

King Lear
Looking at the World with Blind Eyes

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"Only through the loss of our possessions and worldly connections
can one truly realize one's inner being." (Confucius)

Abstract: Reason in madness, truth in suffering, and sight in blindness all contain the same basic meaning. In order to find and recognize our real selves and the truth, we must be aware of blindness. Blindness can normally be defined as the inability of the eye to see, but according to William Shakespeare, blindness means a completely different thing. Blindness is not only a physical impairment, but also a mental flaw some characters possess in King Lear (1605).

The aim of the study is to show how sight and blindness which are associated with many characters of William Shakespeare's King Lear illustrate the themes of awareness, patience, appearance and reality, self-knowledge, and consciousness that exist in the play. It is also to display that the true nature of man is known but is not commonly seen until adversity strikes. Thus, the study analyzes two groups of the characters in King Lear. The first group represents King Lear, Gloucester, Albany, and Edgar. Each one of these characters' blindness is the primary cause of the bad decision he makes; decisions which all of them eventually come to regret. The second group- Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund- is a perfect example of how Shakespeare incorporates the theme of blindness into the play. The four characters suffer from their inability to see things clearly and each one of them remains blind to the end. Therefore, they are punished severely for their actions in the end. Finally, the study sums up Shakespeare's lessons in King Lear through involving, metaphorically speaking, blind characters to truth. The study ends with Notes and a Bibliography.

الملك لير. رؤية العالم بعيون عمياء

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خلاصه :

جنون العقل و معاناة الحقيقة و بصيرة العمى جميعها تحمل معنى أساسي واحد . فمن أجل إبداع و إدراك حقيقة أنفسنا علينا إن نحذر العمى . يعرف العمى بالشكل المألوف على أنه عجز العين عن الرؤيا، لكن طبقا " لوليم شكسبير، فإن معنى العمى مختلف تماما ". حيث أنه لا يعني ضعف البصر بالمعنى الفيزيائي فقط، و إنما يعني أيضا ' عجز عقلي كما في بعض الشخصيات في مسرحية (الملك لير) (١٦٠٥) .

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بيان كيف إن البصر و العمى المرتبطان بعدد من شخصيات مسرحية ((الملك لير)) لوليم شكسبير يوضحان أبرز المفاهيم الموجودة في المسرحية وهي الحذر و الصبر، و الحقيقة و المظاهر، و معرفة الذات و الوعي كما أنها توضح بان الطبيعة الحقيقية للإنسان معروفة و لكنها لا تدرك إلا عند الوقوع في محذور . و عليه، تحلل الدراسة مجموعتين من الشخصيات في مسرحية ((الملك لير)) . تمثل المجموعة الأولى الملك لير و كلوستنر و الباني و ادكر . إن عمى كل شخصية من هذه المجموعة هو السبب الأساسي وراء اتخاذهم لقرارات خاطئة ندموا عليها في النهاية . بينما تمثل المجموعة الثانية كونريل و ريكن و كونوول و ادمند . وهم مجموعة مثالية اختارها شكسبير ليحقق مفهوم العمى في هذه المسرحية . تعاني الشخصيات الأربعة من عجزهم عن رؤية الأمور بوضوح، و كل شخصية بقيت عمياء حتى النهاية . لذلك كانت عاقبتهم شديدا . و أخيرا تلخص الدراسة العبر التي استخلصها شكسبير في مسرحية ((الملك لير)) من خلال الشخصيات العمياء مجازيا . تنتهي الدراسة بقائمة الهوامش و قائمة المصادر .

In William Shakespeare's King Lear, there are several sequences which display blindness of different characters. Blindness of the characters often differs from one to another because of what they are able to see and also because of their nature. Motives such as pride, anger, jealousy, and ambition, ..etc. obstruct their vision, i.e. not allowing them to see clearly.

King Lear tells of the tragedies of two families. At the head of each family is a father who cannot see his children for what they are. Both fathers are lacking in perceptiveness, so the stories of the two families run parallel to each other.

