**Text 1** Cathy Guisewite 1986



**Text 2** *The Blindfold Horse, Memoirs of a Persian Childhood*-

Shusha Guppy1988

During my mother’s labour, my father was in his study, praying for a safe and speedy delivery. Nanny rushed in with the news and was given the traditional tip – a gold sovereign. Later, when the room had been tidied and Mother put to bed, he came in to see her. My parents had already three children, two boys and a girl. When the boys were born, Father congratulated Mother with a quotation from Firdowsi’s *The Book of Kings:*

*“Sufficient unto women is the art of Producing and raising sons as brave as lions”*

My sister was a welcome variety, and “such a pretty little girl.” I just happened.

Would Father have preferred a boy, as men always did in those days? I once asked him: “not because boys are better, but because women suffer more. One worries about their future; one wonders into whose had they will fall…”

I was born into a new and rapidly changing Persia. The veil had already been abolished and women were emancipated; they could go to school and university and take up professions. By the time I grew up, other freedoms and equalities were taken for granted and more reforms were planned to balance the law in their favor. Yet many found it hard to accept these improvements and adjust their attitudes.

“God knows how far women will go once they start enjoying their liberty” was the reason for apprehension. Certainly I caused my parents endless trouble, with my radical adolescent politics, my settling in Europe and subsequent marriage to an Englishman. Perhaps my father foresaw all this at the time of my birth; perhaps it was all “written on my brow?” Ah, that writing on the brow! They said that, when a baby was born, an angel wrote its destiny on its forehead with an invisible ink, and that nothing anyone later did could alter it.

Fortune-telling charlatans played on this belief and claimed that they could read what was inscribed “on the brow” and change it with potions and talismans. As a philosopher, my father was no Determinist, and did not believe in any of this superstition; nothing was ‘written’ and no one could foretell the future since we make it as we go along. Naturally, such factors as heredity ad circumstance play a part, but basically we shape our own destinies. […]

Over the years, scholars and mystics came to see my father from all over the world, among them a famous Indian yogi, when I was a year old. Apparently he did have an extraordinary power to foresee the future, for he gave a broad outline of every member of our family’s destiny. When my turn came he shook his head and said:

“She won’t stay with you long.. her life is elsewhere.”

My mother laughed incredulously:

“Oh yes, she’ll marry the Governor of a Province or an Ambassador and travel…”

The Yogi smiled and said no more. Perhaps it is all ‘written’ after all!

**Sample Response 1:**

The works *Cathy* and *The Blindfold Horse* are very different types of text, since one is a four frame cartoon by Cathy Guisewite and the other one is an extract from a memoir by Shusha Guppy. However, these works both share the theme of stereotyping baby girls which we will come to see later on.

In Cathy, the protagonist, who is probably the author herself, is with a baby, facing a jolly, but ignorant nurse. After the nurse asks the gender of her baby, Cathy replies that she is not saying, for it is the baby’s only chance to meet new people free from gender stereotyping. Even without reading the rest of the comic, we can right away tell that the baby is female, because if it was a son, Cathy probably wouldn’t had a problem with people stereotyping her baby. At the end of the comic, Cathy gets angry at the nurse for being so ignorant. The main point of the comic is that we cannot escape stereotyping. This comic is found interesting mainly by parents, since they usually have the experience of someone gender stereotyping their baby. In The Blindfold Horse, the author talks about her childhood and women rights in Iran in general, but a big part of it is also about stereotyping baby girls. She talks about how when she was growing up in Iran, male babies were preferred over female babies. We see that when her father quotes *The Book of Kings* upon her brothers’ births: “Sufficient unto women is the art of Producing and raising sons as brave as lions”. Also, later in the work, her mother says that women can only succeed in life by marrying rich people, such as Ambassadors and Governors. This text is informative and it is meant for people who are interested in Iranian history and female rights in Iran before the Islamic revolution. Another theme that can be mentioned is Prediction, as the nurse in Cathy tries to predict weather the baby is a boy or a girl by looking at some of the baby’s traits and the whole broad story about your destiny being “written on your brow” and people who can read it in The Blindfold Horse.

