

## **Lear: The Language of His World**

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(Received A.H. 10/2/1416; accepted for publication A.H. 7/10/1416)

**Abstract.** A word count analysis of Lear's speeches reveals, in addition to his rich vocabulary and short sentences, that his use of personal pronouns is different from that of a Shakespearian ideal king like King Henry V. Lear uses first personal pronouns at a higher rate than he does the second person pronoun. In addition, he uses imperative verbs instead of solicitous, diplomatic, and consensus building verbs.

Furthermore, Lear's concept/map of the world is inaccurate since it is based on his ability to create his world by uttering words only. At the start of the play, his world coincides with the map he has drawn by his words and those used by others who confirm his view by obeying his words. Lear gradually confronts a world that does not fit the map he has had of it, and begins to see that words can portray reality as well as falsehood.

Some critics and scholars were quite passionate in their analysis and their response to *King Lear*.<sup>(1)</sup> The passion is evident in the words of Keats' famous sonnet, "Adieu! for once again, the fierce dispute/Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay/Must I burn through."<sup>(2)</sup> It is also evident in Samuel Johnson's confession that he was "so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor."<sup>(3)</sup> On the other extreme, Tolstoy presented a very vehement attack on the play which he described as "A very bad, carelessly composed production, which . . . cannot evoke amongst us anything but

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(1) A large portion of the literature written about *King Lear* is reviewed by two books: Ann Thompson, *King Lear* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988), and Gamini Salgado, *King Lear: Text and Performance* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1984). Their discussions present many of the different ways the play was approached.

(2) John Keats, "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again," 11.5-7.

(3) Walter Raleigh, ed., *Johnson on Shakespeare* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 162.

aversion and weariness."<sup>(4)</sup> Another critic in Tolstoy's camp is John Middleton Murray who finds that the play "makes upon me the impression of the work of a Shakespeare who is out of his depth. He does not really know what he wants to say."<sup>(5)</sup>

Along with the passion, a fascination with the first scene of *King Lear*<sup>(6)</sup> started with Johnson and continued with Coleridge and ran through Tolstoy, A.C. Bradley, John M. Murray, and George Orwell among many others. The fascination and wide interest extend to involve all aspects of the play. One can count over 12 books dealing exclusively with *Lear* since Leo Kirschbaum's book of 1945. These include case studies and a two volume annotated bibliography by Larry S. Champion. This bibliography reports more than 2500 items written on the play between 1940 and 1978.<sup>(7)</sup>

In her book on *Lear*, Ann Thompson reports about the critics' fascination with the first scene of the play, a scene that was discussed by them she suggests, whether they were talking about the play's sources, setting, politics, characters, or theme. She adds that there aren't many discussions of any length of *Lear* that do not touch on the problems posed by that scene.<sup>(8)</sup> A similar statement is made by John Reibetanz, in *The Lear World*, who also points out the fascination of critics with the first scene. Reibetanz finds the critics' reactions remarkably similar. Despite their various approaches, they still use words like "strange," "absurd," "improbable," and "obscure" to convey their shared response to a scene they consider to be uncharacteristic of the tragedies of Shakespeare.<sup>(9)</sup> Of the other critics' amazing variety of responses one can cite Harley Granville-Barker as one who defends the scene. He sees the opening scene as having a grand theme that has formality and grandeur where *Lear* dominates so that one can clearly see the similarity to Greek tragedy. The question of the scene's probabilities, however, is not important to him as he points out the right of the dramatist to create any situation as long as he abides by its logic.<sup>(10)</sup> On the other hand, William Frost's defense centers on seeing the scene as allegory which makes it hold well together.<sup>(11)</sup> Another

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(4) Leo Tolstoy, "On Shakespeare and the Drama," tr. V. Tchertkoff, *Fortnightly Review*, 86 (1906), 963-83; reprinted in Helmut Bonheim, ed., *The King Lear Perplex* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1964), p. 53.

(5) John Middleton Murry, *Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 339.

(6) Line references within the text of the paper refer to The Arden Shakespeare edition of *King Lear* edited by Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1972).

(7) Thompson, p. 9.

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 55.

(9) John Reibetanz, *The Lear World: A Study of King Lear in its Dramatic Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977; London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 11.

(10) Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare, I*. Princeton University Press, 1946, reprinted in *King Lear*, ed. By Russell Fraser, The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 244.

