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Editor's Note

We are pleased to bring out the second issue of *Ideas- A Journal of Literature, Arts and Culture*.

We are delighted to offer this issue with articles on arts, literature and culture illuminating the complexities of civic literacy and the barriers to greater civic participation, with suggestions and views of the authors for the upliftment of the society as a whole.

They range from deeply personal to the dextrorously satirical to the humorous, but all leave behind footprints on which every reader will find the charisma to trend; unalone; accompanied by the authors.

We welcome your comments on these articles, as well as your submission of your own research. Please send them to ideas.bangladesh@gmail.com

Professor Mustafizur Rahman
Editor-in-Chief
IDEAS

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Just Trivial or Weighty: A Study on Beckett's Tramps from Shakespearean Fool to Ahmad's Vagabonds in *Waiting for Godot*, *King Lear* and *The Thing*

Rahman M. Mahbub*

Abstract

This paper examines the presence and significance of vagabonds in Shakespeare's King Lear, Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Ahmad's The Thing, and attempts to identify how Beckett's tramps are similar to Shakespearean fool and Ahmad's vagabonds. Lear's Fool tells the truths by criticizing his master and reminding him of the wrong decisions he has made whereas the vagabonds in Waiting for Godot and The Thing tell truths about the harsh reality and predicaments of human existence in different forms and faces. The use of language is different from one another because they manipulate it to create misunderstanding and word games in implicit and philosophic manners. Through the actions and dialogues of Beckett's tramps and Ahmad's vagabonds, we can perceive that life is absurd and that we live in a world full of uncertainties. Apparently, the fool, the tramps and the vagabonds may seem trivial but they are of great significance in the theater and have a distinctive manner of interrelating with other characters as well as with the audiences through their philosophic voices telling the truth.

Key words: *King Lear; Waiting for Godot; The Thing; philosophic foolery; reality of absurdity*

Martin Esslin, perhaps the best known critic of the Theater of the Absurd, believes Shakespeare's plays are "akin in their ultimate sense to the contemporary Theater of the Absurd" (Kott, 1964, p.xix). And, Jan Kott's book *Shakespeare, our Contemporary* (1964), was highly praised by Martin Esslin since it is an attempt to bring together Beckett and Shakespeare as our contemporaries. One must agree with Esslin that Shakespeare and Beckett are "akin" if he means that both writers deal with the human circumstance, man's nature, man's impermanence, man's surrounds, and the mystery of his existence. No doubt, this is a kinship they share with all great dramatists. And, this is the case in Sayeed Ahmad also. Ahmad's plays are very much

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realistic where he blends the absurd form with the real incidents familiar to the audience. The subjects of Ahmad's plays are the relentless cruelty of cyclone, famine and of contemporary social and political crisis. Martin Esslin opines that Theatre of the Absurd is concerned with the ultimate realities of the human condition and problems and that it is "intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe" (Esslin, 2004, p.402). This preoccupation with making the audience aware of man's condition is a dominant characteristic in Ahmad's plays as well.

As not enough attention has been given to the recurrent presence of vagabonds in world literature, in this article an attempt is made to shed some light on the Fool in *King Lear* to identify how Beckett's tramps in *Waiting for Godot* are similar to Shakespearean fool and Ahmad's vagabonds in *The Thing* from the philosophical perspectives concentrating on the reality of absurdity in their works. Lear's Fool tells the truths by criticizing his master and reminding him of the wrong decisions he has made whereas the vagabonds in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Thing* tell truths about the harsh reality and predicaments of human existence in different forms and aspects. The use of language is different from one another because they manipulate it to create misunderstanding and word games in an implicit and philosophic manner. Through the actions and dialogues of Beckett's tramps and Ahmad's vagabonds, we can perceive that life is absurd and that we live in a world full of uncertainties. Apparently, the fool, the tramps and the vagabonds may seem trivial but they are of great significance in the theater and have a distinctive manner of interrelating with other characters as well as with the audiences.

