

(I added the **bold** part to the Bullingbrook paragraph)

Tragic heroes are complex characters who face complex adversaries.

To what extent do you agree with this view in relation to two texts you have studied?

Tragedies typically tell the story of an individual's fall from grace, and as such it is in the nature of these stories to have protagonists with depth who undergo great change, as we see in Richard's. The antagonists in tragedies however can be argued to vary a lot more in their complexity, with some being caricatures of certain traits in order to pose the greatest possible threat, whilst others are more ambiguous and can even be argued to be protagonists in their own right. Characters like Tom Buchanan, who is the embodiment of a "supercilious" upper class man of the jazz age, are given scale by way of their unwavering personality. Characters like Bullingbrook on the other hand are more ambiguous in their true nature and motives. This leaves question as to whether these characters are in fact complex, and whether or not a protagonist can be complex without a complex antagonist.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald makes Gatsby seem a complex character because there is such a discrepancy between his constructed public identity and the truth of his past. Gatsby to the public is enshrouded in mysticism, being described as "second cousin to the Devil" which links him to an inherently dangerous and powerful idea. Even our narrator describes Gatsby on a biblical scale, as Gatsby without effort asserts ownership over the "local heavens". We later find out that "these rumours are a "source of satisfaction to Gatsby". It is this "satisfaction" that implies to us that this illusion Gatsby has consciously concocted, as Fitzgerald also implied through the title of the text. "The Great" is a prefix we see often used with magicians, and so we can take this as hinting at Gatsby having a constructed reality separate from his actual one. Gatsby boasts of living "like a young Rajah", pushing so far out of his natural class that he strays into foreign royalty. Fitzgerald shows us an uninhibited aspiration in Gatsby to appear as more than he truly amounts to. Jay Gatsby is in actuality James Gatz, a name lacking the connection to American aristocracy that Gatsby so desires. Within Gatsby's own mansion, his room is the "simplest" of all, a superlative which we can take as a metaphorical representation of the man underneath the mysticism, who is as plain as can be in the intimate sanctuary that a bedroom typically represents. Gatsby at his core is still "James Gatz", a man without the upper-class sensibilities necessary to understand that people like "the lady" (a character who is kept ambiguous to perhaps represent all upper class women like Daisy) don't "want" him in their social circles. Gatsby is kept out of the intimate dinner setting he's teased with, just as he's kept from ever truly regaining the intimacy he desires with Daisy. Fitzgerald uses this repeated rejection to give us another side to Gatsby, a man abused by his own limitations who can't become more than "a regular Belasco", a fraud with divine ambition. These conflicting traits are brought together by Fitzgerald to display to us the complex nature of Gatsby's situation, caused by his complexities of character.

Gatsby is arguably a complex character because he is presented by narrator Nick Carraway as both flawed and heroic. Gatsby throughout the first few chapters is described romantically by Nick, with his smile being attributed "eternal reassurance" and him distributing "starlight" to his partygoers. Fitzgerald uses these ideas of undying intimate understanding and unrestricted generosity to make Gatsby an appealing human to the reader. This is later built on as Gatsby is described as "following a

grail", this metaphor aligning Gatsby with heroes and pilgrims of legend on a noble and holy journey. Gatsby is again given biblical connections as a "grail" implies a cup which held the blood of Christ. This also represents Gatsby's ambition for higher power, he wished to reach unreachable heights. Nick calls Gatsby "gorgeous", a word used typically in the context of attraction. Fitzgerald uses this word to emphasise just how much Gatsby is admired by Nick, our sole "window" into the narrative. However, Fitzgerald later uses this fixed perspective to later show us the complexities of Gatsby. Nick says in the beginning that he has an "unaffected scorn", implying an unchanging hatred, for all that Gatsby represents, and yet for the most part he describes Gatsby positively. Then Nick returns to his prior mentioned view, stating that his disapproval of Gatsby spanned "from the beginning to the end". Though we could take this as true, labelling Gatsby as an irredeemably deplorable man, this is unlikely. It is more likely that this is a lie from Nick which not only shows him to be dishonest, it also displays Gatsby as a character too complex to be summed up accurately after one summer of knowing him. Nick can't seem to make a decision as to who Gatsby is and how he feels towards him, which is surprising as Nick so easily passes judgement on the other characters of the novel. This serves as testament to the idea that Gatsby is not at all a simple character, but is in fact a flawed and ambiguous hero.

