

'Visual action can be as important on the stage as speech,' How far do you agree with this claim? In your answer you should refer to two or three plays you have studied.

Within Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, both visual action and speech assume prominent roles in the conveyance of the plays' central themes as well as in the defining of their central characters. However, in order to determine whether visual action can be as important on the stage as speech, it is imperative that the manner in which these two elements interrelate and contrast with one another are taken into consideration.

Comment [K1]: Make it clear which texts and authors you are talking about from the start

Comment [K2]: Two clear points set out here & these are used to structure the essay clearly as they are considered in each main point made

It is apparent that speech and visual action can collaborate and work together on the stage thus placing them in roles of equal importance and prominence. Tennessee Williams utilises both speech as well as visual elements in order to define the character of Stanley within *A Streetcar Named Desire*. During his entrance to the play he is described as carrying his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from the butcher's and he is later seen to leave the package at Stella. These actions serve to present Stanley as a somewhat primitive, basic and vulgar character and, through the presence of his bowling jacket, emphasise his role as a strong individual who is defined by his masculinity. These actions are reinforced by his speech during this scene when he states, 'Hey, there! Stella, Baby!' and employs phrases such as 'Catch!' and 'Meat!' The ubiquitous nature of exclamation marks throughout his speech as well as the monosyllabic nature of 'Catch!' and 'Meat!' emphasise his control and dominance over his wife in addition to his surroundings. Furthermore, Williams indicates Stanley's spontaneity and violence through his actions of smashing light bulbs on his wedding night and hurling a plate to the floor in response to Stella's request that he aids in the clearing of the table. The audience witnesses a consolidation of these actions through Stanley's proclamation, 'Remember what Huey Long said. Every Man is a King! And I am the king around here so don't forget it!' Thus, through the collaboration of speech and visual actions, Stanley's dominance and power is established and his basic, vulgar and coarse nature is re-emphasised.

Comment [K3]: Opening sentence that makes it clear what this paragraph is going to be about

Comment [K4]: A clear role for visual action and speech has been established here and this links clearly back to the points introduced at the start

Comment [K5]: Multiple quotations used as evidence

Comment [K6]: Clear analysis of elements of the quotations

Moreover, Williams employs both speech and visual action in order to vilify Blanche as well as to establish her as a tragic character in the eyes of the audience. Through Blanche's revelation that she took a trip to Miami as an investment, thinking [she'd] meet someone with a million dollars, in addition to her visual action where she takes off the blouse and stands in her pink silk brassiere and white skirt in the light through the portieres, Williams presents Blanche as a seductress and a calculating manipulator as she simply views men in terms of their monetary value and employs her sexuality as a means by which to attain the attention of men and in particular Mitch who she is later seen to manipulate. However, in contrast, Williams additionally uses speech and visual action in order to portray Blanche as a tragic character in her attempt to breach the divide between fantasy and reality and incorporate elements of fantasy into reality. The symbolism of Mitch's attempt to remove Blanche's paper lantern from the light bulb is made obvious by Blanche's speech, 'I tell you what I want. Magic!...I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth. I tell what *ought* to be the truth.' Blanche's emphasis of the word *ought* serves to indicate her attempt to colour the world in order to allow it to seem better and thereby evoke a more sympathetic response. Thus, the presence of the paper lantern in addition to Blanche's speech regarding her attempt to instill a degree of magic in the world indicate the relationship between and the importance of both speech and visual action as tools by which Williams is able to rescue the character of Blanche within *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Comment [K7]: Final sentence in the paragraph establishes a clear link back to the question

Comment [K8]: Connective used to link similar ideas together & in this case visual action and speech again working together to present Blanche as a seductress

Comment [K9]: More complex development of Blanche's character

Similarly, Miller utilises both speech and visual action in order to define and further vilify the character of Abigail within *The Crucible*. This is evident when she threatens, 'I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder

Comment [K10]: This term needs to be explained a little & it would have to be made clear why Blanche is rescued and what exactly this means

Comment [K11]: Clear connective and opening sentence to indicate how this point follows from the previous one

you'd .I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!q The abundance of harsh consonants (for example, the harsh ~~h~~ sound in ~~h~~pointyq the harsh ~~h~~ sound in ~~h~~eckoningq and the ~~h~~ sounds in ~~h~~hudderq and ~~h~~eddishq insinuate that she is effectively spitting out these phrases and thereby illustrate her spiteful and to a degree malicious nature. This speech alone is seen to be vital in defining Abigail as a cruel, heartless, villain; however it is her violent visual actions which ensure that the audience maintains this perception. Abigail's rough and violent treatment of Betty is depicted when she is seen to ~~h~~uriously shakeq Betty and she ~~h~~smashes her across the faceq

