

Shakespeare in the Restoration Theater

Paper #5: King Lear Comparison Essay

The idea of this essay is very open-ended: now that you've seen a few revisions of Shakespeare, I'm asking you to think in a focused way about what changes seem most interesting, problematic, or significant, so that you can advance an interpretive claim in the brief space of 5 pages.

Therefore, for this essay, you can focus your examination of Shakespeare's and Tate's versions of *King Lear* in several ways. As always, the queries listed below are designed to suggest possibilities, not set limits. Whatever you choose, make sure you focus very carefully so you don't end up writing a general, vague, and shallow comparison. Focusing on a specific, concrete relationship will let you probe the question in much more detail and write a more interesting paper as a result. If you focus on a character, consider turning to *The London Stage* as you write this to help flesh out the historical angle of your paper. In fact, the approaches in both of the previous papers would benefit you here, at least as a possible process.

- Choose a specific pair of characters (ie: Shakespeare's Cordelia and Tate's) and compare their function in the play carefully. What larger conclusions can you draw from the changes in the character? (for example, is there some implication about family relationships behind the change? Or the role of women? Or the meaning of love/loyalty?)
- Choose a specific plot line to compare (Edmund's/ the Bastard's desire for power, for example) and investigate how that line functions differently in each version – what issues does it bring up, etc. How sympathetic or critical is the presentation?
- Focus on a larger, abstract comparison, such as the use of language or location – what seems at stake aesthetically and ideologically in the changes? (ie: what does it mean if a king's language becomes more 'everyday'? what might it mean if a scene of political anarchy is kept close to home?)
- The most famous difference here is, of course, the resolution. Think carefully about what is at stake in that change. Is it merely a nod to aesthetic decorum, or is there a more complex motive at work?
- Trace changes in a specific set of images – the storm imagery of Lear's mad scene, for example – and see what significance you might find there. Is poetry being put to a different use? Different assumptions made about how language works?

For all of these options, and any others you can think of, you should feel free to include (properly cited) ideas from the articles we've read to help back up your assertions, and you should copiously support your argument from the texts under discussion. The larger question behind all of the possible angles you can take on this prompt is "what became of Shakespeare in the Restoration?" – keep that in mind.

See me if you have questions – this paper will be workshopped in class a week before the due date.