Examiners' Report
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GCE English Literature 9ET0 01

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Introduction

As always, it was a genuine privilege to read the work produced by candidates this summer – there were so many interesting, creative and illuminating responses to the texts – and enormous credit is due to the work of students and teachers in ensuring that candidates were so well-prepared for this paper. In a world where it can sometimes feel as if our subject is currently under siege, I hope that English teachers will read some of the candidate essays that have been reproduced in full in this Report (whether or not you teach the texts) and reassure yourselves that the study of English Literature continues to be inspiring and energising for students.

Question 1

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

The question asked about the use of the play's structure.

Less popular than Q2, this question was nonetheless handled well by those candidates who chose to answer it. They were able to explore how Shakespeare uses structure to present the 'back and forth' between Rome and Egypt and the significance this had for themes and characterisation. The fast pace of short scenes was mentioned, as was Shakespeare's structuring of the death scenes. Some responses considered the use of foreshadowing to explore the notion of fate in tragedy. Tony Tanner's essay on time in the play and Emrys Jones' exploration of the play's structure were used to good effect by some candidates.

Weaker responses tended to focus almost too much on the play's historical and critical contexts at the expense of the text itself:

In 'Antony and Cleopatra' the structure of the play is a crucial concept of the performance. The structure includes the frequent shifts between locations of Rome and Egypt, the demonstration of the passing of time as well as using this structure in order to provide a social commentary. Throughout the performance each scene shifts between Rome and Egypt. As Brent Dawson writes, the play 'violates the Aristotelian unity of space through the dizzyingly quick scene changes'. To an extent one can argue with Dawson, as frequent shifts in location could make the play difficult to understand. However one must not ignore that this piece is meant to be performed onstage, therefore it would be visible to an audience through the use of props and staging that location has changed. This use of location is effective as it allows for multiple demonstrations of the goings on of events without having to be restricted to one area. An example of this is the change between Act One scene 3 and scene 4. The stage directions acknowledged that scene 3 is set in Alexandria inside Cleopatra's palace, allowing for Cleopatra to be shown talking to her friends about Antony. Scene 4 however is set in Rome inside Caesar's house, where Caesar and Lepidus are also talking about Antony: 'Antony, leave thy lascivious wassails'. By shifting the location so swiftly, Shakespeare has presented the audience with two genres of character talking about the protagonist. With the scenes so close together one may gather that they occurred at the same time, if not chronologically after one another.

In addition to this, Shakespeare demonstrates the concept of passing time between each scene through the shifting structure. Although not always obvious, the passage of time can be demonstrated through the implied order of events between scenes through from Act Two scene 2 to scene 5 we follow his business deal of marrying Octavia. The character Agrippa presents the idea, saying 'to make you brothers' as Octavia is Caesar's sister. This concept of brotherhood enables Antony's later betrayal to become more personal, allowing for his downfall to be foreshadowed. Antony's attempt to court Octavia while saying 'the world and my great office will sometimes divide me from your bosom'. The dramatic irony of this statement describes to an audience that despite his marriage he is still interested in the 'world', being his lover, Cleopatra who remains in Alexandria elsewhere on the globe, foreshadowing his later return to her. Then scene 5 returns to Egypt as Cleopatra receives the word from a messenger that Antony is married to Octavia. The chronological order of these events links to the heavy influence of Roman history which impacted Shakespeare's writing of this play. Whilst his influence comes mainly from Plutarch, Shakespeare was able to take events and use them in his performance. As J Leeds Barroll explores, by setting this performance in the later stages of the Roman civil war Shakespeare was able to gather multiple sources to make the events of the play historically plausible and reliable. As Barrow goes on, to utilise surveys of historical material, gathering specifically the ones relevant to an Elizabethan and Jacobean audience, allowing us as modern day readers to gather evidence of the historical truth or question the events of this performance, Shakespeare has enabled himself through his structure to provide his own social commentary. As Doctor John Lennard explores the history behind this play, Leonard depicts the death of a republic through the reference to the execution of Charles the First in 1669. Despite Shakespeare not being around to witness the execution (after his death in 1616) the theme is still evident. This topic however was a subject that one could not talk about openly. By saying that there ought to be a republic, Shakespeare would be seeing that they should get rid of the king, which would potentially lead to his imprisonment. Therefore, Shakespeare uses Rome as a cover-up location and speaks about the death of a republic and the birth of an empire, to quote Doctor Lennard.

To conclude, Shakespeare has used the structure of this play in order to portray the chronological historical events between Roman Egypt whilst also commenting on his own 17th century society using his on-stage characters as microphones to project his opinions.

This response does not get much beyond the 'general' level on AO2 because it is not really discussing the text in any depth and for higher levels there needs at least to be 'consistent' analysis. There is some clear understanding of context and there is some use of critics and their ideas, but this is not detailed nor developed enough for higher level marks.

Stronger responses kept the text front and centre of their argument:

In Shakespeare's tragedy of love and duty the structure of the play is used to intensify – as conveyed by Kastan – Antony's fall from prosperity to wretchedness as he deviates from his Roman culture. When exploring the opening scene, the tragic climax and the denouement of the play in the final scene it becomes explicit how integral Shakespeare's use of structure is in effectively communicating the weaknesses of people in power. He is able to subtly critique the hierarchical powers in his own Jacobean society as he uses the historical nature of the play to do so.

Firstly, Shakespeare uses the opening of 'Antony and Cleopatra' to establish and foreshadow the downfall of Antony he challenges the gender expectations of his ancient Roman society and those of the puritanical Jacobean audience. At the beginning of the scene, Shakespeare uses Philo's scornful monologue to reinforce how Antony has been 'Egyptianized' by Cleopatra and is now a disgrace to his culture, and he uses the simile, 'his goodly eyes … have glowed like plated Mars' to project Antony's emasculation. Mars is the planet of masculinity and war, so the fact that Anthony is no longer paralleled to it indicates so he has been de-Romanized. Establishing this key harmatia of Antony in the introduction is influenced by the tropes of Greek tragedy, where key themes and tensions are established in the prologue: the audience are introduced to the weakness of Antony before meeting him, which elevates the inevitability of his downfall. Jacobson asserts how 'there is a strange rather fleshy vividness' in Anthony's conjured image of himself 'having made himself too much a man', but perhaps this is more reflective of Philo's conjured image of Antony's past self in his opening monologue: the audience are introduced to Antony as a man who was once 'as vivid and ruthless' as Mars – the ideal Roman man.

Antony's new submissive and emasculated self is further reinforced through Shakespeare's order and weighting of dialogue: Cleopatra speaks first before Anthony – ordering 'if it be love indeed, tell me how much'. By selecting Cleopatra to speak before Antony it fortifies how she has an unconventional dominance over him, but even more so as she has the arrogance and power to challenge him: 'I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved'. Shakespeare equally ways there 'weights' their dialogue in the scene to indicate how Antony no longer has the patriarchal power to be dominant in the relationship. Perhaps Shakespeare does this to foreshadow Anthony's tragic downfall/ the tragic arc of the play, but also to depict the pressure and expectations James I had to live up to his society's previous queen, Elizabeth I, whose glorious reign is known to be one of the greatest in history.

Another way Shakespeare uses the play's structure to intensify and illustrate how Antony is the tragic hero, is through the tragic climax in Act four scene 14. Shakespeare uses an antithetical structure between Egypt and Rome throughout the five acts, however it is most impactful during Antony's suicide. Positioned in Rome, Antony is oblivious to the fact that Cleopatra is still alive and hiding from his anger in her monument, yet the audience are. In Act four scene 13, Cleopatra orders Charmain, 'Tell (Antony) I have slain myself' as she retreats to her 'monument', which creates a dramatic irony during Antony's suicide (Act 4 scene 14 as the audience acknowledge Antony's feeling that 'the time has come' for his death is unnecessary and tragic. It could be that Shakespeare uses this dramatic irony to elevate the manipulative power of Cleopatra, 'the enchanting queen'. Her ability to 'beguile' [Antony] to the heart of loss', even when they're apart, is a threatening concept but may be necessary when considering Bradley's view that 'No play in which the hero remains alive is, in the Shakespearean, sense a hero'; without her contribution to catalysing the tragic climax the protagonists may not have become tragic heroes, remaining alive in the intense and tumultuous relationship which society disgraces. Maybe this reflects Shakespeare's relationship with 'the dark lady' a sexually liberated, Mediterranean woman who Shakespeare had a rumoured affair with. He wrote about her in sonnets. The ending of this affair would have been more satisfying than when it was alive, as society would not have ridiculed him for loving a coloured woman who had allured him into being unfaithful to Anne Hathaway, his wife.

When exploring the denoument of the play, however, it comes to light that Shakespeare also uses structure to glorify downfall, that of Cleopatra. He gifts the 'grand finale' of the play to Cleopatra, so her suicide is in the spotlight. Antony is not there to observe or detract from her glorious end. Cleopatra's suicide in Act 5 scene two is one of isolation, but also of inspiration. Jones asserts how the play contains 'brilliant snapshots surrounded by darkness' which exemplifies how Cleopatra has the power to produce brilliance in such a dark and tragic moment, but also suggests how darkness will follow once she does die. Cleopatra 's ritualistic and satisfying suicide is composed as an act of passion and as a political manoeuvre. She avoids becoming Caesar's 'Egyptian puppet' and reunites with her Antony in the afterlife. The 'brilliance' of this denoument stems from her composure and organisation. She orders Charmian: 'Give me my robe. Put on my crown' which is a regal and composed way to die, that of a true leader – contrasting the botched suicide of Antony. Maybe Shakespeare beautifies Cleopatra's death as a way to make up for Elizabeth I 's haunted and disturbed one: she died traumatised by her frail appearance, whilst a playing card with a nail through its head was found on her chair. When acknowledging how Cleopatra could be a reflection of Elizabeth I – who had 'the heart and stomach of a king' much like the violent tendencies of Cleopatra – it becomes apparent that Shakespeare may structure the play and its resolution in such a way to provide her with the glorious death she deserved.

Ultimately, Shakespeare uses the play's structure as a crucial method to portray the downfall of Antony and the intricacies to it, but also as a way to express the power and 'enchanting' persona of Cleopatra /Elizabeth I. Cleopatra contributes heavily to the play's tragic arc: conducting the deaths of others and even her own.

In this response, there is a consistent awareness of the fact that this is a piece of drama and of potential audience response. There is also much sharper focus on the question.

The question about structure led to some very interesting responses because of the need to address the dramatic nature of the text. Candidates tended to lean heavily on the juxtaposition between Egypt and Rome but did successfully manage to retain an appropriate focus on the question.

Question 2

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

The question asked about the presentation of human weakness in the play.

This was by far the more popular of the two questions on *Antony and Cleopatra*, with candidates finding plenty to consider, particularly around the character presentation of Antony. Here is the introduction to a clear, but fairly straightforward, response:

In 'Antony and Cleopatra' Shakespeare presents human weakness as the result of passion through relationships and dramatic characterization. Throughout the play weaknesses is portrayed through the passion the characters display for one another and how it leads to their death. Human weakness is presented through Antony and Cleopatra's relationship and the characterization of Enobarbus.

Through the tragic relationship of Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare presents passion as the couple's human weakness. Immediately as the play begins we are introduced to the minor character Philo, who quickly and harshly notes that Antony's 'dotage' of Cleopatra 'o'erflows the measure'. Throughout Philo's speech he comments on how Antony used to be and how he had a 'captain's heart' and 'the masters at war have glowed like plated Mars'. Shakespeare uses a simile to compare Antony to Mars, therefore glorifying how he was before he met Cleopatra. Philo then goes on to argue that now all Antony does is neglect his duties and fool Antony's raw passion for Cleopatra. This passion that the couple share evidently allows Antony to neglect his duties as the 'third pillar' of the 'triumvirate', therefore making passion his human weakness. This is again further portrayed in the play when Antony says 'Let Rome in Tiber melt'. Shakespeare uses this metaphor for to show how Antony feels about his duties in comparison to Cleopatra: he would let Rome melt as if it were as insignificant as ice.

More discriminating responses successfully wove context into their analyses of the text. Here is an example where the candidate introduces the idea that characters can be viewed through various lenses according to context, in this case by highlighting the different presentations of Cleopatra by Plutarch and Shakespeare:

Shakespeare presents human weakness in 'Antony and Cleopatra' through the deteriorating status of Antony as he abandons his military duties in favour of Cleopatra, who in turn weakens him through her manipulation of him throughout the play, which eventually leads to his death. Shakespeare also presents weakness in character through Caesar who cares for his singular goal of gaining and winning power and little else.

Shakespeare sets up the weakening of Antony due to his dilemma between Rome and Egypt, which eventually leads to the downfall of Antony, the tragic hero. Antony is a member of the triumvirate and a powerful military hero, however from a Roman point viewpoint he is losing his strength and abandoning his duties due to his relationship with Cleopatra. This tension is set up from the beginning of the play: 'his goodly eyes, that o'er the files and musters of the war have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn the office and devotion of their view upon a tawny front'. Shakespeare stresses through Philo the extent of Antony's downfall. The use of the simile 'glowed like plated Mars' reiterates Antony's previous military superiority as Mars is the god of War. This Roman view that Shakespeare sets up of Cleopatra as a distraction from his duties is influenced by Plutarch's portrayal of Cleopatra, a whore who draws Antony away from the empire. Although Shakespeare doesn't only present the Roman view, but also makes us understand why Antony is so drawn to Egypt. Bloom says 'Egypt represents everything Rome denies itself', in depictions of the play onstage Egypt is often displayed in warm colours such as yellow and gold, whereas Rome is grey and blue (colder colours) ...

In some instances, however, responses became too caught up in critical and contextual ideas and, as a result, did not pay enough attention to the play itself. In the following example, while the candidate initially offers some analysis of Enobarbus' speech, we can see in the argument about differing views of Cleopatra that the text is beginning to be left behind:

Human weakness in Shakespeare's tragedy 'Antony and Cleopatra' serves as a catalyst increasing the pace for its predetermined ending. Human weakness takes the form of harmatia stemming from the Aristotelian tragic genre in which the characters' tragic ending is due to an uncontrollable flaw within their characterization. This genre influenced much of Shakespeare's writing and its popularity within Jacobean society could be due to the result of its irony inducing nature.

However, Shakespeare was not only influenced by Aristotle's creative genre but also much of the philosopher's ideology. Aristotelian hylomorphism is the concept that all living beings are made of two elemental binaries: water and the sun. An imbalance between these may result in human weakness. Cleopatra embodies the semantic of passion, desire and the eros drive through her characterization in existing as this emblem of water and fluidity. Enobarvus, who typically speaks in prose, describes Cleopatra in connotation to 'the barge she sat on … burnt on the water'. Not only does Shakespeare make the direct shift from prose to poetry, including the iambic pentameter structure, implying that Cleopatra's excessive passion corrupts others, even the winds making them 'love-sick', but the oxymoronic imagery of 'burning' the water implies that she is being anthromorphisized as on omnipotent God. This hylomorphic inspired depiction, this 'enchanting' Queen's Siren-like characterization may explain Antony's human weakness, stemming from his infatuation with her. This excessive femininity in the semantic form of water not only corrupts Enorbarbus, but also Antony himself. Antony's equally strong initial characterization as 'plated Mars', with Mars as being the symbol of fire and masculinity, placing him on the opposite side of the hydromorphic binary to Cleopatra, only highlights his later emasculation due to the corruptive nature of Cleopatra. The phallic image of the sword can be interpreted to represent his masculinity which makes the line, 'She hath robbed me of my sword' even more significant. This thesis is further evident when he falls on his sword but fails to die, signifying this once 'plated Mars' has been in emasculated to the point of debilitation, therefore showing his human weakness was his over commitment to Cleopatra and her 'o'erflowing' femininity. The critic Watts stated that Cleopatra justifies the 'whore' archetype as displayed in biblical texts. While my earlier thesis does link to this interpretation, her femininity should be looked at as a more liberating and powerful force rather than viewing it as an annoyance or to degrade her strength as a character. Plutarch's initial depiction of Cleopatra as a 'whore' through her being a possession owned by men can be seen to be adapted by Shakespeare, for while her over-sexualization is still prominent, it can be argued that Shakespeare uses her femininity to show her power as a ruler. The Jacobean audience would have just experienced a politically strong queen, Elizabeth I, and so the influence of this strong female ruler may have led to the change in characterization of Cleopatra from Plutarch, showing that what was thought to be a human weakness (femininity) may instead be a strength…

Candidates sometimes struggled to explicitly address the question of human weakness though there were some thoughtful considerations of individual weaknesses of Anthony and Cleopatra. This could have been more strongly argued and linked to the question.

Question 3

HAMLET

The question asked about the presentation of grief in the play.

This was the more popular of the questions on Hamlet and candidates found plenty to write about, with many able to integrate extensive knowledge and understanding of contextual and critical ideas. Weaker responses saw candidates write about anything they wanted – madness, suicide, inertia, corruption – and then simply append the comment, 'This was caused by grief'. Higher level responses addressed the significance of grief in relation to other characters as well as Hamlet. Those who compared and contrasted the grief experienced by Ophelia and Hamlet while also discussing a lack of grief in other characters tended to produce more nuanced and discriminating readings.

Here is an example of a sound response. It is a little too character-driven for a fully discriminating approach, but there is strong focus on the question which is explored from a number of perspectives:

Shakespeare's presentation of grief in 'Hamlet' lends itself to the deeper understanding of the play's central individuals, most notably Claudius and Hamlet. The grief that those men individually experience throughout different parts in the play highlight how Shakespeare may have wanted us to look beyond their conventional roles within the revenge tragedy genre, and to focus on the transitions they undertake as the protagonist and antagonist of the play.

In Act 1 Scene 2, Shakespeare presents the extent to which Hamlet's grief ails him as we see him contemplating suicide, wishing that his 'too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew'. Here the verbs 'melt', 'thaw' and 'resolve' create a semantic field of desperation as they amplify Hamlet's desperate need to escape the grief he feels being trapped inside his own solid flesh. Further, the brutal personification of the phrase 'self-slaughter' indicates the conflict over Hamlet's desire to commit suicide. In the Protestant Denmark in which Hamlet inhabits, suicide would have been considered a sin and a violation against God. As the critic William Hazlitt rightfully stated, Hamlet is 'the prince of philosophical speculation', and so knowing that to kill himself would be a sin, Hamlet's grief is exacerbated by this desire, as he knows it is morally wrong. Shakespeare may have perhaps done this in order to demonstrate that Hamlet's grief afflicts his moral and philosophical self, as the sinful idea of suicide would have illustrated to a Jacobean audience the grip that Hamlet's grief holds over him.

This can also be said of Claudius, as his grief is presented through his self-realisation and subsequent remorse over the sinful action of murdering his own brother, as well as the king. He states in his Act 3 Scene 3 soliloquy that, 'My offence is rank/it smells to heaven/ it has the primal eldest curse upon't, a brother's murder'. Not only is this the first instance in the play in which we receive definitive proof of Claudius' guilt and complicity in Old Hamlet's murder, but the religious semantic field created by 'heaven' and the 'primal eldest curse' indicates that due to his religious moral conscience, Claudius' grief is inflicting on him the remorse he now feels. The 'primal eldest curse' refers to the biblical story of Cain and Abel in which Cain is the murderer of Abel; the first murder that took place in the Bible, resulting in a curse placed upon mankind. This story intensifies the extent of Claudius' grief as he is left with nothing but his 'rank offence' and the guilt he feels over committing it. David Kastan once posed the question 'Are there reasons for the intolerable suffering? Is the tragic motor human error or capricious fate?' and calls into question whether perhaps Shakespeare wanted us to examine the extent to which Claudius' grief is genuine. He takes on the role of the offender and usurper of the crown, yet continues to do so even after the admission of his guilt forcing us to question whether the grief Claudius experiences here inflicts the lasting emotional conflict on him that it does for Hamlet.

Part of this emotional conflict that Hamlet experiences as a result of his grief comes from his complex role as a tragic hero of the play. Conventionally, the revenge tragedy genre that the play is written in would include the use of a traditional tragic hero whose 'harmatia' directly results in their tragic downfall. However, Shakespeare subverts this expectation by disrupting the conventional role Hamlet is meant to play. This is done through the philosophical nature of Hamlet's character: he constantly questions the world around him – something that was encouraged during the Renaissance at the time of 'Hamlet's writing – however this consequently inflicts an added layer of guilt to Hamlet's character as his philosophical disposition and constant questioning of the world around him means he is never able to fulfil his conventional role of enacting revenge. His statement of 'my thoughts will be bloody' indicates this sense of conflict, as the adverb 'bloody' alludes to the fact that he knows his role and purpose as the avenger is to commit the bloody act of murder. However, his contemplative nature prevents him from doing so, highlighting this guilt that he suffers, knowing he cannot successfully fulfill his role as a tragic hero. Further the critic, Maynard Mack, once said that Hamlet is a ' great moraliser; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience', which supports this argument as fundamentally Shakespeare demonstrates how Hamlet's inability to fulfil his role as a tragic hero and avenger of the play in turn causes his grief, as he knows that he himself is the cause of that inability and his failure as the avenger.

To conclude Shakespeare's presentation of grief allows us to question the morals and actions of Claudius and Hamlet as a result of how, and why, their grief afflicts them. Shakespeare illustrates how grief provides an undertone of questioning throughout the play, as we are able to examine and understand in greater depth the extent to which Claudius and Hamlet suffer with the conflicts of grief.

Below is an example of a very strong response that engages with a broad range of ideas whilst keeping the focus firmly on the question. There is a convincing and discriminating argument about grief and revenge, and highly effective use of critical and contextual material:

Within 'Hamlet' Shakespeare presents grief as the cause and consequence of death. Adhering to the tragedy genre, it is the suffering and calamity that eventually conducts to death facilitating 'an enjoyed discomfort (Hazlitt) owed to the catharsis evoked in the audience from such outpourings of grief. As a tragedy composed heavily with composed soliloquies, Shakespeare psychologizes and philosophizes the characters, allowing greater focus on their suffering as opposed to other revenge tragedies of the time period. Shakespeare presents how grief can manifest from the death of a loved one. Within Hamlet's first soliloquy Shakespeare creates a semantic field of the ephemerality of the body, desiring that the 'too, too solid flesh would melt' and dissolve into 'dew', an impermeable substance that underpins Hamlet's desire to disintegrate into a natural element through actions of 'self-slaughter'. References to suicide would have been especially pronounced for the contemporary audience as 'suicide' had not even been coined as a term yet and was referred to as 'self-murder', deemed against the Church used to the belief in the sanctity of life – thus such proclamations would be transgressive. Shakespeare continues Hamlet's preoccupation with the liminality between life and death in the fourth soliloquy, through the syntactic parallelism of 'to be or not to be' and the metonomy of 'to sleep; to sleep'. The hyperbolic metaphors of the 'sea of troubles' and the 'calamity of so long life' reiterate the extent of Hamlet's grief as an overwhelming and uncontrollable force in which death produces a cascade effect onto the survivors. This soliloquy has been deemed universal in its themes, with its limited plot relevance enabling its transferability in the play, such as the National Theatre's 2015 production's choice to position it at the opening scene of the play.

Shakespeare arguably even more prominently depicts the grief of Ophelia upon her father's death: 'he is dead and gone'. Despite Gertrude 's depiction of the accidental nature of her death, it is often argued that her drowning is a consequence of the loss of her father figure upon which she 'fell into the weeping brook'. This death is often romanticised with Bachelard depicting it 'a beautiful immersion and submission into the female element'. As such, Bachelard adheres to the classical significance of the four humours, granting Ophelia's death in line with female fluidity. Despite the common idealisation of Ophelia's grief, there is is an equally juxtaposing portrayal of her madness stemming from such suffering as she hands out 'sweet flowers' of 'fennel, columbines… violets' presenting conflation of innocent blossoming and morbid contamination. A clearly key example of such grief was in Lincoln Inn Theatre in 1720 when, Susan Mountford, a former actress, upon the loss of her lover rushed to the theatre and interrupted the performance becoming 'the real Ophelia'. Consequently, Shakespeare poses the dire consequences of grief in which such pain becomes unbearable.

As well as precipitating the death of the self, Shakespeare suggests that grief can also catalyse a yearning for revenge. This was especially significant for the Elizabethan revenge tragedy genre, often with the presence of a ghost that desires revenge be taken – present also in Kyd's 'The Spanish Tragedy'. For Hamlet, the ghost of King Hamlet urges him to revenge his 'foul and most unnatural murder', repeated in the tricolon, 'foul, strange and unnatural'. While not only evoking the semantic field of decay that pervades Denmark, the ghost of King Hamlet persuades Hamlet not only to 'remember me' in his grief but to act upon it. However it is the conflicting nature between Hamlet's longing for revenge and his understanding of the legal system – implementation of state monopoly of justice – that hinders Hamlet's ability to fulfil such requests. In contrast, through McCartney's claims that 'Laertes seems to be the revenger that Hamlet longs to be', it is clear that Laertes, functioning as a dramatic foil to Hamlet, is able to manifest his grief into anger and dare damnation, vowing 'to the blackest devil! ... profoundest pit'. The semantic field of hellish imagery, exacerbated by the caesura, further reinstates the clear contrast in responses to grief, despite the fact that both have the same aim. For Laertes he 'will be revenge most thoroughly for [his] father's death, exemplifying the filial duty that overrides the complexity of the legal system, framing his grief as less interior and more exterior. However, through Shakespeare's final revenge foil, Fortinbras, it could be argued that the separation of grief from revenge ultimately prevails as he has hamlet in as he has Hamlet's 'dying voice'. Although the significance of Fortinbras is diminished by the way that he was not included in theatrical productions between 1732 and 1897, as well as regularly lacking in feature even in modern an interpretations such as such as the Young Vic's 2021 production. Thus Shakespeare perhaps argues that even within a revenge tragedy grief should not always accumulate into further death.

As a result it is from such actions that Shakespeare presents the grief that stems from conscience. Despite Gardener's claim that 'Claudius is the principle source of rottenness which pervades Denmark' it is important to consider that Shakespeare does provide Claudius with a degree of psychological complexity in guilt and his grief over his past actions. Shakespeare presents thoughts as a tangible element as after, 'It hath the primal eldest curse' Claudius is incapable of prayer, the futility of such attempts signified through the rhyming couplet 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below/Words without thoughts never to heaven go'. As such, the personification of 'thoughts' while in one state creates a modicum of sympathy for Claudius, simultaneously it represents the 'burden' referenced in his previous aside, of grief that without true repentance performative prayer is not able to redeem the individual. This contrasts contemporary revenge tragedies such as Shakespeare's 'Titus Andronicus', in which grief and consciousness of actions were deemed to be punishment from God for the sin. Additionally, despite the truth for the most part in Stockton's statement that 'where Hamlet is verbal, Laertes is physical' Laertes does exhibit a brief moment of the verbal through his aside, 'And yet tis almost 'gainst my conscience'. As a result. perhaps Shakespeare grants the audience permission for Laertes to be redeemed rightly, certainly to a greater extent than Claudius. Over time the use of soliloquy and asides has transformed from thinking out loud to talking to the audience. In larger amphitheatres with greater distance between the audience and the actor such an aside would be thought of as thinking aloud exacerbated by cinematic techniques in film interpretations such as the 2007 David Tennant's ability for the camera to almost transgress into the mind. However the usage of smaller and more intimate theatres means that often there these are deemed as more external than internal, and so the grief and suffering could be experienced to a much greater extent with the audience, invoking catharsis.

In conclusion, Shakespeare formulated a narrative within 'Hamlet' that centred around the grief from the death of a loved one. This extended into suffering over the morality of the characters' responses to grief assuring its role in the tragedy genre.

Students were well prepared to construct an argument about grief in 'Hamlet', and both AO3 and AO5 tended to be well covered, with plenty of consideration of contextual attitudes to melancholy and a lot of consideration of the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism, though the latter of these sometimes tended to be over explored. The interactions between Hamlet and the Ghost were a key consideration for many students; while there were lots of valid interpretations as to how grief impacts, it is worth students noting that the Ghost appears in Act 1 Scene 1 prior to and independently of Hamlet, so a direct interpretation of the Ghost as solely a metaphorical manifestation of his grief is not convincing (at least in Act 1). This was more convincingly applied by the far fewer numbers of students who considered the closet scene. Ophelia was also a very popular area of focus, and while students had very good textual knowledge, the sharp focus of grief could get lost sometimes.

Too many answers were trying to write a prepared essay on madness or loyalty into a 'grief' essay with varying degrees of success. Weaker candidates were almost ignoring the term 'grief'; where more successful students were redefining it and linking it to the concern they wanted to discuss.

It is important to remind students to write a new essay where necessary rather than dredge up learned ones.

Question 4

HAMLET

The question asked about the presentation of Laertes in the play.

Reponses to this question were generally impressive, with candidates able to discuss Laertes' function in the play using discriminating approaches and demonstrating understanding of Shakespeare's craft, looking at, for example, dramatic foils, use of symbolism, stagecraft, genre, use of language varieties and so on. As with several other questions, the more nuanced responses addressed not just Laertes in relation to Hamlet but also in relation to his controlling behaviour to his sister Ophelia. Some Laertes responses insightfully 'did a lot with a little' and constructed a thorough comparison between Hamlet as the supposed tragic hero and Laertes as the revenge hero; at times, there was the risk that the balance tipped too far towards analysing Hamlet, with some pre-prepared material being seen.

Here is an example of a high-level response. Note its confident opening – there's a clear sense of an argument and the candidate does not waste time 'describing' the character. Rather, there are convincing points being made regarding his dramatic function and Shakespeare's intent:

Laertes is, in some ways, the epitome of the world of Elsinore, constantly looking to the past and indulging in fantasies of revenge and honour. Through the character of Laertes, Shakespeare parodies both the courtier and the typical revenger, offering a humanist critique and questioning the nature of action in an epistemologically unstable world.

Rebin argues that in preceding parts of the play, before the death of Polonius, and his return from France, that 'Laertes is a character we are led to admire'. Indeed, in juxtaposition to Hamlet, Laertes is an autonomous character who is wholly part of the Danish court. Claudius' use of repeated interrogation, for instance, 'And, now, Laertes, what's the news with you?' fully implicates Laertes, establishing his status as a courtier. Whereas Hamlet is forbidden to return to Wittenberg, Laertes is given 'gracious leave' to return to France. He is autonomous and masculine. However, I would argue that Laertes' implication in the court, and his status as an autonomous character, are not sufficient to consider him a character to 'admire'. By being so closely implicated in the Danish court, it is quickly clear that Laertes indirectly embodies its corruption. He mirrors the elaborate language of his father, notably the use of hendiadys in his rather patronising speech to Ophelia: 'thews and bulks'; 'safety and health'; 'voice and yielding'. In essence Polonius only echoes what Laertes has earlier preached to Ophelia; he is firmly established as his father's son at court, a figure of corruption and pretence.

Although Polonius' language use maybe harsher, their use of imperatives is similar, as Laertes commands Ophelia to guard her 'virtue': 'keep you in the rear of your affection', indirectly contributing to her madness – an attempt to temporarily transcended patriarchal control.

