

# Filial Relations in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*

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**Abstract**

William Shakespeare takes into consideration most types of social relations among which filial relations cannot be exempted. Father-daughter relations in *King Lear* is made prominent in that there arises particular misunderstanding between him and his daughter Cordelia, and at the same time this kind of relation can be applied to the other daughters of the King that are Goneril and Regan, for a social relation as this is regarded one of the essentials of dramatic works. The structure of the play itself stems from Lear's attempt to distribute his kingdom to his daughters on the grounds of the amount of love they hold for him. Goneril and Regan's false flattery and love deceive Lear to take a false decision of distributing the kingdom among them both, for Cordelia expresses truthful feelings towards him that are void of false flattery. The foolish King assumes a foolish decision for the favorite daughters have neglected him and let him live a miserable life. It is only that Cordelia who has taken care of him in the end. The moral lesson to be obtained from Lear's behavior is that foolish decisions lead nowhere but to destruction and it is only the faithful children who will be truthful to their parents. This research paper revolves around the filial relations between King Lear on the one hand and his three daughters on the other hand. This study attains the moral lesson that can be summed up in the fact that false flattery and foolishness result in evil conclusions. The play depicts an essential aspect of life in that it examines the good represented by Cordelia and the evil represented by Goneril and Regan. Moreover, the play demonstrates Shakespeare's awareness of manifestations of good and evil that are inherent in the human nature.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Filial Relations, King Lear, Tragedy, Comedy.

## INTRODUCTION

Societies around the globe criticize all of the factors that are considered as harmful and bad for human life.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, societies also advocate and support the aspects that are considered as beneficial and good for human life. These aspects are normally witnessed from the moral lens.<sup>2</sup> Studies have discussed in a number of studies the opinion of the different societies regarding what is good and bad. The societies around the globe have inherited from the past regarding what is bad or good. Therefore, the struggle of good and bad is very old.<sup>3</sup> Some of the authors have discussed that it is regarded as key aspect of human experience and life.

The concern of the dramas is experience and human life. It represents a number of conflicts that cannot be neglected by the producers and directors of the dramas.<sup>4</sup> It is because the main concern of all dramas related people is to reflect realistic picture of society and human life. Moreover, the main concern of the dramatists is to develop bad and good characters that develop conflicts with each other in a way that complications can be understood in their dramas.<sup>5</sup> It also helps in developing solution that is suggested by the producer of the drama. This solution is shown in the ending of the drama which needs to be portrayed.

Shakespeare in his dramas most of the times reflects the kind of conflicts that can be inner conflicts or the external one.<sup>6</sup> The inner conflicts are the ones that can be seen within the character's mind. Whereas, the external conflicts are represented through physical conflicts between different enemies.<sup>7</sup> The inner conflict is linked to the psychological behavior of the individual character that requires in-depth knowledge regarding human psychology.

In his plays Shakespeare always advocates the notion that morality necessitates that evil practices should be eliminated from society in order to attain a perfect state of life void of evil that is abhorred by all sound societies and heavenly religion.<sup>8</sup> It is always shown that societies try to castigate all kinds of evil and whatsoever is harmful to human life and support an attempt to create whatsoever good to mankind, which is the background that inevitably determines the struggle between good and evil. In this regard, as long as societies exist, there must be the everlasting struggle between what is accounted to be evil and what is accounted to be good.<sup>9</sup> This kind of struggle was first originated in the brotherly relation between Cane and Abel which results in the first crime in the human history. This kind of struggle has since been part and parcel of human life and experience.

Realistic representation of life experiences is the aim of all dramatists—modern and otherwise. Since conflicting parties are always found in actual life, Shakespeare's *King Lear* can by no means be exempted from the domain of conflict.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the good and bad characters will inevitably involve themselves in conflicts in order to actualize the moral principles they believe in. Thus, conflicts in drama lead to the appearance of complications that result in the solution to be designed by the dramatist himself, which is decided according to the genre of the drama concerned. The conflict in *King Lear* has been ignited by Lear's negligence of his duties due to his abdication of the throne and his distribution of the kingdom. Kenneth Muir has his word in this regard, saying that the Duke in *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear* in *King Lear* has neglected their duties. Hence, the negligence of the Duke can be "compared with Lear's abdication from responsibility; the debate on justice and authority which runs all through *Measure for Measure* reappears in the mad scenes of *King Lear*".<sup>11</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

William Shakespeare is one of very well-known and famous English prolific writer, actor, playwright and Poet. He was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. William Shakespeare went to Stratford Grammar School for the purpose of early education. Later, he started his career as actor in London. He became a successful theatre owner, actor manager and actor. In the later half of his life, he came back to Stratford. He passed away when he was just 52 years old in 1616.<sup>12</sup> Trinity Church is the place where he was buried.

