



Cornell University
John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Document Title: Looking Closely at Close Reading
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Course: English 1190
Course Title: Great Books? Exploring the Literary Tradition

Year of Award: Spring 2010

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Instructor's name Jane Kim

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Looking Closely at Close Reading

Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature Jane Kim

Date 5/10/10

**Looking Closely at Close Reading:
Assignment Sequence from “Great Books,” ENGL 1190.103**

Rationale:

As I began to structure and plan for my course, “Great Books? Exploring the Literary Tradition,” I very early identified close reading as one of the main skills I wanted to encourage my students to learn and develop. Close reading is one of the stated objectives of the Course Description: “Writing assignments will focus on introducing and developing skills in close reading and literary interpretation,” and, as a graduate student in the English Department, close reading is an integral part of my own research and work. I felt convicted, however, to focus primarily on close reading for my Freshman Writing Seminar for the following reasons:

1. In a course devoted to studying the major works of the English canon, I knew that many of my students would be familiar with the authors and works we would read. Even if they had not read the particular works on our syllabus, they would, perhaps, have seen film adaptations or dramatic performances, or know enough about the plots to be complacent in their understanding of the works. I wanted to challenge my students to truly question what made these well-known works merit the appellation “Great Books,” and to consider not only the meaning of each text, but also how the meaning was produced. I felt that close reading would allow my students to grasp the depth of the richness and complexity invested at a word-by-word and line-by-line level and help them to gain a new appreciation for the old classics.
2. I feared that my students might approach the class viewing the established works of the canon as staid and hackneyed products of obsolete times. I wanted to demonstrate the vital and energetic nature of literary study by empowering them with a sense of authorship and originality. Close reading allows for each individual reader to uncover intriguing and original interpretations, and I wanted my students to understand that, by a process of delving into the text and teasing out nuance and meaning, they could offer new contributions to the English tradition.
3. Close reading promotes the development of a sensitivity to language and a sense of responsibility to the text. I knew that many of my students would not be future

English majors, but close reading would still equip them with attentive analytical impulses and critical thinking skills that would be invaluable for their future work in any field of study.

Plan:

My strategy for teaching close reading consisted of two major parts: First, students were to learn the process of close reading. We would practice analyzing and dissecting a text to discover points of interest, identify questions, and make observations. Next, we would move on to crafting close reading papers that would allow the students to synthesize and present all of their thoughts in a carefully developed argument. Finally we would write longer analytical papers that incorporated the practice of close reading.

➤ *Part 1:* We began the semester by reading Ernest Hemingway's short story "Cat in the Rain." I assigned a short response paper in order to assess my students' level of analysis and writing, and we discussed the story's symbolism and style of writing. Through our early discussions and writing exercises, I tried to impress upon my students the importance of attentive reading and sensitivity to language. Our first major work was Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, and, in my lectures, I looked at specific moments that were particularly meaningful and that contributed to a larger understanding of the text, challenging them to deeper levels of literary interpretation. Of course, we looked carefully at the many appearances of the word "persuade," and examined how each context in which the word was introduced colored its meaning or importance.

For our first in-class exercise working towards close reading, I had my students divide into smaller groups and choose a paragraph in *Persuasion* that they found interesting or enjoyable. Each group was responsible for breaking down their passage. They were to pay close attention to the grammar and syntax of each line, count the number of words, track repeated words, tally each grammatical part of speech, identify the subjects and objects and number of clauses in each sentence, and so on. Students also looked at the use of punctuation, active and passive voice, verb tense, and figurative language. The purpose was to attain a fuller understanding of the passage than was initially apparent by identifying any patterns in authorial style or tone that contributed to producing meaning in the passage. Reconvening as a class, we looked together at one paragraph and discussed how *Persuasion*'s theme of renewal and the text's preoccupation with Wentworth's return were manifested in the passage's frequent usage of

“re-” words, such as *repeatedly*, *renewed*, *recollection*, *reverted*, and *remembrance*. This helped the students to appreciate how themes of the text may be encoded and reinforced at the word-by-word level.

Before we began the next work, Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale from *Canterbury Tales*, I wanted my students to learn about the Oxford English Dictionary. I hoped that the OED would be helpful for their close reading, especially as they began translating and studying the unfamiliar words and orthography of Middle English. We had a class with an Olin librarian, who helped us to navigate the library’s many online resources and research tools, and we also focused specifically on the online OED. Students had the opportunity to practice looking up words so that they would understand how to find historical meanings and to consider various connotations.

