

Shakespeare's *King Lear*: Origin of 'Absurd Drama'

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In the late 1950s, a number of dramatists, basically European are well-known for the style of theatre which has emerged from their work. Their work focused mainly on the concept of [existentialism](#) and explored what happens when human existence has no purpose or meaning and therefore all communication comes to end. Albert Camus, in the *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), defines the word, 'Absurd' as a disjoining from reason. The idea of the Absurd stops the mind from determining anything with assurance. Taking into account, Camus' definition of the Absurd, Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605) is specified as a basis of the Absurd Drama.

A few American experts of the Theatre of the Absurd notably, Edward Albee in his *The American Dream* (1960) and Eugene O'Neill's *The Zoo Story* (1958) are famous as the plays of the Theatre of Absurd in general, present a disillusioned, harsh, and stark picture of the world.

The popularity of Shakespeare *Our Contemporary* is a work of criticism, noting as extraordinary. However critical concepts of this kind are useful when new modes of expression, new conventions of art arise. When the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Arthur Adamov first appeared on the stage they puzzled and outraged most critics as well audiences. If the critical touchstones of conventional drama did not apply to these plays, this must surely have been due to a difference in objective, the use of different artistic means, to the fact, in short, that these plays were both creating and applying a different convention of drama. It is just as senseless to condemn an abstract painting because it lacks perspective or a recognizable subject-matter as it is to reject *Waiting for Godot* because it has no plot to speak of.

The paper deals with presenting the idea that Shakespeare makes use of all the means of an illusionist theatre in order to create a most realistic and concrete picture of the world that there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is lonely in a meaningless world and even without any purpose, in another words absurd. Thus, *King Lear* due to fine elements of absurd drama had paved a path for absurd drama.

Key Words: [Existentialism](#), conventional drama, disillusion, lonely, meaninglessness, Absurd.

Introduction:

Albert Camus, in the *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), defines the word, 'Absurd' as a disjoining from reason (13). The idea of the Absurd stops the mind from determining anything with certainty. Besides, Camus' definition of the Absurd, Paul Riccoeur's view on the role of, 'fool' in his *The Symbolism of Evil* (1960), where he states that the 'fool' in Shakespearean tragedy has 'access to a comprehensive vision' of the world due to the combination of genres, the tragic and the comic (323). Taking into consideration, Camus' definition of the Absurd and Riccoeur's insight of the 'fool', Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605), is measured as a foundation of the Absurd Drama of modernism and post modernism.

Now, it is taken for granted that the views of Kott, as expressed in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, were extensively present in British Shakespeare production of the mid-1960s. In spite of that the fact such as RSC productions of Peter Brook's *King Lear* (1962), and Peter Hall's *Hamlet* (1965) received praise from reviewers.

In the 1960s Helen Gardner, felt that Shakespeare was not "our contemporary" but an Elizabethan, and that to argue otherwise was "outrageous arrogance"

(Beauman 282). Maynard Mack saw Brook's *Lear* as "altering the effect of Shakespeare's text (in ways) which is quite misleading" (29). The criticism has continued to the present, but the tune has changed. Intended for A.N. Parr "the (Kott-inspired) absurdist reading of *King Lear* now seems heavily dated, an indulgent and partial handling of a tough-minded play which has actually no truck with the fake stoicism and flimsy pathos of Samuel Beckett" (4), and Alan Sinfield concludes, "The politics of (Brook's *Lear*) is nihilist" (163).

The latest denial of Jan Kott's basic argument in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* has been persuasive (Dollimore and Sinfield 208-11), but it disregards Kott's appeal in the first place. The popularity of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1974) is, for a work of criticism, noting as extraordinary and restricts time-bond. However, critical concepts of this kind are useful when new modes of expression, new conventions of art arise. When the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Arthur Adamov first appeared on the stage they puzzled and outraged most critics as well audiences. Strangely enough, these plays have success, they have had an effect, and they have exercised a fascination of their own in the theatre. At first it was said that this fascination was merely a *succès de scandale*, that

people gathered to see Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or Ionesco's *Bald Primadonna* merely because it had become fashionable to express astonishment about them at parties. But this explanation clearly could not apply to more than one or two plays of this kind.

