

#### 4. To what extent could at least two works you have studied be considered works of protest?

Both novels, Wide Sargasso Sea and The Great Gatsby can be considered works of protest against societal conventions of the era in which they were set. In Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys' rewriting of the British literary canon Jane Eyre protests the colonial narrative. By setting the novel in postcolonial Jamaica following the 1833 Emancipation Act which abolished slavery, Rhys portrays the protagonist Antoinette as a victim of colonialism while producing a feminist critique of Jane Eyre, which depicts Antoinette as nothing more than a 'mad woman in the attic'. Likewise, in The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald protests the disparity between the social classes in 1920s American society amidst the post-war economic boom. By outlining the immoral means by which Jay Gatsby and Myrtle Wilson seek to rise up the social ladder, Fitzgerald highlights the corruptibility of the American Dream and disparity between the upper class and lower middle class to critique American society during the Jazz Age.

In Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys makes use of narrative voice to highlight the cultural misunderstanding between Antoinette, a white Creole, and her husband, an Englishman assumed to be Rochester from Jane Eyre. The differing narrative perspectives allow readers to be made fully aware of the clash between the Caribbean and British ways of life. When Antoinette and Rochester arrive at Granbois for their honeymoon, Antoinette relishes the vibrancy and warmth of the tropics, describing her surroundings as consisting "extreme green" and possessing an abundance of "red and pink hibiscus". Antoinette basks in the untamed nature of Jamaica and proudly proclaims Jamaica as home, but through Rochester's narrative Rhys draws the attention of the readers to Rochester's growing dislike for Granbois. He believes the colours to be too vivid and longs for England's natural palette, becoming increasingly suspicious of his surroundings and calling the forest "enemy trees". It is this cultural opposition and Rochester's preconceived notion of Antoinette as an exotic being rather than a person that lead to conflict between husband and wife. From Rochester's perspective, readers are made known of the fact that while Antoinette's face is admittedly pleasing, he consciously finds something to be disgusted at as her eyes are "alien" and too large. Thus, his subjugation of his Creole wife Antoinette and his refusal to understand Antoinette's Jamaican upbringing lead him to impose his colonial status and in effect force an identity, that of the dull and mad "Bertha", on her. As such, Rhys effectively attributes Antoinette's descent into madness to her colonial husband's need to control, and brings out the theme of colonialism and racism through the difference in points-of-view as seen through the narrative voice.

Rhys also protests the forces of colonialism through the use of doubling, which enforces Antoinette's search for self in her childhood while her family is ostracised by Jamaican society as a result of postcolonial racism. Coming from a family of Creole landowners, the 1833 Emancipation Act divests Antoinette of wealth and status and encourages physical manifestations of racism between the blacks and the Creoles. Antoinette's family is the subject of resentment by ex-slaves and are left defenceless because of their loss of status. Antoinette is mirrored in her one-time black friend Tia, who states that because Antoinette does not have "gold money", she is not a "real white person" but a "white nigger", and that "black nigger better than white nigger". As Antoinette's parallel, Tia embodies the strength

that Antoinette lacks, allowing Rhys to break down the disempowering effect of postcolonial racism on the Creoles. By taking Antoinette's clothes, Tia steals by extension Antoinette's identity, diluting her sense of self. The irreconcilable differences between the Creoles and blacks are further emphasised when Antoinette tries to be part of the blacks by looking to Tia for help when Coulibri Estate is burning down. However, Tia's throwing of the stone and the reflection of Antoinette's blood in Tia's tears emphasise that the Creoles can never belong to Jamaican society. It is this ostracisation that causes Antoinette's mother Annette to go mad and her brother Pierre to die, hence the doubling technique used in Antoinette's childhood allows Rhys to protest colonial forces for disrupting social order and causing the unfair displacement of Creoles and hence Antoinette's loss of identity.

Rhys additionally employs the use of setting to blame the colonials for the suppression and destruction of Creole identity. While Jamaica is a place symbolising warmth and sunshine, England is known to Antoinette as cold and dreary. Antoinette's aunt states that "another English winter will kill (her)" and this is true indeed for Antoinette, as when Rochester takes her away from her native home and supplants her there, imprisoning her in his ancestral family mansion Thornfield Hall, he will inevitably cause her to die. While Antoinette loves Jamaica for its lush greenery, Thornfield Hall is characterised by grey stone walls and a driveway lined uniformly with trees, in stark contrast to the untamed jungles of Jamaica. As such, Rhys is able to critique colonialism in driving Antoinette to madness and ultimately a gruesome suicide. She protests the colonial narrative's depiction of Bertha Mason as a woman who is expected to be mad purely because she is a Creole and as such lack all sense of self-restraint and civilised behaviour.

In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald protests the corruptibility of the American Dream, that resulted in illicit and reckless behaviour among the rich, through narrative voice. The narrative structure of The Great Gatsby consists an overarching frame narrative and several nested narratives that provide insight into Gatsby's background. Gatsby's pursuit of the American dream and his achievement of it in the material sense involved a certain degree of immorality as revealed in Meyer Wolfshiem's narration that Gatsby had "bought up a lot of side-street drug stores" amidst the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment Prohibition of Alcohol Act. That Gatsby had resorted to illegal means to join the new upper class, or nouveau riche, to impress Daisy and win her over reflects Fitzgerald's cynical view of the rapid gaining of wealth in the 1920s. His emphasis on the fruitlessness of such a pursuit is also seen in Nick Carraway's frame narrative, in which Nick records that Tom Buchanan, a member of the established rich, called Gatsby a "crazy fish" and a "Mr Nobody from Nowhere". Despite Gatsby's wealth, his blatant unawareness of the unwritten codes of conduct of the upper class meant that his efforts to truly become part of the upper class were useless, as seen when Daisy later chooses to remain with Tom because he possessed the status that Gatsby lacked. Nick's first-person narrative further underscores the dark side of the American Dream as he observes that the party crowds that had once thronged Gatsby's halls fail to attend Gatsby's funeral, allowing Nick, and hence the readers, to realise the superficiality of material wealth. Fitzgerald thus protests the carefree lifestyle of Jazz Age culture, which amounted nothing more than conspicuous consumption and a corruption of values.

Fitzgerald also protests the disparity between social class through the use of setting. Fitzgerald contrasts the description of the valley of ashes with that of the East and West Eggs

to highlight the stark difference in social conditions in 1920s American society. While the upper class of East and West Eggs live in “glittering palaces” and a “Georgian colonial mansion”, the valley of ashes is characterised by “ash-grey men” working on dusty roads. Such disparity between the upper class and the lower middle class inspires Myrtle Wilson to seek an extramarital affair with Tom, as she believes that an affair with an upper-class male will allow her to rise in social status. However, this only leads to tragic consequences, as seen in her gruesome death. Here, the disparity between the social classes is also emphasised as Daisy is able to get away with accidental murder because of her wealth, while Myrtle is ultimately made to pay for her sexual transgressions. Therefore, Fitzgerald portrays the disparity between social classes that existed during the post-war economic boom of the 1920s.