

## Paper 2 Essay Framework (Timelessness)

### Introduction:

- Timeless: works that have influenced audiences beyond their immediate cultural and temporal context
  - Convey important messages that abide beyond their era
  - Continue to be influential and instructive to the present day
  - Exploration of universal, timeless ideas of society and the human condition that have made them transcend their individual historical context
  - Achieved significance as seminal works
- Outsider (1942)
  - Absurdity of life
  - Mankind's tendency to impose rationality on an irrational world
  - Society's rejection of the eponymous outsider in the midst
- Gatsby (1925)
  - Man's inclination for hope and its corruption
  - Mankind's propensity for moral decay
  - Society's continual tendency to exploit the defenceless/stifling of lower social class

### Absurdity of life

- Camus espouses the idea of absurdism
  - Absurdism: The belief that life is ultimately meaningless and that men's search for meaning is in the end futile
- Insights influenced by personal experience
  - Father died in WWI when he was a year old
  - Nearly died of tuberculosis
  - Personal experience with the brevity of life and the inevitability of death is reflected in his construction of Meursault
  - Meursault who acts as Camus mouthpiece
    - State examples – Affirmation to Chaplain (Chapter 5 Part 2)
    - Sentiments about marriage and death
    - Response to his boss offering him a posting to Paris
- Through Meursault, Camus points out the existential notion
  - Existential notion: Existence does not necessarily have meaning, and men often try to ascribe meaning to what is in fact meaningless
  - Suggests that it was coming to terms with the "benign indifference of the world" - its innocuous meaninglessness - that would allow one to be truly happy
    - Example: Just before Meursault's execution

- Link
  - Existential philosophy of which absurdism is a subset
  - Occupied minds since the Frederic Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre era
  - Remains relevant as each individual continuously seeks to understand life
  - Hence, Camus exploration of this idea makes his work outlast his era and influence the development of subsequent philosophical thoughts.

### Mankind's propensity/tendency to impose rationality on an irrational world

- Examining magistrate asking Meursault why he shot the Arab 4 times (Chap 1 Part 2)
  - Seeking a rational justification for what seemed to be an outburst of hatred and passion
  - Meursault conversely, wanted to point out that he was wrong to insist on the number of shots
  - Here, the rational flounders and struggles when it is juxtaposed with the completely irrational
- Prosecutor's portrayal of Meursault (Chap 1 Part 2)
  - Strives to portray Meursault as a "heartless criminal"
  - By insisting on the "tragic and vital relationship" between his lack of grief at his mother's funeral and the murder of the Arab
  - Seeks to condemn Meursault based on his disconnected and unconventional life, using it as the grounds to rationalise that his murder was premeditated
  - Ironical as courtroom fails to realise the fact that the murder was in fact irrational
  - "Public laughed" when Meursault explained the Sun compelled his murder
  - These episodes outline the way people have elevated reason to a higher place than it ought to have
- Link:
  - Such assertion has implications for society and the way we think even now, and is indeed a salient truth that abides beyond the details of the novella.

### Society's rejection of the eponymous outsider

- Meursault represents the belief in absurdity and reconciliation, with the reality of irrationality
- Other characters represent what is antithetical
- Interaction between Meursault and examining magistrate
  - Brandishing of the "silver crucifix" in an impassioned attempt to proselytise Meursault
  - Threatened by Meursault's indifference and unbelief
  - Meursault not weeping at the symbol of suffering strikes fear in the magistrate
  - Magistrate's beliefs shaken by anomalous encounter

- Prosecutor's condemnation of Meursault
  - Condemns Meursault for his non-conformity to the "fundamental rule of society" and his divergence from "basic human reactions"
  - Brings up Meursault's sexual encounter with Marie and his watching of a Fernandel film the day after his mother's funeral
  - Evidently, it is the fear of a person who thinks and behaves differently –an outcast- that drives Meursault's trial, rather than a factual judgment of his crime
- Link
  - Camus thus perspicuously suggests that what society condemns is 'peculiarity' rather than 'criminality'
  - The courtroom, as a microscopic symbol of the macrocosm of society thus shows the intolerance of society, which remains pertinent till today in understanding and shaping the development of human society
  - The Outsider thus succeeds in achieving a timeless importance.

