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Tragedies teach more than they entertain.
To what extent do you agree with this view in relation to two texts you have studied?

It is understandable that some readers may find tragedies to be more educational than entertaining because of the moral messages they offer, which are employed in order to avoid the audience becoming subjected to the same fate as the tragic hero. Indeed, Fitzgerald's protagonist Gatsby is perhaps, through his fixated pursuit of his dreams that ultimately leads to his death, an embodiment of the widespread hedonistic values possessed by the rich in 1920s American society. Likewise, Richard II demonstrates the perilous consequences of usurping a divinely appointed monarch. However, there is a prevalent element of entertainment in both of these texts which stand to provide relief from the anticipation and sorrow associated with tragedies.

It could certainly be argued that by the end of F Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, the reader is left with a clear moral message about the carelessness and selfishness of the wealthy in 1920s America. We begin to understand the ease with which the rich ignore the struggles of the working class in the Valley of Ashes when Nick recalls that "ash-grey men [...] stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight". The depiction of the labourers as "ash-grey" connotes death, suggesting that their existence is futile because they are so poor that their life ultimately amounts to nothing. Through Fitzgerald's use of the lexical field of blindness – as their struggles are imperceptible to the "sight" of the wealthy – he suggests that they consciously side-line this plight of the poor, ignoring harsh reality to focus on their own sybaritic desires. The carelessness of the wealthy is also illustrated by the lack of people who attend Gatsby's funeral despite the fact that they were previously content to indulge in his generosity. Fitzgerald uses Nick as a mouthpiece for his criticism of the moral depravity of society as he reminds us that people used to flock to his parties "by the hundreds" but now his funeral is reduced to "procession of three cars". The juxtaposition of 'procession', which evokes an image of multitude, and "three", a comparatively small number, has an inherent tone of cynical irony. It is clear that Nick sees this to be appallingly shameless ingratitude that lacks basic decency. Tom and Daisy also fail to attend the funeral or even call, something that Nick quickly condemns. He argues that "they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness." The use of the third-person plural pronoun 'they' creates a sense of one entity and therefore that they possibly serve to symbolise the negligent attitudes of all the affluent people in society. It is possible that Gatsby's relentless chase for the American dream is a manifestation of the selfish principles and excessive extravagance rife in 1920s America. The tragic hero's dream becomes so elaborate and significant to him that eventually "it had gone beyond [Daisy], beyond everything". It appears inevitable that she, a mortal human, will not be able to live up to the transcendental future he pictures for them and is made to suffer as a result. She states that he wants "too much" from her while she "sobs helplessly". It is clear that his persistence for the acquisition of riches and social mobility has taken an emotional toll on her. Ultimately, Gatsby "paid a high price" of death for this, which could be Fitzgerald attempting to teach the reader that such hedonistic and egotistical values can only end in tragedy.

While the reader cannot help but share Nick's critical view of "the whole damn bunch" of characters in the text, we are, like him "enchanted" by the entertaining glamour and intrigue of New York society. During his drive through Manhattan, Nick describes his experience as a "promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world", a typically romantic portrayal of the scene from our retrospective narrator. The determiner 'all' implies that the city has an unparalleled aesthetic which is almost magical. Later, Nick gives the reader a sense of the alluring charm felt by all at Gatsby's party as the air is filled with "yellow cocktail music". Fitzgerald uses synaesthesia to show how the incredibly atmospheric events results in a fusing of the senses, creating a vividly entertaining multisensory image. Nick recalled that there "was music" through Gatsby's house throughout the night, but shortly after states that "the orchestra has arrived". The shift in tense here constructs a fiction of immediacy, immersing the reader in the events and inviting them to share in the overwhelmingly pleasure. To Nick, the air of this party seems to be "alive with chatter and laughter".

Fitzgerald draws on colour and movement in a way that makes the prose almost dance, evoking the sense of hearing to create what seems like background noise to Nick's narration. Our perception of events is filtered through Nick's perspective who is amazed by the "inexhaustible variety of life" in New York. Thus, it seems understandable that we too find the East and it's festivities to be thrilling and entertaining.

Richard II perhaps contains a more explicit moral message than The Great Gatsby: it warns of the danger of violating the Divine Right of Kings. Bishop Carlisle is a religious figure perhaps used by Shakespeare to express the views of Christianity on what medieval society would perceive to be a sacrilegious usurpation. During the deposition scene, he correctly prophesises that "the blood of English shall manure the ground" and generations to come will "groan for his foul act". There is a sense of dramatic irony in this as a contemporary audience would know well that Bullingbrook's reign is truly troubled. We begin to understand the physical and emotional despair that will result from this sinful deed, ultimately leading to the war of the roses. Arguably, the play's ending exposes the dire consequences of usurping the throne. Bullingbrook comes to the throne as a usurper and an illegitimate monarch. He was responsible for the death of God's anointed Richard and it is because of this that his rule is instable and plagued by guilt. In his first scene as king he is informed that "rebels have consumed with fire our town of Cicester", illustrating that the people of England have already begun to retaliate against his sacrilege. His "soul is full of woe" because Richard has been murdered, suggesting that the presumed victor is consumed with remorse and grief as he now bears the immense burden of a "guilty hand" and worries of what punishment he will receive for his sin. Through both the accurate prophecies of Carlisle and the turbulent reign of Bullingbrook, Shakespeare informs the audiences of the inevitably dire results of sacrilege.

However, there is no denying that the development of Richard's poetic insight makes him a highly entertaining protagonist. Richard employs classical and sophisticated metaphors with deeper meaning following his downfall. As a result of this, we may be willing to explore the proposal of critic Tim Spiekerman – that Richard is a better poet than a politician, as his language is 'replete with dazzling images and metaphors'. This is best exemplified by his use of images of the sun as a symbol kingship. What begins as a simple reference to the "sun" in the early stages of the play develops into an intricate and deliberated metaphor. He tells Northumberland that he will descend to the base court "like glistering Phaeton." He is comparing himself to the son of a Greek Sun-God, who stole his father's chariot and could not control it, ultimately leading to his death. It is possible that Shakespeare uses this to represent Richard's god-like descent or perhaps that like Phaeton, he could not control what he had and will in due course meet a fatal end. During the deposition scene, Richard performs an inverted coronation ceremony to magnify the sacrilege of usurpation and savour his last moments as king. He states that with "mine own tears I wash away my balm" and "with mine own hands I give away my crown". The repetition of possessive pronouns 'my' and 'mine' reinforce the illegality of the event, reminding us that Bullingbrook is stealing his rightful place. Further to this, his reference to aspects of his own body such as 'tears' and 'hands' make the act seem inhumane, inevitably evoking our pity for him. Richard demonstrates a show of elaborate articulation as his demise draws nearer, creating a sense of admiration and sympathy amongst the audience, which can easily be deemed as entertaining.

It is perhaps true that by their very nature tragedies are designed to teach the audience in the form of moral messages, as do both Richard II and The Great Gatsby in their criticism of hedonism and usurpation respectively. Yet, both texts also use intricate and remarkable language to engage the reader and, of course, entertain as a respite from the misery of tragedy. It can therefore be said that both texts are in fact a fusion of ethical teachings and enjoyment.