

Examiners' Report  
June 2018

GCE English Literature 9ET0 01

## Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications come from Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at [www.edexcel.com](http://www.edexcel.com) or [www.btec.co.uk](http://www.btec.co.uk).

Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at [www.edexcel.com/contactus](http://www.edexcel.com/contactus).



### Giving you insight to inform next steps

ResultsPlus is Pearson's free online service giving instant and detailed analysis of your students' exam results.

- See students' scores for every exam question.
- Understand how your students' performance compares with class and national averages.
- Identify potential topics, skills and types of question where students may need to develop their learning further.

For more information on ResultsPlus, or to log in, visit [www.edexcel.com/resultsplus](http://www.edexcel.com/resultsplus). Your exams officer will be able to set up your ResultsPlus account in minutes via Edexcel Online.

### Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: [www.pearson.com/uk](http://www.pearson.com/uk).

June 2018

Publications Code 9ET0\_01\_1806\_ER

All the material in this publication is copyright  
© Pearson Education Ltd 2018

## Introduction

This was the second outing of the new A Level qualification and it has been a pleasure to see such genuine engagement with Shakespearian and other drama texts on the part of candidates and their teachers. There was evidence not only of detailed textual knowledge and understanding, but also of substantial exploration of a wide range of critical material and of innovative approaches to the texts. There was a sense that candidates took pride in their work for this paper and, with very few exceptions, they were able to use the questions to demonstrate their learning and skills.

## Question 1

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

### The question asked about the play as a political tragedy.

This play tends to be chosen by a relatively small group of passionate devotees, and a spirited appreciation in both teaching and reception was evident. In both questions, particularly noteworthy was the range and relevance of close reference: candidates were almost always able to pluck substance from any part of the play to support their argument. The quality of conceptual and contextual discussion was often extremely impressive: many candidates were aware of the issues raised by a Renaissance interpretation of Roman history and produced some admirably detailed discussion not only of Shakespeare's sources but, more importantly, the values and preconceptions he would himself have brought to his view of history.

The play as political tragedy was handled with confidence. Shakespeare's use and manipulation of the sources was treated with knowledge and subtlety. Candidates saw political forces in play in the presentation of all the major characters, but often balanced this against the portrayal of ordinary human weaknesses and desires. There were interesting discussions of Antony's contribution to the global crisis, often challenging the view that he is in thrall to Egypt by citing his constant and destructive oscillation between East and West.

Here is an introduction to a Level 5 answer that explored a wide range of relevant ideas in response to the question:

**'Antony and Cleopatra' stands out among Shakespeare's tragedies because it is determined by an element of historical realism which, while often overstated, cannot be denied. Importantly, the historical characters involved – Antony, Cleopatra and Caesar – all hold enormous political power. With the source material of the play being primarily North's translation of Plutarch's Lives, a common school text in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, there is an undeniable fidelity to the true history of Roman interaction with the Graco-Egyptian Ptolemic line, then a history that was well known. The play is essentially a clash between differing socio-political archetypes – Antony as the retired military hero existing with an earned-honour mindset; Cleopatra the Egyptian divine ruler and Caesar the Machiavellian proto-dictator. It seems nothing short of tragedy could occur from such a clash and, while A C Bradley derides the play for it does not conform to the standards of classical tragedy as Aristotle would have had it, it still stands out as a tragedy of political ambition and the selfishness of kings and queens destroyed by their own desires.**

## Question 2

### ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

#### The question asked about the theme of honour.

Responses to honour were similarly successful on the whole. Many contrasted the suicides of the lovers; Antony's clear-sighted recognition that honour was slipping from him was seen as an essential factor in the poignancy of the play; Caesar's honourable facade was questioned, often in the use of his sister for political advantage (though the term Machiavellian was used of him rather glibly at times).

There were strong comments on dramatic structure - the speed of action achieved by short scenes, the frequency of messengers, the dramatic ironies thrown up by misinformation. There is a wealth of stimulating critical comment on the play which was exploited by almost all in addressing AO5.

Here are some extracts from a strong Level 5 answer, demonstrating how candidates were able to explore the theme of honour in relation to both the historical (AO3) and critical (AO5) contexts of the text:

**... The lure of Egypt and Cleopatra to Antony is the overwhelming cause of his lack of Roman honour and it is plausible to suggest that Egyptian culture, through Shakespeare's characterisation of Cleopatra, treats the theme of honour with a sense of disregard, and instead prioritises a desire for power. Cleopatra's identity forms Shakespeare's initial presentation of the lack of honour that is apparent in Egypt. Cleopatra is described as having a 'tawny front', meaning of darker skin and therefore somewhat 'other' to the Roman race. To a Jacobean audience, Antony addressing her as 'Egypt', along with her 'tawny front' would be deemed as insulting because in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the term 'Egyptian' was often used in English courts and, along with the term 'gypsy', such language meant that the person accused of being 'Egyptian' or 'gypsy' would be dishonourable. Such an intrinsic link between Jacobean society and Shakespeare's play would suggest that the audience would, in the Jacobean era, initially perceive Cleopatra as disloyal due to her background. Furthermore, the East and Egypt are shown to be dishonourable when Cleopatra inflicts spite on Mark Antony upon hearing of his marriage to Octavia. Cleopatra instructs Charmian to be dishonourable and lie to Antony when she says. 'if you find him sad/Say that I am dancing; if in mirth, report/ That I am sudden sick'. These lines in Act 1 Scene 3 show Cleopatra's willingness to appear dishonourable and deceitful in order to get Antony back. The use of antithesis of 'sad' and 'dancing', as well as 'mirth' and 'sick' emphasises Cleopatra's absence of honour because she is not lying by a small matter, she is in fact trying to panic Antony into returning to Egypt by making false statements and trying to inflict jealousy and (arguably undue) remorse on Antony, which would be viewed as dishonourable. Such dishonourable behaviour by Cleopatra is suggested to be the reason that the play was first performed in 1606 and 1607, because due to the fact that Cleopatra was a powerful female ruler not afraid to boast of military competence (she said 'I have sixty sails, Caesar none better'), much like Elizabeth I, who is accredited with the success over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and a time of international discovery through military competence. Due to the factional nature of the royal court, many have since suggested that Shakespeare delayed the performance of the play to avoid the comparison of Cleopatra to Elizabeth I being made. Critic James Hirsch has made the comment that 'what Rome sees as immaturity, Egypt sees as playfulness', and this can be seen in Shakespeare's presentation of Cleopatra and of Rome, within the theme of honour. Cleopatra is effectively playing on Antony's emotions in saying 'if you find him sad/ Say that I am dancing', with the connotations of dancing being of play and freedom. These connotations suggest that Hirsch's**

comment has a strong validity because the dishonour that Rome feverishly laments, Cleopatra subverts and indeed plays with, suggesting that overall, there is an absence of honour about her character and arguably the Egyptian culture as a whole... Roman honour is conveyed as a masculine characteristic that is stable and enduring in Caesar, though subverted through the betrayal of Enobarbus from Antony to join Caesar's forces. This is juxtaposed with the feminine aspect of honour explored in Egypt, where honour is presented as changeable and certainly not constant, which it is more so in Rome. Caesar's characterisation is used by Shakespeare as a construct by which to demonstrate the masculine nature of honour. As a leader, Caesar states, 'Welcome to Rome, noting more dear to me', showing the honour he feels in representing Rome. The language employed by Shakespeare such as 'nothing' is emphatic in tone demonstrating his love for Rome and its values; however, it is through the final two words: 'to me' that the selfish nature of Caesar's character is presented, showing him to be Machiavellian in principle and arguably reflective of Machiavelli's Prince...