#### (Gatsby) Humanity's inclination for hope

- In Gatsby, Fitzgerald likewise delves into timeless ideas of the human condition and society. First of all, he points out humanity's inclination for hope
- Gatsby
  - Having a "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life"
  - Pursuit of the "orgastic future"
  - It is this capacity to dream- the belief in the "unreality of reality" and that reality is founded on a "fairy's wing" that propels him to seek wealth and the hand of Daisy Fae
- George Wilson
  - Ability to hope is also evident
  - Constantly asks about Tom Buchannan's interest in selling his car, in the hope of making some money
  - Hoped to secure the transaction and move elsewhere to lead a happier life upon discovering that Myrtle had a "life apart from him" in Chapter VII
- Link
  - This hope in the future and "romantic readiness" about the possibilities of life thus permeate the novel
  - Through his description of the universal capacity to dream, Fitzgerald thereby elucidates an integral trait of humanity which transcends America in the 1920s.

### (Gatsby) Corruption of these same dreams

- Secondly, Gatsby also demonstrates the corruption of these same dreams
- American dream
  - American Dream: The belief that anyone in society can achieve wealth, social advancement and high station in life through sheer hard work, regardless of their background.
  - Taking away the label, this is in fact quite a common aspiration and ideal in every society
  - However, Fitzgerald shows the 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
    - Example: Gatsby's mistake
      - "foul dust that floated in the wake of [Gatsby's] dreams"
      - Focusing his "incorruptible dream" on the wrong person
      - "colossal vitality of his illusion"
      - Blinded him to the carelessness and imperfection of the woman he pursued, leading to the inevitable tragedy
    - Example: Unmoral means of encompassing wealth
      - Phone calls from Philadelphia/Chicago
      - Willingness to deal with the underworld
      - "sold grain alcohol over the counter"
    - Example: Myrtle Wilson's attempt to climb the social ladder
      - "foul dust that floated in the wake of [Gatsby's] dreams"
      - No qualms about being a mistress to Tom Buchanan
      - Sought to elevate herself away from a man who was "beneath her"
- Link
  - Here, we see the loss of the pure spirit of the American Dream and the unscrupulous means that society is willing to stoop in order to achieve personal advancement.
  - As a diagnosis of human fallibility and depravity, Gatsby achieves timeless significance.

### (Gatsby) Society's continual tendency to exploit the defenceless/stifling of lower class

- Dan Cody
  - Gatsby's millionaire mentor
  - Brought the "violence of the Eastern brothel to his yacht"
  - A conceptual amalgamation of Daniel Boone and Bill Cody, pioneers who exploited the native Americans
  - That this connection should be made as an inspiration of Gatsby's rise to wealth is telling of the Gatsby's cruelty and exploitation

- Tom Buchannan
  - Likewise condescends and bullies George Wilson
  - Unrepentant about his affair with Myrtle (George's wife)
  - Threatens to withhold car from him
- Joining statement: Besides outright oppression of the lower class, we also see the more insidious reinforcements of barriers to social advancement.
- Contrast between the nouveau riche and the "old rich"
  - Aristocratic Mr Sloane, the woman in the brown riding-habit and Tom Buchannan subtly condescend to Gatsby in Chapter VI. Do not regard him as their equal
  - While similar in superficial ways- in wealth and possessions- Gatsby lacks the sophistication and shrewdness to realize as Tom points out that the woman "doesn't want him to come" to her dinner party.
  - Gatsby's nativity and eagerness to come is all the more poignant, as they leave him behind before he gets ready.
  - This is symbolic of the inability of the lower class to ever attain equality with the aristocratic upper class
  - Daisy is "offended" and "appalled" by the West Egg- its "raw vigor" and "awful simplicity she failed to understand" (At Gatsby's Party)
- Link
  - As social classes occur to a certain extent in every society, Gatsby succeeds as perhaps the supreme American novel in transcending time.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, both The Outsider and Gatsby are important timeless works due to their salient exploration of universal themes that govern society and the human condition.