Shakespeare is widely known as one of the great writers of English language. The work of Shakespeare is being taught at different levels of education around the globe. There are a number of literary pieces in his account. The literary pieces include 38 tragicomedies, tragedies and comedies plays. On the other hand, he also composed healthy poem collections, three long poem narratives and 154 sonnets.<sup>13</sup>

The plays of Shakespeare show the importance of relationships. The writing of C.L Barber in terms of "Shakespeare's art," shows that "is distinguished by the intensity of its investment in the human family, and especially in the continuity of the family across generations". At this stage Stephen Orgel stated that "families in Shakespeare tend not to consist of husbands and wives and their offspring but of a parent and a child, usually in a chiastic relationship – father and daughter, mother and son".

One of the famous critics who discussed the politics within different family in the plays of Shakespeare mentioned that "Shakespeare's dramas consistently explore affective family dynamics with such an intensity that justifies the growing inference among Shakespeare scholars that the plays may be primarily 'about' family relations and only secondarily about the macrocosm of the body politic" (325). The critique further added that "While father and son appear slightly more often in the canon, figuring in twenty-three plays, father and daughter appear in twenty-one dramas and in one narrative poem" (325).

The work of Shakespeare is mainly interested in examining relationships of human. But he is more interested in examining the relationship of parents and child. The main illustration of filial relationship is always present in the dramas of Shakespeare.<sup>14</sup> Whereas some of the critics mentioned that topics related to filial relations can be witnessed around 67% of the work of Shakespeare. On the other hand, the main concern of Shakespearean dramas is filial relationships. The plays of Shakespeare represent the interaction of children and parents in a number of different ways. The plot of the most of the Shakespeare plays is based on conflicts of the families.

Some of the dramas of Shakespeare are related to the tragedies based on the conflicts of families. If the tragedies of the familial conflicts are fixed, the solution is provided to handle the tragic situation in the end. A group of play was introduced by the Shakespeare in which the main characters were controversial figures in the real world.<sup>15</sup> These famous characters included King Lear, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet. In literature, King Lear is discussed as long lasting story because its contents are based on family downfall, human nature and child-parent relationships. All these factors create link among modern time and play despite the fact that these plays were written around three centuries earlier.

King Lear is the character of 1604 and 1605. In literature, it is considered as one of the best work of Shakespeare. Some of the scholars have termed it as challenging work by the Shakespeare. One of the challenges in this character is in taking notes regarding the language being used for the Character as it is based on some obsolete terms.<sup>16</sup> These problems can be witnessed in most of the plays of Shakespeare. Whereas the character of King Lear is very imaginative and emotional. Moreover, this character is exceptionally demanding as well. It is an evolutionary perspective that plays a vital role to help the readers to face these challenges in three dimensions. Initially, by introducing vision of metaphysics that develop connection among the characters of the play. Secondly, by offering values and ideas of human life that develops connection in the play and in the end, by creating awareness through historical aspect.

One of the earliest sources of King Lear's story is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. This story was written by the writer in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Around 800 years ago, this plays was first time recorded and performed. It is one of the legendary characters. The story of King Lear is mostly discussed and presented along his daughter in a number of English editions and fairy tales. A number of critics argue the work of Shakespeare as this work is not near to reality. Shakespeare changed the story and characters skillfully. He also changes different sources representing actions of the dramas.<sup>17</sup> He has successfully discussed the traditional story through new characters.

Whereas, in 1681 this version of character was overcome through the introduction of love affair among Cordelia and Edgar. Because of this induction, the play of Shakespeare was brought to happy ending in which forces of Cordelia were victorious. Moreover, throne was restored by King Lear. According to researchers the main character return "startles and terrifies by suggesting that the folly of Lear and the ingratitude of his daughters are no accidents or merely individual aberrations, but that in that dark cold world some fateful malignant influence is abroad ...".<sup>18</sup> The main focus of the commentators and critics is on the tragic ending.