To analyze Shakespearean fools and the Theater of the Absurd, I decided to work with Samuel

Beckett's absurd play *Waiting for Godot*, Ahmad's *The Thing* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Because of the presence of the Fool, we feel closer to Lear and able to understand and connect with him. Lear's Fool is not a part of the tragic plot of the play, but is, most of the time, by Lear's side to clarify him as well as the audience, through his wrongdoings. He is often engaged in word-plays and riddles to try to entertain Lear and take his mind off from his master's misdeeds. Lear's Fool is, according to Welsford, "an all-licensed critic who sees and speaks the real truth about the people around

him" (Welsford, 1966, p.256); and being a critic of Lear's actions, he also philosophically explains the spectators about matters of our own lives.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett tries conveying the absurdity of life through the language of the two tramps - Vladimir and Estragon to show that communication is useless. The lack of hope and certainty as well as the continual use of repetition has the role of showing the stagnation in the lives of tramps. Our uncertainty nowadays is linked to all the horrible things that happen in the world and that we cannot control. Everything in life is too transient, and that is what causes the feeling of uncertainty. This lack of certainty is one of the things that makes the truths Vladimir and Estragon say different from the truths we find in Lear's Fool as well as in Ahmad's vagabonds.

One of the most innovative disciples of Beckett, Ahmad owes his fame to the fusion of absurdity and realism. Williams says, "Sayeed's philosophy is very firmly based in the mysticism and tradition of his Bengali heritage" (quoted in *Three Plays*, 1989). He fashions his dramatic writing based on the reality, and perpetually employs real characters in his works. Yet, Ahmad's plays, like Beckett's, take the audience into the anxious world and abruptly they find themselves in an uncanny, and bizarre atmosphere that elicits they sink in bewilderment.

In *The Thing*, Ahmad presents trivial action and comic elements through the characters called Man and Convict, as they do nothing important within the play like the characters of *Waiting for Godot* on surface level. Man, whose name is Whistlemanfluteman, in his first appearance utters words which are crammed with philosophic hopelessness and utter uncertainty:

"It is already dark. How funny. I must be exhausted.
[There are six beats of the gong] Oh, it is only six. Did I
count it correctly? Probably. Well the Bellman could be
wrong just as I could be wrong (Ahmad, 2012, p.12).

Uncertainty plays a big part both in *The Thing* and in *Waiting for Godot*.

Over 300 years after Shakespeare wrote *King Lear*, Irish playwright Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* and 7 years after Beckett, Bengali

Playwright Sayeed Ahmad wrote *The Thing*. Like Lear's Fool, the main characters of Beckett's and Ahmad's play can also be identified as fools. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky open the audience's eyes to hidden truths or to the truths are not hidden, but that the audience chooses to ignore; and they also use verbal language and visual foolery for comedy, two of the well-known characteristics of fools. Out of the four characters, this paper will focus mainly on Vladimir and Estragon. I believe these two characters are the true Beckettian heroes because of the way they portray the absurdity of our lives. My reading of Beckett's play made me realize that we cannot always understand what is happening with our lives, we do not always know what we are waiting for, and, at the same time, we try to find things that "give us the impression we exist," (Beckett, 1997). Vladimir and Estragon make the spectators face facts and question by themselves about matters in their own lives, unveiling the helplessness of life.

Beckett's play does have the atmosphere of make-believe, with actions happening on a country road with a tree in the background and a boy appearing at the end of each act saying that Godot will not be able to be there that night, but will surely meet them the following day. However, underneath the plays apparent unpretentiousness, lack of solidity, and triviality, there is a sad and harsh truth behind the lives, actions, and dialogues of Vladimir and Estragon. One of the common interpretations of the play is that, through the hopelessness and meaninglessness of Didi and Gogo's lives, we realize that our own lives might also be hopeless and meaningless. Perhaps we are all, like the characters in the play, pointlessly waiting and hoping for something – or someone – to change that will never come or come up with nothing as "Nothing will come of nothing (*King Lear*, Act I, Scene i).

Cordelia's "nothing" is the first of many utterances of the word in *King Lear*, as is Estragon's "nothing" in *Waiting for Godot*, of which "nothing" is also the opening word. The play's first line reads, "Nothing to be done," (Godot, Act I), which echoes Goneril's "There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror" (*King Lear*, Act IV, Scene vi) in her letter to Edmund arranging for her husband's death. Headman's "nothing" in *The Thing*, is also almost an expression akin to both Cordelia's and Estragon's "nothing":

Headman: Nothing

U.Nen : How on earth? It is impossible.

