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Shakespeare 221-01

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Tragedy Is Death;

Death Is Freedom

The fundamental way I understand reality is through a psychological lens that puts a heavy value on people and the world is affected by people as individuals. Narrowing this broad term, I view people for their emotional core: the thing inside us that has its deeply rooted needs and desires. The world is a consequence of individuals' actions that attempt to satisfy this emotional need within themselves. Everybody seems to claim their actions are in line with their identity; but actions are based on emotions. Emotions are an unconscious process, and the unconscious cannot be understood as the definition says: "not directly accessible to the conscious mind, but capable of influencing emotions and behaviour." (unconscious n., 1818). These actions are not a definitive portrayal of somebody's emotion, it is instead somebody's best understanding of themselves and their limited capabilities to express themselves.

I will preface this paper that I see myself as a happy person that puts a tremendous effort into becoming healthier. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] instead, viewing action as a person's attempt to satisfy their own needs makes this almost impossible. With needs being a part of our unconscious, these actions are the person's best tool to attempt to connect to themselves. It's almost like how creating art is an attempt to capture an idea that can never be truly captured. How everything we learn is based on everything we know, everything we know is unsatisfactory and we are just somehow born with it given to us. These actions are trivial attempts because we can never understand the true depth of who we are; however, viewing action as a human's desperate attempt to connect to themselves creates meaning. These exploration uncovers hidden parts of who we really are and we apply the now known back onto our identity. We become a canvas of our unconscious through the extreme limitations of understanding and expression; we become just beautiful as any artform.

To elaborate this mentality I have, I will reference my interpretation of *King Lear* to ground abstract statements onto physical examples. Initially, I find that this play is far more demanding of a psychological reading than any other play that we've read and I will focus on *King Lear* as an emotional rebirth. One of the main themes I constantly saw in the play is how everything in this Shakespearean world can be viewed as an invention. Societal structure, language, physical objects; these have all been solutions to problems at one point in time. Their importance can be marked by their existence and its utilization. The play illustrates how all these inventions cause divisions, from ourselves and from others. Rather than bringing people together as we try to understand oneself and advance society without conflict.

The conflicts in *King Lear* begin when characters view the world, with all the inventions they've inherited from their birth, and interpret it in a way that always wounds their identity. They are people forced to integrate these unnatural creations into their natural self and it breeds hate. Their natural selves are never able to understand what these creations are and it leaves the person constantly unsure who they are while that exists within them. This results in the unconscious calling that forces them to reshape aspects of reality to search for their lost identity. The play begins with a king attempting to reimagine what a king should be. He attempts to reinvent succession as he provides his inheritance while he is alive and divides the kingdom in the process of ending his reign. The idea of why rulers exist is not questioned, it's just wholly accepted as it's the way the world has been for hundreds of years and must continue. The invention of kings emerged into society to shape it; the shape of society shapes it back and doesn't have an identity without a ruler. Here the play roots its necessary psychological understanding: it questions the effectiveness of inventions as they continuously cause emotional harm to individuals and it shows how unnatural it is for them to coexist. The perpetuating process of identity change: of both individuals and the inventions themselves.

Looking further into the division of the kingdom, He only asks his daughters to let him know how much he is loved; promising larger pieces of land for the one who loves him the most. Cordelia's 'nothing' is a statement of her true heartfelt love and is particularly moving. Audiences can only understand it as it is represented because of lines like "Love, and be silent." (Lea. 1.1.68). Lines that are spoken *aside*: A theatrical representation of her inner dialog, her unconscious. The only way Lear gets access to this is when Cordelia says "Nothing" (Lea. 1.1.97). Lear must interpret this initially tragic statement; but he cannot connect to it in

the same way the audience has. His seeming lack of understanding or connection *is* his connection and his actions reflect his emotions. This results in him acting out like a literal child. Lear utilizes his position of a father to demonstrate how he is severing his connection to Cordelia: “I disclaim paternal care,/propinquity, and property of blood”(Kin. 1.1.125-6), but these connections he seems to understand appear to be statements of obligation, graciousness of his presence, and his ownership. I believe Lear truly views these as his understanding of love; but he is a king: the pinnacle representation of society and society divides humans.