King Lear is a character who is most affected by blindness, even though his physical vision is normal. As the play opens up, Gloucester and Kent are speaking of Lear's intention to resign his authority to his three daughters just because he sees that this is better for him, for his daughters, and for his kingdom, without thinking of its consequences whether tragic or happy:

*Lear: Give me the map there. Know that we have
divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cars and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths while we
Unburdened crawl toward death.*
(I. i. 38-42)¹

Lear is imaginative in thought. Value, for him, depends on material quality that can be weighed or numbered².

*Lear: Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extent
Where nature doth with merit challenge.*
(I. i. 52-54)

This means that the more his ears are pleased with the most beautiful words of love and respect, the largest part of the kingdom will be given to that speaker. Thus, Lear's kingdom is divided according to a test of love. It is that test of love which causes Lear to banish his most beloved daughter, Cordelia.

When she is asked how much she loves her father, Cordelia replies that she loves him according to her bond, no more nor less. This response angers Lear and drives him to ban her for her refusal to comply. Although Lear can physically see, he is blind in that he lacks insight, understanding, and direction. He is suspicious and he bans Cordelia because he thinks that she is the only daughter who does not love him.

It is Lear's rashness which prevents him from seeing that she speaks the truth. It is the same rashness which leads him to believe that Goneril and Regan are being truthful.

The metaphorical language and beauty of both Goneril and Regan's speeches blind Lear's eyes. He refuses to listen to anyone. Kent's attempts to warn him not to bow to flattery are in vain:

*Kent: Think'st thou that duty shall have to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness
honour's bound
When majesty stoops to folly. Reserve thy state,
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness.*

(I. i. 148-152)

Kent tells Lear to "see better": "See better, Lear, and let me still remain/ The true blank of thine eye." (I. i. 160-161) He does not understand Lear's condition and his rashness, it is "his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him."³

The result is that Kent is banished as well. Cordelia and Kent are victims of Lear's wrath and blindness to reality. Since Lear's vision is unclear, he cannot see people for who they really are. Lear cannot and does not want to see the truth in Cordelia's and in Kent's statements. He cannot see what their words really mean.

Kent sees things better than Lear does because he does not see with his eyes. He sees with his mind. Kent, who has insight, can see through the lies of Lear's eldest daughters, and can see that Cordelia is the one who truly loves Lear the most. Kent tries to convince Lear by saying: "Answer my life, my judgement, Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least" (I. i. 152-153). Lear, with no sight, only sees what is on the surface, and cannot look beyond the words.

Unfortunately, Lear cannot see what he should see, as Kent sees; his eldest daughters' flattery.

*Kent: Sirth thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence and banishment is here.
[To CORDELIA] The gods to their shelter take
thee, maid,
That justly think'st and hast most rightly said.
[To GONERIL and REGAN] And your large
Speeches may your deeds approve,
That good effects may spring from words of love.
(I. i. 181-185)*

Moreover, Cordelia predicts a plight will fall on Lear and the whole kingdom. This matter should be seen by Lear who is supposed to be a wise old man, and not by Cordelia, inexperienced young lady.

*Cordelia: Time shall unfold what plighted cunning
hides, Who covert faults at last with shame
derides.
Well may you prosper.*

(I. i. 281-283)

Lear's blindness to truth puts him in a great plight as Cordelia predicts. Lear lives with Goneril first since she is the eldest daughter. His living with her makes him ask a tragic question: "Are you our daughter?" (I. ii. 220). After receiving her share of the kingdom, Goneril's real personality comes to the surface through her bad treatment to her father. It drives Lear to rediscover who he and his daughters are seriously:

Lear: Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
Dos Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his
eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied__ Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so!
Who is it that can tell me who I am?
(I. iv. 227-231)

Gonril reveals herself that she was flattering and she was after wealth and power. Now Lear sees that Cordelia's love for him was so tremendous that she was not able to put it in words. He compares Goneril's fault with that of Cordelia's. He finds that Cordelia's failure to express her love is "most small fault" (I. iv. 268) if it is compared with Goneril's ingratitude.

*Lear: How ugly didst thou in Cordela show,
Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame of
nature
From the fixed place, drew from heart all love,
And added to the gall.
(I. iv. 269-272)*

This comparison, in other words, this half realization leads to Lear's derangement: "O Lear, Lear, Lear! Beat at this gate that let thy folly in" [Striking his head] (I. iv. 272-273). Yet, it does not open his eyes, for he still sees that Regan is "kind and comfortable", and she will stand with him, support him, and will punish Goneril.

