**King Lear**

**Introduction –Andrew Hadfield argued that the division of Britain by Lear was an inversion of the unification of Britain by James and that the play was a warning to James as in the play a monarch loses everything by giving in to his sycophantic courtiers who only seek to use him while neglecting those who truly loved him.**

If it’s a theme then say… **Shakespeare develops this idea further in the play and explores [theme name] through the use of personification, foreshadowing, imagery, simile, oxymoron, metaphor, irony and repetition to demonstrate how Lear’s initial actions which he saw as justified due to his belief in the ‘divine right of King’ led to the ultimate tragedy with the death of the daughter that loved him, Cordelia.**

If it’s a character then say… **Shakespeare explores how Lear’s initial actions which he saw as justified due to his belief in the ‘divine right of King’ led to the ultimate tragedy and the character of [character name] helps to further move the plot forward through his actions of [whatever the character does or why they’re relevant to the play] though ultimately the [character name] ends up [**if Edgar then **– overcoming the adversities he faces -** and for anyone good **– another victim of the tragedy -** and for anyone bad **– losing.]**

**Key Quotes**

**Nothing will come of nothing** – incorrect association between language and property as if she offers him no flattery she will receive no inheritance – Shakespeare establishes a pattern of superficial treatment between characters – they often base their actions on appearance and speech instead of according to honest principles or sentiments – word ‘nothing’ appears 34 times in the play – highlights the theme of nothingness and the complete lack of meaning that results from nothingness – end of the play offers no justice at all – entire social order, good and bad in annihilated and turned to nothing

**Thou, Nature, art my goddess** – renounces the value of human laws and instead chooses to exalt the wonder of ‘Nature’ – turns away from the systems that organise human life – reveals a wish to violate social norms and seize power for himself – Nature exists beyond the royal system – offers him a world where he can receive proper inheritance – he selects God to be his goddess – marks a subtle turn away from Christianity and towards paganism – foreshadows the way he will sin both spiritually and politically in order to further his own ascent to power – soliloquy imitates a pattern in King Lear of characters seeking solace or support in the natural environment – Shakespeare positions nature as a open psychological and physical space on which characters can project their ideal worlds, beyond the constraints of normative human society

**Thou hast pared thy wit o’ both sides and left nothing in the middle** – Fools point is not direct and is conveyed through an odd image – ‘pared thy wit o’ both sides’ means he has sliced or cut off his intelligence – Fool imagines ‘wit’ as a physical object that can be cut – ‘both sides’ represent Goneril and Regan and ‘left nothing in the middle’ means he maintains no power or land of his own and thus his action could be seen as a result of no ‘wit’ – passage plays with the idea of madness and role-playing in the tragedy – Fool is meant to be a jesting figure yet he speaks with remarkable insight – one would never expect him to be able to criticise a King in the way – Shakespeare seems to have tuned the Fool into a ruler at the very moment the King becomes a Fool – even amidst the strict social roles that predominate the text interactions like this speak to a fluidity in the identities of all the play’s characters – **Asimov, ‘that, of course, is the great success of the fool – that he is no fool at all.’ – The role of the jester in renaissance period in the court was for entertainment primarily but also to help advise the monarch – Queen Elizabeth I once dismissed a jester for not being critical enough**

**My old heart is cracked, its cracked** – draws attention to his ‘old heart’ which links to the theme of aging – emotional pain is particularly damaging due to his age – begins to follow actions reminiscent of Leers – ‘Cracked’ thus speaks not only to sadness but also to the misdirect emotion that causes him to condemn Edgar to death – characters use it to refer to emotional stress and t betrayal as Gloucester does from here – employed to signify insanity – pain and betrayal function alongside insanity – first can induce the second or vice versa, the line between the two is never particularly clear – **Greenblatt, ‘Mental anguish in King Lear, then, is closely intertwined with physical anguish.’**