In Cathy, the tone is quite humorous, since the nurse is coping finely with the whole situation while Cathy is frustrated because of her ignorance. When Cathy starts getting angry, we see her text bubble changing, as the words become bold, grow in size and exclamation marks appear, but the humorous tone is not that visible through texts as it is through the pictures in the boxes: the nurse is totally indifferent towards Cathy’s frustration, while we see Cathy portrayed with a large mouth, yelling, with drops of sweat flying around when she gets mad in the 3rd box and we also see her giving an angry smirk when she gives up in box 4. The narration in the comic is indirect, since we get to eavesdrop on the whole situation. In The Blindfold Horse, however, the author addresses us and that makes it direct narration. The tone is also mainly humorous, even though the theme is serious. We see a lot of Irony, since his father didn’t believe in a Yogi’s prophecy that she will live her life elsewhere, yet she found herself married to an Englishman. Sarcasm is also present, when her mother denies the Yogi’s words by saying “Oh yes, she’ll marry the Governor of a Province or an Ambassador and travel...”. Hindsight wisdom can also be mentioned, since the author frequently refers to what she knows now.

Even though the works are completely different in style and structure, meant for different purposes and written in completely different places and more importantly cultures, we see that they both share a common theme – we can’t save our babies from sex stereotyping.

**Sample Response 2:**

Both the cartoon by Cathy Guisewitte and the memoir by Shusha Guppy, *The Blindfold Horse,* comment on the importance that people attach to gender once a baby is born. While the texts comment on different cultures and make use of different structures, their message is similar: People look to babies to confirm gender stereotypes.

First of all, one must consider that these texts appeal to different audiences and serve different purposes. Cathy is a comic strip that presumably appears in a newspaper, where readers look for something humorous or light-hearted to brighten their day. Readers who have children will most likely recognize the humor. Guppy’s memoir, on the other hand, is most likely read by people interested in the history of Iran. We see evidence of this in the second paragraph, “I was born into a new and rapidly changing Persia. The veil had already been abolished and women were emancipated.” Readers of this memoir, in contrast to the comic strip, are committed to a longer text, interested in the life of the author and intrigued by the role of women in Iran.

Although both texts are different types of texts, they comment on people’s preconceptions of gender roles. The comic clearly states that it is about gender stereotyping in the first frame, where Cathy says, “This is our baby’s one chance to get to meet people totally free from gender stereotyping.” The nurse claims that the baby is ‘strong, mischievous and tough,’ and therefore must be a boy. Cathy is frustrated by this stereotype and argues that girls can be strong too. The nurse continues in her stereotyping once she learns the baby is a girl, by saying that she has “precious dimples.” Similarly, *The Blindfold Horse* comments on people’s tendency to stereotype women. We can see from the father’s quote from *The Book of Kings* that Persians favor sons over daughters and define good mothering by the ability to raise sons. “Sufficient unto women is the art of producing and raising sons as brave as lions.” Furthermore the text comments on people’s ability to predict the future of a particular gender. By reading the author’s brow, the yogi can predict that she will live abroad. Her mother suggests that the only successful way of living abroad involves marrying an influential foreigner or diplomat. Just as Cathy concedes and tells the sex of her child, Shusha Guppy admits with humor that she has settled abroad and married an Englishman. As she says, “Perhaps it is all ‘written’ after all.” Again, the theme of predetermined gender roles runs through both texts.

This brings us to the point that both texts create a humorous tone through similar stylistic devices. First of all, the texts are both autobiographical, as ‘Cathy’ is both the name of the comic and the cartoonist, and *The Blindfold Horse* is a memoir. This autobiographical approach adds to the humor, as the authors seem to be laughing at their own futile attempts to change the way other people think about gender stereotypes. Both audiences are meant to laugh at the narrators’ frustration. Secondly both texts use juxtaposition to create a humorous tone. In the third and fourth frame of the comic strip, the cartoonist uses exaggerated expressions of outrage and frustration with a large mouth (frame 3) and a stern set of eyebrows (frame 4). Cathy’s expressions are juxtaposed to the cool, ignorant look of the nurse. This contrast of characters makes the audience laugh, as Cathy fails to protect her child from gender stereotyping. Similarly we see two characters juxtaposed in *The Blindfold Horse*. The father is depicted as a philosopher and determinist, who believes that we “shape our own destinies.” He is in contrast to the Indian yogi, who shakes his head with such certainty after reading Shusha Guppy’s brow as a baby and says, “She won’t stay with you long… her life is elsewhere.” As we know from previous information, the yogi is very correct in his unscientific prediction of the author’s life, which is ironic. The audience finds this use of irony humorous, as it proves that gender stereotypes can be true.

