Connotative Confluence: Imagery and its functions in Shakespeare’s King Lear

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Abstract:

Written in the early 1600s, King Lear, an early modern tragedy with the human condition as its main premise, displays Shakespeare’s effective exploitation of complex imagery. Through various images and extended or long drawn out metaphors, Shakespeare not only comments on character, plot, action, man’s position in the universe in relation to Nature, offspring and siblings, but also addresses such questions as political legitimacy, treason, treachery, aristocracy and the relationship between land and the monarch. In a turbulent period marked by strict rules against commenting directly on politics and royalty even in the parliament, imagery also serves as advice for the monarch in the tradition of speculum principis i.e., mirror for princes literature. This paper discusses the effect and manifold functions of various imagistic techniques used in King Lear and how imagery as a stylistic tool helps the playwright to substantially expand the meanings of the play making it a timeless and universal reading not only for the learners of Literature, but also for historians, psychologists, political scientists, philosophers, economists and food theorists, to mention only a few.

Key words: Imagery, linguistic device, metaphors, similes, symbol, themes, pathos, catharsis, psychological trauma, extended metaphor