

CORDELIA



ROLE IN THE PLAY

THE QUESTION



CORDELIA PLAYS A VERY IMPORTANT
ROLE IN 'KING LEAR'. DISCUSS THIS
VIEW OF CORDELIA. SUPPORT YOUR
ANSWER BY REFERENCE TO THE PLAY.

2002 SEC



THESIS

- ❖ Appears in only four of the twenty six scenes but has an enormous influence on the action of the play nonetheless.
- ❖ Truly principled
- ❖ Her honesty and integrity throw Goneril and Regan's insincerity and selfishness into sharp relief
- ❖ We can measure the other characters' behaviour against hers
- ❖ Offers us hope when evil appears to be triumphing
- ❖ Shows us that love can overcome all human failings

FIRST POINT

- ❖ Too sincere to take part in the love test.
- ❖ Shows us that words can never accurately convey human love
- ❖ Silence is in contrast to Goneril and Regan's lavish speeches
- ❖ Shows us their hypocrisy by questioning their actions

SECOND POINT

- ❖ Cordelia, like Lear, is stubborn, proud and unyielding
- ❖ However, she shows us that such qualities do not necessarily lead to rash or unfair actions
- ❖ She stands by her principles and will not be moved

THIRD POINT

- ❖ The reactions of others in the play to Cordelia's banishment are important as they show us how Lear's actions are viewed by others
- ❖ Lear's flaws become more obvious because of the speeches made by France and Kent

FOURTH POINT

- ❖ Unlike Goneril and Regan, Cordelia represents the right and natural bond between a parent and child
- ❖ Before she leaves for France, she speaks to her sisters to warn them that she knows what they are like and to instruct them to 'Love well our father'

FIFTH POINT

- ❖ Although she leaves the action of the play, Cordelia remains the embodiment of hope
- ❖ Her name is brought up in the darkest hours
- ❖ When Kent is put in the stocks, he takes comfort in a letter from Cordelia
- ❖ After Lear has been thrown out by his ungrateful daughters, Kent tells the Gentleman he meets in Act 3 that Cordelia has brought her troops to Dover
- ❖ Gloucester also knows of Cordelia's plans and tells Edmund that the wronged king will be 'revenged home'.

SIXTH POINT

- ❖ As the play progresses, Cordelia becomes less a person and more a symbol of divine justice
- ❖ She is a Christ-like figure of redemption
- ❖ When she reads Kent's letters and hears how her sisters have treated her father, Cordelia sheds the 'holy water from her heavenly eyes'

SEVENTH POINT

- ❖ Cordelia's reason for returning to England is purely love
- ❖ It is important that this is made clear as Shakespeare's audience would not have taken kindly to any sort of political invasion by France!
- ❖ This idea is reinforced by the King of France leaving his wife to lead the army

EIGHTH POINT

- ❖ When we meet Cordelia again, it is immediately clear that she holds no grudges against her father
- ❖ Her first words express her concern for her father
- ❖ There is no bitterness whatsoever in her speech

NINTH POINT

- ❖ The simplicity and brevity of Cordelia's speech is still evident
- ❖ She asks his blessing, showing just how virtuous a daughter she is
- ❖ The contrast between her and her sisters could hardly be more striking

TENTH POINT

- ❖ Cordelia is a tragic victim
- ❖ Her death makes Lear's suffering complete
- ❖ The audience is moved to pity on seeing the broken king and father carrying his daughter's body onstage
- ❖ The death of such a good and loving person shows just what a grip evil has taken on the kingdom

CONCLUSION

- ❖ Cordelia is the embodiment of goodness
- ❖ She shows selflessness and true love against which the evil of her sisters, Edmund and Cornwall can be measured