## Question 3

HAMLET

### The question asked about uncertainty.

This was a popular question. Discussions of uncertainty addressed many issues: the status of the Ghost, Hamlet's knowledge of Claudius's guilt, his love for Ophelia, audience evaluation of Claudius as king, the future of Denmark under threat from abroad. The majority of the responses recognised the complexity of the issues at hand and the structural and linguistic skill with which Shakespeare embodies it in dramatic form. The Ghost prompted much informed consideration of contemporary religious tensions. Choice of material was varied. There was some rather laboured and overdone discussion of how the very opening lines of the play seem to set up this topic; more successful were discussions of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' and the nature of the Ghost, with accompanying contextual discussion.

The best answers focused on the 'how' of the question and covered things like entrances and exits (the uncertainty at the start of the play with the night watch), Hamlet as a character, through use of language and soliloquies creating uncertainty surrounding the murder of his uncle, and subsequently how successful Hamlet is as a revenge hero in that genre. More successful responses also discussed the theatrical importance of the 'Murder of Gonzago' to dispel uncertainty and Ophelia's real madness contrasted with the uncertainty of Hamlet's feigned madness creates.

Less successful responses lacked a clear understanding of the differences between Protestant and Catholic faith, especially in respect to the historical facts in England that surrounds them. Many speculated over whether Shakespeare was criticising religion and/or England indirectly through his creation of the 'rotten state of Denmark'; others made more subtle suggestions regarding uncertainty concerning the succession in England. This question had the widest range of critical sources and did not just rely on the anthology. However weaker responses had not fully grasped how to apply Freudian theories to the play and there were some ideas surrounding Greek tragedy that did not fully appreciate its relevance to Shakespeare's play.

This is an extract from a response that achieved a high Level 4 on mark grid 1 (it is strong on AOs 2 and 3, but its rather narrow focus on revenge brings it down on AO1):

**Lawrence Olivier described *Hamlet* as the tragedy of 'A man who could not make up his mind,' this line sums up the uncertainty that is centred within the character Hamlet. When Hamlet initially sees the ghost he states 'Be thou spirit of health or goblin damned', this displays an uncertainty that influences Hamlet's actions throughout the narrative of the play. Uncertainty in Hamlet could be linked to Coleridge's weakness of will theory and equally to Goethe's theory of sentimentality. Either way uncertainty is intrinsically linked to Hamlet's delay in taking revenge on his father, and subsequently linked to his effectiveness as a revenger. The uncertainty within Hamlet's character ultimately causes his duty to be carried out effectively in a society caught between two worlds, one of medieval honour, and one of a fledgling law system.**

**Uncertainty becomes a key aspect of Hamlet's character as soon as he meets the ghost. He questions the entity stating 'Be thy intents wicked or charitable'. Though Hamlet has an initial inclination that the ghost he is seeing is his father this quote shows uncertainty towards the credence of what he is seeing. This uncertainty is increased after the ghost requests Hamlet to 'revenge his foul and most unnatural murder'. This request is what drives the narrative of *Hamlet* as now Hamlet has become a revenger, tasked with killing his own uncle. Uncertainty towards the ghost's testament could be linked to the period of**

**Reformation. In this period view of the Catholic church were being denied in favour of Martin Luther's view. Whereas the Catholic Church has a belief in purgatory which would account for this occurrence, the emerging new belief system did not hold such opinions. This means that the testament of the ghost that drives the narrative of the play, and acts as motivation for the actions of Hamlet, may be uncertain, thus causing uncertainty within Hamlet himself.**

**This uncertainty leads to a cyclical structure of the play. Hamlet goes through phases of thirst for revenge having 'sworn't' to the ghost of his father. This attitude is then followed by uncertainty which leads to delay which causes self-deprecation. This is seen most prevalently in a soliloquy given by Hamlet after meeting the Players. He describes himself as a 'John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause' this shows his anger at his own delay caused by uncertainty. He sees himself merely as a daydreamer unable to complete his actions. He goes on to say that even though he is the son of the one who was murdered and even though he is prompted to revenge by 'Heaven and hell' he instead 'like a whore unpack [his] heart with words'. Shakespeare uses religious language to display the importance of Hamlet's purpose, and then contrasts it with insults to display Hamlet's anguish at his uncertainty. This links to Goethe's sentimental theory that states Hamlet is 'without strength of nerve' to constitute himself as a hero. In Goethe's view Hamlet is too much of a sensitive, caring character tied up in his own emotions to be an effective revenger. However, this critique is falsified in this soliloquy for Hamlet's need to 'Have grounds more relative than this'. Hamlet's uncertainty is not necessarily a negative force in the play, rather a necessary element of his own psyche needed for him to be an effective revenger in a Renaissance period which is characterised by a fledgling law system. Something which could easily be manipulated against Hamlet.**

**Using the Players to put on a production deliberately mimicking the murder of Hamlet's father he, from the reaction of Claudius, now has solid grounds to enact his revenge. Stating to Horatio 'I'll take the ghost's words for a thousand pound' this shows that Hamlet is now in a state of committed revenge, stating later on 'Now could I drink hot blood;. However, in the Chapel scene where he has a prime opportunity to kill Claudius and then be 'revenged' he decides not to. This could be seen as an element of Hamlet's uncertainty as to whether he, in actual fact, wants to murder Claudius this linking to Coleridge's weakness of will theory. A theory that states Hamlet is a 'creature of mere meditation' and thus unable to commit the actions necessary for him to be a hero. Yet, contrary to this Hamlet's meditative qualities cause him to be a more effective revenger. Hamlet would rather murder Claudius in a situation where he 'has no relish of salvation' and thus send him to 'hell'. If Hamlet were to murder Claudius after prayer then this would not happen, Hamlet wants to murder Claudius in a state which will cause him eternal damnation. Though this action shows delay, this does not relate to uncertainty...**



## Question 4

HAMLET

### The question asked about Ophelia.

There were some particularly engaged and strong readings of Ophelia's role from a feminist perspective. The consideration of how Ophelia was presented opened up opportunities for the consideration of male attitudes in Elizabethan society and one candidate mentioned Mack's view of how the play revealed embarrassing 'truths about Elizabethan England' and their divisive attitudes in the past. Most candidates were good at presenting informed views with the occasional emotive responses thrown in. Undeniably, Ophelia does not have many lines in the play, and a few candidates produced statistics to back this up! A balance needed to be struck between two extremes that were seen – asserting that Ophelia has no 'voice' and simply focusing on how she is perceived by others, versus focussing exclusively on her few lines and analysing these in great detail. To call her 'a nonentity' does no-one any favours. Knowledge of, and reference to, her role in the play was thorough, and there was a good deal of affronted challenge to the idea that the play would be not much different if she disappeared from it altogether. The best responses – shaded, circumspect, alive to nuance – saw her as a victim of male priorities, but weighed this against such factors as her sarcastic riposte to her brother, the fact that Shakespeare gives her the wisest epitaph on Hamlet (though before he dies), and the moral and political denunciations in the flower scene.

