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A Necessary Death in King Lear

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This paper looks at *King Lear* and its tragic ending. Shakespeare's *King Lear* is based on various accounts, but interestingly he changes from the happy endings of his sources into his own tragic ending by putting Lear and Cordelia to death. This tragic ending has been criticized, but no one could be certain why Shakespeare ends his play in the way he does, especially why he makes Cordelia die. As a result, many critics tried to discover why Cordelia dies in the end. This paper will analyze the various criticisms on Cordelia's death, and show the opposing views of critics' arguing that Cordelia's death is just meaningless. Furthermore, it will prove that Cordelia's death is meaningful and crucial to *King Lear* based on the persuasive grounds which many other critics propose.

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* is based on various sources and accordingly there is an analogy between the storylines of his *King Lear* and the sources he seems to have used. Specifically, two of the probable sources of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *The Second Booke of the Historie of England* by Raphael Holinshed (1587), and *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir and his Three Daughters; Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* by an anonymous playwright, both are about a story of Leir. At the beginning of both stories, Leir divides his kingdom by asking his daughters to answer how much they love him, and even though Leir goes through adversity in the middle, both ends with happy endings; Leir and Cordeilla's or Cordella's French army win a victory and Leir reclaims the throne of Britain. In Holinshed, after Leir's natural death, he is succeeded by Cordeilla, and in *The True Chronicle*, Leir turns his kingdom over to the Gallian King which is now called France. Although some contents are different from *King Lear*, a major portion of their plots are similar.

Nonetheless, Shakespeare transforms these happy endings of his sources into his own tragic ending by putting Cordelia and Lear to miserable death. The tragic hero's death in a tragedy might be a reasonable case, but it is not possible to find definite reasons why innocent Cordelia must die, and so in 1681, Nahum Tate even rewrites it with happy ending.

Many critics have tried to analyze the reasons why Shakespeare carries out events unexpectedly and differently from his sources and leads to Cordelia's sudden death in the end. In consequence, some critics, who find their grounds based on modern understanding such as Jan Kott and Sigmund Freud, still consider that her death is just the meaningless expression of a godless universe, and it does not take crucial part in the play. However, others such as Paul Siegel, A. C. Bradley, and Coppélia Kahn argue that the grounds for Cordelia's death are more complicated than the mere expression of a godless universe, and they give their reasons that her

death is meaningful. Accordingly, this paper will study Cordelia and focus on her death to decide between these different views. Furthermore, it will show that even though Shakespeare does not reveal a definite reason why he puts Cordelia to death, after all her death does take a crucial part in *King Lear* owing to the persuasive reasons given by several critics' analyses.

In detail, Jan Kott in "King Lear, or Endgame" defines tragedy as "the theatre of priests" (141), and so in his contemporary, the idea of tragedy has no important meaning at all. According to his modern understanding, not only must Cordelia die, but also every other character must meet his or her death, and everyone is destroyed in the play (Kott 152). Thus, for modern society, Cordelia's death is an event of no consequence. Kott's interpretation has been influential to readers' understandings of Shakespeare's plays, as he interprets the plays which are written far back in the Elizabethan era from the viewpoint of experiences in the 20th century, and he juxtaposes them with modern literary works. In addition, Kott is well known for his concentrating on theater of Shakespeare performance.

Sigmund Freud in "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913) shows a similar idea of *King Lear*: Cordelia represents death because "psycho-analysis will tell us that in dreams dumbness is a common representation of death" (28). According to Freud's discussion, Cordelia is "a dead woman" (29). So, as she is meant to be dead, her death has no significant meaning or reason in it. Therefore, Cordelia's death does not take crucial part in the tragedy of *King Lear*. This analysis of Freud's was novel to people as he interprets literary pieces based on psychoanalysis which he himself created. Arthur Kirsch in "The Emotional Landscape of King Lear" refers to Freud in his discussion of Cordelia's death, "A modern understanding of psychology of dying can help illuminate this phenomenon. Freud's discussion of *King Lear* is especially pertinent" (164), and so Freud's psychoanalytical approach to literary works including

King Lear is another persuasive way of understanding the works.

On the other hand, there are many more reasons that support Cordelia's death as a meaningful event in *King Lear*. Firstly, Cordelia's death causes Lear's recognition of his errors. Further relating her death to religious ground, like Siegel argues, Cordelia is like a Christ figure, and so her death is like a crucifixion that causes the salvation of Lear. Moreover, based on moral order, Cordelia's death allows the audience to perceive that virtue does not always win as a matter of justice. A. C. Bradley, one of the foremost thinkers of Shakespeare's works and whose influence lasted more than a century, argues in "Lecture VII & VIII" on *King Lear* that goodness's success or failure in this physical world does not matter. His lectures on *King Lear* have been significant since he had great influence on many students through his pedagogical manner that provided a real guide to the understanding of Shakespeare's literary pieces. According to Bradley's assessment, soul is important, whereas body is nothing. As a result, body's suffering and death are not wrong, but "they do matter greatly" (Bradley 327). Suffering and death in this world teach one to give up the things that look good, and the soul can be set free after the death of the body. On that ground, Cordelia's death and also Lear's death signify because their souls will be free after their deaths, owing to their suffering that might have destroyed their bodies (Bradley 327). Coppélia Kahn comes up with an entirely different idea in "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*." Kahn introduces the question of gender into Shakespeare studies, and similar to Freud, she does psychoanalysis of *King Lear*, and so her argument is based on the fact that there is no mother figure in the play. Kahn finds that Lear considers Cordelia as both daughter and mother. For that reason, Cordelia's death signifies that she cannot be a mother for Lear. These interpretations of Cordelia's death vary because they focus on diverse ideas such as religion, morality, and gender, but they all consider the understanding of

Shakespeare's contemporary audiences, and prove that her death is meaningful.

It is indisputable that Shakespeare's *King Lear* is influenced by Holinshed and *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir*, but still a controversy continues about why Shakespeare alters the happy endings that all of his sources have for his tragic ending. Particularly, about Cordelia's death, many critics including Dr. Johnson find it "both bewildering and unendurable" (Kirsch 163), and wish to deny it. No one could be sure why Shakespeare altered in the way he did. On that account, Nahum Tate once again changes Shakespeare's tragic ending into his own happy ending by "putting Edgar in the place of the King of France as Cordelia's lover." Shakespeare's tragedy was replaced by Tate's and "was never seen on the stage for a century and a half" (Bradley 243). If so, this means that the audience of that era preferred Tate's happy ending.

Nahum Tate writes to his friend, Thomas Boteler in "The History of King Lear" in order to give his reason for this epoch-making alteration of *King Lear* which was seen on the stage for more than a century: "'Twas my good fortune to light on one expedient to rectify what was wanting in the regularity and probability of the tale, which was to run through the whole a love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia, that never changed word with each other in the original... This method necessarily threw me on making the tale conclude in a success to the innocent distressed persons: otherwise I must have incumbered the stage with dead bodies, which conduct makes many tragedies conclude with unseasonable jests" (1-2). Tate's play of *King Lear* ends with Edgar's declaration, "That truth and virture shall at last succeed" (*The History of King Lear* V.vi.160). As Tate emphasizes "the regularity and probability" (1), and considers carefully if his play would satisfy his audience and his reader, his happy ending does succeed to satisfy them. For a long time, Shakespeare's tragic ending had been forgotten by the audience since according to Tate's view, it is "unseasonable jests" (2). However, nowadays what common people

remember about the story of King Lear is neither the happy endings of Shakespeare's sources nor Tate's, but Shakespeare's tragic ending. Notwithstanding many critics' frustration, there should be a purpose for Cordelia's death.

Still for some modern critics, the death of Cordelia is not a necessary event in the play, and it is just a meaningless expression of a godless universe. From the perspective of Kott: "A great and powerful king holds a competition of rhetoric among his daughters, as to which one of them will best express her love for him, and makes the division of his kingdom depend on its outcome. He does not see or understand anything: Regan's and Goneril's hypocrisy is all too evident. Regarded as a person, a character, Lear is ridiculous, naive and stupid" (129-130). When Cordelia's death is considered crucial to the play, it is the starting point when Lear asks his daughters to express their loves for him because it shows how Lear blunders. The audience feels pity when Lear realizes his errors by the death of his good-natured daughter. In contrast, King Lear's folly that causes this play to be a great tragedy does not make sense to Kott. For him, Lear is just ridiculous, naive and stupid. This perception of Kott's on Lear and his ideas about this play as a whole come from his interpreting the traditional idea of Shakespeare's tragedy as meaningless.

