



## Role of Fate in the Life of Shakespeare's Hero King Lear

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**Abstract:** *Shakespeare was not trying to justify the ways of God to men or to show the universe as a Divine Comedy. William Shakespeare has freely discussed the fate of humanity in King Lear. In the moving play, King Lear, Our tragic hero, has obvious hamartia. This phrase shows us how our tragic hero completely goes insane and must endure the hardest pain before his own ruin or death. Humanity encounters the same fate. The moment right before we hit rock bottom is where the most pain is felt. Due to our unjust actions, we not only ruin the guilty ones, but also the innocent ones. There is one final characteristic of humanity's fate. This deals with humankind's ability to pull themselves out of a ditch and start all over again. Humans will always get the best out of the worst situations. The tragedy of King Lear helps us understand our own fate better.*

We see that there will be certain individuals whose unjust actions will bring everyone down. This we cannot say the individual is evil, but that they made a fatal misjudgment. Their actions will cause a great deal of suffering on their part and ours, but they will seek redemption and also realize that no matter what their position is in life, we are all the same. Just as in King Lear, we will also feel that we have hit rock bottom, but there is one thing we must remember about humanity's fate.

It is obvious that these impressions about fate are seen in Shakespeare's tragedies. On the other hand, there is practically no trace of fatalism in its more primitive, crude, and obvious forms. Nothing makes us think of the actions and sufferings of the persons as somehow arbitrarily fixed beforehand without regard to their feelings, thoughts, and resolutions. Nor are the facts ever so presented that it seems to us as if the supreme power, whatever it may be, had a special spite against a family or an individual. Neither do we receive the impression that a family, owing to some hideous crime or impiety in early days, is doomed in later days to continue a career of portentous calamities and sins.

What, then, is this fate which the impressions already

considered lead us to describe as the ultimate power in the tragic world? It appears to be a mythological expression for the whole system or order, of which the individual characters form an inconsiderable and feeble part; which seems to determine, far more than they, their native dispositions and their circumstances and action; which is so vast and complex that they can scarcely at all understand it or control its workings; and which has a nature so definite and fixed that whatever changes take place in it produce other changes inevitably and without regard to men's desires and regrets. And whether this system is called fate or not, it cannot be denied that it does appear as the ultimate operating power in the tragic world.

Whatever may be said of accidents, circumstances and the like, human action is presented as the central fact in tragedy and as the main cause of the catastrophe. That necessity which so much impresses us is chiefly the necessary connection of cause and effect. For his own actions we tend to hold the hero responsible. The critical action of the hero is to a greater or lesser degree bad or wrong. The catastrophe is the return of this action on the head of the hero. Another way to say this is that the ultimate power in a Shakespearean tragedy is a moral order. Thus, what a man does in violation of the moral order must be inevitably paid back to him. Even if we confine our attention to the heroes who are not guilty of overtly monstrous sins, even if they are comparatively

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innocent, they still show some marked imperfection or defect-irresolution, pride, credulousness, excessive simplicity, excessive susceptibility to sexual emotions, and so on. These defects are certainly in the widest sense evil, and they contribute decisively to the conflict and catastrophe.

Shakespeare was not trying to justify the ways of God to men or to show the universe as a Divine Comedy. He was writing tragedy, and tragedy would not be tragic if it were not a painful mystery. Nor can he be said even to point distinctly in any direction where a solution might lie. Good and evil are both present in his tragedies, first one in control and then the other. Perhaps it is his faithful presentation of these two conflicting forces as they affect man that makes his tragedies so fascinating and compelling.

**"Come what come may, Time and the hour runs through the roughest day"**

Many tragedies have been written throughout history. The purpose of these tragedies was to illustrate some type of moral lesson. The tragic situation involves man's miscalculation of reality and the fatal results of those miscalculations. Our tragic hero must endure a great deal of suffering. It ends in his ruin or destruction. We must also understand that tragedy not only destroys the guilty, but also the innocent. The tragic hero represents what could happen to humankind. He is responsible for his society. He is a representation of our own fate. William Shakespeare has freely discussed the fate of humanity in

King Lear.

In the moving play, King Lear, Our tragic hero, has obvious hamartia. It is his vanity. Lear is so full of himself that he doesn't realize the truth. First of all, Lear wants to divide his kingdom up into three parts for his three daughters. Each daughter's portion depended on how much they would proclaim their love for him. Lear says:

**"Give me the map there. Know that we have divided. In three our kingdom; And 'tis our fast intent to shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths while we Unburdened crawl to death."**

Lear should not have relinquished his powers in the first place. He expects to be treated like a king when he no longer will have the power of a king. Secondly, he says:

**"Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love, Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn, And here are to be answered. Tell me, my daughters (Since now we will divest us both of rule, Interest of territory, cares of state), Which of you should we say doth love us most, Those we our largest bounty may extend Where nature doth with merit challenge."**

Within these few lines, we see Lear's first sign of vanity. For one daughter to receive more land than another, one must proclaim their love to be more than the other. He is measuring their love with land. Naturally, his first two daughters, Goneril and Regan, will lie to him, but his vanity blinds him from the truth.

