

SHAKESPEARE'S VIEW ON AGEING; FOCUS ON KING LEAR

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ABSTRACT: *Ageing or Aged people have always been a matter of critical approach with lots of associated considerations. Hence, Shakespeare, though a universal writer, has not been able to keep himself out of the thoughts of society in regard of Ageing. This paper tries to investigate the approach of Shakespeare to the Aged people. Keeping social norms in mind it is difficult to find a neutral point of view in case of aged people. So, this paper aims at discovering the ideology that Shakespeare has been bound by about Aged people and Ageism. For this King Lear is focused here, as a text, where Shakespeare's view on ageing, as a writer, can be found and for this, the whole text is to be read with critical eye to find out how he sees the old people.*

KEYWORDS: gerontology, Shakespeare, *King Lear*.

Shakespeare, though a universal writer has not been able to overlook the prejudiced view on the Old, poured on by the then society which seems to be continuing till date. He sketches the look of his protagonist in such a way that nobody can deny that he is not aged. Again, he unfolds the blindedness of his protagonist, Lear, to be the cause of his all sufferings which is also trotted out as the reason of the king's being old. Furthermore, the king is exhibited as a lunatic one who is incapable of doing anything rightly let alone ruling a country or maintaining the family matters. Moreover, the king, who is taken to a position without power, is very much unfit to use the power he possesses. In addition, Lear is shown with the family problems due to his being old like chaos in parent child relation where he ill-treats and is treated. However, the theme of old age is highlighted as it has been shown as the main reason of the very birth of the drama. Several veteran critics have expressed their thoughts on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, showing their feelings and ideas regarding the old king and the overall play. So, Shakespeare has not tried anything special rather than presenting the picture of the society which considers being old is nothing more than losing interest in earthly life and being a man more as burden than useful.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare has come with a view of his own about the old people which is depicted by the character, King Lear. He, according to Shakespeare, is an example of how the old looks and his look can be understood if his age is once known. First of all, the age of King Lear is not expressed directly as there have been many thoughts in the mind of Shakespeare. But, he is old enough to have three daughters and the last one of the daughters is yet to be married, though she has been not so young. Lear, too, refers to his own age saying, 'Fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less.' (IV, VII, 58). This is a self contradictory statement as this contains two negativities as 'not' and 'less' and yet 'upward' of eighty. As the statement itself a contradictory and relative one, the number of eighty is difficult to believe. There are a couple of issues working here in case of determining his age by this speech. The 'Fourscore and upward' a five syllable phrase sits in its

poetic line forcing a huge pause either before it or after it. The cause of this pause may be either someone who knows him well like Cordelia and Kent or by his self realizations as a means of the lack of certainty. And later it becomes the cause of his confusion which builds up a point where he admits, 'I fear I am not in my perfect mind.' (IV, VII, 60) Then, he can be of 80 but considering the period Shakespeare has been a product of, it is difficult to imagine someone can be at the age of eighty, as the average life expectancy of the Elizabethan England has been just been over forty years of age. In this regard the age of his three daughters can provide something to believe on. As known, Goneril is the eldest and no children is referenced at least when Lear leaves her portion to her saying;

To thine and Albany's issues
Be this perpeheal (I, I, 65-66)

Infact, when Lear curses Goneril for punishing him and his followers for thir actions, he says of her lack of children;

Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt; that she may
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!— Away, away. (I.IV. 257-271)

Here, this curse of her future sterility becomes meaningless, if she, Goneril, is postmenopausal woman with sterility. So, Goneril may not be over forty and so. After Goneril comes the Regan who has also been referred to having possibility of children as 'hereditary ever' (I.I.78) as this is the only material thing he mentions about Regan and she has been younger to Goneril. Therefore, she may have been in her fertile years. Lastly, her younger daughter has been seen as nurse by the king. Here, the King connects Cordelia with the age of young 'nurse' ready to be mother as not the one whose maternal aspects can be either ignored like Regan or cursed like Goneril. However, with three daughters of this age and mental condition so disturbed and willingness not to work anymore, it is quite possible that he is more than sixties. But, the ambiguity and contradiction about age, created by Shakespeare in this regard, makes the King a character of more importance. Here, a man with this age is certainly imaginable with wrinkles, white hairs, weak and shaky hands and words. To get an idea of the look of Lear, the adaptations of this play in movies can play a good role. There are a lot of adaptations made. In 1971, there are two adaptations. One of them is directed by Grigori Kozintsev and the role o King Lear has been casted by Juri Jarvet. Another

