LIAM DINGLE

SAMPLE ANSWERS-THE GENERAL VISION AND VIEWPOINT (V&V)

SAMPLE 1; LC 2025, Q. 1

(a) **Do you think that the climax of a text is over-influential in shaping a reader's perception of the general vision and viewpoint of that whole text? Develop your response in relation to one text on your comparative course. (30)**

I strongly **disagree with the premise** that the climax of John B. Keane's 1950s rural tragedy "Sive" is over-influential in shaping the reader's perception of its general vision and viewpoint (V&V). In my study of the play I found that the tragic climax—Sive's self-destruction—did not unfairly skew my view of the text's outlook. Instead, it served as the **inevitable and crushing confirmation** of a bleak vision of the human condition that Keane established from the very first scene.

To me, the general vision and viewpoint of *Sive* was already deeply pessimistic long before the final tragic discovery. The author sets a **tone of bitterness and oppression** from the opening stage directions in Act 1, scene 1, describing a "bitter March day". This external coldness is immediately mirrored by the toxic and bitter interactions between Mena and Nanna. I felt the vision was already dark because of the **corrosive nature of this relationship**. As the story unfolded, the V&V remained downbeat. We learn that a young girl with a bright future is to be "sold like an animal" into a marriage with a much older man. The conniving between Thomasheen and Mena and Mike "man of straw" Glavin further added to the idea of the world of the text as a wasteland of cruelty**. Any seeds of hope, for example in the form of the loving interactions between Liam and Sive and Nanna and Sive were quickly neutralised and the key moment where Sive's bag is thrown across the stage, symbolising the end of Sive's educational ticket out of this grim world really hammered home for me the shocking selfishness of those who controlled Sive.** The climax did not change this feeling; it merely validated this pervasive sense of unease at the way people treated each other in this world.

Furthermore, the author's commentary on the human condition—specifically the **commodification and objectification of people**—is reinforced throughout the narrative arc. When Thomasheen and Mena plot to match the young, vibrant Sive with the "wizened" and lecherous Seán Dota for money, I was struck by the sheer **greed and self-interest** that defined this society. Sive is monetised, objectified and commodified like livestock. Even the staged performance of Sive being forced to walk down the boreen with Seán Dota made me feel that the V&V was already grim. **For me, the climax was simply the logical conclusion for a girl whose future and hope had been purchased by the highest bidder.**

The **moral cowardice** of the characters also contributed to my perception of a bleak world well before the ending. While Mike Glavin initially shows a flicker of empathy,

stating he has "responsibility" and that he would “never, never, never, never” allow the match to happen, any morality he has is ultimately eclipsed by the darkness of his own, Mena’s and Thomasheen’s greed. His failure to protect Sive and his decision to agree to the match despite knowing it was “wrong" suggested to me that in this world, **love is not enough** to ensure survival. When Thomasheen burns Liam’s letter—Sive's last shred of hope—I felt my final hopes for Sive’s escape were extinguished. The climax was not a surprise that reshaped my view; it was the final seal on a fate that had been decided by the **weakness and cruelty of the adults** around her.

In conclusion, while the sight of Sive’s body on the table is a riveting and tragic climax, it does not exert an undue influence on my perception of the play's V&V. Instead, it **confirms a crashing bleakness** that was present from the start. The climax is merely the final punctuation mark on Keane’s dark message: in this world, **empathy and love are defeated by self-interest**. The vision is not shaped by the ending, but by the relentless accumulation of cruelty that makes the ending unavoidable.

(642 words)

(b) **In the case of <u>two other texts</u> on your comparative course, compare the extent to which the climax, in each of these texts, is over-influential in shaping a reader’s perception of the general vision and viewpoint of these whole texts. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (40)**

In my study of Greta Gerwig’s film “Barbie” and Claire Keegan’s novel “Small Things Like These” (STLT), I came to believe that while the climax in these two texts is a vital component of the narrative, it is not over-influential in shaping the reader’s perception of the general vision and viewpoint (V&V). Instead, the climax serves as the **final, logical confirmation** of an outlook that the authors meticulously construct throughout the texts. While both texts conclude with a protagonist making a definitive, life-altering and positive choice, the **unambiguous triumph** at the climax of Barbie and the **profound ambiguity** of STLT’s climax provide very different emotional resolutions that are entirely consistent with their preceding narrative arcs. Neither climax comes as a surprise, I believe, because the authors left a breadcrumb trail of clues that brought us to the climax.