Throughout our study of *Persuasion*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *King Lear*, we continued practicing looking closely at passages through in-class discussions, informal writing exercises, and shorter response papers. I often began class by having students free-write on interesting passages. We, then, discussed how their detailed observations and explications helped to illuminate the rest of the work. If students offered differing interpretations of the same passage, we discussed how ambiguities and ambivalences of tone or diction allowed for greater textual complexity and varying interpretations.

➤ *Part 2:* Now that I felt my students had developed a certain level of attention and awareness in their reading, I moved toward having them funnel their observations and thoughts into compelling and polished close reading papers. I created a handout on close reading adapted from Kerry Walk’s “What is Close Reading?” We discussed the steps of close reading and the movement from close observation of text to larger connections and literary analysis. Essays 4, 5, and 6 were designed to build upon each other as a sequence of close reading papers. My goal was to help my students recognize how the seemingly narrow focus of completing a close reading was essential to the development and support of larger ideas and arguments.

Before assigning Essay 4, however, I shared with the class two of my own close reading papers that I had written in college. Many of my students had never written a close reading paper, and so I thought it would be helpful for them to view a couple sample papers. One was the very first paper I had written my freshmen year, which allowed me to demonstrate the level of writing I could expect from my own freshmen, and the other was from my sophomore year

after I had declared myself an English major. We read the papers together in class and talked about how to gather the different strands of observed symbolism, allusion, and connotation to weave an organized argument. My students later told me that my papers were very helpful in demonstrating to them how to form a cohesive argument from disparate observations and that they were encouraged about the possibility for improvement in their own writing as they saw my progress from one paper to the next.

Essay 4 was composed of two parts. The students first submitted a proposal identifying a passage in *King Lear* that they would close read. The proposal included a summary of the important plot points in the passage, as well as questions and arguments they were interested in pursuing. The next step was to submit the first draft of their close reading. I delimited my students' range of study to their selected passage and restrained them from making broader connections to other moments in the text or to larger themes. I wanted to make sure that they looked closely enough at their passage before stepping back to make more general claims. My response to the first drafts focused primarily on helping my students to propose stronger and more specific arguments. I tried to suggest ways in which they could make connections in order to structure a cohesive argument based on their observations and interpretations. While the students made very interesting and insightful comments and explanations, some of the papers needed clearer thesis statements to shape and focus their ideas. I also encouraged my students to stay away from plot summary by contributing their own unique interaction with the text.

Essay 5 also had two steps. Part 1 of Essay 5 asked for a close reading of a passage from Shelley's *The Cenci*, much like what was assigned for Essay 4, and Part 2 was intended as a kind of telescoping out into a broader analysis of the work. Now that they understood more clearly how to organize an argument from their close reading notes on a passage, I wanted to give my students the opportunity to make the intratextual connections and larger examination that I had kept them from in the previous assignment. I wanted my students to make interesting arguments about the work as a whole using their close reading as strong textual evidence and support. I also met with students individually in conferences during the drafting of part 2 of Essay 5 to discuss how to formulate strong arguments and to expand upon their ideas. Although the stepping back and extrapolating larger ideas from a specific passage is the general movement of close reading, there is also the reverse order of selecting first an argument about the work as a whole and then close reading a passage in support of it. Just as close readings tend to lead us in a

direction that telescopes outward, the writing process also often requires a kind of microscoping into a passage in order to identify details that bolster our arguments. Essay 6 would allow us now to practice this reverse movement from the general idea to the specific passage.

As our final assignment, Essay 6 was the culmination of a number of skills we had worked on throughout the semester. I chose to highlight two—close reading and research of secondary sources—in the essay prompt. All of the students had presented on critical articles concerning the works we read, and so I asked for them to respond to at least one scholarly article in their analysis. Of course, I also asked for the incorporation of at least one close reading in support of one of their arguments. Whereas Essays 4 and 5 isolated close reading itself as the main thrust of the assignment, I wanted my students to comprehend the integral role of close reading in larger papers as a tool and weapon in the arsenal of literary analysis. I had provided directive prompts for Essays 1, 2, and 3, and while Essays 4 and 5 had been free-topic papers based on passages of their choice, I returned to suggesting essay topics for Essay 6. I wanted my students to have a final paper that resembled the format of their earlier work so that they could compare their papers that were before and after their development of the tool of close reading. We discussed our extensive investment as a class in cultivating the skill and process of close reading, and I believe that my students understood how close reading enriched their development and support of sophisticated and complex ideas and arguments.

