

King Lear Notes on Freudian, Psychoanalytical and Family Drama readings

2.2

- “I would divorce me from thy mother’s tomb” (2.2.320) – this is the only direct mention of Lear’s wife, who presumably died before the play. Lear’s incestuous desire for his daughters, which ultimately sets the chain of events in motion, is fuelled by this deficiency in his sexual life.
- “Sepulchring an adultress” (2.2.321) – in his sexual frustration, Lear links his legitimate daughters with Edmund’s bastardy – psychoanalytically, he viewed his daughters as goddesses of love and death at the same time
- Family dynamics are demonstrated by Goneril and Regan’s collaboration to strip Lear of his retinue of a hundred knights, even though the sisters will find themselves in a deadly conflict over Edgar later on.
- At the beginning of the play, Lear already has a pre-existing mental condition. This is manifested by his overreaction to the inferiority conferred on him by Goneril and Regan, much in the same way as Cordelia.

3.1

- The storm rages both inside and outside Lear’s mind, “One minded like the weather, most unquietly”.
- Lear has a child-like personality – he uses his outward madness to great effect in attracting universal sympathy.
- Psychoanalytically, Lear can be seen as more neurotic than insanely mad. He possesses a neurosis that he has always had, manifested in his untimely rages. We can see how quickly he mentally recovered after the storm.
- Modern psychoanalysts agree that Lear would not classify as being insane – in fact, he shows ‘reason in madness’ by correctly postulating that he is “More sinned against than sinning”.
- Freud believes that the way that Lear has been presented is not clinically consistent.

3.2

- “High-engendered battles” – unrest in heaven, an association with 1H4 4.1.129
- The Fool’s comments frequently contain sexual undertones to highlight Lear’s precarious situation, e.g. “codpiece”
- Lear to daughter: “Hide thee, thou bloody hand / ... That art incestuous” – Freudian slip? Does this show the true extent of their relationship, as more than the bond between a father and a child?
- Merlin, who was the legendary prophet from King Arthur’s time, is an anachronistic outside reference.
- Lear’s rambling – free association from Freudian psychoanalysis, and treatment of psychiatric patients

3.3

- If we perceive Edmund as possessing an Oedipal desire for a motherly figure, he may feel that his father Gloucester is an interference to the satisfaction of that urge. He viciously and coldly responds to his kind, trusting father.
- Edmund’s id is not suppressed by his superego

3.4

- Pillicock is slang for penis, Pillicock hill refers to the mount of female genitals
- Lear could be in a state of self-pity, for by becoming an “unaccommodated man”, he denies himself the power that he has always wanted, even at the conclusion of the play.
- Phrases such as “What is the cause of thunder” and “learned Theban” use concepts taken from classical ideas, and show that Lear is trying to find deeper meaning in his life.