King Lear: Family Relations

The famous and unique drama tragedy, King Lear, was written by William Shakespeare. This drama tells a story of a king, Lear, who divides his power and land to two daughters and gives his third daughter nothing based on their declaration of love to him. However, the two daughters treated him badly after they had his power. Lear becomes mad because of his misjudgments. Finally, he understand his third daughter but tragedy happens to him and his third daughter. This essay will focus on Act 1, Scene 1, especially when Lear dividing his power and land to his daughters according to their declaration of love to him.

To begin with, the great tragedy King Lear was written in the literary format of drama. Words and actions are being used to depict characters' inner thoughts, which makes the characters more realistic. In the beginning of Act 1, Scene 1, King Lear says, "Give me the map there. Know that we have divided in three our kingdom", this shows Lear wants not only to pass his authority to his daughters to achieve his practical needs but also to test daughters love for his emotional needs. However, he has a misunderstanding of the relationship between political power and private love. According to Robert B. Heilman (1948), he illustrates that the main reason of Lear's tragedy is he unreasonably believes love can be measured as a certain shape which is certainly not reliable. The way Lear divides his kingdom is indeed ridiculous. "The map" in this scene demonstrates it is easy for Lear to divide his kingdom in to three parts but what he can not divide is the love he gives to his daughters. But what has to be noticed is that Brayton points out the names of the male characters directly connect to their powers and status. Lear gives up his power, meanwhile, he has no actual right. Ironically, Lear imagined he can free himself from being in charge of the kingdom and have privileges at the same time. Although Lear might be a perfect kingdom ruler when he was young but he is not good at being a father. It is normally being assumed that words can be lied but actions prove the real thoughts, but Lear is too naive to believe that words can perfectly show one's heart other than actions. Also, the words "shall we say", Dodd, William reveals Lear suddenly turned his "family I" in to "royal we" means he will decide everything by himself. Lear takes love test as a serious political question and expects to get the answers he wishes. As for the character of Cordelia, she is the one who have genuine love, and she does not aim to mix her pure love to his father with power, so she treats Lear's test as a true communication (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997). As Lear put his power over her to make her say the answer he requires, she aware and refuses. Maybe it is because that once Cordelia gives up her right to speak the truth, she will lose the right to choose her husband. Therefore, she keeps silence to cling to her rights as a person. (Dodd, William,1999)

According to "Conferring them on younger strengths, while we Unburden'd crawl toward death." Shakespeare uses the word "crawl" to illustrate Lear's process toward death. This word is more likely to portray an animal other than a person which prove Lear humbly dead without dignity in the future. Also it depicts Lear's tragedy ending without dividing his power and authority rationally.

What is more, exaggeration of statements was used largely in order to make a feature of characters' traits. This was shown obviously in three daughters declaration of love to their father. Goneril stated to Lear that "Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter..so

much I love you”. Also, the second daughter Regan emphasizes that “ sir, I am made of that self…in your dear highness’ love”. How can they love Lear more than anything in the world? Goneril and Regan both overstate their feelings toward Lear because their burning desire of power and wealth. They become liars to cheat on their father. Except of Cordelia, she is reserved. Thus she understate her love to Lear, by saying “nothing”. Cordelia uses a plain word to describe her love towards Lear, but it is real and sincere. It is apparently that Lear is fatuous and unjustifiable because the attraction of power inevitably determines that those daughters would not say the truth. Goneril and Regan’s statements are too exaggerate to believe but Lear trust them due to his incompetent. It is ironic that Lear gave his all to those two daughters but gained nothing, especially the ‘love’ they described before.

Even though in some families, parents treat their children with love and care. Freeman, Donald C,(1993) believes “In financial accounting obligations are recorded both to and from the entity keeping the books.”. He views the family love in King Lear as financial situation that “children are financial assets”, and Lear as a father classified his daughters as his wealth. He invests his daughters in order to gain financial returns and interests. In Donald’s perspective, Lear’s action of dividing the kingdom by daughter’s statement of love is viewed as Lear’s method of testing whether he gets interests and which of them give him more interests. Lear regards interests above everything else, so that he invests more on Goneril and Regan and abandons Cordelia, the one that is useless. However he denies and forgets the power of love, and he doesn’t realize the desire of power. Thus leads to Lear’s bad ending, because there should be kinship other than interest.

Sources:

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