

Hell is other people

Philosophy



The fact, however, remains that while his hell is other people, it is also of his own making. This is clearly evidenced in his continued lack of authenticity, expressed in his use of double-tongue and failure to say what he means. When greeting King Hamlet in Act I, for example, he remarks in an aside, " a little more than kin and a little less than kind." Aloud, however, he greets his uncle quite courteously and does not show his true feelings. This attitude, which is typical of Hamlet and symptomatic of his " to be or not to be a dilemma," evidences the extent to which he is complicit in his own suffering. His failure to be true to his own sentiments and confront his own feelings and beliefs plays a key role in his suffering and, indeed, makes other people hell. Nowhere does " hell is other people," hold truer than in Hamlet's complex love-hate relationship with his mother. He does not trust Gertrude and his mistrust is such that he suspects her of complicity in his father's murder. He does not have the courage, or the self-honesty, however, to confront her. Instead, he transfers his resentment of Gertrude onto Ophelia and accuses Ophelia of that which he wants to accuse Gertrude of. This is quite clear when he tells Ophelia, " get thee to a nunnery." Ophelia has done nothing to deserve such treatment but, in Hamlet's mind, Gertrude has. The implication here is clear: his relationship with his mother is so twisted and dysfunctional in nature that it has transported him to hell. It is, not, however, a hell which is pure of Gertrude's making but one which Hamlet's own failure to be true to himself and act with any degree of authenticity has played a fundamental role in creating.

Similar to Hamlet, relationships in *The Great Gatsby* underscore the extent to which the type of relationships one chooses to engage in with other people rendered " hell other people." Gatsby's relations with practically all those

<https://assignbuster.com/hell-is-other-people/>

around him are dysfunctional; he throws parties but barely makes the effort to introduce himself. Indeed, most of those who frequent his home are neither friends nor even acquaintances. At his funeral, and despite the fact that while he was alive, his parties were always full of people, hardly any attention. Gatsby's relationship with Daisy is virtually poisoned. Not only does it lead, albeit accidentally, to Myrtle's death but it eventually leads to Wilson's descent into a hell from which he cannot escape without killing both Gatsby and himself.

While, contrary to the case with Hamlet, Gatsby cannot be accused of lacking authenticity he is, nonetheless, complicit in his own death and in the hell which others push him deep within. He is responsible insofar as he chose to engage in exploitative relationships with Daisy, Tom, and Jordan - they exploited him and he used them. The consequence was the death of three people. Indeed, in this work, hell is not only other people but other people are dead.

The correlation between lack of authenticity and "hell is other people," is further established in O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation." The plot, while sharing little in common with either *The Great Gatsby* or *Hamlet*, is based on the premise that if hell is other people, then we make them thus. The English and Irish stand in sharp contrast to one another. The English soldiers/guests, reject their status as prisoners/enemies and, instead, integrate into their surroundings and live the moment as they want to live it. They are true to themselves and, as such, do not allow others to drag them into hell. The Irish soldiers are different. They do not want to execute the Englishmen but they carry out the order nonetheless. In so doing, they fail themselves and allow their relationships with others, specifically with the two Englishman, to

<https://assignbuster.com/hell-is-other-people/>

become a private hell. The narrator clearly expresses this when saying: "Noble says he saw everything ten times the size, as though there was nothing in the whole world but that little patch of bog with the two Englishmen stiffening into it, but with me it was as if the patch of bog where the Englishmen were was a million miles away, and even Noble and the old woman, mumbling behind me, and the birds and the bloody stars were all far away, and I was somehow very small and very lost and lonely like a child astray in the snow. And anything that happened to me afterward, I never felt the same about again." Noble is lost to himself and others have become his hell. He is, however, responsible for this situation because he did not act in accordance with his beliefs and failed to realize his authentic being.

In sum, and as this essay has tried to argue, Hamlet, The Great Gatsby and "Guests of the Nation," are illustrative examples of the veracity of Sartre's contention that hell is other people. All three works can be categorized as tragedies and the tragedies which unfold are a direct consequence of the nature of the central characters' relationship with the people surrounding them. Other than that, the events which lead up to the respective tragedies confirm the degree to which jaundiced relationships with others can lead to deep personal suffering. Nevertheless, the central characters are complicit in their own suffering and if others made their lives hell, they did the same.