

## THE VECTORS OF EVIL IN THE MILITARY THEME OF THE TRAGEDY KING LEAR BY W. SHAKESPEARE

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### Abstract:

This article examines the manifestations and vectors of Evil in William Shakespeare's tragedy King Lear, with a particular focus on its military and psychological dimensions. Through an analysis of key characters such as King Lear, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Oswald the study explores how themes of betrayal, tyranny, madness, and physical suffering contribute to the play's overarching depiction of moral chaos. The discussion highlights the role of pride, slander, conspiracy, and violence in perpetuating Evil, ultimately leading to irreversible tragedy. Special attention is given to the motifs of war, captivity, and torture, which underscore the destructive consequences of unchecked ambition and moral decay. The article argues that King Lear presents Evil as an all-consuming force that corrupts individuals and society, leaving devastation in its wake.

*Key words:* King Lear, William Shakespeare, Evil in literature, tragedy, betrayal, pride, madness, war and violence, moral decay, suffering, power and corruption.

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The fundamental philosophical basis of the coexistence and struggle between Good and Evil [1] essentially determines the genre features of tragedy from its very inception in the art of Ancient Greece. Good and Evil are philosophical categories whose understanding and interpretation have varied significantly across different eras and regions of the world, depending on the level of development and structure of society. At the same time, there seem to be some universal, key concepts tied to human nature itself instincts, consciousness. It is obvious, for example, that the deliberate infliction of harm, damage, pain, or humiliation upon another person or people can in no way be associated with the accumulation of positive experience, creation, creativity, proper upbringing of children, hope for reciprocal kindness, inner harmony, or even simple inner peace. It is no coincidence that the categories of Good and Evil are systematized by every religion, though some tenets, due to their ancient origins, may carry archaic connotations and provoke debate.

As his dramatic craftsmanship developed, W. Shakespeare explored the essence and cost of royal power in his historical chronicles and tragedies, depicting the formation of English statehood. Parallel to this social theme, he delved into questions of psychology the genre of tragedy most vividly portrays the extremes of human passions, up to the most unpredictable and horrific. The tragedy King Lear represents a special concentration of terrifying metamorphoses in human nature, culminating in universal chaos.

It is evident that King Lear's disownment of his youngest daughter, Cordelia, occurs, as they say, out of nowhere making its seriousness and scale all the more astonishing. His blatant injustice and verbal disproportion in response to Cordelia's reasonable and calm remark about love and loyalty to her future husband is undeniably evil, as it overturns reason and justice. King Lear seems to invoke the entire universe, appealing to it and enlisting it as an ally thereby elevating his purely familial, paternal dissatisfaction with his daughter to a global level. It is here that King Lear programs the coming Storm as an embodiment of chaos. The mention of metaphorical "the barbarous Scythian, // Or he that makes his generation messes" [2], who, in Lear's admission, instantly become closer than Cordelia, draws an inhuman line between father and daughter. This is clear evil.

Immediately following this scene, King Lear's banishment of his loyal subject Kent continues this vector of evil.

Thus, it can be stated that at the root of the unfolding, spring-like torrent of Evil lie willfulness, despotism, selfishness, pride, and an inability to listen to others clear sins described in religious doctrines of virtuous behavior. All of this is provoked by a long-standing habit of power. Essentially, it is all tied to King Lear's sin of pride the most diabolical sin [3], as it provokes others. Further development of the theme of pride is seen in Lear's rebuke to Kent, who dared to warn him of inevitable punishment for his unjust treatment of Cordelia. Thus, evil is immediately shown in its potential for growth: two innocent individuals, Kent and Cordelia, are punished for nothing.

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The next manifestation of evil is slander. It is masterfully executed by the cunning Edmund, who stages a vile performance, manipulating the vulnerabilities of his father and brother with equal precision. Edmund's slander stems from his envy and resentment at being overlooked by fate: the legitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester and thus the rightful heir is his brother Edgar, not him. From this very understandable and common human situation, it follows that Edgar is doomed to misfortune and, most likely, death precisely the catastrophic spread of evil.