one is directed by Peter Brook of Denmark and the role of Lear is been casted by Paul Scofold. Again, in 2008, Trevor Nunn directs another adaptation where the role of the King is performed by Ian Mckellen. Besides, in 2018, the newest adaptation of *King Lear* is directed by Richard Eyre and the protagonist has been Anthony Hopkins. One common thing about the characters of the mentioned adaptations is that Lear has got a beard. Interestingly, all the directors have used the same prejudiced idea of presenting an old man recommended by society. Lear is shown as a societal old with a lot of arrogance, property. So, the view of an old by Shakespeare is not different one than the society which is a depiction of age with the prejudice received from society.

Lear, the King, is portrayed as a person who suffers from blindedness which is related to his power of jurisdiction. In Shakespearean terms blindedness has a different meaning which can normally be defined as being unable to see. As if it is a mental flaw rather than physical, in the play it has a special place, shown as a negative quality of being old. *King Lear* is the prime example where Shakespeare incorporates this theme into. Lear's blindedness is the primary cause of the terrible decisions he takes. Eventually, he comes to regret the decision which brings a tragic doom to his life. as Lear holds the greatest position in that society, he is supposed not to be showing this and these kind of lacking is not expected from a man of his stature. Perhaps, he should have been in a position to distinguish the good from the bad. Unfortunately enough to say that Lear's lack of sight prevents him from doing so which also displays that he is a typical product of Shakespeare. First, his (Lear's) blindedness makes his daughter, Goneril and Regan, able enough to deceive him. Goneril, when she is asked to say how much she loves her father, says;

Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter,
 Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
 Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor,
 As much as child e'er loved or father found—
 A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (I.I. 54-57)

Goneril, here, expresses her false love for her father. Though her speech is unnatural, deceitful, manipulative one, shoeing the real character of Goneril as malevolent, malicious, maniacal, malignant and beastly which Lear can neither see nor try to understand. He does the same mistake of understanding second daughter. Then, Lear even cannot see the true love of Cordelia as a result of that he banishes her from his kingdom with the following words;

...for we have no such daughter, nor
 Shall see that face of her again. Therefore gone
 Without our grace, our love, our benison (I.I.265-267)

Again Lear's blindedness also causes him to banish one of his most loyal followers, Kent, which comes out of the fact of Kent's try to protect Cordelia from banishment and her father's irrationality. Lear banishes Kent saying;

Peace Kent!!

Come not between a dragon and his wrath...

Hence and avoid my sight. (I.I.123-125)

Interestingly enough, Lear calls him a dragon but shows the wisdom not even of a rat. In this way, Lear not only banishes Cordelia, his only true daughter, but also Kent, the only most loyal and caring soldier. Lear is blinded to the true motives of those around him when he wrathfully sends the true ones away. Lear's believing the flattery of the world around him and neglecting the true ones show nothing but his blindedness. But, this blindedness is not applicable to Lear only. There are also some other characters too who show their blindedness in various regards which cause them great harm. Such one character is Gloucester who is also an old one and blinded to Edmand, his bastard son. Gloucester believes Edmund without any advance investigation. But, he cannot find his son's intention completely which is opposite to his due to the lack of foresight and gullibility. When Gloucester understands this, he says;

O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter!

Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish

Villain—worse than brutish! (I.II.72-74)

He also says;

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.

I stumbled when I saw. (IV.I.20-21)

This manifests his unwillingness to get the ability to see because he has fails miserably to use them when he has been with them. After realizing the truth and finding out what has gone wrong in his act, he says;

O dear son Edgar,

The food of thy abused father's wrath,

Might I but live to see thee in my touch,

I'd say I had eyes again! (IV.I.24-26)

Again, Albani, another not too young character, is blinded to Goneril. If Goneril is of forty, then Albani may have been more than fifty or of the average life expectancy of the then period which signifies his being old too. Albani is a weak social character who is blinded by the false love of Goneril. He has been completely unaware of Goneril's greed and malicious nature. Albani says;

How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell. (I, IV, 24)

But being younger than Lear, he gets a second chance to reshape his life solving the problems.

