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## **Shakespeare's *King Lear*: The ANTICIPATED End**

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## ABSTRACT:

William Shakespeare's King Lear begins with Lear ignoring the natural order of inheritance by deciding to divide his kingdom among his three daughters before his death. Typically human, Lear is influenced by the flattery of his two eldest daughters, Goneril and Regan, while his true and loving daughter, Cordelia, is abandoned. The most remarkable aspect of human nature present in this play is greed, from which the two eldest daughters of Lear, their husband, and certainly Edmund, suffer. Even Lear himself divided his kingdom for some greedy reason, wanting all the benefits of being king but no responsibility. Sweet and innocent Cordelia has little chance against her sister's betrayal. There is no reward for being "good" at the play, leading you to believe that God is not involved in the unfolding events. Instead, nature governs the outcome, a Darwinian survival of the fittest in which the most desirable qualities are avarice and deception. Although the play is set before the rise of Christianity, it was written for a Christian audience. Many Protestants in the UK believe that God has a plan for everyone and everything that happens in the universe for a reason and will eventually lead to something better. In this work, however, that belief is noticeably absent. There is no happy ending when good triumphs over evil except for Edgar defeating Edmund, which was not enough to save Cordelia in the end. Edgar's defeat to Edmund in itself was a fraternal rivalry, reminiscent of the biblical Cain and Able, even if they were only half-brothers. What happens in the play doesn't seem to be for the better, at the end of the play the king and all of his daughters die, leaving England under either Albany or Edgar's control. Instead, the play is fueled by the greed of men and women who want happiness, but do nothing to deserve it. The play's tragic ending reflects a nihilistic perspective, where there is no promised end but chaos and death.

**KEYWORDS:** Shakespeare, King Lear, Drama, Death

By dividing his kingdom, King Lear wished to give up his responsibilities as king but retain all benefits. This is another form of greed, different from girls, but still clearly untrue. His desire to maintain power is evidenced by Lear's expulsion of Kent shortly after he abdicates the throne:

*Hear me, recreant, on thine allegiance hear me!*

*That though has sought to make us break our vows,*

*Which we durst never yet, and with strained pride*



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*To come betwixt our sentence and our power,*

*Which nor our nature nor our place can bear (1.1.170-174)*

It is ironic that Lear mentions nature here because he is someone who goes against nature and the natural order of things by dividing his kingdom before his death. He went against his natural paternity by banishing Cordelia, and he now wields the power with which he no longer has to banish Kent from the kingdom. Lear fed his daughter's greed by describing his kingdom in natural terms as he gave Goneril his share of the land, "From all these limits, even from line to line, / With shady forests and rich fields, / With rich and wide rivers- skirted grasslands, (1.1.63-65) This also shows the relationship and ability to do things. His description of these abundant natural resources only makes Goneril and Regan more covetous, plotting to outdo themselves and gain more land. flattering her father just like her sisters, King Lear again invoked nature to banish her from the kingdom, "For by the divine radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and of the curtain night, / By all the activities of the sphere / In which we exist and cease to exist, / Here I renounce all fatherly care, / The closeness and property of blood" ( 1.1. 109-114). Here, Lear urges nature to reject her and cut ties with her own daughter.

Nature is often personified in this work, a pagan god in Lear's world. After Kent's expulsion, Lear went on to refer to Cordelia as "...asshole of a shy nature/almost recognizing you as her own (1.1.215-216)." But is it too wrong to be something that Nature is ashamed of in this context? In Lear's world, nature is seen in a turbulent storm, which also reflects Lear's inner turmoil. Nature is not kind or selfless, she has no human feelings like Cordelia. Cordelia represents the truth, refusing to develop her father's ego and arguing over stupid things with her sisters as their father's most important love. In nature, the purpose of life is the survival and permanence of the species, and that means doing whatever is necessary for your good, as Goneril and Regan did. But Cordelia abandons it, clinging to very human things like truth and love instead of wealth.

