King Lear Essay, Research Paper

King Lear

King Lear is the tale of a vain, prideful, and foolish old man who

is blinded by his rage and too stubborn to mend his ways. The “self”

of Lear is overwhelmed by the authority of the “King,” in the grip of

the most primitive of emotions, a human being dying inside a model.

By the time of Lear’s redemption, however, from this honorable self,

what is mortal in him has been lost to any role that might be

accommodated in the structured world of man. Lear is a fool and it is

not Lears tradgedy but his fate because he was nothing more than a

fool.

As King Lear opens, Lear presents his three daughters with a

plaaned meeting that allows them to make a public announcement of

their love for him. He is delighted when Goneril says hers is “Dearer

than eyesight, space and liberty” (1.1.56). He is also pleased with

Regan’s praises. Lear foolishly believes that Goneril and Regan love

and respect him the way they say they do; he is oblivious to the fact

that his daughters, or anyone for that matter, may lie for their own

benefit. Because he believes his eldest daughters’ insincere adulation,

Lear’s trial proves him a fool.

In addition, Lear senselessly concludes that Cordelia is a

disrespectful daughter and not worthy of her share of the kingdom. He

is displeased when she states simply that she loves her father as a

daughter should, no more and no less: “I love your majesty/According

to my bond, no more nor less” (1.1.92-93). Angry and humiliated at

her lack of honor, Lear immediately exiles Cordelia from the country.

Through banishment, Lear intends “to reduce her to nothing, this

being the payment that she had earned by not pleasing him wiht her

answer. He then orders her to marry the King of France and finally

divides the kingdom between his two eldest daughters and their

husbands.

Furthermore, Lear’s foolishness is again evident when both

Goneril and Regan later shun him. As he ventures into the night’s

storm, he tells the Fool, “O fool, I shall go mad” (2.2.475). He later

remarks, “My wits begin to turn” (3.2.68). Here, Lear begins his

downward spiral toward madness. But in his madness, he discovers the

essence of humanity; he descends from his majestic position to a

ranking of lower class. He declares, “When we are born we cry that we

are come/To this great stage of fools” (4.6.182-83). The Fool

accurately comments, “this cold night will turn us all to fools and

mad/men” (3.4.79-80). Ironically, the Fool and the king begin to swap

positions. Up until this point, the Fool has granted Lear helpful

understanding of his decisions; this establishes the question of which

of the two is now the real fool. Lear asks, “Dost thou call me a fool,

boy?” The Fool replies, “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that

thou/ wast born with” (1.4.145-147). The king has been openly told by

the fool that he has diminished to the level of the Fool.

Moreover, when Lear is reunited with Cordelia at the end of the

play, it is not as the petty unjust king who has banished her but as a

fool who has himself been banished by such a king. Lear is fooled a

final time by Cordelia’s death. As Lear falls to his death, he has a

glimmer of hope. He asks, “Do you see this? Look on her: look, her

lips,/Look there, look there” (5.3.317-318). Rather than part in misery,

Lear journeys to his final rest content for he is fooled into thinking

Cordelia still lives.