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Advancing Toward Division

King Lear is a play that follows characters as they navigate society. Edgar has a status within this society, being the rightful heir of Gloucester, but he is rebranded with a hunter's mark after society hears rumors that he plans to overthrow his father. From the society's point of view, Gloucester is right to believe his malefic intent due to Edmund's intentional plotting; he didn't tell Gloucester to attack Edgar but said and showed what they 'did' knowing Gloucester would brandish Edgar's status in society that would be targeted. Edgar flees into the woods where he tries to hide from society. While attempting to distance himself from society, he removes his clothes, covers himself in mud and sticks, and changes his speech to how a beggar would speak. He is acting like a beggar because society has placed a mark onto the homeless and conformed to dismiss their existence as much as possible.

Edgar becomes physically engulfed by the earth while asserting himself in the bottom of society, and in doing so begins to act like the Fool. Fool is this extremely numinous figure that is capable of speaking nonsense, he speaks profound observations that contradict Lear's understanding of the world. When he asks Lear who is a madman, a yeoman or a gentleman, Lear says "a king!" aimed at himself. The fool responds "No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his/ son, for he's a man yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him." (Lea. 3.6.11-4) and demonstrates that the Fool is attempting to show Lear a philosophy. The yeoman is only mad because of the titles, societal constructs, he has placed upon his son. The fool is showing Lear how pointless these societal markings are, that the language that has become invented functions a role in society but the language is separating us more than connecting us.

This could be said for every advancement that has allowed humans to gain consciousness and begs the questions should we revert back towards animals. Edgar himself is descending from one of the highest places in society and now compares himself to a wild animal. Edgar is only acting like a fool, and he is unable to carry any profoundness in his speech. He understands what a low caste citizen should resemble, he acts in that manner to save his life and grows fond of its simplicity. He even dismisses his previous place in society "Yet better thus, and known to be contemned,/Than still contemned and

flattered.” (Lea. 4.1.1-2) due to the fact he feels he was hated and flattery was a facade because of his title. His true human self has become split between his emotions and his place within society. A society that outcasts and hates him, so now he has incorporated that societal perspective in himself and it bred his hate towards society. It is intentionally ambiguous whether he enjoys this low-caste lifestyle due to it freeing him from society and its inherent toxicity, or whether he is becoming more in touch with his true-human self as he becomes more animal-like. He and Fool are the only characters that note their spirits in the woods. Whenever Gloucester comes eyeless, it becomes clear that Edgar cannot immerse himself in this beggar facade. His reaction to his father demonstrates he is still connected to society, and in his pursuit to become more ‘human’, animal-like and connected to the earth, he cannot remove the ingrained society within him.