In general, secret conspiracy is one of the strongest and most persistent triggers of the tragedy's intrigue, present in all plotlines. Besides Edmund, the conspiracy involves Lear's two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan. The conspiracy leads to betrayal in both plot variants: Edmund betrays his father and brother, while Goneril and Regan betray their father and sister. This mirroring is highly advantageous in terms of artistic composition, reinforcing the idea of Evil.

Among the traitors, one character stands out as a symbol of this vice Oswald, who strives so hard to please his new mistress Goneril that he not only disregards but seems to forget his former master, King Lear, even referring to him as "my lady's father" [2] instead of the expected address to a king, "Your Majesty." Oswald is the epitome of betrayal, capable of switching allegiances instantly for personal gain.

As a result of the vile actions of Edmund, Goneril, and Regan, true darkness descends upon the fates of King Lear, Cordelia, Kent, Gloucester, and Edgar. This includes exile, hunger, cold, constant threat of death, and ultimately death itself or, in cases where life is spared, unending physical (and spiritual) suffering...

Physical pain is coupled with torture. The classic and unbearably horrific scene is the blinding of Gloucester. The famous monologue of Poor Tom Edgar is built on hyperbole and fantastical metaphor, which alone offers some respite from the horror: "Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad, // the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, // eats cow-dung for sallets; swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the // standing pool; who is whipped from tithing to tithing, and stock-punished, and imprisoned; who // hath had three suits to his back, six shirts to his // body, horse to ride, and weapon to wear; // But mice and rats, and such small deer, // Have been Tom's food for seven long year. // Beware my follower" [2]. These quotes depict the torments of hunger, cold, humiliation, and mental anguish... The latter evolves into a theme crucial for understanding the tragedy - madness, whether real or feigned. In essence, Satan from Poor Tom's monologue, and the very name Poor Tom, are images of madness ("Poor Tom o' Bedlam" - an expression from medieval London life: the lowest of the low, those abandoned by all, not even kept in a madhouse they are outcasts [4]). Thus, madness is one of the most terrifying things that can befall a person, and in medieval times, it was perceived as a dreadful punishment, a trial by the devil. Edgar is not mad he is pretending. This makes it even more terrifying, as he must live in two dimensions.

Another motif in the military theme is captivity, which in some ways parallels the motif of exile as in Edgar's case. This motif is primarily developed in the story of King Lear and Cordelia's capture, but in one way or another, Edgar (Poor Tom), Gloucester, and Kent can also be considered captives. Captivity entails physical and psychological torment, hunger, cold, humiliation... The famous monologue of Poor Tom Edgar though not about captivity but exile can be seen as a concentrated expression of these sufferings, as evident in the quoted passage above.

The most horrifying vice in the tragedy is undoubtedly the readiness to kill. Or rather, its various forms: the most forgivable killing on the battlefield, in war. The most terrible secret and treacherous. For the characters embodying Evil, there is no barrier before secret poisonings or conspiracies. Given such plot development and the genre of tragedy, most (if not all) will likely perish... And so it happens. Death, as we know, is irreversible. It is preceded by the all-destroying Storm. Only some (King Lear) achieve enlightenment and are forgiven by their victims (Gloucester, Kent, Cordelia), while others die having obliterated all laws, all rules of family and state.

And perhaps the most unbearable for ordinary human consciousness and utterly alien to a healthy society in peaceful times is the constant presence of death in its various forms: from battlefield deaths to brutal executions, war injuries, wounds, and what is most unbearable deadly physical pain. The blinding of Gloucester, the sufferings of Edgar, the murder of Cordelia these are the torments of noble heroes. But the horror of war, wrought by their opponents the prisoners of evil also affects them. Regan, before her death, complains of terrible pain she dies from poisoning. The tragedy mentions battles meaning masses of people perish on the battlefield from fatal wounds; they suffered physically. This is the illustration of the total nature of Evil.

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