Some responses to this question struggled to go beyond a detailed character study – often failing to consider why Shakespeare might present Ophelia as he does. Here is an example of an opening to a Level 5 answer which shows the candidate shaping a clear argument in response to the question rather than embarking on a straightforward character study:

**Shakespeare's presentation of Ophelia and her purpose in Hamlet's plot as been widely disputed by critics, directors and performers since its debut. It has been critiqued that the trajectory of Hamlet's life is not affected by Ophelia, his purpose is still significant without her, whereas Ophelia without Hamlet is nothing; he is her reason for being introduced into the plot and is (arguably) the reason for her eventual suicide. However, through Ophelia, Shakespeare has created a foil for Hamlet while using her characterisation as a vehicle to comment on women's status in society, their social immobility and attitudes towards insanity...**

Here are two more extracts from high-scoring responses which developed interesting critical arguments around the character:

**... Ophelia also provides a manifestation of Hamlet's masculinity, which he must reject in order to execute his revenge. Jaques Lacan argues that the etymology of 'Ophelia is o'phallus'; she exists as the symbiotic double of masculinity. This perhaps explains Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia which Rutter argues seems so unfair. The cruelty of 'I loved you not' is highlighted by the end stop line and the brevity of the sentence. This is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth who must purge herself of femininity in order to commit her atrocious acts; as femininity is the antithesis of masculinity, in his rejection of Ophelia Hamlet proves himself to be a man capable of the task he has been assigned. Sue Hemming highlights Shakespeare's use of Fortinbras to expose Hamlet's lack of masculinity. The nominal determinism of Fortinbras, 'strong arm', immediately proves Hamlet to be the weaker of the two. Claudius' claim 'tis unmanly grief', indicates the importance of a rejection of emotional responses which Hamlet is so afflicted by. Perhaps Shakespeare uses the femininity of Hamlet to explore the Humanist arguments at the time for a new kind of king, one not**

involved in the masculine fighting, but involved in thought and philosophy. In this way, Ophelia is used once again as a tool, exploring Hamlet's struggle with masculine ideals...

... Ophelia's presence in *Hamlet* is easy to miss, even her death occurs offstage and is told through another character. Through this objectification she becomes a tool through which Shakespeare can reveal the nature of other characters. Showalter points out the impossibility of having female representation in patriarchal discourse that isn't one of 'madness, incoherence, fluidity or silence', so perhaps one ought to consider dynamics in the court, or indeed the play *Hamlet* itself, as a form of patriarchal discourse...

## Question 5

KING LEAR

### The question asked about control.

The idea of 'control' elicited numerous interpretations. Lear's initial desire to relinquish responsibility, but maintain control benefited from relevant contextual knowledge about political unity. His loss of mental control was often contrasted to Edgar's self-protective facade of madness. The greed for power – political, financial and sexual – in Goneril, Regan and Edmund was another fruitful topic. Candidates who charted Lear's descent through rage, rejection, misogynistic rant to incoherence made valid points about dramatic structure, often in parallel to Gloucester's comparable downfall. One candidate indicated Dunsinberne's argument that Shakespeare was a 'feminist in sympathy'. The matter of King Lear's loss of control destroying the Great Chain of Being leading to his own downfall while exercising and conflicting liberal views on female roles was explored in a variety of ways. Many arguments were strong and effectively delivered. At the other end, some candidates limited their discussion to comparing a few key scenes in which Lear was demonstrated as 'in control' and 'not in control', with some rather laborious writing on Act I Scene 1 that rather lacked relevance. Many included a section on the characterisation of Edmund: whilst at times this read like a previous response that had been tacked on, elsewhere it added an interesting angle.

Here is an extract from an answer that achieved Level 5 overall. Note the strong driving argument, the pertinent reference to contexts and the use of critical views to develop and enrich those of the candidate:

**In 'King Lear', Shakespeare explores Lear's relinquishing of control following the usurption of his kingdom, whilst his adversaries (Goneril, Regan and Edmund) assume control through violent and deceptive means. Lear's downfall, and with it, the loss of control, would be particularly resonant with Shakespeare's contemporaries, as Shakespeare was, as R H White asserts 'a man writing for men who were perpetuating a tenacious hold on a patriarchal system'. This 'tenacious hold' implies that Shakespeare's first audiences were hyperconscious about the transferring and relinquishing of control; this is consistent with the anxieties that characterised Elizabethan rule, as unmarried and childless Elizabethan stimulated concern that a dynastic feud would emerge similar to that of the War of Roses in the fifteenth century.**

**Shakespeare explores the theme of control through the linguistic control demonstrated by the deceptive characters in the play. In the 'love contest' which ensures in the play's first scene, Goneril and Regan's manipulation of language through their use of meaningless abstractions and hyperboles serves to conceal their true motive: 'unmitigated self-love', as established by Marcia Holly. Indeed, Goneril, in her love for Lear, contends that she loves Lear 'no dearer than lofe, with grace, health, beauty, honour'; through her use of the asyndetic list, Goneril creates a sense of accumulation, highlighting the extent of her love for Lear as something which is superior to all other aspects of life. However, the abstract nouns she incorporates 'grace, health, beauty, honour' signal that her words lack concrete dimension, and that her language is manipulated as a means of developing a persuasive discourse. Lear demonstrates similar linguistic control, and asserts control, in the opening scene, when his ceremonial power is assured, evident in the multitude of imperatives which permeate his language in Scene 1; his first word 'Attend' establishes the assertive nature by which a monarch expresses control, reinforced by the later imperatives 'Give me' 'Know that'. The power and control apparent in Lear's words is consistent with the Medieval cultural position of The Divine Right of Kings, which establishes that the monarch was**

chosen by God, and considered an earthy representative of God's will and intention: subsequently, the control and authority enforced by the monarch should be adhered to unquestionably.

The loss of control is explored through Lear's madness, most significantly when he enters the storm and his vulnerability is most apparent. Kettle comments that the 'storm has three levels'; the 'elemental storm, the social storm, and the psychological storm', as the storm becomes an externalisation of Lear's inner turmoil, which emerges from a refusal to relinquish the control he has exercised for the entirety of his reign. Lear's lack of emotional control is conveyed in the first line upon his entry into the storm, 'Blow wind, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!', as the elongated vowels in 'blow' coupled with the plosive 'b' sounds signify Lear's bitterness and fury, as his rage at Goneril and Regan is projected into his address of the storm. This expression of rage expounds how Lear cannot comprehend the limits of his control; he refuses to relinquish the social control which he possessed when he was king, but moreover the mental control as his encroaching senility and mental deterioration begin to overcome his mind: through his depiction of Lear's loss of control Shakespeare presents him as mortal and limited. Indeed, Marcia Holly commented that 'Every old man is a King Lear'. In Lear's command 'crack your cheeks', he evokes the Renaissance imagery of faces puffing with which were used as illustrations in the corners of maps. Through this evocation Shakespeare accentuates Lear's desperation to reassert his control as by using the imagery of a map, it is evident that Lear is addressing the entirety of the world. The demonstration of a loss of control would be particularly potent for Shakespeare's contemporary audiences, as James I extensively theorised the political role of the monarch as a figure with divine right, and absolute control over his kingdom. Furthermore, the bitterness and anguish which characterises Lear's words in this section juxtaposes against the established norms of a king in the 'Basilikon Doron' (1599), written by James I, which clarified that a king would uphold values of spotless personal integrity. Goneril and Regan also exhibit a loss of control in the exercise of their newfound power, most significant in the scene when Gloucester's eyes are removed. Goneril's command 'Pluck out his eyes!' in its exclamatory nature and plosive 'p's' denotes a desire for pagan spontaneity and surreptitiously an abandonment of the controlled image of the doting daughter which she projects in the first scene. In this violent and aggressive exertion of control Goneril and Regan reject the stereotype of a demure, passive female. The excitement and energy of Goneril's tone during this scene implies the corruptive power of control, a notion which Goneril and Regan are vulnerable to, as Lear is. Therefore it is evident that 'Goneril and Regan exhibit traits which Lear attempts to justify under the guise of father and king', as Shakespeare explores the corruptive power of control through the king's role, and the way in which Goneril and Regan assume and enjoy control following their usurption of his rule...