If the critical touchstones of conventional drama did not apply to these plays, this must surely have been due to a difference in objective, the use of different artistic means, to the fact, in short, that these plays were both creating and applying a different *convention* of drama. It is just as senseless to condemn an abstract painting because it lacks perspective or a recognizable subject-matter as it is to reject *Waiting for Godot* because it has no plot to speak of. In painting a composition of squares and lines an artist like Mondrian does not want to depict any object in nature, he does not want to create perspective. In the same manner, in writing *Waiting for Godot* Beckett did not intend to tell a story, he did not want the audience to go home satisfied. He obliged them to find solution to the problem raised in the play. Hence, rather than reproaching him, it was essential to think about his real intention behind creating such kind of literary piece.

A term like the 'Theatre of the Absurd' must therefore be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in convention, approach and method of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition. A label of this kind therefore is an aid to understanding, valid only in so far as it helps to gain insight into a work of art. It is not a binding classification; it is certainly not all-embracing or exclusive. A play may contain *some* elements that can best be understood in the light of such a label, while other elements in the same play derive from and can best be understood in the light of a different convention. Arthur Adamov, for example, has written a number of plays that are prime examples of the Theatre of the Absurd. He now quite openly and consciously rejects this style and writes in a different, realistic convention. Nevertheless even his latest plays, which are both realistic and socially committed, contain some aspects which can still be elucidated in terms of the Theatre of the Absurd (such as the use of symbolic interludes, *guignols*, in his play *Spring '71*). Moreover, once a term like Theatre of the Absurd is defined and understood, it acquires a certain value in throwing light on works of previous epochs. The renowned critic Jan Kott, for example, has written a radiant study of *King Lear* in the light of Beckett's *Endgame*, a comparative study featuring similar ideas present in Elizabethan period, the concept of meaninglessness life as *absurd*.

Edward Albee, one of the few American experts of the Theatre of the Absurd. As an adopted child, he shares with Genet the orphan's sense of loneliness in an

alien world; and the image of the dream child which exists only in the adoptive parents' imagination recurs in a number of his plays, notably *The American Dream* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. The latter, which has earned him an enormous success on Broadway, is undoubtedly one of the finest American plays since the heyday of Eugene O'Neill. It is a savage dance of death reminiscent of Strindberg, outwardly realistic in form, but in fact, as in the case of Pinter's best work, existing on at least two levels apart from the realistic one: as an allegory of American society, a poetic image of its emptiness and infertility, and as a complex ritual on the pattern of Genet. *The Zoo Story* (1958), one of Albee's earliest dramatic ventures, has a similar complexity: it is a clinically accurate study of Schizophrenia, an image of man's loneliness.

The plays in this volume, like the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd in general, present a disillusioned, harsh, and stark picture of the world. Though often couched in the form of extravagant fantasies, they are nevertheless essentially realistic, in the sense that they never shirk the realities of the human mind with its despair, fear and loneliness in an alien and hostile universe. There is more human reality in the grotesquely extravagant images of *Amédée* than in many far longer plays in a convention that is a mere photographic copy of the surface of life. The realism of these plays is a psychological and inner realism; they explore the human sub-conscious in depth rather than trying to describe the outward appearance of human existence. Nor is it quite correct that these plays, deeply pessimistic as they are, are nothing but an expression of utter despair. It is true that basically the Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely *because* there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.

The Conflict Between two Philosophies:

Two types of theatre become particularly acute in times of great disturbance. When established values have been overthrown, and there is no appeal to God, Nature, or History from the tortures inflicted by the cruel world, the clown becomes the central figure in the theatre. He accompanies the exiled trio - the King, the nobleman and his son - on their cruel wanderings

through the cold endless night which has fallen on the world; through the 'cold night' which, as in Shakespeare's King Lear, 'will turn us all to fools and madmen'.

II

After his eyes have been plucked out, Gloster wants to throw himself over the cliffs of Dover into the sea. He is led by his own son, who feigns madness. Both have reached the depths of human suffering; the top of 'the pyramid of suffering', as Juliusz Slowacki has described King Lear. But on the stage there are just two actors, one playing a blind man, the other playing a man who plays a madman. They walk together.

Gloster : When shall I come to the top of that same hill?