Instead of Shakespeare's traditional tragedy or "the theatre of priests," Kott emphasizes the grotesque which is "the theatre of clowns" (141). Kott says, "A striking feature of the new theatre is its grotesque quality...It deals with problems, conflicts and themes of tragedy such as: human fate, the meaning of existence, freedom and inevitability, the discrepancy between the absolute and the fragile human order. Grotesque means tragedy re-written in different terms" (132). This grotesque element is "a criticism of the absolute in the name of frail human experience" (Kott 132), and its "last metaphysical concept is "the notion of absurd mechanism"

(Kott 133). Kott contrasts tragedy and the grotesque, and he argues that modern theater performances are more like grotesque than tragedy. Also, since Kott focusses on the theater of Shakespeare performance, he considers that pantomime is a significant element in the performances. Through comparison among Shakespeare's *King Lear* and two of Beckett's modern literary works, *Endgame* and *Waiting for a Godot*, Kott points out that Beckett's plays contain the factors that he emphasizes about modern tragedy or theater.

Historically, in Shakespeare's times, people believed in the idea that a Christian God had created the Earth and oversaw their daily lives. Their beliefs and ideas could not be separated from Christianity. L. C. Knights in "Shakespeare: 'King Lear' and the Great Tragedies," writes, "He had behind him the humanistic and Christian tradition of the West" ; all his tragedies including *King Lear* present "the humanistic and Christian tradition" (232). Accordingly, this is also the reason why Kott terms the tragedies of Shakespeare as "the theatre of priests" (141), that is, they are aimed at people who believe in God. Nevertheless, as time passes, people's ideas and understandings also change. Kott further says, "In modern tragedy fate, gods and nature have been replaced by history. History is the only frame of reference, the final authority to accept or reject the validity of human actions. It is unavoidable and realizes its ultimate aims; it is objective 'reason,' as well as objective 'progress'" (138-139). This reveals that Kott considers that for his contemporary readers or for modern society in general, there is no fate, gods and nature anymore. These used to prevail in Shakespeare's time. Instead of those beliefs, only history exists and has significance in modern tragedy that focusses on reason and progress that are factual and objective.

In consequence, Kott interprets: "In Shakespeare's play there is neither Christian Heaven, nor the heaven predicted and believed in by humanists. *King Lear* makes a tragic mockery of all

eschatologies: of the heaven promised on earth, and the Heaven promised after death; in fact – of both Christian and secular theodicies; of cosmogony and of the rational view of history; of the gods and the good nature, of man made in “image and likeness.” In *King Lear* both the medieval and the Renaissance orders of established values disintegrate” (147). In accordance with modern understanding, Shakespeare’s play cannot be interpreted by the humanistic and Christian tradition or by “the medieval and the Renaissance orders” (Kott 147). The notions that had been meaningful during the medieval and the Renaissance era or Shakespeare’s contemporary no longer have the same essential meanings. People started to doubt about the beliefs that everyone used to believe in Shakespeare’s times. Kott thinks that at present, there is neither Christian heaven promised on earth, nor the heaven promised after death. Several events in *King Lear* might require Christian understanding which Shakespeare’s contemporary might have had, but modern contemporary audiences no longer understand in Christian tradition and they make tragic mockery of eschatology (Kott 147). However, in these days, still religions including Christianity influence our ways of thinking. Although the modern society is not governed by Christianity like the medieval society was, we still consider that the religious reference is strong in our society, and entirely removing the ideas of Christianity from our understanding is impossible.

On Gloucester’s suicide, Kott writes that “Gloucester’s suicide has a meaning only if the gods exist. It is a protest against undeserved suffering and the world’s injustice” (149). Gloucester shouts “O you mighty gods!” (IV.vi.35), and falls to the ground attempting to commit suicide as a way of showing his protest to the gods and because he cannot bear his undeserved suffering any longer. Although the disguised Edgar lies to Gloucester that they are at the top of the cliff and Gloucester is easily deceived because of his blindness, from Gloucester’s perspective, he survives his deadly fall from a high cliff. Since Edgar says:

Ten masts at each make not the altitude
Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:
Thy life's a miracle. (IV.vi.53-55)

Gloucester believes that he is given a new life by the gods. In other words, this scene can be interpreted as his protest to the gods and also as his revival or rebirth, provided unexpectedly by the gods. Nevertheless, these circumstances become meaningful only if the gods exist.

Kott understands that Gloucester's death can become meaningful, but he supports the opposite case because he develops his idea based on a denial of the gods' existence: "If the gods, and their moral order in the world, do not exist, Gloucester's suicide does not solve or alter anything. It is only a somersault on an empty stage. It is deceptive and unsuccessful on the factual, as well as on the metaphysical plane" (149). Since Kott deems that the audience in modern society does not believe in the gods, and their moral order, he thinks they would consider that this whole scene is not objective, but rather deceptive. The character Gloucester is just "ridiculous, naive and stupid" (130) like Lear in the beginning of the play. To the audience that does not accept the Christian tradition, Gloucester is merely credulous and gullible since he believes the falsehood without doubt that Edgar tells him; he has fallen from a high cliff and miraculously survived. But if not all, some of the modern audiences still believe in Christianity and for these audiences, Gloucester's death becomes meaningful. Thus, Kott cannot affirm that the gods and their moral order do not exist in modern times. Also, Gloucester is not ridiculous or stupid.

This is also applied to Cordelia's death. Like Gloucester's suicide, where there is the same premise that the gods exist, her death can have a significant meaning in the play. For instance, in terms of the Christian tradition, Cordelia's death can be interpreted as a crucifixion and sacrifice for Lear that is founded on her love for him, and this issue will be developed in

more detail later in this paper. On the other hand, according to Kott's interpretation, these events signify only if the gods, and their moral order in the world, do exist. Kott regards Gloucester's suicide as meaningless because "Death exists in any case" (151), so Cordelia's death is also meaningless since everyone meets his or her death.

With the premise that gods, and their moral order do not exist, Kott reveals that regardless of each character's virtue, after all everyone meets his or her death. Kott states:

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 the Histories and Tragedies, in *King Lear* the world is not healed again...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 dies or been murdered. (152)

Not only does Cordelia die in the play, but also many other characters die or are murdered. At the end of the play, there are only Edgar, Albany, and Kent who have survived. There is the proclamation of a new king, but there is no one who can celebrate Edgar's becoming the new king. In this play, it is not important to notice who have survived, but one has to recognize that no other characters have survived to the end. Kott says that the theme of this whole play is "the decay and fall of the world" (152). In order to create this theme, all have to die. If everyone dies, then each death of each character including guiltless Cordelia does not have significant meaning individually. As everybody has died or been murdered, "there is no one whom Edgar can invite to the coronation" and thus, "there will be no coronation" (Kott 152). This fruitless ending of the play represents "the decay and fall of the world" (Kott 152). All deaths of the characters are to

show the deserted world where there is no one left.

Kott further adds, “Of the twelve major characters half are just and good, the other half, unjust and bad. It is a division as consistent and abstract as in a morality play. But this is a morality play in which every one will be destroyed: noble characters along with base ones, the persecutors with the persecuted, the torturers with the tortured” (152). Some audiences might deem that Cordelia’s death is cruel and unfair due to her being honest and kindhearted, while in the case of characters like Goneril and Regan who are unjust and bad, their deaths are reasonable and fair enough. But, if there are no gods, there is no moral order, and this implies that there is no justice or fairness that we can judge a character by.

Consequently, no characters can be compensated or punished justly owing to his or her being good or bad. In this play, every single character is going to be destroyed, no matter what social status the characters are in and what virtues they have or lack. *King Lear* shows every character’s fall and death in his or her world where the gods or their moral order do not exist which is similar to what all people in modern society experience in their own lives. However, Kott seems to deny analyzing the scenes one by one, but by his rejecting the ideas that gods, and their moral order exist, his answer for *King Lear* is just one; all of the characters in the play die because everyone dies. Also, Cordelia’s death as an individual does not have any significance in *King Lear*, but her death is just one of the characters’ deaths. His consideration of Cordelia’s death jumps at conclusion that because there is no gods, it is only a meaningless expression of a godless universe. If someone still believes that there are gods, and their moral order, Kott cannot persuade him or her.