When Laertes returns from France he's presented as embodying the traits of a typical revenger. He renounced his both Christianity and humanism upon hearing of his father's death, 'To hell allegiance, vows, to the blackest devil/Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit'. Although his use of exclamative language renders Laertes slightly metatheatrical, unlike Hamlet, he renounces 'conscience' and his use of modal verbs, 'I'll be revenged', establishes the purpose that Hamlet lacks. Laertes here is reminiscent of the true tragic heroes of contemporary revenge tragedies, like the Spanish tragedy hence, perhaps, his slightly metatheatrical language use. Macdonald concludes, consequently, that Laertes 'has no principle but revenge'. This does not do his character justice. He is chiefly concerned with his father's 'obscure funeral' further emphasised by the syndetic listing: 'No trophy, no sword …' Similarly, his almost petulant repetitive interrogation of the priest, 'What ceremony else?' clearly establishes the main motivation for his revenge which is, as Watson puts it, 'his belief in the immortalising fantasy of revenge'. MacDonald's claim dismisses Shakespeare's fierce interrogation of revenge itself: not only its morality but its function to distance mankind from its own mortality. Thus, through parodying the revenging hero of contemporary revenge tragedies, Shakespeare dissects the nature of revenge.

Yet, although Shakespeare parodies the revenge hero through Laertes, this is not done without nuance. Some critics, such as Magnus, polarise the characters of Hamlet and Laertes, deeming him a 'crucial and explicit dramatic foil'. There is, of course, much juxtaposition between the two characters. Whereas Hamlet, either to avoid murdering Claudius when he is 'fit and seasoned for passage' or more likely to prolong and avoid the act, does not take his revenge in the chapel, Laertes asserts that he will cut Hamlet's throat 'i the Church', directly juxtaposing the two characters. However, Laertes, like Hamlet, does not ultimately execute his revenge. In almost a microcosm of Hamlet's tortured soliloquies, Laertes says in an aside, ' 'tis almost against my conscience'. As a 'woodcock caught in mine own spring' Laertes accepts implication with nobility, surely differentiating himself from the ruthless revenge hero. Ultimately, the fact that neither Laertes nor Hamlet – although often a 'foil' to one another – do not achieve revenge demonstrates the inability to act in an epistemologically uncertain world of Elsinore. Shakespeare through the character of Laertes therefore echoes the epistemological uncertainty of his own age: Copernicus' discoveries, for instance, no longer placed man at the centre of things. Shakespeare's world is not one certain enough in which to establish concrete 'foils' as Magnus does.

In conclusion, through the character of Laertes, Shakespeare deconstructs the notions of revenge and honour. For a time, Laertes parodies his contemporary revenge heroes but, ultimately, just like Hamlet, his quest to defend honour and memory proves to be futile.

This question was far less popular but that meant responses to this were often stronger as it was selected by those who confidently knew the character and had something to say about him. Laertes' dramatic role in the play as a foil to Hamlet were well explored. Better responses were very clearly categorised by having a complexity of thinking around that, with the best considering both impulsiveness and decisiveness. There were some very interesting considerations of the Polonius family dynamics.

There were many interesting explorations of Laertes as a foil to Hamlet as a way for Shakespeare to mock the typical medieval tragic hero as outdated in a renaissance revenge play; 'Laertes acts but doesn't think, Hamlet thinks but doesn't act'. Strong candidates were then able to smoothly link in context of how unfit they are in comparison to the debate about Elizabeth's possible heirs.

Question 5

KING LEAR

The question asked about the use of different types of language in the play.

This was not the popular question, but responses were often perceptive and interesting. A wide range of interpretations of 'types of language' was accepted and, indeed, expected by examiners:

In Shakespeare's 'King Lear' he employs shifting patterns of language to enforce the tragedy of the play. Right from the beginning, Shakespeare sets up a pattern of language of negation. emphasising the ever-present nihilism. The language discussing family, and fatherhood in particular, is specific and shifts to reflect the changes in the relationships between Lear and his daughters, as well as in the subplot which draws upon Sidney's 'Arcadia'. A semantic field of the natural, cosmic and divine pervades the play, reinforcing the superstition of the characters as well as drawing upon that of the time…

One approach was to consider that language discriminated the villainous (using language that was deceptive and duplicitous through dramatic irony) from the good (using language that was simple and clear with nothing to hide). The speech by the Earl of Gloucester was considered to show the court as a masculine sphere, misogynistic and not morally sound. The duplicitous and hyperbolised language of the sisters in the love test compared with Cordelia's plain speaking was explored as it revealed Regan and Goneril were not loyal, thereby going against their duty as daughters and subjects of the rightful king. This was linked to context by way of the belief in the divine right of kings. Lear was seen to assume the language of a madman as social and familial structures were broken down. Those who adopted language not conventional to their traditional role died, noted one. Pagan mythology was set against Jacobean rhetoric leading to discussion of James I's interest in the supernatural, witches and his book 'Daemonologie'.

There were also some very successful explorations of gender readings of language use in the play:

… Varieties of language are also used by Shakespeare to comment on traditional gender roles. As part of the corruption of Lear's language he reverts to a feminine metre in his grief for Cordelia: 'Never, never, never, never …' Contrastingly, both Regan and Goneril become more dominant in their use of language, speaking with more imperatives and thus with more dominance. Rutter argues that 'they occupy the male voice, the male space that Lear abandons', subverting the Jacobean natural order by challenging traditional views of women as obedient and subservient. In this way Shakespeare's use of language reinforces their presentation as 'unnatural' daughters, drawing inspiration from the court case of Sir Brian Annesely whose daughters tried to have him declared insane so that they might inherit his property. Shakespeare uses language to villainise Goneril and Reagan, in part for going against typical gender roles, but also as a means of condemning those who break bonds of family loyalty…

and quite a few responses looked at the deterioration of Lear's language and the influence of the Fool's discourse:

… Initially in the play the Fool acts as the voice of madness through his blunt sarcasm and, at times, nonsensical discussions with Lear. For example, in Act One when the Fool describes, 'Why, after I have cut the egg i'the middle, and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg'. Yet beneath the often complicated metaphors that the Fool evokes, he is able to provide a key sense of wisdom. In this case he illustrates the dangerous consequences of Lear's division of his kingdom. As Halvorson suggests, the Fool is able to expose the folly and foolishness of the higher ranks of society which indeed was the primary role of fools in court in the 16th century. A notion that Shakespeare uses to expose the foolish mistakes made by those with authority. This idea is further expanded upon by Mac who suggests that 'madness contains both punishment and insight' which is where the deterioration of language becomes most important. As Lear descends into madness, his language changes almost entirely to become more reflective of that used by the Fool. The audience witnesses a series of increasingly nonsensical soliloquies filled with evocation of pagan gods, and punctuation that creates a sense of fragmentation – 'that all the world shall – I will do such things – what they are yet I know not'. However, once Lear completely descends into madness, as reflected by the deterioration of his language, he is able to understand and feel more remorse for his own mistakes. Reduced to the basest form of humanity in his madness, and in turn reduced to the basest form of language, Lear is forced to confront his own human nature and it is through this that Shakespeare critiques the corruptive influence of power…

Below is an extract from a top level response. Its strength lies in its well-integrated, and highly effective, use of critical views to explore a range of language variety in the play:

… Foakes (1993) suggests 'we are likely to view 'King Lear' as Shakespeare's greatest tragedy as it portrays the pessimism and anxieties that world events over the past century had made prominent'. Thus, Shakespeare perhaps aims to use the presentation of varieties of language, surrounding King Lear, as monarch and central protagonist, to analyse the feudal society he observed in contemporary politics of the time in peril – with a succession crisis as the crown passed from heirless Elizabeth I to James I – and perhaps warn of the pitfalls in a social system founded on honest loyalty in a period of potential social breakdown.

Shakespeare explores the language of truth by juxtaposing the dialogue of Cordelia with her sisters Goneril and Regan. During the love test Goneril and Regan speak with marked hyperbole and exaggeration: 'Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty/Beyond what can be valued rich or rare'. The emphatic and ostentatious nature of Goneril's language is reinforced by asyndetic listing – 'No less than life with grace, health, beauty, honour' – that forces the actor to increase the pace of delivery of the line, as the rhythm reflects Goneril's desperation to add ever higher praises to her father. This 'magnificently insincere language' (Kermode) is clearly juxtaposed with that of Cordelia in the same scene, defined by its absence of hyperbole, 'Nothing, my Lord' and the use of parataxis 'nothing' and repetition of the same phrase. Thus, Shakespeare presents an inverted idea regarding truth – that the ostentatious 'honeyed words' (McCrae) that characterised the courts of feudal monarchs cannot be taken as truth; rather the understated absence of ceremonial language contains truth. This idea undermines the accepted truth of the feudal system, in which members of the aristocracy expressed loyalty to the monarch in educated and expressive terms, linguistically separated from the lower classes. Yet Shakespeare perhaps takes the Machiavellian view that truth is constantly manipulated in this sense to gain access to power, as Rutter suggests, in the case of Goneril and Regan, 'By managing their words, they manage their father'. Inspired by the writing of Niccolo Machiavelli, such as 'The Prince' (1532) perhaps Shakespeare aims to criticise the false and manipulative truth that the power-hungry aristocracy would use.

However, Shakespeare further explores varieties of language through the expressions of the Fool. A key voice of reason in the play, the language of the Fool is lexically paralleled to that of Cordelia, using simple declaratives and mirroring the motif of 'nothing': 'I am a fool; thou art nothing'. Here Shakespeare begins to build two contrasting idiolects throughout the play: characters that use truthful, honest language and politically cunning characters, such as Goneril and Regan. Not only are Cordelia and the Fool semantically linked, but they were played by the same actor in the original productions, hence why Cordelia and the Fool are never on stage on the same time, a further cue to the Shakespearean audience to associate the two. Shakespeare presents the Fool as the moral, rational centre of the play, frequently employing natural metaphors and imagery to present the truth to Lear: 'I can tell why a snail has a house … to put's head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case', undermining Lear's desire for a complex understanding of morality, core philosophies that he never achieves. Portrayed as the centre of basic rationality, Shakespeare reinforces the Fool's position as a truth speaker, with 'lyrical flights' and 'doggerel verse'(Muir) that reflects on the social disintegration occurring as a result of Lear's downfall: 'When nobles are their tailors' tutors… Then shall the realm of Albion come to great confusion'. Shakespeare's use of rhyming couplets contrasting the darkness of the Fool's prophecy – which essentially foreshadows the breakdown of the feudal system as 'nobles' do not perform their duty to uphold the status quo but engage in power struggles – conveying a sense of a general loss of morality, where the rhyming verse of the Fool portends more truth than the monarch himself. Thus, Shakespeare presents a complete inversion of traditional morality – the king being the wisest character and the Fool the least – through the wise understanding of the Fool, which undermines the concept of the 'divine right of kings' (that the monarch was given divine wisdom to rule by a Judeo-Christian deity) still widely accepted in the 1600s. By 'seeming to work with no morality at all' (Samuel Johnson) Shakespeare perhaps attempts to portray a nihilistic world view, warning against the supposed divine leadership of the monarch. The Fool becomes a borderline metatextual character but frequently breaks the fourth wall to joke luridly with the audience – 'This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time'. Thus, Shakespeare uses 'the remarkable breaches of realism' (Watts) in the Fool's character to relate his warnings to the contemporary audience of his time.

Shakespeare also employs the use of chivalric language to reinforce a model of how the aristocracy should behave in a feudal society. As Kent is shown to exclaim to Oswald, 'If I had you up on Sarum plain/ I would drag you back to Camelot'. Evoking the legends of King Arthur and romantic notions of honesty and loyalty, Shakespeare implies that defending virtue and truth should be the true use of aristocratic power. This emphasis on virtue is further paralleled in the language of Edgar, claiming that to fight Edmund is 'my truth, my profession … and the honour of mine own heart', evoking the concept of 'noblesse oblige' – the obligation of the elite in feudal society to protect those beneath them. As Edgar ultimately survives the end of the tragedy, perhaps Shakespeare attempts to present an alternative archetype for aristocratic behaviour via chivalrous language.

Ultimately, Shakespeare presents a variety of uses of language throughout the play that illustrate the breakdown of morality, truth and loyalty in a society mirroring, the perilous political scene in contemporary politics, with a fraught succession crisis. However, while Edgar's final lines express 'more exhaustion than triumphant conclusion' perhaps Shakespeare attempts to present the language of political success via chivalry, virtue and honesty.

Generally well handled with some interesting and varied insights. Across the whole paper, those candidates who attempted 'varieties of language' questions did so with confidence, grappling with a wide range of ideas and producing essays strong on AO2 and giving some impressive personal interrogations of the text. It may be that these more open questions attracted the most able students, but certainly it was noticeable that the quality of these answers tended to be impressive!

Some very strong writing here with candidates able to show off their AO2 to good effect. The best managed to make a thesis too, encompassing the wider themes of the play.

Question 6

KING LEAR

The question asked about the presentation of justice in the play.

This was by far the more popular question of the two and candidates were well-prepared to discuss the topic. Weaker responses tended simply to describe just or unjust situations and limited their range to characterisation, while more discriminating approaches were able to consider the play's 'world view' and make extensive use of contextual and critical ideas.

Many students discussed Lear's culpability for the events that occurred in the play, positioning his division of his kingdom as contrary to the 'natural hierarchy', 'the divine right of kings', 'the great chain of being', and thus directly causing the spiralling violence by provoking various variations of the 'gods' or natural law. Attributing guilt or innocence to certain characters often formed the focus of responses to the main topic of justice, somewhat limiting the discussion. A character-driven approach was popular. Whilst the fate of Cordelia was a popular area of focus, candidates often had more success when discussing Edmund.

There was some very general engagement with the plot as a whole, and other responses that showed good engagement with the play but struggling to pin down the AOS – these often begun with the opening scene of the play but struggled to go beyond this or to make their discussion relevant to the question.

The more discriminating and sophisticated responses addressed these issues while situating the idea of justice in a broader historical and philosophical or religious context as a way of considering potential reasons for the injustice that leads to a lack of any comfortable resolution in the play.

Here is an introduction to a strong response. Notice how the candidate is using the views of other readers to start shaping, with confidence, a discussion right at the beginning of the essay:

Shakespeare 's presentation of justice is consummately ambiguous. Justice acts in the deaths of Goneril, Regan and Edmund who subvert their positions in society, and in the redemption of Lear and Gloucester through the realisation of their 'follies' seeming to affirm Dowden's assertion that 'good is normal and evil is abnormal'. However, the brutal and anarchic destruction that arises by the closing of the play, along with Shakespeare's presentation of the extent of cruelties committed by characters, seems to discredit the simplicity of Dowden's interpretation. Rather, Elton's claim that Lear is a play of perverse or non-existent justice, 'the wilful operations of an upside down providence, in an apparently deranged universe' is far more compelling in Shakespeare's presentation of 'gored state'.

Occasionally we saw responses that were rather too caught up in critical debate around the play, so that analysis of the text and the dramatist’s craft was forgotten. Here is an example of a high-level response that, while exploring different critical and contextual ideas, consistently comes back to the play itself:

Shakespeare's ‘King Lear’ is a play characterised by a distinct lack of justice. From the chaotic subversions of moral principle in the opening scene, to the bleak and ambiguous conclusion, the play subverts societal and audience expectations of how and, at times, if justice can or should be attained. The presentation of gratuitous suffering and violence described by G Wilson Knight as ‘purposeless’ and ‘unreasonable’ is what truly cements ‘King Lear’ as a play about injustice.

The opening scene of ‘King Lear’ perhaps provides an apt introduction to the injustice that follows in the play, as Fintan O’Toole argues that there is no clear sense of morality of what is virtue and for his voice in the opening scene’, which would perhaps be suitable given the disintegration of moral principle as the plot progresses. It seems, however, that the true sense of justice in the opening scene is established not from the absence of clear moral principle but through subversion of what audiences might expect of it. Even in the opening scene there is a dichotomy established between the honest Cordelia and her duplicitous sisters. Goneril and Regan's speeches are littered with hyperboles, such as ‘more than word can wield the matter’; ‘no less than life’ and ‘an enemy to all other joys’ when describing their love for their father. This use of hyperbole in such fluent speeches quickly establishes Goneril and Regan as duplicitous. It also creates contrast with Cordelia 's simple ‘nothing’ and simple syntax used in the phrases ‘kept me, bred me, loved me’ and ‘obey you, love you and most honour you’, the parallelism creating a simple and truthful presentation of dutiful love. It is through Lear’s outburst to this honesty as he disclaims ‘all paternal love’ that the sense of injustice which runs throughout the rest of the play is established, as he rejects an innocent daughter in favour of two ruthlessly ambitious and self-centred ones. That being said, the sense of justice being dictated by an almost autocratic monarch would likely not have been a shocking to a Jacobean audience who lived under the law of a king whom they were to believe was divinely appointed and thus had absolute power.

Ideas of justice which may have been recognisable to a Jacobean audience can also be observed in Maxwell 's idea that 'King Lear' is 'a Christian play about a Pagan world'. The idea of sin and suffering as Lear recognises his wrongdoing and goes mad because of it, could be interpreted as a kind of purgatory, through which Lear suffers before his forgiveness and salvation in his reunion with Cordelia. Lear's suffering in his madness can clearly be observed when in Act 3 Scene 2 he describes himself as a 'poor, infirm, weak and despised old man', the listing emphasising the extent to which he has come to recognise his own vulnerability. He also comes to recognise that he is not 'ague-proof', and his hand 'smells of mortality', showing a clear understanding of his own humanity which clearly contrasts with his disillusioned and sinful pride in the opening scene. There is, then, a sense of justice, and of Christian justice, in Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia, as she, like a Christ figure, forgives and embraces Lear, asserting that there is 'no cause, no cause' for her to seek vengeance against him. It seems that there is only a real sense of justice in this scene because Cordelia does not need to avenge Lear's sins against her; he has recognised and atoned for them himself. As such, Maxwell's claim can be applied to Lear's plot in the play, as the Christian plot line of Lear's atonement and forgiveness is intensified by the pagan idea of there being multiple gods whose presence throughout the play is ambiguous, as they fail to intervene even when characters, particularly Gloucester, appeal to them to stop their suffering. This may perhaps actually move the plot away from being constructed as a Christian play, as the idea of godlessness and justice being dictated only by human action would not be accepted by Catholic or Jacobean Protestant audiences, perhaps contributing to Shakespeare's decision to distance of play from his contemporary society by setting it in a pagan mediaeval society.

In many of the play's immoral characters it could perhaps be argued that they are driven by a desire to overcome societal injustice. This is most clear with Edmund whose status as a bastard places him below his legitimate brother, Edgar, in terms of social standing. This idea of primogeniture was common in Jacobean society and, as such, Edmund's mockery and disdain for the principle may not have been particularly widely accepted as a motive for his actions against his father and brother. Edmund's first soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 1 immediately makes his disgust at his status as a bastard clear, as he questions 'Wherefore should [he] stand in the plague of custom', the use of the word 'plague' implying that he sees the current state of society as something which is limiting and should be ended. His repetition of rhetorical questions, 'With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base? Base?' also shows his incomprehension of why he has to suffer because of societal norms, with the repeated plosives establishing a further sense of disquiet as they resemble spitting. The mocking tone of the soliloquy is most clear in the phrase 'fine word, 'legitimate' and further establishes Edmund 's desire for vengeance against what he views as societal injustice. That being said, Edmund's actions in the rest of the play clearly remain unjust as he subverts the expectations of both Jacobean and modern society as to how a child should interact with a parent, and brings immense suffering to the play's moral characters due to his own selfishness and greed, veiled behind the suggestion that the injustice that he faces is the real driving force. As such, G Wilson Knight's suggestion that Edmund 'obeys nature's laws of selfishness' appears to be true, as he is driven by only what will allow him to thrive, creating a deeper sense of injustice in the suffering he causes other characters, as it is done without any moral reason.

Fintan O'Toole argues that the ending of 'King Lear' 'bursts out past the moral ending'. This can be applied to both the main plot and to the subplot. The sense of atonement and salvation, and thus justice, established when Lear is forgiven by Cordelia in Act 4 Scene 7 is brutally shattered by Cordelia 's death in the closing scene. As Lear walks onto the stage carrying his daughter, he questions 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life and thou no breath at all?' clearly conveying the painful injustice of the situation as Cordelia, an image of honesty virtue and love in the play, is no longer afforded life due to the cruelty and greed of Edmund, Goneril and Regan. This also renders the justice achieved as Edgar reveals himself and defeats Edmund in a dual futile as Edmund's evil actions have still triumphed despite his own half-hearted attempts to prevent them. As such, it seems that G Wilson Knight 'suggestion that the suffering in the play is 'unreasonable' and 'purposeless' is true, as suffering is no longer used to atone for actions or to achieve salvation, but becomes a symbol of the inherent injustice of life as the most virtuous people are forced to face the most painful of fates.

While there were many good responses to this question, some students did assume a very broad understanding of 'justice' and left it as an implicit idea connected to suffering, the gods, loss of power etc. without really nailing down what they understood this term to refer to. This question naturally led stronger candidates to comment on the character development and structural contrasts used in the play and could draw on their knowledge both of the main plot and the Gloucester subplot.

At lower levels, candidates identified which characters they felt were treated badly in the play and described their situations or events in which they suffered. Some stated that death was a means of serving justice, but others also noted that some characters did not deserve the fate they were dealt. Some candidates offered an examination of Regan and Goneril's behaviour, considering whether a male acting in the same manner would be so condemned. Some considered if they were seen as villainous purely because they were women with ambition and guile to get what they wanted in a patriarchal setting.

Question 7

OTHELLO

The question asked about the tension between public life and private life in the play.

This was the less popular of the *Othello* questions and some candidates used it as an opportunity to focus solely on the characterisation of 'honest' Iago. More discriminating approaches, however, also considered the question in relation to the tragic genre, arguing that Shakespeare was writing a 'domestic' tragedy that explored the tensions between public and private lives. A typical approach was to examine Othello's failure to separate his military status from his role as a husband:

In Shakespeare's dramatic tragedy 'Othello' a tension between the public and private spheres is largely explored through our eponymous hero: Othello's paranoia and vulnerability stems from predicating his success in marriage with success on the battlefield. This causes a growing chasm between Othello and Desdemona as they become isolated from one another after Othello lacks any self-identity after triumph over the Turks. Elsewhere Iago is a microcosm of the dangers that external influences, warping the private lives of others, has. His own important hold over the plot resulting in the deaths of many…

Other responses made some interesting links to contemporary society:

Writing during a time of anxiety towards social change, Shakespeare's 'Othello' explores the conflict other people may face between their public image and their private identities. By diverting in some ways from Cinthio's 'The Moor of Venice' Shakespeare exposes the professional, marital and racial tensions surrounding Othello's identity, ultimately bringing the play from a public sphere to being a domestic tragedy about the dangers of internalising societal expectations.

Firstly, Shakespeare's presentation of the 'noble' Othello contrasts greatly with Iago's Machiavellian plots which are revealed in private only. Iago states, 'I must show but a sign and flag of love, which is indeed but sign', using military imagery of a 'flag' which emblemizes his loyalty and devotion to Othello in public. Shakespeare's use of soliloquies from the start of the play allows for a Iago to gain 'a godlike sense of power', as Honigman puts it, and this makes the audience compliant in his duplicitous actions. Iago's 'godlike' power is magnified when we realise the link between his public image and his personal relationships. When Othello states in the 'temptation' scene, 'for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty, And weigh'st thy words before thou givest them breath, Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more. Notably the abstract noun, 'love' parallels Iago's 'flag of love' and his reputation for honesty juxtaposes its true nature – merely a 'sign'.

Shakespeare portrays therefore the significance of public image and reputation because Othello seems to not only trust Iago on a professional level, but also as a personal adviser, implying that full belief in reputation can have detrimental effects on personal relationships. This would have been especially intriguing for a society that had experienced forty years of coup attempts against the queen, and fear around betrayal of leaders in private would make a Iago's pragmatic approach to creating a public image that contradicts his inner motives all the more engaging…

Only a few candidates considered characters other than Othello and Iago:

… Moreover, Shakespeare's employment of the contrast between Cassio 's public life as an archetypal Casanova, and his private life which is defined by his relationship with Bianca is perhaps a warning that the two cannot coexist. This is seen in the collapse of Cassio 's public image after Othello's release of him: 'Reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have lost my reputation. I have lost that immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial'. Perhaps through the construction of Cassio 's public image as immortal and almost superhuman in nature, Shakespeare is commenting on how society ultimately exposes the frailty of the human condition, as shown in the melodramatic repetition of 'reputation' which builds to exclamative crescendo. Cassio clearly values a social construct greater than his true self which he describes as 'bestial'. This is further explored in his dialogue to Bianca, his mistress, in which the guise of a Casanova is dissected, leaving only a bestial man of foul language: 'Go to, woman! Throw your vile guesses in the devil's teeth'. Perhaps in alluding to the 'devil's teeth' Shakespeare is textually alluding to Iago's initial speech which was charged with similar degradation and sexual language …

It was certainly possible, however, for candidates to focus mainly on the two main characters and offer a wide-ranging, sophisticated response:

In Shakespeare's 'Othello', the tension between public and private life works as a parallel to other dichotomies within the play, that of good and evil, honour and jealousy and, to some degree, the opposing forces of Othello and Iago.

Public and private life are two separate worlds within the play, one that Iago and Othello thrive in opposing sides of. Within the first act of the play, for example, between Brabantio and Iago words of malice are shared: Iago 'hate[s] the Moor', he vents his hatred for Cassio 'a great arithmetician' with no experience on the battlefield. We can also consider his speech to Brabantio to be part of the private world, too, done under the cover of darkness and with his reputation hidden. However the private world of darkness appears to be where his insults and misconduct end, for the most part, and while the epithet of 'honest' covers any reference to him in public he is a creature of 'motiveless malignity' feeling most at home in the shadows where he can 'spin as little a web as this' to 'ensnare as great a fly as Cassio'. Despite his hatred for the man, reputation is what holds up the public world. Someone as great as Cassio holds greater sway as far as to say that 'the lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient'. Within the shadows Iago sways closer to the kind of demonic and purely evil world, the 'magnanimity' (as AC Bradley would describe Othello as having) within the initial acts where Othello is present keeps him in the good graces of Venetian society and of God. In fact, considering Othello's apparent devotion to Christianity, praying that Desdemona reaches heaven even once he is set on killing her, compared to Iago who refuses to mention God by name, opting instead for substitutes such as Jove, the tragedy of the play seems to take on a more biblical weight with the worlds of the public and private methods by which Shakespeare demonstrates Iago's subterfuge and Othello's grace and reputation.

The world of public and private can also to some degree have an opposite meaning to them. Privacy is intimacy and, especially in the case of Iago, opinions expressed in public can be dishonest. Even here, however, the juxtaposition of how each character handles this intimacy is used by Shakespeare to paint an ever-growing picture of good and evil, as well as the slow corruption of Othello by Iago. Although not getting any private scenes between Othello and Desdemona until Othello's mind has already been poisoned, the enraptured vocabulary Othello expresses at the sight of her ('my soul's joy) and the obvious conflict and stress Othello is put under when convinced of her infidelity is evidence of his love for her. Yet Iago is always cold. Despite Emilia's retrieval of the handkerchief for Iago, he only states that 'it is a common thing to have a foolish wife'. His misogyny extends into the public world within Act 2 scene one describing the perfect wife as one who effectively just serves a man perfectly. More subtly, other characteristics slip into his public identity, ones which he freely admits in private but are never caught onto. His soliloquy as Othello leaves in Act 3 scene 3 mentioning that 'trifles light as air/are to the jealous confirmations strong/ as proofs of holy writ' mirrors words he mentions directly to Othello in reference to himself: 'It is my nature's plague to spy into abuses/ and oft my jealousy shapes faults that are not'. Emilia exposes to Desdemona proof that this may be fact, that Iago had once suspected Emilia 'with the Moor'. The language Iago uses, mirrored across his private life held to himself, mentioned to Othello, to Brabantio, to Emilia and within a more public setting, allows Shakespeare to indicate perhaps what drives Iago, referred to as a 'playwright within a play' to push the tragedy forward. It could be that alongside the obvious irony of 'honest' Iago's continuous admittance to jealousy the epithet may prove correct, even should Iago himself deny 'I am not what I am' (opposing the God of the bible's own words and driving further a comparison between him and a demon).

After the corruption of Othello's mind in Act 3 scene 3 we see very little of him in public, but what is seen is a method by which Shakespeare continues to develop a dichotomy between him and Iago. Primarily this is seen in the first two scenes Iago's murder of Rodrigo and immediate attempts to look as though he has done nothing wrong, even to portray himself as virtuous attempting to save Cassio's life, immediately contrasts the pained murder of Desdemona wanting 'not to scar that whiter skin of hers than snow' – Othello trying to convince himself it is for justice so that she doesn't 'betray more men'. The respect Iago has for a life is null and void. He strikes by surprise or in darkness, and with a dagger, even against Emilia in public where Othello only turns the dagger against himself, and admits to killing Desdemona even when she insists that her death was of her own will. Even as Othello is convinced to kill Desdemona, the use of the public and private is used to demonstrate the complete opposing thought process of Iago. There is no intimacy in Iago; a critic mentions that 'love is missing from his composition' and all he appears to value is himself – putting Bianca as a primary suspect and using her reputation in the public setting of the street against her. Othello must convince himself to murder and believes continually that it is the work of love and of justice, and the only things he attempts to kill by his blade is Iago land himself, valuing justice above all.

The public and private lives of the characters in 'Othello' is a method that Shakespeare uses to emphasise the more prevalent dichotomies within the play. As the sustained vocabulary of Iago throughout the settings of each scene, and the ideals that each character values are exposed through actions they perform in what scenario, all play a part in unveiling a tragedy more concerned with good and evil, two opposing forces embodied in Othello and Iago.

Iago’s motives and lack of motives, his 'motiveless malignity' was the basis of a popular approach to this question. This varied in success: while brief references to Iago’s conduct in private and public were often successful, an overreliance on his soliloquies, however, meant that the focus became either on a character study or a pre-prepared response on appearance and reality. In general, this question produced the weaker responses to the ‘Othello’ questions simply because they were descriptive and narrative in nature.

There was a clear divide between those for whom the question’s reference to ‘difference’ formed their essential argument (that characters are very different in private to public) and those who understood the need to craft and express their ideas about the significance of those differences. Weaker students naturally tended to talk through Iago’s villainy relying on seeming honest but opening up to the audience, sometimes in a descriptive fashion.

Focus on the tension between public and private needed to be clearer – often students wrote general character essays on Othello with perhaps a paragraph on a different character but without fully articulating the nature of the competing demands on them and the different facets of their identities. Use of critics felt a bit scattergun on this question, though some good use was made of evaluations of Iago. Heavy reliance on Coleridge, Leavis and Honigmann – would be good to see stronger representation of more modern criticism. Some nice commentaries on the play in production.

Question 8

OTHELLO

The question asked about the extent to which the play is about prejudice.

