

Comparative essay - Ornella

Literature often portrays characters confronting a new environment, culture or set of beliefs. How are the dynamics of such confrontations explored in two works on your OIB syllabus ?

In the play Intimate Apparel written by Lynn Nottage as well as in the story This Blessed House by Jhumpa Lahiri, both authors pessimistically explore the theme of arranged marriage through their character's different beliefs and disillusionments. Indeed, both couples in these two stories are faced with disappointment when they are brutally immersed in this new environment, with no possibility of going back. The characters of Esther and George in Intimate Apparel are both very different and married each other for different purposes : George for money and hope for the American Dream, and his wife because she is too old to be presented any other opportunity. Similarly, Twinkle and Sanjeev in This Blessed House have different goals and perceptions in life, even though they both married for tradition. But the novelty of the situation make the four of them have at least one thing in common : they are all learning to love.

Commenté [1]: Great sentence, clear intro.

Commenté [2]: Beautiful introduction---logical buildup to present your thesis

Firstly, in Intimate Apparel, Lynn Nottage creates a parallel between Esther's high expectations about marrying George and the distressing reality she actually faces when he finally becomes his husband. The playwright also demonstrates how the difficulties of intimacy and absence of love in a couple can lead to suffering and broken dreams. This idea is more particularly explored on the first night of their marriage, when the bride expresses her disappointment "I guess I expected something to be different. [...] I've been waiting for those words since - they nearly took my breath away." Here Esther is frustrated that the ceremony that she had been dreaming of her whole life was, in the end, not worth waiting so impatiently. But her excitement is still obvious as she interrupts herself in the middle of her sentence. Just the memory of having had her breath taken away by the words "man and wife" produces the same effect as if she was still at the church, hearing the priest's voice pronouncing them again. This shows the contrast between the magical marriage that girls often picture themselves and how it actually feels to marry a complete stranger : not different, though a bit exciting. But then when George asks her why she is shaking, she answers that "None of this be familiar", adding a new feeling to this idea of arranged marriage : fear.

Commenté [3]: Okay, great. Can you make a slightly clearer connection to the essay question/thesis?

Commenté [4]: thus, shows how women are given a "set of beliefs" about marriage-- see if you can, again, make reference to the essay question a little more clearly.

That fear is due to an obvious absence of love from both of the characters, even if it is not necessarily conscious. For example, earlier in the play when Mayme asks Esther if she loves George, she responds "As much as you can love a man you've never seen", and insists on the fact that she is marrying for status and for the sake of accepting an

opportunity that she will never be given again : “I’m thirty-five, Mayme, and he wants to marry me. [...] I’ve told him yes.”. Then a while after the ceremony, when Mrs Van Buren exclaims “Oh, Esther, it must be wonderful to be in love”, she only answers “I suppose”, which means she eventually realised that, just like Mrs. Dickson, “she was in love with the notion of love”, but not love itself. On the other hand, George marries to follow the American dream by taking advantage of Esther’s money, which she won’t give to him because she herself has a dream : “That money for my beauty parlour, I told you that.”.

Unfortunately, this absence of love also leads to an absence of intimacy which leads George to have an affair with Mayme and to steal Esther’s money to make his own dream come true, breaking hers at the same time. Worst of all, he makes her feel guilty for wanting anything at all, saying “You want me to touch you. Is that all you want from George ?”.

Esther and George’s couple is used as a warning of how an arranged marriage organised for other purposes than love can be a disaster and lead to a miserable life.

Secondly, in This Blessed House, the writer opposes the sparkling, curious and adventurous personality of Twinkle with the traditional and closed-minded personality of Sanjeev to show how different perceptions of life can lead to poisoning disagreements in the relationship. Sanjeev rejects Twinkle’s obsession for Christianity because he decided to remain a “good Hindu”. For that reason he insists on the fact that “There are Christians in India, but we’re not” in front of their guest.

His frustration towards his wife gets more intense as the story goes on, and he becomes irritated for any detail : for example, “it irritated him when Twinkle insisted on wearing high heels”, because it made him feel so short and miserable. It is easy to notice that this frustration is actually caused by jealousy, as the narrator confesses “She was like that, excited and delighted at unpredictable events. [...] It made him feel stupid, as if the world contained hidden wonders he could not anticipate, or see.” This jealousy for an open mind that he is not able to develop is accentuate everytime Twinkle finds beauty in a piece of religious art, which causes that at the end of the story, he cannot help but to hate the statue even more because she seems to love it.

