

Paper 2 Essay Framework (Contrast)

Introduction:

- Contrast: A key stylistic feature in literary works where the differences between two elements are highlighted
 - It is thus not uncommon to find pairs of characters or settings that are juxtaposed for the sake of emphasising their contradictory or antithetical characteristics
 - Gatsby and Outsider make salient use of contrast to communicate and elucidate their central messages
- Outsider(1942)
 - Contrast between the protagonist Meursault and other characters/ Contrast between different settings
 - Convey the notion of the absurdity of life
 - Men's tendency/propensity to impose rationality on an irrational world
 - Society's rejection of the eponymous outsider
- The Great Gatsby (1925)
 - Highlighting differences in setting and characterisation
 - Communicate ideas about the corruption of the American Dream
 - Tragedy of social stratification in 1920s America.

(Outsider) Contrast in setting to illustrate the absurdity of life

- Events of the novella set in French Algeria
 - Meursault - a pied noir (Someone of French decent born in Algeria)
- Meursault confronted with the disharmony and hostility of the universe represented by heat and light
 - Chapter 1 Part 1 – Funeral and night Vigil
 - Meursault experiences immense physical discomfort
 - Meursault laments “glaring heat reflected off the road” on the way to the nursing home
 - Speaks of the “blinding light” in the room in the midst of the vigil
 - Reiterates the punishing heat and his throbbing temples during the funeral processions

- Chapter 6 Part 1 – Climax of the novella
 - Meursault experiences “the same sun as the day of Mother’s funeral”
 - “sheets of blinding rain”
 - the overwhelming sensory assault of the sunlight leaping off the Arab’s knife “like a spear”
 - Description of heat coupled along with hyperbole and violent imagery perspicuously communicates the hostility of nature and the universe towards Meursault, who as yet has not come to terms with the fact that rationality and meaning cannot be imposed on an existence that is fundamentally irrational and meaningless (Link to thesis statement)
- Transition: Camus’ attempt to communicate ideas of absurdism is only consummated when he shows the contrast in setting when Meursault finally embraces the meaninglessness of life.
 - Chapter 5 Part 2 – Night before execution
 - Meursault describes how night air “cooled [his] temples with the smell of salt and earth”
 - A “wondrous peace” was experienced
- Link
 - Indeed Camus effectively shows that we can only find peace when we do not deny the absurdity of life but embrace it, when he likens it to a “melancholy trance” with “the benign indifference of the world”
 - This contrast in setting – between the discomforting and the soothing – therefore aids Camus in convincing readers of his notion of absurdism.

Contrast between Meursault and other characters- to demonstrate men’s propensity to impose the rationality on the irrational

- Chapter 1 Part 2 – Interaction between Meursault and examining magistrate
 - Meursault persistently questioned on why he shot the dead Arab four more times
 - Meursault’s reaction: Expressed his desire to “tell him he was wrong to insist on this last point”
 - Here, the rationality of men represented by the legal system, flounders and is disoriented in the face of what is irrational (Link to thesis statement)

- Chapter 3 of Part 2 – Prosecutor’s condemnation of Meursault
 - Prosecutor strives to rationalize Meursault’s crime as a premeditated act of cold-blooded murder
 - By pointing out Meursault’s disconnected and unconventional way of life
 - Meursault indicted for:
 - Smoking and drinking white coffee besides his mother’s body
 - Being ignorant of his mother’s age
 - Watching a Fernandel film/having sexual liaison the day after the funeral
 - The above points used to prove Meursault was an unfeeling and “immoral monster”
 - Meursault ultimately condemned not for his crime but for his unconventional lifestyle
 - Bring in “some people laughed” when Meursault explained his murder was compelled by the Sun
- Link
 - The contrast between the rationality of man and the irrationality of reality serves Camus’ point that man tends to elevate reason to a higher status than it ought to have
 - Contrast therefore brings across his point that we must come to terms with the irrationality or existence

Further contrast between Meursault and other characters - to demonstrate society’s fear and rejection of the outsider/ intolerance of the anomaly