This was the most popular question on Section A, and candidates were able to approach it with broad understanding and some confidence. It was good to see the majority of students understanding and responding to the phrase 'is a play about' before the key term 'prejudice.' That being said, students who simply noted its importance and then explored prejudice were not penalised – they had simply missed a discursive opportunity. A few students tried to use this to explore other important themes in pure isolation (eg. 'but it's also a play about jealousy...') and these were not successful responses. Discussion of Othello's race naturally dominated proceedings and there were lots of well-crafted arguments around his initial confounding and later internalisation of those prejudices. Prejudice against women was the other dominant area for analysis. For both these areas, weaker responses tended to set out to exhaustively 'prove' that characters were racist or sexist but did not develop much further beyond that. Range was a key marker of students' ability to demonstrate knowledge of the text, with many students hugely relying on very prolonged commentary of the first few scenes and then moving straight to Act 5 with little consideration of the interim three Acts.

Prejudice is first presented in 'Othello' through Iago's descriptions of Othello in the first scene. Iago is informing Brabantio of the fact Desdemona and Othello have wedded without his consent, something that would be unheard of during the time Shakespeare was writing. During 1603 to 1604, England was a patriarchal society in which the men had significant control over the women in their lives. This is another form of prejudice that will be discussed further in this essay. Prejudice is presented through Iago's description of Othello, commenting not on his personality but his looks, the colour of his skin and the connotations surrounding that. Iago describes Othello as 'an old black ram' likening Othello not only to a black animal, which is prejudiced in itself, but an old 'ram'. In contemporary English society the country was significantly religious under a Protestant queen. A ram was an animal associated with witchcraft and the devil. Shakespeare uses this animal in relation to Othello because of societal stigma at the time of the play being written around people of colour in society. The stigma is linked largely to a phenomenon known as 'fear of the unknown' which is simply a dislike of a person thing or idea because it is not understood or has not been experienced by a certain group. Othello experiences prejudice throughout the play because he is a black man, but also because he is a black man who has married a white woman. The colour white is associated with connotations of innocence and purity, whereas black is associated by Shakespeare with evil and violent tendencies. When Iago says 'an old black ram is tupping your white ewe' to Brabantio, he's reflecting and reinforcing these views. Critic GK Hunter believes that a Iago's determination to be the author of Othello's downfall is nothing to do with jealousy over Othello's power, or anger at the fact Othello promoted Cassio over him, like other critics believe. Hunter argues that Iago's obsession with overcoming and harming Othello is down to Othello's race. That is why Iago makes consistent references to Othello's race throughout his lines and monologues in the play, repeatedly calling Othello a 'black moor' or a 'blackamoor'. Shakespeare presents this prejudice and the stereotypes enforced on Othello as something that cannot be defied or overcome. He does not allow Othello any self-improvement or much character development at all throughout the play. Critic Leavis argues that Othello does not learn from his suffering and has a talent for self dramatization. They claim that Othello consistently feels sorry for himself, but he does nothing to change the situation he is in. This is reflected in the play's conclusion with Othello murdering Desdemona. The consistent stereotypes Shakespeare has presented in regards to Othello seemingly turn out to be true. Othello, a man associated with violence, evil and inhumaneness because of his race, kills his wife by suffocating her. Othello's murder reinforces Elizabethan perceptions and prejudices of people of colour because Shakespeare presents these prejudices as ideas that turn out to be true. While Othello is also presented as 'a brave and noble warrior', as AC Bradley states, ultimately he succumbs to his prejudices and fulfils his role as the black Moor of the play.

Prejudice is also presented by Shakespeare as something that can arise because of gender. Women are repeatedly shown to be obedient throughout Shakespeare's 'Othello' – women like Desdemona and Bianca. Emilia, an arguably strong women with an almost proto feminist view of the world for the time, also is a victim of societal prejudice against women at the time. Despite a woman being on the throne in England, the country still valued societal rules and ideas; while during Elizabeth I's reign Shakespeare did begin to write some stronger female characters like Emilia in 'Othello' and Lady Macbeth in 'Macbeth', many of his female characters still fall victim to their male accompaniments. Critic Abrahams argues that Emelia is a classic victim of marriage in contemporary England. She fulfils all the roles of a wife should have, despite being opposed to them. Her opposition to the traditional patriarchal values is shown in Act 4 Scene 3 where she is discussing marriage with Desdemona. She says husbands should 'know their wives have sense like them: they see and smell and have their palates both for sweet and sour as husbands have'. She draws similarities between men and women which are seemingly obvious, but in Elizabethan England were not often considered. Emilia is perhaps one of the most complicated characters in the play because she has qualities to her that are so unlike many women in this time, and yet she still voluntarily does whatever a Iago asks of her simply because he is her husband and she wants him to love her. She delivers the handkerchief to him despite not knowing what he wants it for. Arguably, Shakespeare presents Emilia as a character with many layers and traits specifically to emphasise that prejudice that women experienced. Emelia sees and expresses the faults in the way society works and yet she still carries out her societally assigned role. This reflects the lasting impactful effects that the long term of prejudice against women had, and Shakespeare reflects it perfectly through Emila; the desire for more for equality but the inability to overcome those societal boundaries that have been in place for so long. In a way Shakespeare also presents the prejudice against women in the play as something that can be overcome in the right circumstances. At the end of the play following the murder of Desdemona, Emilia finds out about her husband's involvement in the murder by Othello and is outraged by it. She directly disobeys Iago's order to 'be wise and get [her] home' with a stern 'I will not', indicative of the respect she has lost for her husband as a person and as a man. Out of love for Desdemona and hatred for Iago, just for a short time societally ingrained prejudices are non-existent for Emilia and she speaks her mind because her friend cannot. She dies at the hand of Iago by her husband's sword. Iago, a symbol in her life of the patriarchy, is the very man that brings her demise. The way Shakespeare portrays that the prejudice that ultimately cannot be overcome is nothing short of artistic. Shakespeare presents in 'Othello' as inevitable.

Overall, Shakespeare's presentation of prejudice is powerful and impactful throughout the play. He illustrates the detrimental effects that prejudice can have, prejudice because of race and prejudice because of gender, and he repeatedly highlights the inescapability of both.

Above is a fairly typical response at Level 4: well-written; sound in knowledge of the text and making good use of lots of contextual information. The response also engages with pertinent critical views, but there is just not enough evaluation of the text for the very top level on AO2. It makes clear and relevant points, e.g. we're told that Emilia's 'I will not' shows her disregard for her husband, but there is too little sense of the text as a piece of drama. There is limited awareness of an audience, nor is there much consideration of the writer's craft.

This next response is much stronger on AO2, while being equally successful in integrating contextual and critical points. It is discriminating about language, looks at features such as genre, setting and symbolism, and considers audiences and alternative productions:

Shakespeare's 1604 play, 'Othello' is largely a tragedy about prejudice. Although the play deals with the themes of jealousy and deception, the root of the conflict can be found in prejudice against those considered 'other' in the Christian society and the effects of that belief on the outsider. Shakespeare chose the setting of the Venetian-Ottoman wars of the late 16th century to explore the theme of prejudice, both due to the wartime feeling of chaos and conflict and because of the questions it raises about loyalty, as Othello was a 'moor' from North Africa fighting for the Venetian army yet would have still been treated with distrust. Despite the roles they take on as the tragic hero and the antagonist both. Iago and Othello are victims of prejudice and outsiders in Venetian society. However, while Othello internalises this and descends into madness, Iago seems to vent his misanthropy by causing the downfall of others. The status of the two men can quickly be seen through their interactions with other soldiers and nobles in the first two scenes. Upon appearing in Act 1 Scene 3 the Duke addresses him as 'Valiant Othello' and tells him 'we must straight away employ you against the general enemy Ottoman'. He is received with praise, and the imperative of 'must employ' highlights his value to the Venetian army; yet he is also described as a 'valiant Moor'. This epithet illustrates his double existence – it juxtaposes the honour and respect he has achieved through his military efforts directly with the reminder that he is 'other' and will never be fully part of society. John Wain describes how Venetian acceptance of Othello is 'partial' and this is evident in the epithet he bears and internalises for the rest of the play. His internalisation of Venetian racial beliefs can be seen through his self-assurance that 'for she had eyes and chose me'. The emphasis placed on the theme of ocular proof throughout the play leads the audience to realise Othello truly believes Desdemona saw him as defective, but loved him anyway.

Iago considers himself to also be a victim of the hierarchy. He decides to involve the unwitting Cassio into his plot purely because Othello chose the 'mere arithmetician' over him to be Lieutenant ,which Iago views as a classist snub due to his supposed inferior military skill – 'mere arithmetician' denoting education and refinement but not necessarily talent in battle – and because of Cassio's treatment of him. Upon meeting in Act 2 Scene 1, Cassio follows a display of courtly behaviour with, 'Let it not gall your patience, good Iago, that I extend my manners;'tis my breeding that gives me this bold show of courtesy'. His flowery language and self-importance asserts his supposed intellect and upper class background over Iago, and can be considered as an act of classism that causes Iago to make him a scapegoat. In Iqbal Khan's 2015 production of 'Othello' he cast a black actor as Iago. This had the effect of turning the focus of the play away from race and onto the more prevalent theme of prejudice, as it posited both Iago and Othello as outsiders. The visceral effects of Othello's internalised racism can be seen in the breakdown of his language as the general whose speech was once measured and calm (giving an eloquent self-defence in Act 1 Scene 3) by Act 3 Scene 4 is reduced to exclamatory expletives: 'Zounds!' and repetitive language exclaiming, 'the handkerchief' three times and 'O! blood blood blood!' in Act 3 Scene 3. 16th century critic, Schlegel, explained this as 'not a shocking reversal … rather the return of a barbarous man to his uncivilised roots'. While apt in Othello's downfall being inevitable, this is a result of his harmatia – the jealousy his insecurity has instilled in him – rather than a generalised fate based on his background as Schlegel's limited and rather biased views would suggest. Iago's prejudice against others causes his own downfall, as the Machiavellian villain fails to plan in the long term and ends the tragedy having lost his wife, status and freedom.

Prejudice based on race and gender are seen as inextricably intertwined in 'Othello'. Desdemona and Othello's relationship is paradoxical, as under the great chain of being she is subservient to him because she is female, yet due to his race he is deemed inferior and undeserving, accused of using 'potions' and 'spells' by Brabantio in Act 1 Scene 3 as he cannot fathom them as equals in marriage, or rather Othello as her superior as was custom at the time following Roman law. Ania Loomba's analysis that 'Othello becomes a victim of racial beliefs precisely as he is an agent of misogynistic ones' is apt as we see the peripeteia of Act 3 Scene 4 – Iago's confrontation of Othello with the handkerchief – to be the peripetia of the tragedy. Othello both fully absorbs the idea that he is inferior to Desdemona and turns against her, believing she is dishonest. Othello professes this disappointment as 'her name that was as fresh as Dian's visage is now begrimed as black as my own face'. The illusion to Diana, a Roman goddess representing youth and chastity, reveals the qualities Othello valued in his wife, and the correlation between Desdemona's loss of purity and his own skin tone through 'black' emphasises the moral weight of the adjective in the 16th century. It described not only one of African origin, but also anyone who wasn't white as well as someone of evil morals. This juxtaposes the Duke's praise in Act 1 Scene 3 to Brabantio that 'Your son-in-law is more fair than black', once again equating colour to morality and proving their 'partial 'acceptance of him. Othello only truly believes he is inferior once he is convinced that Desdemona has been unfaithful as this 'shatters the close link to Venice' that Desdemona provides, according to Wain. Previously he instructed Iago to 'exchange me for a goat when I turn the business of my soul to such blown surmises matching thy inference'. This imperative foreshadows his fate as the origins of tragedy lie in 'tragoiade' or 'goat song', a Greek dithramb for Dionysus where a goat was slaughtered as a sacrifice. Goat symbolism is prevalent in Othello, labelled 'an old black ram' by Iago in the first act, and it allows us to infer that Othello's downfall is a sacrifice made to restore the social natural order that was disrupted when he transgressed his acceptable role as a Moor and became General. John Quincy Adams said that Desdemona 's death was necessary due to her transgression of 'intermingling white and black blood', but I find more credit in Currie's observation, three centuries later, that 'the woman becomes like the black outsider and must die'. As a woman and a black man both Othello and Desdemona transgress their acceptable roles under white patriarchy and therefore are irrevocably fated to be punished by the prejudice of the Christian republic of Venice.

The setting of Venice was familiar enough to British audiences to use it to explore British attitudes and anxieties over foreigners, following the age of exploration in a projected way. While Shakespeare's moral intentions in portraying a black man in this way are ambiguous, the play is an excellent observation of prejudice against different marginalised groups and the effects of discrimination.

A large number of essays relied heavily on Act 1, Scene 1 exploring the 'black ram' quote at laborious and not terribly illuminating length. There was a sense of students having thoroughly learned and recited this example rather than developing their own thoughts on the specific question. AO2 was often light or restricted to naming word classes with only very general or sweeping exploration of the impact of that particular language choice ('the verb tupping…' etc). Better answers ranged more widely across a range of moments in the play and varieties of prejudice, with some exploring the significance of more minor characters (for example Emilia) to good effect. Here and elsewhere, there were quite a few GCSE 'evaluate' style comments that weren't necessarily developed – 'Shakespeare vividly presents…' Where there was evidence of a meaningful plan, students tended to write more convincing essays which were much more effective at identifying and grappling with the specific demands of the question.

Many responses explored in clear and controlled ways the argument presented by Ania Loomba that 'Othello is a victim of racial beliefs precisely because he becomes an agent of misogynist ones'. This reflected an overall tendency of the analysis of gender prejudice against the female characters to be more relevant/controlled/discriminating than the accompanying analysis of racial prejudice (and occasionally class prejudice).

Most answers looked at racial prejudice, but the best responses were evaluative, considering the comment Shakespeare is trying to make through considering racial, gender and class prejudice. It was very common to see students' first paragraph (after introduction) on the exchange between Iago and Roderigo prior to meeting Othello, which was valid, but the best responses considered a range of areas of writers' craft. Again, Iago was a popular area of focus: some responses effectively analysed Iago's soliloquies and how Shakespeare crafts these ambiguously, leaving us questioning to what extent Iago is motivated by prejudice, and regardless of motive, the subsequent impact Iago has on Othello's language, stage directions and characterisation in terms of internalised self-prejudice.

Question 9

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The question asked about different perspectives on love in the play.

This was a very popular question and candidates approached it with confidence. Candidates often engaged productively with Hopkins' idea of marriage as comic closure from the Critical Anthology, although some considered 'love' and 'marriage' to be synonymous. This led to some over-long introductory discussions on the ending, and then a sense the candidate was running out of steam as they struggled to find other material. However, some responses were discriminating in selecting the most sophisticated examples of writers' craft and evaluating the subsequent comments made by Shakespeare about love:

'A Midsummer Night's Dream' has a constant presence of love throughout the play. However, the comedic nature of 'Dream' allows for the focus on love to range from quite a tragic idea of whether love can overcome strict social structures, to a mocking jest of dramatic 'true love' as fickle. Shakespeare also explores love in different power dynamics …

Hopkins' ideas around marriage in comedy and Ryan's arguments about the play's inversion of social hierarchies were popular critical lines pursued by candidates. There were also some excellent gender readings:

Shakespeare presents many different perspectives on love in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Although the play arguably begins and ends with evocations of true love, the shift to the anarchic locus of the woods complicates this as it allows the exploration of the capricious and changeable nature of love, as symbolised by the love potion. Indeed, not only does it transform romantic alliances for both fairies and mortals, it also shatters female platonic bonds, ensuring the subservience of women and marriage needed for the closure of a traditional comedy…

The following thoughtful and wide-ranging response fulfils many Level 5 criteria:

In 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' Shakespeare creates a microcosm of Elizabethan society, considering how different perspectives on love are impacted by the social hierarchy of gender, class and religion.

One of the ways in which Shakespeare presents love is through the impact of the patriarchy, where women must be dominated by men. For instance, in the opening scene Theseus reminds his betrothed, Hippolyta, in exposition to the audience, how he 'wooed her with his sword' and 'won' her love through 'injuries'. This violent language, combined with a phallic image of the sword could be considered as, what Lisa Hopkins refers to as, 'one of the problematic ways in which marriage is generally treated in Shakespearean comedies'. Nevertheless, even a contemporary audience would struggle to identify with this overtly physical and sexual threat from Theseus to his supposed love, which is why Shakespeare has decided to set his play in the classical world of Athens, predating mediaeval concepts of chivalry, gallantry, courtly love and 'fin amour'. Moreover, another example of the patriarchal perception of love can be found later on in Act 1 Scene 1 where Egeus, discussing his daughter, Hermia, declares 'She is mine and all my right of her I do estate upon Demitrius'. Shakespeare's use of possessive adjectives and his semantic field of transactions – 'right'; 'estate'; 'fortunes'; 'ranked' – accentuates the objectification of women and the way in which they are crushed by the patriarchy. Indeed, many feminist critics, including Sarah Nelson Garner, have commented on how harmony at the end of Shakespearean comedy is only truly restored when 'women's bonds' are broken and women 'submit' to the tyrannical patriarchs. Although this may be the case in other Shakespearean comedies, most notably 'The Taming of the Shrew' where Katherine is punished and humiliated for her outspoken wilful ways, we must remember that Hermia does eventually secure a happy ending by marrying her chosen husband, Lysander, instead of her father's choice of Demetrius. Hermia's victory was an incredibly progressive and audacious writing choice from Shakespeare, who was writing at a time, long before the Women's Property Act, where unmarried young women were indeed viewed as the property of their fathers until the 'came of age' (Stephen Greenblatt). Notwithstanding through the preposterous nature of the 'Dream' it is difficult for a modern audience to ascertain whether Shakespeare was criticising the misogyny of late 16th century England or simply providing a comedically unusual circumstance for a contemporary audience to be shocked by. Either way, Shakespeare considers the patriarchal perspective of love through symbolic euphemisms and semantic language.

A second way in which Shakespeare explores varying perspectives on love is through his portrayal of sexuality and fertility. According to Andrew Dickson the title is particularly significant as the Midsummer festival was a celebration of fertility and fecundity for pagan Tudors, whose praise of sexuality rebelled against strict Puritan attitudes. Such 'celebration' is certainly supported by the constant references to the 'moon' – motif that appears 28 times in the play – representing fertility and Diana, the virgin goddess of new life. Moreover, Lisa Hopkins asserts that 'marriage brought with it the promise of new life' in the 'birth of offsprings' in Elizabethan romantic comedies, a notion which is clearly considered in Oberon's final monologue, where he declares that the 'best bride-bed' will be 'blessed' by the fairies. Whilst a contemporary audience would consider the blessing of fertility a great privilege, a modern audience may instead consider the plosive alliteration and the superlative 'best' in this phrase a as a threatening declaration of voyeurism. where Oberon takes on a predatory role of assessing the 'bride[s']'reproductive abilities. Alternatively, Shakespeare's manipulation of the metre and rhythm of this monologue, straying away from the iambic pentameter and abab rhyme scheme typically adopted in Oberon's speech to a contrasting strocaic tetrameter, accompanied by consecutive rhyming couplets – aa, bb – creates a melodic, 'sing-songy atmosphere, as if Oberon is lulling us to sleep.

Nevertheless, while the traditional Athenian court explores sexuality through the socially conservative consummation of marriage, sexuality is portrayed as a far more liberated act in the woods. An escape from a strict and rigid structure to a liberated distorted forest is a common trope in Shakespearean comedy, used most notably in 'As You Like It' where the Forest of Arden provides refuge for Orlando and Duke Senior. In this case, however, the forest appears more as a 'labyrinth of errors, tricks or illusions' as Francoise Laroque describes it, as social identities and relationships are upturned and left behind. Titania, queen of the fairies, provides a prime example of the dark sexuality prevalent in the forest, which may have been the reason Jan Kott crowned the 'Dream' the 'most erotic of Shakespeare's plays'. Although David Bevington would dispute this, claiming that the relationship between Titania and Bottom is instead 'touchingly innocent', a contemporary Elizabethan audience would be likely to associate Titania with the Celtic and Gaelic literary tradition of The Fairy Queen, a queen who would kidnap and seduce young mortal men. For instance, in the first scene of the penultimate act Titania sings Bottom to sleep, describing how 'the female ivy so/Enrings the barky fingers of the elm'. According to Helen Hackett, this symbolism seems to point in the direction of sex, where the traditional symbol of a vine is supported by an elm, representative of a married couple, is distorted by the phallic imagery of the 'barky fingers'. Furthermore, if we view Titania as an homage to Queen Elizabeth I, the virgin queen of England during the 1590s, we could interpret Titania's sexual perversity towards a young mortal man of lower class as an allusion to Elizabeth's own tendency to surround herself with young men, such as the Earl of Essex, as she was known to demand love poems from her votaries. Alternatively, modern audiences have taken Titania to resemble the anachronistic Freudian concept of the Id – our unconscious and repressed primitive desires – where Peter Brooks' notorious 1970s production doubled the roles of Titania and Hippolyta and Oberon and Theseus, suggesting Titania is a surreal incarnation of Hippolyta's repressed desires. However, through any interpretation, it is clear through Shakespeare's natural and sensuous imagery, that he was conscious of the paramount role that fertility and sexuality played in relationships and love.

A third way in which Shakespeare considers different perspectives of love is through the reckless actions of the four Athenian lovers. Writing the 'Dream' at the same time as its tragic counterpart 'Romeo and Juliet', Shakespeare allows for many parallels between his two 'sister plays' as well as the close intertwining of both with Ovid's 'Metamorphosis' from which Pyramus and Thisbe is derived (Helen Hackett). Throughout the play, Shakespeare presents the male lovers, Lysander and Demetrius, as fickle and easily led astray. For example, Demetrius is described by Lysander as a 'spotted and inconstant man' due to his switching of allegiances between Helena and Hermia. The adjective 'spotted' has connotations of a snake – a motif used various times throughout the play to indicate deceitfulness, duplicity and temptation. The snake, of course, is a key symbol of evil in literature, stemming from original sin and the Bible and even appearing in Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra'. Therefore the audience would be right to be suspicious of Lysander and Demetrius who appear unfaithful and untrustworthy. Nevertheless, as Harold Bloom reminds us, 'all love is ironical in the Dream', supported by Tom Bishop's statement that 'there are virtually no happily married couples' in Shakespeare's plays. Perhaps agreeing with Bloom, we can thus interpret the inconstant nature of the lovers as a light hearted and whimsical comedic plot point. Nevertheless, from a contextual background, it is important to remember that cuckoldry was a serious issue in Elizabethan England and many Tudor men even refused to marry or made a joke out of marriage out of fear of being cuckolded by their wives. Therefore it is possible that Shakespeare's alternative portrayal of the men as infidel challenges the blame placed on seductive women and instead holds unfaithful men accountable. Equally, in the ending of the play, with the mechanicals' production of Pyramus and Thisbe, Stephen Fender argues that 'this parody is a farcical reminder of the tragedy [the Dream] might have become'. Although some would view the mechanicals as simply a source of comic relief, Fender's opinion is supported by Shakespeare's use of duality and parallels. For instance, when Helena encounters Lysander in the woods, she asks a series of rhetorical questions: 'Dead? Or asleep?' Although, with the audience's prior knowledge that Lysander is indeed only sleeping, this line appears initially as melodramatic and morbid and even hyperbolic, the dramatic irony reaches us later when Thisbe parallels this line by asking Pyramus: 'Asleep, my love? What, dead, my dove?' when Pyramus is, in fact, dead. Although the cloying simplistic rhyme scheme is intended to indicate that this is a lower form of theatre than Shakespeare's own work, it is also reminder that comedy and tragedy are not entirely separate but closer to two halves of a whole and the lovers were ultimately lucky not to have met the same fate as Romeo and Juliet, Pyramus, Thisbe or any other 'star crossed lovers'. Therefore, Shakespeare uses symbolic parallelism to portray love as potentially dangerous.

Ultimately, Shakespeare considers the multifaceted nature of love, and the contradicting perspectives of it, through his rich variation of language, manipulation of setting and allusions to historical events, in order to explore the complexity of love in Elizabethan England.

Some candidates focused more on marriage than love. Theseus and Hippolyta's relationship was seen as problematic since he 'won' her with violent and phallic imagery. Women were thought to be stripped of consent and free will. Love was explored as a transaction in which woman were used as property passed between men.

I enjoyed marking this question because there was so much material for the candidates to think about. Often the argument was sound, but some candidates focused too narrowly on Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius and the court and did not examine the contrast or comparison with Oberon and Titania and the 'romance' between Titania and Bottom. There were some interesting comments about how Shakespeare was commenting on the role of women in marriages of the period.

Question 10

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The question asked about the play as a festive comedy.

There were very few responses to this question and, of these, even fewer considered the ‘festive’ part; some weaker answers tended simply to discuss ‘comedic’ moments in the play. However, more discriminating responses went on to consider Shakespeare’s dramatic purpose, which many argued was to ‘challenge the patriarchy’:

Shakespeare indeed presents 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' as a festive comedy. The relationship between Titania and Bottom, the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe in act 5 by the mechanicals, and the complicated love triangles between the four lovers all contribute to the idea of the play as a festive comedy. However it could be argued that Shakespeare in fact had a much greater objective whereby through his festive comedy he challenged and critiqued or reflected on the patriarchal values of the 16th century.

At the heart of the play, both metaphorically and structurally, is the glorious breach of hierarchy that is the relationship between Titania and Bottom. While highly comedic, with the queen of the fairies declaring ‘I love thee’ to a peasant with the head of an ass, this relationship could also be interpreted as an inversion of the hierarchy which prevailed in the 16th century. Titania is, and was, widely recognised as a representation of Elizabeth I. Oberon alludes to this idea when he refers to Titania as a ‘fair vessel’ which means ‘beautiful virgin’. Elizabeth I was known as the virgin queen and it is likely that Shakespeare was drawing parallels between Titania and Elizabeth I. Though Oberon attempts to humiliate Titania by making her fall for Bottom, it is he himself who is cuckolded and arguably humiliated. Perhaps Shakespeare, through his powerful and sexually liberal Queen Titania, was critiquing the misogynistic views of the late 16th century...

Here is a clear and relevant response that meets most Level 3 criteria across the assessment objectives and is beginning to show some discrimination. However, the response never quite fulfills the promise of its introduction to 'evaluate' Shakespeare's methods and there's quite a bit of feature-spotting rather than developed critical analysis. Nevertheless, there is lively engagement with the text and its contexts:

There is much speculation over the purpose for the writing of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', much of which concludes that it was written to be performed at a nobleman's wedding. As was tradition in Elizabethan England, comedies would be performed, such as we actually witness in 'Midsummer' as the ceremonial entertainment. 'Midsummer' is evidently a comedy; Shakespeare's wit, wordplay and subtextual ridicule are woven throughout the play, which critics have called his 'most lighthearted'. However, the comedy flourishes to only a certain extent, and, as is typical of the intricacies of Shakespeare's craft, underlying the comedic tropes are matters and themes which he raises and questions; matters of a more serious tone. The ways in which Shakespeare embeds these questions are meticulous and innovative, the specifics of which will here be evaluated.

From the very first scene Shakespeare establish is these contrasting themes of the festive comedy and the fairly tragic truth. '...I wooed thee with my sword... doing thee injuries'. Interlinked in this quote are certain subtle truths about the harsh reality of the marriage rights of women in the 16th century which are maintained throughout the play. The metaphoric symbol of Theseus' sword not only has sexual and phallic connotations, but an overwhelming imposition of them – a threat. The reminder of the forceful capture of Hippolyta, whom mythologically Theseus captured as queen of the Amazons, stirs up quite a sinister truth. G Wilson Knight writes 'The play definitely invokes a sense of terror. It is oftentimes dark and fearsome'. This interpretation certainly applies here. Hippolyta, who is about to be married, is menacingly reminded of her place; her lower position. Inasmuch as this is a negative tone to start what is famously known as a comedy in, its truth resonates with the menacing imposition of the patriarchy on Elizabethan women – an issue Shakespeare is artfully raising.

However, so as to maintain the overarching lighthearted tone, Shakespeare challenges these issues, embodied by the challenge of Hermia to her father and ultimately the Athenian law: H – 'I would rather my father looked but with my eyes'.

T: 'Rather, your eyes must with his judgement look'.

The playful nature of this challenge – in order to maintain the lighthearted tone – is reflected here in the language by this antimetabole. The direct and quick succession of this back-and-forth dialogue, almost in stichomythia, replicates quite a childish and playful tone. The reduction of Theseus to this childish character, emphasised by his importune to wed Hippolyta, creates comedy.

The notion of the playful comedic overlaying more sinister and relevant Elizabethan issues is one consistently repeated throughout the play. The lovers in particular serve as the romantic heroes of the comedy, and their eventual marriage is as much a success for them as it is for the audience. There is intense passion and excitement in the dialogue between Hermia and Lysander: H – 'O cross! L – 'Or else…' H – 'O spite!…L – 'Or else…' The pace of the dialogue created here by the stichomythia – Shakespeare clearly drawing on his classical inspiration, such as the work of Ovid in his 'Metamorphosis – illustrates the passion between the lovers and the excitement of their 'forbidden fruit'. Nonetheless the obstacle which they face was indeed very real in the 1500s, as arranged marriages were commonplace and always organised by the fathers. One is thus forced to think: had this been performed at a wedding, was that marriage arranged? The answer we won't know, but the sentiment Shakespeare certainly evokes which subtly draws away from its appearance of a festive comedy.

The comedic centre of the play is certainly the meta-theatrical play-within-a-play of Pyramus and Thisbe performed by the mechanicals. The ridiculousness of their personae is such that even in modern audiences their presence alone on stage excites laughter.

'Snout: Will not the ladies be afeared of the lion?'

The ridiculousness of this comment, which proceeds to be picked up and augmented by the other mechanicals is entirely comedic. Exaggerated by the malapropism of 'afeard', the comedic relief which the mechanicals provide is essential not only as a staplemark of Grecian comedy from which Shakespeare has taken inspiration (nodded to with the setting of Athens) but also to create a parallel with the ridiculousness of the lovers mishaps and mayhem they encounter in the wood. Cedric Watts writes 'The misunderstandings of the mechanicals mirror the mistakes and misunderstanding which takes place in the action of the fugitive lovers.' In concordance with Watts, Shakespeare has blended the intense ridiculousness of the mechanicals with the chaos of the lovers; essentially blending two of the three families of the dramatic personae. Not only does this blur the lines of class distinction but reduces and mocks the complexities of the lovers' situation. 'The course of true love never did run smooth.' The sentiment reflects this complexity, and is something which even modern audiences can resonate with and laugh at.

In contrast to the humour created from the degradation of the more noble characters, the raised status of Bottom from mechanical to 'gentleman', and the transformation of his head to an ass' and his language and his language contrasting from lower to higher register, cultivates yet another peak of comedy in the play. The succession of 'Hail!' from the fairy retinue to this lowly Bottom produces a clash of class and appearance. At this point Bottom has the head of an asked but in B is being worshipped by the fairies. This is in essence a juxtaposition of character, the ridiculousness of which creates humour. The language of Bottom also shifts in the manner of accommodation theory, whereby his language has been adjusted and raised to a higher register to appear in sociolect of a higher status. This contrasts with his previous language which, when talking to the mechanicals, is simplistic informal and full of malapropisms. Shakespeare has skilfully dressed a working-class character played by amateur actors in the original performances, in the tropes of a high class 'gentleman'. This composition of character is ridiculous and humorous; quintessential of festive comedy.

