

Jay gatsby and valjean in 'les miserables': comparative essay

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



The 'Great Gatsby' is a novel revolving around the story of a young man, Nick Carraway, a graduate from Yale University. He does bond business and lives in the same neighborhood as Gatsby, a rich man whose life is a mystery. Gatsby, despite his earlier struggles with life, is now living a comfortable life in a large mansion (Fitzgerald and Bruccoli 1996).

Les Misérables, on the other hand, revolves around the story of Valjean, an ex-convict jailed for sixteen years after "he was caught stealing bread for his siblings who were dying of hunger" (Hugo, 2007). After another attempted arrest, he escapes and manages to start a factory under the name Monsieur Madeleine. The lives of Gatsby and Valjean have many contrasts and similarities in the way they live and the way they eventually die.

One of the similarities is the fact that they both live mysterious lives at some point. Gatsby in 'Great Gatsby' is a rich man with many business associates, but most people are not aware of his true identity. It is revealed that his idea of living in that particular area was so that he could be reunited with Daisy, who is married by now. The reason why he lives anonymously is so that he can hide his unfortunate past, which is why he separated from Daisy earlier in life (Fitzgerald and Bruccoli 1996).

Valjean of 'Les Misérables,' on the other hand, is an ex-convict trying to live beyond his dark past. Still, the past is not about to let go of him. He becomes a hero in a number of occasions but his past status somehow catches up every time he is almost succeeding in erasing it (Hugo, 2007). On many

occasions, he changes his identity to protect himself from the authorities. He even goes as far as changing his name, but his true identity is still revealed.

The other similarity is that in the end, both parties die though under different circumstances. Gatsby is mistakenly shot dead by a man named Wilson after an accident that was caused by his car killed Wilson's wife. On the other hand, Valjean dies a natural death after all the struggles in life. Besides him on his death bed are the two most influential people in his life; his adopted daughter and his son in law. From this similarity, we get the first contrast between these two characters.

Gatsby, despite his seemingly good life with parties and a lot of wealth, dies miserably after being suspected of having killed Myrtle by hitting her with his car. Valjean, on the other hand, despite his struggles, finally finds happiness in death, where he experiences the real value of family (Hugo, 2007). This implies that the end always justifies the means since it is what matters the most.

Another contrasting element between these two people is in the way they live their lives. Valjean's life contains a series of misfortunes in the sense that he has to hide his true identity.

Each time his identity is revealed, he is in trouble with the law. He, however, has friends who are always coming to his rescue, one of them being Javert. Despite the misfortunes befalling him all through the novel, he manages to create relations that work for his good eventually. Gatsby, on the other hand, has a comfortable life since he has all the money in the world.

He has many friends and business associates, but these people are nowhere to be seen during his burial (Fitzgerald and Brucoli 1996). This is an indication that he never had friends who were willing to stand with him in trouble. Most of the people in his life were there just for convenience and for the fact that he had a high position in society.

From the comparison of these two characters, we can conclude that it is never possible to predict the future since the present is usually deceptive in most cases (Crawford 1993). Gatsby seemed to be doing well from the beginning but ends up dying most unexpectedly.

His close associates also forsake him at this point. He is buried by a few people, unlike the many people who attended his parties. Valjean, on the other hand, seemed to be losing from the very beginning, since he is always running away from authorities. He, however, has the heart to assist people in the best way he can and ends up creating a family for himself, which stands with him even to the point of death.

Crawford, Bartholow V. *American Literature*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993. Print.

Fitzgerald, F S and Matthew JBrucoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner, 1996. Print.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Miserable*. Education Books, 2007. Print.