

General Vision And Viewpoint | Sample Answer 2007

“The general vision and viewpoint is shaped by the reader’s feeling of optimism or pessimism in reading the text”. Discuss with reference to the three texts you have studied as part of your leaving certificate course.

The General Vision and Viewpoint of a text relates to the authorial/directorial outlook on life, how the world of the text is perceived by the reader/viewer. However the general vision and viewpoint is rarely a clear-cut thing. A text is rarely either entirely pessimistic nor entirely optimistic. There are usually factors that serve to highlight both positive and negative aspects of a text. I also found, through my time studying the comparative course, that the general vision and viewpoint is also fluid. It can swing between moments and situations that can be shockingly bleak, towards moments of real light and positivity. The three texts that I have studied as part of my comparative course are, the novel “The Spinning Heart” by Donal Ryan, the play “Philadelphia, Here I Come!” by Brian Friel, and the film “Brooklyn” directed by John Crowley. All are Irish writers and give a very different outlook on life in Ireland in their works, through descriptions in the opening and closing scenes, and the relationships in each. The General Vision And Viewpoint of each of these texts correlate and diverge in a number of interesting ways, with feelings of both optimism and pessimism emerging at sundry points throughout.

All three texts at first seemed quite dark though both “Philadelphia Here I Come!” and “The Spinning Heart” seemed more pessimistic than “Brooklyn”. Both set in post-crash rural Ireland, from the outset we are met with a pessimistic outlook. In “Philadelphia, Here I Come!” we are first met with main character Gar O’Donnell the evening before he is set to be moving to Philadelphia to escape his dire old town. Thanks to Gar’s subconscious - Gar Private, we soon see his public self is amenable and polite, but deep down inside, his private self is fed up with nearly every person in his life. His father will not express any sort of emotion or even really acknowledge the fact that Gar is leaving Ireland for America, perhaps forever. The woman Gar

loves wouldn't marry him because he couldn't offer her enough financial stability and he was too frightened to speak with her father about marrying her. His best friends turn out to be jerks, and his old schoolmaster is a drunk who keeps asking him for money. Seeing the realities of Gar's life make for a pessimistic start to the play. This is not unlike the opening to "The Spinning Heart". Just like "PHIC" we are first introduced to the novel with main character Bobby Mahon. He is on the way to visit his father, admitting that he goes '*there every day to see if he is dead and every day he lets me down*'. Although the protagonist of the novel, and a role model for many of the other characters, much like Gar, it is clear that behind closed doors even Bobby is struggling. His father's cruelty has left him psychologically damaged, and between that fact and the harsh reality that he has just lost his foremen's job after the economic crash, he feels that he is '*filling up with fear*.' However in contrast with Gar who has the hope of escape, unfortunately Bobby does not have this luxury. However in "Brooklyn" the main character Eilis does. On the surface, Eilis's troubles in the film seem less significant. Unlike Bobby and Gar, she has a stable home life, although in her own way, she is also deeply unhappy. Similarly to Bobby, she is a victim of the economic conditions of the time (1950s) in that she too has no job and partly as a result, she has become disillusioned with life in Enniscorthy. She only sees a limited future where her best hope will probably be to marry one of the rugby club lads with '*their hair oil and blazers*.' Despite the sadness of having to leave her loving family behind, I felt the opening of the film was much more positive in that, despite the misery of emigrating, Eilis at least had the possibility of a bright future in America. Gar also has this possibility of emigrating however he is felt to be held back and indecisive about the decision due to his unresolved struggles at home. This contrasts significantly with Bobby whose only hope for a happy future seems to lie with his wife – his '*lovely lovely Triona*.' Overall my initial impression of all three texts was quite bleak but there's no doubt that "PHIC" and "TSH" offered the most pessimistic general vision and viewpoint.

Another significant factor that both reinforced and changed the initial impression of the general vision and viewpoint in all three texts was the influence of key relationships. On the one hand in both "PHIC" and "TSH", both central characters are haunted by key familial relationships, each of which is dysfunctional in its own way. Gar is constantly searching for his father's approval and