Albani says;

O Goneril,

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind

Blows in your face. I fear your disposition.

That nature, which contemns its origin

Cannot be bordered certain in itself.

She that herself will sliver and disbranch

From her material sap perforce must wither

And come to deadly use. (IV. II. 31-38)

In these ways Shakespeare presents his theme of blindedness to the old aged characters as if it was their age that had made them think and suffer like that. Blindedness is not surely a blunder done by old ones only as it can be to persons of any age. Specially the present age provides us a lot of

example of blindedness but that has to be due to old age cannot be accepted from a person with so much universal and real life knowledge which portrays his idea about the old people.

Shakespeare in this play, *King Lear*, presents the protagonist as mad. As far as ethical ideas are concerned, the principal way, to distinguish a man from an animal, is to use as reason. And, if this reason fails to perform correctly that is known as madness. In Lear's aspect, he may not be mad in real sense at the start of the play but he behaves to be far from being rational with the progress of the drama. Given that, he decides and ultimately divides his kingdom between his two daughters depending on the love test which does not mean any sense to any sensible man. Lear, here, says;

—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 with merit challenge?—Goneril,
 Our eldest born, speak first. (I. I. 48-54)

Here, his demand to know which one of his daughters loves him the 'most' before he announces the division of his kingdom. In the process of doing this he operates under assumptions that love is quantifiable and that language is capable enough in expressing love. It is quite imaginable that a person with greed of being powerful can certainly bring up with words which can be sweeter than the sweet. And, Goneril and Regan does so which are visible to any person with ration. But, at this stage, after hearing the love speech from all three of his daughters, Lear disowns Cordelia as she refuses to fake show of love like her other sisters and then Lear says;

Let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower.
 For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
 The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
 By all the operation of the orbs
 From whom we do exist and cease to be—
 Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
 Propinquity, and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee from this forever. The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation messes
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved
 As thou my sometime daughter. (I.I. 120-133)

This insists that Cordelia is no more than a 'barbarous Scythian' to Lear. In other words Lear misinterprets Cornelia's speech and equals the speech to so called betrayal to her father. After Lear leaves the stage by dividing the kingdom when Goneril and Regan also questions his ability and consider him as a mentally falling old man. In this stage Goneril says;

You see how full of changes his age is.
The observation we have made of it hath not been little.
He always loved our sister most, and with
What poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly. (I.I.295-299)
In reply Regan says;
'Tis the infirmity of his age. Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself. (I.I.300)
Then Goneril says about the flaws of age;
The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash.
Then must we look from his age to receive not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition,
But there withal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric year bring with them.
(I.I.301-304)

They, thus, question the abilities of the king regarding his mental situation. Lear, here, has rejected the biological and social bond without any reflection. However, both Regan and Goneril are willing to ponder to his unwanted thoughts until their own acquisition of power. The love test reveals Lear's disturbed mind and undistinguished need for affirmation and respect. It also reveals his unsubtle appeal to greed and his addiction to power though in all regards, he fails due to his irrational decisions. After seeing this situation, his state of mind can be called into question which is remarked by Goneril too. Again, the fool says;
O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
I would not be mad.
Keep me in temper. I would not be mad. (I.I.39-41)

This exposes the future or even he has already seen so. Moreover, it becomes clear that Lear's judgment of reality is a distorted one and this is nothing but the imbalance of his mental condition. However, in Act-II, Scene II when Goneril demands the dismiss of half of Lear's followers, it is lucid to all as he pleads;
Now, I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad. (I. IV. 213)
This line implies that Lear already has a notion of his mental health being fragile and fading. Later, again when he is in midst of storm pitying his fate and blaming his daughters for his desperate situation, he cries;
O fool, I shall go mad (II.II.175)
Lear's growing mental illness also causes to affect the people around Lear and they respond differently to his insanity and to try to make him sane. Even, the fool tries to applaud him up realizing the anxiety of Lear. In fact, the fool makes an attempt to show Lear how far he has gone in madness and so he says;
Then I prethee, be merry,
Thy wit shall not go slipshod. (I.V. 11-12)
Then the fool sings songs and does mockery to lighten Lears mood. Besides, Kent also treats the mad king with respect as he addresses Lear several times as 'My Lord'. Both the fool and Kent pay a great respect to the condition Lear is in and it is Cordelia in the end who succeeds in curing her father from madness for a time being at least. Cordelia's speech, while one of her attendants

preparing remedy for her father, seems to be like a prayer which shows her true feelings for her father. Her real intentions are known when she says;