Headman: Yes nothing, simply nothing (Ahmad, 2012, p.6).

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Commonly *King Lear*, *Waiting for Godot* and *The Thing* obsessively contemplate what exists at the root of the human condition, and all come up with nothing. Shakespeare peels away layers of Lear one at a time—his title, his kingdom, his knights—until he goes mad and finally perishes. Beckett's story begins and ends with madness and absurdity. It takes place nowhere. The idea that nothing lies at the core of humanity is also put forth by Gustave Flaubert in *Madame Bovary*, in which Charles' autopsy at the novel's end reveals that there is "nothing" inside of him (Flaubert, p.435). Perhaps "nothing" is the only common denominator between people; it is what we all become. In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom writes, "We enter crying at our birth, knowing with Lear that creation and fall are simultaneous." (Bloom, 1998, p.515). No matter what may happen over the course of a lifetime, the end is always the same. Following Lear's decision to disown Cordelia and give his kingdom to Regan and Goneril, the fool tells him, "I am better than thou art; I am a fool, thou art nothing" (*King Lear*, Act I, Scene iv). Why Lear has been reduced to nothing in the fool's mind is never specified. It could be due to his decision to disown the only loving person in his life. The idea that we are nothing without love dates back to antiquity, as the Christian Bible reads:

[...] if I [...] understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians, 13:1-3)

Indeed, Lear does gain nothing from his decision to carve up his kingdom and grant it to his daughters.

Welsford says that the role of the fool is also to show the contradictions inside every one of us, and when they show us these contradictions, we are able to realize we are just like the fools:

In the first place we are creatures of the earth, propagating our species like other animals, in need of food, clothing and shelter and money that produces them. Yet if we need

money, are we so wholly creatures of the earth? If we need to cover our nakedness by material clothes or spiritual ideals, are we so like the other animals? This incongruity is exploited by the Fool. The Fool is an unabashed glutton and a coward and knave, he is – as we say- a natural; we laugh at him and enjoy a pleasant sense of superiority; he looks at us oddly and we suspect that he is our alter ego; he winks at us and we are delighted at the discovery that we also are gluttons and cowards and knaves. (Welsford, 1966, p. 322)

At first, it is difficult to accept that we are like Vladimir and Estragon, no doubt, we felt somewhat superior to them. After reading a few more times or at the end of watching it, however, we become more and more aware of our similarities with the fools. Perhaps their absurdity, nonsensical dialogues, their games and imitations, their physical humor, and their friendship mimic our lives- our real life. They stage, right in front of us, how absurd existence is.

Estragon always tries to fall asleep to escape from his real life. Vladimir, on the other hand, is afraid of hearing about Estragon's dream. Unlike Estragon, he knows that escaping from the real world by sleeping is meaningless:

Estragon : (restored to the horror of his situation). I was asleep!
Why will you never let me asleep?
Vladimir : I felt lonely.
Estragon : I had a dream.
Vladimir : Don't tell me!
Estragon : I dreamt that-
Vladimir : DON'T TELL ME!
Estragon : (gesture towards the universe). This one is enough for you?
(Beckett, 1997).

In Act II, when Vladimir is listening to Pozzo's cry, he starts to doubt the reality of being, as well as his own existence:

Pozzo : One day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second.[...] They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant then it's night once more.
Vladimir : We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries .[...]
But habit is a great deadener.(Beckett, 1997).

Vladimir and Estragon suggest that man is apt to spend his transient life without thinking about the truth of being. Thus, we hear voices telling the truth in the protagonists' speech and able to perceive reality in their absurdity through their conditions. Their behavior also tells the truth about the human condition of waiting. The act of waiting is an essential and characteristic deed for man. Throughout daily life man is always waiting for something: a person, a thing, the all-powerful natural disaster, an event, and even death. Therefore, the action of waiting for Godot, whether it happens or not, represents the essential aspect of the human condition. In other words, waiting is man's habit in life. The act of waiting, at the same time, shows another essential aspect for the human condition, an attachment to hope. Even though Vladimir and Estragon feel depressed, they do not give up hope of being saved, and repeat the same action as usual. Similarly, that the protagonists cannot leave each other, nor quit the place where they have been told to wait by Godot implies a contradiction of human beings. That is, even though man has a free will, it is difficult for him to actually do something. The working of his mind is limited only by the bounds of his experience and the power of his imagination. Additionally, the two protagonists who, are incapable of keeping silence, always try to keep talking is a natural action, for endless talking dispel their isolation. Thus, it is likely that Vladimir and Estragon have a similar character to Shakespeare's fools in that they tell the truth. When he talks about the habit of 'a great deadener' it seems that he might be able to free himself from his habit, but then he stops thinking of it :

