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English 336 Shakespeare: Tragedies and Romances
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Question #2: Discuss the sequence: error, purgatory and suffering, redemption in some of Shakespeare's plays. Who are the key functioning characters in the sequence? How does one achieve redemption, if at all? What is redemption?

Thesis Statement: King Lear and Winter's Tale, two plays in which Shakespeare chose to embody the theme of redemption, have the main characters committing a sin and having to go through the suffering and redemption aspects of life which are a result of them abusing power and pride one way or another.

“The fitness of Redemption as a remedy for original sin [is] almost to make it appear the sole and necessary means of rehabilitation.” To be rehabilitated is to be brought back to life or to normal being, and redemption is the feeling people crave to be forgiven for the sins they committed. Committing a sin, especially one of the seven deadly sins, can only be forgiven by being redeemed. Along with the theme of redemption in Shakespeare’s writings, two ideas precede it. First, a character must commit some sort of error, or sin, at the start of their story. This wrong doing causes trials and tribulations to formulate around the characters, which is viewed as the suffering portion of the formula the writer has chosen to place into his story. Finally, after some time, these sufferings bring about redemption. Many may think that this could be an easy task, but as seen in many of Shakespeare’s plays, it is not something easily attained. In the Roman Catholic Religion, the seven deadly sins are evil actions or thoughts that humans commit in their daily lives. As stated, there are seven total, but only two are going to be focused on during the course of this paper. With those two sins, there will be two plays also being focused on as well. King Lear and Winter’s Tale, two plays in which Shakespeare chose to embody the theme of redemption, have the main characters committing a sin and having to go through the suffering and redemption aspects of life which are a result of them abusing power and pride one way or another.

The key functioning character in King Lear is Lear himself. The first conversation the King holds is with his three daughters Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia have him say:
...Tell me, my daughters

(Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state),
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth merit challenge? (I.i.48-53)

With his first conversation of the play we see that Lear does not take his kingdom close to heart. With simple words from his three daughters, he is willing to divide an entire kingdom to the three women in his life. Not keeping his crown and responsibilities close to heart is his first mistake. His second is when he commits his sin of pride. When committing the act of pride, one feels the desire to be more important than those around and to have the love of everybody around them. They also have an excess of love for ones self and are concerned with more of their well being than others. This test that Lear has asked of his daughter's shows his insecurity in growing old. He wishes to hear, three times, how much he is loved and bribes them in doing so. He knows their answers will be very extravagant in order to please him to the fullest. Lear mistakes a display of love from his two older daughters Goneril and Regan, versus what his youngest, Cordelia says. The two eldest tell their father "Sir, I love you more than [words] can wield..." (I.i.54) while Cordelia says "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less" (I.i.91-93). Cordelia is the only daughter staying true to her heart and what he believes, which is the love that the bond her father has created. This answer however is not what Lear wanted from his most beloved daughter. He tells her in lines 114-116 "Here I disclaim all my parental care, / Propinquity and property of blood, / And as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this for ever." The king's pride has caused him to shun and disown the

one true person that loves him, and the two daughters in which he did decide to trust actually turn out to be enough to bring destruction to his kingdom.

Goneril and Regan realize that their father disowned Cordelia over something as small as saying what he wanted to hear, so in order to secure their land and wealth, they pushed their father into thinking he was going mad. Neither one of them would take him into their castle, and in realizing that this was occurring, he says in the second act, “I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad” (II.iv.219). Both children offer small numbers of soldiers for the king to keep with him, and both times he keeps persisting for the 100 servants. Lear’s sanity is the price he pays for his greed. The audience can see that he is slowly starting to go mad from the fact that he is not only losing his authority, but to his own daughters. These servants represent his authority and importance that he feels he must have in order to keep the identity he has built for himself. Again in act two, scene four, line 285, Lear shows his madness is fast upon him: “O Fool, I shall go mad!”

One of the devices that Shakespeare uses to show the chaos going on in Lear’s mind as well as the world around him is the tempest in act three. After being thrown out of Goneril and Regan’s castle, he is left to wander the heath. In being a king, he has relied on personal possessions to make him who the person he is, and coming in contact with the natural world allows him to see that he is just a man under nice clothes. His true madness, which is the suffering he is enduring due to his sins, comes out in this act as well. In his wanderings, he is screaming to the storm going in and out of his madness. He says:

...Spit, fire! Spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters.

I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
 I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children;
 You owe me no subscription. Then let fall
 Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave,
 A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man... (III.i.14-20)

Lear shows that he truly does blame his daughters for what they have done, shown when telling the thunder that it does not owe him a thing, but yet his daughters do. Once word is sent to Cordelia of what has happened, Lear is almost able to realize what sin he has committed and how only humility can redeem him.

Once Cordelia's men bring Lear back to her French camp, his first encounter with his banished daughter brings him back to sanity and he once again has love in his life. Cordelia is said to resemble a Jesus life figure, being able to forgive her father for the sin he committed and come back in a non-resentment attitude. Another example of this is when she first sees him and says "O my dear father, restoration hang / Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss / Repair..." (IV,vii, 24-25). Stories in the bible have said that the touch or kiss of Jesus has cured people of certain ailments that once clouded their lives. Just like that, Cordelia is able to give her father a kiss and fully show him what true love means. He goes on to further show his humility by saying "I am a foolish fond old man..." (IV, vii, 59). Despite the fact that the play ends with Cordelia dying in Lear's arms, and Lear as well dying, he seems to have attained the redemption he was searching for. He realized his mistake in shunning the daughter who truly loved him, showed everyone around him how his sanity was lost, and stood up to the wrong persons who were causing the havoc in their country. He is able to feel real compassion for the first time for another, and shows how he has in fact grown from his humility.