The same nature to which Lear refers is the same nature to which Edmund swore allegiance. Edmund ignores the natural order of things, dictated by society, by trying to claim the rightful inheritance of his brother Edgar. Although Gloucester claimed to love them equally, Edmund still felt slighted. With a desire to take what he believes to be his, he is more natural, using his skill of deception to outmaneuver his brother and claim his inheritance regardless of human laws. what can be said. He speaks to nature in a monologue



where he tells us about his bad intentions:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law/My services are bound. Wherefore should I/Stand in the plague of custom and permit/The curiosity of nations to deprive me, for that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines/Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base? (1.2.1-6)

Edmund questions the natural course of things and why he was given this terrible hand in life. He then tricks his father into believing that Edgar is trying to kill him, and Gloucester himself becomes so upset that he questions nature:

*These late eclipses in the sun and the moon  
portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature  
can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself  
scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friend  
ship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, in mutinies' in  
countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond  
cracked twixt son and father (1.2.106-112).*

Edmund's plan comes to fruition after he betrays his father, delivering his letter to Cornwall. After Gloucester was blindfolded, Edmund received a reward for his intrigues, becoming the new Duke of Gloucester. It will lead you to believe that this natural social order has lost to a more sinister order. Lear clearly distinguishes between the order of man and the beast when he says, "Our lowest beggars/ Are superfluous in the poorest. / Don't allow nature more than it needs, / Human life is as cheap as an animal's life (2.4.266-269)", referring to man's greed for useless things. Goneril and Regan also have an animalistic lust, not only for power, but also for Edmund. It was the jealousy that erupted between them that led to their deaths. Natural order, in a social sense, was restored after the deaths of these sisters, but also when Edgar regained his inheritance by defeating Edmund in a battle. It is a small victory against the nature that has ravaged England throughout the play. Humanity still loses in this war against nature because the rightful king, who has divine rights, is dead, as are his daughters.



Cordelia is not a greedy creature like her sisters, but she adheres to the "natural" order of things when it comes to human laws. She asked her father "Why do my sisters get married if they say / They all love me? (1.1.99-100)." At that time, wives became the property of their husbands upon marriage, so there was no way that Goneril and Regans could truly love their father with all their hearts. What truly proves Cordelia's love for her father is her return to England to find him, even after the harsh words and deportation he has given her.

Lear often describes human nature in terms of animals. Goneril, who had little patience with his father and his knights, drove him out of court. He compared her to a bird of prey, "Disgusting kite, you're lying!" (1.4.262), what to call it. He was so upset by her lies that he wished nature had made her infertile and then compared his transgression with the biblical creature that had led to man's fall: Snake teeth / How ungrateful to give birth! (1.4.287-288). He again compares Goneril to a carnivore by saying that Regan will "scratch your wolf's face (1.4.307)". It was those comparisons that really opened the door to the truth, when Lear woke up to find that he had been taken advantage of and his powers exploited. When he discovers that Goneril and Regan are denying the whereabouts of him and his knights, he himself is reduced to the level of an animal, as he has nothing left. He vowed revenge, again referring to nature and the earth, "No, unnatural witches, / I will avenge both of you like that / That everyone will - I will do things like so - / What they are still, I don't 'don't know, but they will be / The horrors of the earth. You think I'll cry; No, I won't cry. (2.4.280-285)", which he was unable to accomplish because the sisters received a punishment at their own hands.

The king may not cry, but nature is crying for him, forming a storm that reflects his inner anguish, as if a signal. Here, chaos exists in nature, as in the human world - the kingdom is crumbling and Lear roams the countryside. The only ray of hope is the return of Cordelia, but that's not really the case, as she brings the French with her, which audiences don't tend to support.

The relationship with nature continued until a tragic end. Over time, Albany became more and more sympathetic to Lear's reasons and he discovered his wife's infidelity. He also compares Goneril to a snake, calling him "the golden snake" (5.3.86). As the serpent contributed to the downfall of man in the Bible, Goneril contributed to the destruction of Lear's England. Aristotle says that tragedies require an admirable but flawed character to play the lead, but there is little that can make up for Lear. His time in the storm allowed him to see where he went wrong, but there was little he could do to change what he had created. His



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greedy desire for the power of a king but no accountability is what sends the kingdom into chaos. A chaos that can only be remedied by the death of most of the main characters, as in many other Shakespearean tragedies. Even the innocent Cordelia became a victim of this natural order due to this pervasive greed. In this world, good has no place, surrounded by evil. This fatalistic view is tragic in itself, but it is Lear's appearance with Cordelia's limp body in her arms that is most tragic. Lear summed up his dark nihilistic view of the earth when he said, "I know when a person dies and when a person lives; / She dies like the earth. (5.3.265-266)." There is no discussion of the afterlife or hope for the future, that's all. The tragedy of this ending was so profound that later works changed the ending because it was too sad. This shows that there is no purpose or meaning to human life, other than returning to earth, the nature in which Lear and Edmund place so much faith. In this play, the just and loving Christian God is not present and is instead cruel in nature. Living a virtuous life like Cordelia would only lead to the same end as her sisters, death.

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