# Stage 2 English

**External Assessment: Comparative Analysis**

**Compare the ways in which the novel, 'The Dressmaker' by Rosalie Ham and the film of the same name, directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse, use techniques to explore the idea of revenge.**

The gothic novel written by Australian author Rosalie Ham and published in 2000, titled *The Dressmaker,* relies on imagery and figurative language to recount the return of protagonist, Myrtle "Tilly" Dunnage, to her home town in rural Australia. Upon her arrival, she endeavors to instigate revenge against the citizens that supported her removal twenty years ago after being accused of murder when she was a school girl. The film adaptation, by comparison, was released fifteen years later and while director, Jocelyn Moorhouse, also explores Tilly's pursuit for revenge, she instead highlights the love and hate she experiences as she introduces haute couture to Dungatar through a range of film and visual techniques.

A defining similarity between the two texts is the way in which they each convey the idea of revenge when the protagonist arrives in her home town. In the early 1950s, Tilly Dunnage returns to the fictional town of Dungatar, located in Victoria, Australia to care for her mother. Her arrival is met with malice and criticism from the judgmental locals of the "middle of nowhere town", who believe she was responsible for the death of a peer. In retribution of the locals' ongoing suspicion and dismissal of her innocence, she aims to clear her name and impress them with her sewing skills. Thus attempting to win over the local women by becoming the town seamstress and creating extravagant, Parisian style dresses for them. As each resident requests a dress that will make her the most beautiful woman in Dungatar, Tilly's designs become even more stunning and the locals continue to praise her remarkable outfits.

In addition, both texts share a mutual purpose; to captivate their respective audience. In the novel, Ham constructs the narrative appropriately and utilizes literary techniques to create an engaging story that entertains the audience, via rich language that describes the shocking events to maintain the reader's interest as well as provoking emotions from the targeted female audience. Figurative language such as metaphors and descriptive expressions result in imagery, obtaining the reader's attention and maintaining their interest. Moorhouse includes film techniques as well as suitable conventions to achieve the same purpose in a different way. This includes lighting and costumes used to depict characters in addition to non-diegetic music that portrays emotions and represents the development of relationships. Since they are two different texts that must achieve a similar purpose, different techniques are utilized entertain and engage the target audience.

Each text has been designed to attract the attention of a specific target audience, which is determined by various factors and interests. Both texts are intended for adult women who are interested in fashion, however, the novel further refines the target audience to individuals that have an interest in 1950s clothes, materials, and Parisian style. The structure of the novel supports this as it is divided into four sections, each named after a different fabric that represent different phases in the story. The texts target an audience with a standard education, as they must be able to identify and understand complex issues in both texts, such as murder, sexual assault, trans-dressing, and bullying. In addition to these topics, the film also references domestic violence and blackmail. The ability to recognize these issues is vital to understanding the relationships in Dungatar and how it relates to the theme, as Tilly exposes secrets to ruin the locals' lives and get revenge. The female audience for which the story is intended are more inclined to empathize with people who have been mistreated, therefore the audience will support Tilly throughout her vendetta.

All texts have a specific structure that allows an audience to interpret the story, once the tone and context is identified. In this case, both the novel and the film follow the same writing conventions of a narrative to explain the story in the following order; orientation, issue, climax and resolution. This composition maintains the attention of the audience as the theme of the story continues to be conveyed. However, although both texts are structured similarly, in addition to the basic conventions, Ham divides her novel into four sections that represent the different phases in the story. Each section is named after a type of fabric; gingham, shantung, felt and brocade. In each of these texts, the dialogue between the characters is a key factor that results in the idea of revenge being conveyed to the audience. The locals are patronizing and critical towards Tilly's return as, "everybody was speechless with disgust" and the "Saturday shoppers" label her as a "bastard", "murderess" and a "trollop", causing both her and Mad Molly to become sarcastic and defensive. The negative tone is also conveyed through the dramatic genre, since they are both stories with a life situation that portray realistic characters in conflict with other people. These mature exchanges, as they appear in the film, imply that the protagonist is the cursed outcast who seeks vengeance and will no doubt resonate with a teenage and adult audience. Comparatively, however, the novel provides readers with a more detailed description of these conversations and therefore, a more sophisticated look at the idea of revenge.