*Lear: I have another daughter,
Who I am sure is kind and comfortable.
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolvish visage.*

(I. iv. 307-310)

Regan announce her alliance with Goneril when she leaves her home though she knows that her father is coming. Lear finds that Regan is as hard as Goneril is. Though Lear kneels to Regan to stay with her, she refuses and insists that Lear should return to Goneril. Lear cannot control himself. He does not know what to say; or what to do. His desire to have revenge upon his daughters and to punish them on the one hand, and his disability to do anything to take his right by his hand, on the other hand, makes such a strong clash inside himself that he weeps against his will and tears his white hair. Lear's portrayal in such a pathetic manner makes him "embod[y] the bleakest vision of human nature in the history of the theatre—the once-powerful king has been reduced to the thing itself."⁴

*Lear: You think I'll weep;
No, I'll not weep.
I have full cause of weeping, [Storm and tempest
but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flows
Or ere I'll weep. O Fool, I shall go mad!*

(II. iv. 280-284)

Lear slowly comes to clear vision. He realizes that his two eldest daughters betray him and they do not truly love him. His inability to believe what he sees begins to push him towards the edge of insanity which can be defined as "distorted vision, not seeing things as they are."⁵ Immediately, after Lear's weeping, nature weeps as well. This is symbolized by the storm and the tempest.

The storm is a turning point in Lear's life. His suffering in the storm opens his eyes to an ultimate reality that all human beings are equal and everything but love is vanity⁶. Because he sees that he, the king; Tom, the beggar; and the Fool are all equally the victims of the cruel storm, Lear realizes that each man, underneath his clothing, is naked and therefore weak. So, in a moment of insight, he confesses his guilt that he is a sinner: "I am a man/ More sinned against than sinning" (III. ii. 58-59). He neither excuses nor pities himself. In these moments, he cannot see, he cannot sense, but he begins to learn about true need: "The art of our necessities is strange" (III. ii. 70). Also, his sudden vision of "homeless poverty" (III. iv. 26) turns his thoughts outwards from self to others.

It is his failure to see reality that leads to Lear's intellectual blindness, through which he sees that he was mocked and his eldest daughters flattered him for the kingdom whereas Cordelia was honest. Here Lear gets a clear idea that eyes are not enough to make a man see his way, but he also needs patience, reason, and sense to help the eyes: "A man may see how this world/ goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears" (IV. Vi. 149-150). This is Lear's confession that eyes are not enough to see the essence of things. On the contrary, eyes may be deceived by appearance. A man must use his mind in seeing what is beyond the appearance, i.e. reality.

His realization is too late. Cordelia, in a failure attempt to return the kingdom to her father, dies. Her death leads to Lear's death, i.e. Lear's blindness causes the death of Cordelia and his own.

Earl of Gloucester is a second typical example who suffers from blindness. His blindness prevents him from seeing the goodness of Edgar, his legitimate son; and the evil of Edmund, his illegitimate son.

Gloucester's blindness begins when Edmund convinces him by a forged letter that Edgar is planning to kill Gloucester in order to inherit the latter's title, position, and wealth.

Since Edgar is legitimate, he has all respect, the title, and the wealth of his father. That matter arouses Edmund's jealousy and drives him to

have revenge upon Gloucester and Edgar. Gloucester lacks the direction and insight that it takes to see reality, instead he sees only physically and this helps Edmund in achieving his aim.