No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
But love—dear love!—and our aged father’s right.
Soon may I hear and see him. (IV. IV. 26-30)

In this way, Shakespeare presents the madness of Lear as something common to old human being due to stress and mental pressure. Here, Shakespeare categorizes old people with zero common sense and sensibility related to rational world which upholds the prejudiced idea of old people by society.

The power of a King and a father as delineated by Shakespeare in *King Lear* goes through declining process of losing power which is shown as an effect of old age. By the family dynamics and an old fatherhood, Shakespeare draws the handover of authority by dividing the state, this old father possesses. Before Lear hands over the authority, the tone of power can be heard in his voice.

Lear says;
Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.—
Give me the map there. (I.I.34-35)

Here, Lear wants to divide his kingdom but anyone who has read *Henry IV Part I* remembers the rebels’ plans to divide Britain into three territories, knows that this is a big no. In addition to this, when Lear announces his decision of dividing his kingdom, he says about his age and calls the kingdom a burden to a people of that age.

It is our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths while we
Unburdened crawl toward death. (I.I.36-39)

Meantime, he prefers delivering the burden of kingdom to the ‘younger strengths’ while he, himself, sees as an aged man crawling towards death. This passage conjures the image of a feeble old man who cannot even walk upright and therefore he should crawl like an infant. This beautifully delineates how Shakespeare has seen the old aged ones who are weak and vulnerable as an infant and so the retirement from the power is a necessary to be done to an old. Besides, it depicts how once a ruler can be ruled when he is in his old age. The loss of power is systematized as a natural procedure for the old. Moreover, Lear’s choice of dividing the crown to the younger strengths is quite a social phenomenon where the old wish to live a carefree, relaxed life. Again, Lear thinks about the future strife that may destroy the tension free life of the retired king. As Lear has no son to inherit his crown, he wishes to prevent future strife among his daughters. However, the king, though divides his kingdom or power to his daughters, has been a part of show off inclination to retain a power and authority by taking one hundred knights to follow him around. Despite, this can be thought as the intention to retain power without any hassle and responsibility of an active ruler. The initiative taken by those guards can also be defined as something which is

needed to give an old king to exist. It is like the walking stick to the king which may help and support him to get rid of the problems of daily and king life. It is found in Lear's speech;

With reservation of an hundred knights
By you to be sustained, shall our abode
Make with you by due turns. Only shall we retain
The name, and all th' additions to a king.
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
Belovèd sons, be yours; which to confirm,
This coronet part between you. (I.I. 144-150)

With age all those who are powerful lose their power and that is what is shown in *King Lear* too by Shakespeare where Lear loses his power with age and by dividing his kingdom to his daughters. Even the fool understands the situation and says;

ever since thou madest thy daughters thy mothers.
For when thou gavest them the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches,
(I.IV. 176-78)

Here, ironically the fool seems smart enough, though it is not expected; to point out that Lear's daughters have become more like his mother as Lear has given up his power and kingdom to them. The fool means to say that by dividing the kingdom, Lear has given up his adult authority to his daughters and have deprived himself of all power. And it is all because of his age that he thinks of his kingdom as burden and delivers it to his daughters who make him a king without kingdom and power. Later in the play, Lear is rebuked by his daughter and he can hardly believe his daughter's insolence after Goneril insults him by complaining about his possession of hundred knights. Having relished the power of kingship, Lear has not been used to being treated in so bad a way. And, as a result, he does not find any way to define his present condition which is found in his allegorical question;

Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear.
Doth Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
Are lethargied. Ha, sleeping or waking?
Sure, 'tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am? (I.IV. 231-37)

Here the loss of power puts him in an identity crisis. And, fool's answer is equally smart and interesting as the fool can read Lear's situation better and so he comments. In fool's speech, Lear is nothing without his former power and title. It is seen here that with age Lear loses his kingdom and power which take him to such a condition where he is been neglected, deprived of honor, and put to dust. When Goneril reduces Lear's retinue of knights, the helpless and old Lear is seen which is compared to emasculation of Lear. In Lear's speech;
I'll tell thee.

