Stage 2 English Literary Studies

**External Assessment Cover Sheet**

Assessment Type 3: Text Study

Part A: Comparative Text Study

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**SACE Registration Number:**

**Compare the ways in which Williams in *The Glass Menagerie* and Iñárritu in *Birdman* explore the damaging nature of managing reality through illusions.**

**Word count:** 1500

This **comparative study** is assessed using the following specific features:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Knowledge and understanding** | **Analysis** | **Application** |
| KU1 | An1 |  |
| KU2 | An2 | Ap2 |
| KU3 | An3 | Ap3 |
|  |  |  |

Compare the ways in which Williams in *The Glass Menagerie* and Iñárritu in *Birdman* explore the damaging nature of managing reality through illusions

Throughout their introspective texts, *The Glass Menagerie* and *Birdman*, Tennessee Williams and Alejandro Iñárritu, respectively, explore how individuals manufacture illusions to escape their desolate realities. In his memory play, which he loosely labels plastic theatre – a malleable form of drama using symbolism – Williams depicts the Wingfield family, who struggle with oppressive expectations due to the betrayal of their husband and father. Comparatively, in his film, Iñárritu employs elements of magical realism and surrealism – styles that use imagery and symbolism to distort reality – to portray Riggan Thomson, an actor desperate to relive his glory days, exploring the dangers of fame. Both authors explore theircentral characters’ disappointmentsto illustrate that life’s difficulties are a multilayered set of challenges, encompassing economic hardships, strained relationships, and frustrated hopes. Iñárritu and Williams reveal the human tendency to falsely reinvent the past,reinterpret their dismal present, and develop illusions to provide hope for the future; however, doing so shows that such successes are only temporary.

AP3: In keeping with a formal essay, the student provides an introduction to the argument that will be explored in the essay.

KU1, An1: The student provides a pithy and useful context to both texts that establishes a clear foundation on which to construct the argument.

KU1, An3: Clear, useful topic sentence.

Both authors explore the idea that all individuals contend with oppressive realities. Both protagonists occupy worlds that the authors suggest are challenging. Williams visually represents the lives of those who inhabit the world he depicts as “burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation” through the set, its background featuring “huge” tenement “buildings”. Williams uses pejorative adjectives to depict the “dark, grim rear wall”, the “dark, narrow alleys” that “flank” the buildings, and the “sinister lattice-work of neighbouring fire escapes”. To similarly emphasise the nature of ubiquitous suffering, Iñárritu uses the environment to symbolise Riggan as one of many who grapple with significant challenges. Iñárritu first uses a shot that establishes the contextual environment of a canyon of oppressive apartment buildings – highlighted by the cacophony of street sounds, with the foley of traffic creating an irritating discordance – then dollies back, tracking through the window into Riggan’s apartment. In this context of generic suffering, both authors reveal how individual characters contend with difficulty. The mother figure in *The* *Glass Menagerie*, Amanda Wingfield, struggles with the abandonment of her husband, “a telephone man who fell in love with long distances”, which Williams reflects in the omnipresent “larger-than-life-size photograph” of the husband on the set. Through lighting and stage directions that instruct characters to acknowledge the father’s absence by “turn[ing]…to[wards] the photograph”, Williams reflects the perpetual nature of the father’s absence, for although never appearing as a figure on stage, he has a pervasive influence, being labelled as the “fifth character in the play”. A similar psychological loss is apparent in the film, as Rigganis left bereftas a result of a lost relationship – his marriage to Sylvia dissolved. Iñárritu externalises Riggan’s emotional strain regarding his uncertainty about “why [he and Sylvia] broke up”, using an insistent, non-diegetic ticking sound to create underlying tension, particularly in its intimation of a dripping faucet, which implies the consistent, omnipresent frustration Riggan experiences. The authors accentuate both protagonists’ disillusionment with their lives through a sense of purposelessness in their experiences. The trauma Amanda faces is a consequence of her passionately desiring “success and happiness for [her] precious children!” but, as a result, fretting over how they, to her, seem dysfunctional: Tom’s frustration with his job at the warehouse is so intense that he “wants to beat his brains with a crowbar”, and Laura’s fragility, for she just “amuses [herself] with [her] glass menagerie”, causing Amanda to “worry so much [that she] doesn’t sleep.” Riggan’s apprehensions similarly emerge from a focus on the future; once a famous actor, he now views himself as “fucking disappearing” – the profanity expressing the depths of his frustration – and compares his physical appearance in a darkly humorous manner to “a turkey with leukaemia”. Iñárritu uses these elements and the subtle chaos of syncopated jazz percussion to create a sense of irritation, thus externalising Riggan’s emotional turmoil.

An3: Frequent shifting back and forth between the texts creates a well structured comparison.

An2: References to the stylistic features are particular to, and appropriate for, the text type.

Ap2: a well-considered use of metalanguage that is appropriate to the exploration of film.

