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# A-level ENGLISH LITERATURE A

Paper 2B      Texts in shared contexts: Modern times: Literature  
from 1945 to the present day

June 2017

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## Insert

Extract from *I Am Charlotte Simmons* by Tom Wolfe, published in 2004.

All spring and all summer Dupont had been a wondrous abstraction, the prize of a lifetime, the trophy of all trophies for a little girl from the mountains; in short, a castle in the air. Now it was right in front of her at ground level, and this was where she would be living for the next nine months, and dealing with — what? Her roommate was a girl named Beverly Amory, from a town in Massachusetts called Sherborn, whose population was 1,440, and that was really all she knew about Beverly Amory. Well, at least she was a small-town girl, too. They had that much in common . . . As to what coed dorm life really was, she knew even less. Whatever it was, the concept, now that the time had come, was alarming.

Charlotte, Momma, and Daddy had gotten out of the pickup, and Daddy was heading toward the rear to open the fiberglass camper top and the tailgate, when one of the young men approached, pushing a dolly\*, and said, “Welcome! Moving in?”

“Yeah,” said Daddy in a wary tone.

“Can I give you folks a hand?”

He was smiling, but Daddy wasn’t. “No thanks.”

“You sure?”

“Yep.”

“Okay. If you change your mind, let one of us know.” Whereupon he went off, pushing the dolly toward another vehicle.

Daddy turned to Momma and said, “He’d want a tip.”

Momma nodded sagely over this insight into the wiles of life here on the other side of the Blue Ridge.

“I don’t think so, Daddy,” said Charlotte. “They look like students to me.”

“That don’t matter,” said Daddy. “You’ll see. When we git in’ere, you’re gonna see those ‘students’ standin’ere waiting and folks digging into their pockets. ‘Sides, what we got, h’it won’t take much to tote it.”

So Daddy opened the fiberglass camper top and lowered the tailgate. Charlotte really hadn’t brought a whole lot, just a big duffel bag, two suitcases, and a box of books. Daddy had gone to the trouble of putting the camper top over the bed of the pickup, not so much to protect her things from the weather, which the TV said would be fine all over the East, as to provide some privacy in case he and Momma had to spend the night here for some reason. They had their sleeping bags rolled up on the truck bed and an Igloo cooler with enough sandwiches and water to get by.

True to his word, Daddy toted the two heaviest things himself. He put the duffel bag up on his shoulder and somehow carried that whole box of books under his other arm. Goodness knows how he did it, except that he was strong as a bull from all the hard work he’d done in his life. The literature from Dupont had said to come dressed ready for “moving in,” and so Daddy had on an old short-sleeved plaid sport shirt that hung out over a pair of the thorn-proof gray twill pants he wore when he went hunting. Charlotte immediately monitored the parking lot and was relieved to see that most of the other fathers were dressed more or less the same as Daddy: casual shirts and pants and, in some cases, shorts . . . although there was something different about theirs. Naturally, she checked out the other female freshmen with that same swift sweep of the eyes, and that was a relief, too. She was afraid they might be all dressed up, although she didn’t really think they would be. Practically all of them were wearing shorts, just the way she was. Hers were high-waisted denims with her sleeveless cotton print blouse tucked in — “blouse” was the word Momma used — an ensemble designed to show off not only her trim athletic legs but also her small waist. She saw immediately that most of the other girls were wearing flip-flops or running shoes, but she figured her white Keds fit in fine with the running shoes. She didn’t see any other mothers dressed quite like Momma, who had on a T-shirt and a denim jumper that came down below her knees. A pair of athletic socks rose up from out of her striped sneakers as if to meet the hem of the jumper. Never in her life had Charlotte possessed the strength to entertain . . . Doubts . . . about Momma’s taste, any more than her authority. Momma was Momma, which was all there was to say about Momma.

Momma carried the bigger suitcase and Charlotte the other one, and they were heavy enough, but Daddy's feat was really something. People were staring at him, probably because they wondered how one man could carry such a load, which made Charlotte proud, or marginally proud; but then she noticed that the way Daddy had his arm around the box made his forearm look huge, which in turn made the tattoo of the mermaid look huge . . . and reddish from the strain . . . which in turn made the mermaid look as if she were blushing. Was that what they were all actually staring at? Despite herself, Charlotte felt shamed, for she did entertain doubts about Daddy's taste and the tattoo in particular.

Charlotte caught two of the boys in the mauve shirts sneaking glances at it. One said to the other in a low voice: "Nice ink." The other tried to suppress a snigger. Charlotte was mortified.

\* dolly - A small trolley on wheels used to move heavy objects.

**END OF MATERIALS**

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