- Chapter 1 Part 2 - Interaction between Meursault and examining magistrate
 - Magistrate brandishes a “silver crucifix” in an impassioned attempt to proselytise Meursault
 - Becomes increasingly agitated that Meursault did not “[weep] at this symbol of suffering
 - Magistrate is threatened by Meursault’s unbelief
 - He then proceeds to insist that “all men believe in God”
 - Declares Meursault’s indifference was an affront to his own sense of meaning; encapsulated by rhetorical question “Do you want my life to be meaningless?”
- Chapter 4 Part 2
 - A prime example/scene that reinforces the idea of society’s fear of one who thinks differently
 - Meursault condemned for
 - Being ignorant of the “basic human reactions” and “fundamental laws of society”
 - Having a soul so “empty” that it was likened to a “chasm that threatens to engulf society”

- Soon becomes apparent that Meursault is condemned not for his 'criminality' but for his 'peculiarities'
- Link
 - The contrast between Meursault's atheism and the defiance of social norms and the beliefs of other characters therefore clearly convey Camus' message that society is fundamentally afraid of the anomaly

(The Great Gatsby) Contrasting characters to communicate central ideas

- Central Ideas: Corruption of the American Dream, Tragedy of social stratification in 1920s America
- Set in Roaring twenties where the American Dream was a popular belief
 - American Dream: That anyone could achieve social-economic advancement and high station in life through hard work, regardless of their background or upbringing
- Corruption of the American Dream, from its original ideals of progress for humanity and betterment of society to a selfish pursuit of material wealth and social status
 - Upward social mobility in fact a lie
 - Contrast between Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan
 - Gatsby – A “self-made man”, representative of the nouveau riche who had acquired their wealth during their lifetime through their own efforts
 - Tom – Representative of the ‘old rich’ who were “enormously wealthy” by virtue of their lineage
 - Different fates of characters:
 - ❖ Gatsby “broke up like glass against Tom’s hard malice”, took the blame for Daisy’s inadvertent killing of Myrtle, subsequently murdered by George Wilson
 - ❖ Tom emerges unscathed
 - ❖ Contrast between fates of these 2 characters illustrates Fitzgerald’s opinion of social mobility. He also pities those who believe in a version of the American Dream with naivety, and conveys a thinly veiled disdain for the impunity of the upper class through this contrast

Contrast between setting to bring out the tragedy of social stratification

- Contrast between East and West Egg
 - Contrast in geographical location shows the reproachful disparity between the aristocratic upper class and the nouveau riche
 - East and West Egg “dissimilar in every particular except shape and size”
- East Egg
 - Described as “fashionable” with “white palaces” that “glittered along the water”
 - “White palaces” : complements idea of royalty with an impression of purity and sophistication (Colour imagery)
 - “glittered” imparts a magical, attractive quality to the East Egg which is therefore seen as an exclusive enclave of the culture and wealthy
- West Egg
 - “less fashionable”
 - Gatsby’s home is dismissed as a “factual imitation of the some Hôtel de Ville”
- It is thus evident that that while the nouveau riche are superficially equal to the upper class in wealth, their sophistication was not genuine
- Disparity that cannot be changed even with the acquisition of wealth:
 - Example 1): East Egg’s atmosphere is idyllic, with the evening being “casually put away”
 - Conversely, in the West Egg the evening is “hurried from phase to phase in a continually disappointed anticipation” or “sheer nervous dread”
 - Example 2) West Egg’s “spectroscopic gaiety” cannot conceal the underlying lack of class and heritage of the nouveau rich which is juxtaposed with the “staid nobility” and “distinguished homogeneity” of East Egg in Chapter III
- Link
 - This striking difference illustrates Fitzgerald’s that the glass ceiling of social class can never be broken- part of the tragedy of social stratification.
- Note: May want to consider using Valley of Ashes as an example

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Camus and Fitzgerald make salient use of contrast as a literary device to effectively elucidate and communicate the central themes in their works. In both Gatsby and The Outsider, striking contrasts between characters and settings make these authors’ central messages memorable and compelling by means of antithesis.

