

# Critical essay of shakespeare english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



William Shakespeare is a playwright who has produced a plethora of memorable texts, being recognised as a benchmark for writers of both the Elizabethan and modern era. Because of Shakespeare's use of language techniques, characters, time-transcending themes which display realistic moral values and the revolutionising change he made to the English language, he is regarded as a playwright of all time. An example of the incorporation of these elements is in the play: King Lear. Despite the degree of contrast put forward by critiques, it undeniably composes a tragic tale of greed, love and power, and effectively applies these factors with: sporadic characters, relatable themes and a unique language and structure which continually engage the reader. William Shakespeare's genius and recognition dominantly lays within the magnificent use of unique language as well as plot-enhancing linguistic devices such as imagery and metaphors, leading to climactic moments and a satisfying resolution. This opens his texts up for interpretation and study in the modern era. His use of language and devices had influenced the creation of at least 3000 modern English words and phrases. In Act 2, Scene 4 of King Lear, William Shakespeare demonstrates the use of his complex language and metaphors in conversations between King Lear and his daughter, Goneril. Shakespeare uses King Lear's language -which include metaphors and multi-layered writing in order to portray an image of a beast which holds similar characteristics to her -greedy and betraying, those which were portrayed through the betrayal of her father: "struck me with her tongue,/Most serpent-like, upon the very heart" (2. 4. 154/155). One of the initial instances of a well plotted linguistic device in this quote is the sense of betrayal presented through the imagery of a

malevolent beast - a serpent. A serpent, in Elizabethan time (and still subtly referred to in modern days) is a 'devil in the form of a snake', an entity that resembles somewhat a harmless, or at least avoidable being, but intends to only inflict detriment to another. This metaphorical choice of words presents a fully-grown hatred - portraying a seemingly fitting image of her daughter - one that inflicts pain "upon the heart". This imagery and metaphorical use in the quote allows the audience to understand the emotions of the protagonist - King Lear. It displays personal traits of the character with ease, which further moulds the type of relationship between characters. The fine implementation of these linguistic devices: such as similes to portray a character's feelings and opinions like no other playwright, makes him recognisable and enduring. The language and accompanying devices Shakespeare used is now the basis of a plethora of modern words and phrases: "Full Circle, flawed and foppish", one of the most influential strides in English literature. The implementation and impact of the quote - the way it expresses a relationship, also lies within the structure - also known as the iambic Pentameter, which incorporates the use of stressed and unstressed syllables in sets of ten. Iambic pentameter, a very complex composition of poetry - has influenced many scholars in present day; his emphasis on this structure made him a playwright of all time. Despite Shakespeare's unique writing style, his connections of themes with modern reality make him a worthy candidate of an enduring playwright - one that expresses important aspects of life; transcending time. The prominent themes which are universally explored in the play - King Lear, are the ideas of justice and the connected themes of betrayal, greed and madness. The initially explored

theme is one which can be paralleled in contemporary society—the theme of justice. King Lear is undoubtedly a play of pain, agony and avoidable disasters – or human unfairness. As Gloucester states: " As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; /They kill us for their sport" (4. 1. 42) he soon realises that his current era is one that does not comply with the fair etiquette of human rights and justice – rather a world of unfairness (powerless wanton boys) and undeserved cruelty – humans are killed for enjoyment. Mike Moeller, an online critic, states that (through Gloucester's quote), Gloucester outlines a: " sheer nihilistic theme" (Moeller, 2009) present in the play – where Mike also believes that the gods provide no reason for this cruelty. The enduring feature is the connection of the theme: justice, with the modern world; with contemporary society now being overrun with injustices (suggested thoroughly in King Lear – human cruelty), based on political, cultural and racial agendas. This connection allows humans to develop an understanding of the consequences of cruelty, and recognise mistakes suggested in King Lear-and avoid them. Another theme which periodically develops is greed. The contemporary relevance is evident in the slowly progressive, yet evident development into betrayal, madness, and then tragedy in King Lear. The relevance with contemporary life is extremely subtle, yet fully relevant. In King Lear, and reality, political agendas are the most affected by this process of development. During King Lear, once the kingdom is divided amongst the daughters – greed soon follows (driven by power). This leads to the betrayal of their father, through events such as disallowing him to reside within his own home. The betrayal soon develops into madness –as suggested by the storm : " Rumble thy

bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!" (3. 2. 14) which indicates Lear's inner turmoil, thus leading to tragedy - death. The connection of this theme with the modern era, is prominent in being a timeless playwright. For example, in current political agendas, issues such as overtaxing citizens - later leads to tragedy: economically and politically. Despite the English language changing - human nature has not, and Shakespeare presents a plethora of compelling characters which not only share similar problems to modern day, but describe varying forms of character in the world. A noticeable factor in the play - King Lear, are that the characters have the same motivations, emotions, flaws and weaknesses as members of a contemporary society - an enduring factor. Many people can see themselves as a placeholder for King Lear: the protagonist who is lied and deceived to by his daughters - a relevancy to the modern world. Lee Jamieson, however, argues that King Lear is not only egotistical, but a character who (despite making many mistakes) refuses to " regret his own flawed actions" (Jamieson, 2012). Furthermore, through characters such as Lear, society can both understand and avoid mistakes which were suggested in the play. One of these mistakes include the test he had devised to measure his daughters' compassion for him; a motive which led to tragedy. This test of love suggests that one cannot " heave their heart into their mouths" (1. 1. 91/92)-a notion popularised in the 21st century, where love is expressed in a more non-verbal fashion: such as showing loyalty or compassion. This quote simply suggests that no matter what Cordelia says, he will never fully understand her feelings for him. On the flip side, however, there is a betraying antagonist - Edmund, who betrays his brother and deceives his father. The

relevancy of Edmund's actions with contemporary society is unmatched. He promotes themes of greed and betrayal, but overall, he is troubled with love, and is narcissistic and egocentric: " Now, then, we'll use/His countenance for the battle, which being done,/Let her who would be rid of him" (5. 1. 68), where we wishes to only use Albany for his own sake (his authority). This is not only linked with contemporary events—such as political vain (which, like Edmund, normally leads to tragedy), but can relate to relationships in modern society. A narcissist in any contemporary relationship, who is rather interested in caring for themselves rather than their partner, can cause deterioration and tragedy in any loving connection. Overall, social likes, distastes and ambitions have all remained equal, no matter which time period. Shakespeare—through his astounding depth of description in King Lear, devised a set of characters which not only represent similar human issues, but display similar emotions and mistakes to individuals in a contemporary society—a timeless playwright. Despite the evidence surrounding Shakespeare's universalities incorporated within King Lear – many critiques still argue the controversial idea of Shakespeare being a playwright of all time. A great Polish critic-Jan Kott argues that: " In King Lear the stage is empty throughout: there is nothing, except the cruel earth, where man goes on his journey from the cradle to the grave" (Kott, 1974, p. 118). He believes the reason for this unstable journey which King Lear takes part, is based on the contemporary themes of " decay and fall of the world" (Kott, 1974, p. 123) which is resultant of sides of just and unjust characters fighting, where " everyone will be destroyed" (Kott, 1974, p. 123). However, unlike real tragedies, in King Lear, " the world is not healed again" (Kott,

1974, p. 123). He suggests that, despite the tragic resolution of King Lear, there are moral messages being conveyed - those which are heavily influenced by the torture that greed and madness inflict. Shakespeare, unlike many preceding playwrights, set an extremely high benchmark for plays in both the modern and Elizabethan era, revolutionising and being the driver for many common terms and phrases we use today - " More sinned against than sinning" (3. 2. 60). Despite the belief of many, Shakespeare is undoubtedly a playwright of all time, with themes relevant to modern society, memorable linguistic devices and composition, and the major impact on the current English language. Shown in his play - King Lear, there is no hesitation that the mysterious themes put forward are those which relatable in current society - love, greed and power. His unique writing style and composition makes this playwright the foundation of further years of teaching and understanding - a true playwright of all time.