In both texts, the V&V—the broad outlook on life created by the authors—is established long before the final scenes. In *STLT*, the vision is initially defined by a **claustrophobic and bitter atmosphere**. From the opening chapter, the description of "long November winds" and "blades of cold" that "cut the knees off those who still knelt" creates a sense of **societal oppression**. This outlook is reinforced by the gossipy nature of the town and the isolationist philosophy of characters like Eileen, who believes that to get on in life, there are **"things you have to ignore"**. However, the bleak and cold wind of hardship is strongly offset by numerous instances of compassion and empathy, mostly emanating from Bill’s small acts of kindness; giving Mick Sinnott’s “young chap” the change he had in his pocket and a lift home; Bill’s obvious love and pride for his girls. He didn’t lick this

compassion off the ground, Mrs. Wilson's over-arching and kind memory-presence informs the positive V&V of these moments profoundly, preparing us for the climax. The pattern of positive preparation we see in STLT is echoed in "Barbie". The initial vision is shaped by the **multicoloured utopian vision** of Barbieland 1.0 established in the opening sequence. However, this plastic perfection is immediately shown to be **imbalanced and unequal**, as the Kens are presented as a sub-species, a homogenous blob of non-entity with no real purpose and Barbie begins to "malfunction".

The vision evolves as Barbie enters the "real world," which is portrayed as **toxic and threatening**. Yet it is here that Barbie has an epiphany in a heart-lifting scene, the scene Gerwig described as "The heart of the movie": the bus shelter scene. Here our hearts are lifted as, with the strains of Billie Eilish's "What was I made for?" soaring in the background, Barbie makes her first tentative steps towards self-actualisation, culminating at the climax of the film when she becomes fully human. Further on in the film we see systemic societal change as Barbieland 2.0 looks likely to be a more egalitarian society: " No Barbie or Ken should live in the shadow" President Barbie announces following the usurping of the Kens. These moments of positivity inform the V&V in a positive way in the film, mirroring the positive moments in the novel and paving the way for the expected climax.

The **climaxes themselves** serve to validate the authors' respective commentaries on the human condition. In STLT, Bill Furlong's decision to liberate Sarah Redmond from the coal shed is a **heroic and maverick act**. This moment confirms that **goodness and kindness** can win over darkness, but it does not over-influence the vision because Keegan has already shown us glimpses of empathy as mentioned above. However, unlike the unambiguous Hollywood ending of "Barbie", the climax of STLT is **deeply qualified by ambiguity**. As Bill walks Sarah home, he feels a "fresh, new, unrecognizable joy," yet the author leaves us with unanswered questions. We are forced to wonder if Bill and his family will be **punished or ostracized** by a society and a church unwilling to accept his defiance of social norms. This ambiguity ensures the vision remains grounded in the **reality** of a church-fearing New Ross society; it is a hopeful ending, but one shadowed by potential negative consequences. It does not over-influence the V&V, however, in my opinion.

The climax of Barbie, on the other hand, provides an **unambiguous, triumphant and life-affirming** resolution that lacks the ambiguity of the climax of the novel. When Barbie says her affirmative YES to becoming fully human, accepting all its complexities and contradictions, its perfect imperfection, the reader is left with a feeling of overwhelmingly positive joy. This unambiguous ending is epitomized by the final scene where a beaming Barbie visits her gynaecologist, signifying her **complete humanness**. While this ending is certainly influential, it is not over-influential because the film has traced Barbie's **emotional development** and her potential to learn and to feel empathy. The "Hollywood ending" is the earned result of her "achy but good" epiphany at the bus shelter and her subsequent empowerment of Ken to self-realise, to feel that "I am Kenough"

To conclude, the climaxes are a **distillation** of the author's message rather than an undue influence upon it in the case of these two texts. Whether through the **unanswered questions** facing Bill Furlong or the **beaming smile** of Barbara Handler, these climaxes merely provide the final evidence for a vision of the human condition—be it **ambiguously hopeful** or **triumphantly optimistic**—that has been carefully constructed from the very first scene.

