

# The destructors by graham greene english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The two sources for this essay are "The Destructors" by Graham Greene and "Tsotsi" by Athol Fugard. "The Destructors" tells the story of a gang of kids in postwar England, who aim to tear down an old man's house. Through the influence of the main character 'T', the gang destroys an old man's house, for no other reason than to destroy something beautiful. This can be viewed as disturbing, as it is not something most kids would spend their free time doing; which starts to give the idea that the story may be a depiction of something greater. Whereas "Tsotsi", set in Sophiatown in 1956, is more about a young gang leader, surviving in South Africa during the Apartheid period. His lack of 'decency' guiding the other members of the gang to commit awful crimes, reflecting the state of their homeland during this time of great racial prejudice and segregation. Written by Fugard in 1960 after Sophiatown had been destroyed by the white community, gives a knowledgeable reader an almost instantaneous sense of inevitability to its destruction. It should also be noted that "The Destructors" is a short story whereas "Tsotsi" is a Novel, so for the purpose of this essay only the first two chapters of "Tsotsi" are being analyzed and compared. Greene has written "The Destructors" as both a paradoxical and an allegorical tale. The paradox is demonstrating the instability of post war England, by using the presentation of opposing forces throughout the story. These are evident for example, in 'T's' attitude toward 'Mr. Thomas' on numerous occasions. An example of this is where 'T' burns 'Mr Thomas'' money, not for any hatred towards him or with any intent of making use of its value; just because they can. Another example is when the boys trick 'Mr Thomas' and lock him in his outside toilet, but not wanting him to be uncomfortable or starve, "We want

you to be comfortable tonight" ' T' states. These opposing forces portray ordinary people who have both the capacity for good as well as evil. After they find that these opposing impulses conflict, they must make decisions about the path they will take. Some of these characters choose evil or at least are persuaded to follow evil, but Greene also shows that there is a possibility of redemption within the work; possibly making comment about the nature of mankind. The story itself is not just representative of the words on the page, but can be interpreted as something more important. The issues that the characters overcome will be similar to the ones they will have to manage as adults, but on a different scale. For example, the main issues for the boys are how to tear ' Old Misery's' house down in the most efficient way; and who should be in charge of these actions. In the context of this story, this can be interpreted as tearing down a country in war; and selecting a general for troops. To the boys, these issues would seem like games or mischief, but due to the allegorical nature of this story, we can see that when these kids grow up; some of these games will become a reality. Using these allegorical elements, Greene is also able to comment on post-war England. Greene also writes that the boys "... Worked with the seriousness of creators" when destroying the house, destruction being noted as a form of creation; which also paradoxes the rebuilding of post-war England and the rebuilding of society. The story is also one with an allegory about power. Newcomer ' T' joins the group and soon takes the power away from ' Blackie'. Although ' Blackie' encouraged mischief, it is the kind that does not cause harm and could be compared to the type of fun described when adults would use the phrasing ' boys will be boys'. ' T' on the other hand, raises the

stakes and the kind of mischief they seek to cause. He makes decisions for the whole group and gives them all orders, not too dissimilar from a military superior or dictator. 'T' easily persuades the others to participate in a cruel plan to destroy an innocent man's home, a home that 'T' himself describes as "... a beautiful house". In the changing social structure of this small community, the balance of power is shifting; signalling the changing of social order, as well as the earlier type of 'innocent' mischief to the more destructive. In the wake of the Second World War, these are troubling images of a new generation, emerging from the wartime experience; which would not bode well for the future. Greene uses a mix of well placed similes and personification in the text, for example, when describing 'Mr Thompson's' house "... The house stuck up like a jagged tooth". Going on further when describing 'Mr Thompson', Greene uses personification by stating that "He lived alone in the crippled house". This gives the readers' imagination a mental picture of the physical structure itself and the area surrounding it. The character 'T' takes prominence within Greene's text, namely due to the changes he causes within the story. As previously mentioned he is able to change the dynamic of the gang, persuading them to do things that the reader would not expect of them. He is a powerful character, easily thought as by the reader as disturbing. As this was written during the 1950's where people were uncertain about England's future after the war, 'T' can also be an interpretation of that very same disturbed nature. Fugard's "Tsotsi" whilst based around a gang, not unlike "The Destructors", focuses more however on the main character 'Tsotsi'. 'Tsotsi' in the native language simply means 'thug', which makes it clear that it is a

title or label rather than a name. Clearly there is some sort of distance or disconnection between 'Tsotsi' and his family, simply from the lack of use of his name. This in itself can start to even suggest a Freudian interpretation. Through the text we see that rather than creating a sense of identity from his very own history, 'Tsotsi' creates an identity in other peoples' reaction to him and his gang. We are shown "... the big men, the brave ones stood down because of him, the fear was of him, the hate was for him" and " He knew he was". Perhaps here we see a character craving to prove his actual existence, because of the disconnection with his family, but only able to gain negative identities through violence, murder and rape. Considering we learn this in the first two chapters of this novel, we learn early on that 'Tsotsi' is a character with intense anti-social and perhaps sociopathic tendencies; a desperate and possibly frenzied need for attention & recognition. As stated earlier, there is a sense of inevitability with this story, as this was written after the destruction of Sophiatown. Fugard also expresses this inevitability by describing the remnants of broken houses as being like "... skulls". This type of simile is comparable with the description of ' Mr Thomas'' house in " The Destructors", as being "... Stuck up like a jagged tooth". Just like this inevitability, Fugard cleverly uses effective foreshadowing to build up tension within in the story, with phrases such as " But he never knew until it was too late. They gave him no warning". Fugard uses however, a very different writing style to Greene in " The Destructors". Greene uses a very traditional and unbiased narrative, although with very effective descriptions, similies and personifications, to describe the harrowing conditions of post-war England and its after-effects. Fugard lengthens the sentences in the text

when describing something that could be perceived as boring or tedious, making the reader experience this as they read the text itself. This effectively conveys the feeling of lengthening time, making it comparable with the tedious nature within the story; and can be found in the very first sentence of the book. This long sentence is describing a type of silence in the day, including appropriate similes such as an old woman's voice that "... Was scolding, rattling her words like stones in a tin". Fugard's style of writing includes many colloquial terms and spellings, drawing you further into the story, as well as into the lives of the characters. Similarly to 'T' in "The Destructors", 'Tsotsi' is able to persuade his gang to commit crimes, some of which the others are hesitant to commit. An example of this is 'Boston' in "Tsotsi" and is comparable to 'Mike' in "The Destructors". 'Mike' doesn't start destroying the house as early as the rest of the gang as he's "... Got to go to church", showing that there is some sense of innocence within at least one of the characters. 'Boston', although still committing crimes alongside the rest of the gang, comments on 'Tsotsi's' mental state, stating that he himself feels sick "... Because of my decency". The readers, along with 'Boston', are encouraged to see 'Tsotsi' as lacking empathy. Personally I found that Greene's writing style was easier to read, although not as gripping as Fugard's "Tsotsi". "Tsotsi" being a story about the lives of people during the apartheid system, I found was a more interesting and significant read; as "The Destructors" was a story with an intentional openness to interpretation. With that being said I believe that both writers make good use of the appropriate similes and were narrated in the correct way, for example Greene told the story in a very open and unbiased manner;

so as open for interpretation by the reader. Fugard on the other hand, has told it in such a way the reader would be appalled by the characters living conditions and the actions they take; but with hints at ' Tsotsi's' lack of a past and ' Boston's' sense of ' decency', leaves it open for later in the book for ' Tsotsi' to realise his mistakes and perhaps a recreation of his image once more.