(to GONERIL) Life and death! I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,
That these hot tears which break from me perforce
Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee! (I.IV. 295-99)

After all these, there comes the reason of all these sufferings of Lear from Regan. She points out that he is old and his life is on the verge of declination. She, also, implies that Lear's old age makes him unfit to rule and live a normal life as he should be under care of someone for his better off.

Regan says;

O sir, you are old.

Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of his confine. You should be ruled and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
That to our sister you do make return.
Say you have wronged her, sir. (II.IV. 164-70)

Finally, Regan's speech on Lear's age and his present powerless, crawling situation proves that Shakespeare, being a product of a particular society has not gone beyond its thought, culture, and customs. As a result of that, King Lear, as an aged man, is shown as crippled one. It is quite understandable that to some extent the tendencies of taking old out of power and responsibilities and putting him under observation of someone young can be seen as what Shakespeare has wished to see his protagonist as. Surprisingly, Shakespearean drama portrays old as any other simple person thinks. King Lear is a journey of an old man from king, father, and powerful leader to helpless, crawling old man.

King Lear is a the real life portrayal by Shakespeare in regard of parent children relationship where parent, in old age, becomes burden to most of the children while devoted child like Cordelia is also found. It is seen in Shakespearean plays that he often provides clues about the play's pressing issues or themes by the opening lines. Here, this play is not a different one as it also starts with a discussion on which son in law Lear likes most. This says that the play is going to be about the family dynamics of parent children relationship. Kent says;

KENT: I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER: It did always seem so to us. But now in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most... (I.I.1-3)

The king is loved and respected when he possesses power, though the real face of his daughters comes out after the division of authority and power. Especially the two elder daughters express their love in such a superficially well manner that the king gets a great pleasure after hearing their love speech. Despite being a king, Lear shows his lacking by believing their flattery whereas the real love from Cordelia is not understood by him. Among the world of fake faces, still there are the tastes of real love which can be found in Cordelia. But not being able to detect the real love brings the bad days of king's life. After the division of kingdom surprisingly the behaviour of his daughters changes who have power and authority. For the audience and all other outside of this

drama, this is nothing but the generational conflict between the parent and children. Again, in this situation the children grow impatient with the behaviour of the parent. When Goneril complains that Lear and his men are disruptive who are out of control, this scène makes everyone, both parent and children, remember of their extent. Basically the relationships among the royal family, as seen in history, are based on power and authority where love has a very simple role to play. These two ladies, Goneril and Regan, do not even hesitate to treat their own father, once king, so insantly that takes his life close to a nightmare. The overriding importance of power complicates the relation among them which blinds them from seeing the basic human love. Again Gloucester is also a character who suffers from this problem also, as he fails to realize the real intentions of Edgar which brings the end of father son relationship. Power, money authority is that kind of things which has a direct relation with the modification of relation between parent and children where the sense of love loses its control. And, this kind of conflict is easy for those who can play love and pretension game very well. On the other hand a child with real love but without the knowledge is always the victim of the wrath of the power. And, such kind of incident happens with Cordelia who in spite of having love cannot gain the part of the kingdom. Even lack of the power to differentiating the real from the fake is also a matter to be considered which is seen in regard of Cordelia and the King. King, being old, falls into the trap of flattery and cannot see the real love of Cordelia and does injustice to her who comes as aid to him when he is in great problem. Despite being a powerful king, Lear meets a miserable end which is only because he is old and not been able to see the unseen. The nature teaches to love all but breaking the natural law has been a kind of custom and social culture to those people of the society who need to show the path to righteousness. And, as the nature is treated, so the nature treats the other which can be seen in case of Goneril and Regan who also suffer a great deal. So, Shakespeare presents a drama which just represents not only the social system about the parent children relationship of the then time but also a universal one. At last, it can be said that Shakespeare has willingly shown the suffering of the king as he is old otherwise it could have been dealt in other way too because good relationship between parent and children is not that rare where parent may do some compromise and behave in a matured way and the suffering end of the king could have been avoided.