(901 words)

SAMPLE 2-2025 Q. 2

Compare the extent to which your perception of the general vision of viewpoint, in at least two texts on your comparative course, is influenced by the varying degrees to which these texts present human nature as contradictory and paradoxical. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (70)

In my study of Greta Gerwig's film "Barbie", Claire Keegan's novel "Small Things Like These" (STLT), and John B. Keane's play "Sive", I have found that the general vision and viewpoint (V&V)—the "broad outlook on life" created by the authors—is profoundly influenced by the varying degrees to which human nature is presented as **contradictory and paradoxical**. Whether the authors choose to highlight these internal conflicts as a source of tragedy, a moral challenge, or a path to self-actualisation fundamentally shapes how I, as a reader, perceive their ultimate message regarding the human condition.

In Keane's "Sive", the vision is deeply pessimistic precisely because the **paradoxes of human nature** are presented as corrosive and destructive. The most striking contradiction lies in **Mike Glavin**. Initially, Mike appears as a protective figure, asserting he has a "responsibility" for Sive and famously declaring "Never…never…never…never…" when the idea of a "match" with the aged Seán Dota is first proposed. However, this moral stance is eventually **eclipsed by the darkness of greed**. The paradox of a man who claims to love his niece but ultimately sells her to a "wizened" and lecherous man for money creates a crashing bleakness in the text's vision. Keane suggests that in this society, **self-interest and moral cowardice** are more powerful than familial duty. Unlike the protagonists in the other two texts, Mike does not grow through his contradictions; he is neutralized by them.

Similarly, the character of **Mena Glavin** embodies a paradox of **cruel intent masked by a pretence of kindness**. I found her interactions with Sive and Nanna to be toxic and bitter, yet she is capable of a staged performance of civility when it serves the nefarious plan of the match. When she tells Sive towards the end of the play that Liam Scuab only came to wish her well on her marriage, it is a **cruel lie** that isolates Sive further. This presentation of human nature as a desert of cruelty where maternal figures act as oppressors rather than nurturers informs my perception of a world where **empathy and love are defeated**.

In Claire Keegan's STLT, human nature is presented as a **moral paradox**, but in opposition to "Sive", this creates a vision that is ambiguously hopeful. The central contradiction is explored through **Bill Furlong's struggle** between his "head" and his "heart"—the desire for the safety of the "ordinary" versus the drive to do something "extraordinary". Furlong is a man who, in his own mind, is haunted by his past and the prejudiced attitude of society toward his own illegitimacy. The paradox here is that Bill, who has everything to lose, is the only one willing to risk his status to help **Sarah Redmond**. He asks himself a profound question that gets to the heart of this human contradiction: was it possible to go through life without being brave enough to "go against what was there" and yet still "call yourself a Christian"?

This internal conflict is contrasted with the **paradoxical morality of the town** and the church. The town of New Ross is defined by its gossipy nature and a claustrophobic atmosphere, yet there are "things you have to ignore" if you want to "get on in life". Eileen Furlong represents this isolationist philosophy; she is a loving mother in a scene of domestic bliss in the Christmas cake baking episode in chapter 3 yet she believes they must mind their own children and ignore everyone else's. This contradiction—that a "good" woman can advocate for ignoring the suffering of the Magdalene girls in the convent—contributes to a vision where **societal self-interest** is a dark influence. However, Bill's final heroic and maverick act of liberating Sarah Redmond confirms that goodness and kindness can triumph, even if the ending remains ambiguous regarding the potential negative consequences for his family. The V&V is complicated by these contrsdictions but remains, overall, in the positive zone as the story climaxes.

Echoing the positive V&V in the novel, in Greta Gerwig's "Barbie", the presentation of human nature as contradictory is not a source of despair or a quiet moral struggle, but rather the catalyst for a triumphant journey to self which parallels Bill's character arc. The film begins with a mostly pink utopian vision that is itself a paradox: it is perfect but imbalanced and unequal, as the Kens are treated as a sub-species with no purpose other than "Beach". This superficial fantasy is challenged when Barbie begins to have intrusive thoughts about death, a paradox for a doll designed to represent eternal youth and perfection.

The core of the film's vision is found in Gloria's feminist diatribe, which explicitly outlines **the "literally impossible" contradictions** placed on women. Women are expected to be "thin but not too thin," a "boss but not mean," and "extraordinary" while always "doing it wrong". Gerwig presents these paradoxes as "achy but good" in the bus shelter scene, moving Barbie toward an epiphany of life's imperfect perfection. When Barbie experiences empathy for the first time at the bus shelter, it informs the vision in a positive way, showing her potential to learn and to feel; to attain what Bill always has in the novel-compassion.