In past a lot of Efforts are made by different authors in order to interpret King Lear. This effort of the researchers is most of the times interrupted in effort to make the play according to the vision of the society in which reward is given to the good people and punishment is given to the evil people. It is important to mention that from year 1681 to 1834, poet Nahum Tate was the only version that was produced by the producers on the stage. Whereas, its revised version presented a happy ending of the drama in which love story among Cordelia and Edgar was presented. All of the characters of the play were shown to live happy ever after in the play.<sup>19</sup> At this stage, the original version of the play was again played in theatres for around two hundred years ago.

Whereas, the focus of interpretation in the 20th century was on consolation and redemption. At some point of the play, all of the characters including Gloucester, Albany, Edgar, Kent and Lear affirmed that lives of human are controlled by Godly justice. Though, there is no evidence from the play's action that fate of the characters is decided by the others.<sup>20</sup> The violence was revived in the play that shows the lethality of the characters. This violence took the lives of Gloucester, Lear and Cordelia, the servant of Cornwall and many others. In the play, Kent also mentioned that he will lose his life soon.<sup>21</sup>

In the play, Kent also mentioned that he will lose his life soon. On the other hand, only two main characters namely Edgar and Albany survived till end.<sup>22</sup> It is evident from the play that any normal human can make sense from this ending of the drama. According to the scholars, life is the process that is blindly and mechanically developing through different processes. The survival of the organisms is less than the birth of the new organisms. All these factors do not reflect the basic source of values and motives of human lives. From the evolutionary point of view, people can look for the justification of they are looking to justify the ethical values. These justifications can be found in the perspective of human.<sup>23</sup>

In the play, most of the characters made general and broad statements regarding the conditions of human. Most of the conditions do not conflict with the play's action or go beyond the evidence it has. During the play, Gloucester has the main role to motivate the Cordelia and Lear after they lost the battle. At this stage Edgar mentioned that "men must endure/Their going hence, even as their coming hither; / ripeness is all".<sup>24</sup> This statement is different from the affirmation of Edgar regarding providential order. After the defeat in the play, Edgar stated that "the gods are just" as they gave reasonable punishment to vice.

### **Analysis and Discussion of the Filial Ingratitude in King Lear**

The action of the play begins when the Earl of Gloucester presents his illegitimate son Edmund to the Earl of Kent. King Lear appears in the court as an old man. He announces the renunciation of the throne to be divided among his three daughters, Goneril, the Duchess of Albany, Regan, the Duchess of Cornwall, and Cordelia. It is decided by Lear that the division will depend on how much love they hold for him. Goneril and Regan flatter him excessively while Cordelia just expresses her fatherly love towards him. The kingdom is then divided between the flatterers and Cordelia has been given nothing. To add, she has been deprived of any portion of the kingdom and is at the same time banished. Lear also banishes the Earl of Kent because he sides with Cordelia who cannot express her deep feelings of love towards her father who has misunderstands her as being disloyal to him.

Filial ingratitude is considered the pivot of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Ingratitude is regarded one aspect of human life and experience and is one aspect of evil acts. But, the theme of filial ingratitude has been depicted as an evil power which cannot be victorious in the end, for Shakespeare always aims to represent poetic justice in all of his dramas. Hence, he cannot be regarded wholly pessimistic in this regard. The representation of good and evil in Shakespeare's plays is considered an endeavor to represent reality on the stage. When it is seen that good has been harmed, it cannot be said that it is attributed to pessimism: "Pessimism does not consist in seeing evil injure good...it is rather the inability to see good, or to discover total depravity, but no grace. It is not pessimism but realism which makes one recognize that without Edmund there could be no Cordelias"<sup>11</sup>

Cordelia has been wronged by her father in that she is not given any portion of the kingdom distributed among her other two sisters, and despite this fact it is only Cordelia who appears to be faithful to her father due to her good heart and kindness. Moreover, it should be noted that Kent and Edgar appear to be faithful to their masters. Edgar pretends to be another character in the guise of a Bedlam-beggar who helps his father.

