

# The Arrogant Gentleman

By Olivia Smith

I wonder how many good books out there get left unfinished, or how many readers die before they meet final chapters. Perhaps some books aren't meant to be finished, or maybe some readers aren't worthy enough for the end discovery.

Sitting like a cold sardine on the busy 6pm train heading out of the city, not even the suspense in this crime fiction can hold my attention away from eaves-dropping the conversations around me. Most evenings my inherent curiosity draws me towards either, the crazy gentlemen who converses with his hands or the group of young well-dressed business men, who interact like a pack of boastful lions. Don't get me wrong, the gentleman casually chatting with his hands is certainly fascinating to overhear, but this evening it is the gentleman's club that attracts my nosiness. The savageness that comes with climbing the corporate ladder astounds me. It's like watching an episode of suits, although all the charm and likability is replaced with spiteful jealousy.

I can originate most of the cruel comments back to one rather striking gentleman in particular. He stands taller than the rest, not physically but through a strong sense of self-proclaimed superiority, as unmistakable as his confidence in stare. He's holding a small book upside down, making it difficult to comprehend its title: 'The Manifestation of Wealth.' His ruthlessness is impressive, his gaze patronizing enough to prevent eye contact and make you second guess your whole existence. He reminds me of a story my parents would tell my brothers and I whenever we were nasty to one another. It was about a boy called Salty Sam who lacked kindness and as a result lost all his friends. This real life grown up Salty Sam, is certainly aware of his conventional good looks and the fact that the others orbit around him in envy. As he smugly pushes back his youthful hair the others apprehensively attempt to gain his approval and I suppose his friendship, regardless of how superficial it may be. If they are lucky enough to receive any response at all it's as submissive as it is cruel. If I couldn't hear his commentary with my own ears, his patronizing eye rolls alone would make me assume that anything said by anyone but him was utterly pathetic. Human nature is a fascinating thing, a lust for acceptance leads to moral corruption and not a slither of modesty. The rest of the pack laugh along like bystanders in a schoolyard, driven by fear, relieved that someone else is the victim of the arrogant man's ridicule.

As the night's darkness truly sets in, softening the cabin chatter, the topic of conversation has turned to a promotion the arrogant man is adamant he's going to receive. The vanity in his words is nearly as overwhelming as the cliff-hanger of the book I'm too distracted to finish.

"Huh, I must say that imbecile in finance has got guts going for my promotion, then again, considering that Holden shitbox he drives can you blame him, he's desperate. Nevertheless, gentlemen, watching his delusional attempt crumble to pieces is guaranteed entertainment." He expresses this through a devilish grin while relishing in the groups fear-driven admiration. As he adjusts his perfectly fitted coat and reaches for his book, his conceited laugh fills the train, making me wonder where all this bitterness began. Maybe his arrogant nature is a disguise, hiding his true character, cloaking his deep-seated insecurities by presenting a kinglike figure he remains faithful to. Perhaps the arrogant man has remained so faithful to his self-made image that he has become the disguise he once wished he was.

Answering a question that no one asked, the arrogant man begins to describe a car, I assume he's purchasing in celebration of the promotion. He's convinced even me that it couldn't possibly go to anyone other than himself. His eyes widen in excitement, the first time I've seen them do so when talking about something other than himself. He's painting a picture with his words and losing himself in the description.

"I tell you, my girl makes Cleopatra look cheap. She's slender and delicate but when she roars you'll feel vibrations through your spine even before you know she's coming. Deep opal blue with white rims and a V8 engine with horsepower enough to make you drool. The most beautiful thing you've ever seen. Realistically it'll be the closest any of you get to such a vehicle, so if you're lucky I might let you touch her," he says, humouring himself while the other business men chuckle along looking slightly insulted but never the less displaying endless adoration. All except one gentlemen, younger than the rest whose suit is at least two sizes too big. Rolling his eyes and turning away, he catches the attention of the arrogant man, whose

amusement has now turned to anger. Through the cruel grin I've grown so familiar too, I assume it's his only form of smile, he declares,

"Hey kid, if you're lucky you might score a job washing it, a career you might actually show some skill in... no offence buddy," Surprising me, the rest of the group and most noticeably the arrogant man, the younger gentlemen utters with a confidence I aspire to have, and a confrontational nature that makes me sink into my book,

"I think I'll pass... buddy." The arrogant man's infuriation is as evident as the clenching of his jaw. The sounds of the train muffle the arrogant man's whispers although it can't muffle the roar of spiteful laughter it provoked, undoubtedly directed at the younger man in the big suit. I guess it's true that nice guys finish last in a condescending society made up of sheep, willing to throw one another under the bus.