In conclusion, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is a delicately constructed comedy from Shakespeare. The comedic tropes which he creates, manipulates and maintains have been, and still are, fit to receive laughter and standing ovation from audiences. Nonetheless Shakespeare is known to be an innovator, a craftsman; having climbed his way from a merchant's son to frequent the houses and dinner tables of royals, his political awareness is significant. Underlying slapstick humour of the comedy are indeed hints and whispers of his issues and questions surrounding the themes of love, marriage and class in the play and as a reflection of those aspects of Elizabethan England. Shakespeare is genius, so if it is not farfetched to conclude that simultaneously he is able, as shown in 'Midsummer', to make audiences both laugh and question the fabric of the society around them.

Question 11

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The question asked about the use of contrast in the play.

This was, by some margin, the more popular question on *Measure for Measure* and it appeared to be accessible for a range of candidates. Most were able to make well supported explorations of the contrasts between Angelo and The Duke, Isabella and Mistress Overdone, and Angelo and Isabella. Many were able to link this effectively to the rule of James I and to note Shakespeare's appeal for more moderate, less extreme religious views.

In 'Measure for Measure' Shakespeare uses the contrasting religious extremes in order to critique possessing extreme religious views. In the play Shakespeare uses the 'virtuous maid', Isabella, and the 'severe' Angelo who lie at contrasting ends of extreme Christian belief – Catholicism and Puritanism – which Maus argues leads to both characters being in strict sexual self-denial which 'warps their perception of morality'. Initially in Act 2 scene 2 Shakespeare presents the contrasting extremist views as being somewhat similar through the frequent use of shared lines and shared rhyming couplets, 'like man new made' and 'be content fair maid'…

Some responses explored *Measure for Measure* as a 'problem play' while others used alternative readings to develop their arguments:

Moreover, Shakespeare explores contrast through a drastic gender imbalance throughout the play utilising the character of Isabella to demonstrate the silencing of women and challenge the institute of absolute male domination within Jacobean society. Indeed critic, Marcia Riefer, comments on this stating, 'The gradual loss of Isabella's voice throughout the play suggests that 'Measure for Measure' is Isabella's tragedy'. This is evident through the contrast of Isabella's independent, morally righteous character at the start of the play and the silent submission she is forced to at the end…

The best responses did not lose sight of either the text or of the writer's intent, consistently grounding their arguments in the play itself and paying attention to Shakespeare's dramatic craft:

'Measure for Measure' is full of contrasts – both metaphorical and physical – that are employed by Shakespeare in order to explore the nature of humanity and leadership. The high status of Angelo, contrasted with his corruption, as well as contrasts made between forms of sexual expression, allow Shakespeare to comment on, and channel, the feelings and experiences of the public of Shakespeare's time.

Angelo is a character intended to uphold justice and order in Vienna, which in many ways can be argued to mirror Shakespeare's London. Shakespeare makes use of contrast between his kingly portrayal of Angelo in comparison to his actions and vices throughout the play. Escalus suggests there is no one else of 'such grace and honour' as Lord Angelo, suggesting that he is a man capable of upholding integrity and law in Vienna. Equally the Duke's description of Angelo as a man 'of structure and firm abstinence' creates a stark contrast with his true intentions.

The motif of dress throughout the play is particularly important in Shakespeare's use of this contrast allowing him to expose Angelo as a fraudulent individual through comparison. Angelo is 'dressed with our love' which initially is indicative of his power, but equally his 'lov of justice and morality. However, the idea of dressing employs a new meaning when Isabella suggests he is a 'proud man dressed in a little brief authority'. The idea of dressing almost suggests a 'costume' – the idea that Angelo's costume of authority wields power but is easily removed. Shakespeare builds upon this further in the line 'Angelo in all his characts, dressings and titles' in which these indicators and costumes of power allow Angelo to reject morality. The contrast between Shakespeare's depictions of Angelo perhaps, then, emphasise the contrasts between his character – both his 'grace and honour' but also his 'brief authority' which are then used by Shakespeare to expose the discrepancies that exist within the justice system…

A wide range of approaches were seen and enjoyed: male vs female characters (Lucio and Isabella), contrasting models of authority (Angelo and the Duke), outward presentation vs inner selves, and how characters contrasted between the opening and ending of the play. There was the sense that some candidates were trying to do too much, e.g. write three 'mini-essays' about the Duke, justice vs mercy, and comedy vs tragedy, without developing these to their full potential. The political context of Measure for Measure is always fascinating to discuss: an odd error crept in this year with some candidates being convinced that James VI and I was himself a Puritan. Several candidates expounded the theory below:

Shakespeare makes use of contrast within his play 'Measure for Measure' as a way to communicate his message and social comment that within society there must be balanced to prevent it from corrupting. Within Shakespeare's 'problem play' (as named by John Rowe) it is highlighted that within the society of Vienna, modelled on the 17th century England, there is a sexual imbalance, a power imbalance and a gender imbalance which is corrupting Vienna from the inside. Shakespeare uses contrast through both characters and ideology to push his message for the need for balance.

Here is an example of a strong response. It possibly tries to explore a few too many ideas, but its strength lies in its breadth of reference to the play throughout and its consistent focus on the question:

‘Measure for Measure’ is fundamentally a play about balance. The title of the play itself is taken from the Bible and represents the notion of just leadership. However, being Shakespeare's ‘problem play’ according to Bates, ‘Measure for Measure’ importantly ends in unfulfilled justice, completely undermining the title. Instead, the play revolves around the contrasts between leadership which is too weak and lenient, exhibited by the Duke, and leadership which is overly harsh and merciless, as demonstrated by Angelo. The ending of the play reveals metatheatrical contrasts as well, such as those between a comedy and a tragedy – ‘Measure for Measure’ blurs the line between the genres – it is labelled as ‘impossible to define’ by Johnson Reeves and is a notable contrast to a typical Shakespearean comedic ending, despite it being defined as a comedy by the 1623 ‘Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies’.

At first glance Shakespeare illustrates the Duke as a moral leader of Vienna, instructing Angelo to rule in a way so that ‘mortality and mercy live in thy [his] tongue and heart’. The Duke is highlighting the importance of ruling with mortality, perhaps representing the justice of capital punishment but with the necessary juxtaposition of mercy ensuring a balanced form of leadership. The imagery of ‘thy tongue and heart’ is perhaps part of the recurring theme of body politic throughout the play, also seen when the Duke talks about ‘passing over the organs of our own power’ but the Duke could also be reminding Angelo of his own mortality and warning him against becoming a ‘demi-god’ as Claudio later sardonically calls him.

However, this seemingly just nature of the Duke is immediately contrasted with the descriptions of the Duke’s own reign. He admits that he has let the laws in Vienna ‘slip’ like an ‘o’er grown lion in a cave’, Schmidt claiming that ‘o’ergrown’ means too old rather than too fat, as other critics have argued. Accepting Schmidt's statement, it is evident that the Duke has let the law grow old and decrepit under his rule, which is by no means how he instructed Angelo to rule. The contrast between his words and actions renders him a hypocrite. Brian Gibbons mocks the Duke’s leadership saying that Vienna is like the Jacobean theatre business, ‘it produces nothing’. The mediaeval fable of the overgrown lion also serves to highlight the Duke’s ineptitude as a ruler. It depicts a lion who has grown too lazy to go out and catch prey and instead invites the animals inside his house before eating them. Another indication of the Duke's overly lenient attitude towards the law is conveyed when he describes that ‘Liberty plucks Justice by the nose’ in Vienna, expressing debauchery through the comically violent image of ‘plucking by the nose’. It is depicted here that liberty does not go hand in hand with justice, as pointed out by Claudio who says that he only allowed himself to commit his crime because of ‘too much liberty’. Therefore, the Duke’s rule as leader is presented as inadequate and too lenient, which is starkly contrasted when Angelo takes power.

Angelo is presented as the polar opposite to the Duke in the way he rules, being harsh and unfair in the punishments he distributes. 'Measure for Measure's chief source was Cinthio's 'Hecatommithi' which told of a corrupt magistrate and an infamous bargain. Shakespeare's inspiration for Angelo evidently arose from here. He forces Isabella into an uncomfortable decision between laying down the 'treasures of her body' and letting Claudio suffer. By coercing Isabella into making such a horrible choice, which goes against her moral and religious judgement, Angelo is presented as a perhaps evil ruler. Yet it can be argued that Isabella is the one who has made Angelo so harsh and corrupt; his apparent obsession with the 'treasures' of her body, suggesting that the only value women in mediaeval society choice to Isabella because of his lust for her. Indeed, Stead referred to Angelo as being 'corrupted by virtue'. Moreover, Lucio describes Angelo's blood as being 'very snow broth', the imagery conveying how Angela has become so cold under his position of power that his human emotions have been all but destroyed, explaining his harshness as a ruler. The mediaeval belief in the four humours was widely held in mediaeval society, where if they were imbalanced a human is seen as ill; through Lucio's focus on the nature of Angelo's 'blood', he could be declaring Angelo as unfit to rule. Angelo's coldness acts as a direct contrast to the Duke's leniency and perhaps over generosity, emphasising the two polemical ends of bad leadership. Another instance of Angelo's cold heartedness occurs in his talk about Juliet with the Provost. He tells the priest to 'Dispose of her to some more fitter place'. This blunt order to have Juliet 'disposed of' clearly dehumanises her, comparing her to not only an object, but an unwanted one at that. The line break suggests his realisation that he can't simply kill Juliet as he needs to uphold his facade of moral leadership, perhaps implying how Angelo is not completely heartless or, contrastingly, depicting him as all the more corrupt because of his determination to conceal his evil. In any case, the contrast between the harshness of Angelo and the softness of the Duke is exemplified.

The final act of the play is important in revealing the contrasts between justice and injustice, but also the contrast in nature of 'Measure for Measure' compared to Shakespeare's other comedies. The Duke, even though he is supposedly delivering justice to Isabella, says 'Away with her. Poor soul. She speaks in the infirmity of sense'. 'Infirmity of sense' referring to an unstable state, with a play on the word 'sense' meaning 'strong feeling'. The Duke is effectively silencing Isabella and removing her autonomy. Effectively committing – 'in a legitimate and honourable way – the crime which Angelo attempted in vain' according to Maus. The Duke is willing to sacrifice anybody in pursuit of his self-perceived notion of justice, mirroring the affiliates of Machiavelli who said that 'the ends justify the means' in his 1513 book 'The Prince'. The contrast between the Duke's idea of justice and the justice for other characters, such as Isabella, is made apparent here, as well as questionably condoning Angelo by sparing him. This effectively kills Isabella's dignity and voice. Finally, he makes Lucio marry a 'whore' and in response Lucia says that 'marrying a punk' is 'present to death, whipping and hanging'. In a traditional Shakespearean comedy marriage is depicted as the 'happy ending' however Lucia claims that he would rather die than 'marry a punk' firmly emphasised by his emphatic tricolon of torture: death, whipping and hanging. The contrast between 'Measure for Measure' and Shakespeare's other comedies is exemplified here, likening it more to a tragedy which typically ends in death. Marriage is equated to death in Lucio's outburst.

Overall 'Measure for Measure' is completely based on a contrast; a contrast in leadership between the Duke and Angelo, highlighting to a contemporary audience the importance of good leadership. Moreover, the play itself is a contrast to other plays of its type with Emma Smith saying that 'it looks like a duck but doesn't quack like one' referring to the tragic nature of the comedy. The play is essentially an impossibility, having a far from satisfying resolution which would have in deeply unsettling unnerving for the audience at the time who were undoubtedly used to the 'green world' of other Shakespeare comedies.

Candidates generally made good use of the Critical Anthology to support their own interpretations of the texts. However, as noted in the general comments on Section A, there was a tendency to overuse critics, citing them and moving on without exploration. Unfortunately, this was sometimes an active hindrance rather than help, if this was at the expense of the candidate's own argument.

A few candidates explored the contrast between comedy and tragedy by considering perhaps the text's earliest literary critics, the compilers of the First Folio who assigned the play the genre of comedy: a pleasing inclusion in this 400th anniversary year.

Question 12

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The question asked about the presentation of time in the play.

There were only a handful of responses to this question. Candidates appeared to struggle with the concept, and examiners were asked to accept a broad variety of interpretations of 'time'.

Here is an extract from a clear, but under-developed response which was awarded a Level 3 mark:

… Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure', being a comedy, 'deals with the dangerous present' as Maslin argues. As such, Shakespeare topically explores a time of succession in order to flatter James I. Shakespeare's Vienna parallels Jacobean England where there had been much public concern surrounding the succession crisis when James I assumed the throne after Queen Elizabeth's death. The Duke is much like the English king who similarly did 'not like to stage [himself] to their eyes'. Moreover, the Duke, who Knight argues is 'God-like' in his ethical attitude and also in his costume of a friar's holy robes, echoes King James' views that kings are 'justly' compared to gods as expressed in his Basildon Doran. Plausibly, then, Shakespeare was indeed 'highly attentive to his company chaperone's tastes' as Emma Smith argues. Whilst the Duke is not seen assuming the throne, he 'lent (Angelo) our terror, dressed him with our love/ And gives his deputation all the organs of our own power.' Clearly then, in a time of anxious succession the Duke 'never truly lets go of the reins' and the public anxiety is unfounded, as Hampton Reeves persuades. This may suggest that the anxieties surrounding King James were similarly unfounded because, like the Duke, he was a God-like figure in control. The balanced sentence structure in the Duke's lines above suggests a controlled and considered approach. The opposites of emphatically positioned 'love' and 'terror' situated before the caesura of a comma and the end of a line also suggests a balanced approach towards 'power' – another emphatically positioned word at the end of a sentence before the full stop's caesura. The concept of costume introduced in the verb 'dressed' evokes the idea that the role itself is not really as important as the way in which you govern – which should be in 'love' and 'terror'. This is also presented through Angelo and the continued dressing motif. Angelo is, Isabella claims, 'but man, proud man/Dressed in a little brief authority'. The repetitive 'man' highlights his humanity and is levelling. This suggests that Angelo is not inherently powerful or deserving of the throne, rather he is a man playing pretend, merely 'dressed' in the disguise of power. Furthermore, the Duke remains deserving of the throne even when Angelo is governing. This relates to the Jacobean concept of the 'Great Chain of Being' according to which the king was the holiest man and God ordained. Consequently, Angelo, who is just a man may never supersede the Duke even when he assumes his role. In relation to Jacobean England, Shakespeare may suggest that James I is the rightful heir and is God-ordained. Clearly then, Shakespeare presents a time of succession in order to flatter King James…

Question 13

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

The question asked about the impact of the wooing scene (II, i).

Here is an example of a response that was awarded a Level 4 mark. It is clearly expressed and shows a discriminating grasp of the play's contexts, but the question wanted candidates to focus on the scene and, while there is some consideration of staging, there is not enough consistent and detailed analysis of the writer's craft for the response to be worthy of a higher level. We would also expect more development of the critical ideas cited, with closer reference to the text, for top level marks:

In 'The Taming of the Shrew', Shakespeare uses commedia dell'arte stock characters to enforce the performative nature of courtship and wooing in the Elizabethan era. Commedia dell'arte became popular in Europe during the mid 16th century. It can be said that these tropes are heavily explored in 'Shrew' due to the play's setting in Padua and Verona, Italy. The wooing scene, Act 2 Scene 1 is a key scene in Shakespeare's comedy as it explores the attitudes to courtship and wooing and highlights its performative nature through the style of commedia dell'arte.

The mercenary, harsh nature of Elizabethan courtship is emphasised through the interaction between Petruchio and Baptista as they discuss Petruchio's marriage to daughter Katherina. Petruchio's intense focus on money and his own personal gain from his marriage is evident through his early question of, 'What dowry shall I have with her to wife?' Through this blunt question Shakespeare establishes the mercenary approach to marriage that was common in the Elizabethan era. It is also very important to note that Katherina is not on stage at this point. This emphasises the detached and isolated role she plays in her own possible marriage. This is a decision made by the men of the play, emphasising the strict patriarchal order that was present in the Elizabethan era. Despite England having a female monarch at the time – Elizabeth I – the society she ruled was still heavily instilled with strict and harsh patriarchal values. The clear idea that women were of lesser value to men was felt strongly, in particular by John Knox who, in 1559, wrote his disapproval of a female monarch in 'The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women'. Through this interaction between Petruchio and Baptista the unequal state of the patriarchal society is clearly presented by Shakespeare.

However, the power balance on stage shifts when Katherina enters and 'the battle of words' as critic Karen Newman described it, commences between Petruchio and Kate. Through the stichomythic exchanges between the two, a sense of equality and power balance is illustrated. Through the exchange 'asses are made to bear and so are you/women are made to bear and so are you', Shakespeare presents an alternative attempt at wooing and courtship not yet explored. Through similar language choices, Shakespeare portrays Petruchio and Katherina as similar people who bounce off of each other and have clear chemistry. Some could argue Petruchio was being presented as the 'capitano' of commedia dell'arte, the machismo alpha male, who can control the action on stage, and that can be said for his interaction with Baptista, however the clear connection displayed in this display of wooing and courtship lends itself to the comedic stock trope of the cavalier, the more successful wooer of women. The performative nature of their exchange can be read clearly too. Through the bawdy and sexual innuendo-filled back and forth, a physical gag is then introduced between the two characters. In commedia dell'arte these were known as lazzis which contributed to the comic performative nature of the performance. Lisa Hopkins argues that Shakespeare's comedies 'bear clear marks of being written expressly for performance'. The stichomythic, bawdy exchange between Petruchio and Katherina emphasises this clearly as Shakespeare is using them to emphasise the ridiculous and performative nature of Elizabethan wooing and courtship. Through the continuation of animal imagery throughout that exchange with mentions of 'wasps' 'buzzards' and 'asses' the comic nature of the interaction is further emphasised.

Shakespeare makes clear the idea that wooing leads to marriage, in what critic Hopkins described as 'the most basic props of social and patriarchal order'. In the final section of the wooing scene, Tranio and Gremio are seen bidding against each other for Bianca's hand in marriage. In this section the commedia dell'arte trope of the young usurping the old is accentuated. Here Gremio argues 'Youngling, thou cant not love so dear as I', to which Tranio replies, 'Greybeard, thy love doth freeze'. The clear concept that it is the young versus the old in this situation is clear through the verbal insults 'youngling' and 'greybeard'. Here Tranio attacks Gremio through his comedic stock character of the pantaloon or' il vecchi'. He is the loveless old man lusting after younger girls. Despite this being an unsettling idea to a modern audience, this works as a comic device for a contemporary Shakespearean audience. Shakespeare uses the stock character the pantaloon to further emphasise the comic nature of wooing and courtship and how that ridiculous performance eventually led to marriage. By the end of Act 2 Scene 1, Tranio rejoices that 'the maid is mine from all the world. By your firm promise; Gremio is out-vied'. This portrays the idea that wooing and courtship is a game to be won and having a woman as its prize at the centre. This conveys the ever present concept of patriarchal dominance and control and how, in the words of Karen Newman, 'women will be exploited for their use value as products'.

In conclusion, Shakespeare emphasises the comedic, performative of nature of wooing and courtship in the Elizabethan era through his crafting of the wooing scene, Act 2 scene 1. Whilst also heavily critiquing the strict patriarchal values that were instilled into society that, it can be argued, are still relevant today through the use of commedia dell'arte tropes, Shakespeare crafts caricatured characters that enhance the performative of nature of love at the time.

Question 14

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

The question asked about the presentation of inequality in the play.

This was by far the more popular question and, perhaps unsurprisingly, candidates focussed mainly on gender inequality, writing about women being seen as property or commodities in a patriarchal society. The way women were viewed by society and their expected roles and codes of behaviour were commented on and it was noted that women were branded as 'shrews' if they did not conform to social norms and conventions.

Here is an extract from a high-level response. There's a convincing, driving argument; confident engagement with contexts and, importantly, a strong focus on Shakespeare's dramatic intent:

... One form of inequality which 'The Taming of the Shrew' directly addresses is the differing power status between men and women. Primarily through the physical, abusive, controlling dynamic between Petruchio and Katherine, Shakespeare effectively conveys the hegemonic status of men and the subordinate unequal position of women in Elizabethan society. Petruchio takes it upon himself to transform Kate from a 'wild Kate' to a 'comfortable' 'household' Kate. The use of zoomorphism (which extends throughout the play) by which Kate is labelled 'wild' and in need of being domesticated reflects traditional 16th century patriarchal attitudes towards women. The theme of a 'wild shrew' was prevalent in the 16th century male-dominated literature landscape, as well as in the Commedia del'arte. Petruchio's desire to tame Kate and transform her conforms with Miller's modern interpretation of 'The Taming of the Shrew' in which Kate was a psychologically disturbed child in need of taming.

This concept of outspoken women being psychologically disturbed was commonplace in Elizabethan society and through Petruchio's hegemonic control over the play (he has twice as many lines as any other character) he serves to represent all men in suppressing 'wild', 'froward' women. Similarly. in the Induction, Sly denounces women by belittling their impact in society as being 'the maid of the house'. Once again Shakespeare conforms to what a 16th century audience would expect. The impact of Sly's patriarchal remark, however, is heightened in comparison to Petruchio due to his lowly status as a 'drunken man' and a 'beggar', If a man at the bottom of the hierarchy can subjugate women in such a patriarchal tone, it indicates to the audience the extent of inferiority and inequality women endured. Moreover in 'The Taming of the Shrew' Shakespeare reflects women's inequality through the dehumanisation they endure. Across the play the motif of women as a financial asset indicates their unequal position in society where they simply serve as a foil to ensure financial security. For example, when Petruchio considers courting Kate 'to be my wife' he enquires 'What dowry shall I have?' The curiosity reflected through the question indicates the appeal of marrying a rich daughter in the hope of securing her father's wealth. In comparison to Lucentio who courts Bianca through romantic wooing, calling Bianca 'the mistress of my heart' Petruchio (reflecting the interests of 16 century men) has greater concern regarding the economic benefits of marrying Kate. Similarly Hortensio warns Petruchio that he 'would not wed her (Kate) for a mine of gold'. This reaffirms the inequality Shakespeare hopes to depict in 'The Taming of the Shrew' in which a woman's value is simply deemed by the financial rewards she entails. Further on in the play, Petruchio (conforming to the traditional Commedia dell'arte character of a Cavaliere and Capitano) quotes the ten commandments to describe Kate's worth: 'my goods, my chattels, my property … my anything'. By quoting the ten commandments Shakespeare highlights how gender inequality is deeply rooted into 16th century social structures, like religion. but also men's godly power over women. In addition, the language of the bargain, 'goods'; 'chattels'; 'property' once again illustrates how women were simply financial assets. This god-like authority Petruchio was able to have over Kate, and men over women, is further demonstrated in his ability to seemingly control nature. During the height of the taming process Petruchio attempts to psychologically manipulate Kate, stating now 'it be moon or star, whatever I command'. This ludicrous suggestion that Petruchio can control nature seems foolish and a comedic tool to induce laughter, however its underlying connotation that Petruchio has ultimate power over Kate, resembling that of God, emphasise how unequal 16th century society truly was. This is heightened in Hall's production of 'The Taming of the Shrew' within which he emphasises the physical brutality of the domestic violence between Petruchio and Kate, to epitomise the control he was able to exert over her, and, significantly, the inequality between men and women…

Other successful responses broadened their scope to consider Shakespeare's presentation of inequalities in social class:

... Shakespeare uses the idea of the fluidity and social construction of class identity through clothing in order to present class inequalities as unjustifiable. Within the play's induction, the wealthy Lord decides to trick the tinker Sly into believing he too is a Lord, through Sly being 'wrapped in sweet clothes' with 'rings put upon his fingers'. The Lord implying that Sly merely wearing sweet clothes with rings on his fingers will convince him of being a Lord shows the importance of clothing in the perception of social class and suggests Shakespeare believes that class identity is malleable and not as fixed as thought by many Elizabethans. The concept of clothing indicating identity is emphasised by Sly himself, who, in order to confirm his low class, describes how he has 'such shoes as my toes look through the over-leather' and so should not be called 'Honour' or 'Lordship' ...

The question allowed candidates to address explicitly the issue of gender inequality in a patriarchal society. The responses varied in terms of their subtlety and relevance but were representative of a wider focus on the same issue that recurred in many of the responses to other questions. Gender inequality proved to be a key topic when analysing the wider context of each play from the Elizabethan age to the more contemporary.

Question 15

TWELFTH NIGHT

The question asked about the presentation of shifting moods in the play.

Around half the candidates chose this question and clearly found it accessible. The most successful responses were able to link their ideas about the play's shifting moods to its genre context as a piece of festive comedy and to the social and historical contexts of twelfth night celebrations. Weaker responses tended simply to point out parts of the play where mood changes or describe characters where their mood changes. More successful approaches linked the idea of shifting moods to Shakespeare's dramatic purpose and were subtle and discriminating in their analysis of his characterization.

Here is an extract from a low Level 3 response. It is clear and shows some awareness of context, but it relies too much on describing characters and events in a fairly general way, missing the subtleties of Shakespeare's craft in its eagerness to talk about Malvolio's puritanism:

Shakespeare presents shifting moods throughout 'Twelfth Night' to create action and excitement at specifically crafted points in the play. For example, Malvolio's mood shifts after he is tricked into thinking Olivia loves him. Shakespeare does this to emphasise hypocrisy of Puritans as secretly Malvolio is overindulgent and materialistic. Viola's mood also shifts when she finds out Olivia has fallen in love with her, as she realises her disguise is the catalyst for chaos and allows Shakespeare to deploy the comedic convention of a love triangle to further heighten the chaos.

Shakespeare's use of comedy and satire in Act Two scene three when Sir Toby, Maria and Sir Andrew prank Malvolio with a love letter from Olivia, causes Malvolio's mood to shift from melancholy puritan to overindulgent, 'Sir Toby if you can separate yourself and your misdemeanours, you are welcome to the house'. In Act two scene 3 Malvolio is seen to dampen the mood as he tries to confine Sir Toby's merriment. Bevington states how Malvolio is 'an enemy of merriment' and therefore doesn't fit the type of theatre 'Twelfth Night' presents. This is evident in the scene because he is a puritan so it doesn't celebrate Twelfth Night. However, Shakespeare craftily decides to set him up to reveal the hypocrisy of puritanism ...

Here is a more nuanced and discriminating response which makes sophisticated use of contexts and critical ideas and which was awarded a Level 5 mark:

Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' continually acts in a transformative state, using traditional acts of Twelfth Night celebrations and fickle characters to enhance the shifting moods felt in the play. Laroque states that Shakespeare 'stood in defence of old holiday pastimes' and therefore it is perhaps the use of festivity, as well as romantic love, that creates emotional depth and changeability.

The gender transgressions as part of role reversal seen in the play act as a key trigger of emotional instability. Viola begins her disguise in an optimistic mindset, believing herself to 'time I will commit; Only shape thou thy silence to my wit'. This becomes a form of dramatic irony as she instantly feels emotional torment of 'a barful strife!', exclaiming and thus enhancing a shift in mood. Viola speaks in rhyming couplets in both scenes, perhaps suggesting an urgency of control and rationalisation, which is lost gradually over the course of the play. This is supported by Watt's idea that 'love resembles lethal lunacy' and therefore Viola's change of heart due to newfound passion can foreshadow a non-traditional and perhaps darker ending. The anticipation of unpredictability created here by Shakespeare shifts the mood of the play to an unnerving state, reflecting Shakespeare's own shift to his tragic comedies whereby humour and darkness synchronise.

Shifting moods are clearly observable in the tortured character of Malvolio. The Puritan-like servant experiences a great change in emotion constantly throughout the play, reinforcing him as an unstable character with no true place in Illyria. Because Malvolio is a 'hypocrite' as Bevington states, he sorely lacks consistency and reliability because 'he secretly longs for the pleasures of this world'. Malvolio shifts from criticising others for 'making an ale house of my lady's house' and is in turn told he is criticised of being no 'more than a steward' before revelling in his own dreams of 'my branched velvet gown' and 'seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for him' [Sir Toby]. Shifting moods are reflected here by a shift in language from critical language to luxurious imagery and desire. This exemplifies how Malvolio secretly longs for 'the authority to control others'[Bevington] and his own mood shifts from anger and spite to excitement. It is this changeability that encourages the idea that 'people could just as easily be their own opposites' as argued by Stern, and reveals the concept of reversal as a way of creating shift in moods.

Shakespeare's use of Feste and his songs is an effective tool to shift emotions from comic to poignant. Feste acts as an 'allowed fool', typical of Shakespeare's own time, but unusually disrupts his traditional role of entertainment using wit. He draws on dark concepts like 'many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage' and 'anything that's mended is but patched', which – using ambiguous and philosophical ideas – create depth and moments of reflection in an otherwise satirical play. Magnusson states that 'punning repartee is a mainstay' in the play, and it is possibly through Shakespeare's comic character of Feste that a perhaps relatively dark turn is alleviated using puns. However this changeability of darkness and comic may feel unsettling to audiences, enforcing the idea that 'comedy occurs when there is no way out', as suggested by Kerr. Shakespeare also creates mood shifts in Feste through the use of songs. Whilst songs typically are used to create joy, Feste's songs are often rather melancholy describing, 'inside cypress let me be laid' and 'not a friend greet my poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown'. Comparing a realistic fear and sadness that comes when thinking of death to the love triangle in the play creates a deep poignancy and shifts the play's mood from one of humour to one of sadness.

Shakespeare reflects shifting moods in Sebastian's development, exploring tender and vulnerable moments and ending his plot in an unsatisfactory way. Drawing on homoerotic tendencies of many men in Shakespeare's time, Shakespeare creates a deeper bond between Sebastian and Antonio to the point where Sebastian exclaims, 'how have the hours racked and tortured me since I have lost thee!'. Rhyming and exclamatory language reflects the passion and love felt by Sebastian for Antonio, which eventually led to Antonio being 'excluded from the heart of the community', as stated by Buchanan. Perhaps the exclusion is due to the lack of stability in their relationship, as highlighted by uncontrollable forces like the Lord of Misrule. Sebastian's abandonment of Antonio and marriage to Olivia after having 'having sworn truth' creates a shift in mood from romance to discomfort, due to such a shift swift change of affection. Changing affections exemplify, as Smith suggests, 'that it is gender identity, rather than romantic love, that is at the heart of the play'. Not only, therefore, does Sebastian experience mood shifts due to affection, but modern audiences may feel dissatisfied with an ending that is 'too easy', as 'Shakespeare habitually disrupts the tradition of marriage', argues Hopkins.