While there is no denying Tom Buchanan's destructive power as Gatsby's antagonist, he is not a complex man. Tom is displayed to us constantly as arrogant. He is described by Nick as "supercilious" 3 times in the novel, showing us how often one may notice the stupendous scale of his ignorant self-righteousness. Nick also oft makes reference to his "arrogant eyes" and "hulking" body, giving Tom such arrogance that it manifests physically. The personification of his eyes as "arrogant" is especially significant, as eyes are an important literary symbol representing God and a window into the soul. Tom therefore is implied at his core to be strong headed and oblivious to his lack of knowledge. This is supported by his concern with the changing social landscape of America in the 1920's. Tom speaks on issues of race and gender equality with outdated views displayed in force. Tom states "violently" that civilisation is "going to pieces" as a result of coloured people. The idea of "going to pieces" is an emotive phrase, but as the view is so drastic we don't emote. Rather we gain an understanding of Tom's passion and "profound" belief. Fitzgerald having him break this out "violently" also shows us the inescapable nature of Tom as a brute, and again helps readers to recognise the vigour behind his sentiment. Tom later states that "women run around" too much in the 1920's for his "liking". This is both explicitly and implicitly misogynistic, not only openly saying women shouldn't share in the fast-paced American lifestyle, but also implying that all women need to conform to his "liking", his desires as a man. This is directly in conflict with the increasing freedom women found in the '20's, putting Tom behind the times and making him seem unwilling to change. Even after aiding in Gatsby's death by telling Wilson where he lived, he sticks "defiantly" by the decision he made. This defiance is used by Fitzgerald to show us that even in the face of undeniably superior morality, Tom seeks to overrule and overcome the opposing view into irrelevance. Tom Buchanan characterises the patriarchal dominance of American society: unchangeable, uncomplicated, and unapologetic.

In Richard II, the eponymous King is complex in the sense that he undergoes profound change. Richard begins his story almost as a dictator, obsessed with his divinity as a monarch. He believes at one point that God will protect him with a "glorious angel", a delusion of holy protection which ultimately renders Richard defenceless to his adversaries. Richard believed that he was grander than the elements, stating that "not all the water in the rough rude sea" could depose him. Shakespeare gives Richard this self-assured nature on this elemental scale and has him insult the sea to display just how highly he's permitted to think of himself as a king. This is later contrasted by his depiction after his deposition. In Richard's only soliloquy of the play he says, "I wasted time, now doth time waste me", a utilisation of chiasmus by Shakespeare which implies a cyclical cause and effect

relationship. Richard is not utilising his time and laying "waste" to it, ensured that he would be "wasted" in turn. This seems to be a conscious comment, almost remorseful in tone. Richard has transitioned from arrogant entitlement into self-aware consideration. But this is not a transition from simplicity into simplicity. Richard displays inner conflict with an identity crisis. He speaks of being "kinged again" and "unkinged" repeatedly one after another, and the direct opposition of these words with one another reveal the dichotomy of Richard's character. Richard cannot settle on his change into a "beggar" and as such recognises himself as "nothing". Shakespeare chooses this word to inform us as to the value Richard now puts in himself, showing that he has indeed become the antithesis of what he once was, but is unable to come to terms with this. This makes Richard a character who is diverse in his personality traits, a complex tragic protagonist.

Instead of a simple adversary, we could view Bullingbrook as a Machiavellian opportunist, who uses his inheritance as a political pretext for seizing power. Bullingbrook may outwardly claim that he has returned solely in order "that [his] banishment be repealed and lands restored again", yet his actions elsewhere seem to contradict this claim. In 2.i, Northumberland informs Ross and Willoughby that Bullingbrook "repeals himself" and that his plans to return are strategic; he will wait until "the first departing of the king for Ireland" so that he can continue to gather support in Richard's absence. The scale of Bullingbrook's military support also suggests that he seeks more than the simple reversal of Richard's royal decree. We learn that he has gathered "eight tall ships" and three thousand men of war" in support. Shakespeare's choice to quantify Bullingbrook's forces makes the audience aware of the great power that he has amassed. Shakespeare's telescoping of time in this scene, in which events that in reality took place over the course of several months, occupy minutes of a single scene, reinforces the audience's sense of Bullingbrook's swift and pragmatic approach to seizing power. Bullingbrook's response to Richard's abdication of power is also very revealing. His immediate and unhesitating response, "In God's name, I'll ascend the royal throne," suggests that becoming King was his intention all along. As such, the contrast between Bullingbrook's claims and his actions suggests that he is more complex than a stock villain. **It is also worth noting that Bullingbrook does also have a downfall, which turns out to be bloodier than even Richard's. The war of the roses stems from his reign, and within days of becoming ruler he has "guilty hands". This tarnishing physically represents a mental and reputational tarnishing, showing us a downfall arguably worse than Richard's. This leaves the option open to interpret him as his own tragic protagonist, adding to the complexity of his character.**

In summation, we can take it that tragic heroes are destined to be complex in nature and simple in design, following the model of high status to lower status. Gatsby goes from loved to forgotten, and Richard goes from revered to dead. This can create antagonists who are staunch in personality eternally like Tom, or villains who are adaptive to any situation at hand such as Bullingbrook. Complexity is integral to tragedy, but not necessarily to all characters.

