

Tragic heroes in "the great gatsby" and "king lear"

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Tragic Heroes in The Great Gatsby and King Lear

A tragic hero is doomed to misfortune not by moral corruption, but by a tragic error in their judgment. Every human, in some way, have their own tragic weaknesses or limitations in their personality. While Shakespeare's King Lear and Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby both follow the traditions of the tragic hero narrative, King Lear adheres more closely to traditions by allowing the protagonist to develop excessive pride, tragic recognition, and emotional purging. To contrast, The Great Gatsby has no real tragic recognition or emotional purging.

King Lear follows more closely to tragic hero conventions by allowing the protagonist to develop excessive pride. To begin with, King Lear divides his throne based on whichever daughter professes the most love to him. When Lear is distributing his assets, he ask each of his daughters " which of you shall we say doth love us most" (Shakespeare 1. 1. 51). Lear doesn't truly care about his daughters, he would rather hear false flattery from Goneril and Regan than true love from Cordelia. Furthermore, Lear's pride inhibits him from seeing the truth and he ironically antagonizes the people who truly love him, which ultimately leads him to his tragic downfall. In addition, Cordelia refuses to profess her love for her father. While she cannot illustrate the true extent of her love in words, she " cannot heave / [her] heart into [her] mouth". Lear can not understand this and is blinded by his pride, which consequently leads him to banish his daughter. Furthermore, Lear's tragic pride makes him perceive the manipulative nature of his two eldest daughters as true loyalty towards himself. Afterwards, Kent warns Lear of his tragic error of judgment. Kent explains to Lear that his " youngest daughter

does not love thee least". Lear's pride blinds him and he again sides with his daughter's flattery. Moreover, Lear develops false-pride which leads him to his downfall following closely to tragic hero conventions.

CONCLUSION SENTENCE

The Great Gatsby also follows the tragic hero conventions by allowing the protagonist to develop excessive pride. first off, Nick and Gatsby discuss about recapturing the past. When Nick says that repeating the past is impossible, Gatsby " cries incredulously. ' Why of course you can!'" (Fitzgerald 118). Gatsby is so infatuated with the idea of being together with Daisy, that he is willing to go to extreme lengths, even as far as recreating the past with his immense wealth. Furthermore, Lear and Jay Gatsby share excessive pride as they both feel superiority in themselves which ends up killing them at the end. In addition, Gatsby tries to take Daisy away from Tom by confronting him. When Gatsby is in the Hotel with Tom, Gatsby tells him "' Your wife doesn't love you, '. ' She's never loved you. She loves me'" (139). Gatsby is desperate to hold on to his chance to be with Daisy, he is willing to erase the past with Tom and claim Daisy for himself. Gatsby and Lear are related as they both are immensely arrogant that they can do what ever they want, relating to. Thereafter, Gatsby is willing to take the blame for Daisy's accident. When Nick tells Gatsby to leave the city, Gatsby is " clutching at some last hope and I couldn't bear to shake him free" (158). Even after Gatsby has lost the love of Daisy, he still thinks there is a chance that they could be together. Similar to Lear's excessive pride and following tragic hero traditions, Gatsby is not willing to admit defeat because of his immense arrogance.

CONCLUSION SENTENCE.

King Lear follows more closely to tragic hero traditions by enabling the protagonist to recognize his mistakes. To begin with, Lear realizes that he has never helped his citizens when he was the king. When Lear pities Poor Tom, he has "ta'en / Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp" (Shakespeare 3. 4. 32-33). Lear realizes his tragic mistakes, he understands that when he was king he was selfish and arrogant and decides to make the world more fair. Furthermore, Lear recognizing his mistakes makes him follow the conventions of a tragic hero. Subsequently, while Lear is in the storm, he perceives the deception he was once in. While talking to Kent, he says, "I am a man More sinned against than sinning" (3. 2. 57-58). Having given his authority to Regan and Goneril, and been betrayed for it, Lear comes to realize that he is but a "poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man" (3. 2. 20). Furthermore, this demonstrates Lear's tragic recognition which affirms the traditional tragic hero. In addition, Lear understands his faults when he wakes up in the hospital to Cordelia. While Lear kneels in front of Cordelia, he says, "I am a very foolish fond old man, / Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less. / And to deal plainly / I fear I am not in my perfect mind" (4. 7. 60-63). Lear realizes his tragic mistake, when he wrongly banished Cordelia for not professing her love for him, he feels sinful when accepting Cordelia help after he betrayed her. Moreover, this exemplifies Lear's tragic recognition which closely resembles the attributes of a tragic hero.

