



AP[®] English Literature 2003 Sample Student Responses

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F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby is the seminal 20th century American novel, and while being a vivid and enthralling illustration of the Jazz Age, it is entirely tragic in scope on all three scales of tragedy - personal, inter-personal, and societal. The tragic figure, of course, is Jay Gatsby.

The first image the reader ever sees of Gatsby is that of him on his lawn in the moonlight reaching out across the sound, as the reader ^{later} learns, towards Daisy Buchanan. This first image is nearly pathetic, and is a private glimpse at Gatsby's tortured nature, contrasting with his public image as an enormously wealthy playboy. This dichotomy is the perfect illustration of Gatsby's two-fold tragic flaw; his intense love and devotion of Daisy and the belief that with material extravagance he can get whatever he wants. Gatsby came from an impoverished farm upbringing in the midwest and always felt he was above his situation. With encouragement from yachtsman Dan Cody, he reinvented himself as a member of the social elite, and pursued further material wealth through any means available, be it bootlegging, gambling, or trading in stolen securities. He creates the image of the Great Gatsby, both to fulfill his lifelong dream of being important and furthermore, ~~to~~ to win Daisy back from Tom Buchanan. Gatsby falls victim to the belief of the age that wealth and importance were the keys to happiness.

Gatsby has a further flaw, that being his belief in the past and future. When Nick Carraway tells him that you can not repeat the past, Gatsby replies "Of course you can." At the very end of the novel, Nick explains how Gatsby "believed in the green light," or the happier future that mankind strives for, though we are "boats against the current, borne back to the



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LLH

past."

Gatsby's personal flaws lead to his own demise and subsequent death, but beyond himself he leaves a path of destruction in his wake. The lives of all who knew him are irreparably altered if not completely destroyed. Of course, Gatsby does nothing deliberately malicious, but as a tragic figure his character flaws cause the undoing of others. His life's love, Daisy, does not have the temperament to deal with Gatsby's intense love and Tom's possessiveness. Gatsby needs more than just her love, he needs her assurance that she never loved Tom or anyone but himself. When Gatsby confronts Tom with this fact at the Plaza Hotel, Daisy suffers a breakdown, feeling love for Gatsby but unable to give him what he wants because of her one-time devotion to Tom. Tom, in return, loses his faith in Daisy and runs away from East Egg with her. The Wilsons, George and Myrtle, get wrapped up in the situation and both lose their lives as a direct result of Gatsby; Myrtle is hit by his car, though Daisy was driving, and George kills himself after killing Gatsby. "The holocaust was complete" declares Nick. Nick himself becomes further disillusioned by his relationship with Gatsby, though he is the only character to gain any positive insight from his interaction with Jay. To Nick, the East Coast, New York, and the dreams of success are destroyed by his revelations at the time of Gatsby's death, and he retreats to the midwest where things make more sense.

The fall of Gatsby is synecdochal with the fall of the Roaring 20's, the Jazz Age, and the great decadence of the East. Gatsby is the ultimate figure of the age, and is certainly the "highest point in [his] human landscape." All of the false ideals of the age are captured in the strongly idealistic Gatsby, and as the



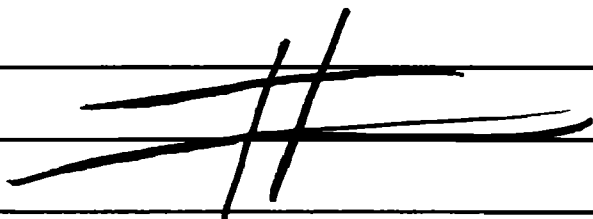
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444

age's false pretenses collapse, so does Gatsby. His demise parallels the failure of the American dream, ~~and~~ the idea that material wealth and popularity will buy happiness. It seems that Gatsby's greatest flaw was stooping to the level of his environment. "They're a rotten bunch," ~~and~~ Nick tells him, "You're better than the whole damn lot of them put together." Gatsby's intentions are much purer than his means; his love for Daisy and his "belief in the green light." His methods of attaining them, wealth and prosperity, prove to fail him in the end, ushering in his final fall. Gatsby was an enormous figure, far too big^{over} for the decadent age that he reigned over, and his inability to grasp what he truly wanted destroys him in the end. In a way, Gatsby, who catered to the pondering rich with his parties and praise, helped to bring about their collapse; in a much bigger way, however, he was an idealist who was destroyed by ~~a generation~~^{the} foundationless generation that he was too good for. The demise of Gatsby, his acquaintances, and his era were preordained long before Jay Gatsby met Daisy Fay.

by encouraging their lifestyle;



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C1

Northrop Frye wrote that "tragic heroes... conduct the power around them, [they are] great trees more likely to be struck by lightning... Conductions may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning." A tragic hero that exemplifies Frye's statement is the titular character in William Shakespeare's King Lear. He represents the instrument of suffering of others in the disintegration of children's/people's duty toward their parents/elders. The tragedy rests in the demise of the good followers of duty, all brought on by Lear's vanity and pride, and the gods do not ~~not~~ ^{shine kindly on} ~~not~~ ^{hubris.}

In the opening act of King Lear, Lear has decided, at the tender age of eighty, to divide up his kingdom into three (unequal) parts for his daughters. He has already decided who will receive which parcel beforehand but wants to indulge his vanity by having his daughters flatter & praise their father to feed his ego and receive their land. The two wicked daughters Goneril & Regan feed his ego, but Cordelia ~~tells~~ speaks the truth and refuses to indulge in this parade of vanity, stressing that once married half her love and duty shall rest with her husband. Lear, outraged by ~~at~~ her comments and nursing ^{his} wounded pride, banishes her from the kingdom. Just as Hamlet was plagued by inaction, Lear is plagued by the consequences of the false praise he



#3

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C2

commanded. He divided his kingdom between his two deceitful daughters who felt no sense of duty toward their father-king and thus begin to cruelly mistreat him and ^{by} reducing him to nothing (he was already penniless & landless now he was daughterless). Lear conducted the suffering of Cordelia who was cast off from the father she loved for honesty. She subsequently was hanged because her sense of duty and attempts to rectify the ills of his sisters' discourtesy led to her attack on England. Lear stupidly left himself with nothing and his actions led to the death of all three of his daughters, the latter by the greed and envy the land division fueled.

