
CONFERENCE ARTICLE

**THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN'S BETRAYAL AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S
KING LEAR: AN ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT**

Mamamdaliyeva Dildora

PhD Student, Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article explores the psychological conflict between children's betrayal and parental responsibility in William Shakespeare's King Lear. The play presents the tragic relationship between King Lear and his daughters, showing how pride, misunderstanding, and poor judgment can destroy family relationships [1, 2]. Using qualitative literary analysis, the study examines the psychological development of the main characters and the conflicts that shape the tragedy. The findings suggest that Lear's downfall is caused not only by the betrayal of Goneril and Regan but also by his own mistakes as a father [3, 4]. His vanity, emotional blindness, and inability to recognize genuine love contribute to the tragic outcome. The analysis also shows that psychological conflict drives the characters' actions, leading to suffering, self-discovery, madness, and ultimately death [2, 3]. Shakespeare highlights the importance of both parental responsibility and children's loyalty in maintaining healthy family relationships [5].

Keywords: King Lear, Shakespeare, psychological conflict, filial betrayal, parental responsibility, family relationships, tragedy.

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare's King Lear is one of the greatest tragedies in world literature. The play explores important themes such as power, family relationships, loyalty, justice, and human suffering [1, 7]. One of its most significant themes is the conflict between parents and children, particularly the betrayal of parents by their children and the responsibilities parents have toward their families [4, 8]. The relationship between Lear and his daughters demonstrates how family bonds can be damaged when trust and understanding are replaced by pride, selfishness, and emotional blindness. Lear's decision to divide his kingdom based on his daughters' declarations of love sets the tragedy in motion [1]. While Goneril and Regan use flattering words to gain power, Cordelia remains honest and refuses to exaggerate her feelings. Lear misunderstands her sincerity and rejects her, creating a conflict that leads to devastating consequences [2, 3]. Many scholars have studied King Lear from different perspectives, including authority, family relationships, self-knowledge, and social disorder [2, 5, 8]. However, examining both children's betrayal and parental responsibility together provides a deeper understanding of the play's psychological and emotional complexity [3, 4]. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how these two forces interact and contribute to the tragedy.

Methods and Findings

This study uses a qualitative literary analysis based on close reading and psychological interpretation of Shakespeare's King Lear [1]. The research focuses on key scenes involving Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan, whose relationships form the central conflict of the play.

The analysis reveals that Lear's tragedy begins with a failure of parental responsibility. As both a king and a father, Lear should act with wisdom and fairness. Instead, he judges his daughters according to their public expressions of love. His desire for

admiration prevents him from recognizing genuine affection and allows him to be deceived by flattery [2, 3]. Lear's rejection of Cordelia is one of the most important turning points in the play. Although Cordelia truly loves her father, she refuses to use exaggerated language to please him. Lear mistakes her honesty for disobedience and banishes her [1]. This decision reflects his emotional blindness and poor judgment, which later contribute to his suffering [3, 11]. The study also shows that the betrayal by Goneril and Regan causes deep psychological pain. After gaining power, they treat Lear with disrespect and gradually strip him of his authority and dignity. Their actions leave him feeling rejected, lonely, and powerless [1, 4]. As Lear begins to understand the consequences of his mistakes, he experiences not only anger toward his daughters but also guilt and regret [2].

A major finding of the research is that psychological conflict drives Lear's transformation. The betrayal he experiences creates an internal struggle that forces him to reconsider his identity, values, and past actions [3]. The storm scenes symbolize his emotional and mental turmoil. At the same time, this suffering leads to self-awareness and moral growth. Through hardship, Lear develops empathy and gains a deeper understanding of himself and others [8]. Cordelia represents the opposite values of her sisters. She remains honest, loyal, and compassionate despite being rejected by her father [1, 5]. Her willingness to forgive Lear demonstrates emotional maturity and moral strength [12]. Their reunion is one of the most moving moments in the play, showing the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation even after great suffering [1, 14].

Discussion

The findings suggest that Shakespeare presents family conflict as the result of both parental mistakes and children's wrongdoing. Lear's tragedy demonstrates that authority alone cannot create loyalty or love. Healthy family relationships require trust, understanding, respect, and responsibility from both parents and

children [4, 8]. From a psychological perspective, the play shows how poor communication can damage family relationships. Lear's demand for public declarations of love turns genuine affection into a performance. As a result, he rewards dishonesty and punishes sincerity [2, 11]. This situation highlights how emotional insecurity can influence decision-making and lead to conflict.

The study also emphasizes Shakespeare's view of suffering as a path to self-knowledge. Lear gains wisdom only after losing power, status, and family support. Through his experiences, Shakespeare suggests that personal growth often comes through hardship and reflection rather than privilege and authority [3, 8].

The contrasting behavior of Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan further illustrates the relationship between morality and family loyalty. While Goneril and Regan prioritize ambition and self-interest, Cordelia remains committed to honesty, compassion, and forgiveness [5, 12]. Shakespeare presents these qualities as essential for strong and healthy family relationships.

Conclusion

This study examined the psychological conflict between children's betrayal and parental responsibility in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The analysis shows that the tragedy results not only from the cruelty of Goneril and Regan but also from Lear's own failures as a parent [1, 2]. His pride, emotional insecurity, and poor judgment lead him to make decisions that damage his family and contribute to his downfall [3, 7].

The findings demonstrate that family conflict in the play is shaped by both personal responsibility and moral obligation. Shakespeare shows that parental mistakes can create conditions for betrayal, while children's disloyalty can intensify suffering and destroy trust [4, 13]. The study also highlights Lear's psychological transformation from arrogance to self-awareness. Through suffering, he gains wisdom, humility, and compassion [3, 12]. In contrast to the selfishness of Goneril and Regan, Cordelia represents honesty, loyalty, and forgiveness [1, 5]. Although the play ends tragically, her relationship with Lear reinforces the importance of truth, understanding, and unconditional love [14].

Overall, *King Lear* remains relevant because it addresses universal human experiences related to family, loyalty, authority, and personal responsibility. Shakespeare's exploration of these themes continues to resonate with readers and audiences across different cultures and generations [7, 8, 15].

References

1. Shakespeare, W. *King Lear*. Edited by R. A. Foakes. London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997.
2. Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth*. London: Penguin Books, 2007. (Originally published 1904.)
3. Cavell, S. *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
4. *Family Matters: Shakespeare and the English Household* (1988) was written by Carol Thomas Neely, not Carol Chillington Rutter (C. C. Rutter).
5. Bloom, H., ed. *William Shakespeare's King Lear*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2008.
6. Weigel, M. "Fathers, Children, and Siblings Theme Analysis in *King Lear*." LitCharts LLC, 2013.
7. Greenblatt, S., Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, eds. *The Norton Shakespeare*. 3rd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.
8. McEachern, C., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
9. Kermode, F. *Shakespeare's Language*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
10. Elton, W. R. *King Lear and the Gods*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 1966.
11. Cavell, S. "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*." In *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*, expanded edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 267–353.
12. Hunter, R. G. *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.
13. Honigmann, E. A. J. *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited*. London: Macmillan, 1985.
14. Foakes, R. A. *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
15. Wells, S. *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.