“At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying,
he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (pause) I
can't go on! (pause) What have I said? (Beckett, 1997).”

A similar characteristic of fools that we find between the pair in Vladimir and Estragon and Man and Convict in *The Thing* that they are social outcasts, and because of that they know the truth. Since they are excluded from society they are allowed a broader vision that enables them to see things through a different perspective. One of the ways through which the fools teach and mock others is through language, and both in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Thing* we see the language is broken down. It is not used merely to interact and exchange ideas, but to show that communication is often complex and useless.

- Convict : They drove everybody out. Not a soul in the prison.
Man : Why, is there a famine?
Convict : Fool. What is the idea of keeping people now?
Man : Why ever?
Convict : Have you heard the news?
Man : An engagement confirmed. Bla -. A nuptial consummated.
Bla- bla-. An offspring hailed. Bla – bla-. A wrinkled fool
laid to rest. Plop. What more?
Convict : What do you mean?
Man : The first three are make-believe, the last one is a big joke.
Convict : Idiot. The real news. A cyclone. It is proceeding with all
the hunger of a demon.
Man : Why?
Convict : We are damned, we are doomed. (Ahmad, 2012,p. 13)

And, such is the condition of human being all through the world. Besides their apparent nonsensical conversations which lead nowhere yet symbolizes “all where – all when”(quoted in Malick, 1997, p.24), we have Lucky’s (in *Waiting for Godot*) and The Girl’s (in *The Thing*) confusing and fragmented speech, within which man is a helpless prisoner and all human endeavors are devalued as mere meaningless routine .

I believe, the fool in *King Lear* is really wise and sensible, and he often shows his wisdom when criticizing his master, other characters in the play, and the society they live in. Lear’s Fool can be considered superior to other characters because he acknowledges and accepts his folly. As Terry Eagleton says in *William Shakespeare*, “to know your own nothingness is to become something, as the Fool is wiser than fools because he knows his own folly and so can see through theirs” (Eagleton, 1995, p. 80).

In the first scene (Act I, Scene IV) in which the Fool appears, he calls Lear a fool. The Fool also adds that, if the King were his fool, he would have him beaten because “ thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise” (Act I, scene V); the Fool means that Lear lacked wisdom and did not know how to deal with the fact that he was growing old and would have to find a solution to who would rule his kingdom. His pride took over his bad judgment, which caused the kingdom’s doom.

Throughout the play we see the Fool constantly teaching Lear and trying to open his master's eyes to the reality what Lear still cannot see, as we can see in the following examples in which he does not focus only on Lear's mistake of giving his kingdom to his daughters, but about general matters in life:

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest;
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score. (Act I, Scene IV)

The fool is giving Lear as well as the audience advice on how to behave and act; people should not flamboyance their wealth, and they should not tell people everything that they know and lend all of their belongings.

The Fool again teaches Lear and the audience, and he shows how much he understands our society and how he can grasp the meaning of people's action in the following excerpt:

Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind,
But fathers that bear bags
Shall see their children kind.
Fortune, that arrant whore,
Ne'er turns the key to th' poor. (Act II, Scene IV)

Welsford points out that the Fool's criticism is filled with grief, and that he is indeed sorry for his master's current state. Throughout the play, Lear's Fool more than once tells his master he is now nothing: "I had rather be any kind o'thing than a fool. And yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o'both sides and left nothing in the middle" (Act I, Scene IV). A few lines later he repeats that Lear is nothing, saying: "I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing. (Act I, Scene IV). The Fool tells him he is now Lear's shadow that Lear is nothing but the shadow of the man

he used to be. It must have been very upsetting and distressing for Lear being told by his Fool the sad truth of his current situation – and this scene and dialogue make the audience realize, perhaps for the first time in the play, that our lives, like Lear's, can be reduced to nothing.