Reflections:

Our class did a great deal of peer revision throughout the drafting and revision processes for Essays 4 and 5. We spent several class periods workshopping the first drafts of Essay 4, with four or five students presenting their work each day. I believe it was important for me to experience the vulnerability of sharing my own work with the class before the workshops began because it helped me to be more sensitive and understanding of the student presenters. Sharing my work first also helped to foster an environment of mutual trust and a sense of a group effort toward maturing as writers. We also used a system of peer revision (using a review sheet adapted from Knight Institute resource materials) for part 1 of Essay 5. I believe that the class enjoyed reading each other's papers, and I was impressed by the level of their comments and suggestions to one another. In conferences, students told me that the pressure of opening up their work to examination by the class motivated them to work harder. They were also interested and

mutually challenged by each other's unique perspectives and styles of analysis, and the workshops helped them to become stronger editors of their own work, as they recognized mistakes and habits they had in common with others.

On the whole, I felt that my students gained an appreciation for the importance and value of close reading and grew as critical thinkers, readers, and writers through our development of close reading skills. I know that my students enjoyed the process of unearthing new meanings and introducing original, and even controversial, readings to our discussions. In the free-write for our final day of class, one student wrote:

Throughout the semester we had looked at works of literature from all the periods and I feel that I have changed my perspective on literature. In high school I felt that we were never really taught to go in depth in a certain passage or section and so I missed a lot of the author's writing and was unable to understand the work as a whole. Now I am better able to read a novel and see the underlying themes, especially in a work like *The Dead* which is more subtle about it.

I have attached my close reading handout, directions for Essays 4, 5, and 6, and two student close reading papers that were produced in my course this semester.

Looking Closely at Close Reading

To find interesting ideas that lead to interesting arguments, a person must read carefully, paying close attention to details and how the writer combines those details. “Close reading” is the term used in literary studies to describe the process of attention that leads to worthwhile questions, discussions and arguments. “Close reading” means somewhat different things in different contexts, but is usually understood as “an exploration of how a literary work produces meaning.”

Close reading is both a *process*—of analyzing and interpreting a piece of writing—and a *product*—an argument based on this process. This method of reading is “close” in that it is attentive to minute details within a text (a poem, novel, short story, etc.)—details that may be very precise but that can nonetheless help to elucidate the larger issues at play within a piece of writing. Ultimately, close reading steps back, telescopes out, and tries to place the details in reference to the larger whole. The final result is a well-considered piece of writing that arranges details from the text so as to support an argument.

“Close reading” a text usually involves three main steps:

1. *Observation*

What do you notice about the text? What patterns or details do you observe in the language of the text? (These details may well be completely obvious once pointed out, but that’s fine.) What kinds of images or symbols are used? How does the plot develop, if there is a plot? What words or phrases are repeated throughout the text? What is the overall tone of the language? What is the feeling evoked by the language?

2. *Interpretation/Inferences*

Once you have identified details in a particular text you’ll want to consider questions such as “how” they function and “why” they are there. Why is a particular phrase used over and over? Why is a particular effect created at a particular moment? How do the details, images, or symbols relate to the bigger picture of the text? Do plot and language reinforce one another, or is there a disjuncture between what the text says and how it says it?

3. *Weaving an argument*

What is my argument? What does all of this add up to? Once you have a series of *observations* and *interpretations*, step back and think about what seems most important or interesting among the connections you have drawn, and the ideas that you have developed from the text. Produce a coherent argument based on your *observations* and *interpretations*. This will form the basis of your argument, and you will already have observations and interpretations with which to support that argument in a precise, concise, well-crafted essay.

[Adapted from “What is Close Reading?” by Kerry Walk]

Engl 1190.103 Great Books
Essay 4
Final draft due: Mar 31

Essay 4 will require you to perform a close reading of a passage of your choosing from *King Lear*. Close reading often forces us to hone our critical thinking and is one of the definitive skills of a good reader and writer. This assignment has two parts:

Part 1: Proposal (due Mar 5)

The first step is to select a passage that interests you and appeals to you as a passage that is rich and complex in meaning. The passage should be at least 10 lines but no longer than 80 lines. Your proposal should include a written summary of what happens in the excerpt, as well as questions and possible arguments that you would like to investigate concerning the passage.

