

Comparative: Vision and Viewpoint | Sample

Answer

Happiness is Elusive

The vision and viewpoint of a text encompasses the most prominent themes and messages throughout. The vision and viewpoint is often where the thoughts and feelings of the writer can be most clearly seen and understood. Often, I find, it is the lasting impression imparted onto me in a given text.

As part of my comparative studies, I have analysed 'The King's Speech' by Tom Hooper (Text A), 'The Great Gatsby' by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Text B) and 'The Plough and the Stars' by Sean O'Casey (Text C). While these texts deal with wholly different characters and plots, they are all, undoubtedly, intrinsically linked. Their most obvious link would be their characters' struggles with adversity, and quest for happiness which was so often elusive. I noticed that all of these characters' happiness was linked to their state of poverty, be it emotional or financial.

Is Happiness Synonymous with Wealth?

In Text A, readers are transported to the aristocratic world of regal splendour, where outer appearances trump moral values. Bertie, the soon to be King of England, suffered no deprivation of wealth in his childhood. While this unlimited fortune would have undoubtedly aided the heartbreaking conditions of the Dublin tenants in Text C, it did little to aid Bertie's emotional void, which was created by his family's relentless taunting.

In the eyes of the monarchy, how Bertie was perceived by the public is of much greater importance than his wellbeing and happiness. I was appalled to learn that he was forced to write with his non-dominant hand for purely aesthetic reasons. This cruel act of shallowness marked the beginning of a dismal and emotionally traumatic childhood for Bertie. This unnatural and forced ambidexterity triggered a debilitating stammer which would plague him

for the majority of his life. The unhappiness that ruled Bertie's life is testament to the fact that happiness is in no way synonymous with wealth.

Similarly, in the Great Gatsby, I was mesmerised by the lavish, glamorous and opulent lives of New York's social elites in the dazzling 1920's. However, I quickly learned, as in the King's Speech, looks can be deceiving. Behind this facade of extravagant wealth and perfection lies a morally impoverished society.

Jay Gatsby, the elusive protagonist spends his life trying to woo the flirtatious Daisy Buchanan. It saddened me that in this society, money was the only way to a woman's heart. Gatsby's brazen efforts to win Daisy over results in his crippling heartbreak "*it's hard to make her understand*". Daisy wants the praise, thrill and adoration that comes with a new love, but tires easily of the commitment that comes with a monogamous relationship.

The traits of shallowness and insatiable greed don't only apply to Daisy however, instead they are somewhat of a social norm in the privileged Long Island. This bubble of wealth and prosperity seems to trap its inhabitants, with many of them feeling unfulfilled and dejected. This text further underscores the vision and viewpoint of happiness not being synonymous with wealth.

In stark contrast, the financially wealthy livelihoods in Text A and B are strongly juxtaposed against the poverty riddled tenements during the height of Ireland's 1916 Rising. We see poverty having a desperate and unfortunately fatal effect on the tenants. I was charmed by the young Mollser, whose poor living conditions led to her contraction of TB "*sure she never got any care*". I found it frustrating that Daisy in Text B wished for her innocent daughter to be nothing more than a "*beautiful little fool*", while Mrs. Gogan desperately wished for her daughter to survive her avoidable illness "*a few more weeks o' this weather an' there's no knowin' how you'll be*".

The gravity of Mollser's problems further underscores the fickleness and self-centred attitudes of characters such as Daisy Buchanan and Wallis Simpson. The unjustness of Mollser's premature illness emphasises a key vision and viewpoint throughout the three

texts; life is problematic, and the blissful and desirable state of happiness is so often elusive.

Depiction of Men

The men in these texts are depicted in a largely, but not entirely, negative light, with many of them being shown as reckless, pedantic and manipulative individuals. Their rash and impulsive actions often result in unprecedented consequences.

In the 1920's New York of *The Great Gatsby*, men appear to be obnoxious, senseless and self-indulgent. These off-putting characteristics are bountifully possessed by the arrogant Tom Buchanan. I found his selfish, misogynistic and condescending character repulsive "*it's up to us, who are the dominant race*". More worrying however were his violent outbursts. His language and actions were often aggressive and offensive, but I was truly shocked when he mercilessly punched his mistress in the nose for simply mentioning his wife's name. This lack of self-restraint would be foreign to a gentleman like Nick Carraway, or indeed the composed Lionel Logue in Text A. Tom's infidelity is infuriating and disgusting, and his shameless and cruel parading of Myrtle shows the dominant role men played, as every appalling action was shrugged off as a 'norm'.