Videback highlights that the Fool's jesting, even when it is harsh and direct, "shows deep compassion and understanding of the human condition" (Videback, 1999, p. 114). The understanding of the human condition is due to the fact that he is excluded from society and, from a certain distance, the fool is able to see things more clearly because he has a broader view of what is happening. Not being a part of society, he is able to observe it from afar and analyze how people comfort themselves.

We are always just one step away from nothingness. Through the situation in *The Thing* and by the Fool we learn that we can lose everything and be reduced to nothing. Lear's situation reminds us that our lives are not as stable as we might take them to be that reminds me of *The Thing* as well as *Waiting for Godot*. As we see that Oedipus, though battling against the vicissitudes of life, cannot escape 'piercing pain' in the 'flesh' and 'soul': "O agony! Where am I? ... What fate has come to me" (Sophocles, 1979, p. 62). Suffering, combined with appalling condition, human beings are entangled in the net. Here, we find like Lear, Oedipus also represents the mankind: "Chance rules our lives, and future is all unknown" (Sophocles, 1979, p. 52).

The control we believe to have over our lives is an illusion, because everything can be taken away from us based on a simple mistake or by an all-powerful Nature like the cyclone in *The Thing*. While the characters are waiting for the thing, the Man says:

Nothing rotates here, nothing topples here. Neither to the left nor to the right. Everything goes up and up. That is the only way out in this blinding maze (Ahmad, 2012, p.21).

Shakespeare is able to show us like the Theater of the Absurd, terrible things about our existence, but he does not mean that he leaves the comedy aside. In Beckett's theater and specifically in *Waiting for Godot* and in Ahmad's *The Thing*, we are also confronted with the awe-inspiring- drama and comedy of life.

Beckett's play shows that in life we are constantly waiting for something; and, while we wait, time is passing by and life is getting closer to the end.

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We identify ourselves with Vladimir and Estragon and notice that we too are in a universe which makes no sense. *Waiting for Godot* tries to show a world in which hopes do not turn into reality, and human interaction and dialogue rarely make sense. Nonetheless, people are still eager to talk and engage with others. Vladimir is aware that, when Pozzo and lucky leave and they run out of distractions, they will be once again in an empty world: "In an instant all will vanish, and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness" (Beckett, 1997). The characters know that moving, talking and rationalizing is useless, but they do it, or attempt to do it, nonetheless. The characters are aware that, whatever they do, it will not take them away from the nothingness of their existence but time will pass and life will get closer to the end:

Munir : I will play the fool.
Ahmad : I will play the fool.
U.Peng : Let us all play the fool.
Munir : Let us start. Hurry.
Headman : Where is the piece of wood?
Ahmad : I do not know.
Munir : I have not seen it.

[They all start searching for the piece of wood. They cannot find it. They criss-cross the stage. The girl is also helping.]

Headman : (Shouting, as if in a forest, where one has been lost for hours) Did you find it? Can you hear me.
Ahmad : (In the same pitch) cannot find it.
Munir : Help, help. Anybody round here?
Man : (With the flourish of a whistle) I am here.
Munir : Can you help us find the wood?

Man: Of course, why not? That is what I have been doing all my life. Finding things for others. I know it is difficult.

Munir : Why did you do that?
Man : It passed the time (Ahmad, 2012, p. 20-21).

They need this or that "to pass the time" (Ahmad, 2012, p.21). As if they are lost and seek help like pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*.

The fools in the both *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* teach the audience and entertain and, even though sometimes they might do their teaching and entertaining in different ways, they share this very important role of serving

as a teacher and guide to the audience. Vivian Mercier says that Vladimir and Estragon represent, at the same time, the tramp “who is at once clown and philosopher” (Mercier, 1994, p. 72), and this is the most evident characteristic Beckett’s pair has in common with Shakespeare’s fools. The truths they tell are not only regarding the world on stage, but also the world of the audience. As Esslin said, the author of the Theater of the Absurd represents the absurdity of the human condition; the play in its entirety makes us notice that life is absurd. The stagnant situation of Vladimir and Estragon and the little difference the changes in the play make serve to make the audience realize the hopelessness of life. Beckett wants to show us that we are all like Vladimir and Estragon – the characters themselves say they represent all mankind - , we just need to brave enough to admit and accept that we lead absurd lives in an absurd world as the characters on stage do.