Freud argues for Cordelia’s death with a different reason from Kott’s ideas, even though for him still her death does not have an essential part in *King Lear*. Freud says, “Cordelia makes

herself unrecognizable, inconspicuous . . . , she remains dumb” (27), and because of her dumbness, she represents death. Freud approaches *King Lear* with psychoanalytical theory and presents his evidence for his identification of Cordelia: “More than ten years ago a highly intelligent man told me a dream which he wanted to use as evidence of the telepathic nature of dreams. In it he saw an absent friend from whom he had received no news for a very long time, and reproached him energetically for his silence. The friend made no reply. It afterwards turned out that he had met his death by suicide at about the time of the dream” (28). This shows that one’s muteness in dreams means one’s death, and so owing to Cordelia’s relative muteness, she must be interpreted as a sign of being dead (Freud 29). Cordelia’s silence is noticed in the first scene. When Goneril magnifies her love for her father, Cordelia talks to herself, “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent” (I.i.64). Cordelia could speak out loud her true love for her father, but she chooses to be silent. Moreover, when Lear asks Cordelia, “What can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak” (I.i.87-88), he looks forward to the best answer since Cordelia is his most beloved daughter.

However, Cordelia’s answer is surprising. What she says is merely “nothing” (I.i.91). As Lear asks her to speak again, she adds, “I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less” (I.i.94-95). Cordelia’s refusal to talk about her love garrulously to her father leads Lear to be indignant with his favorite daughter, get disappointed with her, and disown her. About this reticence of Cordelia’s, Freud contends that it “directly connotes death, as muteness often does in dreams” (Kirsch 165). Cordelia’s silence can be seen as her integrity and genuineness, in contrast to her two sisters’ lengthy and affected speech of their love that is in fact falsehood. Also, Lear’s resentment against Cordelia can be seen as the cause for his incapability to recognize true and real love. On the other hand, Kirsch develops his thoughts with regard to Freud’s discussion by

arguing Cordelia's "peculiar gravity and the austerity of her insistence on the word *bond* as well as her reiteration of the word *nothing*, reflects more than her temperament" (165). Cordelia's reticence that could be shown as merely disposition is actually the only factor to identify Cordelia as a whole character in relation to death (Kirsch 165). If she represents death, her emphasizing bond can be also related to "bond with death" (Kirsch 165), and the father-daughter bond between Lear and Cordelia means a bond between a human and death. Their ultimate bond leads Lear to act towards Cordelia as how he perceives about his death. At this point, we need to pay particular attention to why Freud suggests that Cordelia represents death. He in fact exaggerates the mere characteristic of Cordelia's, and concludes that she is death. However, Cordelia shows changes later in the play as she does not keep taciturn, but she speaks out her mind to Lear, and her muteness cannot be found. In addition, we have to consider that in his analysis, there is neither Christian reference nor a concept of morality.

The identification of Cordelia as death can be possibly used as a tool to interpret the character Lear. Accordingly, the reason for Lear's indignation is not that Cordelia's answer does not satisfy him, but rather, his rage against her is "like his cosmological rage throughout the play, his refusal to 'go gentle into that good night,' his unavailing, as well as heroic, attempt to deny death and hold on to life" (Kirsch 165). For Freud, "Lear is not only an old man: he is a dying man." (33). Like all humans, he wants to deny his impending death and keep on living. As a result, because Cordelia is death, Lear's ire and his disowning of her are ways of trying to delay the time of his death permanently as he sends Cordelia away flatly by announcing that he shall never see her face again. Unfortunately, Lear's effort to deny death comes to naught in the end because no one can avoid death.

In the last scene, Lear carries Cordelia's dead body on to the stage. Once Cordelia who is

the representation of death is abandoned, she comes back to Lear and this symbol of death is right next to him at the end. Eventually Lear cannot refuse death, but at this moment, he has to follow her, “choose death and make friends with necessity of dying,” and so she “will take him into her arms” (Freud 34). In this interpretation, owing to Cordelia’s representing death, Lear’s actions can be interpreted differently from seeing them as his disowning his daughter because of his errors like his ignorance of truth. But, unlike various interpretations of Lear’s actions, Cordelia’s death is apparent. Her death does not connote any recognition by Lear or redemption of Lear, because Lear’s actions such as disowning Cordelia have a different cause, and they are not due to his errors or his flaws. There is no plot-reason for her death, but she is already destined to die because she is a depiction of death. It would be contradictory to leave the symbol of death to live happily ever after. Consequently, due to Freud’s identification of Cordelia, her death cannot be interpreted in depth as he only emphasizes one of her characteristics, her reticence, and establishes her identity as a dead woman.

Both Kott’s and Freud’s analyses are based on their modern understanding of *King Lear* and based on their arguments; Cordelia’s death is merely a meaningless event. They might be convincing as they speak for the modern society we live in and these days differ greatly from the days of Shakespeare. Their interpretations have neither Christian reference nor a concept of morality which they deem as old-established ideas and no longer valid enough. However, these ideas are still influential these days and affect our understanding, so their interpretations can be counter argued. Moreover, in order to interpret a literary work, we should understand the author’s contemporaries. Naturally, *King Lear* is also influenced by Shakespeare’s contemporaries and events in British history, and we should see his play through the lens of his contemporary understanding. In consequence, excluding Christian tradition or moral order that could not be

separated during the Elizabethan era from *King Lear* will interrupt fully understanding why Shakespeare unfolds events in the way he does. Shakespeare's use of language in this play is highly Christian. For example, when the Gentleman describes Cordelia's reaction to Kent's letters, he says, "There she shook / The holy water from her heavenly eyes, / And clamor moistened" (IV.iii.30-32). The Gentleman calls the tears of Cordelia the holy water that has been blessed, which seems to identify her as a holy person. This description of Cordelia shows Shakespeare's use of Christian language. Because the setting of the play is pre-Christian England, his use of language does not fit to the setting. Nevertheless, Shakespeare uses this type of language because it is relevant to his contemporary audience.

There are critics whose reasons are based on Christian tradition and moral order who believe that Cordelia's death is not meaningless, but actually has a significant part in the play. Moreover, even based on modern understanding, Kahn analyzes Cordelia's death as a meaningful event in the play. Before everything else, in order to consider Cordelia's death the first scene is very important and eventually causes the tragic ending of the play. This scene should be examined carefully.

At the start of the play, King Lear commands his three daughters to say which of them loves him the most before he turns over the kingdom of England which he has divided for them. His eldest daughter, Goneril, answers, "A love that makes breath poor and speech unable: / Beyond all manner of so much I love you" (I.i.62-63), and Regan says, "Find I am alone felicitate / In your dear highness' love" (I.i.74-78). King Lear is satisfied with their answers; he confers each part of the separated territory to each of them with his blessing. At this point, Cordelia's answer is that she can add "nothing," and goes on to say, "Since I am sure my love's / More Ponderous than my tongue" (I.i.79-80). So, she furthers, "Unhappy that I am, I cannot

heave / My heart into my mouth” (I.i.93-94). Since Cordelia is Lear’s favorite daughter, he has greater faith in her than in his other two daughters, and so he expects her to be more eloquent to express her love for him than them, but her speechless answer disappoints him. Moreover, at this moment, he is only concerned about the fact that he is humiliated in front of the entire court and he does not distinguish between truth and falsehood.

As a result, the king gets angry and disowns Cordelia:

Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower!
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. (I.i.110-118)

This demonstrates that Lear’s act towards Cordelia totally rejects her. She will not inherit his kingdom and he commands her to leave England. However, Lear is not just saying that she cannot have her share of the kingdom and banishing her like he does Kent. Lear believes that he has godlike power, and he can even break the laws of nature which God created and determines that he will no longer be biologically the father to his daughter. As Bradley writes, having lived “a long life of absolute power, in which he has been flattered to the top of his bent” (282), he expects everyone to flatter like Goneril and Regan do, and sycophancy is the right answer that Cordelia must also do for him. Lear is not aware of telling truth at the present, but others’ words spoken to him always should be fine-sounding. As a result, Cordelia’s unexpected and flat expression of her love gives offense to him and he cannot endure the humiliation in front of the important people. His anger and his belief in his godlike power cause him to even break the bond between father and daughter. It was conventional in the days of the play that parents passed

inheritance to their children. If Cordelia is not the biological daughter of Lear anymore since Lear wishes, then she loses her right to inherit her father's possessions. For this reason, Burgundy withdraws his offer of marriage by saying, "I am sorry then you have so lost a father / That you must lose a husband" (I.i.147-148). Cordelia replies:

Peace be with Burgundy.
Since that respects of fortune are his love,
I shall not be his wife. (I.i.249-251)

Burgundy, who only emphasizes fortune, renounces his proposal because Cordelia is now penniless.

