

## Literature Notes – Comparative Essay

### How to Write a Comparative Essay (Structure)

#### Planning:

- Narrow down the scope of the essay – usually given in the question
- List down all similarities and differences,
  - o Thesis statement must include both the points for similarities and the points for differences
  - o For example:
  - o If similarities>differences: Although (difference between two texts), they share the key understanding that (similarities) – and this leads to (thesis statement)
  - o If differences>similarities: While both texts are similar in the sense that (similarities), they differ in the fundamental understanding that (difference) – and this leads to (thesis statement)

#### Structure:

- Introduction (thesis statement + relevant background + hook)
  - Content (A1, B1, A2, B2, A3, B3)
  - Conclusion
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### Theories of Tragedy

The tragedy arises when we see a character ready to lay down his life to secure his personal dignity and to achieve his desired position in society.

Hamartia is his unwillingness to remain passive in the face what he conceives to be a challenge to his personal dignity. To secure this personal dignity, Willy fails to remain passive, fights against the system by trying to make the American dream his reality, and he loses.

Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy, AC Bradley	Tragedy of a Common Man, Arthur Miller
Source of tragic emotions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- High status (and eventual reversal of fortunes)</li><li>- Calamity extends beyond the tragic hero (affects the general populace, in Macbeth)</li></ul>	Source of tragic emotions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Common man (to whose story the audience can relate to)</li><li>- By motivation is a man of virtue, but this virtue is not recognized, as the protagonist dies without recognition or ceremony.</li></ul>
Motivation of downfall:  The events that lead to the protagonist's eventual downfall are motivated by the characters' actions which are evil (and not virtuous) in nature.	Motivation of downfall:  The events that lead to the protagonist's downfall occur because of a system that oppresses our tragic hero that he simply cannot win against.

### Comparison of Texts

Macbeth	Death of a Salesman
Archetype of greed and ambition	Archetype of determination and persistence to achieve his goal of living the American Dream (to the point that he considers suicide at numerous points)

## American Dream

- 'Rags-to-riches principle' → End goal was financial success
  - o Play hence ends on an ironical note, because Linda states, in the Requiem, that she has finally finished the payment on the house (hence finally achieving a sense of financial security that Willy has worked towards for years) - but Willy's death is the only way he can achieve this American dream he aspired to live.
- About how hard work and determination can lead to money and recognition
- Bernard's success VS Willy's failure VS Ben's success (beyond America, in African diamond mines)
  - o Shows Miller's uncertainty in the American Dream

## Gender Relations

- Society is rather patriarchal: lack of mix between public and private spheres (the women never play a role in the men's public working lives)
  - o Seen in Macbeth as well, Lady Macbeth simply urges Macbeth to commit his sins from the influence of the private sphere of the bedroom alone
- Similarity: Both wives (in Macbeth and DoS) fuel the tragic heroes' virtues (ambition and determination)
  - o LM tells her husband to kill Duncan
  - o Linda tells Willy to try getting a job elsewhere in order to be more financially successful

## Character Types

- Difference: Macbeth's characters are round characters that show evolution and adaptation, DoS characters are flat and show little or no evolution
  - o Macbeth starts out as a person of virtue, courage and determination (hence the promotion to double Thane) – but then evolves into an ambition-driven and rank-thirsty individual who would kill to achieve a status. Hence the buildingsroman.
  - o Willy starts out as a character who has certain business principles which do not work, and he continues to enforce these principles till the end of the play
  - o Happy and Biff still have childhood issues: Happy was never good with women, and Biff is still scarred by learning about his father's extramarital affair.

## Downfall of Characters

Macbeth: Fall of a character of high estate (double Thane, etc)

Willy: Fall of a character of 'perceived' estate (but really who was worth nothing) – in fact, his death was more beneficial to his family (insurance money, can pay off house, can let Biff and Happy set up business) than his life was.

## How Willy killed his own dreams

Willy at one point came to realise that the only way his dreams could materialize was through Biff. His dream was of social reputation, but he fails to realize that he himself destroyed Biff's social reputation. Biff used to be a confident guy, and all the "girls paid for him on dates", but this changed and Biff lost his confidence when the Boston incident occurred.