

garish sun.(3.2.21-25) This imagery again invites the audience to remember the celestial path that is fated for them both and speaks transiently about their everlasting love.

Romeo and Juliet's tragedy was one of destinies, one that was 'star-crossed' from the beginning, and this is the presentation that Shakespeare gives of tragedy within this play; that there does not always need to be a downfall from a great height at the own fault of the protagonist. If this be the case, the fault that is embedded within *Romeo and Juliet* is one of loving too deeply. One sees many falls from great heights within Shakespeare, in both *King Lear* and *Hamlet* alike. However, within this 'tale of woe' George Seiner must be observed in his statement that 'The Greek tragic poets assert that the forces which shape or destroy our lives lie outside the governance of reason or justice'¹⁴. The idea of unconditional fate was accepted and appreciated at the time of the Great Shakespeare, and has only in the modern day come to be interpreted as a statement against Christianity and love.

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Chapter 2.

King Lear's Doomed Death.

*King Lear*¹⁵ is placed victoriously in the middle of Shakespeare's finest extension of his imagination, although many academic discussions have been concentrated on the argument that

¹⁴ George Seiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961). pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ William Shakespeare and R. A Foakes, *King Lear*, 1st edn (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997). All further references to the play will be given in the body of the text.

bound up, determined and constrained by broader social, economic and political tragedies’²⁰.

This similar understanding resonates within other Shakespearean tragedies as *Romeo and Juliet* are controlled by forces which are not responsibilities that they have sought. This is perfectly fitting as to understanding why tragedies can occur between ‘normal’ people, such as two young lovers, and why their continued agony of life may have been just as tragic as, for example, that of *King Lear*.

The suffering felt by King Lear through continued living is as intense, violent and relentless as Juliet’s love for ‘her Romeo’ (5. 3. 320), and the way that their love was their downfall, King Lear’s vain conceitedness is his. King Lear is almost beyond the limits of endurance before he dies, and through his agonizing need for death the reader sees his weak character ever more present. King Lear wishes for an escape from the pain of death that he endures and says ‘If you have poison for me, I will drink it’²¹. Lear repeatedly imagines that his life has ended, and repeatedly is only hopelessly and incorrectly. He wistfully imagines that he can die and not over live in pain. On coming to from madness, he says ‘You do me wrong to take me out o’ th’ grave/ Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound’ (4. 7. 44-45). He endeavours to ensure everybody around him knows he is in pain; another cry for attention exposed. Lear tells Regan that her sister Goneril has ‘struck’ (2. 4. 155) him with her tongue and ‘tied/ Sharp-tooth’d unkindness’ (2. 4. 129-30) around his heart and within this language turns his daughters against each other, bringing sadness to Regan when she hears this. He also talks to Regan about his realisation of his death, and with heavy irony says ‘Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; / Age is unnecessary’ (2. 4. 154-55). Lear’s suffering in this play seems needless, and death does seem like a release

²⁰ Andrew Bennett, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory, Fourth Edition* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009) p.109

²¹ William Shakespeare, *King Lear* ed, R.A. Foakes, (London: A& C Black Publishers, 1997) 4. 7. 71. All further references to the play will be given in the body of the text.

catharses²⁵. Bennett and Royle argue this optimistic take on the tragedy and reminds one starkly that ‘at the same time tragedy says: we have to suffer, we are going to die, there is no justice and there is no afterlife’²⁶.

The most dreadful outcome for King Lear is most certainly the agony of continued living rather than the release of death. King Lear lives to endure the horrible pain of a slow death, stumbling between madness and bitterness, with knowledge of what he has done. Without any love from his daughters, his mental and physical healths deteriorate. The tragedy of this play certainly intensifies the prolonged living of Lear, and while he dies with the knowledge that Cordelia has died, the optimum moment for the release that death grants did come when Lear wanted it; just after he had seen that all hope was lost.