The situation in *King Lear* is indeed absurd, and it is the Fool and his jokes that make us accept this absurdity in other words the reality. The Fool’s jokes are present in the play to balance with the tragic, and then it is possible for the audience to come to the terms with the absurdity in the play. David Bevington and David Scott Kastan believe that the universe in *King Lear* shows that “human life is meaningless and brutal” (Shakespeare, 1988, p. vii), which we can see in the pointless provisions of the king. This statement is also applicable to *The Thing* since the condition in the play is also absurd when they are waiting to face death; the Man and drummer cry “What shall I do? What shall I do?” (Ahmad, 2012, p.23).

Esslin says that the Theater of the Absurd is concerned with the ultimate realities of the human condition and problems such as life, death, isolation and communication and that it is “intent on making its audience aware of man’s precarious and mysterious position in the universe” (Esslin, 2004, p. 402.). This preoccupation with making the audience aware of man’s condition is also a characteristic present in *King Lear*. We see Lear’s world falling apart and understand how insignificant life is and how little control we have over what happens to us. Similar condition happens in *The Thing* “Because once you know why you are miserable, tortured, you cannot play fool” (Ahmad, 2012, p. 20) and they face death boldly:

U.Peng : What shall we do?

Headman : Hold your breath. Stand erect. Talk. Talk. Only Talk

Both Beckett and Ahmad show us the characters that are doomed from the start “We are damned, we are doomed” (Ahmad, 2012, p. 12). When the play starts, we know not to hope for salvation since their existence is throwaway,

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absurd, and the cyclone is inevitable and "proceeding with all the hunger of a demon" (Ahmad, 2012, p. 13) - so hoping for salvation is useless, since life is "Happiness of few hours, before The Thing comes" (Ahmad, 2012, p.15). In *King Lear*, we also see that Lear is doomed from the start of the play, when he divides his kingdom between two daughters and leaves out the one who truly cares about him because of pride. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are well aware of their insignificance since the very beginning of the play; Lear only realizes and accepts his meaningless condition after he has gone mad. Lear's fall is the fall of the world, and the same is true for Estragon and Vladimir, as well as for the Man, Convict and other characters since they also represent the absurdity of our lives and our uncertainties about the world. Because, the characters in all three plays, in a way, asking the audience to reflect on their own lives and ask themselves what they can do to either accept the absurdity of life or fight against it as long as possible.

The use of language of Lear's fool and of vagabonds is very similar too. The tramps in Beckett's play use word games with a comical intent, a characteristic they share with Lear's Fool and Ahmad's vagabonds, but their main goal in playing with language is to show its emptiness. The nonsensical dialogues and the countless repetition of sentences in the play are there to show that communication is difficult and should not be taken so seriously. Perhaps, both Beckett and Ahmad are trying to show the breaking down of language and that the spectators should look for the meaning beyond the words spoken.

In all three plays the characters use language and dialogue (might be nonsensical) to prevent them from thinking. Vladimir and Estragon even admit that the reason why they are constantly talking is to stop them from thinking. It seems they talk to save their lives and talking entertains them and gives them the impression they exist. We also see Lear's Fool using the technique of talking to prevent the King from thinking about his mistakes in *King Lear*. The Fool tries to entertain his master, using riddles and word games, all to engage into conversation and make Lear stop thinking about his mistakes. . In *The Thing* the characters through the word games try to change the current of their thoughts by questions providing diversions to pass the cruel time and face the impending disaster:

Headman : [...] Now we will have to find something else.
Munir : For what?
Headman : To pass the time (Ahmad, 2012, p. 21).

In spite of having some differences between the Shakespearean fools and the characters in absurdist plays, the characters are very similar. Lois Gordon believes Lear has a lot in common with Beckett's Pozzo. Gordon says that Beckett's character is "a modern-day Lear, on the road to nakedness and unaccommodation (sic), to madness and truth" (Gordon, 2002, p. 78). Both Pozzo and Lear have a very high opinion of themselves and believe they are better than the people around them.

