

THE GENERATION GAP IN KING LEAR

One of the underlying themes in Shakespeare's play, King Lear is the concept of the generation gap. This gap is mainly illustrated between the family. The older generation is Lear himself, and the younger generation consists of his daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. In the second plot of the play, Gloucester represents the older generation, and his sons, Edmund and Edgar exemplifies the younger generation. Both younger generations can be divided into two distinct groups. Goneril, Regan and Edmund are the villains in both the plots and Edgar and Cordelia are the loyal, faithful children. This little twist adds to the effect of the generation gap in the play. There are many comparisons that can be made and confrontations that occur between the generations. These events contribute to the themes of authority, power and loyalty, judgment and wisdom. Overall, it emphasizes the general themes of the generation gap.

Symbolism contributes to the themes authority and power in King Lear. These symbols are represented by material things. For example, in [Act 1 scene 1] when Lear is dividing up his land, power and authority to his three daughters, depending on how much they can verbally express their love for him. [Lines 52-53] "Which of you shall say doth love us most? That we our largest bounty may extend where nature doth with merit challenge." The land that each daughter received is the extent of their authority and of their power in the Kingdom. For example, the Duke of Burgundy did not wish to marry Cordelia after he found out she was getting nothing from her father. He was marrying her for power and authority. Goneril's servants show disrespect toward Lear which shows that Lear's authority and power over them has diminished. An example of this is Oswald's attitude towards Lear after his daughter, Goneril told him to show discourtesy towards Lear. [Act 1 scene 4, Lines 75-80] "O, you, sir, you! Come you hither, sir. Who am I, sir? My Lady's Father. "My Lady's Father"? My lords knave! You Whoreson dog! You Slave! You Cur!"

Another example of lost authority and power in this act is when Lear's Fool offers Lear his Coxcomb (Jester's Cap) and tells him how foolish he was when he gave up his power to Goneril and Regan.

Lear's 100 Knights symbolize Lear's power in his mind. When Lear is confronted by his daughter Goneril and is told by her that his men are too disruptive and are to be trimmed to half because she feels he does not need them. Lear is angered at Goneril for this because the Knights represents the remainder of his limited power. Regan then tells him in order to stay with her, he had to dismiss all but 25 knights because he did not have need for these men. He realizes his lost of authority and power and leaves to seek shelter in a storm. Lear's knights represent power and authority in his eyes.

Another example of authority and power is Kent being placed in the stocks in the middle of the court yard by Regan and Cornwall. Not only does this symbolize the fact that Lear has no authority or power to them, but shows that they have taken the power of Gloucester because they guests in his castle. The Second Generation strips the First generation of power and increase their own over the first generation.

There seems to be a great disparity in the way the older generation and younger generation views loyalty. Lear's loyalty is in his trusting nature. Being a man of great power and authority, he cannot fathom having someone lie to him. It is this naive approach that leaves him vulnerable for betrayal. When Lear decided to divide his land to give to his daughters, it symbolized the turning point in which his power was relinquished and true loyalties began to unfold. Gloucester showed

true loyalty by aiding Lear in his fight against the evil forces of Goneril and Regan. In [Act 3 scene 3, Lines 17-20] Gloucester, not knowing of Edmund's evil intentions, states about Lear "If I die for it, as no less is threatened me, the King my old master must be relieved. There are strange things towards, Edmund. Pray you be careful." Without a moments thought, he was willing to place his own life on the line to assist Lear.

It is apparent that the younger generation is motivated by greed, power and lust. This potentially made them more cunning and ruthless in their actions by exploiting the older generation's vulnerability. Edmund's desire for Edgar's half of the inheritance, shows how benevolent a human being can be. In Edmund's soliloquy in the beginning of [Act 1 scene 2] he planned to betray both his father and half-brother by forging a letter describing Edgar's intentions on Gloucester's inheritance. Upon showing this letter to the gullible Gloucester, he ordered to have a contract out for Edgar's head.