‘The Old King Lear resolves to divide his kingdom while he is still alive among his three daughters, in proportion to the amount of love that each of them expresses for him (...) Is this not once more the scene of a choice between women, of whom the youngest is the best, the most excellent one?’²⁷

Berman reflects here that Lear made the wrong decision, as could be argued Hamlet and Romeo did. Had Hamlet been focused on Ophelia, she would have not died, the catalyst for the tragic end in *Hamlet* being her funeral, and had Romeo remained with Rosaline the issue of family conflicts would never have induced secrecy and therefore death. Shakespeare may be stating here, that to choose one’s true love, one must remember that pain is imminent, no matter which way it proves itself. A comparable conclusion to that of Romeo and Juliet, the deaths of the main protagonists do not grant release to victims of themselves or the fates but only to the living, to the characters that love, desperation and destiny did not reach.

²⁵ Ashley Chantler and David Higgins, *Studying Literature* (London: Continuum, 2010) p.38

²⁶ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory, Fourth Edition* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009) p.109.

²⁷ Emanuel Berman, *Essential Papers On Literature And Psychoanalysis*, 1st edn (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp. pp. 26-27.

love to that of a siblings is one human thought the Shakespeare expresses. Some readers may be forgiven for being of the opinion that until the end of the play, all of the interactions between the two could be interpreted as mistakes, lies and coincidences. Laertes describes Hamlet's perception of love as 'For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour, Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood' (1.3.5-6). A clear example of this is Ophelia's description to Polonius, of what had just occurred, 'My Lord, as I was sewing in my closet,/ Lord Hamlet (...) As if he has been loosed out of hell/ To speak of horrors- he comes before me' (2.1.78-85).

This quote stands as one of the most perplexing among the scenes in Hamlet- the context must be fully understood. The interaction described in this quote is the first interaction Hamlet engages in after realising the mission he must partake in order to avenge his father and kill Claudius. The coincidence in this text is that Polonius mistakes Hamlet's state to reflect how love sick Hamlet becomes in front of Ophelia.

Howard Dietz summarises in a very brief sentence the argument that is being presented 'When the Ghost and the Prince meet and everyone ends up in the mincemeat'³⁶. The beginning of the play is the end of the love that Hamlet shared with his father, and therefore deterioration and fate are set into motion. The repetition of this parallel plot throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet* is strikingly clear; Shakespeare is confirming the human fear that once love is gone, all else is lost. This could well be an explanation of Hamlet's sudden transfer of attention from his father when he was living, to now his only living parent. Shakespeare presents the relationship between Hamlet and his mother as both an abnormal and unappealing one throughout the text, in particular during Act 3 Scene 4. The scene, and therefore the core of the relationship, can be analysed in many different ways, and one of these is to see this scene as if it

³⁶ Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz, [*That's Entertainment*, 1st edn, 1953.

were a lover's dispute. The way in which Hamlet concentrates upon the physical appearance of his father and his uncle when forcing his mother to stare at their portraits, Hamlet describes his father as 'the front of Jove himself,/ An eye like Mars' (3.4.57-58), here comparing his father's love to that of Great planets such as Jupiter. He remarks at his 'Hyperion's curls' (3.4.57), comparing him to a godly image, and repeatedly asks 'Have you eyes?', 'Ha, have you eyes?' (3.4. 66-68).

An interpretation here could be that Hamlet is truly a victim of the Oedipus complex, and is in truth asking his mother why she must remarry a man who has 'Eyes without feeling' (3.4.98) when there may still be 'An eye like Mars' available in front of her. However, the repeated question that Hamlet poses to his mother could also be a question of her moral blindness 'what judgement/ Would you step from this to this?' (3.4.71-72). Hamlet's failure to successfully form a relationship with Ophelia was due to his father's re-appearance, which in turn may have sparked his Oedipus complex, having seen his mother in a dangerous, murderous light instead of an object of secondary thought. Through this, the barrier between a successful relationship for Hamlet and Ophelia is therefore his supposed lust for his mother. Hamlet tells his mother that 'such an act' as the one performed against his father 'takes off the rose/ From the forehead of an innocent love' (3.4.42-44). Shakespeare provides us, within this mother son relationship, a way in which one may associate with Hamlet. One new parent, one deceased and one who stays silent, wary in case she 'doth protest too much'(3.2.230). The play, so open to interpretation, has this open elucidation during the opening exchange of 'Who's there?' 'Nay, answer me' (1.1.1-2) and this is clearly the open mind which Shakespeare wanted the audience to view this relationship in.