To conclude, both texts use humor to comment on people’s tendency to label young children with gender stereotypes. Cathy’s attempt to protect her child from gender stereotyping is futile. The nurse sees typical boy traits, such as mischievousness, when she thinks the baby is a boy, and she sees typical girl traits, such as “precious dimples,” as soon as she learns that the baby is a girl. This message, that we cannot escape gender stereotyping, is seen in Shusha Guppy’s memoir as well. Her father favors boys over girls and her mother assumes girls must marry ambassadors or governors to live abroad successfully. Ironically, she ends up marrying an Englishman. This comparative analysis has shown how two different types of texts can comment on a similar theme.

**Examiner’s Comments**

**Criterion A - Understanding and comparison of the texts - 5 marks**

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| *Sample response 1*  **2 out of 5** - The student shows an awareness of the audience and purpose of the texts. He mentions the ‘hindsight wisdom’ and female perspective. He comments on the contextual background of Iran for Text 4. The comparative analysis has some references to the language of the text, but many points are made in passing with no illustrations. | *Sample response 2*  **4 out of 5** - The student overlooks some of the basic similarities between the texts, i.e. they are written in retrospect by women in the 1980s. However, the main idea of the analysis (that both texts comment on the gender stereotyping of young children) is relevant and focused. The student also does a good job commenting on the nature of the texts and their different audiences, by mentioning that parents could appreciate the humor of the cartoon. |

The analysis should show and understanding of the similarities and differences between the texts. There needs to be a clear understanding of the target audience, the purpose and the context (where possible) of the text. The comparative analysis must be supported by relevant examples from the texts.

**Criterion B - Understanding of the use and effects of stylistic features - 5 marks**

The comparative analysis should show an understanding of how various stylistic features, such as tone, style and structure, are used to construct meaning. The analysis should comment on the effects that these features have on their target audience.

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| *Sample response 1*  **2 out of 5** - The student shows an understanding of the use of stylistic devices. While he refers to the features of the comic strip that make it humorous, such as the expressions of the characters, he does not explore the effects of the language of Text 4 in depth. | *Sample response 2*  **4 out of 5** - The student comments on the importance of [**irony**](http://www.thinkib.net/glossary/irony.htm), [**juxtaposition**](http://www.thinkib.net/glossary/juxtaposition.htm) and the autobiographical perspective, both of which contribute to the humorous tone of the texts, as proven in this analysis. Furthermore the student analyzes the expressions of the characters in the comic strip, which is the level of analysis that is required for visual texts. |

**Criterion C - Organization and development - 5 marks**

The analysis must be well-balanced, meaning that it treats both texts equally. Furthermore, it must be well-structured, coherent and organized.

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| *Sample response 1*  **2 out of 5** - This commentary is difficult to follow because it jumps from idea to idea quite randomly and quickly. There are only two paragraphs. The content of these paragraphs is not always relevant to the guiding idea or topic sentences of each paragraph. The illustrations are both lacking and poorly integrated. | *Sample response 2*  **4 out of 5** - The comparative analysis offers a balanced view on both texts and focuses on their similarities. It has clear topic statements that aim to meet the criteria of Paper 1, such as, "both texts create a humorous tone through similar stylistic devices." A lot of analysis is offered in the conclusion, unfortunately. |

**Criterion D - Language - 5 marks**

The language of the comparative analysis must be clear and accurate. It should be appropriate, meaning it contains formal sentence structure, good choice of words and effective terminology.

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| *Sample response 1*  **3 out of 5** - The language of the analysis is not always accurate. Several words, such as ‘deny’, are not used in the proper sense. The style is not consistent and slips into an informal register at times. | *Sample response 2*  **5 out of 5** - The use of language is very clear and accurate, which we see in lines like "Cathy’s attempt to protect her child from gender stereotyping is futile." This sentence, like others, has a good level of vocabulary and effectively describes a rather complex idea. The use of grammar is very fluent and without error. |