The daughters Goneril and Regan are inspired by their hunger for power and their lust for Edmund. Once Goneril and Regan received their land, they immediately showed no respect to Lear, who gave them the land. In [Act 1 scene 4] Goneril instructs her servant Oswald to show utter disrespect for Lear. Oswald complies and enrages Lear. Soon Lear will find that his two daughters have no loyalties to him.

As it turns out, there is no loyalties within each other. In [Act 5 scene 3] Goneril has poisoned her own sister, in hopes of capturing Edmund's love. However, Edgar and Cordelia are exceptions to this generalization. Their actions are very noble and they show great amounts of integrity. In the beginning of [Act 4 scene 1] Gloucester has decided to end his own life. Edgar, knowing his father's intentions, guides him to a cliff disguised as a beggar named Poor Tom. He tricks Gloucester into thinking that he has survived an impossible jump, which only meant that the higher Gods wanted him to live. On top of that, Edgar kills Oswald in a duel when Oswald was about to murder Gloucester. This shows how loyal Edgar was because his father still wanted him dead. Out of respect and loyalty, he helped save his father's life, twice.

Cordelia shares the same attributes as Edgar possesses in this play. Knowing full well that her father was in trouble; in [Act 4 scene 4] she orders the French troops to find her wandering father, in hopes of helping him regain his power and throne. She states in [Lines 20-29] "Tis known before. Our preparation stands in expectation of them. O dear father, it is thy business that I go about. Therefore great France, my mourning and importuned tears hath pitied. No blown ambition doth our arms incite, but love, dear love, and our aged father's right. Soon may I hear and see him!" Cordelia is no doubt worried about her father's mental and physical state. Even though she thinks Lear is still upset with her, she goes out of her way in attempts of saving him. This undeniably shows her unconditional love towards him.

Miscommunication is one of the major factors causing the generation gap between the father and children in this play. At the beginning of the play, Lear preferred to listen to the flattery speeches from his daughters for his own judgment of dividing the kingdom. In [Act 1 scene 1, Lines 49-51] Lear states "Tell me, my daughters, which of you shall we say doth love us most?"

Cordelia did not want no part in that flattering Lear's ego, which made him so angry that he immediately disowned her. He believed that the way the father should treat the daughters was to give her the best way of living. He also thought the daughters should tell the father how much they loved him. However, Cordelia did not act the way Lear preferred. She thought she did not have to tell how much she loved her father, even though she loved him unconditionally.

Gloucester, also misjudged his son Edgar, similarly to the way Lear mistreated Cordelia. He was so naive that he believed whatever Edmund told him. Edgar would seize him for taking over his assets. Besides, he did not go to question and confirm the letter with Edgar. He just banished him. Edgar was naive too. He

trusted Edmund and did not go to Gloucester and clarify the confusion in Gloucester's mind.

There was no question that Edgar and Cordelia loved their fathers very deeply. There is a similarity between the two in that they always stay beside their fathers when they are in a crisis. In Act 4 scene 1] Edgar was in disguise and hiding; but when he saw Gloucester suffering on the way to Dover, he appeared and led him to Dover. You see this in [Lines 80-81] "Give me thy arm, poor Tom shall lead thee." In [Act 4 scene 4] Cordelia led the French army to aide her father. She was not concerned about the political control in Britain. [Lines 26-29] "In my mourning and importuned tears hath pitied. No blown ambition doth our arms incite, but love, dear love, and our aged father's right, soon may I hear and see him!" Therefore, the mistreatment from the older generation is because of the generation gap, which is caused by miscommunication.

The combination of these themes illustrates the relationship between Lear and his daughters and Gloucester and his sons. Throughout the play, the gap between the older and younger generation gets larger and larger as each event passes. The differences between them become more evident. Also, the contrast between the 'good' and the 'evil' younger generations emphasizes the relationships between the main protagonists and their offspring. The confrontations between young and old symbolize authority and power, loyalty, judgment and wisdom. They relate directly to the overall rift between the generations.