An3: A clever use of a transitional statement as the student does not repeat what has been already stated, but uses the phrasing to both summarise what has been presented and what is about to be presented. The statement contributes cleverly to the comparative nature of the argument.

AP2: Fluent integration of textual evidence, in the course of which reflection on some features (pejorative adjectives) is deftly interwoven.

Both authors explore how individuals invest hope in symbols embodied by human figures – for Amanda, it is the gentleman caller, and for Riggan, it is the titular Birdman – to escape their desolate realities. The idea of the gentleman caller is established in Amanda’s hyperbolic retelling of her own past, in which she describes suitors – “prominent”, “young” men of means who may impress a maiden and, therefore, rescue her financially and psychologically through marriage – as being the epitome of salvation. Contrastingly, in the opening scene, Iñárritu establishes Birdman as the embodiment of Riggan’s aspirations and employs a guttural, baritone voiceover and mid-shot of Riggan levitating, characterising Birdman as an omnipotent figure. For Riggan, Birdman symbolises flight, superpower, and impressiveness – the greatest role Riggan has ever performed. Subsequently, Riggan succumbs to the illusion that he is Birdman, for without Birdman, “all that’s left is a sad, selfish, mediocre actor grasping at the last vestiges of his career.” The authors explore how, through their respective illusions, Amanda and Riggan can reimagine and relive their apparently glorious pasts. Williams demonstrates how the notion of the gentleman caller invigorates Amanda through stage directions that animate her, for when she speaks about it, “her voice becomes rich and elegiac”, “her eyes lift, her face glows”, and “music [plays] with a spot light [on her]”. Williams enhances this physical manifestation of psychological hope through costume, forAmanda dons a “girlish frock” just before the actual gentleman caller, Jim’s arrival to revive the legend of her youth. She also transforms her surroundings, as indicated in the change of set, for when Amanda decorates the house with new furnishings – a “new floor lamp”, “new billowing white curtains”, “chintz covers” for the “chairs and sofa”, and “new sofa pillows”– the effect is “astonishing”. Visualising himself as Birdman similarly allows Riggan to escape his difficulties into an illusory world where he retains superpowers and significance. When Riggan imagines flying above the city, Iñárritu employs hopeful string music, a low-angle shot, and a voiceover of Birdman whispering to Riggan, “You’re a God. This is where you belong. Above them all”, juxtaposing the city’s cacophonous chaos with the sky’s peacefulness to symbolise Riggan’s desire to escape his feelings of inadequacy.In his professional life, Riggan uses the vigour imagining himself as Birdman provides to succeed in his role in an onstage production, hoping it will resurrect his acting career and thereby bring him relevance and fame.

Perhaps it could be argued that the student should reflect on both texts in the closing statement. However, there is no doubt that the essay is constructed to be comparative.

An3: It is these sub-statements integrated throughout the paragraphs that mean the comparative element is consistently sustained.

KU1: Again, a clear topic sentence that creates a focus upon a logical concept.

Despite the sense of control and contentment these characters find in their respective illusions, both authors reveal that the mechanism only operates temporarily. Similar to Amanda’s moment of epiphany upon learning that Jim is engaged and therefore cannot fulfil the function of the gentleman caller, Riggan realises, while exposed on stage in front of the audience, that he can never be the actor he aspires to be, leading him to decide to shoot himself. The discovery of Jim’s engagement results in the “sky fall[ing]” hyperbolically,the previous “tender waltz” being punctuated by a symbolic “ominous cracking sound in the sky”, and a revelation that is the metaphorical “climax of [Laura’s] secret life”, which means she is left in an “infinitely desolate” state. Iñárritu similarly uses sound, employing the rumbling of diegetic thunder to emphasise Riggan’s intense feelings of inferiority. Iñárritu combines thiswith three consecutive gunshots: first, Riggan aggressively points the gun at his co-star, yelling “Bang!”, representing his extreme resentment and jealousy towards the famous theatre actor; next, he whispers “Bang!” as he faces the audience, indicating his disillusionment with fame and his sinister rejection of the public approval he once believed he craved; and then, self-destructive, he turns the gun on himself*.* Both texts end on a tone of ambiguous despondency.The final result in the play is the family’s rupture, which Williams pre-empts as at the play’s point-of-attack, Tom stands on the “fire escape” landing on the set, “dressed as a merchant sailor”, foreshadowing his eventual departure andtransformationinto “the bastard son of a bastard”.In the final “interior pantomime” image, Laura inertly “huddles upon the sofa”, Amanda apparently attempting to “comfort” her. The audience’s inability to hear Amanda’s speech suggests the futility of her words and how her family’s circumstances will remain “tragic”. Contrasting the lengthy single-shot sequences Iñárritu uses to compose the film’s preceding parts, he portrays Riggan’s fragmented consciousness by structuring the final sequence as vignettes, featuring non-sequiturs as he cuts to a series of abstract, spontaneous images from light to someone in a Spiderman costume, to a meteor, to jellyfish. The scene’s final shot features an open window with Riggan’s daughter looking out, prompting the audience to question whether Riggan has committed suicide,whether the scene symbolises his death as Birdman, or whether he has become Birdman, as indicated by the faint bird noises. As the film ends, these unresolved questions highlight Riggan’s ‘vanishing’ from the film itself, paralleling Tom’s abandonment of his family in the final monologue.