While *Gatsby's* brazen fight for Daisy could be viewed as romantic and well intentioned, it highlighted to me just how objectified women were. It wasn't so much a display of love, in the end, but more a pitiful battle between two alpha males competing for dominance and Daisy's fleeting affection. Readers are given a rather dismal view of men in this novel, apart from Nick Carraway of course, who assures us "*I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.*"

In *The Plough and the Stars*, we are given an equally unflattering view of men. Jack Clitheroe is depicted as an egotistical, selfish and artificially-patriotic character. I found it troubling that he was willing to abandon his marital responsibilities and distraught pregnant wife for the sake of *The Rising*. This self-centred decision results in his death, and his loyal

wife's descent into insanity. His betrayal of his loving and devoted wife vilifies him, *"they have driven away th' little happiness life had to spare for me"*.

The complete opposite is seen in *The King's Speech*, as David willingly sacrifices his position of power for the woman he loves, Wallis Simpson. While it could be argued that such a decision is simply another example of men's recklessness, I believe it shows integrity and loyalty, two traits which are, in my opinion, of much more importance.

Contrastly to the aforementioned texts, the men in this text are depicted as strong, noble and tenacious characters. Bertie's metamorphosis from a cold, somewhat embittered man to a triumphant statesman is heartwarming. Along with the dogged determination of the lovable Lionel Logue, Bertie shows true courage in his battle to overcome his impediment, unlike the childish bickering of the rebel soldiers in Text C. While readers do encounter some deplorable excuses for men in all three texts, Bertie and Logue possess redeeming and impressive qualities which restores our faith in mankind.

Depiction of Women

Women, I believe, are portrayed in a much more flattering and commendable manner than their male counterparts. I was impressed by their bravery in the face of adversity and admired their devotion and loyalty to those closest to them.

In *The Plough and the Stars*, women are both victimised and applauded. It is through female characters that Sean O'Casey introduces the vision and viewpoint of human beings' capacity for greatness. We see tremendous bravery with the complex and enigmatic character of Bessie Burgess. Readers are unaware of her compassion and gentleness until the final act of the play as she comforts the delusional Nora Clitheroe

"we'll have to be brave, rememberin' that sorrow may endure for th' night, but joy cometh in th' mornin'".

The warmth and love expressed by such a typically volatile character is touching. Her willingness to risk her life for Nora is a display of true heroism, unlike the arrogant bravado of the rebel soldiers.

Bessie's gruff exterior and argumentative manner acted as a camouflage to her gentle demeanor. This sense of pretence and facade reminds me of the elusive Daisy Buchanan in Text B, whose bubbly and carefree nature masks her discontent and resentment for her position in life. I believe Daisy felt trapped in a world which was as shallow as it was affluent. Daisy is undoubtedly a flawed character, and I was angered by her careless treatment of Gatsby who loved her unconditionally. Upon further contemplation however, I realised she never truly had a choice. Her beloved daughter confines her to her unhealthy, manipulative and emotionally abusive marriage to Tom. I believe that in the end, her maternal instincts surpassed her desire for self-liberation. This maternal devotion is wonderfully mirrored in all three texts.

Elizabeth is a pillar of support for Bertie in Text A. Her commitment and devotion to her husband throughout his struggles with adversity was refreshing. Similarly, Nora Clitheroe is faithful to her beloved husband until the end. Women's unwavering loyalty in all three texts is truly admirable.

The female characters in these texts were symbols of strength and humility. They showed courage in worlds that were laden with aggression and violence. They were capable and subtly powerful, all while bestowing the graceful qualities of femininity. Undoubtedly, they are depicted in a much more praiseworthy light than their male peers.

Religion

Religion is of varying importance throughout these texts. It most notably plays a role in *The Plough and the Stars*, where religion and faith are a form of solace for the impoverished citizens of Dublin 1916. The play itself showcases myriad religious commentary and innuendo "*well God Almighty give me patience.*" Such comments were so frequent, in fact,

that I began to suspect they were not so much a display of reverence and devotion to God, but rather an element of their everyday vernacular.

In stark contrast to the Catholic majority, Bessie Burgess is a proud Protestant, who sees no fault in boldly proclaiming her religious beliefs

“it’s a bad thing for anyone that thries to jilt the Ten Commandments!”

Bessie’s Protestantism is a sign of defiance, I think. She is a confident and self-assured woman who is fiercely committed to her faith, in fact, she places her trust in God until her dying breath *“I’m dyin’, I’m dyin’, oh God, oh God”*. Despite the comfort that many found in religion, O’Casey powerfully reminds us of religion’s power to divide *“she’s a right out orange bitch”*. Perhaps Fluther was on to something when he proclaimed;

“I think we ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can so as to keep it out of as many things as possible.”