## Question 6

KING LEAR

### **The question asked about the relationship between Lear and Cordelia.**

Lear's relationship with Cordelia might seem at first to be more demanding, since she is absent for so much of the play, but the best responses found plenty of material, especially the ones who asserted, confidently and justifiably, that in spirit and in Lear's mind she is never absent. A few found her guilty of precipitating the tragedy by her obstinate refusal to play the game in the love test, but most admired her honesty, her distaste for the whole charade, and her well-founded suspicion of her sisters. There were detailed discussions of the Christian elements of redemption and forgiveness in her presentation, though these were frequently balanced against the amoral desolation of the concluding deaths.

The extent to which candidates engaged critically with the issues here was what really differentiated middling from excellent responses. Some content was well-learned, however, with some pleasing discussion of the 'inverse Pieta' motif at the end. A large number addressed AO5 through stage and screen productions, and it was pleasing to see that so many had experienced the play where it should be experienced, and on a number of occasions.

Weakest responses gave surface readings of the familial relationship between the different characters. The focus was mainly on the love test leading to conflict, but then Lear seeing the errors of his way and their reconciliation. Context mainly revolved around the patriarchal views of the time.

Here is an example from a typical Level 2 response. The candidate shows knowledge of the play and some awareness that it is a construct open to interpretation, but the response is general at best with little sense of a writer at work or any analysis beyond speculating generally about the motives of characters:

**In 'King Lear' Shakespeare presents the audience with many relationships; however, the most heart wrenching one is between Lear and his daughter Cordelia. Lear is blinded by his other two daughters, Goneril and Regan's declarations of love for him in order for them to rule parts of the Kingdom. Due to his ego, Lear fails to see his one true daughter, Cordelia and banishes her from the Kingdom.**

**The audience's first experience of Lear and Cordelia's relationship is in Act 1 scene 1 and it is ultimately an experience of betrayal. Cordelia is Lear's favorite child and when asked for her declaration of love says 'nothing', this shows the audience her independence and her rejection of her sisters' deceit.**

**In the BBC production of 'King Lear' Cordelia's asides have been cut which presents her as a very confident individual, again a feature she could have gained from her father, unlike her father though she was true to her feelings and did not let her ego stand in the way of her morals. Due to their similarities in personalities, their clash in opinions could be behind her banishment along with Lear's fear of being undermined by a female, but also his daughter ...**

## Question 7

OTHELLO

### The question asked about Cassio.

This question was less popular than Q8, however responses generally were effective and reasonably thorough, recognising Cassio's dramatic importance for Iago as an object of jealousy and one source, through the promotion, of his hatred of Othello. His self-loathing after the drinking bout prompted much relevant contextual comment on reputation. Some, mystifyingly, managed to overlook Bianca altogether, but those who did not drew telling comparisons between Cassio as gallant with Desdemona and Cassio as customer with the woman who loves him, recognising the complexity of Shakespeare's portrayal.

There were some mainly surface readings of Cassio's portrayal at the start, although stronger responses focused on the legitimacy of the audience's original impression considering it is coming from Iago. Students sometimes veered away from the question and discussed Iago and Othello instead. Analysis of writer's craft was often on word level (for example, the repetition of 'Reputation') and weaker responses had little focus on Cassio as a foil to Othello. This latter was an area effectively explored in the very best responses.

Here is an extract from a sophisticated answer to the question that explores Cassio's function in the play from a range of critical perspectives:

**To understand Shakespeare's presentation of Cassio in 'Othello', it is necessary to understand his role and significance in the play, and what Shakespeare is using him to express. The essential purpose of Cassio is to demonstrate in contrast to Othello's blackness an example of whiteness, a concept just as key to the play as racial darkness, and one best explained through the creation of a drama whose central character is not white. Cassio is both inwardly and externally fair, for the most part, and functions as a foil to both the outwardly black Othello and the internally dark Iago. He is used as the supposed lover of Desdemona to demonstrate a point about the masculine consideration of women, being perversely an unthreatening cuckold, one who allows Othello to perceive the world as conforming to his expectations. Finally, Cassio's relationship with Bianca is a judgement upon whiteness in the play as sexually cynical and lacking in the moral righteousness that Othello takes far too far. Thus Cassio is a key figure in 'Othello'; the truly white young man in a play concerned with white European society, for if Shakespeare had been centrally interested in other races, he would have written a play involving not one Moor but several.**

**Cassio is frequently described as 'fair' and 'courtly' sometimes to the point of emasculation, as when Iago describes him as a 'great arithmetician' and 'a spinster', his learning being academic in contrast to Iago's martial experience and practicality. Iago's masculine values of war action may be shared by Othello, but the play mocks these values when Cassio reports "the Turkish loss" of their fleet, removing the need to fight...**

**The fact that Cassio is unrelated to Desdemona except through Othello –unlike Roderigo – makes him an ideal target for the jealousy of a largely self-regarding hero. Othello's concern with his own identity over Desdemona's is evidenced both in early scenes: 'she loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them' – and in Othello's death speech in which he is completely concerned with resolving his identity as either a Venetian citizen or 'malignant Turk', if not simply 'cheering himself up' as T S Eliot had it. A further feature of the fair Cassio who is certainly one of the 'wealthy curled darlings' of Venice that makes him an ideal suspect for Othello is that for Desdemona to love him requires far less**

agency on her part than her bold choice of a foreign husband...

Stanley Cowell has argued that the tragedy arises from a horror of female sexuality; that Desdemona "had eyes and chose" him being more than he can bear. As such the idea that Desdemona should love the white, young conventionally attractive Cassio is in fact less threatening than the idea that his wife displays sexual autonomy...

...in order to understand the critique Shakespeare is making of white society, we must look at Cassio's actions. His relationship with Bianca and its contrast to "manners" "breeding" and "courtesy" indicates a willingness to associate with sexual indecency that undermines his chivalric manner. Antithetically to Othello who is jealous of a faithful wife, Cassio toys with a whore and "cannot refrain from laughter" at her love. If the black character in the play loves "not wisely but too well", Cassio's fault as the whitest morally of the main white characters is to act wisely and not love at all ...

...Othello is instead used as a foil to white European society, for which he is given a noble status that Wilson Knight described 'the most tragic' of Shakespeare's heroes. Cassio meanwhile exemplifies the effeminacy of action, sexual cynicism and moral stupor that the dramatist sees and criticizes in his own environment.



## Question 8

OTHELLO

### The question asked about identity.

This question was the most popular on the paper. Many candidates, relevantly and often very successfully, approached the subject via stereotypes – soldier, lover, daughter, wife, malcontent, ladies' man. The dramatic ironies generated by Iago's dual identity in the eyes of audience and characters were almost universally recognised. Othello was most often seen in terms of racial identity, especially the tension between his inferiority as an ethnic 'other' and his status as Venice's leading soldier. As ever, there was far too much irrelevant word-level analysis: as one examiner put it, 'the heart sinks when the serpent in the Garden rears its head at the most fleeting and accidental sibilance'. However, detailed analysis was often used effectively to support discussion of Othello's linguistic disintegration and the broader theme of his reversion in the later scenes to the racial stereotype he had implicitly discredited in the earlier. Gender was an equally popular way into the question. While there was, as so often, a great deal of simplistic generalisation about the status, rights and potency of women, there were also candidates who challenged these perceptions by referring to Desdemona's rebellious marriage and cogent public defence of it, and Emilia's fearless moral denunciation of her husband and her master.

As was the case last year, in middle-level answers the typical response structure was by character: a section on Othello, one on Iago, and one on Desdemona or, perhaps, the female characters overall. Really exceptional candidates took a step back from this approach, considering identity at a conceptual level: not only did they link to ideas including race, gender, and class, but the interplay and tensions between 'identity' and 'character'. Many were able to allude to these, but failed to signal them clearly in their writing.