(11) William Frost, "Shakespeare's Ritual and the Opening Of *King Lear*," *Hudson Review*, 40 (1958), 577-85, reprinted in Bonheim, p. 583.

critic, Harry V. Jaffa, defends the scene as showing the political wisdom of Lear's original plan of dividing the kingdom.<sup>(12)</sup>

One of the perspectives taken by some critics is to examine the language of the play.<sup>(13)</sup> Indeed, Tolstoy in his treatment of the play did refer to the language. But his approach was rather superficial. He saw an undifferentiated Lear, a Lear who speaks the language of all of Shakespeare's kings which he describes as a language which is "pompous and characterless."<sup>(14)</sup> More steady approaches can be seen in Winifred M. T. Nowotny's study that finds the play to have an interrogative atmosphere. However, she is critical of the play: "Perhaps one reason why *King Lear* has been mistaken for an unactable play is that it is so nearly an unreadable play: taken passage by passage, it is so flat and grey."<sup>(15)</sup>

A scholar who is enthusiastic about the play, Marvin Rosenberg, suggests that the play exists at a multiplicity of levels, its world dialectical, its symbols visually and verbally "rooted in the flesh that responds," its characters "dynamics" on a "spectrum of possibilities."<sup>(16)</sup> Rosenberg suggests that an analysis of the words of the play can give the most essential clue to the system of the *Lear* world. He finds certain words repeated many times. For example, he finds the following semantically charged words repeated often: *heart*, 44 times; *nature*, 46; *poor*, 48; *eye*, 50; *love*, 60, and *father*, 70. Furthermore, Rosenberg proposes that the verbal structure of the simple and small words present significant substructures. For instance, Rosenberg suggests that the word *if* reflects the dynamics of the *Lear* world.<sup>(17)</sup> He finds the word repeated more than a hundred times—reflecting a world of uncertainties. The word *but* occurs even more often, 122 times, *yet* about half as much. Such words cast doubt on what has gone before, thus equivocating the future.<sup>(18)</sup> In addition, number words occur frequently, and so do alternatives, the words *nothing* and *all*. The words, Rosenberg argues, along with spectacle and sound, contribute to a dialectical world where characters are understood as moving between two poles of the spectrum of possibilities.<sup>(19)</sup>

Word frequency count as presented by Rosenberg is quite enlightening, especially since it shows a pervasive equivocation that informs the entire play. His analysis,

(12) Harry V. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics: An Interpretation of *King Lear*, Act I, Scene I, *American Political Science Review*, 51 (1957), 405-27, reprinted in Bonheim, p. 160.

(13) See Madeleine Doran, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

(14) Tolstoy, p. 981.

(15) Winifred M. T. Nowotny, "Lear's Questions," *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957), 90-97; reprinted in Bonheim, p. 12.

(16) Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of King Lear* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 9.

(17) Rosenberg, p. 6.

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

(19) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

however, does not deal separately with the language of the main character nor with the development of that language. His analysis reflects the world of the play and not that of the protagonist. But the continuum on which Lear exists and the dialectic of this existence must take into account his language.

Lear's language is quite interesting. A major part of this language, namely imagery, has been studied extensively. Of the large number of studies of imagery, Caroline F.E. Spurgeon stands out.<sup>(20)</sup> She found the images in the play to be drawn from the human body and its movements and from the world of animals. Robert B. Heilman in another study, *The Great Stage*, examined the structure of the play through its imagery.<sup>(21)</sup> Finally, a more recent study by John and Ann Thompson applied a linguistic and philosophical approach to the animal metaphors in *Lear*.<sup>(22)</sup> But no word frequency analysis has been made of Lear's language.

Lear is often described as an autocratic person but no quantifiable evidence has ever been presented to support this characterization. When one looks at the word frequency count or Lear's speeches one encounters very interesting patterns. The words Rosenberg sees as informing the atmosphere of the play are used by all the characters including Lear. Lear does use "if" and "but" two times each in I.i. as well as, "yet" once, "nothing" five times, and "all" eight times. This usage fits with the general analysis presented by Rosenberg but does not differentiate Lear from the other characters. More interestingly, Lear uses a large variety of words. Lear's words in the play total 5,564. He uses 950 sentences, which makes the average length of his sentences to be 5.8 words per sentence. This short length suggests that his language can be comprehended without much difficulty. Furthermore, one can say that Lear uses a large variety of words to express himself and this can be demonstrated through a word count of his speeches.