It is only France who notices Cordelia's candidness at this moment and he says:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon.
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect. (I.i.252-257)

Through France's speech, the audience discovers that Lear foolishly cannot recognize his youngest and favorite daughter's sincerity. France names Cordelia as an "unprized precious maid" (I.i.261), which means that France realizes her virtues and her answer to Lear is actually unassuming, and it reveals her true love for her father. His words express the Christian idea that what the world prizes least is in fact the most important. Contrary to Lear and Burgundy, France does not ask for anything and takes Cordelia who is without an inheritance to his country. Thanks to France, we start to see the errors of Lear; he only cares about the humiliation that Cordelia gave him and he is blind to perceive that she is telling the truth, breaks the natural law, and abandons his only virtuous and precious daughter.

The first reason why Cordelia must be put to death is in connection with Lear's recognition of his errors. Some might argue that Lear's errors are punished not by Cordelia's

death, but by his own death. But there is a possibility that Lear is going to die before the end of the play based on his age and his intention to step down from the throne. Before Lear's asking his daughters to express their love for him, he says to everyone:

Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthend crawl toward death. (I.i.39-43)

Shakespeare does not write the reason for Lear's division, but his intention of dividing his kingdom to bequeath to his daughters can be seen as his wish to abdicate from the throne. As he says he wants to confer the kingdom to the younger generation and to unburden himself of the responsibility of reign before his death by visiting each of his daughters' households. Lear has always been on the throne and ruled over the entire kingdom that had been burdensome for him, and he wants to remove this burden and die a peaceful death with his daughters at his side. Thus, his intention of handing over his property earlier than his natural death can signify that he is preparing for his approaching death. During the rest of his life, he wishes to live comfortably under each of his daughters' care. If he is not that old, then this idea might be unconvincing. However, when Lear sees Cordelia again, he does not completely recognize her and confesses, "I am a very foolish fond old man, / Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less" (IV.vii.60-61). Lear tells that his age is more than eighty, which is very old for the time period. Throughout the play things do not turn out as he expects, and there is a possibility of old Lear's death because his pain, insanity, and especially grief for Cordelia's death may have shortened his lifespan. Old Lear's death seems much more natural than young Cordelia's death in the end. In the case of Cordelia, her death is surprising because she does not deserve punishment as she is usually considered as innocent. As Bradley assumes, "We think of her as quite young, and as

slight and small” (317), so she should be young because she is the youngest daughter of Lear.

She is just old enough to marry, and her father is about to choose to whom to marry her. Nobody would think that her death is near.

Moreover, if to let Lear realize his faults by his own death, he could be dead before, and Cordelia die afterwards or even live to the end, but Shakespeare puts Cordelia to death first and leaves Lear to cry out his daughter’s death and die right after. Cordelia is hanged and it is not just somebody else, but it is Lear who carries Cordelia’s dead body on to the stage. This is not an accident, but Shakespeare seems to make Lear see his beloved daughter’s dead body and wail as he shouts “I might have saved her; now she’s gone for ever” (V.iii.272). Lear repents his failure to save Cordelia, and what is left with him is Cordelia’s cold and dead body. There must be a motive why Lear has to suffer his favorite daughter’s death before he finally dies. This being so, Cordelia’s sudden death must have much more important meaning than Lear’s death.

On that account, by Cordelia’s death, Lear realizes that it is his fault which brings about his tragedy. About Lear’s plan to divide his kingdom by his daughters’ expression of their love for him, like William Elton states in “‘*King Lear*’ and the Gods,” “Cordelia emphasizes fidelity to truth and the bond” (114), Cordelia is the only daughter who tells the truth, and she is the one who loves the king most. On the contrary, the other two daughters are flattering to possess the territory, not because they truly love their father. Through France’s speech, the audience learns that no one recognizes Cordelia’s genuineness, and Lear also does not realize her telling truth and disowns her with anger. Due to his ignorance of truth, he undergoes anguish. In other words, the two daughters who get their inheritances neglect him and kick him out of their houses as he is no longer a ruler of England.

After his going through all the agony, it is Cordelia, the daughter Lear has disowned

before, that helps him out of the suffering and performs her duty towards her father. In this way, King Lear and his devoted daughter dramatically reunite. Yet Lear's short-lived happiness ends with the hanging of Cordelia, and this event drives Lear to finally recognize his errors. The king regrets being foolish and thoughtless and that he fell for his two daughters' honeyed words. Lear might have acknowledged that he has made a wrong decision from the moment of reunion. Lear says to Cordelia:

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
You have some cause, they have not. (IV.vii.72-75)

Lear assumes that Cordelia definitely hates him and she might want to kill him due to his wrong doings to her. However, surprisingly, she replies, "No cause, no cause" (IV.vii.75) as if she had never been angry with her father and unconditionally forgives her father for banishing her. Thereupon, they forgive each other by saying "forget and forgive" (IV.vii.85), and become happy again, being together. Through this scene, Lear sees Cordelia's sincerity and her unchangeable love for him.

Even when Lear and Cordelia are both captured in prison, Lear says:

We two alone will sing like birds i' th' 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; 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. (V.iii.9-19)

Although the place they are in is prison, it does not matter to Lear. Wherever Lear and Cordelia are, as long as they can be together, he will be happy and he can sing like a bird. He looks forward to what he will do with Cordelia. Since he is forgiven by Cordelia before, he believes

that he can erase the wrongs he did in the past. He seems to have forgotten what he did at the beginning such as how he ignored the truth, broke the natural law with his anger, and disowned her without any blessing. Because of his anger and blindness to truth, he does not merely banish Cordelia, but he even tries to break the law that God created and disowns her. The laws of nature are absolute; a man should not disobey. Lear cannot be forgiven his errors only by Cordelia, but should be forgiven by the creator. Once a human enters into a time of happiness, he or she forgets the painful period undergone and also his or her faults. Based on this fact, Gloucester whose eyes are gouged out would never forget his great pain since his physical blindness cannot be cured for the rest of his life. But for Lear, who regains his sanity by Cordelia's rescue, there is a possibility to become unaware of or forget his errors in the past to some degree. If Lear lives with Cordelia happily until his natural death like the legend of Leir of Britain, he might well make the same mistake again because of errors like his foolishness and anger, if not to Cordelia then to another person. Thus, by the death of Cordelia, Lear fully realizes that his faults committed are not mere things, but they have caused his calamity and his ruin.

Regarding Cordelia's death, we might find the motives for it with Christian reference. As a result, Cordelia can be seen as a Christ figure because she dies as a sacrifice for her father, and so, through her death, Lear is redeemed from his sin. Cavell mentions her death in "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," "What does her death mean? (cp. Christ died to save sinners)" (68), and "Cordelia is viewed as a Christ figure whose love redeems nature and transfigures Lear" (73). Moreover, Paul Siegel discusses in "Chapter X. *King Lear*," Cordelia's being a Christ figure and her leading Lear to be saved and "regenerated" (Elton 4), in more detail. Contrary to Kott and Kirsch, whose interpretations of Cordelia's death are grounded on modern understanding and modern contemporaries where they believe there is no belief in the existence

of gods, his elucidation of her death is on the basis of Christian tradition which influenced the viewpoint of an Elizabethan audience and still affects modern society. About Lear's disowning Cordelia, Siegel explains: "Lear in his rage had imperiously sent Cordelia away "without our grace, our love, our benison" (I,i,268). He had withheld his love and his blessing because she had been reticent in the expression of her feeling for him. "Nothing will come of nothing" (I,i,92) – this had been his motto. Of the love that asks for nothing in return, of the forgiveness for injuries that is freely given, he had been ignorant. When Goneril had disappointed him, he had gone to Regan, seeking the love that he was to find in Cordelia" (179). Lear fails to sense the true love of Cordelia, and so he disowns her at the beginning, while he seeks this true love in the wrong daughters, Goneril and Regan. However, both women are inhospitable to their father who accepts their love for him as true and undoubtedly hands over their share of his kingdom. Their actions show that their loves are not the true love that Lear seeks. Lear is unable to recognize the sincere love which "asks for nothing in return, of the forgiveness for injuries that is freely given" (Siegel 179). Christians believe that this type of love is ideal and the love of Christ for them is everlasting and unconditional. We can see this ideal love from Cordelia in this play.

