King Lear And The Fatal Flaw Essay, Research Paper

How central is the idea of a fatal flaw in King Lear?

More than any of Shakespeare s plays, King Lear explores the concept of a fatal flaw and the terrible downfall it could lead to. It is indeed the most central idea in the play. Shakespeare shows us how one flaw in an otherwise normal person can lead to their ultimate demise.

From the very inception we witness what Lear s fatal flaw is – his pride. We first see it surface when he decides to divide his Kingdom into three for his three daughters. To claim their share, they must proclaim their love for their father in front of the entire court. Whichever loves him the most will be given the most land. The eldest, Goneril, protests her undying devotion and is given a third of the Kingdom. The second, Regan, does the same and gets another third, but the youngest, Cordelia, is stopped by her honesty. Cordelia does love her father dearly, and knows why her sisters spoke as they did, but is not prepared to take advantage of her ignorant father s pride simply to bring her land and power. Lear s reaction to this can be likened to that of a spoiled child and in his fury, divides the rest of his Kingdom between Goneril and Regan, and casts Cordelia away from him. Hence, and avoid my sight! A fundamental part of Lear s mistake is what he expects to hear from his daughters, especially his favorite, Cordelia.

With Cordelia cast away, he sets about trying to enjoy his old age, but we discover that his two eldest daughter s intentions are not as entirely wholesome as we once thought. When Lear himself learns of this, what he ought to really feel is fear, but what actually possesses him is rage. The King and his fool are thrown out into the stormy night.

You unnatural hags,

I will have such revenges on you both that all the world shall –

I will do such things,

Lear is going mad, but knows more than he once did. Not only does he come to realise what he has done, but also on what a cruel and reasonless basis the world punishes. Crouched permanently in the realm of madness, there is no escape for Lear. It is nothing but the repercussions of his terrible pride that has given him his ticket to this insane world, and the fact that he has realised that.

The concept of a fatal flaw is the most central concept in the play. Lear s demise can attributed wholly to the intense pride he had for himself.