Part 2: Draft (due Mar 12)

As we do in our in-class close readings, begin with general observations on the tone, diction, and style of the passage. What does the passage accomplish at the level of plot? At the figurative level? What other ideas or imagery does the text allude to or consider? Does the text make use of metonymy, personification, onomatopoeia, or apostrophe? How do punctuation, spelling, alliteration, and rhyme produce resonance and emphasis? Also consult the Oxford English Dictionary to discover each word's etymology and to weigh the multiple definitions and connotations that may be contained in each word. It may be helpful to dissect the passage by counting the number of words, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, subjects, objects, etc. (as we did with sentences from *Persuasion*). Be sure to keep careful notes throughout your word studies, as this kind of research tends to branch out in different directions before coming together to form a coherent reading.

With your newfound insight into the passage, construct an original argument about what is happening in the passage. An argument is not an opinion, but rather a statement that is well supported by evidence from the text. Although you may be tempted to make reference to the author's personal life, historical details, or other moments in the work, try to confine your ideas to the boundaries of your selected passage.

Engl 1190.103 Great Books
Essay 5
Final draft due: Apr 26

Part 1: Close Reading (due Apr 12)

Select a passage from *The Cenci* (10-80 lines) that is rich and complex in meaning. Construct an original argument about what is happening in the passage, and write a 2-3 page close reading paper on your selection. Remember that your argument should not be an opinion, but rather a statement that is well supported by evidence from the text.

As with our previous close reading paper, begin with general observations on the tone, diction, and style of the passage. What does the passage accomplish at the level of plot? At the figurative level? What other ideas or imagery does the text allude to or consider? Does the text make use of metonymy, personification, onomatopoeia, or apostrophe? How do punctuation, spelling, alliteration, and rhyme produce resonance and emphasis? Also consult the Oxford English Dictionary to discover each word's etymology and to weigh the multiple definitions and connotations that may be contained in each word. It may be helpful to dissect the passage by counting the number of words, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, subjects, objects, etc. (as we did with sentences from *Persuasion*). Be sure to keep careful notes throughout your word studies, as this kind of research tends to branch out in different directions before coming together to form a coherent reading.

Part 2: Expanded Draft (due Apr 19)

Until now I have asked you to confine your ideas to the boundaries of your selected passage for the close reading papers. Although close reading gives us a greater appreciation for the depth and intricacy of each line of text, it also contributes to a larger understanding of the entire work because broader themes and imagery are often encoded and reinforced at the word-by-word level. Now I would like you to expand upon Part 1 by considering how the explication of your chosen passage informs and relates with other moments and larger themes in the work as a whole. You should think of Part 2 as a kind of stepping back and telescoping out from the focus of your close reading. As you incorporate your close reading in a larger paper (5-6 pages), you may choose to draw on the text's overarching themes, cultural or historical details, or even the author's life.

Engl 1190.103 Great Books
Essay 6
Final draft due: May 14

Please write 7-8 pages comparing two works we have read in our course this semester. Your paper should include:

- a) A close reading of a passage in support of one of your arguments
- b) An engagement with at least one relevant scholarly article.

Topics for Essay 6:

1. In *Persuasion*, *King Lear*, and *Cenci*, we encounter heroines who are motherless. What is the influence or significance of the absent mother in each work? Does the lack of a mother affect the daughter's relationship with her father? How does the absence of the mother alter the development of the child?
2. *King Lear* and *Cenci* explore the complex bond between parents (particularly fathers) and their children. How are these works similar or different in evaluating and complicating this fundamental relationship? You might choose to consider themes of parricide, filial duty, violence, or illegitimacy.
3. Consider the depictions of women searching for love and marriage in *Persuasion*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and "The Dead." Nearly every character in *Persuasion* seems to contemplate his/her own marriage, and the Wife of Bath is constantly looking for her next husband. What is the significance of marriage? How do these works define a successful marriage? In "The Dead," the characters of Gretta and Lily gain prominence only when they are allied to a love narrative. Is romance essential to a female character's growth? How do these women compare to those who are figured as "old maids" (the Elliot sisters, or Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia)?
4. Choose your own topic comparing two works we have read this semester. Please get my approval for your topic before writing the essay.