*King Lear* exposes the theme of the pursuit of power to be done by illegal means and interestingly enough it can be seen that the powers of evil are destroyed by other powers of evil in the play, which all endeavor to destroy the powers of good. All the three evil characters in *King Lear* have been destroyed by their pursuit of their interests and as it are exemplified by Muir. They have all been “destroyed by their superficially sane pursuit of self-interest. They all believe in looking after themselves; they all implicitly deny that we are members one of another; they all assume that man is a competitive rather than a co-operative animal”<sup>11</sup>

Goneril and Regan, King Lear's daughters to the kingdom has equally been distributed to them as they have shown their false love towards their father, badly treat their father and exhibit their cheap desire of the flesh towards the evil Edmund. The latter appears to be unfaithful towards his father at the beginning of the play. The latter shows some good qualities at the end of the play though he at first sight appears to be ungrateful towards his father, which shows a change in character. Hence, there is repentance on the part of Edmund's ch On the other hand, Goneril and Regan have neglected their father and left him live in complete destitution. They both just look for their self-interests.

It may be suggested that *King Lear* is a play of renunciation in that Lear has renounced his kingdom to his daughters Goneril and Regan who have flattered him tremendously, whereas he has deprived his daughter Cordelia of any portion of the kingdom because she does not flatter him in the way he likes. At the same time, he leaves the throne and wants his others respect him as if he were still King. He has not been aware that he will be in a weak position in case he leaves the throne and that his opponents may benefit from his wrong decision. Hence, Lear goes mad and desperate and longs for revenge against those who have already him. He becomes very furious as he realizes that none can fulfill his orders and meet his needs. He has gone through two kinds of feelings as it is shown by Orwell:

“One is the mood of disgust in which Lear repents, as it were, for having been a king, and grasps for the first time the rottenness of formal justice and vulgar morality. The other is a mood of impotent fury in which he wreaks imaginary revenges upon those who have wronged him”<sup>25</sup>

Lear's violent tendency to revenge is shown in his speech as he says: “And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,/ Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill (IV. vi. 185)! The moral lesson to be attained in this regard is that if one renounces one's power among others one will be prone to aggressions from one's opponents. Goneril and Regan prove themselves to be disloyal to their father who has been very generous to them. What Lear has made is to reward the disloyal daughters and disowns the loyal daughter represented by Cordelia who takes care of him in his calamity when he becomes helpless and desperate. Orwell sums up the moral lesson as he says that Shakespeare implies that “to make yourself powerless is to invite an attack”.<sup>25</sup> Orwell ponders the situation of Lear, saying that weaponless people may be prone to attacks by others:

“If you throw away your weapons, some less scrupulous person will pick them up, if you turn the other cheek, you will get a harder blow on it than you got on the first one. This does not always happen, but it is to be expected, and you ought not to complain if it does happen. The second blow is, so to speak, part of the act of turning the other cheek”<sup>25</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the character of the Fool speaks of the moral lesson to be obtained from one who relinquishes power when he says that one should not abandon one's power and lands. To give up one's weapon in a world similar to a jungle means an invitation to weakness, depression and destruction, especially in a world where contrastive powers—those involved in politics and higher positions—are conflicting with one another. The representations of good and evil are always conflicting in Shakespeare's plays which present the good triumphant over the bad. The conflict between those two powers ignites the beginning of the action of the play which sums up the filial ingratitude of Lear's elder daughters and the filial faithfulness of Lear's daughter Cordelia:

“Morality structure was ideal for the history play. It was already didactic, as history was required to be, and it dealt with allegory, which enabled the dramatist to preach his contemporary lessons under the cover of abstractions. For the historian, the abstractions would be the kings and statesmen of another age, whose remoteness so offered him protection from the displeasure of the authorities: It is dangerous to be too openly contemporary. The form was easily adapted to new purposes, the state, *Republica*, replacing man as the battlefield upon which good and evil counselors waged their unending struggle”<sup>26</sup>

It is generally referred to that conflicts are of two types—physical represented by the warring camps and mental represented by the mind of the character, which definitely contribute to the shaping factors of themes, characters and structure of the play. It is the inner conflict in the mind of Lear due to his daughters' betrayal returns his rationality and realizes that the daughter whom he has wronged has taken care of him when facing tremendous calamities caused by his other two daughters, Goneril and Regan:

“The conflict between good and evil is not only physically expressed between two conflicting characters, but it is also shown in the inner self of man; there is a moral conflict within the minds of some characters that have in the beginning committed certain evil practices, but then changed their minds and achieved some good steps towards the attainment of virtue”<sup>27</sup>

As it often happens in actual life, physical and mental conflicts can lead to a significant change in the characters' ingredients. Those conflicts, besides the subsequent events facing them, Lear and Gloucester's characters have undergone remarkable changes. This notion has been substantiated by Muir as follows: “We see Lear and Gloucester painfully learning wisdom; we see Albany increase in moral stature as he frees himself from his infatuation; and we see Edgar change from a credulous fool to a brave and sanity champion”<sup>11</sup>

It must be noted that the tragedy of Lear finds its beginning in his foolish misjudgment which he makes concerning the renunciation of his kingdom and its distribution among his ungrateful children. Their filial ingratitude is shown in their bad behavior towards him, for they have already deprived him of anything that may comfort his life. Lear has to undergo the results of his childish behavior. Knight considers his weakness a “fault of the mind, a mind unwarrantably, because selfishly, foolish”.<sup>27</sup> When he gets nervous, Lear confesses his foolishness when he says: Lear himself admits his foolishness as he gets nervous, saying: “....O Lear, Lear, Lear!/ Beat at this gate that let thy folly in,/ And thy dear judgment out” (I. iv. 270). Lear's state of misery and suffering are the result of his madness caused by his spiritual blindness, for he never thinks that one day he takes a wrong decision and he always considers his behavior right despite its foolishness, and because he is King none can oppose him in this regard. Then he discovers his mistake represented by his wrong decision to endow his ungrateful daughters the reign of his kingdom. He discovers that their words of love towards him have been false. Hence, the theme of King Lear is “embodied continually into a fantastic incongruity, which is implicit in the beginning—in the very act of Lear's renunciation, retaining “the title and addition' of King, yet giving over a king's authority to his children”<sup>27</sup>

At first sight, Lear's daughters give a limited number of servants, but is gradually deprived of everything and left to live in the wilderness. Therefore, he gradually discovers his wrong decision that drives him to madness. His mind becomes chaotic because he has been tortured by examining his daughters' ungratefulness. His chaotic mind becomes harmonious with the chaotic atmosphere he faces in the desert. Gloucester expresses his opinion in this respect saying:

“Gloucester: These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourg'd by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in the cities, munities; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction, there's son against father. The King falls from bias of nature, there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves” (King Lear, I. ii. 100)

The spectators do not seem to sympathize with the character of Lear for his tragic end has been the result of his foolishness, which indicates that he has been mentally deficient when he makes that damned decision of depriving his daughter Cordelia of her legal portion of the kingdom. His end has not been wholly tragic for his childish decision that is against religion: “mentally a child; in passion a titan”<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly enough, as Goneril and Regan stand for the Lear- theme of filial ingratitude, Edmund, the most villainous character in the play, represents the Gloucester-theme of ungratefulness in that he has treated his father in a very bad way. On the other hand, Edmund shows a grave change in his character as he has forgiven Cordelia and shows some sort of sympathy towards her. But, filial ingratitude cannot go without punishment, for the providence of God is quite aware of the good and bad; the good should be rewarded; the bad, punished. Goneril and Regan's love for the same person, Edmund, leads them nowhere but to death. Goneril is stabbed by a knife and Regan is poisoned:

“Edmund is the most villainous of all...Edmund is given a noble, an essentially tragic, end, and Goneril and Regan, too, meet their end with something of tragic fitness in pursuit of their evil desires. Regan dies by her sister's poison; Goneril with a knife. They die, at least, in the cause of love—love of Edmund. Compared with these deaths, the end of Cordelia is horrible, cruel, unnecessarily cruel—the final grotesque horror in the play. Her villainous sisters are already dead. Edmund is nearly dead, repentant. It is a matter of seconds—and rescue comes too late. She is hanged by a common soldier”<sup>27</sup>