My aforementioned psychological understanding is what makes me view Lear as a man who does not understand what love is, or maybe has never felt love in his life. I do believe the text naturally requires asking questions of why he acts this way. To achieve any interpretation requires people to impose their own life experiences onto it. Truthfully this attempt to humanize Lear requires overlooking appalling actions to achieve. Regardless, that is my view of the world and is romanticizing things that are not existent. Maybe Lear is just a bitter old man that’s dying and becoming crazy like the text says. But living in my own fantasies makes me deeply appreciative of the mildest of actions. The ones that originate from desolating sadness. I may also be only able to connect to depressing ideas and try to make them have any meaning.

Regardless, viewing Lear with the idea that he is a deeply emotionally neglected individual creates a second story within *King Lear*. Lear is a king; but Lear, as a king, dies the moment he gives his kingdom away and is now powerless. He wanders like a ghost who cannot recognize he’s dead or why he has died and others fail to recognize him as his old identity. The moment the King in Lear dies he begins his rebirthing process as a human. He can finally understand human emotion, their powerlessness, and how tragic the world is. My personal interpretation is an imposition that is almost nihilistic, but it created a second story within this play. A powerful emotional journey that offers redemption when none is given in the play.

This transitions into Lear’s slow acceptance of his identity death and Fool is introduced. His label of Fool has two meanings, their job and unintelligent; However, the unintelligent definition is imposed onto his job and his name. Viewing this as ironic juxtaposition makes Fool become one of the most intelligent characters in the play. His whimsical entertainment becomes chillingly profound when verbal irony is applied to the statements. Fool is the one that delivers the line that allowed me to understand the play: “Nuncle, give me an egg, and I’ll give thee two crowns...Why, after I have cut the egg i’ th’ middle and eat/ up the mean, the

two crowns of the egg.” (Kin. 1.4.159-163) I took this interpretation as humans divide their identity and attempt to hold their original sense of self while creating a second identity that attempts to operate in society. The golden yoke, true humanity, is lost in this process and we are only left with a shell of what we were before the egg broke. When I read the text this way, it sounds like a criticism of society, possibly even consciousness, or some unknown point of development that is so historic we cannot even recognize after thousands of years of blind acceptance.

This is far too profound and ultimately haunting for any human person to say. This is where the errors of romanticizing everything become absurdly unrealistic. Understanding what the Fool understands is just like King Lear, you have to project experience onto the anecdotes. These anecdotes are definitively nonsensical if you take what these words mean as they’re defined, it could be seen as shamefully crazy to connect with nonsense if you’re unable to redefine these words to work with your identity. Unwilling interpretation of the anecdotes does seem like the initial desire of the statement by Fool; but the complete abstractness demands such intense philosophy to understand. It *should* drive you mad to understand things we were not meant to.

The extreme profound thought from the abstract seems as if Fool can see past the constructed fabrics of reality. It also appears that Fool is amusing himself as Lear becomes tortured at the fool's interjections. Where Fool not only sees what society is based upon meaningless things such as titles, wealth, succession, and aging contributing to the suffering of the individual. Fool not only sees it, he mocks it, as an omniscient character viewing society from outside. The sequence that drives the king mad in the hovel is:

Fool. Tell me whether a madman is a gentleman or a yeoman.

Lear. A king, a king!

Fool. No, he’s a yeoman that has a gentleman to his

Son, for he’s a mad yeoman that sees his son a

Gentleman before him. (Kin. 3.6.9-14)

The Fools belittling of Lear is apparent, but comes across in a way that is attempting to show something to him. Lear is growing his sense of empathy for others but he still has awareness of who he was and develops shame for how he acted. His madness that he grows after that is him becoming entranced by his own thoughts as he interprets this riddle. It’s as if Lear is wandering like a ghost in purgatory, repenting sins

guided by a guardian angel. Instead of removing sin, he is erasing his knowledge of society in order to be able to see the world as a natural human. The Fool's disappearance in act could demonstrate that the guiding angel achieved its goal of transforming Lear and is no longer needed.