Remember: All good papers have a strong and original thesis and focus closely on particular episodes or passages. I look forward to reading your final papers.

Essay 4

Passage selection: 1.1.35-121

ENGL 1190.103

3/31/10

Cordelia as a Mother Figure in "King Lear"

In the opening scene of the play, King Lear announces that he will divide his kingdom among his three daughters and retire from power. However, the language used in this scene indicates that he is reluctant to partition his land, which symbolizes his hesitancy to give Cordelia away to marriage. He demonstrates a childlike possessiveness of Cordelia and does not want her love to be divided between him and her future husband. His increased need for affection is an expression of his senescence; as he ages he paradoxically regresses towards infancy and seeks motherly love from Cordelia.

At the beginning of the play, King Lear seems disinclined to "divest" (49) his territory. The connotation of this word evokes the imagery of unclothing or disrobing; it is as if without his land King Lear feels bare and exposed. He displays a complete preoccupation with his kingdom throughout the duration of the ceremony. He never directly acknowledges Goneril's or Regan's comments, but rather, his attention is fixated on the territory that he is giving away. The profuse descriptions of his land: "shadowy forest" (65), "plenteous rivers" (66), "wide-skirted meads" (66), further illustrate his infatuation with his territory. When King Lear says, "Tell me my daughters – since now we will divest us both of rule, interest of territory cares of state –" (49-51), the repeated use of hyphens captures his reluctance to proceed dividing his kingdom among his daughters. He also holds a map during the ceremony, which symbolizes his unyielding grasp over the land.

King Lear's hesitancy to give away his land also symbolizes his reluctance to give Cordelia away to marriage; he shares a similar possessiveness for Cordelia as he does his land.

He is angered when Cordelia says, “half my love with him, half my care and duty” (102) because Cordelia quantifies and divides her love in the same way that he divides his land. Furthermore, when Cordelia says that she loves him “according to my bond” (93), the word “bond” suggests that she is shackled, or forced to love him. This notion is also seen when she says that she “obey[s]” (98) him, and that it is her “duty” (97) to do so. King Lear becomes even more enraged by her admittance that her love for him will be divided when she get married. He becomes jealous, and by disinheriting Cordelia and leaving her without a dowry, he believes that she will be unfit for marriage. This is seen when King Lear is speaking with Duke of Burgundy and the King of France: “will you, with those infirmities she [Cordelia] owes, unfriended, new adopted to our hate, dowered with our curse, and strangered with our oath take her or leave her?” (1.1.202-206). This excessive stream of unfavorable qualities that King Lear ascribes to Cordelia elucidates his belief that she is unfit for marriage.

In the context of King Lear’s abdication of his power to “younger strengths” (39), it should be understood that the love that he desires from Cordelia is not that of a daughter, but rather, that of a mother. King Lear divides his kingdom so that he can “unburdened crawl toward death” (40). This desire to “crawl” evokes the imagery of a baby. The notion of a regression towards infancy is further illustrated when King Lear says that he planned “to rest on her [Cordelia’s] kind nursery” (124-125). The word “nursery” conveys his desire to be taken care of and nurtured by Cordelia in the same way that a mother would care for her child. As King Lear becomes older he regresses to a childlike state in which he requires the love of a mother. When Cordelia says that only half of her love will be with him, he interprets this as a rejection of his need for motherly love.

Cordelia's refusal to mother King Lear underlines a fundamental tension between them; Cordelia is aware that King Lear's is seeking motherly love but is adamant in remaining simply a daughter figure to him. In order to win her dowry, Cordelia needs to convey that she will love King Lear more than her future husband. Instead she tells King Lear, "half my love with him, half my care and duty" (102) and suggests that her sisters would not have husbands if they loved their father as much as they claimed. Cordelia later says, "you have begot me, bred me, loved me. I... Obey you, love you, and most honour you" (95-98). The parallel sentence structure emphasizes that Cordelia wants to maintain a reciprocal father-daughter relationship. By saying that she returns her duties as a daughter "as are right fit" (97) and "according to [her] bond, no more no less" (93), she is signaling to King Lear that she does not want to mother him.