It is crucial for the author to consider and include a range of language and stylistic techniques to ensure the intended purpose is achieved. These features become apparent in the flashback Tilly relives in the novel, which is adapted in the film to when Teddy reveals the truth about her past at the school. The flashback is described from the point of view of the narrator, almost as though there is a witness to the incident even though Myrtle and Stewart are the only people present. The incident is also portrayed from the narrator's perspective in order to remove the description of emotions, thoughts, or opinions and give an unbiased view of the event. However, the dialogue spoken by Stewart creates an evil depiction as he threatens Tilly by saying "...I'll come around to your house tonight and I'll kill your mother the slut, and when she's dead I'll get you", and looks at her with his "devil eyes". In addition, Ham has incorporated imagery to allow the audience to engage the senses and imagine the uncomfortable situation Myrtle finds herself in. Ham describes the immense feeling of sickness Myrtle experiences by saying that "vomit rose" and "burned in her throat" while being sexually assaulted by Stewart who was wet and smelled like wee." This causes the audience to become repulsed by his actions and the impact it has on Myrtle as a child and as an adult.

Moorhouse uses visual and film techniques to accomplish the same purpose; engage the audience and enhance the tension during the scene. For instance, various camera angles are used to represent different emotions and dominance. A close up shot is used to display Tilly's face as she recalls the events that lead up to Stewart Pettyman's death, which shows the distress she feels as she remembers the brutality Stewart caused her as a child. During the flashbacks, the view changes to a low camera angle to display Stewart in a powerful position, as he prepares to torment Tilly. Close ups are also included of his feet as he is pawing the dirt, and his face to convey his malicious thoughts. The atmosphere during the flashback is kept dark and grim compared to the bright lighting used for the set design of Tilly and Teddy. This contrasts the evil that occurs during the incident to the truth that will allow Tilly to move on. Dramatic music is played simultaneously to enhance the tension. Concurrently, a cracking sound effect is heard as Stewart's head strikes the wall and he falls to the ground. The techniques used in this flashback display the reason she was forced to leave Dungatar due to the lies that followed the traumatic event, which ultimately provided her with motive for revenge on the locals.

The use of literary techniques by Ham assists in the depiction of the characters, which supports in conveying the theme of revenge. Ham has written in third person point of view to allow the audience to understand the story from the narrator's perspective and form an unbiased interpretation. Ham uses descriptive language to portray Tilly's image as she describes her as a "slim young woman" who displays elegance when she steps "lightly into the fog". The sergeant notices her "alabaster skin" combined with facial features that bare a resemblance to Mad Molly. Her "unusually cut overcoat" and "fine boots" demonstrate her European style and skills that she will use to her advantage and win over the locals. The accusation that "everyone will know soon enough" about her return implies that they will realize she has returned when her retribution is felt. This foreshadows the statement that is later stated by Tilly that "our pain will no longer be our curse, it will be our revenge and our reason."

In comparison, Moorhouse has included visual and film techniques to characterise Tilly during her return. This is evident in the scene where Tilly arrives wearing a navy blue dress accessorized with a white hat and gloves. This represents her guarded nature and mysterious reason for returning, which is then exposed as revenge when she states "I'm back you bastards." The hat that sits upon her blonde hair hints to her suspicious motives and the cigarette that passes through her cherry lips symbolizes the danger she will cause the locals, which is only confirmed with the dark shadow cast across her face. The barking dogs in the background also sense peril as the music crescendos to make her arrival dramatic. The techniques used to depict Tilly's characterization and introduce her to the audience displays the beginning of her transformation as she will initiate her revenge in the attempt to uncover the path and expose the truth to the locals.