Lear's anger, rashness and foolishness are the epitome of his passion which appears to be destructive to not only his character but also to those around him. His mind has been polluted by a sense of evil that can be proved by the fact that his mind decides the kindest daughter Cordelia should not have her share of the kingdom, and at the same time, all his properties have been given to his two villainous daughters. This points to the moral and philosophical implications that Lear's weak mind has been spiritually blind and cannot discern the right path which he should follow as a father that should treat his children equally and King that should behave wisely:

“The moral and philosophical implications of exposing evil in this play show that at a moment of high pride and arrogance which culminates into a state of foolish behaviour, Lear fails to fully understand and comprehend the genuine and true expressions of Cordelia, which have sprung from the heart. The moral significance to be obtained from this situation is that at these moments failure to comprehend a certain situation means failure to distinguish the right from the wrong, which leads Lear to commit a grave mistake which inevitably drives him to his tragic end”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it can be inferred that Lear's foolishness and anger in certain situations lead him nowhere but to his inevitable death. He appears to be the cause of all the demises that happen in the play. His doom is not considered wholly tragic because he does not undergo the pattern of the tragic hero that should appear good at the beginning of the play and is then damned by his own personal weakness and Lear Exhibits his weakness right at the beginning of the play when he does not express benign fatherly passions towards Cordelia. his fatherly behavior has terribly gone wrong as he looks forward to rewarding the bad and punishing the good—Goneril and Regan on the one hand, and Cordelia on the other hand respectively. Moreover, Lear proves to be that he is one that can be easily deceived by false flattery. His foolish mind has affected not only the other characters but the entire kingdom.

It may be concluded that the moral lesson Shakespeare may want to convey is that foolishness accompanied with anger leads nowhere but to destruction. Foolishness and anger breed evil implications represented by the entire action of the play, and this is what may often occur in actual, which points to Shakespeare's full awareness of human nature. Foolishness and anger are manifestations of evil and evil, naturally speaking, breeds evil:

“Bad decisions, reasoning, actions, and resolutions, during moments of anger and wrath, are always decided... Goneril herself says something in this regard. She declares that her father has always been hasty and the victim of freakish and sudden impulses. From the psychological point of view, it is true that anger when uncontrolled is more powerful and more dangerous than the circumstances arousing it. Lear's passion reaches its highest point when the storm beats the heath, which can be considered a manifestation of all the forces of evil which occupy his mind and which heightens his fury and anger, and thus he begins to think of inflicting destruction upon all human creatures including his two evil daughters”<sup>27</sup>

Lear faces a strong storm on the heath which corresponds to the psychological storm that has inflicted his mind when realizing the betrayal of his elder daughters and the innocence of Cordelia, a fact which he lately discovers. He learns that his two evil daughters have got their punishment. It has already been shown that Shakespeare does not only allude to evil in general but he also alludes to the kind of behavior practiced by evil children against their father:

“It seems that Shakespeare does not only display the tragedy of a king whose foolishness leads him to his destruction, but he also gives a projection of what social evils represented by some evil children that give rise to serious crimes which they commit against their fathers. Lear and Gloucester are presented as two victims of the ingratitude of their children”<sup>27</sup>

It has been suggested that the storm can be considered a power destructive and symbolic of the evil connotations that govern the mind of Lear, and at the same time the storm may be considered a bad omen:



“The destructive power of the tempest is a Manifestation of the forces of evil that have invaded Lear’s mind. The storm is thus more than an adjunct to the old man’s fury; it elevates his passion to the awesome dignity of natural portent”<sup>28</sup>

In his madness, Lear invokes the natural phenomenon represented by the strong storm in order to devastate all those whom he considers to be his adversaries, which points to the inner conflict in his mind that obliges him to think of the two ungrateful daughters that have already harmed him. Hence, the thought of revenge has occupied his mind:

“Singe my white head! And thou all shaking thunder, Smite flat the thick rotundity o’ the world! Crack Nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once, That make ungrateful man!” (*King Lear*, III. ii. 6-9)