The paradox of power is also explored through **the Kens. When** Ken enters the "Real World" and discovers the patriarchy, he attempts to recreate it in Barbieland, transforming the matriarchy into "Kenland". This gender civil war highlights the paradoxical nature of oppression: the Kens, having been "accessories" in Barbieland,

simply reverse the power structure to make the Barbies mere chattels. Yet, the resolution is overwhelmingly optimistic. Barbie**,** empowers Ken to self-realise, to accept that he is “Kenough” and President Barbie declares that "No Barbie or Ken should be living in the shadow," suggesting a move toward a more egalitarian society. Ulimately, and paradoxically in the film, Barbie swaps the imperfect perfection of Barbieland for the perfect imperfection of the messiness of humanity. This is a contradictory risk for her which mirrors the risk factor in the novel as Bill chooses to jeopardise his family and business’s future by following his heart and emancipating Sarah from the coalshed. In both texts the contradictory nature of the central characters leads ot an awakening which informs the V&V in a positive way.

Comparing these texts, the extent to which these paradoxes influence the GV&V varies by how the authors resolve them. In “Sive”, the paradoxes of human nature are never resolved, only terminated by death. The sight of Sive’s body on the table is the final punctuation mark on a vision of crashing bleakness. There is no growth, no progress, and no new beginning. The contradictions of the empowered adults result in the destruction of hope, youth and the future. On the other hand, In STLT, the paradoxes are **acknowledged and challenged**. Bill Furlong chooses to live authentically by following his empathetic heart over his self-preserving head. This creates an **upbeat but grounded vision**. While the ending is ambiguous—leaving us with unanswered questions about whether society will punish Bill—it nonetheless suggests that **human nature is capable of bravery and empathetic heroism** despite the weight of societal norms. Akin to STLT, in “Barbie”, the paradoxes are **embraced and celebrated**. The vision is overwhelmingly optimistic and life-affirming because Barbie says **"YES" to becoming fully human**, accepting all the complexities and contradictions that come with it. The closing scene, where she adopts the human name **Barbara Handler** and visits her gynaecologist with a beaming smile, signifies a **complete acceptance of "humanness"**.

In conclusion, my perception of the V&V in these texts is directly tied to how the authors navigate **human nature's paradoxes**. In Keane’s work, these contradictions are a **prison** that leads to despair. In Keegan’s novel, they are a **moral crucible** that offers hope shadowed by reality. In Gerwig’s film, they are the **very essence of being alive**, leading to a triumphant and joyful resolution. All of my comparative texts use the roller-coaster of human emotion to deliver a unique commentary on our condition, ranging from the stagnant lack of growth in “Sive” to the journey to self-actualisation in STLT and Barbie.

(1352 words)

SAMPLE 3-2023 V&V Q. 1-PROOFREAD

(a)To what extent does the level of compassion and kindness, evident in one text on your comparative course, influence your sense of the general vision and viewpoint in that text? Develop your response with reference to your chosen text. (30)

In my study of John B. Keane's play "Sive", I have found that my perception of the general vision and viewpoint (V&V)—the broad outlook on life and commentary on the human condition—is profoundly influenced by the **fragility and ultimate defeat of compassion**. While the play contains brief oases of tenderness, their inability to withstand the relentless tide of greed and self-interest leads me to view the text's vision as one of **crashing bleakness**.

Initially, the presence of kindness gave me a sense of hope, albeit a precarious one. I found the conversations between **Nanna and Sive** to be genuine oases of tenderness and empathy in what otherwise felt like a desert of cruelty. Their mutual respect and unconditional love initially informed the vision in a positive manner. This sense of possibility was bolstered by **Mike Glavin's early stance** against the proposed match for Sive. When he asserted, "I have responsibility," and repeated "Never…never…never…never…," in relation to the match, I felt that familial duty might protect Sive from the abysmal fate of the match. These moments of compassion suggested a world where the human spirit could resist corruption.

The **romantic love between Liam Scuab and Sive** further influenced my perception of a potentially positive viewpoint. The heroic/romantic language Liam uses and the tenderness of their exchanges stood in sharp contrast to the lecherous motivations of Seán Dota. Furthermore, **Pat's selfless motivation** in helping to plan Sive's escape—noting that "the young man have a true heart for her"—briefly lifted the vision of the text, giving me hope that Sive might avoid her awful fate.