CONCLUSION SENTENCE.

The Great Gatsby contrasts the tragic hero conventions by not allowing the protagonist to recognize his mistakes. To start off, Nick and Gatsby discuss about changing the past. While Nick and Gatsby are talking, Gatsby wants “to fix everything just the way it was before,” (Fitzgerald 118). Contrasting with King Lear, Jay Gatsby doesn't begin to realize his mistake, his naivety and arrogance stop him from being able to see the truth, unlike Lear who begins to understand his mistake. Furthermore, this contrasts with the traditional tragic hero, because it does not allow Gatsby to realize his error of judgment. Afterwards, Gatsby commits himself to taking the blame for Daisy. Gatsby “knew that Daisy was extraordinary but he didn't realize just how extraordinary a 'nice' girl could be” (159). Gatsby overestimated Daisy until the bitter end, he thought she was extraordinary but in reality she was the complete opposite. Contrasting with Lear's tragic realization, Gatsby never got to realize his mistakes until it was too late for him. Moreover, Jay Gatsby differs from the attributes of a tragic hero because he does not realize his tragic fate. Contrasting with Lear, Jay Gatsby does not follow Aristotle's characteristic of anagnorisis.

King Lear follows more closely to tragic hero conventions by allowing the audience to experience emotional purging. To begin with, Lear is kicked out of his home by his two daughters. As he begins to leave, he mutters, “I have full cause of weeping, but this heart / Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,” (Shakespeare 2. 4. 181-182). The audience feels pity towards Lear as he has been betrayed by the ones closest to him, the audience also feels fear because those closest to them might one day be the same ones that

betray them. Furthermore, Lear illustrates the ideas of tragic hero narrative by conveying catharsis throughout the play. Consequently, Lear carries Cordelia lifeless body and dies of a broken heart. When Lear is speaking to Edgar and Kent, he says, " And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life? / Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all? Thou 't come no more, / Never, never, never, never, never." (5. 3. 369-372). The audience experiences purification of fear and pity when Lear dies, because they are compassionate for the tragic fate of Lear and fearful of how a similar fate could impact them. Moreover, this further affirms the tragic hero archetype according to Aristotle by showcasing catharsis.

CONCLUSION SENTENCE.

The Great Gatsby contrasts the tragic hero customs by preventing the audience to experience catharsis. To begin with, No real evil is purged, Tom and Daisy are alive and escape without consequence. While Tom and Daisy are living in east egg, " they smash[] up things and creatures and then retreat[] back into their money of their vast carelessness" (Fitzgerald 170). Unlike King Lear where the audience feels fear and pity towards the main characters, in The Great Gatsby no fear or pity occurs by the audience but rather are left with a sense of emptiness at the end of the story. Additionally, the tragic hero contrasts with Aristotle's Poetics, as the story doesn't convey catharsis. Thereafter, Jay Gatsby is killed by George Wilson from a bullet in his back. When Gatsby dies, he " lost the old warm world [and] paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" (172). In the story, Gatsby never commits an act of injustice, he is tragic in the sense that he attempts to achieve greatness, and then he fails. Although, the reader is saddened by

his lonely defeat, there is no high passion involved in his tragic ending. Therefore, we can conclude that catharsis does not occur in the story.

Ultimately, *The Great Gatsby* and *King Lear* both explore the tragic hero narrative by sharing a key distinction in anagnorisis, but by contrast, Shakespeare's play further integrates hubris and catharsis within the story. The tragic hero allows the full exploration of their downfall to be understood by readers. Through *Lear* and *Jay Gatsby*, Readers come understand the qualities of a tragic hero and what leads them to their condemned fate. As such, adversities arise not by ones own fate, but by their own lack of judgment.

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