Cordelia who has neither blessing from Lear nor her share of his kingdom, never receives her father with indifference. Moreover, she is never disappointed with her father nor does she resent him for disowning her. Instead, she feels sorrow for her father when she hears about his mistreatment by her two sisters. When the Gentleman tells Kent about Cordelia's reaction to Kent's letters, he says:

She took them, read them in my presence,
And now and then an ample tear trilled down
Her delicate cheek. (IV.iii.11-13)

This proves Cordelia's sincere and truthful feelings for her father. Afterwards, Cordelia heartily

comes back from France in order to help her father:

My mourning and importuned tears hath pitied.
No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
But love, dear love, and our aged father's right:
Soon may I hear and see him! (IV.iv.26-29).

The reason for Cordelia's coming back to England is not her ambition, but her devoted love for her father. Thus, her sincere love asks for no rewards, but it is unconditional and steadfast.

Cordelia forgives Lear when she sees him again without any conditions. In addition, Cordelia speaks with kind words like "an angel of mercy" (Siegel 179). Siegel further states, "In Cordelia's love, which finds no cause for ceasing in the injury he has done her, Lear has found the perfect pattern of love, which he is now able to see and follow" (180). Lear realizes that Cordelia's love is "the perfect pattern of love" what he sought for, and she is merciful as she forgives him unconditionally. Christians recognize that the virtues of Christ are similar to those of Cordelia. They believe that the love of Christ for them is everlasting and unconditional and Christ is also merciful since he is always willing to sacrifice for them. Consequently, Cordelia and Christ make an analogy due to their virtues.

When Cordelia dies, Lear gets really mad and there is no hope to recover his sanity because if a moment or two earlier she was found, he could have saved her (Siegel 183). Thus, it is Lear who experiences the greatest grief for her and he even "refuses to accept the reality of Cordelia's death" (183). However, Cordelia's death is actually for Lear who grieves most for it, and the resemblance between her and Christ is derived from the fact that both die for the salvation of their beloved people. Like Christ's crucifixion, Cordelia must give her life to redeem her father from his errors and allow him to rest in the heaven that is promised after death.

In order to corroborate the analogy between Cordelia and Christ, Siegel beforehand analyzes the character of Lear and his death in the end. When Lear and Cordelia are captured,

Lear even “welcomes prison, for prison with her will be a heaven” (Siegel 181). Although, Lear and Cordelia are captured in prison, this does not matter to Lear because wherever they are if they stay together, the place will be a heaven for him, they will be like “the angels of heaven,” and “they will outlive” (181). After Lear meets Cordelia again, it seems that “his education and redemption are now complete” (180). Lear believes that he and Cordelia have forgiven one another and through this mutual forgiveness, he is physically and spiritually regenerated at this moment. However, even if it is prison, Lear’s expectation of a heaven in this world “seems to be a delusion” (182), since Lear and Cordelia cannot stay together and both die in the last scene.

In the words of Siegel about the death of Lear:

His death, which puts an end to his agony, comes as a relief to the tension of the scene...But an Elizabethan audience...with their strong religious assumptions, would have felt more than such relief; they would also have experienced a greater measure of reconciliation in their perception of a deeper meaning. Lear’s final conviction that Cordelia is alive might be regarded as the mysterious insight believed to be granted a man on the point of death, the last blessing conferred upon him as he is kneeling by the corpse of his daughter. (185)

At a glance, Lear’s death seems to end this tragic world, and relief will come to Lear after his death. However, for the Elizabethan audience who are “with strong religious assumptions” (Siegel 185), Lear’s belief that Cordelia is alive is like the last benediction for him at the point of death, and indicates to the audience what will happen to Lear in his afterlife. Cordelia’s death and this last blessing actually changes where Lear is going to be after he dies. Originally, what Lear would experience after death is going to be hell. Siegel furthers, “For the Elizabethans, with their penchant for regarding what happens in this world as an analogue of what will happen in

the next world, this would have had a deep significance” (185-186). As the Elizabethans believed, when we die, we go to heaven or hell. Sinners end up going hell, while people who had no sins during their lifetime go to heaven after death. What happens and what we do in our lifetime decide where we will go and what will happen in our next world. As a result, Lear’s life in this world affects what will happen in the next world, and so he should be in hell after his death.

Throughout Lear’s present life, due to his blindness to truth and Cordelia’s unconditional love for him, he undergoes agony. Accordingly, his death does not imply an end to his anguish, but the condition of his afterlife will be analogous to his life. He will go through agony once again in the afterlife because of his flaws like the vision Lear has in the scene when “he awoke to the sight of Cordelia” (Siegel 185). Lear says when he sees Cordelia:

Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead. (IV.vii.46-48)

Lear wonders if Cordelia is a soul in heaven, but unfortunately he is in hell and suffers pain. The audience usually considers that Cordelia is innocent and this is why they believe her death is unendurable. If Cordelia committed no sins during her life, her soul will go to heaven while Lear’s soul will go to hell because of his flaws. Lear does not belong to heaven where he can relieve his pain after death, but he belongs to a place like hell due to his errors which he perpetrated in his present life.

Nevertheless, it is Cordelia who saves him from hell and redeems him from his sin.

Siegel states:

There is...a miracle greater than all the other miracles in the drama that has been wrought by the “love, dear love” (IV,iv,28) which has brought Cordelia from her high place in another country to suffer in gentle fortitude for the sake of Lear. This miracle is

the redemption of Lear for heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the Son of God had come down to earth. The analogy between Cordelia and Christ, who redeemed human nature from the curse brought on it by Adam and Eve, (186)

When Lear rejects Cordelia, France leads her away to his own country. France declares:

Thy dow'erless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France. (I.i.258-259)

This illustrates that she is no longer the youngest princess of England, but she is a queen of France. Cordelia could remain in her high place, but she willingly leaves France to suffer since Cordelia truly loves her father and she is always ready to endure any kind of sufferings for the sake of her father. Cordelia asserts, "O dear father, / It is thy business that I go about" (IV.iv.23-24), which shows her volition that she is going to take care of her father's business in England. Correspondingly, Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, sincerely loves his sinful people and he is summoned by God to carry out his father's business for his people on earth. Also, Cordelia's speech is analogous what Jesus Christ says in the Bible. Jesus Christ says, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (*The English Bible*, Luke 2:49) which reminds Joseph and Mary where his true familial loyalty lies. So, Christ comes down from heaven to the earthly world in order to sacrifice, redeem his hopeless people, and ultimately accomplish his father's business. Moreover, like Jesus Christ dies by crucifixion to atone for mankind's sin and bring salvation to them for heaven, Cordelia dies for a similar reason.

Christians believe that they got separated from God because of sin that originated in Adam and Eve. However, Jesus Christ comes from heaven to earth and dies on the cross to save them for heaven. Subsequently, Christ ascends to heaven where God or his father is. Owing to the crucifixion of Christ, Christians are convinced that they may be eligible to go to heaven after

their deaths and be reconciled with God. This understanding can also have relevance to Cordelia and Lear. Cordelia has to leave England because Lear is ignorant of Cordelia's truthful love, and so due to his blindness or his errors, they get separated. Nonetheless, Cordelia gladly comes back from France where she can stay in high place to England to rescue him from danger. In the end, Cordelia dies for Lear in order to save his soul to go to heaven. Since Lear identifies Cordelia as the soul in heaven, she deservedly goes back to heaven after her death. Identical to Christ, Cordelia redeems Lear from his errors through her death and leads him to rest in heaven after his death. In the end, they eternally reunite in heaven. Therefore, the correspondence between Cordelia and Christ is established due to their similar virtues and actions, and they have many similarities to say that it is just coincidental. Shakespeare is also one of the Elizabethan contemporaries who are accustomed to Christian tradition, and his use of Christian language supports this. For this reason, Cordelia's death resembles Christ's death, and Shakespeare makes Cordelia die to signify the redemption of Lear for heaven.

