

King lear and the drawer boy comparative essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Sometimes, unconsciously, role play is used in our daily lives to assume or act out a specific role. The role play portrayed in Shakespeare's King Lear and Michael Healey's The Drawer Boy is best defined as the acts or attitude of a person differing from normal in order to attain a better point of view, social interaction, or a goal. William Shakespeare, born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England in 1564, is known world-wide for his talent for writing plays and poems (William).

Shakespeare's King Lear was officially printed in 1608 (King Lear).

This play follows the life of a headstrong old man, King Lear, whose mental state is disturbed by his two selfish daughters, Goneril and Regan. Lear's other daughter, Cordelia, is loyal to her father, but is disowned for her simple, yet honest response to her father's question in Act one. The daughters must flatter their father in order for him to decide who gets the most desirable part of his kingdom, but this only elicits lies and cruelty from Goneril and Regan, eventually leading to Cordelia's and Lear's downfall.

Meanwhile, Gloucester, the father of Edgar and Edmund (his illegitimate son), is blinded by lies as well. Edmund manages to trick his father into disliking Edgar in order for him to take over Gloucester's power. Michael Healey reflects on betrayal in the form of a stage play, The Drawer Boy, a story told with humour, but also about loss and love. Healey, a Canadian playwright and actor, was born on August 25, 1963 in Toronto, Ontario (Nothof). He based The Drawer Boy on a group of actors who went to farms to research rural life in Southern Ontario and collectively produce a play called The Farm Show.

The Drawer Boy is a full length play that focuses on a young actor from Toronto, Miles, and his experiences while visiting a farm owned by two older men, Morgan and Angus. Morgan cares for his close friend Angus, who has brain damage and memory loss which happened during the bombing of London in the Second World War. By the end of the play, these three men create and interpret reality through storytelling and role play. It is obvious that both works use role play as an important device that helps develop the topic of deception.

Although the essential nature of role play in King Lear is mostly corrupt, in contrast to the innocent intention in the Drawer Boy, both forms of deception have positive consequences. These positive consequences are what allow the characters to act morally and to understand the value of others. Everyone has an individual role that has the ability to influence other lives. Being capable of role play can have negative and positive effects, depending on how it is used. In King Lear, Edmund is described by his father as the “bastard son”, and that is the exact role he plays.

This role was given to him at birth. Although Edmund is cruel and manipulative in nature, he does find a means for redemption. When Edmund is defeated by his brother Edgar, he still has the chance to kill Cordelia and King Lear, but instead, he makes an attempt to save them by calling back his soldiers before they follow orders. Although the attempt is unsuccessful, a different side of Edmund is revealed during this final act, and he admits to being out of character. “ I pant for life. Some good I mean to do, despite of my own nature,” he declares (5. 3. 291-292).

This self-awareness is significant because Edmund acknowledges how his role has affected others, and takes advantage of the opportunity to make a moral decision. This form of justice is also portrayed by the character Miles in *The Drawer Boy*. Miles' task is to go to a farm and study how farm-life works in order to create a play about it back in Toronto. The more he gets involved with the lives of Morgan and Angus, the more intrigued he is by them. Although there are a few humorous references to farming, the main attention of this play is on Morgan and Angus' history together.

Miles decides to use the original story he overheard Morgan telling Angus one night as a part in his play. After attending Miles' rehearsal, Morgan is not impressed by how invasive the play is, but Angus is excited by the reanimation of his life. When Miles discovers there is more to the story, such as sadness and loss, he declines Angus' offer to use their story in his play. "Thanks. But—thanks"(Healey 188), Miles says as he hands over his notebook. Miles decides to give up the whole play, even if it means it will jeopardize his career as an actor.

When Miles hands over his notebook to Morgan it symbolizes the ethical decision he is making. Even though his role in the play is to investigate farm life, he steps out of that role to do what is right. Edmund and Miles are characters that can be easily compared. They both show that a specific role is not given to someone; instead, people can determine how flexible and adaptable their role in life is. The way that Edmund and Miles adapt to their surroundings by changing characters in order to make a just decision is heartening.