Stronger responses discussed the manipulation of the setting, the storm and the non-existing war as devices to create contrast in character's identity.

Critical views referred to were mainly Loomba, Coleridge and Honigman, however, some candidates had often little knowledge of what the quotes from the critics actually meant and seemed to have memorised them and included them as an afterthought, instead of incorporated them into the argument.

As was the case throughout the paper, there were some sweeping generalisations and, often, confusion around historical and social contexts of the play. For example, there was a lack of clarity for some candidates between the English and Venetian contexts and some saw them as interchangeable. One examiner made the following comment:

'Some candidates were distracted into a presentation of racism in Elizabethan society, particularly Elizabeth's reported views on 'blackamoors'. The racial issues in *Othello* are indeed sensitive and complex, but even very able candidates are often all too quick to generalise. Historical scholarship in this area is developing rapidly, with the occasional controversy (such as Mary Beard's discussion of the presence of Africans in Roman Britain), and contemporary historians such as David Olusoga and Miranda Kaufmann would be well worth considering'.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response overall. It meets all the assessment criteria for all four objectives :

**Identity is the defining theme of Shakespeare's 'Othello'. In this play, as Fintan O'Toole has commented, the 'borders of individual character become permeable' as 'identity' becomes**



something seen as fluid and unfixed. In his exploration of the theme of identity in the play Shakespeare explores the Elizabethan anxiety that one's interior 'identity' might not be coherent with their outward appearance. Ultimately it seems as if the true nature of someone's 'identity' may be impossible to determine.

Othello's identity is one of the most complex in the play. F R Leavis has commented on Othello's conscious 'self-dramatisation' and, indeed, Othello's seems to have created a carefully constructed persona to the outer world. The extent to which this identity is crafted is demonstrated in his opening speech to the senate, where he uses the rhetorical device of self-deprecation to show that he is anything but "rude ...in my speech." The repetition of the word 'story' further raises questions about the truth of Othello's persona. His tales about 'cannibals' and 'Anthropopogi' help to create what Kenneth Muir has called his 'alien and exotic' experience, much of which Shakespeare seems to have taken from Philemon Holland's 1601 translation of Pliny's History of the World. Othello's rhetorical mastery goes above his captivating storytelling in his use of phrases such as, 'Most potent, grave and reverend signors', with the tricolon crescendo potentially having even more significant effect on the thrust stage of the Globe when the play was originally performed. Such rhetorical mastery allows Othello to craft his identity of himself as 'valiant' and 'noble', convincing the senate that he is 'far more fair than black'.

However, Othello's identity is revealed as just this, a careful construction, as it breaks down later in the play. Whilst he appears at his most 'poetic' (A C Bradley) in front of the senate, the darker side of Othello's character is revealed as he suffers what Michael Long has called a 'collapse of the personality.' This is evident in the contrast to his noble blank verse in Act I, with his fragmented syntactical collapse in 4.i, where an outpouring of utterances such as, 'Pish! Noses! Ears and lips!' demonstrates the breakdown of his 'noble' persona. Honigmann has commented on the way that his language here acts as 'surrogate genital images' as well as suggesting a frantic dismemberment – foreshadowing his striking modal declaration later on that he will 'chop' Desdemona 'into messes'. Othello's linguistic fluctuations between Act 1 and Act 4 highlight the changing and unfixed nature of identity.

However, while Michael Long suggests that Othello's identity 'collapses' it seems as if there has been a 'savage' undercurrent to his nobility the entire time. Not only is his earlier nobility shown to be little more than a construction, but there are other hints that Othello's 'divided' identity elsewhere in the play. For example the 'antique token' of the handkerchief which he presents to Desdemona as one of the first 'gifts of their love' seems to suggest Othello's noble and chivalric nature. Yet, the handkerchief is said to be 'dyed ...in mummy' made of embalmed maiden's hearts' essentially, dyed in the liquid of crushed virgins' heart. Not only does this foreshadow his later murder of the 'gentle' Desdemona, it also highlights that there is a 'barbaric' undercurrent to Othello's 'noble' identity.

Ultimately, Othello seems unable to reconcile these two antithetical versions of his identity. Michael Mangan has commented on the fact that Othello is shown to be 'simultaneously the civilized man and the barbarian'. And nowhere is this more evident than in his final speech, the two versions of Othello's identity are finally revealed. We see Othello again here as the noble hero of Act 1 with his perfect iambic pentameter and a reminder of the way he has 'done the state some service ...' He again presents himself as the noble defender of Venice. Yet he also describes a 'malignant and turban'd Turk' who 'beat a Venetian and traduced the state'. When Othello proclaims that 'I took by the throat the circumcised dog and smote him thus' while proceeding to 'stab himself'. Othello's 'I' splinters and we see the divided nature of his double identity for what it really is. Othello's identity can be seen as 'changeable' and 'divided' as the island of Cyprus itself – with its constant transition from the hands of the 'savage' Turks and 'civilized' Venetian emblematic of Othello's own fluctuation between nobility and savagery.

It seems as if the 'Moor of Venice' is a contradiction in terms – that Othello could not reconcile his identity as a 'moor' with his identity as a Venetian. Through his characterization of Othello, Shakespeare powerfully highlights the fluctuating and unfixed nature of identity.

The identity of Desdemona is another which is constantly subject to fluctuation and change. However, unlike Othello, this is not a result of her own divided nature, but rather the fact that she becomes the victim of other's idealisations. Honigmann has commented that Desdemona is portrayed as 'woman as man likes to reinvent her' in 'Othello' and, indeed, the multifaceted nature of her identity seems to be overlooked by the characters who stereotype her. She seems somewhat to epitomize the Elizabethan 'madonna-whore' dichotomy which, as Marilyn French has commented, focus on either 'idealizing' or 'degrading' sexuality. Desdemona is heavily idealized by both her father, Brabantio – who describes her as a 'maiden never bold' and Cassio, who describes her as 'divine ...the grace of heaven' with the religious imagery highlighting her portrayal as a Madonna-type figure. Iago, in contrast, paints Desdemona as the 'super-subtle Venetian' who would 'let God see the pranks' she would not 'dare show' her 'husband'.

Ania Loomba comments on the way that English audiences would have been well aware of the stereotype of the sexual tolerance of Venice, known for its celebrated courtesans. In this way, Desdemona's true identity is just as polarised by others as her husband's, as audiences are presented with notions of her 'making the beast with two backs' as well as 'a maiden never bold' before she is given the chance to establish her identity for herself. In this way, Shakespeare uses the character of Desdemona to present the changeable nature of identity.

Othello, too, seems to misunderstand Desdemona's true identity, loving an idealized version of her. Shakespeare demonstrates this through the use of chiasmus, which is typically meant to bind characters together, yet for Othello and Desdemona, demonstrates a disjoint in their relationship based on a fundamental misreading of each other's identity. Othello states that:

'she loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them.'