Martin Esslin believes that the dignity of man depends on his ability to face the senselessness and meaninglessness of their existence "to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions – and to laugh at it" (Esslin, 2004, p.429), which expresses the same notion when Neil says, in Beckett's *Endgame*, that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness". I believe the laughter Beckett and Esslin talk about has to do with acceptance. The laughter that might come out of our acceptance of the meaninglessness of our situation is painful and destructive, because it makes us see a reality we were trying to avoid looking at. It takes courage and strength to accept that actions are useless, as *King Lear*, *Waiting for Godot* and *The Thing* show us "This is this, this is that, this is all (Ahmad, 2012, p.22)

However, are we able to regard Vladimir, Estragon and other characters as merely foolish, stupid people? Admittedly, there are sufficient factors to entertain us: the silence between the conversations, their improvisation, cross-talk routines, gags, and expressions of the physical faults of Vladimir's stinking breath and Estragon's stinking feet. Yet they do not intend to make us laugh, they merely act and speak as they usually do. It is the audience who judge their actions. We laugh from our side, and such a reaction is temporary i.e. the question is whether we can laugh at their actions or at them. Ruby Cohn reports the reaction of one audience: "Laughter did not ring out through the little Theater de Babylone.[. ..] Rather, chuckles faded into smiles or frowns" (Cohn, 1987). Why did laughter 'not ring out'? It is not simply because of the protagonists' hopeless situation, nor their passive attitude toward possibility. It is because the audience empathizes with Vladimir and Estragon. In other words, the audience notices that Vladimir and Estragon mirror the fact that man spends his trivial lives continuing his habit of 'a great deadener'. Therefore, at the moment in which they notice the fact, they take it seriously, because they find the similarity with Vladimir and Estragon as fools. That is, they caught in an illusion that they might be

Vladimir and Estragon, and which may remind the audience of Lear's speech:

I will preach to thee .Mark! ...

When we are born, we cry that we are come

To this great stage of fools (King Lear, Act IV, Scene vi).

In the 'great stage' of the world, man thinks of himself as rational beings and behaves as such, continuing his habits until death .Vladimir and Estragon embody the fact that man seldom stops to think about the fact that he is a fool, especially in busy and civilized modern society which makes his sense dull. From this point of view, I would like to borrow Eric Gans' expression, Vladimir and Estragon also "form a model of a minimal human society" (Bloom, 1987).Following Schopenhauer's assertion, society is explained by Harold Bloom as, "here also life present itself by no means as a gift for enjoyment, but as a task, a drudgery to be performed [...] All strive, some planning, others acting; the tumult is indescribable" (Bloom, 1987).

The fools, in all three plays discussed in this paper are able to open our eyes and make us see the reality of absurdity, the world in a different way and reflect upon how we lead our lives. Due to their allowance of free speech, they are able to say truths that would probably not acceptable by others. When Lear's Fool tells truths and criticizes his master Lear accepts it; when Beckett's fools show us the meaninglessness and absurdity of life, we understand what they are trying to show us and, even if we do not agree with the insignificance of life, we accept their point of view and reflect upon it. In the theater, fools are deeply welcomed by the audience when they appear on stage because of their role as guides in the play. In Shakespeare's plays, for example, they are seen as a bridge between the stage and the audience, helping spectators to better understand the happenings on stage. Similarly, Vladimir and Estragon can also be seen as guides, who lead the audience to the awareness and acceptance of the absurdity of life, in other words help us to face reality of life. As they repeatedly live the same day over and over again, they take the audience with them to show how insignificant life can be. They have nowhere to go. They are tied to this nothingness and they incarnate it. It is an absolute emptiness, and an unidentified absence. The tragedy of Beckett's man and the absurdity of this world are seen as "the inability to face the world deprived of delusions, the impossibility of integrating a finite and limited life with the infinity of the universe, where he stays" (quoted in Irish studies, 2016). The fools manage to both entertain us

and make us laugh as well as make us see the world differently to perceive the real reality. They are, in a way, asking the audience to reflect on their own lives and ask themselves what they can do to either accept the meaninglessness of life or fight against it.