However, as the narrative arc progressed, I realized that these flickers of kindness were destined to be **neutralized and eclipsed** by a more dominant, cruel human nature. My sense of a deeply pessimistic V&V was confirmed when I saw how easily Mike "man of straw"'s initial compassion was **eclipsed by the darkness of greed**. His moral cowardice in ultimately agreeing to the match despite knowing it was "wrong" suggested to me that in this society, **love and compassion are not enough**.

The most distressing influence on my perception of the viewpoint was the way **kindness was weaponized through cruelty**. This is best exemplified when **Mena lies to Sive late on in the play**, claiming that Liam had come only to wish her well on her marriage and was leaving the area. By using the memory of Sive's only romantic connection to isolate her, Mena turns a source of compassion into a tool of despair. This, combined with Mena's verbal assault where she calls Sive a **"bastard"** and throws her

schoolbag across the stage—symbolizing the end of her education and future—left me feeling dejected.

Ultimately, the **final extinguishment of compassion** at the climax defined the general vision for me. When Thomasheen **burns Liam's letter**, the final hopes for Sive's escape are extinguished. The sight of **Sive's lifeless body** on the table at the end of the play provides no new beginning, only the confirmation of a stagnant lack of growth.

In conclusion, while the moments of compassion in "Sive" are deeply moving, their **complete failure to protect the innocent** is what truly shapes my perception of the text. The level of kindness is insufficient to overcome a society driven by greed and self-interest. Thus, the presence of compassion only serves to highlight the **crushing weight of the surrounding cruelty**, leaving me with a final impression of a world where basic human rights and kindness are tragically ignored.

(584 words)

(b)Compare the extent to which the levels of compassion and kindness, evident in two other texts on your comparative course, influence your sense of the general vision and viewpoint in these texts. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (40)

In my study of Greta Gerwig's film "Barbie" and Claire Keegan's novel Small Things Like These (STLT), I have found that the general vision and viewpoint (V&V)—the broad outlook on life created by the authors—is almost entirely determined by the **presence, victory, or defeat of compassion**. For me, these texts suggest that while the human condition is often defined by repressive societal norms and institutional cruelty, the level of kindness shown by an individual can transform a **pessimistic** outlook into one of **hope and liberation**.

In both texts, my initial perception of the vision was shaped by a **lack of genuine compassion** in the established status quo. In STLT, the atmosphere is immediately bitter and uncomfortable, with imagery of "long November winds" that "cut the knees off those who still knelt to say the rosary". The town of New Ross is defined by a **gossipy nature** and an isolationist philosophy, exemplified by Eileen Furlong, who believes that to "get on in life, there's things you have to ignore". The opening of "Barbie", unlike the opening of the novel presents a mostly pink utopian vision of Barbieland that initially seems overwhelmingly positive. However, I soon realized this world lacked true empathy because it was **imbalanced and unequal**; the Kens are treated as a sub-species and mere accessories with no real purpose. The Kens are portrayed as a homogenous blob of non-entity whose only role is to "do beach". Thus, both authors begin with societies where kindness is either **wilfully ignored** or **superficially applied**, creating a vision that feels either shadowed or hollow and thus inform the V&V in a negative way.

The V&V roller-coaster begins to rise when the protagonists experience **active, personal empathy**. In STLT, Bill Furlong's capacity for kindness is rooted in the generosity of **Mrs. Wilson**, who took in Bill's mother and saved them from the fate of becoming a Magdalene girl. This past act of compassion influences Bill's own values; unlike the prejudiced attitude of the town clerk who smirks at Bill as he hands over the birth cert (the column where the father's name should be is blank, indicating his illegitimate status in society, Bill treats people well because he remembers Mrs. Wilson's philosophy: "To get the best out of people, you must always treat them well". This philosophy translates into "small things like these" when he gives Mick Sinnot's son the change in his pocket and a lift home, for example. I found a striking parallel to this in *Barbie* during the **bus shelter scene**, which Gerwig describes as the **"heart of the film".** When Barbie tells an elderly woman, "You're so beautiful," she experiences empathy for the first time. She describes the resulting tear as "achy but good", marking the beginning of an emotional development that moves the vision toward a positive perspective. In both instances, acts of kindness—either remembered or newly felt—becomes the catalyst for the protagonist to **challenge their society's lack of compassion**.