Three weeks of train catching has passed and I've finally learnt to control my eavesdropping habits. I can't say if its due to this enticing book, or the fact that the arrogant man has found another way home from the office. Thus, he isn't around to make me query all the immorality in life. On this stormy night, the crazy man still talks to his hands and the business men still discuss the daily issues, although you'd think they're completely different people to the ones I observed just weeks ago. No spitefulness and deception, just genuine interaction. As I am speculating how vulnerable some people can be to corruption, I am jolted out of my seat onto the train floor, loosing grip of my book that is flying past the distressed passengers around me. Sparks and shattered glass fill my vision as frightful screams fill the train. After instinctively checking myself for wounds, I come to the obvious realization that the 6pm train won't be making its destinations this evening. There has been a crash.

Assessing the damages to my book, I look out the cracked window beside me at the dreadful collision, and sure enough the arrogant man was right, it was beautiful. Through the thick rain, I watch a half-crushed Opal blue sports car go up in flames, ensuring the death of the striking gentlemen inside. Amongst the smoke, fly the burning pages of the book I suppose he never got the chance to finish. I don't know much about karma but one might conclude that the arrogant gentleman wasn't worthy of the final chapters.

### Rational:

As a contemporary tragedy, *The Arrogant Gentleman* aims to provoke philosophical ideas within its contemporary audience, subsequently making readers reflect on their own arrogance and the consequences it may incite. To achieve this purpose, *The Arrogant Gentleman* comprises of accustomed and appropriated forms of Aristotelian conventions, such as hubris and unity of place, validating the tragic nature of the story. This is comparable to Peter Shaffer's appropriation of Aristotelian convention within his contemporary tragedy *Equus*, when attaining the plays purpose. *Equus* aims to explore human nature while attempting to make sense of its complexities, which is reflective of *The Arrogant Gentleman's* purpose as they both query humanity. Considering the upfront concept of death that resonates in each tragedy and the not too dissimilar context each is written into and set, *Equus* and *The Arrogant Gentleman* share a common contemporary audience, being mature readers capable of attaining each texts substance.

In Ancient Greek theatre, setting the play in one single location was logistically the only option, and in doing so was successfully in holding the audience's attention purely on the performers, rather than surrounding influences. I have intentionally incorporated this convention to serve a similar purpose, ensuring uninterrupted fluency and minimal distraction from the narration. By guiding the reader's attention in this way, unity of place makes the audience more susceptible to the ideas being provoked, subsequently allowing the purpose to be clearly achieved. It can be argued that Shaffer's inclusion of this convention within his play, serves a similar purpose of isolating the important aspects. Regardless of Alan's re-enactments, the entire play of *Equus* is situated within Rokesby Psychiatric Hospital, maintaining unity of place.

In Ancient Greek theatre, it was not uncommon for a protagonist's hamartia to be the conventional characteristic of hubris. Aristotle discusses the characteristic of hubris in his *Rhetoric* stating that, "Hubris consists in doing and saying things that cause shame to the victim...simply for the pleasure of it." The demise a protagonist typically experienced due to their hubris was used as a warning in Ancient Greek tragedy, discouraging the audience from judging themselves higher than the gods. Over time this convention has adapted to fit a contemporary context, now commonly serving as a caution against overbearing arrogance, which is reflected by the protagonist in *The Arrogant Gentleman*. I have further appropriated this Aristotelian convention to resonate with my contemporary audience by building the hubristic nature of the arrogant man around his need for materialism and the savageness of the corporate world. This differs to the hamartia, Shaffer has incorporated into his protagonist, Dysart, whose tragic flaw is the dissatisfaction he feels within his life and occupation rather than excessive arrogance.

Furthermore, Motifs often resonate within Ancient Greek Tragedy, to build symbolic significance and subsequently draw the audience towards certain ideas. Both Peter Shaffer and I have included this element within our contemporary tragedies by instilling certain symbols with meaning to achieve this purpose. I have incorporated motif in *The Arrogant Gentlemen*, through the idea that an unfinished book is symbolic of a life cut short, evident in the protagonist's denouement. I have included the protagonist's demise at the point of the climax to add to the finality of the story. Similarly, Shaffer instils symbolic meaning in *Equus* himself, representing Christ.