Edgar : You do climb up it now: look, how we labour.

Gloster : Methinks the ground is even.

Edgar : Horrible steep. Hark, do you hear the sea?

Gloster : No, truly. (IV, 6)

It is easy to imagine this scene. The text itself provides stage directions. Edgar is supporting Gloster; he lifts his feet high pretending to walk uphill. Gloster, too, lifts his feet, as if expecting the ground to rise, but underneath his foot there is only air. This entire scene is written for a very definite type of theatre, namely pantomime.

This technique of conveying emotions only makes sense if enacted on a flat and level stage. Edgar feigns madness, but in doing so he must adopt the right gestures. In its theatrical expression this is a scene in which a madman leads a blind man and talks him into believing in a non-existing cliff. In another moment a landscape will be sketched in. Shakespeare often creates a landscape on an empty stage. But no other Shakespearian landscape is so exact, precise and clear, as this one. It is something like thick with people, objects and events. A little human figure hanging half-way down the cliff is gathering indigo. Fishermen walking on the beach are like mice.

The landscape is now just a score for the pantomime. Gloster and Edgar have reached the top of the cliff. The landscape is now below them.

Give me your hand: - you are now within a foot
Of the extreme verge: for all beneath the moon
Would I not leap upright. (King Lear, IV, 6)

In Shakespeare's time the actors probably put their feet forward through a small balustrade above the apron-stage, immediately over the heads of the 'groundlings'. But we are not concerned here with an historical reconstruction of the Elizabethan stage. It is

the presence and importance of the parody that is significant. Shakespeare is stubborn. Gloster has already jumped over the precipice. Both actors are at the foot of a non-existent cliff. The same landscape is now above them. The mime continues.

Gloster : But have I fall'n, or no?

Edgar : From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.

Look up a-height; - the shrill-gorg'd lark so
far Cannot be seen or heard: do but look up.
(IV, 6)

The represents a scenic area: the top and bottom of the cliff, the precipice. Shakespeare makes use of all the means of ant illusionist theatre in order to create a most realistic and concrete landscape. A landscape, which is only, "blind a man's illusion. There is perspective in it, light, men and things, even sounds. From the height of the cliff the sea cannot be heard, but there is mention of its roar. From the foot of the cliff the lark cannot be heard, but there is mention of its song. In this landscape sounds are present by their very absence: the silence is filled with them, just as the empty stage is filled with the cliff.

Gloster's suicide attempt too is merely a circus somersault on an empty stage. Gloster's and Edgar's situation is tragic, but it has been shown in pantomime, the classic expression of buffoonery. In Shakespeare clowns often ape the gestures of kings and heroes, but only in King Lear are great tragic scenes shown through clowning.

It is not only the suicide mimicry that is grotesque. The accompanying dial ague is also cruel and mocking. The blind Gloster kneels and prays:

O you mighty gods!
This world I do renounce, and, in your sights,
Shake patiently my great affliction off:
If I could bear it longer, and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff and loathed part of nature should
Burn itself out. If Edgar lives, O, bless him! (IV,
6)

Gloster's suicide has a meaning only if the Gods exist. It is a protest against undeserved suffering and the world's injustice. This protest is made in a definite direction. It refers to eschatology. Even if the Gods are cruel, they must take this suicide into consideration. It will count in the final reckoning between Gods and man. Its sale value lies in its reference to the absolute.

Therefore, the theme of King Lear is the decay and fall of the world. The play opens like the Histories, with the division of the realm and the King's abdication. It also ends like the Histories, with the proclamation of a new king. Between the prologue and the epilogue there is a civil war. But unlike in the Histories and Tragedies,

the world is not healed again. In King Lear there is no young and resolute Fortinbras to ascend the throne of Denmark; no cool-headed Octavius to become Augustus Caesar; no noble Malcolm to 'give to our tables' meat, sleep to our nights'. In the epilogues to the Histories and Tragedies the new monarch invites those present to his coronation. In King Lear there will be no coronation. There is no one whom Edgar can invite to it. Everybody has died or been murdered. Gloucester was right when he said: 'This great world shall so wear out to naughty.' Those who have survived - Edgar, Albany and Kent - are, as Lear has been, just 'ruin'd pieces of nature'.

