been betrayed by Edmund and lose his eyes and status due to the charge of treason.

Moreover, the chain of reaction was continuous until the lowest person in the society is affected; the fool, which is the entertainer, was kicked out into the storm with Lear by Goneril because he was smart enough to tell the truth of Lear's blindness. "Why, after I have cut the egg I' the middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown I' the middle

and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away." ( Fool, I, iv, 155-160) Because Goneril realized the wit of the fool who could see through the nature clearly, she kicked him out together with Lear. " You sir, more knave than fool, after your master!" ( I, iv, 312) Lear's exceptional suffering and calamity after his realization of his true character shows the quality of a tragic hero. Due to his flaw, he gave the two daughters a chance to conspire against him and he was finally thrown out of his daughters home and left with a fool, a servant and a beggar. When Lear was left alone in the storm, he started to lose his sanity and realize his fault to banish Cordelia and Kent. Before the thrown out of Regan's home, Lear suffered for shelter food and clothes as he said, " On my knees I beg that you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food." (II, iv, 155) In the storm, he suffered from his growing madness because he could not bear the treatment of his two daughters. He began to realize the true faces of his daughters and did not want to see them again, as he said, " I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad. I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell. Well no more meet, no more see one another.." ( II, iv, 218-220) Further more, as Lear moved all over the place to Dover, he suffered from rest as Kent and Gloucester said, " Now, good my lord, lie here and rest awhile." ( Kent, III, vi, 81) " Trouble him not, his wits are gone." ( Kent, III, vi, 86) " Good Friend. I prithee take him in thy arms I have o'er heard a plot of death upon him, There is a little ready; lay him in it and drive toward Dover, friend, where thou shalt med both welcome and protection. " ( Gloucester, III, vi, 87-91) The madness in Lear's mind grew more serious in his restless journey. Unfortunately, the calamity

continued instantaneously. He then suffered from the death of his youngest daughter Cordelia which broke his heart into pieces, " I might have saved her, now she's gone forever! Cordelia, Cordelia! Stay a little Ha! What is't thou sayest? Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low an excellent thing in woman." ( Lear, V, iii, 270-273) These sufferings contrast the happier times at the beginning of the play when Lear was still the King of England. For instance, his being welcomed and praised by Goneril and Regan which contrasted to his being thrown out of their homes. Also, Lear's pride as a " Jupiter" contrasted an " old man" begging for shelter, food and clothes. In addition, the love from Cordelia when she was alive contrasted the death of Cordelia who could love Lear no longer. As the play moved on, the pain and suffering accumulated in Lear's heart eventually tore down his strength and pride. Lear was no longer a strong, haughty, and prideful king as he was in the beginning of the play. Instead, he became a weak, modest, and confused old man. As we can see at the beginning, he expressed himself as the " Jupiter" and " Apollo". However, at the end of the play, he expressed himself as " a very foolish fond old man." (4. 7 L60) The realization of Lear's true quality of being foolish and hubris with a lack of personal insight, in addition to the death of Cordelia which broke his heart, made him lose his sanity completely and eventually lead to his death. Just before he dies as a man in pain, he said, " And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, And thou no breath at all? Thou it come no more, never, never, never, never!" ( V, iii, 305-308) The death of Lear is most apparent to Shakespearean Tragedy and further reinforces his quality of a tragic hero. In order to certify a play as a tragedy, the feeling of fear and

pity to the hero must appear in the play. The feeling of pity to Lear was apparent when he was in the storm raging against the gods. He was betrayed and thrown out by the daughters and which he thought he did not deserve this cruel treatment. As seen in the quote, " I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness. I never gave you Kingdom, called you children you owe me no subscription. Then let fall your horrible please..." ( Lear, III, ii, 15-20) Here, the feeling of fear appears as well because in a short period of time, Lear fell from the position of King to a normal peasant. His weak, unconfident and mad mind overrules his strong, prideful and sane character. However, in looking deep down, the real fear implied here is, no matter how great things appear now; men do not hold them long and you can sink to the very bottom just as fast as Lear fell from the top of the chain to the lowest. In Shakespeare's tragic play King Lear, Lear the main character demonstrated all the necessary requirements of being a tragic hero. His high social status nourishes his hamartia which is hubris, and the tragedy is initiated by the banishment of Kent and Cordelia. Lear's pride not only altered his life alone, instead, it affected everyone around him down to the bottom of the social chain. Moreover, the realization of his true quality, pains and sufferings eventually leads to his tragic death which the most obvious element in a tragedy. Because Lear fulfills the " formula" of Shakespearean Tragedy, he could be firmly proven as tragic hero in the play.