In I.i. Lear uses 413 different words to speak his 905 words of the scene. This constitutes 45% of the total words used. This percentage stands at 43% in I.i.v., 70% in I.v. [but the percentage in this scene is misleading and is not statistically significant because of the small total number of words Lear uses in the scene: 108], 46% in II.iv. The percentage goes up dramatically in III.ii and III.iv. to reach 67%; then it drops to 54% in III.vi., 48% in IV. Vi., 52% in IV. Vii. And 54% in V.iii. One can thus positively state that Lear's vocabulary shows its greatest and richest variety in all three scenes of Act III. In Act III, Lear is on the Heath.

Despite the richness of Lear's vocabulary, yet, significantly, he has certain words repeated quite frequently. To start with, one would expect function words to figure prominently in language use in general, and it is not different with Lear, for he uses *of*,

(20) Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

(21) Robert B. Heilman, "The Unity of *King Lear*," in *Shakespeare: King Lear*, Casebook Series, Frank Kermode, ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1969).

(22) Ann and John O. Thompson, *Shakespeare, Meaning and Metaphor* (Brighton: Mcthuen, 1987).

*the, a, to, that, this, by, from, for, in, so, as, or*, etc., at a normal frequency found in every English speaker's speech. However, Lear's use of the first person pronoun, in its different forms, occurs at a proportionately higher rate than in every day normal speech. Here, however, two points must be mentioned regarding this usage.

First, a natural feature of the dramatic mode is a deitic component: the "I" speaking to the "you." The dramatic dialectic must be constructed as a dialogue between the I-speaker and the you-spoken to.<sup>(23)</sup> Second, in the case of the opening, the play features a kingly Lear on a state occasion, issuing decrees and proclamations. In such a role, he has to use the first person pronoun, including the royal "we." However, even after taking these two important points into account, and after considering the number of occurrences of the first person pronouns, one is still struck with the fact that the usage is not quite normal. To illustrate this point, a look at the language of the protagonist of another Shakespearean play, *King Henry V*, can serve as a good example of contrast.

King Henry V is often described as Shakespeare's ideal king. He represents what Shakespeare wished to have for his country after Queen Elizabeth's departure. Henry's behavior, including his language, are presented by Shakespeare as the norm for an ideal king. The opening scene of *King Henry V*<sup>(24)</sup> starts with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely discussing the character of the king and the present state of affairs, very much like the first scene of *Lear* that starts with Kent and Gloucester discussing the pending events. King Henry enters and establishes himself, in his first thirty lines, a considerate and wise king.

When Canterbury greets King Henry with "God and his angels guard your sacred throne/ And make you long become it!" the King answers. (Italics and underlines added to pronouns)

Sure, we thank you.

My learned lord, we pray you to proceed,  
 And justly and religiously unfold  
 Why the law ...

... bar *us* in *our* claim.

And God forbid, *my* dear and faithful lord,  
 That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,  
 Or nicely charge your understanding soul  
 ...

For God doth know how many now in health  
 Shall drop their blood in approbation  
 Of what your reverence shall incite *us* to.  
 Therefore, take heed how you impawn our person,  
 How you awake *our* sleeping sword of war:

(23) Keir Elame, *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), pp. 142-43.

(24) Line references within the text of the paper refer to The Arden Shakespeare edition of *King Henry V* edited by John H. Walter (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1979).

*We charge you, in the name of God, take heed;*  
 ...  
 Under this conjuration speak, *my* lord;  
 For *we* will hear, note, and believe in heart  
 That what you speak is in your conscience wash'd  
 As pure as sin with baptism.

(I.i. 11. 8-32)

Henry, addressing his noblemen, illustrates his tact, diplomacy, and skill in weaving cohesiveness among his courtiers. He is deliberating *with* them the affairs of the state and taking their council. Although he uses eleven personal pronouns (including the royal *we*), he addresses his courtiers with the second personal pronoun eleven times. Thus there is a ratio of one to one first pronoun use to second pronoun use. Within this number, Henry uses the possessive personal pronoun exclusively as part of a courteous, solicitous, and thoughtful form of address: *my* gracious lord, *may* dear and faithful lord, *my* learned lord, etc. Later in the scene, when Henry has determined, through deliberation, the best course of action in consultation with his advisers, the royal “*we*” resounds with determination.

Now are we resolv'd; and by God's help,  
 And yours, the noble sinews of our power,  
 France being ours, we'll bend it to our awe  
 Or break it all to pieces.