Due to the analogy between Cordelia and Christ, Cordelia's death becomes meaningful based on Christian reference. Also, when Cordelia's death is considered in accordance with the concept of morality, her death gives meaningful lesson to the audience. Another persuasive purpose for Cordelia's death is to inform that good does not always win against evil. Most of the old tales that the audience had read in their childhoods contain plots that have didactic endings built on reward the good and punish the wicked. Consequently, the hanging of Cordelia is a shock to the audience who has believed in this moral and tried to lead a life of virtue. In fact, the murder of Regan and the suicide of Goneril present the audience a sort of satisfaction. Goneril and Regan are hypocrites who pretend that their love towards their father is eternal, but actually they are obsequious to the king in power and heartlessly abandon their father when he is without

authority, as they already have acquired their share of the dominion. What is worse, they both are eager to gain Edmund's affections, and so Goneril poisons her own younger sister. On that ground, their deaths are a means for expiation and also they are justified. Moreover, as Shakespeare adds a subplot of Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund, the deaths of Gloucester and Edmund are also reasonable according to a matter of justice. Edmund at first narrates, "Edmund the base / Shall top th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper. / Now gods, stand up for bastards" (I.ii.20-22), and plots to deprive his legitimate brother, Edgar's power and betrays their father, Gloucester. Rightfully, he was stabbed by his older brother, Edgar. In addition, Edgar says near the end of the play:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us:
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes. (V.iii.172-175)

For that reason, Gloucester's losing his sight is because of his adultery. The gods punish Gloucester because of his wrong doing. Thus, the gods are just who rightly judge and punish the vices.

Still on the subject of Cordelia, it is impossible to decide finally that the gods are fair and just. The issue leaves an uncertainty that even though the wicked are punished, the gods have not taken the side of goodness. From the beginning of the play, Cordelia speaks the truth and she never loses her deep love for Lear even though she is disowned by him. When the king and his daughter reunite, Cordelia is not at all angry at her father, rather she worries about him in pain as she narrates:

O my dear father, restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made. (IV.vii.26-29)

Cordelia is not clever in her behavior, which emphasized her taciturnity, but unlike her two sisters, she is honest and innocent throughout the whole play. This means that the symbol of virtue being killed deviates from the natural idea of justice. Cordelia should not be murdered, but survive and succeed to the end. In this connection, Stephen Booth in “On the Greatness of *King Lear*” makes reference to Johnson who gives his account of Shakespeare’s purpose of Cordelia’s death: “Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles...A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life:” (5-6). This suggests even though Cordelia’s death disappoints “our hopes and our natural ideas of justice” (Booth 6), that her death shows that human’s events in their lives cannot be righteous and fair deals all the time. Unjustly, the wicked can succeed and win against the good, whereas the good get ruined. Bradley mentions that “every one of Shakespeare’s tragedies contradicts, ‘that Truth and Virtue shall at last succeed’” (252). If Cordelia is guiltless, but she is hanged in the end, then her death contradicts justice or good’s triumph over evil. Shakespeare might have wanted to let the audience know about this fact through Cordelia’s death, that Cordelia is hanged because even though the audience believes that God exists and God judges them based on justice, it is true that in reality God is not always on the side of good. On that account, in *King Lear*, Shakespeare takes Cordelia’s life to reverse the idea of justice existing and reveals the reality of this world. Only being good and virtuous cannot survive this world, and truth and virtue do not always triumph. Therefore, Cordelia must die to give the audience an illumination that justice can fail and goodness does not always win even though they carries on pursuing the natural ideas of justice.

The reason why Cordelia's death is considered deplorable and unendurable is because the audience thinks that Cordelia is guiltless and virtuous. However, some might argue that Cordelia also makes an error because Cordelia's silence makes Lear angry in the first scene, and she should not have kept reticent. Bradley analyzes *King Lear* in this way, and he argues Cordelia does not suffer or die due to Lear's tragic flaw or his recognition, but she does so because of her own fault. If Cordelia is not innocent, she neither deserves to be a soul in heaven, nor can she save Lear's soul for heaven. Nevertheless, Cordelia's death and also Lear's death are still meaningful even though Cordelia's guiltlessness is counter argued. Bradley also believes in the existence of afterlife even though he does not mention about heaven or hell, and accordingly the suffering and death of Lear and Cordelia is a necessary and positive experience for their afterlives. It is not included to evoke the audience's pity or fear, but because of each character's own errors. Through the suffering, Lear and Cordelia both realize and repent of their errors, and grow to be better people in this world. As a result, when they die, their souls in the next world are not bound to their guilt that needs to be judged or punished, but their souls will be set free due to their sufferings in the physical world. Consequently, the deaths of Lear and Cordelia are not the lamentable matters, but they signify the freedom of their souls.

Starting with the very first scene, Bradley states:

The dependence of the division on the speeches of the daughters was in Lear's intention a mere form, devised as a childish scheme to gratify his love of absolute power and his hunger for assurances of devotion. And this scheme is perfectly in character...And it is essential to observe that its failure, and the consequent necessity of publicly reversing his whole well-known intention, is one source of Lear's extreme anger...he looked forward was that in which Cordelia should outdo her sisters in expressions of

affection, ...she put him to open shame. (250)

This is where the tragedy of Lear starts, since nothing is like Lear expected and his scheme fails. The ground for his failure is his character. Lear is going to hand over his kingdom to his daughters, but he wants to hear how much they each love him in front of everybody before he bequeaths his property. As a king of England, Lear believes that he has enough power and wealth to command anything and anybody. By his questioning his daughters, he wants to show others that he is that powerful and his daughters love him to that extent. Lear has confidence that his daughters are going to do as he expects. Especially, he looks forward to what his favorite daughter, Cordelia, will say about her love for him because he openly shows his preference for his youngest daughter as he refers her as “our joy” (I.i.84). Since “he loved Cordelia most and knew that she loved him best,” he has confidence that her expression of affection will be “the most ‘opulent’” and then “he meant to live with Cordelia, and with her alone” (Bradley 250). If Lear knew well enough about Cordelia’s love, no matter how she acts or expresses, he could have lived with Cordelia even though his prediction is not correct. Although Cordelia’s answer does not satisfy Lear, he could have forgiven her as she is his favorite daughter. However, he cannot bear the open shame that Cordelia brings him. Everyone knows that Lear is the king of England with absolute power, and everyone fawns upon King Lear just like Goneril and Regan. Lear is used to these conditions, and so Lear fails to repress his fulminating anger and disowns Cordelia. Because of Lear’s bent on his absolute power, and extreme anger, he is blind to recognize his one and only truthful daughter.

Compulsively, as Bradley adds, “The scheme of his alternate monthly stay with Goneril and Regan is forced on him at the moment by what he thinks the undutifulness of his favorite child” (250). Again this time, his plan does not work, and Goneril and Regan both treat him

cruelly. Lear gets forced out from their houses. An audience might feel pity at this moment because Goneril and Regan are too cruel to their own father, but it actually shows his temper as he showers abuse upon them in anger:

Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.
Into her womb convey sterility,
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honor her. If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child. Away, away! (I.iv.283-296)

Since Lear used to be an absolute monarch, he believes that he is omnipotent like God, but he is treated in an entirely different way. Accordingly, it is not an issue whether Goneril and Regan “deserve these appalling imprecations” (Bradley 283), but how Lear reacts to his daughters’ actions. Lear cannot understand how come his daughter dares to disobey his orders, and neglects him. Lear does not passively accept this situation, but he curses his children. Lear even prays to Nature to let Goneril to be childless in future, and if she must have child, the child will ruin her life. As a father, no one would want his child to be unfortunate. In the case of Lear, he curses his own daughter to be sterile because of his extreme anger at his children. Lear cannot accept his children’s attitudes that he thinks they dared to behave rudely to him. In consequence, due to his errors, he gets to be left out in the storm and he starts to suffer badly.

