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SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

KING LEAR

INTRODUCTION:

*King Lear* is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare. Many have gone as far as to affirm that it is simply not possible to write a tragedy that surpasses the depth and transcendence that characterise King Lear. It is likely that Shakespeare drew some inspiration from mythical figures like the Leir of Britain, whose legend was popular as far back as the 8th century. There have been successful adaptations of the original play, including shortened versions and performances that combine the original play with the local theatrical traditions of countries

SYNOPSIS:

Lear, the aging king of Britain, decides to step down from the throne and divide his kingdom evenly among his three daughters. First, however, he puts his daughters through a test, asking each to tell him how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan, Lear's older daughters, give their father flattering answers. But Cordelia, Lear's youngest and favorite daughter, remains silent, saying that she has no words to describe how much she loves her father. Lear flies into a rage and disowns Cordelia. The king of France, who has courted Cordelia, says that he still wants to marry her even without her land, and she accompanies him to France without her father's blessing.

Lear quickly learns that he made a bad decision. Goneril and Regan swiftly begin to undermine the little authority that Lear still holds. Unable to believe that his beloved daughters are betraying him, Lear slowly goes insane. He flees his daughters' houses to wander on a heath during a great thunderstorm, accompanied by his Fool and by Kent, a loyal nobleman in disguise.

Meanwhile, an elderly nobleman named Gloucester also experiences family problems. His illegitimate son, Edmund, tricks him into believing that his legitimate son, Edgar, is trying to kill him. Fleeing the manhunt that his father has set for him, Edgar disguises himself as a crazy beggar and calls himself "Poor Tom." Like Lear, he heads out onto the heath.

When the loyal Gloucester realizes that Lear's daughters have turned against their father, he decides to help Lear in spite of the danger. Regan and her husband, Cornwall, discover him helping Lear, accuse him of treason, blind him, and turn him out to wander the countryside. He ends up being led by his disguised son, Edgar, toward the city of Dover, where Lear has also been brought.

In Dover, a French army lands as part of an invasion led by Cordelia in an effort to save her father. Edmund apparently becomes romantically entangled with both Regan and Goneril, whose husband, Albany, is increasingly sympathetic to Lear's cause. Goneril and Edmund conspire to kill Albany.

The despairing Gloucester tries to commit suicide, but Edgar saves him by pulling the strange trick of leading him off an imaginary cliff. Meanwhile, the English troops reach Dover, and the English, led by Edmund, defeat the Cordelia-led French. Lear and Cordelia are captured. In the climactic scene, Edgar duels with and kills Edmund; we learn of the death of Gloucester; Goneril poisons Regan out of jealousy over Edmund and then kills herself when her treachery is revealed to Albany; Edmund's betrayal of Cordelia leads to her needless execution in prison; and Lear finally dies out of grief at Cordelia's passing. Albany, Edgar, and the elderly Kent are left to take care of the country under a cloud of sorrow and regret.

#### CONCLUSION:

The tragedy of King Lear revolves around the imperfect relationship between father and child due to misunderstandings and personal greed. The play still holds true to its traditional values such as inheritance, patriarchal societies, and the monarch. Yet, it perhaps raises new questions on topics such as favoritism, and the importance of communication in a father-child relationship.

## THE TEMPEST

#### INTRODUCTION:

*The Tempest* is a play by English playwright William Shakespeare, probably written in 1610–1611, and thought to be one of the last plays that Shakespeare wrote alone. After the first scene, which takes place on a ship at sea during a tempest, the rest of the story is set on a remote island, where the sorcerer Prospero, a complex and contradictory character, lives with his daughter Miranda, and his two servants—Caliban, a savage monster figure, and Ariel, an airy spirit. It explores many themes, including magic, betrayal, revenge, and family.

#### SYNOPSIS:

*The Tempest* opens in the midst of a storm, as a ship containing the king of Naples and his party struggle to stay afloat. On land, Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, watch the storm envelop the ship. Prospero has created the storm with magic, and he explains that his enemies are on board the ship.

The story Prospero relates is that, he is the rightful Duke of Milan and that his younger brother, Antonio, betrayed him, seizing his title and property. Twelve years earlier, Prospero and Miranda were put out to sea in little more than a raft. Miraculously, they both survived and arrived safely on this island, where Prospero learned to control the magic that he now uses to manipulate everyone on the island. Upon his arrival, Prospero rescued a sprite, Ariel, who had been imprisoned by the witch Sycorax. Ariel wishes to be free and his freedom has been promised

within two days. The last inhabitant of the island is the child of Sycorax and the devil: Caliban, whom Prospero has enslaved. Caliban is a natural man, uncivilized and wishing only to have his island returned to him so that he can live alone in peace.

Soon the royal party from the ship is cast ashore and separated into three groups. The king's son, Ferdinand, is brought to Prospero, where he sees Miranda, and the two fall instantly in love. Meanwhile, Alonso, the king of Naples, and the rest of his party have come ashore on another part of the island. Alonso fears that Ferdinand is dead and grieves for the loss of his son. Antonio, Prospero's younger brother, has also been washed ashore with the king's younger brother, Sebastian. Antonio easily convinces Sebastian that Sebastian should murder his brother and seize the throne for himself. This plot to murder Alonso is similar to Antonio's plot against his own brother, Prospero, 12 years earlier.

Another part of the royal party — the court jester and the butler — has also come ashore. Trinculo and Stefano each stumble upon Caliban, and each immediately sees a way to make money by exhibiting Caliban as a monster recovered from this uninhabited island. Stefano has come ashore in a wine cask, and soon Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano are drunk. While drinking, Caliban hatches a plot to murder Prospero and enrolls his two new acquaintances as accomplices. Ariel is listening, however, and reports the plot to Prospero.

Meanwhile, Prospero has kept Ferdinand busy and has forbidden Miranda to speak to him, but the two still find time to meet and declare their love, which is actually what Prospero has planned. Next, Prospero stages a masque to celebrate the young couple's betrothal, with goddesses and nymphs entertaining the couple with singing and dancing.

While Ferdinand and Miranda have been celebrating their love, Alonso and the rest of the royal party have been searching for the king's son. Exhausted from the search and with the king despairing of ever seeing his son alive, Prospero has ghosts and an imaginary banquet brought before the king's party. A god-like voice accuses Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian of their sins, and the banquet vanishes. The men are all frightened, and Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian run away.

Prospero punishes Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano with a run through a briar patch and swim in a scummy pond. Having accomplished what he set out to do, Prospero has the king's party brought in. Prospero is clothed as the rightful Duke of Milan, and when the spell has been removed, Alonso rejects all claims to Prospero's dukedom and apologizes for his mistakes. Within moments, Prospero reunites the king with his son, Ferdinand. Alonso is especially pleased to learn of Miranda's existence and that Ferdinand will marry her.

Prospero then turns to his brother, Antonio, who offers no regrets or apology for his perfidy. Nevertheless, Prospero promises not to punish Antonio as a traitor. When Caliban is brought in, Caliban tells Prospero that he has learned his lesson. His two co-conspirators, Trinculo and Stefano, will be punished by the king. Soon, the entire party retires to Prospero's cell to celebrate and await their departure home. Only Prospero is left on stage.

In a final speech, Prospero tells the audience that only with their applause will he be able to leave the island with the rest of the party. Prospero leaves the stage to the audience's applause.

#### CONCLUSION:

**The Tempest** ends with a general sense of resolution and hope. After four acts in which Prospero uses magic to split up, disorient, and psychologically torture his enemies, in the final act he lures everyone to the same spot on the island and forgives Alonso and Antonio for their betrayal twelve years prior.