(11. 222-225)

But at this point, this “*we*” represents England standing against France.

Henry will lead, but his humility dictates that this leadership can be successful only with God's and the people's help. Immediately after that it is the “*I*” of Henry against the “*he*” of the Dauphin when Henry asks the Dauphin's emissary to relay back his response to a mocking message from the Dauphin.

Tell him he hath made a match with such a wrangler  
 That all the courts of France will be disturb'd  
 When I do rouse me in my throne of France:  
 For that I have laid by my majesty  
 But I will rise there with so full a glory  
 That I will dazzle all the eyes of France.

(11.264-5, 275-76, 278-9)

The final speech of the scene reflects the resolve of Henry as he speaks for himself and his noblemen of their future campaign in France. In every respect, including his use

of pronouns, Henry projects an ideal public behavior of a wise king. He refers to a higher power four times. His humility and supplication to God are paramount in his speech. He gives the emissary of the Dauphin, who brought the insulting message, safe passage back and wishes him well. Henry makes it clear that it is the collective action of all those present that will bring victory rather than an egocentric leader who orders his followers around.

But this lies all with the will of God,  
 To whom I do appeal; and in whose name  
 Tell you the Dauphin I am coming on,  
 ...  
 So get you hence in peace; and tell the Dauphin  
 His jest will savour but of shallow wit  
 When thousands weep more than did laugh at it.  
 Convey them with safe conduct, Fare you well.

Therefore, my lords, omit no happy hour  
 That may give furth'rance to our expedition;  
 For we have now no thought in us but France,  
 Save those to God, that run before our business.  
 Therefore let our proportions for these wars  
 Be soon collected, and all things thought upon  
 That may with reasonable swiftness add  
 More feathers to our wings; for, God before,  
 We'll chide this Dauphin at his father's door.

(11.289-309)

In contrast, Lear in the first scene has 905 words of which 82 are various forms of the first personal pronoun. He uses the second personal pronoun 29 times only. Thus the ratio of first pronoun use to second pronoun use is almost three times that of Henry V. Lear does manage to use courteous forms of address six times: he addresses Reagan as "our second daughter our dearest Reagan," Burgundy as "my Lord of Burgundy," "Right Honorable Burgundy," and "your grace;" he calls France "great king," and Cordelia as "our joy, our last, and least." However, he also addresses others simply as "Gloucester," "our eldest born," "Kent," who is later rudely addressed as "a vassal and miscreant." Furthermore, in the scene, Lear asserts his authority through the use of a large number, twenty-five, of imperative, performative verbs. In fact, his first word in the play is one such verb.

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy,  
 Gloucester.

(I.i. 1. 33)

Lear follows that order with another, “*Give me the map there;*” and then he asks every one to “*Know that we have divided/ In three our kingdom.*”

His attitude is almost the opposite of that of Henry V. While Henry comes in seeking the advice of his courtiers, Lear comes in with his mind made up. In fact, there is no indication that he has done any consultations with his advisers. At the opening of the scene, we find Kent and Gloucester discussing the upcoming division of the kingdom and there is no indication from their discussion that they have been more involved with the decision beyond being informed. Kent starts, “I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.” To which Gloucester answers, “It did always seem to us; but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most; for equalities are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either’s moiety.” (11. 1-6)

When later in the scene Kent objects to Lear’s decision concerning Cordelia, he states outright:

What would’st thou do, old man?  
 .....  
 .....Reserve thy state;  
 And, thy best consideration, check  
 This hideous rashness.

(11. 145; 148-150)

Then later on he gives his council and further characterizes Lear’s action:

Revoke thy gift;  
 Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,  
 I’ll tell thee thou dost evil.

(11. 163-165)

Lear’s treatment of his advisers is one that can be characterized as one reserved for functionaries who do his errands for him. As far as the decision to divide the kingdom and relinquish power, his mind is made up and the occasion, especially when one considers the speed of his action, is a state ceremony to carry out his decision in a formal and public manner. The action to be solemnized in the scene is a done deed. There are to be no deliberations. What is taking place is the sealing of a proclamation, making public a decision to finalize it. The participants are all supposed to follow the directions of Lear for they are all participants in a show replete with pomp and a prop, the map. For the show to be successful everything must go according to the plan of the master of ceremony.