This phrase, with its perfect iambic pentameter and balance with its two clauses perfectly balanced by the reversal of their structures seemingly highlights that the couple are 'well tuned' as two halves of the same whole. Yet Othello seems to love Desdemona for her 'pity, for her passiveness, yet Desdemona loves him for danger – with Carol Thomas Neely commenting on the way that Othello's love awakens her 'energy, assertiveness and power'. Indeed, his love empowers her to assert herself, willing to 'incur the general mock' in her elopement with Othello and assert 'the rites for which I love him' bravely in front of the senate – defying Venetian norms. Yet this assertiveness threatens Othello's idealization of her as his quixotic ideas about her identity not seeming to be coherent with its reality. Michael Mangan has noted that Othello's 'idealizations' render him 'vulnerable' as such highly constructed beliefs are 'fragile and subject to collapse' because Othello's ideas about the nature of Desdemona's identity have already been disrupted that when he realizes that she is not the ideal madonna figure he thought her to be, with Iago asserting that 'she did deceive her father marrying you, that he immediately 'swings to the other extreme' (Mangan). Othello too is so caught up with the Madonna-whore dichotomy notion of women that he refuses to accept that Desdemona might represent a 'middle ground' between 'abstinence and lust' (Neely). Just as he kills himself as he cannot reconcile the divisions in his own identity, he feels he must kill Desdemona to reconcile what he perceives as the divisions in hers – he cannot let his 'fair warrior' carry on as the 'strumpet' he believes she has become. He idealises his image of her to such an extent that even in killing her he cannot bear to 'scar' her 'skin' as 'white' as 'monumental alabaster' - he has idealized her identity to such a degree that she has become almost like a statue in his eyes. Ironically,

whilst he kills her in order to reconcile the two divided parts of her identity, he kills the woman who has reconciled it herself. In this was Shakespeare presents identity as something which is constantly misperceived and only truly known to oneself.

In conclusion, Shakespeare challenges the Elizabethan idea about the fixed nature of identity in order to demonstrate that 'identity' is not as fixed and definite as one might assume. In a society terrified of the gap existing between appearance and reality, to the extent where blasphemy laws were enforced in order to ensure that the nature of someone's identity was always clearly obvious, such explorations would have been greatly transgressive. Ultimately, Shakespeare attempts to show that 'identity' is not fixed.

## Question 9

### A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

#### The question asked about the mechanicals.

Only a small number of candidates responded to this question. Weaker responses often showed a personal appreciation of the Mechanicals, but at a fairly literal level. In keeping with the responses as a whole to Shakespeare's comedies, there was little really meaningful engagement with theory of comedy – there are several useful responses on the genre at the start of the *Edexcel Critical Anthology*, but these were rarely referred to here. Responses of higher quality engaged more with the Mechanicals' dramatic function, and how Shakespeare combines the different plots and environments in the play. At the top end, however, a few candidates produced some sophisticated critical analysis, deftly combining some rigorous textual discussion with a sophisticated grasp of theories of comedy and the possible implications of Shakespeare's treatment of the Mechanicals in juxtaposition with the court of Athens.

Here is an extract from a Level 5 response to this question:

**In Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', it is easily inferred that the Mechanicals were intended to provide the majority of the comedy within the play; their central figure, Bottom, takes on the role of the Clown. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that the Mechanicals are much more than 'hardhanded men that work in Athens'; they contribute underlying social commentary which allows Shakespeare to criticise the strict social hierarchy of Elizabethan England.**

**Moreover, it can be seen that the Mechanicals could even be perceived as the centrepiece of the play, a result of the frivolous nature of the lovers' narrative.**

**At face value, the Mechanicals are a comedic device, established through their farcical humour and crude word play such as the confusion between 'odours' and 'odious'. This is underpinned by Puck's description of them as 'hempen homespuns' in which the alliterative aspirants evoke an aural image of their clumsiness and crudeness. Fender echoes this sense of their clumsy humour but elevates their importance through his assertion that the 'disorder and impropriety of the Mechanicals' (Fender, 1968) is what sets the scene for the realm of the forest where a Queen can be 'enamoured of an ass' and lovers can escape 'the sharp Athenian law'.**

**The Mechanicals also provide comedy through the character of Bottom, whose role as the Clown in the play means his comedy derives from his obliviousness. This is epitomized by how, after being 'translated', he worries that his fellow Mechanicals 'mean to make an ass of [him]'; comedy is manifested for the audience through the use of dramatic irony. Bottom's humour is typified by the litotes of how he is 'marvellous hairy about the face' which highlights his lack of awareness. Comedy derives from how 'a creature capable of transcending himself can be incapable of controlling himself' (Kerr, 1987) which ties into Bottom as a disruption of authority... Shakespeare uses him and the rest of the Mechanicals to undermine the authority of the upper classes. This is illustrated by how Shakespeare does not rely on how the couples are 'fortunately met' and will be 'eternally knit' for closure to the play: 'Act IV culminates in Bottom's awakening' (Ryan, 2009). A sense of this is extended through the very inclusion of Act V which 'serves no further narrative purpose' (Ryan, 2009) except to 'allow the hardhanded men that work in Athens' to steal the show' (Ryan, 2009). Ryan's perceptions is most evident through Bottom's transcendence of the social barriers as he interacts with the fairies and of each he 'shall desire more acquaintance.' This establishes**

him as an everyman figure who is not constrained by the barriers between the classes or between the mortal and fairy worlds.

Shakespeare further uses the mechanicals to undermine the upper classes by parodying their perceived self-importance. Lysander's ridicule that 'one lion may speak / When many asses do' is diffused by how the upper classes have been structurally dismissed by the lower ones; the contrast is established for the audience through their respective use of free verse and prose. The inclusion of the Mechanicals' play elevates their importance whilst the upper classes are forgotten, 'relegating them to the role of bystanders' (Ryan, 2009) ...

Shakespeare also uses the Mechanicals as a gentle parody of the theatrical practices of the time...

## Question 10

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

### The question asked about settings.

This was the more popular question of the two on this play and candidates found plenty to say about the symbolic significance of the play's settings and generally were able to make relevant contextual links. A clear differentiator between middle and higher levels on both questions was the degree to which candidates had engaged with other critical ideas.

Here is an example of a high-achieving answer that shows good, sustained engagement with critical ideas:

**Ryan claims 'the Athenian scenes frame the scenes of erotic mayhem in the woods', and in many ways this is true. In the end, despite briefly escaping the restrictions of Athenian society, the young lovers end up returning home and falling in line with the demands of civilization. For example, the fairies bless the 'bride-bed' and ensure 'never mole, hair lip or scar ...shall upon their children be'. Hermia seemed to be a representative of female defiance, yet the play ends with her playing the traditional role of a woman in Athens - as a wife and child-bearer. Hopkins argues that 'single or multiple marriages provide a sense of comic closure' suggesting such an ending was commonplace, and the signs of defiance were never meant to be permanent but just to add entertainment value.**

**Demetrius sees the continuation of the mayhem in the woods shift into Athens as he is still under the influence of the 'love-in-idleness' flower which makes him infatuated with Helena. This is evidence to suggest that settings shape meaning in the play and are not as straightforward as first thought.**

**The wood is often where disorder flourishes due to mischievous characters such as Robin Goodfellow. Ryan claims 'the play is systematically designed to converge on the moment a common man is wooed by a queen and becomes a 'gentleman'. Athens' strict, class-based system would never allow for such a love affair, between a queen and a mechanical with an 'ass' head, but the woods enable such comic and foolish happenings. However, it is the patriarchal norms, much like those practiced in Athens, that have allowed Titania to fall in love with a 'monster'. After she had 'forsover (Oberon's) bed and company' when he tried to make her give up the beloved Indian chills, he sought revenge. At the end of the play, much like the case with Hermia, Titania is complicit, she refers to her husband a 'my Oberon' and he allows her to believe she was not 'enamoured of an ass' but instead it was just a vision. She then blesses the beds of the newlyweds. Hopkins claims 'the lovers escape the patriarchal society of Athens ... just to find themselves in a wood ruled by a patriarch just a powerful' and thus, mirroring the case with Athens, it is not straightforward; the restrictions of Athens and civilization merge into the mythological, maddening world of the wood and fairies ...**

Another very strong response explored an interesting feminist reading of the use of settings:

**When discussing setting and Shakespeare's use of it in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Of course, the contrasting settings of the city of Athens, and the woods which lay symbolically beyond its limits are of paramount importance. It is the setting of Athens and the place of the nobles - Hippolyta and Theseus in particular - within this setting that quickly enables Shakespeare to establish the theme of social order and patriarchal power, which the audience sees forced upon the feminine in what may be considered a criticism by**

Shakespeare of the place of women in contemporary society. The play opens, for instance, with Theseus' reference to having 'wooed thee [Hippolyta] with my sword' with the connotations of 'sword' - battle, conflict and eventual defeat - introducing the theme of female repression by the patriarchy, as facilitated by the setting of the Court of Athens. Contextually also Shakespeare reinforces the concept of female oppression and loss of identity through the character of Hippolyta, borrowed and altered from Greek mythology: once a strong, independent Amazonian warrior, Shakespeare makes veiled reference through the inclusion of the semantic field of war ('sword', 'won', 'triumph') to Theseus' forced removal of Hippolyta from this setting of power to one wherein she is shepherded to the sidelines of both the narrative and the dialogue in Athens of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Setting, then, and the removal of characters from their settings of origin, is a means by which Shakespeare is able to explore themes of power and patriarchy.