Furthermore, perhaps it is the play itself that shifts moods, rather than simply individual characters. Grindlay argues that 'Act 5 exposes Illyria as a world destabilised by darkness' and Stern suggests that 'Twelfth Night is about a world in reverse', so it may be the totality of the play that is always shifting. Shakespeare's shift into his 'tragi-comedies' meant that 'Twelfth Night' is not a one-dimensional play; it tackles tragic themes and alleviates them using comic language and characters. Such mutability reveals 'Twelfth Night' to be a play of constant emotional change for both characters and audiences and, as Watts suggests, 'exhibits its shimmeringly opaline variations'.

Orsino's melancholy appeared as physical pain through his use of 'O'. His shift in mood at the end of the play was seen to suggest little time to waste on grievances of rejection when the chance of love is presented. Olivia's shift from grieving for her brother to infatuation with Cesario was mentioned in a similar way. Also considered was the shift from melancholy to joy with sudden resolution of all confusion and neat tying up of couples through marriages at the end of the play.

Question 16

TWELFTH NIGHT

The question asked about the use of clothing and costume in the play.

Many responses focussed on the role of clothing in relation to the victimisation of Malvolio in the play as a form of mocking Puritanism (as part of the ongoing battle between various emblems and representatives of Carnival and Lent). More developed responses also discussed the importance of clothing and costume in relation to gender, sexuality, and cross-dressing through the character of Viola and linked ideas about clothing and disguise to the genre features of festive comedy.

Here is a confident and convincing response that scored highly across all the assessment objectives:

In Shakespeare's epiphany play 'Twelfth Night' (1603) he uses clothing and costume in order to demonstrate the changeability of identity in a way that was almost revolutionary for his time. Using the freedom allowed by the Twelfth Night festivities, a time of misrule, mistaken identity and revelry, he uses costume to explore gender and its subversion; to show the rigidity of the class system and to reflect the motto of the Epiphany festival – a time where disorder was not only permitted but promoted.

Firstly, and most notably perhaps, Shakespeare makes use of costume in order to allow his strong-minded heroine Viola to transgress societal rules of gender and therefore enjoy freedom that in an Elizabethan society only a man could typically enjoy. This begins as she arrives in Illyria, asking the captain to, 'Conceal me what I am' and to 'present me as a eunuch'. In doing this removing her 'woman's weeds' rebuking her female identity and effectively changing her gender, Shakespeare presents Viola as this 'strong minded heroine' Leggat suggests, as she is independent, intelligent and resourceful. This transition created by her clothing change perhaps could reflect Viola's attempt to escape patriarchal structures, perhaps signalling in the play a movement into Frye's 'green world' – a place of liberty and unlimited social expectations. However, on the other hand, this need to disguise with clothing and to change her outward character could suggest the opposite: that in Illyria women cannot survive independently and as themselves, explaining why she must hide her femininity and become a eunuch. This disguise that Viola takes on somewhat reflects Mary Frith, a contemporary of Shakespeare who, like Viola, wore manly attire and smoked a pipe in order to escape the fate she would face as a conventional Elizabethan woman, passive and limited. Therefore Shakespeare could be using this disguise in order to demonstrate the extent to which women did not have freedom, critiquing the sexual double standard. However, as the Twelfth Night festivity is a time where disorder is permitted within the 'controlled misrule' (Bahktin) Shakespeare could allude to the fact that only under this constraint is this behaviour acceptable. However, in reality. a man/woman like Cesario is seen as 'an infection which much resembles the plague' ('Hic Mulier'). Thus Shakespeare uses Viola's disguise as she dresses as a eunuch in order to show that 'there is no stable normality where gender is concerned'(Langley) particularly under the lens of the Epiphany, whilst also to critique attitudes to gender which regard it as a fixed and unchangeable concept, damaging women.

Moreover, Shakespeare uses Cesario's clothing at the end of the play to undercut the conventional ending and posed to his audience the question of whether homosexual or heterosexual love is more genuine. This notion is alluded to as Orsino ends the play saying, 'Cesario, come – for you shall be while you are a man. But when in other habits you are seen, Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen'. As Orsino highlights the fact that Viola remains wearing her male attire to the end of the play, he suggests that identity is formed not by the person but by their outwards appearance created by their clothing. In doing this not only does Shakespeare highlight the changeability of gender, but he also alludes to Orsino's somewhat homoerotic tendencies. This notion is also demonstrated as Orsino's references to Viola's male identity could 'represent a desire to retain a relationship with his male servant' (Shapiro). Contextually, performances were always done by an all-male cast, Cesario/Viola's maleness was likely to have been evident, as would be the importance of clothing in reflecting one's identity. This is because with each layer of clothing that Viola's young male actor wears, his identity changes from male to female and then male again. Thus the audience would be likely to be aware of the fluidity of gender in the Epiphany play. However, this unconventional message of gender fluidity is to an extent undercut as the play ends with Viola essentially being struck dumb, as she stands passively being told 'but in others habits you are seen' she will be 'Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen'. Not only does this contrast her vocality throughout the comedy – her asides and her movement around Illyria, from Olivia's house in to the Duke's palace – but also places her as Orsinao's possession, commodifying her. The use of verse and rhyming couplets perhaps foreshadows the concordant bliss that awaits them and how, even if she does 'dwindle into a wife' (Leggett) she may enjoy a happy marriage. Therefore, in using this clothing Shakespeare poses some ambiguity around the question of Viola, her gender and how her marriage with Orsino will be pleasant or repressive compared to her life as a man-woman.

Thirdly, Shakespeare uses Feste and his costumes in order to reflect his desire to enter the upper classes and thus he demonstrates the unmovable nature of Elizabethan hierarchy. Maria, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew could perhaps all reflect the Lord of Misrule – a figure in the Epiphany which promoted disorder – as they 'drop obscure epistles' of love to Malvolio the steward and make him 'a trout that must be caught with tickling'. The use of the metaphor already ridicules Malvolio even before he attempts to transgress boundaries, animalising him. Thus, when the letter leads him to imagine wearing 'a branched velvet gown' and playing with 'some rich jewel' he is already posed as foolish, which is only heightened through the contrast with his role as steward. The use of bawdy humour as he plays with 'some rich jewel' demonstrates the lack of his morals. This is because as a puritan one had to be celibate and it is clear that it would not take much from Malvolio – 'a kind of puritan' – to abandon these morals and attempt to transgress the hierarchy. The use of the box tree, in which Fabian, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, hide allows Shakespeare to use schadenfreude as the audience joins the revellers in ridiculing Malvolio's ridiculous dreams. This ridicule is only heightened later as he puts on yellow stockings cross-gartered, which present him as entirely hypocritical. Bevington states that 'Malvolio's sober sided performance of duty would be acceptable were it not for the fact that Malvolio is a hypocrite', highlighting the reason for Shakespeare's use of schadenfreude. Yellow stockings demonstrate this as being symbolic of illicit sexuality, but also impotence and carnivalesque attire. Malvolio contradicts all the morals he previously seemed to hold, therefore through the use of Malvolio's clothing Shakespeare critiques puritan hypocrisy and manages to evoke schadenfreude (laughing at the misfortunes of others) as Malvolio is presented as mad and even possessed. Additionally, he uses Malvolio's clothing to highlight how, despite the controlled misrule and the freedom this temporarily allows, a puritan will be able unable to transgress the social hierarchy and they will remain miserable.

In conclusion Shakespeare uses clothing and costume in 'Twelfth Night' as part of the festive comedy in order to evoke many elements of festivity, be it a gender subversion or the subversion of class, whether it is successful or not. However, despite these transgressions from the norm which the use of costume allows, ultimately order must be reinforced and as Frye states, 'the structure must be forward to the logical end and be it if the audience is happy with it or not'.

While lower-level responses focussed primarily on Viola and Malvolio and tended to make some sweeping generalisations about 'gender transgression' and 'puritanism', others took a more discriminating and thoughtful approach, particularly in their use of contextual and critical sources. Here is an extract from one such:

In 'Twelfth Night' Shakespeare makes use of clothing and costume in a radical manner that is subversive of gender norms and heteronormative standards, as well as in a manner that exposes the cruelty of deception and disguise. Shakespeare could also be alluding to the performative nature of gender through the ease that Viola adopts the identity of Cesario. Simply by donning male clothing she is able to craft a highly effective identity to allow her to achieve her aims. CL Barber remarks that the play is 'infused with the festive spirit' which is a claim particularly intertwined with the costume choices, as the dressing of a woman as a man and of an orderly man, such as Malvolio, dressed in ludicrous clothing are both ordeals that indicate a turn to the notion of topsy-turvydom that encapsulates the play.

Shakespeare makes use of clothing and costume in 'Twelfth Night' to enhance the festive atmosphere of the play and heighten the sense of festivity that runs throughout. The title of the play alludes to the 'Twelfth Night' festival that occurs on the twelfth night of Christmas, also referred to as Epiphany. Within this festival, it is customary to allow a total subversion of social conventions and encourage raucous, a Lord of Misrule being appointed. The values of this festival are echoed throughout the play, but are particularly evident in the character of Cesario, who is Viola in disguise, CL Barber regards this disguise as a 'festive costume', which one could agree with in the sense that it adheres to the subversion of social norms associated with the 'Twelfth Night' festival. However, one could call into question if this is a total subversion as elements of Viola appeared to 'peek through her disguise' as stated by Orsino who observes her lips describing them as 'smooth and rubious' and her voice as 'shrill and sound'. 'Rubious' suggests a warmth of colour indicative of womanhood and 'shrill implies a pitch of voice that Violet cannot change, therefore rendering her disguise as not totally effective and consequently perhaps not the festive costume that Barber regards it to be.

However, 'costume' implies impermanence, so costumes are eventually to be removed and this works in line with the notion that her costume exists to heighten festivity in a manner akin to the festival which is also a temporary occasion. Once your costume is removed and the festival is over, it becomes Plough Monday – a day of return to social conventions and hierarchies. This is contrasted by Shakespeare in the delayed nature of the ending wherein Viola cannot return to her original identity as she does not have her 'other habits'. This delay marks a sort of 'deviance from the festive spirit' (Barber) as it disallows for a return to normalcy, a return to heteronormative convention wherein Viola is 'Orsino's mistress'. Shakespeare could be alluding to the fact that Viola's costume is integral to the festive spirit of the play and is stubborn, in a sense, in his unwillingness to allow the play back to normalcy ordinary life, free from topsy-turvydom.

Alternatively, Shakespeare utilises clothing and costume to emphasise the cruelty to be found in comedy, particularly within the Malvolio subplot and the temporary character of Sir Topaz. Malvolio is essentially tricked into donning a pair of yellow stockings and cross-gartering in order to ensure revenge for Sir Toby and Maria for the disdainful and rude manner that he has assumed towards them since the start of the play. Malvolio believes Olivia to have commanded this change in fashion and is therefore highly taken aback by her reaction. Olivia states that the situation is 'very midsummer madness, indeed' suggesting that, due to his clothing alone, he seems to appear not entirely sane – the first accusation of madness that Malvolio must endure during the play. Cross-gartering had gone out of fashion by 1601 and yellow stockings were often attributed to a ballad titled 'Give me my yellow hose again' which details the freedom of a bachelor. Considering these, Olivia's claim of 'midsummer madness' is justified for the audience, as they see Malvolio's clothing as a source of high comedy. M Dobson refers to Malvolio's appearance as 'an alarming fashion hybrid'; 'sober steward' above the waist and a 'satyr' below. This assertion emphasises the juxtaposition of Malvolio to the yellow stockings, that seem highly abnormal when paired together. However, the suggestion that above the waist 'he is a sober steward' is perhaps not accurate to Act 3 Scene 4 wherein Malvolio is fulfilling the demands of the letter and does 'nothing but smile' therefore contrasting his typical sober stern expression. For Malvolio that is all highly humiliating, a plight that is to be sympathised with as well as found humorous. This is a form of schadenfreude (meaning 'malicious joy' in German) suggesting that it is the costume that Malvolio assumes which enables him to be 'notoriously abused' by other characters. Shakespeare therefore highlighting the cruelty that is to be found within comedy…

Candidates wrote of clothing and costume in terms of disguises used to create confusion and also to subvert gender. Viola's disguising herself as a man was seen to allow her some freedom in the court that she would not have had as a woman as well as a means of keeping her brother alive. There were also comments regarding the fact that male actors were used so Viola would in fact be a male pretending to be a female pretending to be a male. Some noted Olivia's black mourning clothes as she mourned the death of her brother, vowing not to marry, but cast these off when she fell in love. Malvolio's fantasy and clothing as he attempted to dress 'above his station' was discussed, as well as how his character was thought to mock Puritans. The Lord of Misrule tradition was also mentioned as on the twelfth night members of the court would dress up and swap their usual roles.

Question 17

DR FAUSTUS

The question asked about the effective use of language in the play.

Examiners expected to reward a wide range of approaches to this question. The best responses linked the use of language with Marlowe's dramatic purpose, while weaker answers tended often to 'feature spot'.

Here is an example of a high-level response. Its strength lies in its seamless engagement with the contexts of the play and the fact that it never forgets that *Dr Faustus* is a piece of drama to be performed before an audience.

In 'Doctor Faustus', Marlowe uses patterns of language effectively for different purposes: to reflect the sense of inner turmoil in Faustus; to create drama through moral paradox, and to subversively diminish the discourse between God and Lucifer as they fight to 'enlarge his kingdom'.

Writing against a strongly Christian backdrop, Marlowe uses a motif of gluttony throughout the play to reveal characters who are spiritually blind, inviting an audience to condemn them. From the outset, Marlowe employs a semantic field of gluttony to describe Faustus' overreaching and transgressive desire for knowledge. Indeed the Chorus says that he is 'falling to a devilish exercise'; 'surfeits upon cursed necromancy' and is 'glutted' by the acquirement of knowledge. Becauses Marlowe's contemporary audience would likely believe that to feed the body means to starve the soul (as Christianity teaches) the playwright uses language to suggest that it is Faustus' overreaching and greed for knowledge that will prevent him from obtaining the 'chiefest bliss' (salvation).

Despite this, Marlowe exploits the tensions between Christian limits and humanist desires popularised by the Renaissance, thus using language to link magic to something fundamentally exciting. Indeed, Marlowe uses powerful imagery throughout to create a sense of wonder and awe among his audience. Because these 'miracles that magic can perform' are foreshadowed to bring about Faustus' downfall, the playwright creates tension between an audience condemning Faustus' necromancy whilst enjoying the product of his overreaching. Marlowe uses powerful images of 'Orient pearl' and 'princely delicates' to link Faustus' magic to 'voyages of discovery' undertaken by the likes of Drake and Raleigh which links his overreaching to something exciting to an audience. Furthermore, Faustus describes how he used magic to discover the world, creating powerful images of 'the river Maine fall into Rhine, Whose banks are set with groves of fruitful vines'. Whilst imagery links Faustus' journeys to discovery and delight, Marlowe also effectively uses language to remind us of the limits of magic. Indeed the polysemy of the word 'perform' with both a theatrical and a literal sense either reminds an audience that Faustus' magic is illusory or could create dramatic tension if taken literally. Furthermore, we are reminded that magic can only produce facsimiles, as even the 'vice crew' of Valdes and Cornelius (who are supposed to tempt Faustus in the tradition of the morality play) are given the anaphora 'like lions', like Almiane rutters' and 'like women' to reveal the illusory quality of magic. Faustus cannot create or configure real things but merely facsimiles, an idea enforced when Mephistopheles can only provide Faustus with a wife 'in the devil's name'.

Whilst Marlowe exploits the illusionary quality of magic through language to both create awe-inspiring images and to remind the audience that these are merely illusory, the playwright uses language of justice to create a dramatic moral paradox that seems very real indeed. When Mephistopheles creates the 'deed of gift' that Faustus must sign in blood, the power of language in manipulation is especially visible. For example, Mephistopheles says Lucifer 'will buy my service' and that he 'craves security' in the form of a 'deed of gift'. Faustus commits to Lucifer and Marlowe creates a moral paradox using language that calls into question the morality of the Christian universe; indeed, if Faustus 'fly(s) unto God', he will be 'cast down' because he has broken his contract to Lucifer; however, if Faustus stays loyal to the contract, he has committed to damnation and 'despair in God' – a mortal sin in Protestant Christianity. The power of language is shown in the 'deed of gift' and the semantic field of justice ('deed', 'security', 'prescribed', 'articles') and the playwright effectively creates a moral paradox which encourages an audience to question the extent of God's mercy – after he commits to Lucifer, can Faustus be saved by God?

In perhaps the most powerfully emotive section of the play, when the Old Man is 'tormented' by God in a test of his faith, Marlowe uses language to reflect the tenor of Faustus' thoughts. Indeed, the Old Man uses disgusting and repugnant language and imagery, such as the 'repentant heaviness'; 'flagitious crimes' and 'heinous sins' which can be seen to have two effects: both to reflect the seriousness of Faustus' crimes and the unattractiveness of repentance. Because Marlowe goes on to create a cosmic battle between God and Lucifer, when Faustus states that 'Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast', the power of language in reflecting the inner turmoil is particularly effective here.

Overall, the playwright employs a great deal of images and semantic fields to create different dramatic effects. At a time where theatres were performed in the daytime with rather basic costumes, such powerful language was essential in creating spectacles on stage. Marlowe uses language to reflect a sense of psychomachia within Faustus, whilst subversively questioning Christian morality.

One candidate compared the language of the prologue to that of the epilogue in suggesting Marlowe's crafting language to warn his audience against 'blaspheming and rejecting appropriate knowledge'. They went on to discuss the use of language in the treatment of lower classes through the presentation of Wagner. The candidate considered how other characters addressed him and his later use of Latin, linking this to the idea of the great chain of being and Marlowe's own background.

Students selecting this question tended to either view it in very superficial terms or have a very confident argument to express.

Question 18

DR FAUSTUS

The question asked about the presentation of power that corrupts.

This was the more popular question on *Dr Faustus,* and it appeared to allow candidates to weave in their contextual understanding in interesting and productive ways. While discussion of Faustus was of course the main area of analysis, some candidates also considered the depiction of Robin and Rafe, and of the Pope, as alternative ways in which the corruption of power is expressed.

Here is an example of a highly effective response. The candidate demonstrates a confident grasp of the play's contexts and ranges widely across the text, always keeping focus on the question. A key feature is its convincing argument; less successful answers tended to 'tell the story' rather than offer a developed and discriminating personal response:

In Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' (A text: 1604, B text:1616) power is presented as a corrupting force manifesting itself in Faustus' lack of ability to see past his vast swathes of knowledge to the truth of religion and the world, and the possibility of redemption and salvation. Faustus is unable to see his knowledge and power as more than a procurement of hedonistic experience and social capital, and so damns himself to hell. Power being seen as a corrupting force would have satisfied a Puritan audience in particular, and so the differences between the A and B texts of the play are of incredible importance.

The idea that power is a force that corrupts those in possession of it is demonstrated by Faustus basic spiritual illiteracy and inability to comprehend salvific truths due to his giant intellect and capacity for monomania in his pursuit of it. This trope of a man desperate to transgress the boundaries of his field, as explored also by Marlowe in 'Tamburlaine', is perhaps a product of Renaissance thinking: however, Faustus' intellect is accentuated by the fact that he is not a Renaissance man and, given his 'base born' origins, might even resent the Renaissance ideology regarding class. In any case, Faustus' attempts to transgress the boundaries of human knowledge blinds him to basic tautological truths about the nature of heaven and hell; Mephistopheles' line 'This is hell, nor am I out of it' is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly the devil had never been used before in the English morality tradition to express the suffering experienced in hell, and secondly, Faustus' senses are so corrupted by the power and ego of his intellect that he later replies, 'Come, I think hell's a fable', indicating his wilful self-deception to basic salvific truths. Given Marlowe's somewhat scandalous reputation they would have been expecting to be shocked by this, but the fact that Faustus also conjures the devil on stage, citing a specific Latin chant, would have been unprecedented – interestingly in the B text (which was catering for an audience with an increasingly Puritain cultural background) the devil and his acolytes are already on stage when Faustus summons them. This is perhaps the closest the play gets to a homiletic Puitain address – the devil is ever-present and infinitely more powerful than mere mortals – although the devils' silence as Faustus chants suggests Marlowe has perhaps replaced homily with dramatic irony, as Faustus isn't aware the devil is already present on stage. The sense that Faustus is corrupted by power and his pursuit of it is therefore addressed throughout the play, even from the very beginning – Faustus' satanic desires damn him because of his inability to perceive the truth of salvation and quench his appetite for power.

However, throughout the play Faustus is offered many opportunities to relinquish the power and knowledge that corrupt him. Despite the clearly divine message of 'Homo fuge' written on his arm and the 'staying' of his blood, Faustus desires lead him to ignore anything that might impede him on his quest, seeking instead proof that he has damned himself already to justify his hedonistic and appetitive behaviour. This echoes Faustus line, 'The reward of sin is death' from his first soliloquy, a phrase lifted almost verbatim from the Bible but missing it's crucial reciprocal, 'But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ'. The fact that Faustus is employing scriptural ideas to justify his abhorrent actions shows the extent to which he has already been corrupted by the sheer power and velocity of his knowledge; he knows everything but comprehends nothing of humility and basic salvific truths. It is this corruption that calls into question whether or not Faustus can be seen as a morality play (a traditional English drama in which the protagonist in a post lapsarian state of sin can only be saved by divine grace and repentance) – the fact that Faustus is not entirely beguiled by Mephistopheles (I confound hell with Elysium' shows he has wilfully misunderstood the devil's testimony) suggests he is not the usual morality vice; Faustus' corrupt soul and egomaniacal power-hungry tendencies suggests Faustus' downfall was certain before he even began his devilish activities as the power of his intellect had already corrupted him with no hope of redemption.

The fact that power is a force that corrupts is ultimately and inevitably Faustus' downfall. His intellect becomes his harmatia, already pastiched earlier in the play by Robin and Rafe/Dick (the former using half-digested parts of Faustus' magic to 'make all the maidens in our parish dance at my pleasure, stark naked, before me' – a petty and lecherous outcome which also demonstrates how power corrupts as it is passed down the chain of characters, dropping lower and lower in society) Faustus' power appears to be reduced throughout the play until eventually he is left an everyman figure, destined to damnation. Wagner's line, 'I think my master means to die shortly', indicates a remarkable time jump in between Acts Four and Five in which Faustus' time has eclipsed. The fact that Faustus desires 'sweet Helen' to be his 'paramour' on his final night alive indicates the extent of his corruption – he is confusing form and substance refusing, or failing to realise the twisted and entirely fake nature of his ravishing of Helen due to his lack of agency and obviously deceased status. Faustus is in fact so corrupted that, in the B text, the Good Angel appears before him in his final moments to tell him that he has 'lost' implying to the Puritan audience that Faustus is in fact so far gone down the path of sin that he cannot repent up until the moment of his death – he's already 'damned perpetually'. His final cry of 'I'll burn my books' is a plosive sounding (apparent) relinquishing of his knowledge and power but is again just proof that he is corrupted entirely; his books haven't transgressed human cognitive boundaries, he has. Ultimately Marlowe presents power as a force that corrupts Faustus to a point where he is entirely unable to step across the chasm of humility to God and Elysium because his intellect and brief worldly power have obscured the basic redemptive and heavenly truths needed for his salvation.

Candidates sometimes didn't think about the question of power corrupting before starting their essay and instead wrote rather generally on Faustus' character and some quite narrative essays on the seven deadly sins. Surprisingly few students considered the presentation of politically powerful characters.

Candidates described Faustus as a Renaissance man being punished in a Medieval way. It was noted that Faustus' dream of being a great emperor of the world became corrupt leaving him using his power to play foolish pranks, his once noble goals became base and selfish. Mephistopheles was seen as offering a warning against the consequences of striving for knowledge and power in wanting Faustus to feel the pain of his deprivation from the joys of Heaven, having experienced and lost them. The good and bad angels were thought to have led him more towards corruption than salvation, and it was considered that he was perhaps motivated by the idea that his fate was predetermined anyway. Some tended to fall to narrative of the plot, explaining Faustus' trajectory from ambition to damnation. Many commented on the comparison to Icarus' over-reaching and flying too close to the sun resulting in his physical 'downfall' and death. Many stated how Faustus found that, once he had experienced power, he was unable to repent and seek salvation.

In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, many students raised the 'Great Chain of Being' as a catch-all contextual description of the thoughts and beliefs of characters (and the audience of the period). This was often cited in the responses to Doctor Faustus. But while often cited, the phrase was rarely clarified as to its significance in relation to the question being answered or developed into a more nuanced understanding of how this concept relates to the play being discussed.

Question 19

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The question asked about the presentation of secrets and lies in the play.

It was pleasing to see that this play is now becoming more popular with a number of centres. This was the less popular of the two questions, but candidates found plenty to write about, many building their answers around the secrets and lies of the main characters. As with other questions on this section, the most successful responses looked carefully at the writer's dramatic purpose and considered his craft. Occasionally, a candidate's eagerness to include as much historical and social context as possible overwhelmed the essay at the expense of accessing AO2.

Here is an example of a good response. It is perhaps not sophisticated enough in its analysis to reach Level 5, but it's discriminating, with consistent analysis of the writer's craft, and is able to embed details of context in an appropriate way.

John Webster 's 'The Duchess of Malfi' is cynical of, and pessimistic about, human nature. Much of Webster's criticisms about human nature rest with his consideration of the human propensity to deceive through the perpetuation of secrets and lies. Webster's primary antagonists, the Cardinal and Ferdinand, abuse their power of the church and court using secrets and lies. Yet, even Webster's paragon of virtue is a significant arbiter of secrets and lies – perhaps, as Webster suggests, out of necessity.

Firstly Webster ironically presents the play's matriarch and protagonist as a liar. The Duchess is first described by Antonio as the 'right noble Duchess'. Her virtue is signposted by Webster from the play's beginning. As such, her later duplicity would have shocked Webster's Jacobean audience. The Duchess promises her brothers, 'I'll never marry'; yet, a few lines later she proclaims to Cariola, her lady in waiting, 'Let old wives repent/ I winked and chose a husband'. Her thin promises seem contrary to each other. Cariola, who is also assumed to be good because of her association with the Duchess, becomes complicit in the Duchess' secrecy and lying. She vows to 'conceal this secret' (of the Duchess' marriage) 'from the world'. In the scene Webster uses physical secrecy to illuminate the extent of the Duchess' and Cariola's secrecy. Particularly he uses the 'arras' which is typically a Shakespearean trope connoting secrecy. The stage direction reads, 'Cariola goes behind the arras'. Webster creates both verbal and physical secrecy as somewhat easy and natural for the Duchess, thus reflecting his pessimism about the human condition.

Yet Webster lends his play a sense of moral ambiguity as the Duchess' further justifications of her actions evokes audience sympathy for her character. In proposing to Antonio she laments, 'The misery of us that are born great!/ We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us'. Webster's use of exclamation here reflects the depths of the Duchess' emotion as she reflects on the imposing nature of monarchy. Webster 's play is arguably an exposition of the significantly limiting impacts of the monarchy on women. By 1614, when 'The Duchess of Malfi' was first performed, England had seen two Queens who were subject to much criticism and suffering whilst on the throne. Webster reflects on the conditions of England's monarchy in his play by making the Duchess a monarch deeply affected and forced into secrecy by her noble birth and royal position. Ultimately when the Duchess is discovered by her brothers she is imprisoned and killed – 'the Duchess of Malfi murdered by the Aragonian brethren'. Thus, according to Webster, secrecy and lies are essential to the protection of women within the monarchy.

Furthermore, Webster presents another demographic whose life within the corrupt court he presents must be sustained through secrets and lies. Webster considers the poor or those born out of noble birth as needing to lie to ensure societal position. It is through Bosola, the play's malcontent, that Webster illuminates this thesis. Early in the play, Bosola is established as duplicitous. Antonio's opinion of him is that '... he rails at those things which he wants/Would be a as lecherous, covetous or proud as any man...'. Importantly he works for the cardinal, who is Webster's 'devil'. His deceptive nature is perhaps best reflected through his manner of speaking. Webster uses riddles and euphemisms to characterise his speech. When asking the Cardinal for reward he says slyly, 'Blackbirds fatten best in hard weather, why not I, in these dog days?' Webster accrues Bosola complex, often imperceptible, maxims to emphasise his lying and deceptive nature. Additionally, his dual plot function of 'intelligencer' over the Duchess and 'provisor of the horse' further enhances his lack of virtue. However, Webster offers context for Bosola's choices through this description of life at the court of Amalfi: '...for places in the court are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower'. The court is organised through economic stratification and Bosola, being born out of the monarchy, finds himself at the lower end of the court's hierarchy. Again, Webster references the English court in the Jacobean era. King James was infamous for his nepotism and his exclusive advancement of his Scottish favourites. The court of Amalfi replicates the real-life situation and justifies Bosola's lying and secrecy.

Webster presents the Duchess and Bosola as apparent character foils – though they are not from similar backgrounds as the Duchess is noble and Bosola is not – they both must operate with a degree of lying and secrecy to survive in a court so corrupted by prejudice against women and the poor.

Webster uses Bosola and the Duchess' helplessness to examine the faults of those who are powerful within the court. The Cardinal is at the helm of the court and commands the power of both the monarchy and the church. Antonio notes 'he should have been Pope' yet he is characterised by his evil. Bosola proclaims about him, '... this great fellow were able to possess the greatest devil and make him worse'. The Cardinal's evil comes down to his use of lies to present himself as good and righteously religious, yet Webster's use of irony reveals his religion to be the main enabler of his evil. Webster wrote 'The Duchess of Malfi' after the Protestant revolution when much of England had rejected Catholicism because of its corruption and abuse. Webster himself was reportedly Protestant. As such the cardinal became the symbol of the Catholic Church which would have been perfect in the psyche of a generally protestant England. Webster also strategically sets his play around 1504 at the peak of the Renaissance, when much of Europe developed a scepticism about previously accepted institutions such as the Catholic Church. Ultimately, secrecy and lies characterise Webster's play and are presented as essential to life in a corrupt court run by those who abuse power.

There were comments made about the Duchess keeping her marriage and pregnancy secret due to Antonio's status. The use of lies to entrap characters to bring about their deaths was also mentioned, e.g. the wax figures of Antonio and their children was used to fool the Duchess; Julia was persuaded to kiss the poisoned book.

The few scripts I saw sadly did not make much of this question. The secret marriage was mentioned but not explored far; Bosola as an intelligencer was mentioned; the Arragonian brothers as being secretive were mentioned, but none of this was explored to extent the question could allow.

Question 20

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The question asked about the presentation of gender roles in the play.

This was the more popular question and candidates wrote about gender roles with plenty of enthusiasm, often focussing on the central figure of the Duchess and comparing her lot to that of her brothers. Candidates commented on the attempts to control the Duchess by her brothers and how contemporary social attitudes made it easy for men to abuse women for their own self-interests. Many stated that the Duchess did not behave in the manner expected of her by the patriarchal society in that she was outspoken, wooed Antonio and selected him, a man of lower status, to be her husband, even metaphorically and physically raising him up. Some drew parallels to the Duchess with Queen Elizabeth I and how the changing roles of women (from the years of female rule) and their potential to reject male control was the cause of social anxiety. It was also noted that value was placed upon women according to sexual experience as demonstrated in how the Duchess and Julia were judged and punished with death. It was felt that Webster was exposing men's reactions to women's attempts at independence as ultimately violent responses as they demanded to regain their 'rightful' power. Violence, execution and destruction seemed the only way for men to regain the control society expected of them.