Contrastly, the liberal revelers of Long Island in Text B are a far cry from the Dubliners who *“crawl on their bellies to mass”*. These ‘progressive’ elitists are too preoccupied with materialistic items to pay any heed to faith or spirituality. I wonder if these atheistic views play a role in their moral compass, or lack thereof. They certainly don’t find fault in infidelity, deceit or gluttony, all of which, in fact, are established social norms. However, we do see the importance of religion with George Wilson, the only poor character in the novel. As in Text C, I believe poverty strengthens faith; it gives believers a sense of hope in an otherwise disparaging world.

Religious devotion finds somewhat of an equilibrium in The King’s Speech. Again, it is used as a crutch in times of need, but is in no way associated with poverty or low social class. Instead it is linked to patriotism which is of much more nobility than the chaotic patriotism in Text C. At the precarious time of pre-war, religion is used as a uniting force to enhance the nation’s faith in their monarch *“with God’s help we shall succeed.”*

Politics and War

In *The Plough and the Stars*, Sean O'Casey paints war in a wholly negative light. His graphic and grotesque imagery of war undercuts the pro-violence rhetoric of the rebels entirely "*shredded into torn an' bloody pieces*". O'Casey satirizes the inflammatory rebel speeches which effectively removes any shred of legitimacy "*bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing*". O'Casey vilifies the Voice of Man, painting him as a manipulative fearmonger, and his followers as impressionable fools "*the blood was BOILIN' in me veins*". What's more, O'Casey doesn't romanticise the idea of freedom, especially if it only comes at such a tremendous cost. He sees little worth in a sovereign state if civilians are still starving on the street, "*what's the use of freedom, if it's not economic freedom?*" This quote is very telling of O'Casey's resentment of bloodshed. However, I believe O'Casey used the voice of little Mollser to cut through the bravado, pride and propaganda to leave us with a key vision and viewpoint, "*is there anybody going, Mrs. Clitheroe, with a tither o' sense?*"

Contrastly in *The Great Gatsby*, war is presented in a commendable light. While this novel deals with the theme of war to a much lesser extent, it certainly has an impact on the main characters, albeit in a covert way. Nick and Gatsby are both war veterans, a link which initiates the bond between the pair. They gladly took up arms to fight for their country, a radically different attitude compared to the armchair patriots of Text C, "*go an' get guns if yous are men*". In this affluent world, men's army service seems to validate them and their egos, and exclude them from any criticism. War in this novel is seen as a rite of passage rather than a cause of heartbreak and trepidation.

In *The King's Speech*, the approach of WWII has a significant impact on the atmosphere throughout, creating a tangible tension and apprehension. The gravity and devastating effects of war are fully recognised by Bertie, which only increases the burden and pressure on his shoulders. He resents that his nation has been forced into war, but understands that war, at times, is a necessary evil. He shows much more control than the hysterical Voice of Man in Text C, and appeals to reason rather than exploiting fear. While Bertie is an advocate of peace, his priority is to unite his nation in this time of great fear, which ultimately results in cheers of approval from his loyal subjects in the triumphant final scene of the film.

War is depicted in varying ways by the given author, playwright and director. I found the theme of war particularly interesting due to my prior knowledge of the outcomes of the respective wars before studying the texts. It was fascinating, therefore, to be transported to worlds where the uncertainty of their future was so poignant.

Humour

Humour is a welcome addition to some of the darker aspects of these comparative texts. It provides comic relief to the moments of high tension and apprehension. It is particularly effective in alleviating the doom and gloom which permeates *The Plough and the Stars*.

In Text C, characters are humanized and presented in a much more likable manner due to their broad, slapstick humour. Fluther's misuse of 'elaborate' words satirizes him and removes any seriousness from the comments he makes "*there's nothing derogatory wrong with me*". The petty fights between the tenants is humorous, but also shows the negative effects of poverty on a social level, and how it often results in pointless bickering and friction.

Humour is not so prevalent in *The Great Gatsby*, but rather wit and quick sarcastic comments, "*Tom's getting very profound.*" Gatsby's charm and otherworldly presence often softens some of the more serious moments. His constant use of "*old sport*", even to those older than him is, I believe, humorous in its peculiarity.

Humour is expertly linked into the film *The King's Speech*. The staccato bursts of humour are often juxtaposed against scenes of high tension. While viewers are aware of the pressure that lays on Bertie's shoulders to improve his speech before his ascension to the throne, we are able to laugh at some of Logue's unique practices. I found it particularly funny to see a man as reserved and poised as Bertie explode into a fit of obscenities. Humour is hugely effective and gratefully welcomed in this otherwise serious film.

Conclusion

Upon finishing my comparative texts I can honestly say I was enthralled by the diverse and exciting range of texts. Each writer displayed expertise and finesse in telling these unique stories. It was truly enjoyable and rewarding to find links and similarities between such multifaceted pieces. Indeed, the overwhelming contrasts between the plots and their characters gave me wonderful insights to the endless possibilities that literature allows. It was an enlightening process to engage in such highly acclaimed texts.