... the converse setting of the woods outside the city limits is used equally to present the independence of the feminine and their efforts to escape patriarchal powers (Egeus and Theseus, for example) and settings (the court of Athens) that restrict them. While Shakespeare portrays Helena as feeble in the setting of Athens, with few lines of dialogue besides those on which she focuses on the superficial ('that I were as beautiful as you!') upon her escape to the woods to pursue Demetrius she grasps power both in dialogue and action. She is given, for example, a soliloquy by Shakespeare - normally the reserve of male characters of high status ...

## Question 11

### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

#### The question asked about morality.

This was in many ways an ideal thematic question for Shakespeare's 'problem play' and, as such, invited a variety of approaches. As ever, the Duke was a popular area of focus, but – pleasingly – very few candidates fell into the trap of simply regurgitating material they may have learned before. The bed trick and Isabella's dilemma were also covered well; a few responses considered Angelo's characterisation. Contextual discussion was fairly sound, with the usual comments on James VI/James I, although, unlike other questions in the paper, candidates' knowledge of religious contexts was fairly weak.

At the top end, there was admirable critical evaluation of the task, with sophisticated AO3 and better responses made good use of the debate over the play's genre, relating the questions that the text asks about morality and its nature, to the problematic structure and shifts of tone. Weaker candidates tended to lose sight of the text, and neglected not only AO2 analysis, but, at times, use of specific textual references to support their claims. This was also a question where examiners noted that academic expression was weak – several candidates becoming carried away with an overly-conversational tone or use of rhetorical questions.

Here is the opening to an answer that scored highly and whose strength lay in its sustained, perceptive focus on the question:

**Measure for Measure is described as one of Shakespeare's 'problem plays' and indeed it is open to interpretation. To some critics Measure for Measure represents a rejection of conventional morality and an argument for tolerance of human vices. To others, it can be read as an argument in support of strong government to enforce a legalized morality. Perhaps the most influential reading of the play is the traditional view of it as an argument for Christian ethics and morality, based on forgiveness and not judgment...**



## Question 12

### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

#### The question asked about Isabella.

A number of candidates really focused on AO5 here, structuring their response by different interpretations. Even weaker candidates demonstrated a very pleasing personal engagement with the task. As a result, this was one of the best 'character' questions encountered on the paper as a whole.

An interesting omission was how a number of candidates almost completely ignored Act II Scene II and Act II Scene VI – surely amongst the key Isabella scenes. Whilst they are completely free to choose their material for discussion – and as pleasing as it is to read personal responses that range confidently around the play – it was felt that some candidates would have benefitted from choosing scenes which provide some of the best material for AO2 analysis (reflecting, for example, the development in Isabella's character from the start to the end of Act II).

As with Q11, knowledge of the religious contexts of the play was weak, aside from a few references to the Puritans. Only one candidate referred to the Sermon on the Mount, and very few considered the implications of Shakespeare presenting a distinctively Roman Catholic religious environment to a (largely) Protestant Jacobean audience. Responses to such issues in *Hamlet* and, in Section B, *Doctor Faustus*, proves this can be done.

Here is an example of a Level 4 response to this question. It has a well-controlled argument and is strong on context. There is effective – if not always developed – engagement with critics, too. However its weakness is that there is limited consideration of the writer's craft and, at times, the character is discussed as real rather than as a literary construct:

**The character of Isabella in 'Measure for Measure' by William Shakespeare can be interpreted in numerous ways, and she is often either criticized or celebrated by critics and audiences. In a play about justice and mercy, Shakespeare presents her as one controlled by a power structure that seems to offer neither. In the play, she seems to be presented in three contrasting ways: as a naïve, manipulated novice; as a strong-willed, pious woman or as a selfish and rigid 'vixen'. Her struggle with sexually corrupt men has resonated with many.**

**Isabella is faced with one of the key decisions in the play, of whether to save Claudio by giving Angelo her virtue. Some interpret her refusal as selfish, with the critic Darryl Gless suggesting she has 'spiritual arrogance'. This could be seen in her encounter with Claudio, where she says 'I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death;/ No word to save thee.' This reaction to Claudio's unwillingness to die seems to show cruelty, and suggests Isabella lacks empathy. Her 'thousand prayers' are not being used to implore God to save her brother, but for his death, implying that her religion is not a merciful one. Isabella seems to have no issue with dying for Claudio: 'O, were it but my life' – but believes 'More than our brother is out chastity', valuing her spiritual rewards after death as more important than her brother's life. To Isabella, death would have been much less fearful than the prospect of eternal damnation. Interestingly, the Christian philosopher St Augustine had argued that losing virtue in such a circumstance would be forgiven, and not lead to hell. Isabella's inability to see this reinforces the view of some critics that she is a 'vixen in her virtue'. However, the power of the Church and the fear of Hell in Jacobean times should not be underestimated. Shakespeare's choice to set the play in Vienna, a Catholic city, reinforces Isabella's view of fornication as 'abhorred pollution'. The influence of Puritans in England such as Phillip**

Stubbes may also be felt here, who advised capital punishment for crimes such as adultery and would agree with Isabella's decision. Nonetheless, despite Isabella's belief that sex should lead her to "die for ever" she quickly agrees to the disguised Duke's plan that involves Mariana risking the same spiritual punishment telling him 'the image of it gives me content already'. As the critic McGarrity says, Isabella's virtue is a 'hollow sculpture to hide inside'. her willingness to let Mariana sleep with Angelo and her apparent fear of sex seems to support this. This attitude almost sees her as a parallel to the villainous Angelo, something reinforced by Shakespeare's use of stichomythia in their conversation (' Must he needs die? / Maiden, no remedy.') His attitude to the law seems to be the same as her religious convictions.

However, it can be argued that Isabella is a strong-willed woman trying to stop a patriarchal system from controlling her. This is perhaps shown in her choice to become a nun in the first place - one of the very few roles for women in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that didn't require her being essentially the property of a man...

## Question 13

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

### **The question asked about Petruchio.**

Weaker candidates struggled to find sufficient material to write a whole answer on Petruchio; the best answers were those where candidates knew about comic form and conventions, and could relate this character role to the cultural/historical contexts. Some made effective use of the contrast between Petruchio and Bianca's suitors. The idea of patriarchy was a common area of exploration for AO5, many candidates seeing Petruchio as abusive and assuming that Kate's final speech is ironic.