Comment [K12]: Excellent detailed analysis

In addition, Miller emphasises the power of visual action utilised in conjunction with speech in order to heighten the tension and hysteria surrounding the accusations of witches which Miller parallels to the indictments of Communists during the McCarthy witch hunt. Abigail and Betty's accusations at the conclusion of Act I, when they state, ~~h~~ saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osborn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!q are reinforced by their later actions when ~~h~~Abigail, pointing with fear, is now raising up her frightened eyes, her awed face toward the ceiling . the girls are doing the sameq It is apparent that Abigail's imaginary conversation with the bird works in conjunction with her actions in order to convince Danforth of the presence of spirits when he states, in response to these actions, ~~h~~Marry Warren! Draw back your spirit out of them!q In this instance it is evident that neither the speech, in the form of the accusations, nor the actions, could work individually in order to convince Danforth of the spirits. It is instead the relationship between the two which serves to heighten the hysteria and tension.

Comment [K13]: Connective used to indicate that ideas will be developed further. There is a nice structure here as we have had two sub-points on the same main point topic from each play. This creates a sense of balance and the impression that the candidate knows both texts equally well

Comment [K14]: This point has to be at least raised during a discussion of ~~h~~The Crucibleq in order to demonstrate that you understand the context

Moreover, visual action and speech are seen to work together during scene ten when the back wall of the room becomes transparent and is filled with ~~h~~urid reflectionsq and shadows which are of a ~~h~~grotesque and menacing formq These images of danger and base and course action are reinforced by the ~~h~~human jungle voicesq which rise during the rape and thus build up tension and indicate the equal importance of visual action and speech in setting the scene and increasing the hysteria.

Comment [K15]: Again the final sentence clearly links back to the question

Comment [K16]: It should be made clear that we have switched back to ~~h~~Streetcarq

Furthermore, both Williams and Miller utilise costumes as visual tools by which to define the prominent characters within their plays. Stanley's vibrant outfits such as his ~~h~~green and scarlet silk bowling shirtq and his silk pajamas reflect his vibrancy and vitality, which is omnipresent throughout his speech through phrases such as, ~~h~~Hey, there! Stella, Baby!q Thus, the way in which visual tools such as costumes as well as speech work together in order to create a character is evident. Moreover, Williams utilises costumes in conjunction with speech in order to indicate the multifaceted nature of Blanche. Blanche's initial costume of ~~h~~a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hatq is seen to be incongruous to the setting and is reflected in her speech through her criticism of Stella and Stanley's house when she states, ~~h~~What are you doing in a place like this?q as well as her insistence that Mitch remain a gentleman despite Stella and Stanley's absence. Therefore, through Blanche's contrasting appearance as well as her criticisms, Williams isolates her from the other characters and presents to the audience the view that Blanche attempts to present to other characters: that is, one of propriety, class and wealth. However, through the changing of Blanche's appearance and costume to that of a ~~h~~red stain robeq as well as her speech, Williams presents Blanche as a seductress and thus undermines her character. Moreover, her appearance in scene ten, when she wears ~~h~~a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gownq and a tiara reflects her insanity which is re-emphasised by her stream of consciousness during which she states, ~~h~~How about taking a swim, a moonlight swim at the old rock-quarry? If anyone's sober enough to drive a car! Ha-Ha!q The repeated use of exclamation marks indicates her insanity as does her appearance. Thus, the way in which visual attributes as well as speech work together in indicating the three dimensional nature of Blanche is evident.

Comment [K17]: The development of this point in a new direction is indicated by this clear opening sentence

Comment [K18]: Again opening and closing sentences make clear the link back to the question

However, in contrast, Miller juxtaposes the appearance of Abigail with her speech thereby indicating that visual action can be as important if not more important than speech. Throughout *The Crucible* Abigail's costume reflects those worn by women in Salem during the 1600s in that she is dressed demurely and prudishly. However, Miller juxtaposes and hence undermines her appearance with her actions as well as her speech. During her conversation with John Proctor she is seen to winningly come a little closer and clutch him desperately whilst stating phrases such as, 'I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I came near!' thus expressing her sexuality as well as indicating their primal nature through the animalistic imagery. Therefore, Miller indicates that one's appearance can be undermined by other actions and speech thereby insinuating that presence of both visual action and speech is imperative in enabling an audience to form a complete picture of a character.