**Here’s a night pities neither wise men nor fools** – Lear and Fool both stand amidst the overpowering storm, the first shouts at the natural forces whilst the second offers more reasonable statements – Fool is describing the way Nature doesn’t affect humans differently based on their social status – this statement quite clearly plays with the opposition between ‘wise men’ and ‘fools’ – Fool and Lear continue to switch roles

**Poor naked wretches, wherso’er you are, that bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, how shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, your looped and windowed raggedness defend you From seasons such as these? O I have taken Too little care of this** – moment of anagnorisis – reflect on how little attention he devoted as King to his impoverished subjects – passage shows that Lear’s experience has granted him new level of empathy to others – imagines that common people have gone through what he has – so much be in resource just as he is – nature, here serves as an equaliser between King and subject, allowing Lear to understand how desperate people need aid from ‘seasons’ – then able to imagine the significance of not having and castle and only owning ‘looped and windowed raggedness’ – having redefined his idea of necessity he comes to see even mere shacks as precious – Shakespeare develops the argument that madness can actually bring one clarity and insight – he is seen by others to be insane but his ravings in the wilderness have actually bought him greater empathy for his subjects – the exact quality that would be necessary for any accomplished ruler – he renounces his previous actions places Lear in traditional moral arc of recognition and repentance but Shakespeare plays on this formula by making insanity the route to that realisation

**Out, vile jelly** – command speaks to the evil inherent in Cornwall and Regan’s character – not only torture him but also verbally ridicule him as they do so – ‘jelly’ refers here to the physical substance of Gloucester’s eyes so Cornwall has claimed it ‘vile’ because of Gloucester’s misdeeds – in a sense to call his eyesight vile is correct because he has been blind to the behaviours of Edmund and Edgar but tis also ironic because Cornwall’s actions in that moment are even more despicable – Shakespeare thus press a cycle of violence and retribution in which metaphorical blindness becomes increasingly literal but in which agents of poetic justice are themselves even more hateful than those they’re punishing – 135 references to sight and seeing in the play – **Tim Turner, ‘the play that contains the most famous scene of torture in all of Shakespeare (indeed, probably in all Renaissance drama.’**

**Howl, howl, howl! O, you men of stones! Had I your tongues and eyes, I’d use them so that heavens vault should crack. Shes gone forever.** – exclaims these lines of intense remorse – Lear innovation of ‘Howl, howl, howl,’ recalls his earlier expression during the storm – here he mimics environmental sounds becoming himself an expression of natural catastrophe rather than of rational human logic – call others ‘men of stone’ implies he finds them emotionless and cold in the face of the catastrophe he has witnessed – his demand so sense is particularly evocative considering the role blindness and insanity have played in the work even as he descended into a lack of proper sensation – demands sensor capacities of others

**No, no, no life? Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life. And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more. Never, never, never, never, never** – ends with the abject denial of himself and human nature – tone is quite soft and surprised – repetition of ‘no’ combined with phasing of question casts Lear as quite hesitant even infantile – Shakespeare ends this tragedy with exploration of how one small bit of misplaced language multiplied into a broad and permanent nihilistic denial

**Extra notes**

**McAlinden, ‘the problems in King Lear and problems for all times and places.’**

**Coleridge, ‘All Lear’s faults increase our pity.’**

**Jan Kott, ‘Lear is ridiculous, naïve and stupid. He does not see or understand anything.’**

**Orwell, ‘The fool is the trickle of sanity running through the play.’**

**Charles Lamb, ‘To see an old man tottering about the stage… is painful and disgusting.’**

**Peter Wentworth was an MP during the reign of Elizabeth I who was imprisoned for criticising her actions. His son, Thomas Wentworth was an MP during the reign of James I and warned James of the repercussions of his actions towards Parliament. Kent mirrors Peter in the way that Peter was imprisoned for his actions and similarly Kent is exiled for his.**

**Lear’s actions of dividing the kingdom into three would have alarmed the Jacobean audience who would remember how the question of the succession had loomed large during the reign of Elizabeth I.**

**King James I had two sons, Henry and Charles who were given the titles of the Duke of Cornwall and the Duke of Albany**