

King Lear Essay Notes

Next week we will be constructing the basis for an essay on madness in *King Lear*. It is important that you prepare material in advance.

- Use the seminar handouts, lecture notes, notes in the *Norton Anthology* etc for ideas. Make a list of points which you think are significant to the representation of madness in the play and find supporting quotations from the play.

- Decide on which parts of the play you want to focus on. Remember that you need to analyse the text in detail and depth rather than giving an introduction to it so decide on a clear critical position. Rather than describing different scenes where characters exhibit madness, for example, consider why they appear to be mad and why it is significant eg paradoxically, Lear gains insight and wisdom in madness.

- Scenes of particular interest (feel free to come up with your own!!): end Act 2 sc 4 (vocabulary of madness), Act 3 sc 2 and 4 (Lear in the storm); Act 4 sc 6 (Edgar: 'reason in madness'); end Act 1 sc 5 (Lear: 'let me not be mad').

- Think about how you are going to structure your argument ie how you are going to introduce it, how you intend to prove your case and how you are going to present a clear conclusion.

These quotations were simply taken from a dictionary of quotations. In what sense do they shed light on *Lear* and how might you make use of them eg to structure your argument, as a means of introducing your argument?

- 'A madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering certain intolerable truths.' Artaud, *Selected Writings*.
- 'Insanity – a perfectly rational adjustment to the insane world.' R.D.Laing, quoted in *The Guardian*, 1972.
- 'A man who is "of sound mind" is one who keeps the inner madman under lock and key.' Paul Valery, *Mauvaises Pensees et Autres*, 1942.

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