In addition, Lear conveys the impression of someone who would like to be done with the ceremony in short order. The speed of his actions suggest the image that he uses to warn Kent later in the scene, "The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft." (1. 142) His reasons for dividing the kingdom are stated briefly:

Know that we have divided  
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent  
To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
Unburthen'd crawl toward death.

(11. 36-40)

His reasons are the shedding off the burden of responsibility and the preparation for his near death. One can praise the entire speech for its economy for moving swiftly towards getting underway the action proper of the play. However, it is also obvious that such momentous decisions as dividing the kingdom into three along with deciding who will have Cordelia as wife are subjects that are given short shrift when they are handled in 12 lines, a mere 106 words.

After stating his purpose he turns to his daughters and directs them to, "*Tell me, my daughters.../ Which of you shall we say doth love us most?*" When it's Goneril's turn he addresses her with, "Our eldest-born, *Speak* first." He uses similar but more polite language with Reagan, "What *says* our second daughter/ Our dearest Reagan, wife of Cornwall?" With Cordelia whom he loves and "to whose young love/ The Vines of France and milk of Burgundy/ Strive," he is a bit more courteous but he still orders her, "What can you *say* to draw/ A third more opulent than your sisters? *Speak*." To the "Nothing" answer she gives him that he does not like he gives his order again, "*Speak* again." Then another order comes out, "*Mend* your speech a little," and this is coupled with a threat, "Lest you may mar your fortunes." When he does not hear from Cordelia the part he had expected her to play in the ceremony he turns to the typical royal decree issuing monarch, "*Let* it be so; thy truth then be thy dower." He follows that with an oath that precedes another decree, "Here I disclaim all my paternal care.../ And as a stranger to my heart and me/ Hold thee from this for ever."

After banishing Kent, Lear offers Cordelia to Burgundy who turns her down. Lear answers, "Then *leave* her, sir; for, by the power that made me,/ *I tell* you all her wealth." (11 206-207) Then he offers her to France who very astutely reads the situation correctly and jumps at the chance of making her his queen. Lear is displeased with this turn of events and orders her away.

Thou hast her, France; *let* her be thine, for  
We have no such daughter, nor shall ever see

That face of hers again; therefore *be gone*,  
 Without our grace, our love, our benison.  
*Come*, Noble Burgundy.

(11 261-264)

Thus, from his first word in the play and until he leaves at the end of the first scene Lear speaks with absolute authority. Almost ten percent of his words are forms of the first pronoun, almost as many imperative verbs as there are second person pronouns, two facts that lend support to seeing Lear as absolute and autocratic.

This authoritarian attitude changes, however, and Lear's usage of personal pronouns reflects this change. The ratio of Lear's usage of the first person pronouns compared to his usage of the second person pronouns fluctuates between a high ratio of ( $82/29 = 2.82$ ) in the first act, to (.50) in scene 6 of the third act and back again to (1.38) in the fifth act. Thus, if we consider the mathematical mean of the ratio of his pronoun use to be the average or normal rate for Lear's pronoun usage—it's (1.40)—then we can see that he starts with a high ratio of usage and ends at a normal level after going through a traumatic change in the third act, where, linguistically, he behaves quite differently from the way he does in the other acts. In Act III Lear uses 39 first person pronouns as opposed to 61 second person pronouns for a ratio of (.63)

Though he occupies center stage on the heath, Lear is no longer at the center of the universe. The elements constitute the other part of the dramatic situation. A relationship of subordination-dominance exists between Lear and the elements in the third act. A weaker Lear sees the elements as dominant, fierce, raging, rumbling, brutal and solicits their help to bring justice. In III.ii., Lear orders the elements,

*Blow*, winds, and *crack* your cheeks! *rage!* *blow!*  
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, *spout*  
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!  
 You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,  
 .....  
*Singe* my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
*Strike* flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!  
*Crack* Nature's moulds, all germens *spill* at once  
 That makes ingrateful man!

(11. 1-9)

He continues spouting to the elements orders that are really supplications for help for he has come to understand his weak position and he begins to plead,

*Rumble* thy bellyful! *Spit, fire!* *Spout*, rain!  
 .....

.....then *let fall*  
 Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,  
 A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.

(11. 14; 18-20)

When he feels that the storm is capable of uncovering guilt he continues his supplications that resemble in structure his kingly proclamations.