KU1: A coherent argument is sustained across and within the paragraphs.

AP3: Well-considered diction throughout the essay contributes to its sophistication.

A brief final paragraph, but one that nonetheless provides a clear conclusion to the argument.

Both authors explore how people seek illusions as a means to falsely reinvent the past and provide hope for the future. However, the authors reveal that illusions are only “pleasant disguises” that ultimately lead to despair. Succumbing to those charming pretences, the characters are exposed and made vulnerable and are thus burdened by disillusionment.

**Knowledge and understanding**

* KU1 [Knowledge and understanding of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts] The student has a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the thematic concerns of both texts and has developed a logical line of reasoning to explore clear concepts.
* KU2 [Knowledge and understanding of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas] The student is careful to integrate references to a broad range of stylistic features (set, location, diction, camera shots and movement, sound, titles, symbols, stage directions, costume, tone, etc.) and connects these logically to ideas.
* KU3 [Knowledge and understanding of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types] The use of appropriate metalanguage and range of features that are particular to plays and films, demonstrates a clear awareness of distinct features of the differing text types.

**Analysis**

* AN1 [Analysis of ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values] The student has a detailed and insightful awareness of the thematic concerns in the texts and explores the nuances of the ways in which the director and playwright present these ideas. From this, the student has constructed a well-considered argument that is engaging and convincing.
* AN2 [Analysis and evaluation of ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the interpretation of texts] The student interweaves observations about the ways in which ideas are presented through a range of stylistic features, and each of these reflections is logical so that the feature is sensibly connected to the idea explored through it.
* AN3 [Analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks] The essay is mindfully structured and consistently comparative. The argument is organised around the similarities and differences in the texts and there is a balanced discussion of both the film and the play.

**Application**

* AP2 [Use of evidence from texts to develop, support and justify responses] The student carefully integrates appropriate references to the texts to justify statements. The metalanguage applied in this process means that the examples are fitting for the text type, in particular the descriptions of moments from the film are vivid and appropriately articulated.
* AP3 [Use of accurate, clear, and fluent expression appropriate for purpose and audience] The style is consistently sophisticated, appropriately formal, fluent and precise.

**General Comments**

The student has written a carefully considered, well-argued essay that is consistently supported with evidence that involves insightful references to a significant range of stylistic features.

**GRADE: A+**

|  | **Knowledge and Understanding** | **Analysis** | **Application** |
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| **A** | Detailed knowledge and understanding of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.  Thorough knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Perceptive analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.  Perceptive analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the interpretation of texts.  Perceptive analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Perceptive analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Sophisticated use of a wide range of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.  Detailed and appropriate use of evidence from texts develop, support, and justify responses, with textual references incorporated fluently in discussion.  Use of precise and fluent expression, which is appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| **B** | Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in most texts.  Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Knowledge and understanding of a range of stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Clear analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.  Clear analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.  Clear analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Clear analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Use of a range of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.  Appropriate use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and justify responses, with textual references incorporated in discussion.  Mostly accurate and fluent expression, which is appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| **C** | Knowledge and understanding of some ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.  Knowledge and understanding of some ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Knowledge and understanding of some of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Some analysis of ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.  Description, with some analysis and evaluation, of ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.  Description, with some analysis, of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Some analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Competent use of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.  Competent use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and justify responses, with some use of textual references in discussion.  Generally fluent and clear expression, which is mostly appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| **D** | Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a narrow range of ways in which ideas and values are represented in texts.  Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a narrow range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a few of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Description of the ideas and values represented in texts.  Description of some ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.  Some description of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Recognition of some ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Use of some language features to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task in a limited way.  Some use of evidence from texts to develop, support , and attempt to justify responses, with use of a narrow range of textual references.  Occasionally clear expression, which is appropriate for some audiences and purposes. |
| **E** | Simplistic knowledge and very restricted understanding of the way in which an idea or a value is represented in a text.  Limited knowledge and restricted understanding of a restricted range of stylistic features used by authors.  Limited knowledge and restricted understanding of different text types and conventions. | Reference to an idea or value represented in a text.  Limited description of a way in which a stylistic feature is used to influence the reading of a text.  Simplistic description of a connection between texts in a comparative task.  Reference to a critical perspective. | Attempted use of some language features to create texts that attempt to address the meaning and intention of the task in a limited way.  Restricted use of evidence from texts to develop and support a simple response, with minimal textual references.  Emerging development of control of expression. |