At the beginning there was a king with his court and ministers. Later, there are just four beggars wandering about in a wilderness, exposed to furious winds and rain. The fall may be slow, or sudden. Lear has at first a retinue of a hundred men, then fifty, then only one. Kent is banished by one angry gesture of the King. But the process of degradation is always the same. Everything that distinguishes a man - his titles, social position, even name - is lost. Names are not needed any more. Everyone is just a shadow of himself; just a man.

King Lear : Doth any here know me? - Why, this is not Lear:

Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

Fool : Lear's shadow. (1,4)

And once more the same question, and the same answer. The banished Kent returns in disguise to his King.

King Lear : How now! What art thou?

Kent : A man, sir. (I, 4)

A naked man has no name. Before the morality commences, everyone must be naked. Edgar says that he will with his 'nakedness out-face the winds and persecutions of the sky' (II, 3).

This theme returns obstinately, and with an equal consistency:

'the last night's storm I such a fellow saw;

Which made me think a man a worm. (IV, I)

A downfall means suffering and torment. It may be a physical or spiritual torment, or both. Lear will lose his wits; Kent will be put in the stocks; Gloucester will have his eyes gouged out and will attempt suicide. For a man to become naked, or rather to become nothing but man, it is not enough to deprive him of his name, social position and character. One must also hurt and massacre him both morally and physically. Turn him -like King Lear - into a 'ruin'd piece of nature', and only then ask him who he is. For it is the new renaissance Job who is to judge the events an 'Macbeth's stage'.

King Lear : ... come, come; I am a king! My masters, know you that.

Gentleman : You are a royal one, and we obey you.

King Lear : Then there's life in't. Nay, an you get it, you shall get it by running. So, so, so, so. (IV, 6)

The zero hour has come. Lear has come to understand it at last. And this is how King Lear ends his final anxious outburst:

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even
The natural fool of fortune... (IV, 6)

In a moment he will run off the stage. Before that happens he will ask for his pinching shoe to be taken off. He is a clown now, so he can afford to do this. In Shakespearian tragedy, it is the modern world that fell; the renaissance world, and ours. Accounts have been settled in a very similar way.

King Lear : Dost thou call me fool, boy?

Fool : All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

Kent : This is not altogether fool, my lord.

Fool : No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if I had a monopoly out, they would have part on't: and ladies too, they will not let me have all fool to myself; they'll be snatching. (1,4)

To us it is the most contemporary aspect of King Lear. Only it has to be seen and interpreted properly. For this reason one must reject all the romantic and naturalistic accessories; they appear and melodrama about the old man who, driven out by his daughters, wanders about bareheaded in a storm and goes mad as a result of his misfortunes.

Let us now turn to King Lear:

Fool : Give me an egg, uncle, and I'll give the two crowns.

King Lear: What two crowns shall they be?

Fool : Why, after I have cut the egg i'th'middle, and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i'th'middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt. (...) now thou art an without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing. (I, 4)

In King Lear the degradation occurs gradually, step by step. Lear divided his kingdom and gave away his power, but wanted to remain a king. He believed that a king could not cease to be a king, just as the sun could

not cease to shine. He believed in pure majesty, in the pure idea of kingship. In historical dramas royal majesty is deprived of its sacred character by a stab of the dagger, or by a brutal tearing off of the crown from a living king's head. In *King Lear* it is the Fool who deprives majesty of its sacredness.

Lear and Gloucester are adherents of eschatology; they desperately believe in the existence of absolutes. They invoke the gods, believe in justice, and appeal to laws of nature. Lear, insisting on his fictitious majesty, seems ridiculous to him. All the more ridiculous because he does not see how ridiculous he is. But the Fool does not desert his ridiculous, degraded king, and accompanies him on his way to madness. The Fool knows that the only true madness is to recognize this world as rational. The feudal order is absurd and can be described only in terms of the absurd. The world stands upside down:

Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Albany, even Edmund, still use rhetoric. Fool's language is different. It abounds in biblical travesties and inverted medieval parables. One can find in it splendid baroque surrealist expressions, sudden leaps of imagination, condensations and epitomes, brutal, vulgar and scatological comparisons. His rhymes are like limericks. The Fool uses dialectics, paradox and an absurd kind of humor. His language is that of our modern grotesque. Thus, grotesque exposes the absurdity of apparent reality.