Here is an example of a high mark response. Considered and sophisticated in its approach, it fully explores the topic of gender roles, making frequent and wide-ranging use of the play in its argument. Contextual information is always relevant and is used sparingly so that the focus is always on the question and on the text itself. Note how the candidate focuses sharply on language, with some discriminating evaluation of AO2 that is integrated thoroughly into their argument. Notably, they are engaging with the nuances of gender as an abstract concept, rather than simply dividing their response by character or by male/female:

Throughout John Webster's 1614 Jacobean revenge tragedy 'The Duchess of Malfi', gender roles are explored in a variety of different ways. At Webster's time of writing, women were expected to conform to the role of a weak, submissive, passive inferior to the men in their lives, whilst men were expected to be bold, brave and noble. The titular protagonist of the play – the Duchess – is presented as largely defying the gender roles which the patriarchal society around her expect her to conform to. She is the fair and just leader that her brothers would have been expected to be, marries against the authority of her two brothers, and takes on a traditionally male role in her relationship with her husband Antonio. Despite this, however, the women of the play are largely at the mercy of their male counterparts – Webster explores the double standards that Julia experiences in her promiscuous relationship with the Cardinal, and Cariola pretends to be engaged as a means to prevent her execution. Throughout the play, Webster's exploration of gender roles and what happens to those who deviate from them is extended and amplified through imagery, particularly animalistic symbolism, in order to reinforce his commentary on gender roles in a hughly patriarchal society.

The Duchess Is a character who largely defies the gender roles that she is expected to conform to – yet pays an ultimate price for this. She is based on Giovanna D'Aragona, a real noble woman who married against her brothers wishes, and was thought to have been murdered in 1510. Although this may explain Webster's more radical presentation of a female character, he ensures that even before the audience is introduced to the Duchess, she is established as model of virtue through Antonio's description of her. He even goes so far as to state that "all sweet ladies" should "break their flatt'ring glasses and dress themselves in her". The idea that other women should "dress themselves" in the

Duchess indicates that Antonio perceives the Duchess as a role model for how other women should behave – rather than looking inward through their "flatt'ring glasses", they should follow the Duchess' example and embody the patience and nobility that she possesses. This should indicate that the Duchess is subservient, passive and submissive – qualities which, at Webster's time of writing, were associated with 'good' women. Interestingly, however, the Duchess that we meet in the first act of the play does not conform to the patriarchal expectations around her. When her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, instruct the Duchess that she must not remarry, her response is that "diamonds are of most value they say, that have passed through most jewellers' hands". Though this comment was made in jest, the metaphor expresses a sentiment which would have been widely disapproved of by male authority in Jacobean society. By likening herself to "diamonds", the Duchess indicates that she knows her worth and value, and the idea that a woman's sexual experience should merely make her more desirable than disregarded as lustful is one which a Jacobean audience would view as incredibly radical.

Widows in the Jacobean era were regarded as occupying a strange liminal space in society – as Ferdinand put it, they knew "what man is" and had sexual experience, yet were unmarried. Webster's misogynistic Jacobean society perceived widows as overly amorous, as indicated by Ferdinand's referring to the Duchess as a "lusty widow", so the Duchess' comment, though meant as a joke, would have been seen as a threat to the male power and authority that she is surrounded by. Additionally, after the Duchess defies her brothers' explicit orders and marries Antonio, she embodies a 'masculine' role in the relationship – one that he would have been expected to fill instead, In A2S1, after the Duchess goes into premature labour as a result of Bosola's scheming, she is shown to remain in relative control. Though she fears that she is "undone", she takes the practical response of ordering "lights to my chamber" in an attempt to hide that she is giving birth. However, Antonio is shown as being unable to cope in a crisis. He admits that "I am lost in amazement. I know not what to think on't", and relies on his companion Delio to instruct him of the best course of action. "Lost" indicates Antonio's panic and the fact that he is overwhelmed, in comparison to the more practical earlier response of the Duchess. Antonio even goes so far as to drop the horoscope that bears news of his son's birth, allowing it to fall into Bosola's hands and thus provide proof to the Cardinal and Ferdinand that the Duchess has married secretly. Here Webster uses juxtaposition to show that the Duchess defies the expectations and values that Jacobean society placed on women – she is able to cope well and remain calm in a crisis – while instead it is her husband who is flustered and unable to think straight.

This idea is furthered when Ferdinand enters into the Duchess' chambers and catches her off guard in A3S2. Upon turning and seeing her enraged brother holding her father's poniard, her first response is 'tis welcome: for know, whether I am doomed to live, or die, I can do both like a prince". The Duchess' strength in the face of grave danger is augmented here – she believes that she will face death with the nobility and strength that a "prince" would exhibit. However, this statement alone indicates that the Duchess is still constrained by the gender roles and expectations that the society around her promotes – she likens her strength and valour to that that a male "prince" would exhibit, rather than her own inner courage. The Duchess is referred to as being "princely" repeatedly throughout the play, indicating that the highly-capable Duchess is still restricted by others likening her bravery to that of a man. However, just before she is executed in A4S2, the Duchess proclaims "I am Duchess of Malfi still". This exhibition of pride and nobility from a character who has previously been modest and humble over her status In soclety is the Duchess' one last display of defiance against the gender role she is expected to fill, and against the patriarchal values promoted by the characters and society around her. Therefore, until her death in A42, the Duchess refuses to conform to the role she is prescribed by the patriarchal characters and society surrounding her. She remarried, despite the misogynistic stereotypes that were prevalent at Webster's time of writing surrounding widows, chose to marry a lower-class man for love and defied direct orders from her power-crazed brothers not to do so.

There is debate as to what Webster's intentions were in his presentation of the Duchess – it is unusual for a tragic hero in a revenge tragedy to die as early as the Duchess does, which could be seen as Webster's punishing her for deviating from the passive role she is expected to play. However, the characters who condemn her to death – her brothers – are presented as corrupt and unlikeable, indicating that Webster instead paints the picture of a courageous woman who defied the patriarchal values expected of her, and paid the ultimate price.

Despite the atypicality of the female heroine of the revenge tragedy, however, both the Duchess and the two other main female characters in the play are presented as being very much at the mercy of the men around them. This is most explicitly presented through the relationship between Julia and the Cardinal. In Jacobean society, a cuckolded man was regarded as effeminate and weak – there was a prevalent myth that a cuckold would grow horns on his forehead, as a physical symbol of his lack of control over his wife. The Cardinal is more than happy to have an affair with Castruchio's wife, thus cuckolding him, yet recoils at the idea of being made a cuckold himself. He gloats to Julia that "I'II love you wisely" since "I am very certain you cannot make me cuckold". The Cardinal clearly sees nothing wrong in adultery itself – hence his relationship with Julia – so long as he is not the one being cuckolded. He believes that to love a woman "wisely", a man should do so from a position in which the woman is incapable of humiliating and cuckolding him. This idea is extended when the Cardinal proclaims that "a man might strive to make glass malleable ere he should make them fixed". This image portrays the idea that it is impossible for a man to find a "fixed" and loyal woman, and the Cardinal continues mocking Julla by suggesting that were he to search for a constant woman "'th'moon", he would still struggle to find one. The hypocritical nature of the Cardinal and Julia's adulterous affair is therefore underlined. This suggests that Julia deviating from the expectations placed on her as a woman and wife – to be loyal, obedient and submissive to her husband – is, in the Cardinal's eyes, proof of the inconstancy of women. He belittles Julia for not conforming to the role she is expected to play due to her gender, yet he, as a Cardinal, is too deviating from the religious role he is expected to fill. At Webster's time of writing, many in England regarded the Catholic Church as corrupt and full of the vices that it preached against, such as lust and idolatry. The Cardinal seems to fulfil this stereotype, and his hypocritical stance on Julia deviating from her prescribed social role while he does the exact same portrays the injustice of Jacobean gender roles. The fact that the Cardinal later goes on to kill Julia using a poisoned Bible – the very item he is expected to use for good and to revere – indicates that the women in the play are very much at the mercy of the men, who use them and shun them for actions that they too participate in. This is also seen with the Duchess after Ferdinand finds out that she has remarried. He uses a torrent of abusive and misogynistic language to describe her, including referring to her as a "notorious strumpet". "Strumpet" has connotations to adultery and sexual promiscuity, which is fundamentally untrue of the Duchess, who is married to Antonio. Ferdinand accuses her of the sin of lust in belittling her as a "lusty widow" – yet he fails to see the hypocrisy in his words. It is heavily implied throughout the play that Ferdinand harbours sexual desire for his sister; he is facinated with her body, and is tormented by images of her under "some strong-thighed bargeman" after he finds that she has married again. Though lust is a sin, incest is also strictly forbidden in the Bible – as exhibited by Henry VIII the previous century, when he tried to claim that Leviticus' verse that a man should not marry his brother's widow meant that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was incest in the eyes of God – yet Ferdinand fixates only on the Duchess acting 'immorally' for a woman of her time. A modern day audience, interestingly, does not view the Duchess as having committed any wrongdoing at all, yet is repulsed by Ferdinand's desire for his sister, and is enraged by the confining gender roles that ensnare the justice while allow her immoral brother to continue his corruption freely.

The Duchess' last moments alive additionally indicate that, while largely defying the gender roles of her time, she is still very much at the mercy of the men around her. Just before she is about to be strangled, the Duchess speaks of her death with bravery, yet abruptly ends her speech with "I would fain put off my last woman's fault, I'd not be tedious to you". This references the stereotype of the time that women talked too much, and tragically highlights that even in her last few moments alive, the Duchess is restricted from talking freely by the patriarchal society around her and its silencing of women's voices. Her last thought before she dies is of Antonio and her children, as Bosola tells her that they are alive, and while this is touching and understandable, it means that even the atypical Duchess dies thinking of her husband and children, family values which were expected of Jacobean women. Even Cariola, before she is murdered too, in her panic claims that she cannot be executed because she is "contracted to a young gentleman". Clawing frantically at a way to avoid being strangled, Cariola attempts to use a fictional man as leverage to avoid being killed – she cannot rely on her own innocence and right to speak, so resorts to pretending that male authority in the form of a theoretical husband would punish the executioners if she were to be killed. Therefore, all three of the main female characters in the play are killed at the hands of men, and Webster presents gender roles as being so powerful both throughout the play and in Jacobean society as a whole, that even those who seek to defy them – such as the Duchess – are at their mercy in the end. Webster, a playwright noted for his extensive use of symbolism, uses imagery throughout 'The Duchess of Malfi to reinforce the prevalence of gender roles in society. In A254, Webster uses animalistic imagery in order to portray the power that the Cardinal has over his mistress, Julia. After insulting her and Julia threatening to "go home to my husband", the Cardinal tells her "you should thank me, lady: I have taken you off your melancholy perch, This image establishes Julla as a falcon, and the Cardinal as the falconer who has freed her from her bland marriage to Castruchio. The adjective "melancholy" presents the dull and repressive marriage that Julia is trapped in, since she later tells Delio as he mocks Castruchio for his age and*

impotency that "your laughter is my pain", indicating her dissatisfaction with the husband she likely did not have much of a choice in marrying. However, the Cardinal thinks that Julia should be grateful to him – "I bore you upon my fist, and showed you game, and let you fly at it". This signals that the Cardinal feels that he has added excitement and variety in the form of "game" into Julia's life, and he goes on to liken her to "a tame elephant" who had only "kisses from him, and high feeding". This image presents Julia as an animal in captivity, kept merely to be fussed over and stared at; neither Castruchio nor the Cardinal view Julia, a woman who does not fit the gender role she has been assigned, as an individual in her won rights. The Cardinal states that Castruchio "hath a little fingering on the lute, yet cannot tune it" – this sexual metaphor this time renders Julia as an instrument to be 'played' by the men in her life at their own liking. In just one speech, the Cardinal compares Julia to three concepts which are not human; a falcon, an elephant and a lute. In two of these metaphors, he is human – both the falconer and the lute-player – yet in all three, she is passive and at his mercy. This indicates that the men in this patriarchal society compartmentalise women who are not passive in reality, in an attempt to gain some control over them. The Cardinal is presented as human in these metaphors in an attempt to feel as though he has some power over his 'inconstant' mistress – perhaps he feels that he is not fulfilling the expectations of his own gender by having complete control over Julia, and is overcompensating. This bird imagery is extended to apply to the Duchess in her imprisonment – when Cariola tells her that she shall live, she responds with "the robin redbreast and the nightingale never live long in cages". This image, with its alliteration to draw emphasis, establishes that the Duchess' typicality and deviation from the expectations of her gender has been constrained by her brothers, and without her individuality and agency, she feels that she is not long for this world. Bird imagery is, therefore, used as a motif throughout the play to present the female characters as trapped and oppressed. However, imagery is additionally used to establish the male characters as dominant and with the capacity to be destructive. Whilst when the Duchess is imprisoned she is likened to a "red robin" or "nightingale", when Ferdinand is trapped by his own sense of guilt, he is likened to a "wolf'. He believes himself to be a wolf which is "hairy on the inside", indicating that he feels consumed with guilt, and in A52 is seen pouncing on his own shadow, as a wolf pounces on its prey. This juxtaposition is symbolic – the Duchess, constrained by the external force of the patriarchy, is a mere helpless bird. Yet Ferdinand, who is repressed by his own actions and the guilt that he feels for them, is still the more powerful of the two as a "wolf". Though Ferdinand has created his own 'prison' through his own corrupt actions, and has lost his sanity altogether, he is still presented through a more 'dominant' image than the Duchess was. Ferdinand is often linked to "fire" throughout the play, indicating that the power he possesses due to his gender and status has the potential to be destructive, and is often referred to as a "tempest", once again indicating a powerful and dangerous storm. Webster therefore explores how, even in the midst of his insanity and violent rages, Ferdinand's gender places him in a position of authority over his sister – the power that the men in the play are awarded has the potential to be destructive even when they are imprisoned by their own minds, whereas the Duchess and Julia, who are trapped by the misogynistic society around them rather than their own corrupt actions, are passive and helpless 'caged birds'.

In conclusion, Webster explores gender roles and their impact through a plethora of different ways throughout 'The Duchess of Malfi'. The protagonist of the play is presented as atypical, and exhibiting many of the 'masculine' qualities of bravery and level-headedness that her husband would have been expected to portray instead. However, even the strong and brave Duchess, alongside the other women in the play, are left at the mercy of the patriarchal forces of the men in their lives. Webster additionally uses imagery to reinforce his commentary on gender expectations in Jacobean society – while the Duchess and Julia are likened to 'caged birds', the Cardinal is always human in these images, and Ferdinand, whilst animalistic, is always a powerful force with the potential to be destructive.

Weaker responses tended to resort to very sweeping and general context for this gender question. Exploration of scenes in the play was fair, though would have benefitted from more developed A02 considerations. Candidates tended to focus on the demeaning language used (‘strumpet’ etc) and the choices made by the characters.

There were some very simplistic assertions about the 'role of women' in Jacobean society; some other responses reproduced a character study of the Duchess at a fairly basic level. Some interesting arguments saw Webster as a protofeminist, and the more able candidates were able to support this by evaluating a range of evidence from the text. Another popular area of focus was Ferdinand's fixation with the Duchess's sexuality. For AO3, there was a sound appreciation of the backgrounds of religious tension: however, a significant number of responses had minimal discussion of AO2, meaning that even some very well-argued and contextually aware essays could not progress beyond the very bottom of Level 3. However, there were some excellent responses which looked really specifically at the playwright’s position within a patriarchal society both socially and politically, thinking about the influence of the Elizabethan court.

References to a recent stage production where the Duchess stayed centre stage with all other figures moving round her. Most argued that Webster set out to create a revolutionary proto-feminist figure in the Duchess, but a few explored the issue in context more fully, recognising that the author’s intentions and methods were more complex and to some extent unrecoverable, and that her rebelliousness is portrayed in a complex manner. Most explored her bravery in response to death. Almost none considered her as a mother (which Webster is careful to include), and only a few made any comparison to either Julia or Cariola as the only other female characters named. Most also dealt with the brothers to some extent, mainly asserting that their roles were traditionally male, a few beginning to explore the extreme aspects of their presentation and suggest that Webster was not so much focused on male gender roles as on satirising the Italian or Catholic courts/states. Surprisingly few discussed Ferdinand’s potentially incestuous or at least unnaturally graphic language in his relationship with his sister.

Question 21

THE HOME PLACE

The question asked about the presentation of anxiety in the play.

Around half the candidates chose this question. There was, on the part of many, a tendency to fill their responses with social and political details rather than on analysing the play as a literary construct. The best responses made sure to link contextual points to the detail of the text. Weaker responses were often entirely character-driven, with limited exploration of the dramatist's craft.

Here are some extracts from typical approaches:

'The Home Place' by Brian Friel is a commentary on the conflict between Irish nationalist identity and the domination of the Anglo-Irish. Friel presents anxiety to be a constant concept which reflects the fears of both communities…

… Firstly, Friel utilises the character of Christopher to demonstrate the feeling of anxiety. This is displayed from the beginning of the play when he returns from the funeral of Lord Lifford who was based off the real Earl of Clement who was murdered in 1878. Christopher is immediately anxious over his position in society and threat the Irish pose to his position. This can be seen where Christopher pleads to Margaret, asking her 'Which of us is next on the list?' then restating this, 'There isn't a list Margaret, is there?' Not only does this highlight Christopher's anxiety over his position in society, but it also displays his reliance on Margaret as the liminal space between the Irish and the English to subdue these anxieties and assure him of the Irish intent…

… Friel alludes to many political and historical significant movements in 1878 Ireland, such as the Land War 1879 and hereafter the peace process. This retrospective element aids in the audience's implicit contextual understanding for the fight for the re-emergence of identity, specifically 'rent free' for tenant farmers following the exploitation of land owners. These concepts are reflected in Friel's complex characterization, distinctly divided into Irish and Anglo-Irish. Characters such as Maggie and Christopher act as opposing forces of expression of identity. They also specifically depict internal anxiety experienced as a result of the wider anxiety in the communities. Friel's use of recurring symbolism conveys a constant anxiety imposed on Irish as symbols such as 'the falcon' represent the ever present presence of Anglo-Irish. Alongside this, metatextualy, 'The Home Place' is a direct parallel to Chekhov's 'The Cherry Orchard' which uses natural imagery such as trees to represent the intrusion of a foreign identity …

Centres should note that this is the final time that *The Home Place* will appear on the specification for 9ET01.

Two new texts have been added: *Les Blancs* by Lorraine Hansbury and *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage

These new texts will be for first assessment in Summer 2024.

Question 22

THE HOME PLACE

The question asked about the presentation of lack of understanding in the play.

This question was approached with some confidence by candidates, many of whom were able to explore Friel's use of language, imagery and staging in their responses. As with the other *Home Place* question, there was a tendency in weaker responses for too much contextual material at the expense of literary analysis. Stronger responses consistently referred to Friel's dramatic purpose.

Here is an extract from a higher-level response. It perhaps relies a little too much on some word-level analysis, but it is always aware of the overall intention of the dramatist:

'The Home Place' recounts the various divisions between the characters and communities in Ireland at a time during rising conflict. Thus, consequently, a lack of understanding as a result of this conflict is evident through the use of music, the relationships between the Anglo-Irish and Irish communities as well as the inner divisions within the Irish community itself.

One way Friel presents a lack of understanding is through divisions and lack of relatability with the Irish community, specifically within characters like Margaret with Sally and Con. There is a distinction established between Margaret and Sally's views on Con. Margaret questions 'What's he doing trespassing up here?' and emphasises that 'he knows very well that's not permitted on these lands'. The interrogative sentence immediately foregrounds Margaret sense of suspicion. The verbs of 'trespassing' and 'permitted' connote a sense of crime and illegal activity, highlighting her distrust of members of the Irish community despite being Irish herself. This already exhibits her lack of understanding of the other Irish community members as she rejects their belonging on the Lodge land. Sally, on the other hand, exorts an essence of justification and sympathy, reasoning that he may have 'felt entitled to walk these lands. Sally, also being Irish herself, exhibits more understanding of Con than Margaret does, emphasised by the permissive verb of 'entitled' being the antithesis of the anti-permissive 'trespass' and 'permitted'. Margaret displays her distrust, stating her disapproval of Con 'whispering defiance' and 'ugly activity' the sibilance of 'whispering defiance' imitates the secretive nature of Con and the other Irish members, contrasting the plosives of 'ugly activity' to indicate the negativity and aggression of such activity. Sally rejects Margaret mocking, 'Will 'we'? You'd do anything to be one of the toffs, Maggie, wouldn't you?' The sarcastic, mocking and satirical undertone of 'we' establishes a separation between the two despite sharing the same community. The play is set a year before the rebellion led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRA) which would eventually lead to the decline of the Anglo-Irish landlord presence in Ireland. Perhaps Friel utilises Con as a synecdoche of the IRA. Such uprising rebellions is what causes a rift within the Irish community. Margaret has a lack of understanding towards this, while Sally is more sympathetic and justifies the political reasoning of Con trespassing. Therefore, Friel presents a lack of understanding of motives through Margaret and Sally's disagreements and misunderstandings.

Another way in which Friel presents a lack of understanding is through music. Friel perhaps utilises music to highlight this misunderstanding, as for the Irish community, it helps to transcend and escape grim reality, though this has no effect on the Anglo-Irish. Clement states that the music 'liberates them briefly' and 'can fashion ethereal opulence and become a little heavenly'. The semantics of angelic language of 'ethereal' 'liberate' and 'heavenly' connotes a therapeutic role of music. This is further emphasised by the references to Thomas Moore as a 'sleeping harp' and 'the voice of our nation who divines us accurately'. Inclusive pronouns of 'us' and 'our' indicate a sense of fraternity and collectivism among the Irish community. Thomas Moore was a singer, poet and artist who was a vessel for hope for many people in Ireland at a time of failed rebellion, such as the 1798 Land Wars and the 1801 Act of Union. To contrast, such collectivity is lacking among the Anglo-Irish community who don't understand this sentiment and music. Richard mocks Clement and Moore by stating he is a 'buffoon'. He mocks 'The voice of our nation – good God!' and the stage directions note his ['burst of laughter']. The satirical implications highlight a lack of understanding between the hopeful emotions as a result of Moore's music. Thus 'The Home Place' shows a lack of understanding ...

Centres should note that this is the final time that *The Home Place* will appear on the specification for 9ET01.

Two new texts have been added: *Les Blancs* by Lorraine Hansbury and *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage

These new texts will be for first assessment in Summer 2024.

Question 23

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

The question asked about the use of light in the play.

This was the less popular of the two questions although many candidates chose it.

The wording of the question meant that candidates adopted a variety of approaches. Many considered the motif of light in the use of props, and in symbolic reference to, in particular, Blanche. Some responses revolved solely around this, while others also took the opportunity to think of lighting and comment explicitly on the light cues that Williams uses for significance and effect. Examiners were instructed to take a broad approach and reward any sensible interpretations of what 'light' referred to – including, as many candidates discussed, its absence, eg darkness, both linguistically and as a staging device. Similarly, it was expected that some candidates would verge into considering use of colour reference to be relevant and there had to be judgement on how much they had connected this to 'light'.

Many responses tended to focus mainly on Blanche, with varying degrees of success. A typical opening of a low Level 4 response is below:

Tennessee Williams 'A Streetcar Named Desire', first performed in 1947, uses light to represent exposure to reality. The play follows Dubois whose arrival in Elysian Fields slowly unravels her past and begins her struggle to face reality as she comes into conflict with the metaphorical light and colour that Stanley represents. Blanche's presentation as a moth, and her need to be protected from light, from the exposure of reality, continues into the violent poker night and the play's following of a decline in her sanity by the end. Her conflict with light and colour, with Stanley, serves to represent how Blanche is inevitably unable to survive in Elysian Fields.

From Scene 1 Blanche is presented as a moth, unable to face light or reality. Stage directions describe this representation of Blanche: 'her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light' and 'her manner suggests a moth'. Her presentation as ama moth therefore presents her inability to face light, a moth being a flimsy and fragile insect which would die and be damaged by the light it is constantly drawn to. Light is therefore exposing and harsh on Blanche's delicate manner. She is presented as a weak and easily destroyed individual and it is light and the facing of truth which destroy her. This extended metaphor throughout the play, in Blanche 's presentation as a moth, demonstrates from the beginning that Blanche's downfall is inevitable. This is not only down to her presentation as a weak and fragile individual, but also to the fact that Stanley and Elysian Fields represent the very light she is not supposed to face; the light that will destroy her. Stanley's and the other men's coloured shirts in the poker night scene and the multi-cultural vibrancy of Elysian Fields are the light that destroys Blanche, but not only her. The loss of Belle Reve, the plantation on which she and her sister Stella used to live, represents a loss in old Southern values, the values of romanticism that Williams grieves as much as Blanche does. The changes to American society brought about by the civil war in the 1800s meant that Blanche's grasp on Belle Reve leads to her becoming unable to survive in new Southern society. As a fragile moth, she represents the old values that she holds onto. These are values which have no place in post-war American society and hence the light of Elysian Fields, and Stanley's representation of this new societal change, end up contributing to her downfall…

There were other, broader approaches, however. This from a high Level 4 response:

… Darkness and manipulation of light is utilised by Williams to portray the violent and abusive relationship between Stella and Stanley. Sex is the driving force for their relationship, as represented by the 'coloured lights' that they have 'going'. 'Coloured lights' has connotations with passion and lust, which exemplifies how the abuse which Stella endures is consoled by sex. For example, during the poker scene Stanley hit Stella with 'a loud thwack' on her thigh. The use of the plosive 'thwack' heightens the aggression and violence and the image of 'thigh' also suggests sexual undertones. However, despite this, they reunite in 'low animal moans' and Stella is in a state of 'narcoticized tranquilly' and 'blind with tenderness'. The use of the word 'blind' suggests her delusions and a lack of acknowledgement of the violence she has become accustomed to. Furthermore, Stella states that on their wedding night Stanley 'smashed all the light bulbs with the heel of [Stella's] slipper'. The breaking of light and the darkness motif reflects that the way for Stanley to have control over Stella is through sexual pleasure. This represents the link between upholding hegemonic masculinity in a patriarchal society, and sexuality, since men use sexuality to control and dominate women. Additionally Stella states to Blanche that 'there are things that happen in the dark between a man and a woman that makes everything else seem unimportant'. The use of dark imagery, which is the antithesis of light, further highlights that Stella is not confronting the reality that she is entrapped in a violent and abusive marriage, through lust and passion. The tumultuous relationship between Stella and Stanley could mirror Tennessee Williams' own relationship with Pancho Rodriguez, which was also highly volatile. The darkness imagery highlights the inescapability of Stella's position, as in society women had no agency of their own and are financially reliant on their husbands for survival, which can be seen by the quote, 'Stanley gave me ten dollars to smooth things over'. Moreover, the reference to the Napoleonic Code further reinforces the disempowered and entrapped position of women under the patriarchal society, since it is a legal code in Louisiana stating the all over wife's property must be under her husband's control. Darkness and absence of light imagery is therefore is used by Tennessee Williams to highlight the powerless position of women in society, how men control women and keep them 'in the dark' …

Finally, there were some excellent responses that focused on stagecraft, scoring highly on AO2:

'A Streetcar Named Desire' is an archetypal tragedy that uses expressionist features such as vivid imagery and leitmotifs to exaggerate the highs and lows of status as well as depict the significance of light. Williams. play presents light as representing hope as Blanche seeks to recreate the lost world of Southern chivalry, but clashes with the darkness of the practical utilitarian new South of New Orleans. Light is a predominant physical and metaphorical feature of the play's role as a performance text.

Williams uses the theme of light to reveal several truths in the play. He does this by relating light to certain events and characters. For example, in Scene 1 Blanche's fear of ageing is foreshadowed as 'she must avoid a strong light'. Williams builds up the notion of Blanche as an archetypal temptress by using stage lighting to exaggerate Blanche's presence and the vibrancy of a new location. As Blanche slowly follows Eunice 'into the interior which is lighted', Williams unfolds the setting as dangerous, echoing the fact that she 'must avoid strong light'. Therefore Williams uses the stage and repetition of 'light' as a warning which strengthens Scene One as the exposition, revealing New Orleans as a danger that Blanche 'must avoid'. Furthermore, Williams slowly builds up a naturalist form in the play, through the inclusion of whisky and Stanley's lighting 'a cigarette'. The flame of a cigarette mirrors Blanche's character to be like 'a moth to a flame' and vividly foreshadows Scene 10 where Stanley's 'flame' ends up burning Blanche as she got too close. In this way Williams depicts the light of Blanche being tainted by Stanley's deflating minimalism as the play showcases their war between realism and magic. It can be said that Blanche attempts to add a certain light to her life that conveys a fantastical nature, but her fear of strong light obstructs her ability to do so. Blanche's request for Mitch to 'hang up paper lantern over the light bulb' is evidence of 'plastic theatre' as the lantern is a metaphor for Blanche's need to cover the secret of her age. The paper lantern reflects her fear of light and acts as a barrier for her mental health which deteriorates as the truth is revealed …

…Williams instils a connection between light and the traumatic events. Different lights of the stage and props are used to connect emotion and remind the audience of a lingering trauma. In Scene 3, the poker night, Williams adheres to expressionist features such as a 'lurid brilliance' and vivid colour imagery. The poker night is a scene of action which Williams may have intended as the complication of the play. Williams uses the 'electric bulb' and leaves the 'bedroom relatively dim' to concentrate on any action that occurs in the kitchen. Williams uses stage directions to reiterate Blanche's subtle seeking for attention and manipulation of her sexuality as she 'stands in the light through the portiere'. Williams' use of bifurcated staging as the game 'continued in undertones' attracts focus to Blanche's intention of being in the light in front of Stanley's friends. It is Blanche's outward sexuality and desperation for attention that leads Stanley to 'toss the radio out of the window'. Williams therefore has created the perfect staging for an audience to focus on the violence of the scene …

This proved quite a challenge for those candidates who went blindly into it and reduced the analysis to a simple character study of the contrasting characters of Blanche and Stanley. The key elements of the tragic genre were then ignored by such responses rendering them descriptive and narrative in most cases. As with Q24, there was occasional confusion about the historical context. Lower-level responses tended to focus on Blanche alone or occasionally mention 'plastic theatre' without developing or integrating that phrase into a wider discussion of the question. Higher level responses discussed the use of light in relation to a range of issues relating to 'plastic theatre', the significance and symbolism of light for Blanche, its importance for the representation of Stanley, and the significance of 'The Moth' as a possible earlier title for the play.

Weaker responses listed as many mentions of the light / darkness as they could, all equating to the light being the truth. These included some dubious interpretations of 'moth' analogy, where some candidates struggled to 'explain' her shunning the light yet a moth being drawn to the light. Stronger responses either didn't take this too literally, or explored Blanche being pulled to her demise by 'Stella' drawing her in to New Orleans, and the use of Stanley being associated with strong light.