The adversaries that occur among the ruling family have resulted in many deaths due to the unwise judgment posed by a foolish and angry King who weighs the amount of faithfulness by the amount of false flatteries. The latter can be regarded as a sort of evil insofar as they cause many demises, which can also point to Shakespeare’s pessimistic attitude towards the political situation of his time which shows some sorts of horrors and killing. In *King Lear*, Lear, all his daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, together with Gloucester and Kent have suffered too much and died at the end of the play. It may be inferred that Shakespeare’s experience in life supposes that the power of evil can stealthily creep into the human mind and devastate whatsoever good. It is this power that makes Lear wrongs the innocent Cordelia. It seems that Shakespeare’s awareness of the manifestations of human nature obliges him to depict the notion that evil powers stealthily come into the mind of the individual and destroy all kinds of benign thoughts related to the goodness of the innocent:

“Lear was written by a man who had seen a vision of absolute evil such as was given to those who sat through the Nuremberg trials...in which good, however pure and refined, is futile and overwhelmed by evil, in which man, the paragon of animals, has become a savage, vicious beast. Moreover, the pessimism is in Shakespeare himself and in the story of *Lear*”<sup>29</sup>

Gloucester develops a pessimistic attitude towards life simply because his illegitimate son Edmund has betrayed him. The grievance he has undergone makes him present an absurd thought concerning life which he considers meaningless. He develops a pagan attitude towards life for the setting of the play is pagan. It may be suggested that that attitude can be attributed to Shakespeare’s stance concerning life. This is not to deny that *King Lear* does not give a moral lesson. It can be placed within the domain of didactic drama that teaches not only ordinary people but also kings and politicians themselves. Thus, the giving up of power is an invitation to weakness and decay as is the case with King Lear:

“Symbolically speaking, Lear’s renunciation of the throne results in his renunciation of Cordelia as his dearest daughter and heiress, the world, his two other daughters, and his faithful servant Kent. It is therefore a renunciation of prosperity, which has been made only to invite sterility and death in. In this sense, Lear’s renunciation proves to be something of evil tincture in so far as it leads to a great human loss and the destruction of man’s spirit. Furthermore, Lear, at the end of the play, especially when in prison with Cordelia, announces his renunciation of the entire world and all worldly interests”<sup>27</sup>

“...Come, let’s away to prison:

We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage:

When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down,  
And ask for thy 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: and we’ll talk with them too,  
Who loses and who wins; who’s in who’s out;  
And take upon’s the mystery of things,  
As if we were god’s spies” (*King Lear*, V. iii. 8-17)

Lear and Cordelia have eventually come to the conclusion that they should leave the world. They both know that they have sacrificed too much in the world in which they assume their characters. Lear says "Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, / the gods themselves throw incense" (*King Lear*, v. iii. 20-21). They have both observed what the world is and what kind of characters that surround them. They come to the conclusion that they have been alienated from the world of evil by powers beyond their control and they should endure the conclusions which they have already attained. Lear's declaration shows

"An attitude of complete detachment from the world. Lear and Cordelia will merely become observers of life, interested observers no doubt, but just observers and spectators, no longer partakers and sharers. This is the renunciation, more or less of a recluse, a renunciation approved by the gods because Lear goes on to say that upon such 'sacrifice' the gods themselves throws incense"<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

*King Lear* is a history play that unfolds some dark images that have already darkened the British history. Those dark images can be taken in the good sense in that they provide kings and politicians invaluable lessons. It is an intelligent choice of the history drama on the part of Shakespeare who cleverly makes use of it in order to serve his purpose. The play depicts the moral and psychological implications that characterize all the characters of the play. History can be an ideal source of moral lessons. For example, foolish kings produce foolish decisions that are conducive to their destruction as is the case with King Lear who has foolishly deprived his dearest yet good and innocent daughter of her rights. It may be concluded too that among one's children there may appear to be enemies to their father as is the case with Goneril, Regan and Edmund. Hence, this tragedy can be regarded as a case study of filial ingratitude of the bad children and filial gratitude of the optimal ones. Man, at moments of weakness can be allured by the devil and becomes fiendish himself.

On the other hand, one may come to the conclusion that one becomes blind towards one's weaknesses when one is highly flattered. Being flattered by false children prevents Lear from realizing his limitations. Besides, destruction of family bonds is caused by misunderstanding as is the case with Lear who interprets Cordelia's feelings of love in a negative manner. To conclude, one may come to the conclusion that actions should speak louder than words.

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