Unsurprisingly, he responds to Cordelia's rejection with a childlike tantrum and further expresses his need to be mothered. First he disclaims all "paternal care" (114) and "propinquity" (115). By disavowing that he begot Cordelia and that he is her father he feels enabled to receive her motherly love. Later he draws on the imagery of cannibals who eat their offspring. King Lear is expressing his desire for Cordelia to "to gorge his appetite" (119), which evokes the imagery of a mother suckling a child. The language that surrounds this text also underlines the role-reversal that has occurred; the use of words with the prefix "un", such as "unburdened" (40), "unhappy" (91), and "untender" (107) indicates contradiction or backwardness.

This notion of role-reversal is also seen in the light and darkness imagery used in the passage. After King Lear interprets Cordelia's comments as a rejection of his need to be mothered, he swears "by the sacred radiance of the sun... by all the operation of the orbs" (110-112) that he will relinquish his paternal care for her. The sun, orb, and light imagery signify

human destiny and natural order. King Lear's acknowledgement of his "darker purpose" (35) suggests that he wants to darken this light, or reverse the natural order. The light and darkness imagery illuminates King Lear's ulterior motives for holding this ceremony; he wanted to reverse roles with Cordelia and attain her motherly love.

King Lear organizes the competition for his love as a way of ensuring that he will be taken care of. Regan seems to play off this realization by describing her "deed of love". "Deed" connotes a contractual agreement to love and take care of King Lear in exchange for his inheritance. However, King Lear really wants to be nurtured by Cordelia because he "loved her most" (123). When Cordelia rejects this contract of love and suggests that she will not mother him, King Lear responds by disclaiming all "property of blood" (115). The use of the word "property" underscores the parallelism between the land and Cordelia. He had been hesitant to give Cordelia away to marriage in the same way he was reluctant to forfeit his land. This was because in his old age he needed the motherly affection that Cordelia could provide him. Without her love, he foolishly distributes his land which serves as the impetus for his tragic downfall.

Bibliography

Shakespeare, William. King Lear. Ed. Grace Ioppolo. New York: Norton, 2008.

Essay 4
 English 1190
 March 31, 2010
 King Lear Close Reading: 1.1.79-1.1.121

The first scene in *King Lear* by William Shakespeare is vital to the entire play because in the tense discussion between King Lear and his youngest daughter Cordelia from 1.1.79 to 1.1.121, many of their personality traits are revealed. Because Lear believed Cordelia's nonresponse to his request for demonstration of her love showed her lack of love for him, he was blind to her honesty and instead preferred the phony flattery of her sisters Regan and Goneril. In addition to his blindness, it is also clear that he expected Cordelia to articulate the most love for him because he downright rejected her after not hearing what he desired. Therefore, King Lear only wanted to hold this contest and give up his land in this manner to reassure his status and pride by testing the authenticity of his daughters' love, but instead failed, as his arrogance blinded him from seeing which of his daughters truly loved him the most.

King Lear's contest to decide how to split up his land by asking his daughters for their love simply portrays that he is an insecure man who needs respect and constant reassurance of his status as king. Moreover, Lear's proclamation that "Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom, No less in space, validity and pleasure" (1.1.80-81) illustrates his shallowness in thinking that offering land to Cordelia would draw out genuine love from her. Although it is quite obvious that Cordelia's love is genuine because she does not flatter her father and only speaks the truth to him, King Lear nevertheless rebukes her and believes she does not respond because she does not love him as much as her sisters and he calls her "untender", meaning "unkind", according to the first use recorded in OED (1.1.107). After his long reign as King of England, Lear still displays his pride and need for approval through this mockery of an occasion, lacking the wisdom to discern Cordelia's authentic display of implicit love.

After Goneril and Regan make their pretentious speeches declaring their presumed love for their father, King Lear asks Cordelia to proclaim her love for him. His phrase “What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?” (1.1.86) reveals his desire to hand over more land, or possibly the third with more riches and resources, to Cordelia. This statement exposes the fact that Cordelia was his favorite daughter from the beginning, so her silence completely dumbfounds him, as the daughter whom he expected to proclaim the most love for him had not only proclaimed the least, but none whatsoever. After her initial refusal to speak, King Lear gives her several more chances to speak, still under the false impression that his land was valuable and Cordelia would have said whatever was necessary to please him in order to receive it. Lear’s blindness to Cordelia’s intentions and true emotions for him display his stubbornness and inability to look past the words, only believing what can be seen on the surface.