Generally convincing answers, bringing in a range of ideas from the stage directions (particularly the opening!) and considerable discussion of the significance of Blanche's paper lantern. However, here as throughout the paper, students seemed more confident with the beginnings of plays and sometimes missed obvious and important examples to discuss – the use of lights in the poker scene, the lurid shadows in scene 10, and the symbolism of Stanley's smashing of the coloured lights. Lower mark essays tended to be a reworking of a Blanche essay whereas at the higher levels, students' breadth and depth was stronger, with much more explicit consideration of Williams' intentions and effects on the audience.

Question 24

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

The question asked about the presentation of class differences in the play.

This was the most popular question on the paper, and examiners saw a wide range of responses. Although there was less evidence this summer of candidates struggling with timing on Section B, many examiners feel that students need to be encouraged to plan carefully and be mindful of constructing an argument and being precise enough about this argument in an introduction: many candidates made generic comments about class differences being presented through 'Blanche, Stanley and Stella' which didn't give the essay sufficient direction to justify being considered an argument. There was widespread historical confusion when discussing the class tension between the 'Old South' and the 'New South' (or sometimes the 'New America'). Some candidates seemed to collapse the gap between the American Civil War and the Second World War into a span that affected a single generation. There were many borderline L2/L3 responses that were overly reliant on viewing the conflict between classes as a simplistic representation of either upper class arrogance and entitlement versus working class progressiveness or of feminine victimhood versus masculine brute force. The upper L3 and L4/L5 responses navigated a more nuanced account of these admittedly relevant polarities.

Those who could raise their line of argument to an ideological or philosophical level recorded better marks. Some candidates pointed out that, 'class differences are illustrated from the very beginning, compounded by the contrast that Blanche, a symbol of the Old South, poses to a rapidly modernising, industrial New South...'. These approaches demonstrate an ability to deal with complex and sometimes contradictory ideas and concepts with an impressive degree of ease. They have a flowing argument, a brilliant understanding and embedding of the context and beliefs of the time. Again, there is clear evidence of the ability to deal with contradictions well and integrate them into a logical and powerful analysis. These concepts were then explored well with effective and sophisticated expressions and language.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response. Note how it adroitly includes contextual material into its developing argument. There is a strong focus on the writer's craft (use of language, staging, imagery etc) and the notion of class is examined in discriminating and sophisticated ways:

Williams presents class differences as the root cause of conflict. The differing values that each class are presented to adopt are inherently shown to be incompatible with the others, as the Antebellum South places emphasis on unequal hierarchies and fantasy, whereas the rising industrial America is shown to value equality and empiricism. Such a presentation of conflicting values may simply be perceived as Williams' portrayal of fading aristocracy, yet the nuanced portrayal of an immoral America conveys the universal nature of suffering that pervaded post war America.

Williams overtly displays how inherent differences in values between classes act to bring about conflict. He draws upon colour symbolism to expose the values of each class, with Blanche's opening portrayal enrobed in 'white'. Not only does this present the false presentation of purity she seeks to display, but also her plantation-owning class had to be 'white' so as to exert power over slaves. The class values of Blanche's aristocracy are further explored in her noting 'the colours of butterfly wings' that she aims to display. The fragility of 'butterfly wings' coupled with the innumerable different colour combinations perhaps exposes the weakness of Blanche's class, though this noting of the presumably colourful wings of a 'butterfly' contrast Williams' own directions that describe her as a 'moth'. A 'moth' exists as a destitute, colourless butterfly, and Williams perhaps draws attention to Blanche's obsession with fantasy; still aiming to be a 'butterfly' in spite of her 'moth' reality.

This distinction may also echo the southern belle archetype Blanche has arguably forsaken, unable to maintain her youthful beauty she is perhaps inevitably fed upon by the dominant ideas of the working class. Williams draws upon plastic theatre to display the conflict that differing values brings, staging Scene 3 with 'raw colours of childhood's spectrum' that describes the lighting. The men, who exist as manifestations of the industrial class, are embodied in 'raw colours', an inversion of the fantastical 'colours of butterfly wings' as the 'raw' nature of the staging paves the way for raw conflict to unfold, as it does in the poker scene. In addition, Williams' drawing upon naturalistic and expression methods adds to the sense of conflicting values, with Blanche's fantastical romanticism evident in the expressionistic techniques of the diegetic Varsouvianna, and the 'lurid natural reflections' of the final scene. The fact that these techniques coincide with the hyper-naturalistic setting of the play, confined to the apartment, not only adds a universal nature to the play, but acts to echo the intrinsic clash between the romanticised antebellum South and the empirical, industrial America. Indeed, Blanche's 'Belle Reve' literally translates to 'beautiful dream' which exists in opposition to the 'American Dream' that the male characters pursue. Williams' play has often been regarded as a domestic tragedy, yet others have seen it as a representation of the Southern Gothic genre. Perhaps this perceived conflict genre additionally acts to portray effect of class differences, as even interpretations of the play differ in their acknowledgement of the value in each class.

Williams further explores the conflict that class difference brings via different notions of sexuality, and different expressions of it. The sexual domination of men within the play is unarguable, as Stanley exists as a 'richly feathered bird' immediately tying his sexuality to notions of class – not via the anthropomorphism, but via reference to 'richly', suggesting how 'capital' can be experienced in numerous ways, such as Stanley's bodily capital. Intriguingly, Williams seems to draw attention to similarities in class notions of sexuality, as Blanche later goes on to credit 'richness of the spirit' as more powerful than monetary wealth. Stanley's acquisition of wealth is often aligned with the 'American Dream' yet a less frequently analysed view is that of his Marxist quality, preoccupied with the inheritance of the private property of 'Belle Reve', and acting to 'usurp' the upper classes in his rape of Blanche. Stanley's class existence is therefore a conflict in itself, between the Western ideal of an industrial free market worker and the communist view of Stanley as a symbol of working class revolution.

Intriguingly, both extremities of social class employee euphemistic language to describe sexual activities. Blanche notes the 'epic fornications' of her ancestors, and even refers to her sexual experiences as 'intimacies with strangers'. The possible juxtaposition in 'epic fornications' with sexual activity being primarily transactional to plantation owners, and not 'epic', perhaps betrays Blanche's romanticised view of her past, with the historical process of 'sharecropping' perhaps being the true explanation. However Stella and Stanley's sexual actions are also in euphemism as 'the coloured lights going' indicate their relations. Again, conflict can be observed between these value sets. While Blanche acts to romanticise the unremarkable sexual history of her ancestors, that of 'coloured lights' appears as more attainable than 'epic fornications'. In post-war America, due to the repression of sexual norms during the war, a return to normalised sexual roles was desired. Yet often, men returned home with differing notions of sexual normality, influenced by the masculine sphere of the military. Both Mitch and Stanley served in 'Salerno' and thus have had their class uplifted via veteran status. However, this shifting class inherently spells conflict, especially in a sexual sphere, with both the characters with military background either attempting, or carrying out, rape. Stella notes how her perception of Stanley's class was not altered by his service, not 'blinded by all the brass'. The plosives utilised in this phrase not only echo the violent military experiences of the men, but also the dominance that Stanley's military position conveys, arguably elevating his status to equal Blanche's, and indeed all characters within the play. Ironically, it is Stella's 'blindness' to Stanley that enables his abuse of his veteran class, as 'her eyes go blind with tenderness' following their physical reconciliation in Scene 3. By echoing notions of Stella's blindness, Williams reveals the stark reality of class and status as justification for immorality, as many critics did view Stanley's rape as justified, arguably equally blinded by his status.

Williams also notes how there is a distinct class difference in level of equality, At its core, Antebellum South culture was built upon notions of inequality, tragically echoed by Williams in the 'faint redolence of banana and coffee' that are present in the opening staging. This acts as a stark reminder of the slave-based economy that New Orleans had originally as the historic end point for the 'Middle Passage'. However it is this very same slave trade that facilitates' the 'intermingling of races' that Williams observes. Williams seemingly portrays the deeply racist aspect of Blanche to echo her plantation past, yet it would be naive to absolve the other classes as free of racial notions. Steve, for instance, openly discusses slurs, whilst the '[Black] woman' remains unnamed, and is, by that anonymity, rendered as of a lower class to her companions. Perhaps, then, class differences are united by a tragically racist view of society, reflecting the true American, post war South, where Jim Crow laws were gradually introduced. However, the conflict in classes emerges due to Blanche's xenophobia, noting Stanley as a 'polack'. Through this derogatory phrase, Blanche inevitably begins conflict with Stanley's class, and indeed the whole his whole existence, rendering him as beneath hard due to his immigrant status. The fact that Stanley self-identifies as 'common as dirt' aids in this conflict. The simile acts not only to display Stanley's working-class origin, but arguably draws greater attention to Blanche's racism, as the 'dirt' in her plantation was worked upon by slave labour, and thus her view of Stanley as 'ape-like' carries even greater weight

Conclusively, class differences in values and sexuality of explored by Williams as bringing about conflict. Though limited in some aspects, he seemingly sets out the play as the manifestation of warring classes, and the complex class adaptation in the aftermath of war. Class differences, Williams notes, are both a tragic truth, and destabilising force in society both embodying and instigating conflict.

Many answers were notably similar to responses last year on the tension between the past and the present; in general, the wording was different, but the ideas and approach were the same, whereby candidates would identify Blanche as symbolic of one, Stanley symbolic of the other, and then analyse their presentation, with reference to key words at the start and end of paragraphs. There is a lot of excellent wider knowledge and contextual knowledge being used to good effect. Candidates did tend to overexplain what a 'Southern Belle' is, however. Consideration of Stella was a feature of many of the strongest responses, allowing for a synthesising of their ideas about class differences. Mitch was also a frequent consideration, with mixed success – it is perhaps symptomatic of discourse and class consciousness that many candidates seemed to think being articulate and polite are innately unnatural to the working class, but many candidates identified an interesting consideration, as in Othello, of a character who may seem to defy prejudices but ultimately comes to confirm them. Candidates who engaged well with the specific question throughout had some very interesting evaluation of Williams' messaging about class and applied biographical information well in that endeavour.

Many anchored their whole essay to Blanche as a representation of upper class, Stanley as working class, and Stella as a bridge between the two. These often didn't go beyond the ways in which Williams shows Blanche and Stanley's conflict – class differences through the clash of their clothes, language, incongruous entrance, occasionally lighting. Stronger answers didn't just identify that their clothing was contrasted, but how this showed the "delicate and decorative" aesthetics of the Old South, against the men's "rough and practical" clothing being necessary for work and what this represented.

Many explored how Stella was able to adapt where Blanche could not, but didn't explore the consequences of Stella adapting, and how her presentation might reflect Williams' feelings about having to adapt.

One interesting answer explored the setting in detail and looked into the juxta-positioning of the river and the tracks already at odds with each other, and how they cannot co-exist.

By far the most popular question and often treated as a straightforward Blanche versus Stanley idea, which at the lower levels was quite narrative. Again, heavy reliance on the opening stage directions and Blanche's incongruity. A few candidates had some misunderstandings of context, not appreciating the length of time between the civil war and the second world war and the generational decline of the Du Bois family. More textual references across the whole play were often needed! Better answers were more discerning on AO2, looking at the difference of language between the two main characters, demonstrated a much wider focus, considering for example the class positions of Mitch and Stella, and were more thoughtful in considering what Williams was reflecting and stating about 1940s America.

Question 25

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The question asked about the presentation of servants in the play.

Around half the candidates chose to answer this question. Examiners expected there to be a fairly broad interpretation of 'servants' in responses and, indeed, some candidates wrote convincingly about the roles of Miss Prism and Dr Chausible. However, the vast majority considered the function of the servants Lane and Merriman and explored how Wilde uses them both to make satirical social comment and to create comedy. Many responses commented on the humorous social inversions involving the servants:

...In the opening of Act One we are introduced to an exchange between our rake protagonist, Algernon, who is discussing rather serious topics with his manservant. When Algernon exclaims, 'Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?' the placement of 'marriage' with the adjective 'demoralising' adds comic effect, because marriage was deemed a moral and righteous institution, particularly in the upper class world because it allowed people to gain wealth and rise to the ranks of aristocracy if you were of lower class. Significantly Algernon's exclamation is hyperbolic in nature because, as an upper class gentleman, we would expect him to support marriage but his hedonistic beliefs override this. Lane responds to Algernon's question by stating that, 'I believe it is a very pleasant state, Sir'. The subversion of master and servant roles is strikingly evident and narrows the social gaps. Lane, who is of lower class, supports marriage. Wilde is clearly showcasing an artificial world where the masters and servants are engaging in serious conversation about matters such as marriage and the servant is depicted as the righteous and wiser individual. The Victorian audience indeed would have found this scene comical as Wilde takes 'comedy of manners' to the extreme by exaggerating subjects that the upper class placed important upon and and those they regarded as trivial ...

Here is an example of a high-level response that looks at Wilde's use of servants to develop the play's themes, highlighting Wilde's crafting of absurd humour:

In Wilde's funny comedy of manners,'The Importance of Being Earnest', Wilde uses the servants, Lane and Merriman, to add symmetry to the structure of the play and to ultimately illuminate the themes of homosexuality, societal expectations/pressures and class. Whilst the role of the servants is minor, their impact on the rest of the characters is hugely significant as without them neither the play nor the characters would function fully.

Firstly, his initial presentation of the servant Lane in relation to Algernon (whom he serves) allows Wilde to establish the subtle theme of homosexuality throughout the play, thus demonstrating how Wilde has incorporated his own experiences within the play. This is firstly seen through the use of phallic imagery surrounding the 'cucumber sandwiches' incident at the beginning. Algernon's blaming of Lane for the lack of cucumber sandwiches, 'Lane, why are there no cucumber sandwiches?' even though he has just eaten them himself, followed by Lane's willingness to cover for Algernon with his response that, 'There were no cucumbers... not even for ready money'. This is made more comical through Lane's stage direction, 'gravely', which juxtaposes the triviality of the subject. Lane's attitude towards Algernon could suggest a homoerotic atmosphere, especially due to the repetition of 'cucumber' throughout this scene, which really emphasises this phallic imagery created. Furthermore, Lane is described as having 'somewhat lax' views on marriage, after having been married 'once... in consequence of a misunderstanding'. This unusual portrayal of marriage, strengthened by Algernon's epigram, 'Divorces are made in heaven' could suggest a degree of criticism towards marriage. Algernon's opinions on Lane's attitudes to marriage create a great irony as Algernon's attitudes to marriage are also 'lax'. Therefore Lane clearly serves his purpose as illuminating the superficiality of Algernon, particularly as by the end Algernon is engaged to be married. Further still Lane's enabling of Algy to show his criticisms of marriage allow for Wilde to show his own negative views of marriage, as he faced much discrimination due to his homosexual relationships and was imprisoned in Reading Gaol after he broke the law of Gross Indecency. Victorian marriage at the time could only be between a man and a woman, so Wilde's arguable resentment of the fact he had no freedom to marry who he loved can be seen through Algernon's funny criticisms of it, which are enabled by Lane. Therefore Wilde presents servants – in this case Lane – to illuminate Wilde's own criticisms of marriage through the character of Algernon, and to establish the theme throughout the play of homosexuality.

Secondly, Wilde's presentation of the servants enables him to satirise and mock the upper classes through shining a light on their ridiculousness. Merriman's compliance with the wishes of his superiors add to the hilarity due to the way it leaves audiences questioning what he actually thinks. Merriman's listing of Algernon's many possessions that he brought to Jack's home, 'three portmanteaus, a dressing case, two hat boxes and a large luncheon basket' demonstrates the complete extravagance and overindulgence of the upper classes. This is further enhanced by Algernon's subsequent comment, 'I can't stay more than a week this time', which not only would have received many laughs from the audience, but also demonstrates the complete over-excessiveness of those in the upper classes and this presentation is made all the more stark through the continuous presence of the servants. In Wilde's contemporary society there were significant divisions between the rich and the poor as the Industrial Revolution had played a significant role in widening this gap. Therefore whilst the presence of servant displays the excessive extravagance in the upper classes, it still leaves audiences feeling a little uncomfortable about displays of such wealth in front of people who have little. Therefore in this way Wilde's use of the presence of Merriman in this instance – but also of servants across the play – could enable him to highlight this great inequality (he himself was a socialist) and criticise the superficiality of the upper classes in their ignorance of suffering so near them.

Finally, the presence of servants in 'The Importance of Being Earnest' enable Wilde to highlight societal pressures faced by a women, seen in the scene where Gwendolen and Cecily have tea. Their use of periphrastic language to insult one another: 'Sugar is not fashionable anymore"; 'Cake is rarely seen in the best houses nowadays', combined with the physical comedy as seen in the stage directions 'quite politely rising'; 'very politely rising' demonstrates societal views impressed by Victorian society of 'pas devant les domestiques'. The restriction of the two women in the way they can speak to one another due to the presence of the servant cause could symbolise the ways women in Wilde's contemporary society where restricted. The 1887 Marriage Act made it far more difficult for a wife to divorce her husband and vice versa, which is representative of the significant inequalities faced by women in his contemporary society. Therefore, Wilde uses the presence of servants – in this case Merriman – to demonstrate societal pressures faced by all in Victorian society, but particularly women – as seen when Algy is able to speak very candidly with Lane.

All things considered it is clear that Wilde presents the minor characters of the servants in 'The Importance of Being Earnest' to play an unusually significant role in illuminating the key themes explored such as homosexuality, treatment of women and class. Whilst providing much hilarity due to their serious demeanour in light of triviality, they also enable Wilde to make serious points about his society.

Another successful response focussed on Wilde's use of the servants to develop social satire:

Oscar Wilde uses servants as a key device for the use of comedy in his play. However, the servants also help him craft the play in such a manner that will allow him to satirise the artificial and hypocritical nature of the upper classes, while also presenting the lower orders as immoral themselves.

In the opening scene of the play, Oscar Wilde uses conversation between Lane and Algernon to craft a witty opening to the play. The very first reply to Algernon asking if Lane (his manservant) heard what he was playing is the unexpected reply, 'I didn't think it polite to listen, Sir'. So while addressing Algernon in the polite and respected way expected, he implicitly insults Algernon's playing as being bad, something this would have surprised the respectable members of the audience who will have had their own servants and not expect them to speak in that way. Wilde expertly crafts the language in his play to be formal and polite which contrasts the immoral and surprising content of their speech. The audience will be familiar with the trope in comedy of a servant being wittier than their master as this goes as far back as Shakespeare's plays. Indeed, the conversation Algy has with Lane is surprising as he asks 'merely for information' as to why 'eight bottles and a pint' have been consumed by three people, suggesting that the servants 'invariably drink the champagne'. This characterizes Algernon as a not very strict character and almost quite generous, as he 'happens to be more than usually hard up' but still lets others share his hedonistic way life. In the conversation about marriage Lane comments that he has only been married once due to 'a misunderstanding'. In this way marriage is presented as something that trivial by Lane, yet in the Victorian times, marriage was regarded as something very special and had a central role in people's lives, as much was based around family. The Matrimonial Causes Act in 1950s limited the access to divorce; only the very rich would be able to divorce and in this way Lane is very unlikely to have been able to do so. This creates an artificial and absurd opening to the play, even through minor characters such as the servants. Lane also seems to subvert the very important Victorian respect for marriage which shaped much of life in Victorian society, especially for women who were taught how to be good wives and 'Angels in the House' which was an idealised view of the pure woman. The religious connotations emphasise the sacredness with which marriage was regarded. This reflects Wilde's desire to treat serious things trivially and the trivial things were studied with sincere seriousness. The interaction with Lane leads to Algernon's use of his first paradox and inversion of a Victorian belief as he comments that, 'If the lower orders don't set us a good example what on earth is the use of them?' The interaction with Lane introduces ideas about class into the play and also subverts a belief in Victorian society that it was the moral duty of the moral higher orders to set an example as they were by nature superior and better than the lower class. However Wilde uses Algernon to subvert this view for comic effect.

Wilde plays with the unexpected nature of the answers in order to create comedy through the audience's own expectations and preconceptions. This is linked to the 'Bunbury Suits' he asks Lane to prepare for him. Lane knows the euphemism of 'Bunburying' about Algernon's double life in the country. This shows Algy to be more immoral. Also Lady Bracknell's ability to 'purchase the confidence' of Gwendolen's maid 'by means of a small coin' shows the immoral nature of all of society, which may be Wilde's way of satirising everyone for not being as moral as they pretend.

The scene of the tea party in Jack's manor house in the country, in which Gwendolen and Cecily use manners and language to make snide remarks at each other, is a typical setting for the comedy of manners which makes fun of the behaviour codes in society of the upper classes – easy to achieve when trying to abide by stricter rules of Victorian society. It is a burlesque of a comedy of manners, a parody. Gwendolen calls Cecily 'a detestable girl' in an aside, but says she requires tea. A situation like this this creates comedy due to its farcical nature as physical comedy is used when Cecily puts lumps of sugar in Gwendolen's tea when she specifically asked for none, and the stage directions specify that she cut her a large slice of cake and puts it on the tray for the servant to hand to 'Miss Fairfax'. The presence of the servants makes the women abide by the particular code of behaviour, while clearly intending the opposite; being very polite and acting with elaborate politeness. This gap between what they want to do and duty to conform to the social codes creates a comedic tone to a serious situation of being engaged to the same man. Cecily decides to pay Gwendolen back by spoiling her afternoon tea, but Gwendolen is unable to comment directly as she would appear ungrateful to the servants and the image of respectable propriety was very important to Victorians. The stage direction specified that Cecily is 'about to retort' but the presence of the servants 'exercises a restraining influence under which both girls chafe'.

The use of the servants announcing the entrances of people is also exploited by a Wilde for comic effect. Wilde foreshadows in act two that Lady Bracknell has a habit of coming suddenly into the room that Gwendolen has often had to speak to her about. This is used at the climax in act three when all the couples fall into each other's arms and the situation seems to be resolved. Comedy has the trope of younger generations being separated by older generations in questions of love; here the couples are united in a melodramatic manner, almost like a quadrille dance. Lane coughs to signify the appearance of Lady Bracknell as the couples go from falling into each other 's arms to separating in alarm. This provides a comedic and melodramatic effect for the purpose of comedy in the fin de siècle, which is how Wilde uses servants for comedy – to create enjoyment.

Knowledge of Victorian upper-class society was frequently impressive, and candidates were as ever able to rely on Wilde's satirical intentions for evaluation. Understanding of the play as a comedy for was sometimes less evident, and candidates possibly overemphasise the extent to which the play has a message or a moral crusade to advance. Several candidates confidently asserted the play to be 'didactic', which seems a stretch.

Too much reliance on 'parody/satire of upper class' without concrete context. Quite a bit of championing of Wilde as a working-class hero/class warrior.

Candidates wrote of how the servants were used to expose the hypocrisy and foolishness of the upper classes. Lane and Merriman were thought to mock the Victorian upper-class image of the working-class. While on the surface they appeared obedient to their 'masters', they were shown to be intelligent and cunning in their own rights, more so than those they served and therefore, by extension, representative of working-class people having greater social value than the upper classes. Servants were considered to be used to present ideas on marriage. It was stated that servants upheld and perpetuated the lies of the upper classes but were also used to expose immoral behaviours. Some claimed that the servants were based on Wilde's editors and also made comments on Wilde's imprisonment for homosexuality and noted his accusers were Upper Class.

Question 26

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The question asked about the use of varieties of language in the play.

As with Q25, examiners expected there to be a wide interpretation of 'varieties of language' in responses. Some candidates chose to look at the idiolects of individual characters; others took a thematic approach, exploring Wilde's use of language for satirical and comedic purposes. While weaker responses tended to rely at time on word-level commentary of specific scenes, more successful answers were aware of how Wilde had used patterns of language for dramatic effects and were able to link his crafting to the play's contexts.

Here is a typical example of a mainly character-driven approach:

...Initially, through the neologism 'bunburying' Wilde is able to explore the acts of deception and the escape of duty that characterised the upper class. Notoriously Wilde himself led a double life in which he engaged in illicit homosexual affairs outside of his relationship with Constance Lloyd. Perhaps through the humorous neologism Wilde is able to trivialise the act of deception, highlighting its presence throughout the Victorian upper classes. The term is first used by the dandy, Algernon, who relishes in the practice: 'I have Bunburied all across Shropshire, on two separate occasions'. Wilde contrasts the open and immoral language of Algernon – 'give me an explanation and pray make it improbable' – to Jack who is far more reserved in regards to his acts of deception. He is confirmed as a secret Bunburyist when he details his name is 'Ernest in town and Jack in the country'. Wilde presents two ends of the scale in regards to the practice of living life for pleasure but through the common ground of 'Bunburying' it is evidenced how universal this practice is. However for the audience humour is not only created through the overt language choice of Wilde, but is created through the absurdity of the actions of both the upper class men... Furthermore, Wilde is able to create humour through the specific language used between Jack and Algernon in which sexual connotations are evoked from each character's use of parody and innuendo. Wilde is perhaps able to mock the upper class model of skirting around such a taboo subject creating humour in the tension that follows. For instance, Wilde chooses to use language of evasion such as 'muffins' and the tension surrounding eating as a means to provoke humour out of the links that are made between food and sex. Jack describes how 'When I am in really great trouble, I refuse everything except food and drink – besides, I am particularly fond of muffins'. To the contemporary audience the absurd use of innuendo would be humorous due to the voices it was coming from. As a member of the upper class, it was the belief that privilege entails responsibility and that taboo subject such as sex should not be discussed in the public sphere. Therefore, Wilde's particular choice of language would have been in part amusing for the audience who would have deemed the sexual connotations of Jack's language as uncouth and absurd...

... Another instance of Wilde's choice of language in regards to the upper class is the repartee that builds between Cecily and Gwendolen, highlighting the extent to which conflict is an outcome of upper class attitudes ...

… Finally, through the use of irony Wilde is able to use the language of Lady Bracknell against herself, issuing criticisms and satirising the older members of the upper class. Lady Bracknell prevents the marriage of Jack and Gwendolen on the grounds that Jack represents the frowned upon 'new money' and is a 'foundling'. However, irony emanates from her language when she describes that she had 'no fortune of any kind' when she married Lord Bracknell but 'never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way'. Wilde presents Lady Bracknell as hypocritical and ignorant through her language, perhaps as a means of satirising and commenting on the immorality of the older members of the upper class…

Here is the opening of a response where its strength lay in linking very clearly Wilde's use of language to the contexts in which he wrote:

Oscar Wilde's comedic, and perhaps controversial, play, written in the 19th century, showcases a variety of language to reflect the liminality within Victorian society due to the fin-de-siecle. Wilde utilises hackneyed plots and character tropes, which were popularized within his zeitgeist, in order to subvert other plays with his departure from didacticism and moral character development. The play hosts immoral and absurdist characters, delving into voices and hiding behind masks of dignity, to showcase the entrenched hypocrisy in Victorian society. Wilde makes use of a variety of language to express the Victorian standards of propriety and to expose how obsolete institutions respond to emerging modernism.

Oscar Wilde's gravitation towards epigrammatic wit is a form of linguistic power which permeates the whole play. In particular, Algernon revels in epigrammatic diction, especially when critiquing the topic of Victorian marriages. Algernon's view, 'women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous…It is simply washing one's clean linen in public, evokes humour through the ironic reversal of the realities of marriage in a repressive Victorian society. The epigram directly subverts the idiomatic expression 'washing one's dirty laundry in public' showing Algernon's detestation of marriage or, in particular, heterosexual couples in Victorian society who flaunt their sexual passions…

Here is an extract from a response that successfully explored a specific scene. The candidate comments throughout on Wilde's stagecraft, looking at the dramatic functions of language use rather than simply analysing the text at word-level:

… In the Tea Party scene, Wilde displays – prior to the entrance of the servants – Cecily revealing to Gwendolen, 'If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise, I shall consider it my duty to rescue him'. Wilde employs metaphor to display a choreographed setting that exaggerates the art of social discourse to generate comedy through the demands of Victorian manners and etiquette. Following this, Wilde has Cecily reveal to Gwendolen, 'This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade, I call it a spade'. Following Wilde's utilisation of this idiom, Merriman enters. Wilde shows that the presence of servants 'exercises a restraining influence' whilst employment of stage direction is used to expose the repressive nature of Victorian etiquette. However, Wilde illustrates that the 'shallow mask of manners' has fallen. Within Victorian society to call a spade a spade, or speak one's mind, would represent a failure of upper-class decorum. Thus Gwendolen and Cecily are forced to insult each other periphrastically due to both of them being practised members of polite society. Following the entrance of the servants, Wilde shoes Gwendolen revealing 'Sugar is not fashionable anymore' and 'cake is rarely seen in the best houses'. Wilde then satirises the superficial and ornamental nature of those social values through stage directions. Due to the presence of servants, language must appear polite with hostilities suspended. Whilst Wilde employs a lack of language and uses stage directions to generate humour, he captures Cecily putting 'four lumps of sugar' into Gwendoline's cup, and 'cutting a very large slice of cake'. While the employment of stage directions is used to satirise the Victorian attachment of status to superficial items like food, the removal of language in the scene due to the presence of servants is employed to generate humour through the periphrastic nature of Gwendolen's insults. However, Wilde then further critiques the superficial and performative nature of the upper class through Gwendolen and Cecily naming each other 'sister' one page later. The use of hyperbolic language here displays the superficial nature of his characters. Upper-class Victorian members are critiqued by Wilde as he exposes the way in which the 'shallow mask of manners' is easily resumed…

Typically, different forms of linguistic humour, especially 'repartee', used to mock the upper class was found to be the way forward and a rewarding approach was taken to marking these. One specific pitfall to this was that often the quotations that students were most comfortable integrating into their responses were rare examples of Wilde not using wit in his dialogue! Another more general issue was that once students referred to Lady Bracknell, they launched into extended general discussion of her role in the play and left the question behind.

Once again, language questions tended to be well handled, with students going into considerable depth.

Higher level responses considered the way characters used language to present an acceptable veneer of themselves that fit with social norms and ideals of the time. In support of this, some cited Gwendolen’s refusal of sugar as it was not fashionable rather than what she preferred in taste and the way she and Cecily continued with their ‘polite’ activity of taking tea whilst snidely insulting each other. It was noted how the civilised and polite language was maintained between the two whilst they were actually in combat with each other. Some also indicated the love affair Cecily had written for herself and Algernon before they had even met. Some cited Wilde’s statement about not delving beneath surface beauty, anyone doing so does so at their own peril. Links were then made to Wilde’s own life as he had to hide his truth from society, perhaps suggesting that many others in the upper classes were doing the same. Also commented upon was the use of language by Lady Bracknell to exhibit her authority over others. Gwendolen’s assertiveness in taking control of her own engagement was also commented on as being representative of women’s changing role in society. Yet she was also seen to reinforce the superficiality of the upper classes when she states what is important is 'style, not sincerity'. There were some insightful explorations of the use of language to create comedy in the play. Examples of this included the play on the meanings of the word/name earnest/Ernest, the use of satire, dramatic irony and how characters would say one thing whilst acting contrary to their words (e.g. the cucumber sandwiches), the stage directions effectively contributing to this. The play was seen as Wilde holding a mirror up to society, subtly inviting the upper classes to laugh at themselves and hoping that they would learn the errors in their values and behaviour.

