

Candidate 1

Dissertation
'To Kill a Mockingbird'
'The Great Gatsby'
Isolation

Cordelia
↓
Gertrude
↓
G + R
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Ophelia

22. Compare the roles and functions of the principal female characters in any two tragedies.

'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' by William Shakespeare are two plays in which female characters have important roles regarding the development of the play as a whole. Cordelia, Goneril and Regan are essential in the development of many characters and themes within the play 'King Lear'. The eponymous character treats them ^{unfairly} ~~differently~~ throughout the play. He continually switches favour and proves to be extremely indecisive in regard to them. The female characters within 'Hamlet' are also mistreated throughout the play, Gertrude and Ophelia are often on the receiving end of his frequent aggression. The way in which

They deal with this rage is essential in Hamlet's development as a character.

The female characters in both 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' are undoubtedly some of the most important in each play. The way in which they interact with male characters is explored through the use of various themes and literary techniques.

Cordelia in 'King Lear' is unquestionably Lear's favourite daughter. She is the youngest of his three daughters and has won his favour. Cordelia possesses the important role of being the only honest character through the course of the play. She is aware that through complying to her father's egotistical requests, she could easily obtain his land. However, Cordelia ~~is~~ refuses to do so as she

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	<p>views her sisters displays ^{of emotion} as exaggerated and superfluous. She simply states "I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less" Lear does not recognise the goodness and honesty of Cordelia's statement, he impulsively banishes her "Here I disclaim all my parental care." Cordelia is passive in the face of Lear's aggression and does not attempt to fight it, further highlighting her good nature. She speaks aside to the audience when she says "what shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent".</p> <p>Shakespeare's use of direct communication with the audience helps to engage with the character and gain personal insight, essentially providing access to their stream of consciousness. As the play</p> <p>As the play progresses, Cordelia</p>

continues to be conveyed as the honourable and devoted child. She wants to see Lear back in power, regardless of the horrible manner in which he treated her and his tyrannical actions in previous acts. In doing this, Cordelia is conveyed to the audience as a ~~star~~ Christ like individual who ultimately, meets her inevitable death. Cordelia's role is invaluable within 'King Lear' as she is largely responsible for ^{Lear's} his character change as the play progresses. ~~At~~ Ultimately, Cordelia uncovers Lear's affectionate nature again towards the end of the play, which allows the audience to feel some ~~of~~ form of sympathy towards him. She is a strong character who, like her father, is depicted as extremely stubborn

Ophelia plays a similar role in 'Hamlet' as Cordelia does in 'King Lear'. She is initially favoured by the eponymous character yet eventually is maltreated through extreme methods. Ophelia also meets her death which is largely as a result of the eponymous character's actions. Within 'Hamlet', Cordelia's function is to be passive in the face of Hamlet's anger and eventually mirror his descent into madness. Hamlet uses Cordelia in many ways ~~###~~ She is essential in the development of his madness which essentially leads to her own mental downfall. Hamlet claims "I loved you not" which confuses and embarrasses her, he continues to disrespect her throughout the play ordering her to "Get thee to a nunnery!" Cordelia is a way in which Hamlet can project

his anger. Her role as the helpless female character is further emphasised through the way in which she obeys her father without questioning when he essentially uses her as bait in order to identify the cause of Hamlet's madness. Ophelia's ultimate death is the final way in which her character lives up to expectation. In death, Hamlet does not acknowledge her life which further demonstrates his distasteful treatment of her.

Goneril and Regan in 'King Lear' are depicted as extremely devious and will do anything in order to achieve their goals. Their role within the play helps to further emphasise Cordelia's goodness. The contrast between Goneril and Regan compared

with Cordelia is extreme. They are willing to pamper Lear's ego at the beginning of the play as it is a method of gaining what they want. Lear falls for their obvious deception "Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter". He accepts their praise and banishes the only honest daughter, Cordelia. Goneril and Regan are largely responsible for the theme of betrayal within 'King Lear' and are later shown in their true light to their father. When Regan refuses to house Lear, she deals with his anger in a passive and condescending manner. "Good sir." Essentially, Goneril and Regan represent bad within the play and their role is to demonstrate a direct contrast to their sister.

Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, is possibly the most important female influence in Hamlet's life. Her actions are the fuel for the plot of the play. Hamlet is disappointed, angry and betrayed by his mother's re-marriage. "She married... O with such wicked speed, to post / To such incestuous sheets". His melancholic nature is as a result of his mother's betrayal. In marrying her late husband's brother, she has, in Hamlet's eyes, betrayed Old Hamlet. In Act 3, scene 4, when she attempts to ~~confront~~ confront Hamlet, she attempts to make him feel guilt. "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" to which he replies: "Mother, you have my father much offended". Shakespeare's use of an almost identical sentence helps to emphasise the way in which Hamlet is perceived as a stubborn and rude

child. Their relationship appears to be in turmoil for the majority of the play and Gertrude, like Ophelia, has to deal with much of Hamlet's anger. Hamlet is a misogynist and not entirely dissimilar to Lear in the way he displays it. Hamlet accuses his mother of marrying Claudius due to her "sexual appetite" and perhaps involves himself too much in that aspect of her life. He accuses his mother, and ~~the~~ females in general, of being a weak gender "frailty, thy name is woman". Gertrude is submissive in the way in which she deals with Hamlet's anger. She occasionally questions him, however it is clear that she still loves him deeply. In the final scene, she saves Hamlet's life, albeit momentarily, which demonstrates her devotion and love

for her son. Hamlet's mother is extremely concerned throughout the play in regard to his mental health. In act 3, scene 4 when she confronts him in the chamber, she states "Alas, he's gone mad" ~~and~~ further into the scene, Hamlet begins to converse with the ghost which clearly concerns his mother "To whom do you speak?" Gertrude often questions Hamlet, perhaps due to a fear of his mental state. Gertrude's role is essentially to ~~take~~ deal with Hamlet's aggression and fuel his need for revenge against Claudius.

'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' are two ^{tragedies} ~~plays~~ in which female characters are cleverly used to demonstrate the characteristics of male characters. Their functions in the cases of Ophelia, Cordelia and Gertrude is

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	to deal with the way in which they	
	are treated and eventually support the	
	male character. Goneril and Regan within	
	'King Lear' are also extremely important	
	in the development of character and theme.	
	Ultimately, each female character's role	
	leads them to certain death, yet their	
	contributions throughout the play are	
	invaluable and in most cases, could not have	
	been as successfully executed had their	
	role been portrayed by a man.	