Lear’s suffering is not because of Cordelia’s stubbornness or the other two daughters’ cruelty, but it is because of his tragic flaws such as his pride in his godlike power, his blindness to the hypocrisy, and his extreme anger to his daughters. Lear’s suffering throughout the play is

like “a recollection of the wrong” (Bradley 280). If Lear’s character were not like this, he could have acted differently and recognized his one and only dutiful child, Cordelia, and lived with her happily ever after. Because of Lear’s extreme anger, his blindness to truth, and his hideous rashness, he abandons Cordelia and chooses his other two daughters. On this account, his suffering begins. Nonetheless, Bradley does not only emphasize the causes of Lear’s suffering, but also what he perceives to be more significant, Lear’s knowledge gained through his suffering. Lear learns a lesson that his flaws bring about his adversities. After Lear’s mistreatment by his two daughters and his experiencing the storm, Lear starts to control himself. Bradley states this type of change in Lear as “the effect of suffering in reviving the greatness and eliciting the sweetness of Lear’s nature” (284). Bradley furthers, “On his recovery, unites with the streams of repentance and love, it produces that serene renunciation of the world, with its power and glory and resentments and revenges” (289). After his suffering, Lear no longer expresses his confidence in his power or extreme anger which cause him to disown Cordelia and undergo anguish. Lear learns to renounce what he used to perceive as good and valuable, like an absolute authority, glory, and family, and also his errors built due to his certain perception lead him into agony. Owing to his agony, his good nature such as repentance and love that are latent can revive, and he grows to be better and greater.

Similarly, Cordelia undergoes anguish because of her own fault. When Cordelia answers “nothing” to Lear, the most of the audience discovers by the speech of France that Cordelia is the only daughter who tells the truth to him. However, Bradley states, “truth is not the only good in the world, nor is the obligation to tell truth the only obligation...And Cordelia’s speech not only tells much less than truth about her love, it actually perverts the truth when it implies that to give love to a husband is to take it from a father. There surely never was a more unhappy speech”

(320-321). Lear's errors might have caused Cordelia to be banished, but actually Lear's anger is derived from Cordelia's answer. Cordelia's purpose for her answer is not to satisfy her father, but to focus on telling truth. Surely, truth is a virtue, but Cordelia's sincerity does lead to her banishment. This is because Cordelia tries to be sincere because of her "hatred of hypocrisy and of the faintest appearance of mercenary professions" (Bradley 321). Yet, Cordelia should have said more than "nothing" to satisfy her father. Cordelia's speech "actually perverts" (Bradley 321) her true love for her father. Cordelia's answer reveals her specific hatred that is "mingled with a touch of personal antagonism and of pride" (Bradley 321). Since Cordelia does not want to express her true love for Lear merely because of mercenary aims, she unbendingly keeps reticent owing to her "sense of dignity" (Bradley 321), and the pride of her principles and candidness. Accordingly, Cordelia is not abandoned because of Lear's extreme anger or his complete blindness to hypocrisy, but she suffers because of her pride and sense of personal dignity. Although Cordelia marries France and becomes queen of France, she is mercilessly disowned by her father and banished from her home country that purports her suffering. Similar to Lear, after her suffering, she shows a change in her nature, and she becomes much more emotional. Cordelia refuses to express her emotions in the first scene, but later in the play, the Gentleman portrays Cordelia: "You have seen / Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears / Were like a better way" (IV.iii.18-20), that well shows her expression of various emotions. Cordelia also learns about her faults through her own suffering and grows to be better, and so they forgive each other by acknowledging their faults.

About Cordelia's death and also Lear's death, because Lear and Cordelia forgive each other and grow to be better through their sufferings, their deaths seem to be unnecessary and surprising. Bradley writes, "The tragic world, if taken as it is presented, with all its error, guilt,

failure, woe and waste, is no final reality” (324). The tragic world where Lear and Cordelia both suffer and die in the end is not the final end, and “goodness should be prosper is wrong” because they live in the physical world and “the outward is nothing and the inward is all” (Bradley 326). We should not deem that it is unjustifiable to let Lear and Cordelia die miserable deaths. There is going to be an afterlife when they die. The tragic world is for the bodies and the next world is for the souls. What Bradley emphasizes is not body or outward, but soul or inward. Bradley writes: “The good are seen growing better through suffering, and the bad worse through success. The warm castle is a room in hell, the storm-swept heath a sanctuary. The judgment of this world is a lie; its goods, which we covet, corrupt us; its ills, which break our bodies, set our souls free...Let us renounce the world, hate it, and lose it gladly. The only real thing in it is the soul, with its courage, patience, devotion” (327). Not only their sufferings matter greatly, but do their deaths also matter greatly because even though they damaged their bodies through their sufferings, they could grow by renouncing the physical world. Consequently, their souls could be set free after the deaths of their bodies. As a result, when Cordelia dies, Lear exclaims, “Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips, / Look there, look there” (V.iii.312-313), and he dies. This reveals that “he is sure, at last, that she lives” (Bradley 291). Bradley writes, “Finally, though he is killed by an agony of pain, the agony in which he actually dies is one not of pain but of ecstasy” and there is “an unbearable joy” in Lear’s gestures and look (291). Lear seems to be in despair about Cordelia’s death, but he actually sees hope that Cordelia lives. This can be seen as his deception that “may bring a culmination of pain” (Bradley 291), but this can be wrong because what he sees is not Cordelia’s coming to life again. Instead, Lear sees Cordelia’s soul lives after her death. Although both Lear and Cordelia suffer in the tragic world, Lear acknowledges that his and Cordelia’s souls will be set free after their deaths. So, he feels “unbearable joy” (Bradley 291)

when Cordelia dies and, subsequently, he dies in joy. Consequently, Cordelia's death and also Lear's death are both meaningful because their deaths mean that their souls live and are extricated from this world, its goods and their broken bodies.

Kahn focusses on the fact that "there is no literal mother in *King Lear*" (35). Similar to Freud, she does a psychoanalytical approach and analyzes the hero, Lear, and her analysis corresponds to modern understanding, but is different from Freud; she believes that Cordelia's death is meaningful. Kahn juxtaposes the traditional idea of Elizabethan era and the gender issue that became influential in modern times. In other words, Kahn discovers the absence of mother in *King Lear* and emphasizes the fact that the characters live in a patriarchal society which is analogous to Shakespeare's days. Kahn also argues that because there is no mother whom Lear can rely on in the play, Lear wishes to remove the strict rules of the male-dominated world, and he treats his beloved Cordelia as both daughter and mother. For that reason, Cordelia's death leads Lear to be aware that "a daughter cannot be a mother" (49). In the words of Kahn:

The earlier anonymous play that is one of Shakespeare's main sources opens with a speech by the hero lamenting the death of his "dearest Queen." But Shakespeare, who follows the play closely in many respects, refers only once in passing to this queen. In the crucial cataclysmic first scene of his play, from which all its later action evolves, we are shown only fathers and their godlike capacity to make or mar their children. Through this conspicuous omission the play articulates a patriarchal conception of the family in which children owe their existence to their fathers alone; the mother's role in procreation is eclipsed by the father's, which is used to affirm male prerogative and male power...The only source of love, power, and authority is the father – an awesome, demanding presence. (35-36)

Shakespeare's major source is the anonymous play *The True Chronicle Historie of King Leir and his Three Daughters; Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*, but in this anonymous play, Leir abdicates from the throne because his wife died and he feels lost without her. But Shakespeare effaces the existence of the queen. This means that from the start of the play, Lear has no wife and three daughters have no mother. Unlike the anonymous play informing when the queen died, Shakespeare's play does not tell when the queen died or what happened to the queen. This makes the existence of only fathers to be much more emphasized. The audience starts to comprehend that there are only fathers, and the female characters are only three princesses. Because "the family of Shakespeare's day saw a striking increase in the father's power over his wife and children" (Kahn 38), and also there is no mother in the play, it well shows the love, power and authority of the fathers. Thus, the patriarchal world is highlighted, and the problem comes from the failure of the mothers' presence and the patriarchy's domination which "was considered the natural order of things" in Shakespeare's day (Kahn 38).

Kahn states:

As man, father, and ruler, Lear has habitually suppressed any needs for love, which in his patriarchal world would normally be satisfied by a mother or mothering woman.

With age and loss of vigor...Lear feels those needs again and hints at them in his desire to "crawl" like a baby "toward death." Significantly, he confesses them in these phrases the moment after he curses Cordelia for her silence, the moment in which he denies them most strongly. He says, "I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest / On her kind nursery" (I.i.123-24). (40)

In this patriarchal world, Lear has to have responsibility to his family and he has to be "man, father, and ruler" (Kahn 40), who should not be weak or feeble, but strong and mighty. He also

has to display love, power and authority to his family. He should not express “any needs for love” (Kahn 40). However, as Lear becomes old and infirm, he fails to suppress those needs and he wants kind nursery from his daughters since his three daughters are the only women characters and his mother or even his wife are absent. In other words, Lear looks for a “mothering woman” (Kahn 40) among his daughters, especially his most beloved daughter, Cordelia, who can satisfy his needs. As a result, as Kahn says: “Lear’s contest of love in the first scene functions as a maintenance agreement in that he tries to bind his daughters, by giving them their inheritance while he is still alive, into caring for him. This generational bargain is then complicated by the demands proper to gender as well – the father’s emotional demand that his daughters be his mothers and perform the tasks of nurture proper to females” (44-45). At first, Lear wants his beloved daughter, Cordelia, to give him kind nursery and care for him like his mother, but he gets angry with his favorite daughter and disowns and disinherits her because she does not express her love as he expected. As he gives the other two daughters their inheritance, he is forced to go to the other daughters’ houses and ask them to care for him. Lear considers the father-daughter bond among himself and his daughters is reciprocal as he gets care until his natural death by letting his daughters inherit their shares of his property earlier. Lear believes that he could get care from his daughters like from a mother.