However, the **extent to which this kindness influences the final viewpoint** differs significantly between the two texts due to the varying degrees of risk involved. In STLT, Bill Furlong's kindness toward Sarah Redmond is a heroic and maverick act that requires him to go against the dark influence of the church and a compliant society. When he finds Sarah in the coal shed, neglected and filthy, he faces a **moral paradox**: can he call himself a Christian if he is not "brave enough to go against what was there"?. His ultimate decision to take her home leaves Bill and myself as a reader with a sense of "unrecognizable joy", but the V&V remains complicated, ambiguous. Because the author leaves us with unanswered questions about whether Bill's family will be **punished or ostracized** for his defiance, the level of compassion shown is qualified by a potential harsh reality. The door at the climax remains unopened.

In contrast, the compassion evident in the resolution of *Barbie* is overwhelmingly optimistic and lacks this greyness. Barbie not only empowers the other Barbies to usurp the toxic Kenarchy but also shows **empathy toward Ken**, encouraging him to self-realise; to understand that he is "Kenough". The vision is life-affirming because Barbie's big **"YES" to becoming human** is an unconditional acceptance of human imperfection, with all its complexities. While **Bill Furlong's kindness is a quiet, dangerous light in a dark world, Barbie's kindness leads to a triumphant and more egalitarian society where "No Barbie or Ken should be living in the shadow".**

In conclusion, the level of compassion in these texts **profoundly influences my sense of their general vision**. In STLT, Furlong's empathy provides a hopeful but ambiguous commentary on the human condition, suggesting that **bravery is required to remain kind** in a cruel world. In "Barbie", the shift from superficial perfection to genuine humanness through empathy creates a V&V that is **beaming and joyful**. Ultimately, both texts taught me that the outcomes of our characters depend on their willingness to choose the **extraordinary path of kindness** over the ordinary path of self-interest and ignorance. (843 words)

SAMPLE 4-LC 2023 Q. 2

Compare how the response of characters to personal or societal crises, in at least two texts on your comparative course, influence your sense of the general vision and viewpoint. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. In your response you may discuss personal or societal crises, or both.(70)

In my study of Greta Gerwig's film "Barbie", Claire Keegan's novel Small Things Like These (STLT), and John B. Keane's play "Sive", I have found that my perception of the general vision and viewpoint (V&V)—the broad outlook on life created by the authors—is profoundly shaped by how characters respond to personal and societal crises. For me, the general vision of a text is not a static element; it is a roller-coaster ride where the message varies as characters succeed or fail in overcoming the obstacles placed before them. When I compare these three texts, I am struck by how the **courage to act with empathy** in "Barbie" and STLT creates a vision of hope, while the **capitulation to greed and cowardice** in "Sive" leaves me with a sense of crushing bleakness.

The starting point for my understanding of these texts' visions was the **societal crises** established in their opening movements. In both "Sive" and STLT, the authors use the physical environment to reflect a harsh societal reality. Keane opens "Sive" on a "bitter March day," where the external coldness mirrors the toxic and bitter interactions between Mena and Nanna. This immediately informed my view of a **repressive and stagnant society**. Similarly, the opening of STLT describes "long November winds" and "blades of cold" that "cut the knees off those who still knelt to say the rosary," creating an atmosphere of **societal oppression and discomfort**. In contrast, the mostly pink utopian vision of Barbieland initially presented an overwhelmingly positive vision. However, I soon realized that this utopia was in the midst of a **quiet crisis of inequality**, as the Kens were treated as a sub-species with no real purpose other than "Beach". These initial responses to their worlds established my expectations for the V&V: a world of cruelty in "Sive", a world of silent oppression in STLT, and a world of superficial perfection in "Barbie".

The core of my perception of the V&V, however, lies in how the central characters respond to **personal crises of identity and morality**. In Sive, I found the vision to be deeply pessimistic because the characters' responses to the personal crisis of poverty are defined by **moral cowardice and greed**. Mike Glavin's response to the crisis of his niece's future is particularly telling. Initially, he claims to have "responsibility" for Sive, but his moral stance is eventually **eclipsed by the darkness of greed and the fear of poverty**. When he agrees to the "match" between Sive and the "wizened" Seán Dota, he is essentially choosing to monetise, objectify and commodify a young girl for financial gain. This response to a personal crisis of conscience informed my view that in Keane's world, **self-interest defeats love**, leaving the human condition in a state of a depressing stagnant lack of growth.