Gloucester's sense of duty to Lear left him sightless. He witnessed the cruelty Regan and Goneril showed their father and tried to aid him, an act declared treasonous by the girls. Gloucester's own dutiless son betrayed him in his quest for power, but Lear's idiotic planning and his belief in false flattery led to the brutal blinding of Gloucester.

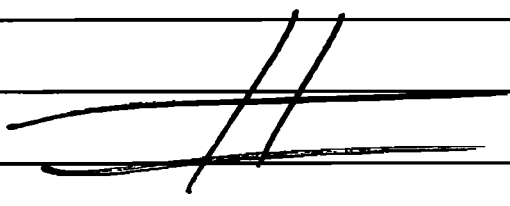
Lear's pride and ego are his tragic flaws. He conducts the actions around him, which resulted from his idiotic land deal. His disinheritance of the loyal daughters and his placements of his per care in the hands of his selfish other two led to the deaths of basically every character in the play—some of those, like Cordelia's, were truly

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C 2

tragic. The lack of duty felt by the gang of greed and their ability for duplicitous praise of the elders represents the tragic vision of the work as a whole. Lear, unfortunately, believed ~~the~~ and was bolstered by their lies, which led to his, and the others, demise.



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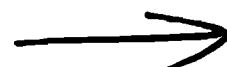
FF,

Ken Kesey's novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest portrays Patrick Randle McMurphy as a tragic hero. But he is not the only one that suffers - his actions result in other patients suffering as well.

The novel takes place on the mental ward of a hospital. A ward run by the strict & watchful eye of Nurse Ratched, or Big Nurse. McMurphy is the newest patient, and the rowdiest. Transferred from a prison work farm he proceeds to enliven the "vegetables" on the ward. The other patients begin to follow McMurphy's boisterous example, but at the expense of ~~the~~ later suffering.

As a result of McMurphy's inability to conform (his tragic flaw) he is killed in the end, at the hands of Nurse Ratched (downfall and destruction). Hence McMurphy is a tragic figure. While in the end McMurphy receives the utmost tragedy, others suffer along the way. ~~the~~

The novel reaches its climax as McMurphy convinces the other patients to throw a party on the hospital ward. Most of the others are hesitant, but eventually they acquiesce to McMurphy's plot. The party commences in the middle of the night after Big Nurse has gone home. McMurphy convinces Mr. Turkle, an ~~old~~ elderly night guard to go along with the plan. Turkle, like the patients, has ~~had~~ his doubts but concedes ~~at~~ ^{at} McMurphy's challenge. ~~the~~ ~~the~~ McMurphy's hooker friend, Candy Starr arrives with her friend Sandy. McMurphy also convinced Candy to ~~go~~ go along w/ the plan - in this case have sex with the stuttering 39 year old



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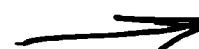
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virgin Billy Bibbit. The patients, under the leadership of McMurphy break into the narcotics closet and steal medicine to get drunk. Billy Bibbit + Candy sneak off to the seclusion room, at the approving wink of McMurphy. The party continues on through the night, the patients going through files + the ward getting destroyed.

In the morning, Big Nurse finds her patients passed out in the day room, ward in disarray. She immediately blames McMurphy and is about to commence punishment when she realizes that one patient is missing - Billy. Enraged, she marches down the hall, throwing doors open. Finally she finds Billy + Candy in the seclusion room, naked + hungered. Nurse Ratched starts yelling - then demonically re-thinks her approach. She turns to Billy's one weak spot - his mother. "Billy, I wonder what your mother will think?" This is too much for Billy to take. When, a couple minutes later, he is left in an office, he commits suicide. A suffering he would not have endured if McMurphy had not invited his lady friend.

Likewise, Mr. Turkle suffers too at the hands of McMurphy. Nurse Ratched fires him on the spot for going along with the party. The time period is the early 1950's a time when it is extremely difficult for an African American male to find a job, let alone keep it. Now Mr. Turkle must return to his family, jobless - because he went along with McMurphy's plan.

Also suffering because of McMurphy is chief



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FF3
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destruction

Bromden, the novel's narrator. This incident of suffering is not so clear cut though ^{because} the chief stands up for McMurphy. ^{In this way he volunteered for his own} Bromden does not want his best friend to be punished alone & so he takes some of the blame for the party that McMurphy organized. Both are sent to electro ~~shock~~ shock therapy, an experience that the chief describes as "painful beyond imagination!"

The suffering of many ~~at~~ the hands of one - McMurphy - contributes to the novel as a whole in that it demonstrates the total power of the combine. The combine is what the chief ~~refers to~~ ^{implies} as being industrial society & authority. A world the Big Nurse is very much a part of. A world that tragically oppresses the underprivileged & the deviant. McMurphy would not conform to the hospital society that Ratched controlled & in the end he was met ~~with~~ ^{destruction.} ~~with~~ ~~destruction.~~ Before his end however, McMurphy functioned as an instrument ~~of~~ ^{of} the suffering ~~of~~ other patients.