King Lear : O me, my heart, my rising heart! - but,
down.

Fool : Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the
feel when she put'em i' the paste alive; she
knapp'd 'em o'the coxcombs with a stick,
and cried, 'Down, wantons, down!' 'Twas
her brother that, in pure kindness to his
horse, butter'd his hay. (II, 4)

The Fool appears on the stage when Lear's fall is only beginning. He disappears by the end of Act III. His last words are: 'And I'll go to bed at noon.' He will not be seen or heard again. A clown is not needed any more. King Lear has gone through the school of clown's philosophy. When he meets Gloucester for the last time, he speaks the Fool's language:

'They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, - I am not
ague-proof.' (IV, 6.)

'Absurd' and Divinity in *King Lear*:

This quote is taken from an essay by Susan Snyder and raises the question that critics have debated for decades – is the play about the total hopelessness and absurdity of it; or is it the contrary, a play of hope and optimism. (Snyder) In this context, Shakespeare also questions the institution of morality which governs every individual. Lear finally realizes that he undertook

the wrong decisions but this self realization never redeems him of his suffering. He suffers till the very end and it is more than what he deserved. Gloucester's gullibility in believing Edmund leads to his blindness. Cordelia, even though she serves her father till the very end, dies undeservingly. Edgar's life becomes a lost cause altogether. All these implications could have been avoided had there been timely divine interventions. These characters held on to their moral beliefs till the very end, yet they never achieved their deserved end. This brings forth the meaninglessness in the entire concept of right and wrong, of fair and unfair.

But arbitrarily cutting them does not expunge them from the play as Shakespeare wrote it. In fact, the optimist view is, from the text (and not from modernist philosophers), optimistic. Lear does learn what it means to be a king and a man. He is not, after all, mad, but very sane in his human self-revelations. Edgar is selfless and without ambition except to help Lear. He accepts the crown at the end, but has never sought it. Kent is never given much credit for goodness, since he follows Lear for no good reason in the health (Edgar does have revenge on his mind, if only indirectly).

Backbone of the 'Theatre of Absurd':

The intricacies of absurdist theatre can be explored in a play written three hundred years before the movement even began in *King Lear*. In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which resonates in the dramatic works of absurdist theatre, Albert Camus draws on the myth to discuss the futility and absurdity of man's quest for meaning and purpose. As punishment for living a life full of deceit and trickery, the gods condemned Sisyphus to repeat the same meaningless task for eternity: to push a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll down before reaching the top. Lear is akin to Sisyphus. He states that his reasons for dividing the kingdom are to confer the duties "on younger strengths. However, Lear never makes it to this outcome. No matter what actions he takes, his "crawl toward death" becomes nothing but burdened, and yet he continues the journey in spite of his hopeful ending's inevitable failure.

With existentialism at its core, the Theatre of the Absurd strives to highlight the meaninglessness of human nature, reasoning, "in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity." Man feels devoid of purpose, stuck facing the emptiness of the human condition. This same absurdist idea is ever-present in *King Lear*. From the very beginning of the play, Lear's life is propelled by nothingness and meaninglessness, in the empty flattery uttered by his two eldest daughters simply to achieve their own ends, to the literal "nothing" spoken by Cordelia in response to her believing that proving her love is meaningless:

Cordelia : Nothing, my lord.
 Lear : Nothing?
 Cordelia : Nothing. (I.i.87-9)

It is this nothingness that propels Lear into his downward spiral towards absurdity, which, as Knight notes in his essay “King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque,” is “profoundly comic and profoundly pathetic. It is, indeed, curious that so storm-furious a play as *King Lear* should have so trivial a domestic basis.” And yet, by looking at this play from an absurdist vantage point it is not curious but makes perfect sense. If Lear is to embark on a journey of discovering man’s futility, then he has no one to blame but himself for his impending alienation and hopelessness; “It is a trap set by man himself into which he has fallen.”

