

Anglo-Chinese School

(Independent)

Name Rohhil (002329-0419)

Subject Langlit Timed Practice P2

Class 6-17 Narareth



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Qn (November 13) 6: Tension is often created between "new" and "old". To what effect do writers make use of such tension in the two works you have studied?

Tension often arises as a result of conflict and impending confrontation, thus signalling the rising action of the story toward a climax. In The Great Gatsby (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the tension is created between the 'new', which refers to the Nouveau Riche and the 'old', referring to the original Aristocracy of 1920s America. The effect created by this tension is the revelation of the emptiness of The American Dream as an ideal as well as the social immobility ^{and stratification} present at the time. Similarly, in The Outsider (1942) by Albert Camus, originally L'Étranger (translated by Joseph Laredo), the tension is created in several forms. Firstly, the 'old' or the indigenous Arabs against the 'new' or the Pied-Noir, referring to the European Algerians. This is done to highlight the racial and social divide present in French-colonized Algeria. Secondly, tension is shown between Meursault and the chaplain, highlighting the rejection of religion in relation to Camus' Absurdist philosophy.

The Nouveau Riche refers to individuals who have amassed their wealth within their generation whereas the Aristocracy refers to individuals who have been born into their wealth. As such, the social divide was evident. Jay Gatsby is a representative of the Nouveau Riche and seems to have as much wealth as his Aristocratic counterparts, Tom Buchanan and Daisy. Gatsby's attempts to fit into and be included in this elite social class

The Best Is Yet To Be

are evident through his pursuit for Daisy. Daisy was his 'golden girl', one who's 'voice (was) full of money'. This insinuates the fact that Gatsby's one and passion for Daisy was not for her, but for her wealth and aristocratic privileges. However, despite his efforts, in the confrontation between Tom and Daisy, she cannot help but utter 'Oh - you ask too much!' as he states his desire for her. It is clear that Daisy is unwilling to leave Tom for Gatsby. Daisy 'loved (Tom) once, but (she) loved (Gatsby) too!', which again hints that perhaps she loved Tom for the sense of security and aristocratic privilege he can give her, but loved Gatsby as a person. As such, in this scene of tension, it is evident that Daisy's love for Gatsby covers before her love for privilege. Thus, the tension used by Fitzgerald serves to show the immobility of society, downward in this case, which inhibits the American Dreamer like Gatsby from achieving his goals. Despite American Dream - connotations of success with hard work regardless of background, the social rigidity present here shows the emptiness of The American Dream as an ideal, since Gatsby will never be able to get Daisy back.

Social immobility however does n't only downwards, but upwards as well. In Gatsby's encounter with Mr Sloane and his lady, it is evident that the Aristocrats including Tom and Mr Sloane don't want his presence since Sloane's lady is having 'a big dinner party and he won't know a soul there'. They are also amused that he doesn't know 'he is not wanted there'. As such, the social divide is made clear through the Aristocracy's rejection of the Nouveau Riche. Since Gatsby didn't inherit his wealth like they did, he immediately become inferior to them. Thus, in a society dominated by such exclusive aristocrats, it would

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be impossible for Gatsby to achieve his ambitions to be accepted into the elite, highly coveted social circle of the aristocracy. To Gatsby, finally being accepted into this elite circle is testament to his hardwork and evidence of the fruit of his hard work. However, he already seems to be denied the privilege aristocrats seem to own, hinting at the impossibility of the American Dream as an ideal. The empty dream he seems to be chasing foreshadows a dead end and his eventual downfall. As such, all the tension created in the novel by Fitzgerald, especially between the aristocracy and the Nouveau Riche, serves to foreshadow the eventual demise of Gatsby and the extreme consequences of his desperation and futile pursuit.

Similarly in The Outsider, tension is omnipresent throughout the novel. In French-colonised Algeria, racism was widespread and Arabs were often discriminated against by the fléd-Noir, resulting in the tension, fuelled by the dislike by both parties for each other, in the novel.

Raymond Sintes often beat his Arab mistress, as Meursault could 'hear a woman screaming' from his apartment. This conflict highlights not only the racial dominance Raymond portrayed but also showed his Misogynistic character. This resulted in a build up of tension between Raymond and the Arab mistress's brother, who seemed to be following him around. The tension thus lead to a confrontation on the beach, where Raymond was attacked by the Arab brother who 'slashed (his) mouth and

The Best Is Yet To Be

arm'. The tension which existed before the confrontation and the buildup of it to the climax functions to heighten the intensity of the climax as well as to portray the pre-existing differences between the Arabs and the Pied-Noir ^{in 1940s Algeria} which contributed to the violence and bloodshed.

Secondly, the tension between Meursault and society is immediately apparent after he shot an Arab. While in trial in an Algerian courtroom, with a predominantly Algerian Arabian crowd, since they were a majority of the population in Algeria, Meursault began to feel the pressure of society encroach since 'for the first time in a while, (he) had this stupid urge to cry because (he) felt that all the people (there) hated him'. This reveals society's limited tolerance for such a heinous crime and the fact that he had murdered an Arab made it only worse. Thus, this tension created by Camus by showing Meursault overwhelmed by emotion for the first time in the novel serves to show the ^{unrelenting} judgement faced by Meursault for committing, in the eyes of society and Algerian law, an unforgivable crime.

Finally, toward the end of the novel, the tension between Meursault and the chaplain is made clear. Despite refusing to see the chaplain "three times", he finally has a conversation with him in which the chaplain begins to convince Meursault to turn to God and cast his worries to him. However, Meursault 'didn't know what interested (him), but (he) did not what didn't interest (him), and this was one of the things that didn't interest (him)'. Thus, Meursault shows no interest in the chaplain's preaching as he 'didn't have much time left' and 'didn't want to waste it on God'. Through Meursault's indifference, Camus rejects

The Best Is Yet To Be

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the ideologies which religion imply. This is in line with his Absurdist philosophy. Absurdism is the belief that human effort to find meaning in life is futile, since no such meaning exists in the irrational universe we live in. According to him, one must come to realise the absurdity and the meaninglessness of one's life. After this realisation, one can either commit philosophical suicide by subscribing to religious ideologies or come to terms with the reality of his situation. In the christian context, these religious ideologies referred to the notion of afterlife, which offered an escape from an otherwise finite life. This, to Camus was a super-destructive belief as it inhibits one from being able to live in the moment. Thus, through Meursault's indifference toward such religious ideas, Camus presents his own argument against religion.

Camus' rejection of religion in support of his absurdist philosophy is made stronger by his violent portrayal of Meursault as he grabbed the chaplain 'by the collar of his cassock' in rage. Thus, the tension built between Meursault and the chaplain solidified Camus' rejection of religion in defence of his Absurdist view to life, better explained in a later essay of his, The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), originally Le Mythe de Sisyphe, where Sisyphus, a greek mythological figure has been eternally condemned to the labour of pushing a boulder up a hill which eventually rolls back down on its own. However, to

comus, Sisyphus's acceptance of the reality of his situation causes him to have pleasure in his labour, the same pleasure Meursault can enjoy if he isn't deluded by religious ideas.

In conclusion, tension is a technique used by both authors in order to highlight the thematic ideas present in their novel. On a personal level, I feel that Fitzgerald's attempt at creating tension between the 'old' and the 'new' was more pronounced, thus pushing through the thematic ideas he wanted to portray more effectively.