The theme of old age is one of the most dominating themes that are prevalent in the drama, *King Lear*. Shakespeare provides a picture of the then society where age confirms disability and deterioration. The very birth of the plot of this drama is because of Old which provokes the King's desires to unburden his responsibility and with the old age lacking, he falls amidst the problems with his own blood and so. Shakespeare's *King Lear* in one of the greatest phenomenon to get an idea of the thought of an aged man in the mind of Shakespeare and his time. In the scene I, Act I, Goneril says to Regan, 'how full of changes his age is.' Here, according to Goneril and Regan, old age is the thing which is contributing deadly to the path of making the king's condition bad. And, there can be no other explanation for the thing that would banish his most favourite daughter, Cordelia and one of best friends, Kent on a whim. These two surprised actions makes both Goneril and Regan think of his age. In reply to Goneril's speech Regan says, 'Tis the infirmity of his age'. Again being old the king is expected that he 'should be wise' as said by Goneril in act I, Scene 4. Even the fool thinks that 'thou should'st not have been old till than thou had'st been wise' in act I scene V. Not only the king but also Kent are shown as an old man who says that 'I am too old to learn' in act II scene II when he talks about the stocks. Surprisingly, When Lear tries to explain

Cornwell's behaviour, he says that 'we are not ourselves.... to suffer with the body' in act II scene IV. Being sad King aims at God saying;

YOU see me here, you Gods, a poor old man
As full of grief as age, wretched in both (II.IV)
His actual condition can be understood when he says;
Here I stand your slave
A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man. (III.II)
But in the last scene Edgar concludes the theme as;
The oldest had borne most. We that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

This is how the theme of old age has been the most discussed idea throughout the drama. From the start to end, the old age of Lear, Kent and Gloucester has been the matter of discussion for the young who receive the old as distorted, weak and poor human being with all the possibilities and wisdom gone.

Critics also have given their valuable views on the old and the old age theme presented by Shakespeare in *King Lear*. In the critical study on William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare' from 'The Reflector' (1810-1811), Charles Lamb says;
To see Lear acted, to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him."
He again says;

On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear, we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, im-methodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks, or tones, to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the heavens themselves, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that 'they themselves are old'. What gesture shall we appropriate to this?
In 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays' by William Hazlitt (1817), Hazlitt says;

In another point of view it is indispensable, in as much as while it is a diversion to the too great intensity of our disgust, it carries the pathos to the highest pitch of which it is capable, by showing the pitiable weakness of the old king's conduct and its irretrievable consequences in the most familiar point of view.

Samuel Johnson in his 'Preface to Shakespeare' says;
...that the cruelty of the daughters is an historical fact, to which the poet has added little, having only drawn it into a series by dialogue and action.

Tolstoy disliked the play so severely that he used it in a pamphlet to attack Shakespeare - '*Shakespeare might have been whatever you like, but he was not an artist.*' In *Everybody's Shakespeare* (1993), Maynard Mack presents *King Lear* as the play most in line with contemporary philosophy, '*As compared with Hamlet, the nineteenth century's favorite, King Lear speaks of a world more problematical...King Lear's world, like our century, is larger, looser, cruder, crueller.*' From *SHAKSPERE* by Edward Dowden (1893), Dowden finds *King Lear*, among the tragedies of passion, is the one in which passions assume the largest proportions, act upon the widest theatre, and attain their absolute extremes. so, critics are also of the views that Shakespeare has tried to depict a character keeping society and societal ideas in mind , specially about the old age.

After observing the limitations of life presented through the aged Lear, it is impossible to deny that Shakespeare has been a part of the society that sees aged and old people as crippled, weak and with all other negative associations that make a man burden to not only family but also to society. Whereas, Bacon, though of similar time, has different view where he says that he will never be an old man and to him old age is just fifteen years more than he is. Besides, in *King Lear*, Shakespeare presents all the notions that a prejudiced society associates for an old. Interestingly, the very reasons of the start and end are the issues related to old age. Here, Shakespeare does not give a new direction to understand the process of being old and without any doubt he wants to replicate the society's views in this regard. However, the word 'Old' has been used forty nine times in the play which serves several languish functions throughout.

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