It is not until the crucial storm of act three, when Lear’s “wits begin to turn” (III.ii.68), that the realization of the absurdity of life finally begins to take hold of the king. Having endured such mistreatment from kin and subjects alike, Lear finds himself in the midst of a storm that “pities neither wise men nor fools,” (III.ii.12-3) and begins to understand that man “is no more than this” (III.iv.101). There are no gods to pray to, nor are there supernatural forces using humanity as pawns – there is just man and nature, and nature is indifferent to all. Through his madness Lear ultimately finds the truth about human existence and through Cordelia’s death finds a way to confront it. He painfully exclaims:

And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life!
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
 And thou no breath at all? O thou’lt come no
 more,
 Never, never, never, never, never. (V.iii.304-7)

While this philosophy truly is the basis, it is important to note the other key elements of absurdist theatre that set *King Lear* apart from Shakespeare’s other works as a fundamental building block. In absurdist dramas, the identities of characters become blurred and ambiguous, leading to a crisis of identity, which is why the protagonists are typically portrayed as tramps and vagabonds - people grasping at the edge of a society. As Kott states, “when established values have been overthrown, and there is no appeal to God, Nature, or History from the tortures of the cruel world, the clown becomes the central figure in the theatre.” Lear falls into such an identity crisis when his deranged world overcomes him and is thus stripped of everything identifying him as a king - his social status, his land, and his “lendings” (III.iv.106) – making him no better than a clown.

Edgar also becomes victim to an identity crisis when he wears the face of poor, mad Tom O’Bedlam.

With Lear as a clown and Edgar as a madman, we see two characters who have abandoned their previous identities not because some greater force compelled them to but because they chose to act of their own free will. “Robes and furred gowns hide all,” (IV.vi.161) and in the end we are all simply “poor, bare, forked animals” (III.iv.105-6), whose names and identities are no longer needed in a world that simply does not care.

If we are to study *Lear* with the idea that tragedy is the theatre of priests while the grotesque is the theatre of clowns, then Gloucester’s mock suicide is certainly a perfect example of what the Theatre of the Absurd strives to illustrate: man’s actions are useless. In his groundbreaking essay “ ‘King Lear’ or Endgame,” Kott even goes so far as to argue that the only way to truly understand *Lear* is for it to be presented through this new, grotesque, absurdist genre of theatre. By overloading the play with elements such as a “definite historical period” or realistic sets, the theatricality of the play is lost and it becomes “untheatrical.” In absurdist plays, the settings are typically simple and ambiguous – a grey room, or a road with a tree. In looking at *Lear* as an absurd, grotesque play, we must realize the importance of Gloucester’s failed suicide in the way Kott sees it. Edgar describes the setting to his blind father, but is the two really on top of a hill? Is the sea truly below them? With an empty stage and a seemingly farcical Gloucester, this particular scene helps establish *Lear* as a forerunner of all other dramas, as an ancestor not just in the philosophical notions of absurdist theatre but in the physicality as well.

In *New York Times*, issue of 15th June 1988, Eugene Ionesco stated, “Shakespeare is the King of the Theatre of the Absurd.” (1988). Shakespeare created the basis of absurdist theatre in his dramas with his handle on the futile struggle of man in such an unfavorable world. But it is in *King Lear* that we see not just the existentialist philosophy being presented on stage but the tangible theatrical techniques adopted by the Theatre of the Absurd in the mid-twentieth century, revealing *Lear* as an absurdist play before its time.

Conclusion:

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is pioneer in presenting concept of the meaninglessness of life and projects it on the stage. Despite all the justifiable intellectual arguments, *King Lear* makes a grotesque mockery (especially see Jan Kott) of human aspirations set against and indifference. Absolutely, the play stills the common reader, represents an affirmation of the human capacity.

The absurdity shown in *King Lear* is a gradual revelation and it evolves with the development of a linear plot. In this sense there is no conventional plot, the entire scenario is absurd. The only truth about human life is revealed through exploration of man’s

struggle leading towards, 'Nothingness'. Shakespearean philosophy, as universally accepted is also evident in his quote, Lear in *King Lear* "Come, let's away to prison; We two alone will sing like birds in the cage: When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down, And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live, And pray, and

sing, and tell old tales, and laugh At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues Talk of court news." proves that even a king cannot be the king forever and without kingship the state is more miserable, powerless, abusive that arouses desire, not to live but die, *absurd*.

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