

## MADNESS IN KING LEAR

- We would expect Lear to speak in verse but as his wits desert him he shifts from verse to prose and back again, signifying the disruption in his mind.
- In the final scene Lear's repetitions of single words convey the depth of his agony and grief for his dead daughter.
- Other Renaissance dramatists used 'mad scenes' for comic effect. However Shakespeare wanted to use a serious portrayal of madness in this play.
- Lear's rash decisions in act one might be viewed as political insanity.
- The bloodlust seen by Goneril, Regan and Cornwall is an abhorrent kind of madness.
- The storm - which reflects Lear's madness – is appallingly destructive. Pathetic fallacy
- Edgar's fake madness
- The end of the play and Lear's madness seems to make, from a psychoanalytical viewpoint, him regress to a sort of childhood and he sees Cordelia as a mother-figure. It could be the influence of repressed or unconscious desires on personality.
- Lear's mental faculties, like his verse structure, is beginning to fragment.
- The scene takes place outside, showing growing isolation and a fragile mental state
- Edgar disguises himself as a Bedlam Beggar named Poor Tom – there were many beggars in Elizabethan times due to lots of poverty because of the loss of 'common ground'. Bedlam hospital housed the mentally ill and when inmates were released they were allowed to go begging for survival.
- Edgar's situation now mirrors Lear's – Edgar is reliant on charity and assumed madness
- Lear becomes very conscious of the plight of the poor and the outcasts. Ironically, now he is on the verge of madness he can see more clearly
- Lear runs around "unbonneted" – he is both mentally and physically exposed.
- Lear wants to know what it's like to have nothing and tries to undress himself – he has learnt the need to look beyond appearances.
- Edgar's language as Poor Tom reflects the language used by the exorcisms in Samuel Harsnett's book 'a declaration from Egregious popish imposters'
- Regan calls Lear the "lunatic king"
- As Lear has begun to regain his wits, the clarity of vision has brought with it distress and regret.
- Lear enters and in his madness realises his daughters were flattering him and did not mean a word they said by claiming "they told me I was everything; tis a lie"
- Madness might be helpful to Lear as it helps him feel more at ease as he thinks being in prison will be like a bird in a cage so does not realise the seriousness of the situation

### QUOTES:

- ❖ 'who is that who can tell me who I am'
- ❖ 'where are his eyes?'
- ❖ calls himself a "poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man"
- ❖ "reason in madness"
- ❖ It's a mad world when "madmen lead the blind"

CONTEXT:

- ✿ 1603, Sir Brian Annesley's eldest daughter and her husband tried to have him certified as a senile lunatic so that they could take over his property. His youngest daughter, Cordell, saved the day by challenging her sister in court.
  
- Trevor Nunn's 2009 version - We also see a sense of Lear's physical deterioration (coupled with his mental deterioration) as the play progresses; he starts shaking more, his hair looks wild, he stoops more.
  
- ✿ **D.J. ENRIGHT** - 'the principal characters are not those who act, but those who suffer'
- ✿ **HAROLD BLOOM** believed "the descent from Monarch to 'unaccommodated man' thus conveys most potently man's fragility, fallibility and fatality"  
The phrase 'unaccommodated man' of which this was its first recorded use in the English language, is also evidence of Lear's madness, for he speaks in prose of "the unaccommodated man like a bare, forked animal that thou art", and therefore a contrast to his earlier speech in blank verse and iambic pentameter. Lear thus, is no longer "every inch a King".
- ✿ **CUNNINGHAM** - Lear finds "wisdom through madness"
- ✿ **HAL HOLBROOK** - "Lear slips into madness...a direct result of Lear's refusal to face the awful truth that has exploded in his mind"
- ✿ **ARNOLD KETTLE** - "Lear's madness is not so much a breakdown as a breakthrough. It is necessary". "It is through his madness [...] that Lear comes to a new outlook on life"