Repetition of certain phrases within this passage marks the fact that words or phrases repeated are emphasized and sometimes given a different meaning. The short dialogue between 1.1.87-1.1.90 in which the word “nothing” is repeated numerous times is significant because each time “nothing” is spoken, the word takes on new meaning. Cordelia’s initial response of “Nothing, my lord.” (1.1.87) depicts her desire to decline to offer any words of love to her father, though there is a hidden “something” behind her “nothing” that Lear does not understand. Lear then repeats her “nothing” with “Nothing?” (1.1.88) as an inquiry as to whether he heard her correctly. Cordelia justifies her decision by responding with just one word, this time a firm “Nothing.” (1.1.89). Lear, now aghast, says, “How, nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.” (1.1.90) to articulate the fact that if she does not speak, she will not receive anything. His first “nothing” refers to the amount of land she will receive if she proclaims “nothing” as her love for him. This short verbal exchange illustrates how Lear’s many years as king have built up his

pride, blinding him from peering beyond the surface of Cordelia's words, analyzing what is behind the "nothing" she proclaims, and comprehending how her response truly demonstrated the most love for him.

Still not satisfied by Cordelia's explanation of her desire to not declare her love, Lear questions her true feelings because of his inability to see the truth in her response. King Lear's rhetorical reaction "So young and so untender?" (1.1.107) followed by Cordelia saying "So young, my lord, and true." (1.1.108) verifies Cordelia's intention to speak the truth to him. This parallel sentence structure garners the reader's attention because it sheds light on Cordelia's longing to open her father's eyes to truth and honesty rather than imitation flattery. Though Lear originally wanted to test his daughters' love, Lear himself clearly failed the test because immediately upon hearing Cordelia speak of truth, he disowned her and did not recognize her as his daughter anymore, further advocating the claim that his pride prevented him from distinguishing which of his daughters genuinely loved him the most.

The multitude of questions King Lear asks his daughter in this short passage conveys how distant he is from his family and how most of his assumptions concerning Cordelia turned out to be completely wrong. After Lear presents her with the initial task to declare her love, he then begins each of his next five lines with questions, before deciding to forsake her. It is curious that although Cordelia answered each of his questions truthfully, not all of her statements were directly related to his questions, as she attempted to alter them by answering in a way to fulfill her desire to make the truth known to her father, rather than fall victim to telling him lies or mock flattery. Her repeated sentence structure in "You have begot me, bred me, loved me." (1.1.96) and "Obey you, love you and most honour you." (1.1.98) describes the delicate yet firm

reciprocal relationship she has with her father. She believes their love is mutual, that she has repaid him by showing her own love every time he had shown her love in the past.

Cordelia's repeated use of the first person "I" more than six times bolsters her declaration of her love by depicting her true feelings toward her father. She continually refers to King Lear as "my lord" which represents her respect for his honor and dignity, while her sisters simply refer to him as "Sir." Her acknowledgement of Lear as her lord indicates her obedience toward him as a daughter, proving that even though her actions seem taboo, she is still his compliant daughter who wants the best for him. When she expresses that when she marries, her love will inevitably be split between her father and her husband, it is noteworthy that in her statement "Half my love with him, half my care and duty." (1.1.102), the ten word sentence is exactly split in two fragments, each beginning with the word "half." This subtle nuance embodies her aspiration for a husband, yet her acknowledgement that she will still love her father equally as much as her future husband. Though not as pleasant to hear as Goneril and Regan's proclamations that they love nothing but their father, Cordelia speaks the truth, her speech layered with tacit meanings. Lear, however, is too focused on the speech's face value rather than its implications, advancing the distressing reality that he has grown blind to the truth and can only understand the literal meanings behind what he hears.

Because of King Lear's insecurity and desire for lavish pride, his contest to determine which of his daughters loved him the most failed because his arrogance had blinded him to truth and the ability to look beyond what he sees on the surface. Lear dwells only on the literal meanings behind the words he hears rather than interpreting them and analyzing the connotations behind his daughters' speeches. Multiple examples in this passage through the level of plot, figurative language, and grammatical style have proven that Lear conducted the contest solely to

boost his pride by testing the authenticity of his daughters' love for him, yet he failed, because his pride blinded him from seeing which one of his daughters truly loved him the most.

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