Lear's first miscalculation was dividing his land between the daughters. The second is allowing his vanity to get the best of him. Injured pride gives rise to anger. Cordelia proclaims that her love will belong half to her husband and half to her father. She also says she loves Lear by her duty, no more, no less. Cordelia was Lear's favorite daughter until this point. When she addressed her love in this manner, he was outraged saying:

**"Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower! For, by the sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Hecate, and the night; By all the operation of the orbs From whom we do exist, and cease to be; Here I disclaim all my paternal care, Propinquity and property of blood, And as a stranger to my heart and me Hold thee, from this, forever. The barbarous Scythian, Or he that makes his generation messes To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom Be as well neighboured, pitied, and relieved, As though my sometime daughter."**

In this previous passage, he was more than outraged. He went to the point that he disowned his daughter, the only true one. Kent tries to dissuade Lear from his unjust actions, but Lear strikes out at him saying, **"the bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft."**

Lear's vanity leads to anger. The next phase is his unbridled anger leading to his unbearable suffering.

Lear now banishes Kent and Cordelia. He is now left with his two ungrateful daughters, Goneril and Regan. He soon realizes that



neither daughter cares for him and this leads to more vanity and anger, proclaiming he would rather 'kneel before France like some petty squire' before he returns to Goneril. He said he would rather 'wage against the enmity o' th' air' or 'be slave and sumpter to this detested groom,' referring to Oswald. Lear tells Goneril that he never wants to see her again, but he realizes that even though she is heartless, she is still his own flesh and blood. By Goneril being described as a disease in his flesh, Lear could be recognizing that her evil stems from his very own. Lear is realizing that his vanity is now extending to his daughter and through his very own daughter he will be destroyed.

Lear again tries to measure love, just as in the first Act. He wants to stay with Regan, but she'll only house twenty-five of his knights. He then says that her love is half of Goneril's because she will house fifty. He measures their love by his hundred knights. These misjudgments by Lear show how humans are constantly making miscalculations concerning reality, but never seem to learn from it. It seems that it is in man's nature to make mistakes, but not truly learn from it.

In addition to the suffering he has felt already from his daughters, they now continue to show how they have no gratitude. Lear replies, 'I gave you alines' Regan responds with, 'And in good time you gave it.' Regan asks her father why he even needs one knight. Lear replies:

**"O, reason not the need; Our**

**basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous: Allow not nature more than nature needs, Man's life's as cheap as beast's."**

What this means is that if you strip a man of everything he has but the bare necessities, he is no different from an animal. Lear is a king and the hundred knights are a representation of what makes him different from other men. What Lear is also trying to say is that it is more a matter of principle than need. He makes reference to that when he asks his daughter whether she needs her decorated dress or not. Goneril and Regan's reduction of the king's knights also represent how they are slowly stripping their father of all power he has remaining. It seems as though Lear is starting to realize that he is not much in this universe. You can rule the world, but it will only last for a season. In the end, we are no different from any other man in any society.

Lear's suffering is not over yet. His daughters turn him out into the storm. In Act III, scene ii, he describes the storm as being more of a tempest. While being exposed to the elements, he realizes more that his daughters were ungrateful because he says to the tempest that it owes him nothing for he did not give it a kingdom or called it children. One must also understand that there is a great relationship between Lear and the elements. The storm during Lear's encounter with humankind's ability to pull themselves out of a ditch and start all over again. Humans will always get the best out of the worst situations. This is exhibited at the

end of King Lear. Albany says:

**" You, to your rights, With boot and such addition as your honours Have more than merited. All friends shall taste The wages of their virtue, and all foes The cup of their deservings. O, see, see!"**

After all that has went wrong, the righteous will prevail and the kingdom shall survive. The pestilences of the land are dead- Cornwall, Edmund, Goneril and Regan- and hope now returns for the land, represented by Albany, Kent, and Edgar.

The tragedy of King Lear helps us understand our own fate better. We see that there will be certain individuals whose unjust actions will bring everyone down. This we cannot to say the individual is evil, but that they made a fatal misjudgment. Their actions will cause a great deal of suffering on their part and ours, but they will seek redemption and also realize that no matter what their position is in life, we are all the same. Just as in King Lear, we will also feel that we have hit rock bottom, but there is one thing we must remember about humanity's fate. Humans thrive on hardships and will always live to see a brighter day. All is not dark for us. There will always be light at the end of the tunnel. The hardest part is getting there.

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