“Shakespeare's play King Lear, provides us with a fascinating study of the twin themes of blindness and insight”

The tragic errors that King Lear and Gloucester make in misjudging their children constitute a form of figurative blindness, the characters have an obvious lack of insight into the true nature of characters around them. The language of the play contains a multitude of references to eyes and sight from the beginning. Cornwall and Regan make these images and metaphors of poor judgement and blindness literal when they blind Gloucester. For the remainder of the play, Gloucester becomes a personification of his actions, he is now truly blind and cannot see, but he was already blind to the intentions of those around him before his physical blinding.

Ironically, Gloucester can see more when he is physically blind. When he could physically see, he was foolish and couldn’t sense people’s intent. However, once he became blind, he surprisingly grew wiser, realizing that he had done Edgar wrong and that Edmund was the villain. Gloucester could only have the insight to know that Edmund was villainous when he became blind. This shows us a fascinating concept from Shakespeare. Shakespeare points out a type of seeing that does not involve the eyes, that is acquired with wisdom rather than being born with it. The power of good character judgement.

Throughout the play, there is consistent reference to “Gods” when seeking insight or justice. “Gods, stand up for bastards!” All the characters in King Lear seem to possess a belief in “Gods”, although it is never mentioned which. This can indicate a blindness in the way of faith, the faith appears to be unanimous without question. Although they still reference the Gods for insight. It is also fascinating that not all the characters get along with these Gods, with Gloucester saying, “As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods; They kill us for their sport.”

* Jonathan Berkeley