Diametrically opposed to this V&V, **Bill Furlong's response** to his moral crisis in STLT. Bill faces a profound internal struggle—the head Vs. the heart; the ordinary vs. the extraordinary—when he discovers Sarah Redmond incarcerated in the convent coal shed. Unlike Mike Glavin, Bill's response to the societal crisis of the Magdalene Laundries is a **journey to self-actualisation**. He recalls the generosity of Mrs. Wilson, who saved his own mother from a similar fate, and this memory of compassion prompts him toward an **extraordinary response**. Bill asks himself if it is possible to carry on through life "without once being brave enough to go against what was there and yet call yourself a Christian". His ultimate response—the heroic and maverick act of liberating Sarah—lifted the vision of the text for me, suggesting that **goodness and kindness can win over darkness**. Even though the ending is ambiguous regarding the potential negative consequences for Bill's family, his choice to act with empathy creates an "upbeat" vision compared to the "despairing" world of "Sive".

In "Barbie", I parallels to Bill's story and development in the face of a crisis. Barbie is also a character responding to a crisis of identity that was both personal and societal. Barbie's personal crisis begins with intrusive thoughts about death and the realisation that she is "malfunctioning". Her response to this crisis is a **triumphant, topsy-turvy journey to self** that takes her into the toxic and threatening real world. I found her epiphany at the bus shelter—where she experiences empathy and tells an elderly woman "You're so beautiful"—to be a key moment in shaping a **positive vision**. Her response to the crisis of womanhood, as articulated in Gloria's inspirational grandstanding speech about the "literally impossible" contradictions women face, is to **embrace imperfection**. When Barbie chooses to become fully human, saying **"YES"** to all of the real world's complexities and contradictions, the V&V becomes overwhelmingly optimistic and life-affirming.

Furthermore, I noted a significant difference in how characters respond to the **societal crisis of patriarchal power**. In "Sive", the response of the adults to the patriarchal "match" system is one of **active participation or helpless weeping**. Mena Glavin responds to the crisis by weaponising cruelty, lying to Sive late on in the play by telling her that her lover, Liam, only came to wish her well on her marriage to Seán Dota. This cruel response isolates Sive further, and when Mena throws Sive's schoolbooks across the stage, it signifies the **extinguishment of hope**. Sive's own response to her crisis—to drown herself because she sees no way out—confirms a crushing bleakness in the text's commentary on the human condition. To me, the sight of Sive's lifeless body on the table is the final punctuation mark on a vision where **human weakness and cruelty are absolute**.

In contrast, the characters in *Barbie* respond to the toxic patriarchy of Kenland with collective action and empathy. The Barbies no longer participate in the new structure; they **organize and usurp the Kenarchy**, neutralising the crisis. Crucially, Barbie's response to the crisis is not to merely flip the power structure back to the original imbalanced matriarchy. Instead, she **empowers Ken to "self-realise"** and apologizes to him, leading to a more **"egalitarian society"** where "No Barbie or Ken should be living in the shadow", as President Barbie puts it. This response to a societal crisis informed

my view that change and progress are possible, moving the vision into a positive, optimistic zone.

Comparing STLT and “Sive” further, I found that the **presence or absence of compassion** in the face of societal crisis was the deciding factor for the V&V. In STLT, Bill Furlong’s empathy is a quiet but defiant response to the dark influence of the church and a complicit Catholic society. His response transforms a depressing vista of neglect—Sarah in the coal shed with filthy feet and long toenails—into a moment of "unrecognizable joy". In “Sive”, however, any points of optimism, such as Nanna’s oases of tenderness, are **neutralized and eclipsed** by the adults' response to greed. When Thomasheen burns Liam’s letter, he is literally and symbolically destroying the last hope for a compassionate resolution. This difference in character response to crises made me feel **hopeful in STLT** but **dejected in “Sive”**.

Finally, the **character outcomes** at the conclusion of their respective crises solidified my perception of each text's V&V. The conclusion of *Barbie* left me feeling joy at her decision to adopt the name **Barbara Handler** and her beaming smile as she visits her gynaecologist. This "Hollywood ending" is clear and triumphant. The conclusion of *STLT* is more **qualified by ambiguity**. While Bill has achieved a personal liberation, the unanswered question of the negative consequences for his family lingers beyond the door…suggesting another crisis on the horizon. Yet, this ambiguity still feels **upbeat** because it is rooted in a heroic act of mercy. In contrast, the conclusion of *Sive* offers no new beginning,"only **death and a stagnant lack of growth**. The body on the table confirms that for Sive, there was no successful response to the crisis of her existence.

(1318 words)