With pride causing people to do irrational things, the sin of wrath does many similar things.

The Winter's Tale embodies the sin of wrath. It is described as inordinate and uncontrollable feelings of hatred and anger that is displayed in the main character named Leontes. He is the ruler of Sicilia and has a queen by the name of Hermonie. His life long friend, called Polixenes, is the king of Bohemia and is enduring a nine-month stay with the king and queen of Sicilia. Leontes asks his boyhood friend to stay a bit longer, and his wife presses this request. Once the two walk away to talk, Leontes's true anger comes out. He says in act I, scene ii, lines 189-196:

Go play, boy, play. There have
 been
 (Or I am much deceiv'd) cuckolds ere now,
 And many a man there is (even at this present,
 That little thinks she has been sluic'd in 's absence,
 And his pond fish'd by his next neighbor-by
 Sir Smile, his neighbor...

The sight of his wife and life long friend all of the sudden push these feelings to the surface of the king. He refers to himself as a "cuckold," which is the husband of an unfaithful wife. Many metaphors are used to show the acts between the two faux lovers, including "his pond fish'd by his next neighbor" (195) and later in the speech in lines 197-198 "Whiles other men have gates, and those gates open'd, / As mine, against their will." One of the ways in which Shakespeare shows that Leontes is fueled by false jealousy is by having all the other characters around him on Hermonie's side. Later in the

first act, he has a discussion with Camillo. He divulges how his suspicions about his wife and friend, saying “Is whispering nothing? / Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses? / Kissing with inside lip? / ...horsing foot on foot? / Sulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?” (I.ii.284-288) and has Camillo respond “No. no, my lord” (I.ii.299) when asked if what he saw were true. Leontes calls on Cleomines and Dion, oracles who even tell the king “Hermonie is chaste, Polixenes / blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous / tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the King / shall live without an heir, if what which is lost not found” (III.iii.132-136). Leontes says “There is no truth at all i’ th’ oracle. / The sessions shall proceed; this is mere falsehood” (III.iii.140-141) and refutes what even an oracle has said. After all of that, he ordered his baby to be left in the wilderness, his wife jailed which eventually dies along with her son Mamillius, and in turn brings a type of winter state to Sicilia. This is what the king must suffer from- 16 years of loneliness and waiting, not knowing whether he is ever going to find his daughter or be able to marry again.

Shakespeare uses song in order to bring the audience into a new season of spring, which is a symbol for rebirth. When Autolycus appears singing in act IV, scene iii. He sings the beginning of a song which goes “When daffodils begin to peer, / With heigh, the doxy over the dale! / Why, then comes in the sweet o’ the year, / For the red blood reigns in the winter’s / pale...” The daffodils are the flowers sprouting in the change of the season, and the red blood meaning the youth that could have brightened the winter’s pale look. A song in a play represents a large change about to occur, just like the season

of spring. In this case is with the characters encountering one another for the first time and once again after such a long period of time. The redemption of Leontes comes with the fact that he sat in his dreamlike kingdom, dwelling on the sins that he committed against his family and people. He promised Paulina he would never marry unless she told him to do so, and he did that as well. Leontes even says “ Whilest I remember / Her and her virtues, I cannot forget / My blemishes in them, and so still think of / The wrong I did myself; which was so much / That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and / Destroy’d the sweet’st companion that e’er man / Bred his hopes of” (V.i.7-12). Those around Leontes are trying to make him forgive himself, but he responds with this, knowing that he can never replace his loving wife nor make his kingdom continue on. He also knows that this is no one’s fault but himself, and he is only to blame. Leontes then gets his chance to apologize and make things right between his daughter Perdita, Polixenes, and his wife Hermione. Florizel and Perdita come to his castle, and when he meets with Florizel, he says:

The blessed gods
 Purge all infection from our air whilest you
 Do climate here! You have a holy father,
 A graceful gentlemen, against whose person
 (So sacred as it is) I have done sin,
 for which the heavens, taking angry note,
 Have left me issueless; and your father’s bless’d
 (As he from heaven merits it) with you,
 Worthy his goodness. What might I have been,
 Might I a son and a daughter now have look’d on,
 Such goodly things as you? (V.i.168-178)

Here, Leontes speaks out about his sins and notices that his kingdom is a great deal more healthy and lively. Little does he know, this is because of Perdita, his daughter

that brings change and happiness among everything she touches. After he asks for forgiveness to the son of the man he tried to murder, his life comes quickly back together. Hermonie is resurrected from a statue she has been encased in for the past 16 years and reunited with the king. Because the king has seen his errors, he is forgiven and rebirth truly begins.

Out of the two plays examined and studied, both main characters show error, suffering, and redemption. One of the most prominent themes in King Lear and The Tempest has to do with a character having grace, and more specifically divine grace. Divine grace is a gift from God that is used for development and improvement for a person. Without these graces, human kind would be limited and many flaws would shine though much of the time. In these two plays, Cordelia and Perdita both have a grace built into their character. Lear and Leontes would not have been able to be saved without them at the end of their plays, hence making them a vital part to the story and the character's existence. With this grace, the two ladies could in a way rid them of their original sins and grant them the salvation they needed to grow into stronger characters. In The Winter's Tale, Hermonie cries out when she is being accused of adultery in act I, scene i, line 79 "Grace to boot!" She is calling out for heavenly grace for help, and by the end of the play, her daughter, Perdita, does help her become alive once again. As shown before, Cordelia kisses her father when she meets him again after being apart in hopes of curing him, which is again an attempt Jesus made in the bible. Both of these characters possess the power in a way to give redemption to their characters, and without them, a character would have had greater difficulty attaining that redemption.

Bibliography

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