Despite their differences, both the novel and the film adaptation achieve the intended purpose by offering an entertaining and captivating interpretation of the characters, theme and plot. Both creators have engaged the target audience by including complex issues and relationships that maintain interest and provoke emotions, successfully conveying the main idea of revenge in both stories. Ham accomplished this through the utilization of literary techniques including flashbacks, point of view, characterization and imagery. In comparison, Moorhouse has incorporated film techniques, such as sound effects, camera angles, lighting, and characterization to achieve the same purpose while following the original storyline. As a young, female adult examining both texts that have integrated film and novel techniques to entertain and engage this target audience, it is obvious that Ham and Moorhouse have successfully conveyed the theme of revenge.

Although the novel *The Dressmaker* and the film of the same name share the same purpose, each text has successfully incorporated literary and film techniques respectively, to convey the common theme of revenge. In Ham's novel, the literary techniques, such as figurative language and characterisation, capture the story and create imagery for the reader that brings the text alive. Similarly, albeit via different techniques, Moorhouse's film version expertly conveys the theme of vengeance via the costume, lighting and music, to name a few. Thus, each text achieves its purpose and engages the audience in a fictional tale of revenge.

Performance Standards for Stage 2 English

Overall: A (26/30)

|  | Knowledge and Understanding | Analysis | Application |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | Comprehensive knowledge and understanding of ideas and perspectives in a range of texts.  Thorough knowledge and understanding of ways in which creators of texts use a range of language features, stylistic features, and conventions to make meaning.  Extensive knowledge and understanding of a wide range of ways in which texts are created for different purposes, audiences, and contexts. | Complex analysis of ideas, perspectives, and/or aspects of culture represented in texts.  Perceptive analysis of language features, stylistic features, and conventions used in texts, and thoughtful evaluation of how these influence audiences.  Critical analysis of similarities and differences when comparing texts. | Versatile and precise use of language and stylistic features to create a wide range of coherent texts that address the purpose, audience, and context.  Fluently integrated use of evidence from texts to develop and support a response.  Sophisticated use of accurate, clear, and fluent expression. |
| B | Knowledge and understanding of ideas and perspectives in a range of texts.  Knowledge and understanding of ways in which creators of texts use a range of language features, stylistic features, and conventions to make meaning.  Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which texts are created for different purposes, contexts, and audiences. | Detailed analysis of ideas, perspectives, and/or aspects of culture represented in texts.  Detailed analysis of language features, stylistic features, and conventions, and evaluation of how these influence audiences.  Clear analysis of similarities and differences when comparing texts. | Accurate use of language and stylistic features to create a range of coherent texts that address the purpose, context, and audience.  Appropriate use of evidence from texts to develop and support a response.  Consistent use of accurate, clear, and fluent expression. |
| C | Knowledge and understanding of some ideas and perspectives in texts.  Knowledge and understanding of ways in which creators of texts use some language features, stylistic features, and conventions to make meaning.  Knowledge and understanding of ways in which everyday texts are created for different purposes, contexts, and audiences. | Analysis of some ideas and perspectives represented in texts.  Description and some analysis of different language features, stylistic features, and conventions, and/or some evaluation of how these influence audiences.  Analysis of some similarities and differences when comparing texts. | Generally accurate use of language and stylistic features to create texts that address the purpose, context, and audience.  Selection of some evidence from texts to develop and support a response.  Appropriate use of accurate, clear, and fluent expression. |
| D | Knowledge and understanding of some ideas in a narrow range texts.  Some knowledge and understanding of ways in which creators of texts use language features and conventions to make meaning.  Knowledge and understanding of ways in which some everyday texts are created for different purposes and audiences. | Description of some ideas in texts.  Description of some language features, stylistic features, and/or conventions.  Description of some similarities and differences in texts. | Use of some language and stylistic features to create a narrow range of texts.  Partial use of basic evidence from texts to develop a response.  Inconsistent use of expression. |
| E | Identification of an idea in a text.  Identification of a limited range of ways in which creators of texts use language techniques.  Recognition of one or more ways in which a familiar text is created. | Reference to an idea in a text.  Recognition of language or stylistic features.  Recognition of a simple connection between texts. | Restricted use of language or stylistic features to create a text.  Limited use of evidence from a text in a response.  Limited use of clear expression. |