In the blind panic of hurt and fear, Gloucester is easily persuaded and deceived by Edmund's forged letter. This shows how much Gloucester relies on others' judgements:

Gloucester: Hum! Conspiracy! 'Sleep till I wake him, you should enjoy half revenue'. My son Edgar! Had he a hand to write this? A heart and brain to breed it in? When came you to this? Who brought it?
(I. ii. 56-59)

Gloucester describes Edgar's action as "conspiracy" without investigating whether the letter is right or fake; or even if it is right, he does not give him a chance to defend himself by revealing the reasons or motivations that drive him to do so despite the fact that Gloucester loves Edgar and he knows how faithful Edgar is: "I loved him/ No father his son dearer" (III. iv. 169-170). Now Edgar is considered a "villain":

Gloucester: O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain! Worse than brutish! Go, sirrah, seek him. I'll apprehend him. Abominable villain!
(I. ii. 77-80)

Edgar is another blind character shown by Shakespeare whose blindness to truth and reality makes him Edmund's second victim. Edgar is supposed to know how much his father loves him, respects him, and intends to make him Earl of Gloucester; yet, he believes Edmund blindly without asking his father about the villain who makes this hypocrisy between the son and his father: "Some villain hath done me wrong" (I. iii. 170). He gives up seeking truth and runs away disguising as "poor Tom".

*Edmund: My father watches. O sir, fly this place!
Intelligence is given where you are hid.*

You have now the good advantage of the night.

(II. i. 21-23)

Edmund lies to Edgar and advises him to run away, and Edgar follows his instructions blindly. This demonstrates that "physical sight does not guarantee sight."⁷ The result is that Edgar is sentenced to death and Edmund is trusted. Gloucester is also blind when he puts his confidence in Edmund and tells him about his alliance to Lear and about the letter which reveals that.

Edmund seizes this opportunity and informs Cornwall, Regan's husband, about the letter "which approves him [Gloucester] on intelligent party to the/ advantage of France" (III. v. 12-13). Gloucester is considered a traitor and he must be punished. Gloucester is brought a prisoner before Cornwall, Regan, and Goneril. He is humiliated deeply. Regan plucks his white beard mercilessly: "So white, and such a traitor?" (III. vii.36). Goneril orders to pluck out his eyes and Cornwall does so. So, driven by his own blindness, Gloucester not only loses his son in his darkened state, but also his eyes, for Gloucester is totally blind. The blinding of a person is not only painful, but also demeaning and tormenting, and that is the criminals' intention. Gloucester calls out to Edmund to help him and save him from those criminals:

*Gloucester: All dark and comfortless! Where's my
son Edmund?*

Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature

To quit this horrid act.

(III. vii. 82-85)

When he knows that it was Edmund who revealed Gloucester's treachery, Gloucester realizes that he was blind and now he has eyes to see the truth: "O, my follies! Then Edgar was abused/ Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!" (III. vii. 90-91). Shakespeare wants to show that Gloucester must lose his physical sight in order to gain the type of vision that he needs to see his son's betrayal. Only after he loses his faculties, Gloucester can recognize that his blindness to honesty has

cost him dearly. In that moment, he emphasizes Lear's idea that eyes are deceived by appearance.

*Gloucester: I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. O dear Edgar,
The food of thy abused father's wrath!
Might I but live to see thee in my touch
I'd say I had eyes again*

(IV. i. 18-24)

Edgar, who is near Gloucester and he sees his blinded father, also realizes that he was deceived by Edmund: "O gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'?/ I am worse than e'er I was." (IV. i. 26-27). Edgar leads his father to Dover where Lear is, without revealing his identity.

The meeting of the two injured fathers, mad Lear and blind Gloucester, witnesses crucial moments when Lear does not notice Gloucester's blinding, showing Lear's own blindness in seeing others. Lear tells Gloucester that he can see with his ears, and then he praises Gloucester because he has no eyes and no money in his purse, yet he (Gloucester) still sees the world more than Lear does with his set of eyes and his entire kingdom. As L.C. Knight points out that "one character echoes another: the blinding of Gloucester parallels the cruelty done to Lear; Gloucester loses his eyes, and Lear's mind is darkened; Gloucester learn to see better... in this blindness, and Lear reaches his final insights, the recognition of his supreme need, through madness."⁸

Lear: O ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light; yet you see how this world does.

(IV. vi. 143-146)

Lear's words reflect his realization. So, it can be argued that "while Lear is forced towards his realization in the storm, Gloucester,..., is forced towards his in darkness."⁹

Edgar's regret is shown when he rushes his way to have revenge upon Edmund for Gloucester: "thou (Edmund) art a traitor,/ False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father" (V. iii. 131-132). Edgar is a fit character to end the play with because he is a model character in that he alone illustrates a number of types of suffering. He endures so much and can make use of his own experience.

