The Great Gatsby, Good Hunting and The Power of One

In both real-life and in stories people write, typically the greatest impact on people’s character and outcomes are the people around them. This means the bonds people share play a key role in determining our personality and the personalities of others. This is also true in the pieces of literature, *The Great Gatsby* and *Good Will Hunting*. In these stories, the supporting characters play a significant role influencing the protagonists, Jay Gatsby and Will Hunting, in their respective fictional worlds. In *The Great Gatsby*, the protagonist, Jay Gatsby, is an incredibly wealthy man living in New York in the 1920s where he hosts extravagant parties in hopes of being reunited with his previous lover Daisy. Daisy has the most influence on Gatsby throughout the book even without communicating with him for 5 years, as in this time Gatsby has become obsessed and dedicates his life to achieve his goal. In *Good Will Hunting*, Will, a poor the janitor who was abused as a child and is a genius, escapes jail time by working with a university professor and therapist to overcome his problems and help him achieve success. Both the professor and the therapist have a substantial impact on Will's character, however the therapist is more successful and tries to help him find happiness in his life. To at least some extent, the characters in the texts represent how an individual can shape and influence another’s path in life. The supporting characters who fundamentally influence the main characters is are affected by the trust they share and how they help them achieve happiness. However, the impact although they may trust and/or be helped to find their own happiness can be negative.

In both texts, the people who impact the main characters are those who help them find happiness in their lives. This is important because it is the primary motivation of both protagonists and an overlapping theme throughout the texts. An example of this them in *Good Will Hunting* is when Sean argues with Lambeau about his treatment of Will.

*And who do you think he’s (Will’s) handling? He pushes people away before they have a chance to leave him. And for 20 years* *he’s been alone because of that. And if you (Lambeau) try to push him into this,* *it’s going to be the same thing all over again. And* *I’m not going to let that happen to him.* (Sant, 1997)

In this exert, we can see that Sean understands Will’s response to his childhood trauma caused by his foster parents. He observes that Will breaks off his friendships at the slightest sign of difficulty in the with the relationship. He has personally observed this in Will during a scene prior where Will confides in Sean about his break-up with his girlfriend Skylar. This tendency to leave relationships causes him to be lonely and therefore unhappy. Sean then tells Lambeau quite directly that the way he is treating Will is going to cause him to exhibit this the response he has seen before with him and Skylar. This reinforces that Sean has Will’s best interests in mind and wants him to be happy. During the conclusion of the film, it is shown that Sean is successful, and Will becomes genuinely happy.

In *The Great Gatsby*,this theme of happiness is less explicitly stated, but it is still a vital underlying theme in the story. This theme is thoroughly explored in Gatsby’s desire to become content with life. Even with his enormous wealth, Gatsby feels dissatisfied with the happiness he thought he would achieve by attaining his fortune. When he achieves wealth, he then moves on to a new desire, to be closer to Daisy. Once he manages to meet with Daisy and invite her back to his home, the following scene takes place.

*He (Gatsby) had passed visibly through two states and was entering upon a third. After his embarrassment and his unreasoning* *joy he was consumed with wonder at her (Daisy’s) presence. He … waited with his teeth set**, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now, in the reaction, he was running down like an overwound clock.* (Fitzgerald, 1925)

Here, Fitzgerald summarises Gatsby’s immediate reaction to meeting with Daisy. In it, we can see that he went through three phases. The first and second reference an earlier scene at Nick’s house, where Gatsby is initially hesitant and socially awkward around Daisy before finally connecting with daisy. After this, he feels “unreasoning joy” as Fitzgerald describes it, implying that his response to the situation is not normal or artificial in a way. The third phase, which is written in present tense, where Fitzgerald uses the metaphor of a mechanical clock as an analogy to Gatsby’s diminishing euphoria. This quote demonstrates Daisy’s influences on Gatsby and how she unknowingly shaped Gatsby’s life due to his pursuit of happiness and belief it can be found with her. This pursuit of happiness that shapes the protagonists in both stories shows the profound influence people can have on others, as both Will and Gatsby believe that they can find happiness in their relationships with others.