Viewing these characters as having any more meaning than what they really are is an element of fantasy; However, adding this layer of fantasy adds unignorable weight and urgency to the story. In an expedited effort to analyze rebirth, In act 4 Lear is found in the furthest part of society. He acts like he's in his early adolescence as he dances through the woods and finds a blinded Gloucester. Instead of being sickened by the sight of Gloucester, he acts playful. Like a child is ignorant, incurious, and accepting of the suffering that is caused by society; but instead is connecting to Gloucester empathetically. He comforts Gloucester's shame of having a bastard son, "When I do stare, see how that subject quakes./ I pardon that man's life." (4.6.128-9) the first time he has connected with anyone on an emotional level. I'm saying this in the tone of an early adolescent attempting, one who can recognize their feelings, overcome them, and is attempting to help others with what they learned. However, the text uses political language that demonstrates that he is in fact unchanged and fails to recognize other people's personal issues as he makes the situation about himself. When the romanticized elements are removed from consideration, the story is permanently stained with that interpretation. For me, the rigid demonstrative text becomes stained with that fantasy element. I cannot wholly accept this story as just a meaningless and appalling tragedy after uncovering this deeply artistic meaning. I don't want to lose that sense of magic that comes from romanticizing life.

The story uses the woods to represent the opposite of society and its effect. The woods are freeing of society's effects as Lear enters as an unwanted king that develops shame of who he was. Briefly discussing the recurrence of shame; Shame in *King Lear* can be seen as the negative emotional feeling someone has in terms of others perception. As a King he is the most mocked character in this world; the most criticized person and highest representation of acceptable behavior. Like a child being carried along through life, Lear is brought closer and closer into society where he begins exploring his individual feelings.

When Lear encounters Cordelia, he begins to represent adolescence in terms of understanding emotions. He wakes from his sleep and begins describing his guilt of his actions: "I am bound/ Upon a wheel of fire...I know not what to say" (Kin. 4.7.53-61). Lear is brought to Cordelia, almost carrying that magical

element of connection that star-crossed lovers possess. From this romantic magic, or unignorable tragic madness, Cordelia is transformed to become this maternal figure and Lear the child. It symbolizes the extremely natural dependence boys have towards their mother and the mothers duty to accept their child for them to grow as they are. She becomes the only maternal figure in the play while Lear becomes the only man capable of feeling complex emotions and acts appropriately with his emotions.

His human experience is not yet finished with his and this is where the tragedy of King Lear gains its significant weight. Lear enters, carrying the corpse of Cordelia. He's carrying out his child, this guiding maternal figure, the person who is responsible for his need for change, and most importantly the first person he has truly loved. Any representation readers put on Cordelia to connect with her is now dead. With all this depth of emotion: the extreme powerlessness he has as a human; All the shame, guilt, and regret he has worked through; The future being taken from him; Lear mirrors his action in the beginning of the play and expresses himself in the most powerful way he can. Without saying a word: "Howl, howl, howl!" (Kin. 5.3.307) all from his idea of unfulfilled love being completely removed from him. Lear finalizes his human journey when he discovers his powerlessness, the fleetingness, and humanizing capabilities of love; how the inevitable death of everything is what allows anything to hold weight. The utter sorrow of love is entangled with euphoric transformation because he now knows what it means to truly love something.

This feeling resonates deeply in me because the idea of love is from a place of complete sadness and emptiness. Either from the feeling of loss or the idea that humanity is innately tragic and anything beautiful is precious. My love story is entirely generated from my values that desperately rely on fantasy to reinvent this story as anything but tragic.

3 Redacted Paragraphs

My view of the world that is deeply fantastical can generate those incredibly unrealistic heights of imagination. The other one, that views everything as trivial attempts to feel alive, makes me concerned that it seems like I make everything depressing in order to connect with it. It can be objectively wrong to impose that onto *King Lear*; but maybe that is the point of this tragedy. It encourages audiences to reflect on their own

values as they attempt to make meaning of this deeply melancholy tragedy. Maybe the play was so demanding of this feeling to be awakened in you to make sense of the tragedy that the comic rewriting is to tell audiences what to feel. It could work, but the entire weight of developing your own meaning from tragedy is what gives life meaning.

Citations

Shakespeare, William, et al. The Tragedy of King Lear. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016.

*“unconscious, n., sense 1”. Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, September 2023,
<<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1835472456>>*