Valuing other people for their individuality or specific characteristics is essential to positive interaction among humans. When people take on the role of someone else they lose their individuality and worthiness of true self-value. This type of deceiving interaction is seen in both King Lear and The Drawer Boy. Lear's flaw at the beginning of the play is that he values appearances over reality. Using role play to their advantage, Goneril and Regan are villainous and use Lear's blindness to their true natures against him.

They alter their characters to flatter their father, who is too full of pride to recognize deceit. Cordelia's sincerity is misunderstood and Lear banishes her because she does not compliment him like her other two sisters. Both Goneril and Regan have altered their personalities to gain all of Lear's powers, and it is not until they take everything away from Lear, that he realizes Cordelia is the only daughter who truly loves him. He begs for forgiveness as he cries 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" (4. 7. 82-84). Although Lear believes he has done Cordelia wrong and deserves to be punished, Cordelia has no desire for revenge, or any need to make her father suffer for having misjudged her. Goneril and Regan make their father believe they are someone else, but in the end, Lear is able to made amends with Cordelia and value her compassion and honesty. This family journey reinforces the idea that at the heart of every betrayal lies a skewed set of values.

Similarly, Morgan values his life-time friend Angus, but does not fully appreciate him until the end of the play. Morgan hides the truth from Angus

for a couple of reasons: Angus hit Sally during one of his headache episodes and that's why she and Frances left the farm. Morgan also wants to protect himself from his guilt over being responsible for Angus' accident that caused the headaches and memory loss. When Miles and Angus push Morgan into finally revealing the true story, Angus is overwhelmed, but understanding.

Morgan explains, " I told you the story of the black car crashing for the first time. I told it again, and you stopped crying. I told it again, and you fell asleep. I kept telling it 'cause it made you feel better. Goddamn it, it made me feel better" (Healey 187-188). By telling Angus the truth, Morgan shows how his protective role overpowered his role as a friend. He was, in a way, being selfish by hiding this secret from Angus because he felt guilty for being the one who made Angus go out to the car to get a bottle of brandy when the accident occurred.

Angus, however, is not mad at Morgan, but upset with himself for hitting Sally, which caused both Sally and Frances to leave. Both men feel guilty and sorry for one another and for what they have done. Angus had the right to know the truth and Morgan realizes that after seeing how his friend handles it. Morgan now has more respect for Angus, especially after they make a promise to tell the story every day even if Angus forgets. Angus plays a unique role in this play because he is lacking memories of his past with Morgan.

Even with memories missing, he still acknowledges the importance of Morgan in his life, and vice versa. The characters recognized the value of others near the end of both works. Truth comes out by the end of King Lear and The Drawer Boy that draws attention to the real role of characters.

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These character traits are what reveal to the audience each character's true nature and this realization is what brings those characters closer. Although in *The Drawer Boy*, Morgan already valued Angus for who he is, it is not until the end of the play that he can explain why he values his friend so much.

Whereas throughout *King Lear*, Cordelia is wretched compared to her sisters, and Lear does not realize how important she is until the very end. In conclusion, while *King Lear* have more sinister intentions of role play, it is easily comparable to the role play in *The Drawer Boy*. Characters from both works change their behaviour to accomplish tasks which lead to important results. The results are identified as the characters making moral decisions, and developing a new appreciation of others.

In *King Lear*, the good are misjudged as evil and the evil are accepted as good. In *The Drawer Boy* the effect of loss and love overwhelms the reader. Two intriguing pieces of writing that are different, but similar in many ways, use an important device, role play. Role play can be as simple as a child playing " Doctor", or it can be as serious as altering one's entire personality to be someone else. In either instance, it is an effective tool that can have many advantages or disadvantages. How people decide to use this ability that defines them and the outcome.