*Let the great Gods,*  
 .....  
 Find out their enemies now. *Tremble*, thou wretch,  
 That hast within thee undivulged crimes,  
 Unwhipp'd of Justice; *hide* thee, thou bloody hand,  
 .....  
 .....; caitiff, to pieces *shake*  
 .....  
 ... ; *close* pent-up guilts  
*Rive* your concealing continents, and *cry*  
 These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man  
 More sinn'd against than sinning.

(11.49; 51-53; 55; 57-60)

Before the elements, he feels the same helplessness he felt after his two daughters spurned him. At that time he said,

You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I  
 need!--

(II.iv 1.270)

Now he attempts to reassure himself, as he did before,

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;  
 I will say nothing.

(III.ii 11. 37-38)

Vulnerable and hopeless, Lear's orientation shifts to heaven to seek redress for the wrongs done him. He addresses the guilty of the world whom he orders to realize that the punishment for their crimes is coming. Throughout this scene Lear attempts to establish connections with the outside world. His attitude towards the storm changes rapidly from commanding it, to insulting it, and then to adopting a more subservient attitude followed by a shift to feeling one with it. Having admitted his need for help, he

comes out of his egocentric world to think of others and their welfare, "Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?" (III.ii. 1.68) He urges Kent and the Fool to get inside the hovel before him. He pleads with Kent, "Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own lease." This change of focus to other people's suffering has been pointed out by many scholars, Goldman, for instance.<sup>(25)</sup> This shift towards others' concern becomes an important element of his personality as he encounters Edgar, Gloucester and Cordelia. In the next scene, we see him extend his concern not only to the people visually around him but to all unfortunate people.

In boy, go first. You houseless poverty, —  
 Nay, get thee in. I'll pray and then I'll sleep.  
 Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,  
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
 Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
 From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en  
 Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;  
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,  
 And show the Heavens more just.

(III.iv. 11. 26-36)

This new awareness of the misery of others and of his own previous lack of such awareness marks the change of his attitudes. He has broken out of his own limited world and has taken the road to a new conception of love that he expresses in the final scene. After he and Cordella are taken prisoners, he invites her to a happy life with him in prison. In this speech of his, the striking emphasis is on the oneness he suggests for Cordelia and himself: "We will sing like birds." The pronoun "we," a union of the "I" and "you" rather than an expression of the royal persona, expresses a yearning for oneness. The speech also emphasizes the real stuff of happiness: sharing and doing things together.

So we'll live,  
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too  
 Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;  
 And take upon's the mystery of things,  
 As if we were Gods' spies: and we'll wear out,  
 In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones  
 That ebb and flow by th'moon.

(25) Michael Goldman, "King Lear: Acting and Feeling," in *On King Lear*, ed. Lawrence Danson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 39.

(V.iii 11. 11-19)

This invitation of Lear's hints of his earlier conception of love, that of a price associated with it. He suggests:

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness.

(V. iii 11. 10-11)

However, the price of love here is returned love and forgiveness.

Interestingly, Cordelia does not respond to his invitation except with tears. She had just uttered her last lines accepting her fortune and asserting her own defiance yet expressing her concern for his welfare. The fact that she does not respond except with tears can be and had been interpreted variously. It definitely echoes her behavior in the first scene where she was content to "Love, and be silent." What matters here is that Lear finally shows an understanding not only of the proper two-way personal relationships but also of the way the world really works.

Shakespeare leaves no doubt about the importance of connecting words to their referents. Cordelia shows this concern in expressing her dilemma in her first aside with "What shall Cordelia speak?" as her sister "say," "tell," "name" their love. She points the impossibility of her sisters' words matching their deeds, "Why have my sisters husbands, if they say/ They love you all?" (11. 98-99) She adds later, "... I want that glib and oily art/ To speak and purpose not, since what I well intend, I'll do't before I speak..." (11. 223-225) Kent is also aware of the difference between flowery language and truth, "To plainness honour's bound/ When majesty falls to folly." (11. 147-148) Lear gets hot and explains the way he had always used language, the only way he can use it as a king: language equating power,

Hear me, recreant!  
On thine allegiance, hear me!  
That thou hast sought to make us break our vow,  
Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride  
To come betwixt our sentence and our power,  
Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,  
Our potency make good...