Pozzo, in his second appearance, when he has been ravaged by time, utters words which are filled with futility: "... one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second ... They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (Beckett, 1997). Shakespeare succinctly depicts almost the same life cycle in fewer words through Edgar, the fool when he says, "Men must endure. Their going hence, even as their coming hither; Ripeness is all" (*King Lear*, 1988). But Shakespeare says more when he charges with the word "endure." The notion of endurance is important throughout *King Lear*; as well as in *The Thing*, the statement, spoken by Edgar, affirms the gift of man to endure, perhaps even to ripen to fulfillment, "One must accept torture, bear it with a smile and finally turn numb" (Ahmad, 2012, p. 9). Though Pozzo's words contain no such idea, it superbly expresses the condition of humanity as felt by a man completely without hope. Nearly the same ideas expressed in *The Thing* when Ahmad speaks, "Happiness of a few hours, before The Thing comes to mute our voices, to blur our vision (Ahmad, 2012, p.15). Another example that demonstrates instability of everything when blind Pozzo, like the blind Hamm in *Endgame*, comes to understand everything and utters:

Pozzo : I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune.
 Vladimir : And when was that?
 Pozzo : I don't know ... Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too.

When Lear pronounces, "No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even. The natural fool of fortune" seems to echo Pozzo, as well as the Convict and Man in *The Thing* when they utter:

Convict : It [Cyclone] is proceeding with all the hunger of a demon.
 Man : Why?
 Convict : We are damned, we are doomed. (Ahmad, 2012, p.13)

It is obvious that from this damnation there is no escape. The characters are aware of their nemesis, but because they cannot control it, they would rather not think about it and simply go on with their lives occupying their attention

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with outrageous conversation in all three plays. Martin Esslin also believes that the dignity of man depends on his ability to face the pointlessness and meaninglessness of their existence, "to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions – and to laugh at it" (Esslin, 2004, p.429). The same notion is also reflected in Ahmad's play *The Thing*, where he opines, "One must face The Thing with full dignity" (Ahmad, 2012, p.11). Ahmad's characters are also a representation of man's courage and valiant attitude towards life; as Gautam Dasgupta, editor of *Performing of Arts Journal*, New York, mentions, "Sayeed Ahmad's plays always have a dominant ringing note of all-powerful Nature and man's ability to take on the challenge" (quoted in *Three Plays*, 1989). And, there is indeed courage in facing the Death consciously without any fear. U.Peng suggests the headman to face the impending horrific death boldly with a notion of hope to be resurrected again in another form, "Courage, Headman, courage. We are like corals. We will die and on our fossilized structure another island will grow. Puppets and ventriloquists will dance and sing, flirt and hate. Not many can boast of this (Ahmad, 2012, p.10)

In the *Theater of the Absurd* Esslin's comments on Shakespeare that, "... above all, there is in Shakespeare a very strong sense of the futility and absurdity of the human condition" (Esslin, 2004). In this regard, for supporting his observation, he also quotes Gloucester's comment "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport" (*King Lear*, 1988). He, like Swinburne, believes this to be Shakespeare's conception of life. But I believe this profound pessimistic statement applies neither to Shakespeare nor to Beckett or Ahmad – for these three dramatists, meeting on that common ground, realize that life's questions perhaps have no answers, but that man must continue to ask questions.

We may, therefore, reasonably conclude that the fool, Vladimir, Estragon as well as the Man and Convict simply mirror us, our absurdity either in an unadorned or philosophic ways, our foolishness, and at the same time, they represent modern predicaments of our reality of the absurdity. In these plays the fools and the vagabonds become not only the wise philosopher for the characters of the plays but truly the wise philosopher for the mankind and for the real people of the world-stage, when the fool declares that "Ripeness is all" (*King Lear*, 1988); and the Man (Whistleman/fluteman) asserts the philosophic message as well as the real position of human beings in the world:

Headman : Let us start. It is getting late

Man : No, we got it a bit too early. You could not tell the fairy tale, I could not play a full note. Others will get it tomorrow may be the day after tomorrow, like us, suddenly, unaware, someday ... someday somewhere, another island, another Whistlemansfluteman, somewhere else That is certain. My salutation to everyone (Ahmad, 2012, p.24).

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