Question 27

THE PITMEN PAINTERS

The question asked about the presentation of stereotypes in the play.

Very few candidates chose to answer this question. Responses, in the main, were clear and straightforward; some, such as the one below, tending to focus on looking at the language used by various characters:

In 'The Pitmen Painters' Hall effectively presents stereotypes in order to develop a sense of misunderstanding and disconnect present between the lower and upper classes of society, with both the pitmen and the upper class characters viewing their counterparts through the lens of stereotypes, emphasising boundaries of class and the struggle of the lower class as a whole. For example, at the start of the play, the disconnect between Robert Lyon and the pitmen is made clear in, 'but you've never actually looked at a picture in real life?' 'Well, no.' 'I don't mean to to be rude in any way but, may I ask why have you chosen to do Art Appreciation?' As Hall uses the comedy of the scene to emphasise how little Lyon understands the pitmen, Lyon's patronising tone in 'you've never actually looked at a picture in real life' is clarified by Hall's use of 'actually' as its use presents Lyon as regarding the miners as vastly inferior to Lyon as they do not understand something he does. The blunt response of, 'Well, no' develops this difference in understanding, as the shorter speech of the miners contrasts heavily with the proper English Lyon uses, such as, 'I don't mean to be rude' as he feels the need to apologise for looking down on the men. The stereotype of stupidity slowly leaves the miners throughout the play as they come to appreciate art, building upon Hall's point that not one group of people is stupid and that anyone can learn if given the ability …

Centres should note that this is the final time that *The Pitmen Painters* will appear on the specification for 9ET01.

Two new texts have been added: *Les Blancs* by Lorraine Hansbury and *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage

These new texts will be for first assessment in Summer 2024.

Question 28

THE PITMEN PAINTERS

The question asked about the use of oppositions in the play.

This was the more popular question, and candidates found plenty to discuss, often around contrasting characters or opposing points of view. Most were able to introduce a range of contextual references and to link these to Hall's dramatic purpose.

The extract below, is typical of most responses:

Lee Hall's 'The Pitmen Painters' is an extremely moving and influential play. Throughout the play the theme of oppositions is paramount to understanding Hall's messages and links to themes of class and gender. The audience also sees his characters manage to overcome oppositions and eventually live in an almost harmonic manner.

Firstly Hall successfully presents the oppositions between class within the play through the presentation of Ben Nicholson and Lyon and how they interact with the miners. The miners speak with a clear dialect which Hall excellently uses to present them as being lower class, however when Lyon is introduced his dialect is notably absent. When George asks Lyon, 'Can I help you?' Lyon responds 'I'm sorry. Is this Art Appreciation?' Lyon's dialogue is clearly much more polysyllabic than that of the men's monosyllabic sentences and he also uses much more complex sentence structures, such as clauses. This immediately puts what's essentially a language barrier between the miners and the upper class. The men's lower class also becomes evident as the stage directions depict 'blank faces' in response to Lyon's asyndetic listing, 'Raphael. Leonardo. Da Vinci?' The art world was very exclusive in the 20th century and arguably still is today due to the high cost costs of art or going to art school. Miners were a very low paid group of workers despite coal being essential to a rapidly industrialising UK. This opposition between the upper and lower class is also explored in the scene between Ben Nicholson and Oliver. Ben is once again lacking the northern dialect of Oliver and this leads to a very pivotal exchange in the play. Ben is seen to 'light a cigarette' and he gives it to Oliver. This nonchalant attitude shows the confidence that his status affords him, making him at home in Rock Hall. However Oliver has to ask Ben 'Are we allowed?' in regard to smoking, showing that he feels inferior to Ben and must ask for his permission to smoke. This moment perfectly encapsulates to Hall's audience the central opposition between class in the book. As the men grow more prominent in the art world they feel subservient and out of place compared to the more traditional upper class artists, despite Ben Nicholson actually coming from a mining family himself. This shows Hall's use of oppositions to explore the differences between class within the play and further into the art world.

Secondly, Hall cleverly presents his audience with the oppositions between gender and the self-destructive nature that the lower class adopts. Midway into the play the audience is introduced to Susan, a lower class girl trying to fund her way through art school. However, the miners are immediately dismissive of her saying. 'You can't come in here, pet'. The reductive word 'pet' dehumanises Susan and shows how little they care for her. This is further emphasises as Harry says 'This is an art class, for men'. Miners were often extremely uneducated, leaving school at age 14 to work down the mines for up to 50 years. This meant that WEA classes such as art appreciation would have meant a lot to them, which could explain their dismissal of Susan. Despite her lower class status, we learn that as well as being a nude model, Susan 'has a job in Carrick's, actually' in an attempt to put herself through art school. This opposition between genders is further emphasised when the audience is introduced to Helen. Helen is extremely rich, contrasting the men's minimalist lifestyle even more than Lyon. The men are once again dismissive of her describing her as 'a wife'. However, this hostility is mutual as the stage directions show that Helen is 'uninterested' in George's description of what the pits are like and how he makes his artwork. Helen also show hostility when Oliver says 'Women are barred, aren't they?' and Helen, in a very humorous moment, responds patronisingly, saying 'I suspect they're rather grateful'. Women were still seen in a very belittling manner during the 1930s, when play is set and as a result their poor treatment by the miners could be understood to be the norm in a small mining town such as Ashington. Jimmy further uses the possessive 'wur lass' when talking about his wife, who he is evidently afraid of as 'Wur lass wouldn't let me hang that up'. This shows how the opposition between gender is actually very self-destructive for the lower class, as instead of tackling the real issues of class inequality, lower class – both male and female – degrade each other and prevent anyone from improving themselves …

Centres should note that this is the final time that *The Pitmen Painters* will appear on the specification for 9ET01.

Two new texts have been added: *Les Blancs* by Lorraine Hansbury and *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage

These new texts will be for first assessment in Summer 2024.

Question 29

THE ROVER

The question asked about the significance of Angellica's picture.

This was the more popular question of the two. Most candidates wrote about Angellica as a symbol of female empowerment, often linking her to the writer herself. Some saw her failure to attain happiness in the end as a reflection of the frustrations Behn may have felt as a female dramatist writing at the time.

Below is an example of a high Level 4 response. It is discriminating in its approach and makes detailed links to context, but there is occasionally a sense of 'telling' rather than evaluating, and it perhaps lacks the sophisticated analysis expected at Level 5. Its strength however lies in its adherence to the question, keeping the focus on the function of the picture and not just on the character of Angellica:

Angellica Bianca is a famous courtesan in Aphra Behn's 'The Rover' who aims to cunningly navigate carnival and gain business interest through her use of smaller pictures of herself. Bakhtin contends that carnival forms 'a trap for fools' thus emphasising the importance of self-awareness within carnival setting as it becomes easy to be tricked and exploited, as Angellica slowly learns through her troubled relationship with the libertine rake figure of Willmore who undermines her use of pictures to achieve financial independence and subverts typical Petrarchan roles. Angellica's picture also forms the centre of an Anglo-Spanish conflict which are commonly portrayed throughout the play as many Englishmen had chosen to visit Naples during carnival in order to escape the tedium and boredom of puritan England of which Behn is known to be highly critical, through her vocal support of King Charles.

The fighting over Angellica's picture creates a clear display of Anglo-Spanish conflict. After being impressed by her beauty, Wilmore boldly chooses to take a small picture for himself, much to the anger of Antonio: 'Restore the picture' Sir!' The calmness in the tone of Antonio conveys how he feels as though he possesses agency particularly given his knowledge of carnival and Spanish Naples, whilst he also chooses to undermine Willmore through the sarcastic use of 'Sir'. Instead, Willmore responds provocatively, 'Tilting for the wench? My Gad, if that would win her, I have as good as sword as the rest of ye!' Through the bawdy mention of 'sword' Wilmore uses phallic imagery to boast of his own capabilities and undermine Antonio, in return claiming that the tough facade ('tilting') he is putting on for Angellica will be no use in battle or the bedroom. The underlying bawdy comedy of the conflict reflects the liberated period in England whereby Puritan rule had been brought to an end by King Charles of whom Aphra Behn was a vocal supporter. Ultimately the Englishman, Willmore, can be seen to be the winner of the conflict, as Angellica allows him to retain the pictures, after a display of the charm and charisma of the libertine rake, 'You may keep the trifle'. As well as losing the picture the Spaniards are also undermined as they are 'beaten off', displaying a second loss within a very short period of conflict, likely appealing to the English Restoration audience who may remember the conflict between Queen Elizabeth and King Philip of Spain as another English victory is portrayed on stage.

Angellica's picture represents her ability to achieve financial independence through the motivation of her beauty and gender. Discussing the picture as a means of advertising, Angellica is able to generate interest from the male characters of the play whilst detailing that, 'He that makes my price can make my pleasure'. The transactional nature of the relationship is evident while she maintains emphasis on the importance of her own pleasure through the possessive pronoun 'my pleasure'. Nancy Vickers suggests that a relationship so constructed involves an active buyer, an active seller and a passive object for sale. Although it could be argued that this is less the case for Angellica as she is more independent and markets herself particularly when compared to the more dependant Lucetta for whom the quotation is likely more applicable due to her pimp Sancho. Angellica's agency is maintained and kept clear as she continues to focus on the importance of payment, stating that 'nothing but gold shall charm my heart'. The largely monosyllabic metaphor ensures absolute clarity within the chaotic carnival setting, allowing Angelica to best maximise her chances for charity. However her independence declines after she allows Willmore to keep her picture, as he physically gains agency over a part of her, 'that of possession which I will maintain'. The idea of possessing a part of Angellica mimics the societal opinions about female playwrights in the Restoration, as they were viewed similar to prostitutes as they were effectively selling parts of themselves through selling literature, which is likely a large contributing factor as to why Behn initially published the play under the pseudonym Astrea in order to avoid such judgments and maintain anonymity. Angellica's loss of agency and independence is epitomised in the confession, 'Though has a power too strong to be resisted', as even a seemingly powerful and affluent woman falls victim to the charm and seduction of the male, undermining the monetization of her beauty and gender which she otherwise successfully achieved, as shown through her pictures.

The subject of Angellica's portraits allows for her to be presented as an idealistic Petrarchan figure. After first encountering one of her images, Wilmore is quick to compliment her beauty, 'I saw your charming picture and was wounded'. The metaphor employs hyperbole to emphasise her physical attractiveness as Wilmore suggests her beauty is so extreme it causes him physical pain, connoting ideas of Petrarchan tropes. The same use of Petrarchan tropes can be seen much later in the 'breeches plot' by Hellena describing how Willmore expressed his affection for one of his female partners in the play, 'He vowed and sighed and swore he loved her dearly'. The link is Petrarchan vocabulary – 'vowed' and 'sighed' may suggest that Hellena is talking about Willmore's wooing of Angelica, particularly given that Hellena's attempting to make Willmore uncomfortable by displaying that she knows of his other promiscuous relationships. Wilmore's initial focus on the image is also important as it connotes to ideas of Elizabethan portraits, whereby pictures of Elizabeth were gifted to foreign monarchs whilst her physical features had been subtly altered in order to enhance her beauty. Within the Petrarchan dynamic, Angellica is quick to assume the role of the idolised woman as she physically elevates herself above Willmore, 'I should have seen you at my feet, imploring it'. A link may be drawn to the balcony scene in 'Romeo and Juliet', thus emphasising the Petrarchan nature of the exchange, whilst Angellica also offers bodily imagery through the mention of her 'feet' perhaps reminding the audience of her position as a courtesan. She is also clearly touched by Willmore's Petrarchan approach, claiming 'his words go through me to the very soul', displaying how this might be the beginning of a deeper spiritual connection between her and Willmore. Despite his alleged adoration of Angellica, he ultimately undermines her and her use of pictures by choosing to marry Hellena and Angellica becomes outraged, 'and use me so inhumanely?' The rhetorical question conveys her shock and confusion surrounding Willmore's actions, particularly given the intensity of his previous affection, whilst also serving to invert the Petrarchan roles whereby Willmore is now the elevated idolised body and Angelica assumes the role of the unrequited lover, effectively linking to the subversion of rules in carnival – the period of celebration before Lent.

Overall, Angellica Bianca's picture is of great significance in 'The Rover' as it provides a catalyst for Anglo-Spanish conflict, namely between Wilmore and Antonio, and furthermore her picture represents the loss of her own independence financially, once Wilmore has obtained it, as her love for him prevents her from effectively exploiting her gender and beauty as a courtesan and she loses her position of elevation as Petrarchan roles are subverted. Angellica is no longer the elevated and idolised figure and instead assumes the position of the unrequited lover due to Wilmore's promiscuity and ultimate commitment to Helena in the conclusion of the play, as it follows the conventions of comedy with multiple marriages and the end of carnival, illustrating the ending of the suspension of order that facilitates a comedy.

Question 30

THE ROVER

The question asked about the presentation of shifting moods in the play.

Only a small number of candidates chose to write on this topic, but examiners saw some very good responses that showed excellent, detailed knowledge of the text and its contexts and could consistently link back to the question. Some of the candidates successfully constructed their responses around Behn's social and political intent:

Behn's presentation of shifting moods is key in 'The Rover' as she uses the play to shift the moods of the audience, while using the shifting moods of characters in the play to comment on society. More significantly she does this through the shifting moods about courtesans and the other women, through Willmore and Blunt's attitudes and the actions of the women themselves, especially Angelica Lucetta and Helena. As as 'The Rover' was written in a period of shifting moods in the aftermath of the 10 year long Civil War and the re-introduction of the monarchy in the Restoration era, Behn's using shifting moods to comment on society seems all the more important.

One of the most important examples of shifting moods can be seen in the audience as Behn attempted to shift their attitudes towards women, especially courtesans. The view of courtesans and prostitutes was as manipulative women who care for nothing except money, and that can be seen by Blunt in Act One scene two when he ridicules the idea that upper class women would accept money for sex: 'Give her! – Ha,ha,ha! Why, she's a person of quality … dost think such creatures are to be bought?' Therefore, he is convinced that Lucetta is far more than a courtesan. Behn not only uses the irony here to ridicule Blunt, who certainty is completely undermined by the fact that Lucetta is a courtesan, but also to show how prostitutes are not always selfish and sinful women that Restoration comedy portrayed them to be. Behn's ideas are added to by what we know of how courtesans in Naples were educated women, so the gap between upper class women and courtesans could be confused. Blunt's ridicule in the quote, seen by the rhetorical statement 'Give her!' and through his patronising laughter, reflect badly on him but may also reflect on the audience who would have held similar views of women. The mood towards prostitutes is further shifted by Lucetta, as she challenges more of the stereotypes associated with her. This can most clearly be seen when she she assures Philippo, her partner that 'I was never guilty of that fully, my dear Philippo, but with yourself' presenting her loyalty and devotion in contrast to how she is expected to act differently. A contrast in her language to that of Blunt who admires her for her status and is patronising, where Lucetta is more affectionate and reassuring also helps to shift moods as Behn uses this to present Lucetta much more positively. Behn achieves this as it is Lucetta who tricks Blunt and therefore as Blunt is seen more negatively as he isn't a cavalier. The Restoration audience is then arguably glad to see his negative fate as Lucetta is presented even more positively …

Other responses demonstrated excellent knowledge of the theatrical context in which Behn was writing:

The figure of Willmore and his portrayal as the stock character of the libertine rake is also used by Ben to convey shifting moods. Willmore's monomaniac desire to bed a woman often disrupts other female characters in their pursuit of love, 'Heavens, isn't he? And passionately fond to see another woman'. The use of a discovery scene in Act Three scene one adds to the comic confusion established in the play. The dramatic irony of Angelica's appearance unbeknownst to Willmore, who is courting Helena adds comedic effect to the comedy of manners. Willmore's libertinism serves to frustrate Angelica who previously had made him swear not to love another woman, "Prithee, confirm that faith'. The construction of the Royal Theatre in Drury Lane allowed for the characters to hide in places on stage and eavesdrop on the other characters. Thus, Willmore's rakish tendencies cause Angelica to feel betrayed while presenting Helena with the challenge of using her wit to seduce Willmore, "How this unconstant humour makes me love him'. The subversion of patriarchal values as Helena gains agency over Willmore through his 'unconstant humour' portrays a juxtaposition between the character of Angelica and Helena who both yearn for Willmore. This idea is further emphasised by Helena dressed in a man's clothes in Act Four scene two. By introducing the 'breeches role' Behn mocks Petrarchan concepts of love as Helena manipulates Willmore into thinking he has another lover, 'young … nobly born … in love with a young gentleman'. The addition of another lover, although untrue, adds to the comic confusion and highlights Willmore's role as the rake to constantly seek new lovers. Thus shifting moods are presented through the libertine figure of Willmore to disrupt a love felt by Helena and Angelica…

Question 31

WAITING FOR GODOT

The question asked about the play as being about the state of humanity.

Three-quarters of the candidates chose this topic, no doubt attracted by the breadth of possible routes into the play. There were many interesting and thoughtful responses, the best of which kept a sharp focus on the text as a piece of drama and considered Beckett's crafting of the play. Weaker responses tended to get caught up in the play's philosophical ideas at the expense of accessing AO2.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response that scored highly across all three of the assessment objectives:

Samuel Beckett 's 1953 tragicomedy 'Waiting for Godot' undeniably explores many universal themes which would allow him to explore the state of humanity such as suffering, existentialism and inability to communicate. In his choice of setting and characters, Beckett also seems to make a concerted effort to universalize the play so it can be applied to many different situations and thus to humanity in general. The use of Absurd aspects, however, could be argued to push the idea of meaninglessness and miscommunication past the point of what is recognisable within society, and as such limits the play's comment on the state of humanity.

In its opening stage direction, focusing on the setting of 'A country road. A tree. Evening.' Beckett immediately creates a setting which is ambiguous enough to be universal. The same effect is achieved by the use of main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who appear to be classless. They have visited Paris and 'stood hand in hand on top of the Eiffel Tower', yet also appear dishevelled, indicated by Estragon's joke that he was a poet 'Can't you tell?' as he gestures towards his clothes. Thus, in creating a play that is without a clear class distinction, setting or time, Beckett immediately and effectively allows his play to become a comment on the state of humanity, as he allows it to be applied to all humanity. The inherent existential ideas within the play can also be taken as a comment on the state of humanity, as it seems that Beckett seeks to argue that human existence is without meaning. These ideas are communicated throughout the plot, most notably by the repeated assertion that the characters are waiting for 'Godot' a figure who never arrives – perhaps a comment on the tendency of humanity to await fulfilment which is ultimately futile. The idea is also reflected in some of the stage directions. For instance, at the beginning of Act One as Vladimir repeatedly 'takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again' and Estragon 'looks inside his boot, feels about inside it, turns it upside down, shakes it' and ends 'staring sightlessly before him'. Once again, this maybe a comment on the inherent existentialism of human existence as both characters seek to find something in their hat or their boot, and do so extensively and repeatedly. Yet they ultimately remain unfulfilled. As such, this extends the idea of 'Waiting for Godot' as a play about the state of humanity, as throughout the play the characters consistently repeat actions and phrases and yet they remain unable to find any further meaning in their existence, perhaps mirroring the nihilistic belief that the meaning of existence cannot be found.

Another universal idea communicated by Beckett in 'Waiting for Godot' is the idea that effective communication and self-expression are impossible. This is first communicated by his consistent use of non sequiturs, for instance, as Estragon asks Vladimir to give him a carrot and Vladimir takes out a turnip and gives it to Estragon. Most significant, however, in expressing the inability of humanity to communicate effectively is Lucky's speech towards the end of Act One. The speech is full of fabricated language, such as 'divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia'; 'Quaquaqua' as well as names such as "fatrov' and 'Belcher' and it creates an almost Joycean monologue, though it perhaps more clearly reflects Beckett's post-structuralist views, as he shows that language is unable to clearly reflect the human condition. As such, this can also be interpreted as a comment on the state of humanity as it presents the idea that even when given the forum to do so, it is impossible to convey the complexity of human existence and individual thought even through language made up for that specific purpose.

The presentation of physical and mental suffering in 'Waiting for Godot' cannot be ignored when assessing the extent to which this is a play about the state of humanity. At the start of both acts Vladimir asks if Estragon has been beaten, to which both times the answer is affirmative. This is a parallel to the later arrival of Pozzo and Lucky, as Pozzo carries a whip and jerks the rope around Lucky's neck 'violently'. In this, Beckett perhaps seeks to argue that suffering caused by other humans is an inherent aspect of the state of humanity as humans seek the ability to assert their power over others. Mental suffering is also portrayed through Vladimir's speech at the end of the second act, as he questions, 'Was I sleeping, while the others suffered?' and recognises that the events that will occur tomorrow will be the same as what occurred today. The play presents mental suffering arising from self-awareness and an understanding of the inherent futility of human existence and, as such, once again makes comment on the state of humanity. The universal presentation of suffering can also perhaps be linked to Beckett's experience living during the Second World War, during which he witnessed extensive, and arguably futile, physical and mental suffering.

It could be argued that, at times, aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd are used in 'Godot' which almost render the play unrecognisable to human existence. For instance, the repeated and incongruous suggestions of suicide for ridiculous reasons like, 'It'd give us an erection' make the universal presentation of mortality, suffering and despair seem humorous, where in reality they are symbols of pain and fear. Perhaps, then, 'Waiting for Godot' is not simply a comment on the state of humanity, but is more naturally a comment on Beckett's own views of life, framed by his depression, and thus contributing to the impulsive suggestions of the characters that they should end their lives.

The play's last lines as the characters agree to 'go' and yet they do not move, act as a clear summary of all the universal themes explored within 'Waiting for Godot' as they display the characters' lack of free will and thus the futility of their communication and existence, as they remain trapped in pursuit of an unreachable goal, despite their own wishes. As such, it seems that, despite its more absurd aspects, 'Waiting for Godot' is undeniably a play about the state of humanity.

Considering the sophistication of the text, the students' ability to explore, with ease, ideas about humanity was just a joy to read. Their knowledge was detailed, and these questions enabled them to fully explore themes / writer's craft and context with ease.

All candidates wrote of the bleak setting, the idea of futility in life and the fear of being alone. There was commentary on people trying to fill life with religion as means of combatting fear. The failure of the characters to do anything and that they do not move after saying they will was noted and linked with the general idea of people's inability to take action in life.

Question 32

WAITING FOR GODOT

The question asked about the presentation of isolation in the play.

Many fewer candidates chose this question and responses tended mainly to focus on the isolation of the various characters and of the play's setting. Some candidates appeared to find it challenging to link their discussion to the contexts in which the play was produced and received and thereby access AO3.

Here is an example of a sound Level 4 response. It shows evidence of sustained textual analysis and a sound grasp of context, but its argument is quite simple – pitting the pairs of characters against each other in terms of their relationships – and it does not therefore quite reach the sophisticated, critically evaluative, argument we would expect at Level 5.

The absurdist playwright Samuel Beckett presents isolation as a key theme within 'Waiting for Godot'. The isolation of singular characters, such as Pozzo and Lucky makes commentary on social divide catalysing isolation, but is however combatted with the companionship of Vladimir and Estragon. Beckett also uses absurdist staging and setting to further suggest themes of isolation.

Isolation can be seen to be self-inflicted through the abuse of power and arrogance. Pozzo is presented as a character of high social standing and class to contrast the 'tramps' and Lucky being presented as a lower than him. This could be Beckett criticising the social class divide of the 1950s through the implication of arrogance of those in power. As 'I am Pozzo!' almost being a declaration through the exclamation. This immediately provides a sense of importance and entitlement, suggesting his high social status. However, he is clearly isolated in his position of high status as, 'I cannot go along without the society of my likes'. The distinction of 'my' furthers the sense of divide and subsequently he isolates himself further through his arrogance, despite the awareness of being 'the same species'. This claim to being 'made in God's image' further highlights his arrogance as Beckett, being known to be not religious himself, could be using the religious allusion to critique his arrogance and the concept of perfection. However, Pozzo's isolation is furthered still through the consequences of his blindness. It is typical of tragedy plays for those who are morally blind to become physically blind, so Pozzo's blindness highlights his arrogance and abuse of power, plunging him further into isolation as he is then truly alone in his world. Ultimately, Beckett uses Pozzo to present isolation as being self-inflicted through his abuse of high status and arrogance.

Contrastingly, Beckett combats isolation within the play through the companionship of Vladimir and Estragon. The two characters always appearing together and never being separate highlights the strength of their bond, as they're never alone or isolated from one another. Their friendship is a dramatic contrast to the themes of isolation as in, Estragon: 'How long have we been together all this time now?' Vladimir: 'Fifty years perhaps'. We understand that the two have been companions for an extended period of time and this further solidifies their companionship and joint combating of isolation, making the audience feel comforted through their bond. Their bond is made apparent throughout the whole play as 'Embrace me!' highlights through the exclamation the excitement of having one another and the authenticity of their friendship through the physical movement of an embrace. This would signify to an audience just how dependent they are on one another and in a post-World War Two time. Their companionship could inspire the audience to lean on their friends to combat their own loneliness and feelings of isolation. Ultimately, the isolation within the play is overshadowed by the sense of companionship and togetherness of Vladimir and Estragon to escape isolation together.

Furthermore, Beckett uses a minimalist post-apocalyptic staging to suggest an isolation from a whole society. The bare staging of 'A country road. A tree. Evening' highlights the barren location and really divides the characters from any sense of a society or community through a sparse landscape. The minimalistic staging is typical of absurdist theatre in the aims to not distract from the play, but also contrast traditional theatre's staging of elaborate design which could be unusual for an audience and create intrigue. This is kept constant throughout the play as 'the tree' is the only feature, much like to the absurdist play, 'The Chairs' only having staging of chairs, it acts as a point of consistency and a reminder of the ambiguity of location and reinforces the sense of isolation. The isolation is further alluded to as 'not a soul in sight' connotes distance from any other community or people. This makes the play more absurd for the audience as they only watch the actions of the same characters in a repetitive loop due to the cyclical nature of the play and no real advancement in plot, suggested by the titular connotations of 'Waiting for Godot'. However, Beckett could be suggesting the characters are content in their repetitive lives in isolation and take inspiration from Camus' 'Myth of Sysiphus', in which Camus states that we have to assume he is content with the absurdism of his task. This could indicate an acceptance of isolation from the characters as 'We are happy' with the collective of 'we' showing a unity of characters, but could also break the fourth wall with the audience, prompting them to question their happiness through 'You must be happy too'. The monosyllabic speech across the whole play further suggests a sense of simplicity to mirror the setting in its absurdist conventions. Ultimately, the staging being bare and minimal suggests an overall isolation from any society, but we learn other characters' acceptance of their state to lessen the tragedy of their isolation.

In conclusion, isolation underpins the whole play from the outset as made clear through the absurdist staging connoting isolation from community. However, the isolation can be seen as self-controlled through the divide of Pozzo abusing power and arrogance directly contrasting the lack of isolation through the companionship Vladimir and Estragon.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

General

- Handwriting. Many examiners commented on how difficult it often was to read candidate scripts: 'Some scripts were so difficult to decipher that it impedes following any argument the candidate might be putting forward'. With online examining still some way off, centres need to remind students of the need for clarity in presentation.
- Lack of paragraphing. Too often (one might almost say 'typically'), responses were composed of massive blocks of prose corresponding to the main headings in a written or notional plan. This is a pity, because more rigorous paragraphing helps the candidate with structure, development and cohesion, and helps the examiner recognise these qualities.
- In all questions, stronger responses tended to refuse black-or-white readings. That extra layer of complexity is a common element in L4 and L5 answers. Of course, students have to answer the questions as set, but stronger candidates always manage to suggest that there is more in the play than the question might suggest.
- Weaker responses tend to list (features, examples of something, what critics say) and try to extract an argument from that. Stronger ones tend to do it in reverse: they have an argument and seek to exemplify it with material.

Section A

AO1

- Evidence of learnt phrases, often in the introduction, which then are not followed through in the essay.

AO2

- A discriminator, as so often, was whether students picked up on the words 'presents', 'presentation' and 'uses' which invited comment on structure and on Shakespeare as dramatist rather than mere character study.
- AO2 evidencing is often weak. Candidates are not referring consistently and regularly to the text in their arguments. This limits potential in AO2 terms whereby close analysis and development of an argument through a pattern of evidence is difficult to achieve.

AO3

- Response to context appears to be increasingly discriminating and text specific. Fewer candidates are making sweeping general comments regarding past attitudes and opinions.

AO5

- Brief comments such as: 'this links to what Loomba believed' showed an attempt to refer to wider reading, but surface level comments highlighted a detachment between the play and respective critics.
- When students did attain marks in Level 4 and Level 5, their wider reading challenged their own perceptions and interpretations of key concepts. More sophisticated responses provided a stark contrast between two respective critics' ideas, before drawing a conclusion which 'illuminated their own viewpoint.
- Mid-range answers tended to list what critics thought (i.e. in a tick-box kind of way); stronger ones marshalled their own argument and drew on critics (often a quotation followed by the name of the critic in brackets) to support it or to argue against. In terms of fluency of answers, this helps a lot (though it demands higher powers of expression and a more sophisticated literary understanding, of course).
- Many candidates made a statement then repeated that statement as a quotation from a critic, eg. "Hamlet's problem is that he fails to take action as Frank Kermode claims 'Hamlet's problem is a problem of action', further supporting what I said about Hamlet's inability to take action." This clearly shows an awareness of other people commenting on the text but does little to enhance the response. With no further exploration or development of ideas from this it cannot move into a high level for AO5. Perhaps centres could look at creating activities that help students to understand how to address this requirement.
- Candidates should be mindful when planning their responses to be secure in their own argument to avoid simply citing critics and relying on others' interpretations rather than having their own critical position. There was a general tendency to cite one or two brief comments by critics without developing or integrating these citations into a more controlled and integrated exploration of how they support or contrast with the development of the student's own critical position. Occasionally these comments were left stranded in quotation marks (followed by the name of the critic in parentheses afterwards) with no signposts back to the student's own position. More positively, many candidates cited a particular phrase or sentence which they then directly linked in support or contrast to their own argument – but often it was as if by completing this link they could now move on and forget the significance of these interpretations for the rest of the discussion.

Section B

AO1

- The best answers answered the question asked closely and referred to the key term of the question regularly and considered how the question term developed over the course of the play. Answers which considered how gender, for example, in The Duchess of Malfi, progressed over the play were more successful.

AO2

- Many candidates appeared to focus too heavily on addressing A03, with A01 and A02 left underdeveloped. Whereas context is a key factor in understanding character roles and a shift in attitudes within 1940's America, when studying A Streetcar Named Desire, candidates must be made aware that each A0 is equally weighted.

AO3

- As this specification has matured, candidates have got much better at handling context, and there are many fewer responses that now overly focus on the personal lives of writers. However, candidates need to avoid making sweeping generalisations and actually analyse how contextual factors play a role in aiding a deeper understanding of a play's themes or writer's craft – as demonstrated by those candidates attaining higher level. Above all, contextual comment needs to be relevant and well-embedded in the argument of the essay.

Grade boundaries

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