The impact the supporting characters have on the protagonists can be either positive or negative depending on the interpretation of the reader. The influence people have on each other is rarely objectively good or bad. In *The Great Gatsby,* as shown previously, the character of Daisy has an exceptionally significant impact on Gatsby’s current life, however whether this impact is positive or negative is arguable. One could argue that the tragedy at the end of the film was a freak accident and had nothing to do with the actions of Gatsby nor Daisy. The other interpretation is that his actions made the tragedy at the end of the text inevitable. Without asking the author directly, neither is more correct than the other. This means that the way you interpret the texts changes whether the impact is on Gatsby is positive or negative. This also applies itself in a slightly unique way with the character of Wolfsheim, Gatsby’s shady business partner, as seen in the following quote.

*‘Fixed the World’s Series?’ I repeated….’Why isn’t he in jail?’*

*‘They* *can’t get him, old sport.* *He’s a smart man.’* (Fitzgerald, 1925)

With this character, you could argue that the Wolfsheim had a positive impact because without him, Gatsby would not be the rich person he is in the novel. However, you could argue that this wealth that has created through illicit means was the cause of his death.

In *Good Will Hunting*, Lambeau and Sean argue about how to treat Will with Lambeau believing that if Will does not use his potential to help society, he would be doing an injustice and should be a professional academic even to the detriment of his own present happiness. Will, in the end, chooses to side with Sean, believing he should try to find happiness even if he does not use his full potential. What the outcome would have been if Will had agreed with Lambeau can only be speculated on. It may have led to the outcome Lambeau describes in the film, or may not. This way of looking at the impacts of characters as potentially positive or negative and understanding that different people may come to different conclusions about the same scenario is another way to show the depth and complexity of the influence of others.

How much someone influences someone else is dependent on how trusting they are of others. In *The Great Gatsby,* the character of Gatsby is shown to trust only a select few of the characters, those being Nick, Daisy and Jordan. This is primarily caused be very few trusting him due to the rumours surrounding Gatsby.

*“Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once.”*

*A thrill passed over all of us. The three Mr. Mumbles bent forward and listened eagerly.*

*“I don’t think it’s so much THAT,” argued Lucille sceptically; “it’s more that he was a German spy during the war.”* (Fitzgerald, 1925)

These rumours spread during his elaborate parties about Gatsby being a murderer or spy make him seem like an exceptionally untrustworthy person. This means that he knows very few people on a personal level, therefore doesn’t trust many people himself. In the story, his neighbour Nick, primarily due to being Daisy’s cousin, manages to befriend Gatsby and gains his trust. When Gatsby starts to trust Nick, he starts valuing his opinions and ideals more and naturally becomes more like him. The same applies to Daisy and Jordan, but to a lesser extent. Gatsby obviously trusts Daisy due to his feelings about her, and he trusts Jordan because of her role in getting to meet Daisy.

In *Good Will Hunting,* a very similar situation is found. Will, like Gatsby, trusts very few people, however due to a differing cause. Will is untrusting of most other people because of the abuse he received by his foster parents as a child. The only exceptions to this during the time just before the story and the introduction are his group of childhood friends, all low-income high school graduates working in construction. These people's influences are a primary factor in why Will speaks in the way he does, a combination of intellectual speech with cussing and colloquial language.

*Hello, Gerald Lambeau, M.I.T.*

*F\*ck do you want*

*…the judge … agreed to release you under my supervision*

*Really?*

*Yes. Under two conditions*

*What’re those?* (Sant, 1997)

In this conversation with Lambeau and Will, it is seen that Will does not show the appropriate respect to those above him in social class. Instead, he is shown to swear to use informal sentence fragments and contractions. This is in juxtaposition to Lambeau’s speech, which is very formal and is the way an upperclassman is expected to speak. This shows the one of the impacts Will’s friends have on him, caused by the large amount of trust they share in each other. Examples of people who will do not trust and therefore is not influenced by are the various therapists Will is forced to talk to by Lambeau before meeting Sean. This aspect of trust being key for others to be able to influence them is another way to show the magnitude of those characters influence on each story's protagonist.

In conclusion, both texts contain themes of people fundamentally influencing others paths in life and being either a positive or negative influence on the main characters. This was proven by analysing the ways in which people are influenced and how that can be interoperated.

Word Count: 1498

# References

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