Comment [K19]: New point clearly indicated by the opening sentence. This point makes an interesting contrast to the previous point as now visual action and speech are no longer working together

Comment [K20]: Good analysis and clear use of literary terminology

Furthermore, Miller continues to express hypocrisy within the character of Abigail in that there is a direct contrast between her speech and her visual actions. Within the first act Abigail proclaims, 'I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus!' this insinuating her vow to redeem herself and accept God and religion. However, her later actions during which she condemns Elizabeth through the poppet incident indicate that she has maintained her vow to take Elizabeth's place and thereby depict that visual action is often more important than speech as it reveals a character's true desires and enables the audience to see beyond the false vows made for the other characters.

Comment [K21]: Clear reference back to the question using key words from the title

Comment [K22]: Connectives used well throughout to indicate the comparison between the two texts

Similarly, within *A Streetcar Named Desire* a contrast is evident between the visual actions and the speech of Blanche hence permitting the audience to view the deceitful and duplicitous nature of the character of Blanche. Perhaps, the most crucial contrast between Blanche's actions and her speech is when during scene six she states to Mitch, 'I guess it is just that I have... old-fashioned ideals!' whilst rolling her eyes, knowing he cannot see her face. This phrase emphasises her deceitful nature and undermines her character as she, herself, knows of the lies that she is telling Mitch for whom the audience feels sympathy. Thus the contrast between Blanche's speech and her visual actions serves to further vilify her character in the eyes of the audience as it illustrates her duplicitous nature. This is further apparent through her constant abuse of alcohol which is coupled with phrases such as, 'No, I rarely touch it' and 'Where could it be, I wonder? Oh, I spy, I spy!' Hence, visual action and speech are seen to be inseparable in forming the audience's opinion regarding a character.

Moreover, the conflict between speech and visual action is epitomised by the character of Stella. Within her speech, Stella is seen to use imperatives when she states, 'Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy. Go and wash up and then help me clear the table!' These phrases thereby illustrate her attempt to assert herself; however they are undermined by her actions, for example when she begins to cry weakly. Therefore, one cannot simply take either her actions or her speech at face value as it is the combination of the two which enables one to build their perception.

Furthermore, both Williams and Miller give instances in which visual action is more important than speech. During Blanche's rape in *A Streetcar Named Desire* her speech is reduced to simply 'Oh!' and thus it is the visual element of her rape which constructs the audience's perception of the scene and thereby plays the predominant role. Similarly, John Proctor's act of seasoning the soup could be termed more important than the speech within much of act two in that his act effectively indicates that there is an element of hope in rebuilding the relationship between Proctor and Elizabeth.

Comment [K23]: An additional new point of this time visual action isn't just working with or working in contrast to speech of it is just straight forwardly all we have to go on

However, it is apparent that what the audience is not permitted to see is often vital to their interpretation of the play. Within *A Streetcar Named Desire* the audience is unable to view the rape of Blanche or Stanley's beating of Stella which serves to increase the presence of ambiguity within the play and thereby allow the audience to come to their own conclusions

Comment [K24]: An attempt to end on an interesting and original final point

and either rescue or vilify the characters within the play. Furthermore, the audience does not see the hanging or the girls dancing naked in the woods within *The Crucible*. The fact that the audience is unable to view the girls dancing introduces further ambiguity and uncertainty as to what actually occurred. Moreover, the fact that we do not see the hanging effectively increases the tension and indicate that it is those that live on who are forced to pick up the pieces and deal with the destruction that remains.

Ultimately it is evident that visual action can be as important on the stage as speech as it is effectively impossible to separate the roles of speech and visual action within *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Crucible* as both play equally prominent roles in enabling the audience to construct their perception of the characters. However, it is apparent that one cannot simply reduce the elements featured in a play to simply speech and visual action as other elements such as music and the charisma of the actors also play key roles. Instead, it is the fusion of all of these elements which present the full picture.

Comment [K25]: However, it is clear that Stanley does rape Blanche and does beat Stella. These scenes aren't ambiguous, these things did happen, the fact that we don't see them perhaps increases the tension as we are left to imagine the violence perhaps more effectively than it could be portrayed on stage

Comment [K26]: Clear answer to the question, although it is a shame that the reference to key themes introduced at the start of the essay has been lost along the way