Albany is a clear example of a character suffering from the case of blindness and repenting later on. He is blinded by his love for Goneril. Although he does not like Goneril's actions, he does not argue or try to stop her. Albany's deep devotion to Goneril blinds him from the evil she possesses: "I cannot be so partial, Goneril;/ to the great love I bear you" (I. iv. 314-315). He is unable to realize how greedy and mean Goneril is when she flatters Lear with a bunch of lies and then kicks him out of her house.

Though Albany follows Goneril blindly, he wakes to reality in the end. He reproaches not only Goneril, but also Regan for what they have gone and are doing to their father; "Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?" (IV. ii. 40). Indirectly, Shakespeare wants to show the daughters' state. So, this helps to "create and increase an unparalleled atmosphere of... cruelty and bodily pain."¹⁰

In Scene ii of Act IV, Albany dissociates himself from Goneril and the anti-Lear party. Blindness is removed from his eyes at the crucial moment when Lear is in need of help. Without fear, Albany expresses his loyalty and alliance with Lear against Goneril and the others to the extent that he wishes that Goneril were not a woman so that he could attack her and awaken her to reality in his own way:

*Albany: Thou changed and self-covered thing, for shame
Bemonster not thy feature! Were't my fitness
To let these obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and Lear*

*Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.*

(IV. ii. 63-68)

What makes Albany more furious than before is the news of Gloucester's blindness. He feels sympathy for him. He wants to avenge evil and fight back for Gloucester. Yet, he makes no action and stays with them because he knows that they have the power and he is not as strong as they are. However, he declares that this incident proves that there are powers above them which are quick in punishing transgressors.

Albany is also blind to the fact that Goneril is cheating on him and that she is plotting to kill him. Fortunately, Edgar comes across a cure for Albany's blindness. A note outlining Goneril's evil plans is all Albany needs to see. Eventually, he recognizes what an evil woman he is married to and he lets out his emotions when he says: "You are not worth the dust which the rude wind/ Blows in your face" (IV. ii. 30-31).

The letter revealing Goneril's treachery allows Albany to have justice upon evil doers. Edmund is arrested and is forced to fight through which he dies: "Stay yet; hear reason. Edmund, I arrest thee/ On capital treason, and, in thy attaint" (V. iii. 84-85). This event leads to Goneril's death at her hand fearing to face the reality of her.

Albany: Most monstrous! O!

Know'st thou this paper?

Goneril: Ask me not what I know.

(V. iii. 157-159)

All the four characters -Lear, Gloucester, Edgar, and Albany- suffer from their inability to see things clearly, and each one of them regrets his deed. Yet, they are punished. Both Lear and Gloucester lose their life as the result of their punishment. Unlike Lear and Gloucester, Albany and Edgar suffer and revenge for their sufferings. They not only

survive the battle, but also they live to rule what was once Lear's kingdom.

Lear sees his daughters for what they have as far as quantity not quality. He offers his two greedy and selfish daughters, Goneril and Regan, his entire kingdom, simply because he thinks that he is so great that he cannot possibly see anyone not loving him. The greedy daughters are like their father in that they are other two examples Shakespeare displays to express the theme of blindness in this play.

Through the characters of Goneril and Regan, Shakespeare gives his readers a lesson that even those who are noble in birth are blind to reality and can easily be deceived by appearance. Their greedy ambition blinds their eyes and drives them to deceive their father by exaggerated declarations hoping to get all his power and his kingdom.

*Goneril: Sir, I love you more than word can wield
the matter,
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,
Beyond what can be valued rich or rare,
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty,
honour,
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of 'so much' I love you.*

(I. i. 55-62)

Goneril mentions "love" four times which reflects, ironically speaking, how much she loves him. Regan, her evil counterpart also declares such unfounded flattery as this:

*Regan: I am made of that self mettle as my sister,
And prize me at her wroth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love:
Only she comes too short, that I profess
Myself on enemy to all other joys
Which the most precious spare of sense possesses
And find I am alone felicitate*

In your highness' love.