But those two characters cannot be blamed for their mutual annoyance, because they still are young souls learning to love. Sanjeev is not full of bad intention, as proved when he wants to throw away the Virgin that his wife found in the property and noticed he made her cry : ““Oh God, Twinkle, please, I didn’t mean it.’ He had never seen her cry, never seen so much sadness in her eyes”. But still he does not know whether he feels love or sympathy : “He did not know if he loved her. He said he did when she first asked him [...]. That afternoon he had replied, yes, he loved her, and she was delighted.”. In comparison to the couple in Intimate Apparel, Twinkle and Sanjeev both feel discontented by their marriage but still want to improve their

Commenté [5]: Okay, great observations! Again, see if you can just link back more clearly to the essay question/thesis

Commenté [6]: Great mini-thesis. This mini-thesis is more clearly connected to the essay question as you say "perceptions of life" :)

Commenté [7]: These are great observations. Just try to link back more clearly to the question, and also try to comment on "style" if you can in order to get full OIB points.

married life, unlike George and Esther who are stuck in their situation and are willing to split up.

In conclusion, in both couples presented in Intimate Apparel and This Blessed House, the characters deal with the situation of being freshly married with different reactions and reasons for being frustrated.

Commenté [8]: underline Intimate Apparel and put Blessed House in quotes

Commenté [9]: link more clearly to question/thesis + develop conclusion

Really great introduction. Your body paragraphs just need to make some extra clear links back to to the essay question/thesis. Also try to comment on “style”/devices/author’s choices. Perhaps you could make some comments on narration and how it enhances your claims. Your “prose” is very clear and smooth.

Develop conclusion and see if you can add another body paragraph.

**ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR OIB AMERICAN OPTION WRITTEN EXAMINATION:
ESSAY**

N.B. A short response may require assessment to be lowered.

Category	Below Level -0.5 or more at the discretion of the examiner	Level 0	Level 1 + 0.5	Level 2 + 1.0	Level 3 +1.5	Level 4 +2.0
Knowledge & Understanding	No true understanding or first-hand knowledge shown. Factual inaccuracies void argument.	Some understanding but superficial. Learned response replaces first-hand knowledge. Factual inaccuracies affect argument.	Satisfactory understanding and knowledge. Development may be limited with some inadvertent or minor factual inaccuracies.	Good overall understanding. Knowledge is full and developed.	Very good and thorough understanding, including some subtlety. Levels of meaning are apparent.	Excellent understanding, including some subtlety. Levels of meaning are apparent. Detailed and pertinent knowledge.
Response to the Question	Off-subject or no clear response discernible. Observation, commentary or opinion may be present but no attempt to form an argument.	Response is partial or muddled. Argument is directed at the question but may be confused or superficial.	A satisfactory response to the main implications of the question. Some aspects of the question may be ignored.	A good response. Argument addresses the question but may need more development.	A very good response. Argument is complete and well-targeted, and the question is well-understood.	An excellent response. Argument demonstrates original thought and addresses the question with clarity and depth.
Analysis & Depth (Includes discussion of style at	Plot summary or generalizations dominate. No successful attempt at analysis.	Plot summary or generalizations frequent. Little or unsuccessful analysis.	Inconsistent analysis that does not always address important elements. Analysis may be	Good analysis that appropriately addresses important elements. Generally	Very good analysis. Thoughtful, pertinent analysis of style.	Excellent analysis and argumentation. Insightful, sophisticated and

Level 2 and above)			uneven or lacking in depth.	appropriate analysis of style illustrated by relevant examples.		coherent analysis of style.
Organization of the Essay & Integration of Evidence	No logical sequence of ideas. Chronological confusion. Development is so inadequate that clarity is in danger of dissolving completely.	Weak or mechanical structure. Development is barely adequate and examples are either impertinent or lack clear connection to the argument.	Satisfactory structure and development. Sequence of ideas generally logical. Examples not always pertinent and integration may be awkward.	Good structure with some transitions. Sequence of ideas logical. Examples are generally pertinent and most often integrated appropriately.	Very good essay structure with solid transitions. Clear development throughout and good integration of supporting evidence.	Excellent essay structure with clear transitions. Carefully planned, persuasive development throughout. Sophisticated integration of supporting evidence.
Expression	Meaning often cannot be surmised. The essay is very difficult to read.	Prose can be read and its meaning surmised even if hampered by weak control (or French interference).	Prose conveys the writer's ideas adequately. Vocabulary is sufficient and notions of good English usage are evident if sometimes inconsistently applied.	Prose shows evidence of good writing skills. Lapses are minor and do not impede understanding. Some care is shown in word choice and register.	Prose is clear and coherent. A rare lapse does not mar ideas or flow. Effective use of vocabulary and register.	Prose is articulate, fluid, and displays an excellent command of written language. Sophisticated use of vocabulary and register.
Totals						

15,5/20