is often left disappointed. The father - son duo speak little words to each other throughout the play apart from their work affairs, with one of the first things S.B says to Gar being, "*How many coils of barbed-wire came in on the mail-van this evening?*". However we know from Gar Private, that what he wants more than anything is for someone - especially his father - to tell him that they don't want to be without him. In reality, like Bobby in "TSH", he is the victim of a cruel callous parent who is too proud and cold to show his only son how he truly feels, even when faced with the possibility of never seeing him again. This is in a similar vein to Bobby's treatment at the hands of his father in "TSH", who justifies his cruelty towards him by claiming he '*had to prepare him for the hard world,*' which involved belittling and ridiculing every positive achievement in Bobby's life - everything from his success on the hurling field, to his work promotion, right through to his relationship with Triona. Clearly these dark and dysfunctional relationships only serve to reinforce the pessimism of the general vision and viewpoint of these texts. It seemed to me that everywhere you looked in "TSH", there was a troubled relationship: from Bridie's broken marriage to Lloyd and Trevor's issues with their mothers, this can also be seen in "PHIC" with the patronizing relationship between S.B and Madge, and even the Canon's hollow, greedy relationship with the O'Donnell family. In the midst of all these dysfunctional relationships it is difficult to track down a happy positive one. One thing that seemed clear to me from reading the novel and/or the play is that the author seems to be suggesting that a huge amount of human unhappiness stems from dysfunctional relationships. Frank and S.B's characters remind me of Ms. Kelly in "Brooklyn". Although only briefly seen, it is clear that her boss is determined to create an atmosphere that drips with dread and tension for Eilis and her other employees. On the other hand however, all three texts include very positive relationships that serve to change somewhat the general vision and viewpoint. In "PHIC" for me as a reader Gar and Madge's relationship was one of the only positive ones in the play. It was clear Madge was very much a mother figure to Gar and their playful, witty relationship brought humour and happiness to an otherwise loveless play. However unlike the other two texts, in "PHIC" love or the chance of it is measured by material wealth, and the novel and film present a vision of love that is true and reassuring. Hence why Gar is left alone and the love of his life Kate marries a more eligible bachelor. The central relationship in "TSH" between

Bobby and Triona is definitely a positive one. We see how strong their love truly is, at the times it almost seems that it's them against the world – particularly when Bobby is first accused of having an affair with Realtin, and then is arrested for killing his father. I thought there was something really admirable about the way that she remained so steadfastly loyal, so sure that *'he wouldn't betray me in a million years.'* Their love seems almost perfect, in stark contrast to the many other messed up relationships in the texts. Their relationship in fact has many parallels with the relationship between Eilis and Tony in Brooklyn. When Tony tells Eilis he loves her she is crippled with ineloquence, and it takes her a few days to give him a fitting reply. The next day she explains: *"I really didn't know what to say...the next time you tell me you love me, if there is a next time, I'll say I love you too"*. This reluctance adds to the authenticity of their relationship; Crowley's view of love is positive but not rose tinted. Similarly to Bobby and Triona, their love helps them overcome the various challenges that they face – the most significant being the death of Rose and the emotional turmoil that emerges when Eilis returns to Ireland. Just like with Bobby though, Eilis ultimately remains loyal and their marriage too looks to have a bright future. So in general, although every text features a number of dysfunctional relationships they also feature positive relationships at their heart that give the general vision and viewpoint of all three texts a much more positive slant.

Ultimately the endings of the texts, both changed and reinforced our initial impression of the general vision and viewpoint of the texts, with the exception of "PHIC". When I finished reading the play, I felt I had the same pessimistic view as I had at the beginning. I do not believe that there is a happy ending here – Gar did not get the attention he so longed for from his father, we do not know if he definitely still emigrated to Philadelphia as he was still unsure, and he did not end up with the love of his life Kate. "TSH", on the other hand, defied much of the misery that had gone before and finished with a slightly more optimistic ending. I do not think this novel has an overly happy ending as we are left with many uncertainties, such as Bobby's innocence being proven, however he has Triona and with that all the other woes of the world seem less important. Having love prevail at the end of the novel, along with Dylan's rescue, the ending to this gritty novel becomes a slightly less bleak. I was most surprised by the message Donal Ryan

seemed to be giving us at the end, that no matter how bad things are, '*what matters only love?*' This sentiment seems to really echo in Brooklyn, where after Eilis finds herself falling under the spell of life back in Ireland, Ms. Kelly's sneering assault on her forces her into a realisation of who she really is, and what she really wants in life. When she defiantly tells Ms. Kelly that, '*my name is Eilis Fiorello*' and later tells her mother that '*I want to be with my husband*' we realise that she is going to build a bright future with Tony in New York. However that moment is tinged with sadness when her mother says goodbye to her, both of them knowing that they are unlikely to see each other ever again. Despite this, the reunion with Tony in New York leaves the film ending on a positive note, and with a similar message to TSH, that love will conquer all. Apart from "PHIC" the general vision and viewpoint of the texts were slightly shaped to be more optimistic.

Overall there's no doubt that the general vision and viewpoint is heavily shaped by the reader's feeling of optimism or pessimism in reading any text. However, from my study of the texts, it became clear to me that a number of factors over the course of each text can also play a significant role, and cause the original sense of the general vision and viewpoint to either be reinforced or possibly changed. Factors such as relationships and opening and closing scenes. This was certainly the case in the three texts that I studied as part of my comparative course, texts that offered some fascinating insights into worlds that were very similar too, but also very different to my own.