(I. i. 70-77)

Lear is enchanted with Regan's expression of love and respect. Lear welcomes the flattery and falls in the trap of words. Nevertheless, the wheel of fortune turns against them and pushes them in the same trap.

Goneril and Regan are deceived by Edmund's expressions of love. Goneril expresses her affection towards Edmund openly: "Our wishes on the way/ May prove effects" (IV. ii. 14-15). She is seen as "a bit of chaos, her vitalism of lust and power a withered branch torn from the tree."¹¹ That state of "chaos" leads to her blindness. She loves and puts her confidence in the person who betrays his father. She cannot see the reality that a person who betrays his father, he may betray her as well.

Regan, on the other hand, detests Gloucester because he is against Edmund, the man whom she is trying to pursue. Therefore, Cornwall's death (Regan's husband)- at the hand of a servant while Cornwall is torturing Gloucester- gives Regan the chance to win Edmund. That matter arouses Goneril's jealousy:

*Goneril: One way I like this well;
But being widow, and my Gloucester with her
May all the building in my fancy pluck
Upon my hateful life.*

(IV. ii. 85-88)

She is afraid that Regan may win Edmund. Jealousy blinds her eyes and starts thinking of doing something to draw Edmund's love towards her. Regan is blind to Goneril's intention of harming her in order to get Edmund. This shows that their greed and jealousy make them see things in such an inhumane manner.

The rivalry between Goneril and Regan for Edmund's affection is getting higher and higher to the extent that they forget the battle Cordelia breaks out with the help of her husband, the Prince of France, to restore the kingdom to her father. Unfortunately, Goneril's letter falls in Edgar's hand after killing Oswald who tries to kill Gloucester

according to Goneril and Regan's orders. Edmund confesses that he expresses his love for both sisters:

*Edmund: To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
Each jealous of the other, as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed
If both remain alive.*

(V. ii. 55-59)

Edmund's confession is too late, for Goneril already poisoned her sister to death for the sake of shallow love:

*Regan: Sick, O sick!
Goneril[Aside]: If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.*

(V. iii. 96-97)

After confronting her with the letter, Goneril stabs herself to death. Both sisters are victims of blindness to the human conditions.

Edmund is a character most blind to reality. From the beginning of the play, we see that Edmund's jealousy of Edgar blinds his eyes. The idea of being illegitimate blinds his eyes to other things more important than title and land. But for Edmund, they are everything in the world and worthy to make traps to others: "Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land" (I. ii. 16). Edmund plans the downfall of his father and he is only interested in his personal gain, at any cost. Hence, he makes the trap of a forged letter in order to dismiss Edgar and to get Gloucester's confidence.

Not content with that, Edmund makes use of Gloucester's confidence and betrays him. Revenge darkens his eyes this time because he cannot forgive his father for his fault that makes him a bastard. The result of Edmund's metaphorical blindness is Gloucester's real blindness. So, Edmund gets the title; Earl of Gloucester.

Edmund's ambition goes so far, for greed is another motivation for his blindness. He draws the affection of Goneril and Regan and "[they] are increasingly caught in a web of lust and adultery,"¹² so that he can

get the entire power on the one hand, and to approve to himself that he is a man worthy to be loved though he is a bastard on the other hand. Edmund remains blind until his death.

Another character that is blind though it has eyes is Cornwall, who "seems to have been a fit mate for Regan."¹³ He follows his wife's orders blindly and without a slight thinking whether those orders are right or wrong.

In this play, Cornwall makes a sentence of works which reflects his lack of vision. First, he leaves his house though he knows that Lear is coming because it is Regan's desire:

*Regan: If they come to sojourn my house,
I'll not be there.*

Cornwall: Nor I, assure thee, Regan.

(II. i. 103-105)

Second, Kent is put in stocks until night according to Cornwall's order without taking into consideration that he is King Lear's messenger. Third, he stands with Regan against her father instead of opening her eyes as Albany's attempt with Goneril. Finally, Cornwall does the most brutal act in the play when he, with the encouragement of Goneril and the assistance of Regan, mercilessly puts out Gloucester's eyes: "Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot" (III. viii. 67) which leads to his death. In this case, Cornwall also suffers from clouded vision because his death is "a direct result of his blinding of Gloucester, when a servant kills him."¹⁴

Throughout King Lear, William Shakespeare uses the characters of the play to make judgements on society by using blindness as a metaphor that runs through the play. He gets his point in a number of ways portraying characters that can be fooled by others' flattery, or they are easily manipulated or deceived, or simply they have a lack of understanding of the human condition.