Unfortunately, “Regan and Goneril betray and disappoint Lear by not being mothers to him” (Kahn 45), and they “prove to be bad mothers and don’t satisfy his needs for ‘nursery’” (Kahn 40). At this moment, Lear starts to realize “his vulnerability and dependency” (Kahn 40), which reveal his femininity, and he rages at “being deprived of the maternal presence” (Kahn 41). “The one and only good woman” (Kahn 46) is Cordelia. Although she is silent in the first scene, her love is the only true one, like Kahn says, “Cordelia’s goodness is as absolute and inexplicable

as her sisters' reprobable badness" (46). Cordelia is the mother figure which Lear looks for. Some readers might think that Lear's perception on Cordelia as the mother figure is unconvincing, but it is true that his love for Cordelia is more serious than a father's love for his daughter, and he easily reveals his vulnerability to her as he really wants her care. Also, Cordelia's goodness is absolute, and her sincere love for Lear is unconditional which is the typical characteristic of maternal love. Cordelia worries about Lear and nurses him just like a mother always does to her children. Cordelia is the "daughter-mother Lear wanted her to be," and she can only be 'the foster-nurse' of Lear's repose" (Kahn 47).

Throughout the play, even though Lear fails to hide "his vulnerability and dependency" (Kahn 40), he struggles between his masculine identity and femininity as he "asserts his kingship, but he behaves like a mischievous child" (Kahn 47) who needs the care of his mother. When Lear sees Cordelia again, like Kahn states, "Lear acknowledges his manhood and his daughter's womanhood in the same line and the same breath...he also calls her his child, acknowledging the bond of paternity that he denied in the first act" (48). Kahn further states, "Lear's struggle to discover or create a new mode of being based on his love for Cordelia continues to his last breath. Imagining their life together in prison, he transcends the rigid structure of command and obedience that once framed his world" (48). In the prison, there is no need for Lear to struggle because there is neither hierarchy nor "rigid structure of command and obedience" (Kahn 48). There is no frame that confines the father to evince his masculinity and the daughter to show her obedience. Father and daughter are equal as the prison is another world, and in this new world, Lear can stay with his one and only loving woman, Cordelia. In consequence, Lear does not want to meet his other two daughters, Goneril and Regan. Kahn gives her reason: "If he did agree to meet Regan and Goneril, he would have to abandon the fantasy that one good woman like

Cordelia can triumph over or negate her evil counterparts, as well as the fantasy that a prison can be a nursery” (49). Lear wants to stay in the nursery only with “his good mother” and he wants to live in his fantasy forever. Seeing Regan and Goneril again means Lear has to return to the real world. Living in a new world only with Cordelia, also where Cordelia can be both mother and daughter, and no one cares how he identifies her is how Lear wants to live. Although Lear and Cordelia are in prison, Lear is living in his fantasy with Cordelia at this moment. Accordingly, he refuses to meet “his bad mothers” which will lead him to abandon his fantasy (Kahn 49).

However, Shakespeare does not leave this father and daughter in the prison, but he breaks Lear’s fantasy in a different way; he puts Cordelia to sudden death. Kahn writes: “Cordelia’s death prevents Lear from trying to live out his fantasy, and perhaps discover once again that a daughter cannot be a mother. When he enters bearing Cordelia in his arms, he is struggling to accept the total and irrevocable loss of the only loving woman in his world, the one person who could possibly fulfill needs that he has, in such anguish, finally come to admit...At the end of *King Lear*, only men are left” (49). Although Lear cannot accept that she is dead, his fantasy cannot last forever because Cordelia cannot be both daughter and mother. Lear has to realize the reality that his fantasy cannot happen in this world. Because Lear is a man, father, and ruler of England, he has to display his masculine authority to his family and his people. Even if he could disclose his vulnerability and dependency to his mother, he should not do that to his daughters in this patriarchal world. Moreover, any fantasies cannot stay in the tragic world of *King Lear*. Kahn says, “It remains for Shakespeare to re-imagine a world in his last plays in which masculine authority can find mothers in its daughters...the world of pastoral tragicomedy and romance, the genres of wish-fulfillment” (49). Lear’s fantasy can happen in the world where all wishes can be fulfilled like “the world of pastoral tragicomedy.” On the other hand, in the

tragic world, fantasies or wishes cannot be accomplished and in the end of this tragic world, only men survive which further emphasizes the power and authority of males in the patriarchal society. Therefore, Cordelia must die to show that Lear's fantasy cannot become a reality, and so Cordelia, who is the daughter of Lear, cannot also be his mother.

In conclusion, *King Lear* is actually based on the several possible sources that finish with a happy ending. Conversely, Shakespeare alters the ending tragically by putting King Lear and his youngest daughter Cordelia to lamentable deaths. Owing to a matter of justice, the death of pure Cordelia induces the audience to throw it into question. Some critics argue that Cordelia's death is a matter of no importance, for example, Kott assesses; since there is no belief in the existence of gods or their moral order in modern society, her death is merely a meaningless expression of a godless universe. According to Freud's identification, Cordelia represents death because of her muteness, and so she should not live, but die. Kott's and Freud's assessments have the premise that Christian tradition and moral ideas are both useless concepts in modern society, and so they interpret *King Lear* without these references. Nonetheless, those ideas prevailed in Shakespeare's time, and even in these days, they remain a strong influence on our thinking. Even though times have changed, it is important to interpret *King Lear* through the perspective of Shakespeare's contemporary audiences. On that account, owing to other critics' scrutiny, the hanging of Cordelia has significant meanings. For instance, Cordelia's death provokes Lear's recognition of his errors. King Lear realizes that his foolishness of not knowing the truth and that his anger have broken the natural law, and caused the misfortune. In accordance with Christian reference, Siegel argues that Cordelia resembles Jesus Christ. Accordingly, similar to the death of Christ, her death is like a crucifixion that causes salvation of Lear for heaven. Moreover, Cordelia must die to let the audience notice the existence of justice in this world. In other words,

even though vice is punished, the good dies as well. Thus, goodness does not always survive and triumph over evil. For Bradley, the characters' suffering and death matter greatly in the play because characters learn lessons through suffering and begin to renounce the goods of the tragic world. Also, they die in joy without regret as they are aware that their souls will be free after death owing to their suffering in the physical world. Thus, Cordelia's death suggests the freedom of her soul after her death. In the case of Kahn, she is concerned about the gender issue in the play and focusses on the absence of mother figures, and highlights the fact that the characters live in a patriarchal society. Since there is no literal mother in the play, Lear searches for a mothering woman among his daughters, and he believes that the one and only loving daughter, Cordelia is the mother figure he looked for. But, Cordelia dies to let Lear realize that his daughter cannot be his mother.

It is true that we cannot discuss Cordelia without analyzing the protagonist, Lear, since the play is about King Lear. However, it is also true that Shakespeare leaves us uncertain about the character Lear. We cannot clarify why innocent Cordelia dies in the end contrary to the happy endings of the probable sources. That is why critics try to find the reasons for Shakespeare's alteration. If Shakespeare had guided the audience or the readers to notice a definite reason why he puts Cordelia to death, then there would not have been so many convincing interpretations of her death. Each scene of the play can be interpreted diversely and accordingly the reasons vary as her death can be analyzed in so many different ways. The critics do not merely guess the reasons without evidence, but their analyses are well-founded conjectures. Therefore, even though Shakespeare leaves us uncertain about the tragic death of Cordelia, owing to the persuasive reasons given by the critics' scrutiny, we try to understand that Cordelia must die to accomplish Shakespeare's specific aims, and thus her death is meaningful.

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