(11. 165-171)

Immediately after Lear is beguiled by his daughters' words in scene one, scene two brings us the realistic way Edmund looks at words. He ponders the words "base," "baseness," "bastardy," and "legitimate" and what they signify and how people neglect

to look at the referents of these words before jumping into judgement. Later, when his father is also beguiled by words as Lear was, Edmund comments on the unrealistic concept of the world his father has of the world since he blames evil on the stars. Edmund points out that his father evades his "goatish disposition" by blaming it on the stars while it was his lust that "compounded" him with Edmund's mother. It's not only the old who fall prey to the machination of manipulators of words. Edgar's view of the world—for he is one "Whose nature is so far from doing harms/ That he suspects none"—is also the door that Edmund uses to weave his plot to undo Edgar.

Lear of the first act was not only egocentric but also ignorant of the world. Lear, "four score and upward," had developed a false map of the world and of reality. It is not his gullibility that makes him believe his daughters. It is his position as king, his long reign/life that made him develop such attitude. In Act IV.vi., Lear's speech that analyzes his situation, after the ordeal of the heath, is straightforward and enlightening though spoken when he is the "mad" king. Rosenberg suggests that the speech is regressive but coherent; the syntax straightforward, the ideas linear, and he shows a flash of self-knowledge.<sup>(26)</sup> Lear had been speaking nonsense that invites pity from Edgar. But he had just seen the blind Gloucester. His next speech breaks out in critical analysis of his and his daughters' behavior.

They flattered me like a dog, and *told* me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To *say* 'ay' and 'no' to every thing I *said!* "Ay' and 'no' was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found'em, there I smelt'em out. Go to, they are not men o'their *words*: they *told* me I was every thing; 'tis a *lie*, I am not ague-proof.

(11.96-156)

Lear knows, now, that "words," and what people "say," are not necessarily connected to concrete and tangible existence. He knows, now, that what he had been "told" does not necessarily correspond to reality. However, in the beginning of the play he lived in a verbal world that did not have much resemblance to the real world. The world map he carried in his head was made of false reports made up of words he was fed by flattering courtiers and daughters.<sup>(27)</sup>

Lear, the king, performed his job through words. He had been doing that work for decades. He exercised all his powers verbally. He utters words and an earl is banished, a kingdom divided. His words become concrete and tangible realities because of his power. Yet at the same time, the words remove him from reality by deluding him into

(26) Rosenberg, p. 270.

(27) Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), pp. 20-28.

thinking that he is all, that he is at the center of his and everyone's world. His usage of the personal pronouns allows us to see that. His commands to his daughters demand words: "*Tell* me, my daughters...which of you shall we *say* doth love us most?" "*Speak* first," "What *says* our second daughter," "What can you *say* to draw/ A third more opulent than your sisters?," "*Speak*," "*Speak*" again," and "Mend your *speech* a little." His two daughters give him the words he asks for and are generously rewarded for the verbal symbols they produce. That is his *modus operandi*. Cordelia, unwilling to fabricate symbols, sounds, language instead of something concrete and tangible, ponders what she will speak and decides on "Love, and be silent." When Lear urges her to speak again to produce words, her response clearly says, as far as she is concerned, that words and their referents must be solidly connected, that her words are "true," that she will not produce language without referent. Lear does not begin to learn the truth about words and their users until he has gone through the storm. His knowledge of the world increases to allow him to see the truth about people, language, and human relations, but by then it is late and much suffering has taken place.

## الملك لير : لغة عالمه

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**ملخص البحث.** يظهر تحليل كلمات لير في مسرحية الملك لير أنه، بالإضافة إلى ثروته اللغوية واستعماله للجمل القصيرة، أن استعماله للضمائر يختلف عن استعمالات ملوك شكسبير المثاليين كالملك هنري الخامس. فلير يستعمل الضمائر الشخصية بنسبة أعلى من استعماله لضمير المخاطب. كما يستعمل أفعال الأمر عوضاً عن أفعال يمكن له بها أن يظهر روحاً دبلوماسية يبني عن طريقها نوعاً من التواصل مع أتباعه. بالإضافة إلى هذا، فخريطة العالم الموجودة في ذهن لير خريطة خاطئة مبنية على قدرته على تكوين عالمه وتغييره بمجرد نطقه لكلمات معدودات. في بداية المسرحية يتطابق عالمه مع الخريطة التي يرسمها بكلماته والكلمات التي يستعملها الآخرون الذين يؤكدون صحة الخريطة بطاعتهم لما يقول. لكن لير يواجه تدريجياً عالماً يختلف عن الخريطة التي رسمها للعالم ويبدأ فهمه لحقيقة الكلمات التي يمكن أن ترسم الحقيقة بالإضافة إلى قدرتها على رسم الوهم.