In King Lear, Shakespeare produces situations in which those with healthy eyes are ignorant of what is going on around them, and those without vision appear to see the clearest¹⁵. In addition, Shakespeare

recognizes the fact that blindness to the knowledge of the human condition is a basic mortal trait.

Hence, before understanding the human condition, a man must endure a journey to wisdom. Shakespeare views the journey to wisdom in terms of metaphors of seeing and blindness. Sight is a frequently used metaphor for perception, knowledge, and awareness while blindness connotes ignorance, insensitivity, and the inability to perceive and understand.

The characters in King Lear are initially blind to their own condition, which eventually leads them to make faulty decisions, despite the warnings of others. Consequently, the characters suffer because of their poor judgement.

Moreover, Shakespeare illustrates that wisdom does not necessarily come with age. The mistakes that Lear and Gloucester make leave them vulnerable to disappointment and suffering at a time in their lives when both should be enjoying peace and contentment. Lear and Gloucester achieve wisdom and "spiritual regeneration after evil does its worst with both of them."¹⁶

As in many of his plays, in King Lear Shakespeare states that appearance can be deceiving. Many people put up false fronts in order to get what they want, including Goneril and Regan's flattery. Here Shakespeare emphasizes the need to think about actions, in order not to fall victims to other's false actions, especially actions that may have serious consequences and not to rush into anything. Eventually, at the end of the play, all wrong is corrected, unfortunately at the cost of several lives of many innocent people, making King Lear a true tragedy.

NOTES:

1William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Philip Edwards (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975). All subsequent quotation from this play are taken from this edition and enclosed within the text in parentheses.

2Philip Edwards, "Introduction," to William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Philip Edwards (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975), p. 31.

3William Hazlitt, "King Lear Characters Analysis," (2005. URL: <http://www.Absoluteshakespeare.com/guide/king-lear/characters.htm>) April 16,2009,p.1of 13.

4Jack Lynch, "A Complex Relationship with King Lear," (October 24, 2007. URL: <http://www.latimes.com/feature/book/la-bkw-kinglear24oct24,1,4488905.story65-k-htm>) May 12, 2009, p.5 of 6.

5Nicholas Brook "Introduction," to William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Nicholas brook (London: Edward Arnold Publisher, Ltd., 1963), p. 21.

6Joe Guretzki, "Physical, Psychological, and Moral Significance of the Storm," (URL: <http://www.community.boredofsudies.org/325/module-b-critical-study-texts/112188/storm-scene-king-lear-k44-htm>) May 12, 2009, p. 2 of 4.

7"Clear Vision in KingLear," (URL: <http://www.field-of-theme.com/shakespeare/Essays/Elear3.htm>) April 19, 2009, p. 2 of 3.

8L.C. knight, "King Lear and the Great Tragedies," in The Age of Shakespeare, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1955), p. 233.

9Gwilym Jones, "King Lear and the Problem of the Heath," (2008. URL: <http://www.globelink.org/2008season/king/lear/theproblemofheath/7-k-htm>) May 12, 2009, p. 2 of 2.

10Caroline. F. E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 342.

11Tohn Danby, The Study of King Lear (London: Faber& Faber, 1948), p. 137.

12John Reibetanz, The Lear World: A Study of King Lear in its Dramatic Context (Toronto University Press, 1977), p. 89.

13A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 298.

14"Clear Vision in King Lear," p. 2 of 3.

15sonny Elizondo, "Sight and Consciousness: An Interpretive Study in King Lear," (August 5, 2000. URL: <http://www.kinglear.theforgerlibeary.shakespeare.com/sightandconsciousness.htm>) April 17, 2009, p. 1 of 4.

16Theodore J. Shank (ed), A Digest of 500 Plays (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1963), p. 79.

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