Here is the opening of a low Level 3 response where the candidate is making clear, but not discriminating, points about the character and is tending to paraphrase, rather than analyse, the text:

### **Shakespeare presents Petruchio in numerous ways that challenge the audience as his intentions are ambiguous.**

**In Act 1 Scene 2, Petruchio is presented as in search for wealth when "Happily to wive and thrive as best ...Crowns in my purse." The declarative sentence highlights his intentions at the start of the play, this is useful as Shakespeare outline Petruchio's objective towards the audience, This also shows Petruchio's stubbornness when he learns of Kate who is , "intolerable curst And shrewd and forward..." Whilst learning that she is a shrew, Petruchio does not let that become a barrier in order to receive his wealth as well as presenting his ego when he stated, "Have I not in my time heard lions roar? Have I not heard the sea?... Have I not heard great ordinance..." The rhetorical questions suggest that Petruchio is willing to take up the challenge of controlling Kate and bearing her shrewish behavior. The animal imagery is presented when comparing Kate to a lion which implies that Petruchio is fearless. The use of animal imagery is constantly used by Petruchio especially in Act 4 Scene 1 when comparing her to a "falcon' that will "know her keeper's call..." This suggests that Petruchio views Kate as an animal that can be tamed in reference to the title. Some audiences might feel pity for Kate as she is potentially meeting her match. As Petruchio first compares Kate to a lion, he emphasizes his power through the use of anaphora when repeating "Have I ..." This allows the reader to feel ambiguous of Petruchio as they are unsure of his controlling methods.**

## Question 14

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

### **The question asked about the play's ending.**

This was much the more popular question of the two and it was generally successful in allowing candidates to engage with a wide range of critical ideas around interpretations of the play and also to explore both genre and gender theory in relation to the text.

Here are the introductions to three high-scoring responses to the question, each one showing lively engagement with critical debate around this play:

**William Shakespeare's 'The Taming of the Shrew' ends with Katherine finally tamed and declaring her love and obedience to her husband Petruchio. At least that's how it appears. The play's ending has sparked much debate over the years about how sincere and genuine Katherine really is. Professor of English, Lisa Hopkins wrote that "Marriage is appropriate as a provider of closure for comedy" but this is not the case with The Taming of the Shrew as the ending is somewhat open and suggests something deeper behind Katherina's behaviour. However, if this is not the case and Katherine is being genuine then Hopkins' idea can be accepted.**

**Hortensio and Lucentio certainly believe she's tamed as the two of them have the play's closing lines ...**

**In 'The Taming of the Shrew', Shakespeare ostensibly presents the play's ending as one in which what Newman describes as 'patriarchal hegemony' is achieved. However, this reading is somewhat problematised by Katherine's final speech on a woman's place which outwardly seems to uphold male supremacy, yet has distinct echoes of the submissive female set piece of Sly's 'wife' in the Introduction, bringing the idea of a subversive coded subtext closer to the surface. Furthermore, Shakespeare's Bianca openly challenges her husband's authority by the end of the play undermining the overtones of 'patriarchal hegemony.'**

**Contrary to Hopkins' statement that marriage in Shakespeare's comedies serves to provide 'comic closure', 'The Taming of the Shrew' subverts comedic norms by featuring marriage as the central point but closes, as the title foreshadows, with evidence of a 'tamed shrew'. Shakespeare, therefore, presents the ending of his dark comedy as an inevitable conclusion for the events of the play, using Elizabethan society's follies to make Katherina's final monologue open to interpretation: it can either be taken at face value as a confirmation of Katherina's subjugation to society, or interpreted as a satirical mocking of Elizabethan expectations by Shakespeare ...**

## Question 15

TWELFTH NIGHT

### The question asked about Sir Toby.

Candidates responded to this question with a strong sense of argument around Sir Toby's function in the play. While weaker responses tended to offer up what seemed like pre-prepared character studies, the best answers considered his function in terms of the play's themes, genre and social contexts. Many made reference to theories of comedy and to a range of critical views.

Here is an introduction to a strong answer that focussed on the notion of social subversion:

**In Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' Sir Toby is effectively presented as a key element of the revelry and social subversion within the play which makes Twelfth Night a "ritualized twelfth night festival in itself", in which characters, such as Sir Toby, delight in the festival, carnival atmosphere where anything can happen in Illyria, being a 'green world' (Laroque). This is true particularly of Sir Toby's relationships with other characters - he appears to revere as well as fall in love with lower class characters and rather insult the people of his own class. Thus, Shakespeare clearly uses the character of Sir Toby to highlight social subversion and the idea of the unconventional as seen in the festival of Twelfth Night.**

Here is another where the candidate, early on, acknowledges the different ways in which the character is received:

**'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' is one of the most famous lines of William Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' in which Sir Toby questions Malvolio's authority. Sir Toby who is a man of excess conflicts with the puritanical Malvolio as Malvolio stands as a 'moral censor' to the merriment, according to Bevington. Even though "Twelfth Night" is a festive comedy one could argue that Sir Toby takes merriment and indulgence one step too far. Shakespeare presents Sir Toby as a foolish lord who tricks his way through life and is the perpetrator of the 'labyrinth of tricks and error' which Laroque suggests prevent comedy and 'comic closure', Hopkins. In some productions he is portrayed as the ultimate villain such as the RSC 2018 production but it depends upon the extent to which his 'tricks' are played out.**

## Question 16

### TWELFTH NIGHT

#### The question asked about gender roles.

This question produced several strong responses and was by far the most popular out of all the comedies. Candidates discussed Olivia's unusually masculine role contextually, as the head of a household and as the person wooing a partner. They also discussed Viola's cross dressing and Orsino's unsuccessful romantic melancholia. Stronger responses discussed the metatheatrical elements and many successfully discussed Hopkins's ideas of how norms were adhered to in the ending. Weaker responses discussed Shakespeare's 'feminist' message about the liberation of restrictive constraints of females, but stronger responses discussed the play's setting up of subverted gender roles appropriate to the festive comedy genre.

Here is an opening to a response that was awarded Level 4 for AOs 1–3 and Level 3 (less discriminating here) for AO5:

**'Twelfth Night' is replete with the exploration and subversion of gender roles. As one critic said, 'Throughout the play we are set free from the assumption that a person is defined by his or her gender.' Whilst this is true to some extent, for example through Shakespeare's depiction of female agency and homosexual desire, gender roles are ultimately reinforced through the final convenient marital bonds characteristic of Shakespeare's comedies.**

**Gender roles are subverted throughout the play, most noticeably in the cases of Viola and Olivia. As a result of Viola's disguise, she is able to have intimate conversations with Orsino who tells her that he has 'unclasped to thee the book even of my secret soul'. This intimacy is greatly contrasted with Orsino's male/ female relationship with Olivia, as he is depicted as only visiting her house in the final scene of the play, demonstrating their lack of intimacy. Furthermore, Viola's disguise allows her to challenge Orsino's hyperbolic – and possibly insincere – statements of love. She uses the rhetorical question 'Was this not love indeed?' after her 'patience on a monument' speech to demonstrate that unspoken love can be sincere. She further demonstrates this with the use of antithesis describing male love: 'We prove / much in our vows, but little in our love'. This clear intimacy between Viola and Orsino may be an attempt to mimic a traditional relationship between a eunuch and his master: in Ottoman courts eunuchs were considered to be trusted advisors, and Viola clearly takes on this role whilst still providing a female point of view. This androgyny is commented on by Penny Giles: 'Viola always exists in the margins between the genders.' Olivia also takes on a masculine role, though to a lesser extent. She states of Cersario, 'thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit/ do give thee five fold blazon'. This frenzied use of anaphora and patrician language demonstrate that Olivia is taking on the masculine role of a suitor. Later in the play, where she asks Sebastian to marry her, she states: 'would'st thou be ruled by me?' This is a clear subversion of contemporary perceptions of marriage; the female marriage vows established in 1549 included the statement 'to love, honour and obey' demonstrating the traditional role of the husband. Perhaps, therefore, as the critic Williams states, 'It is a feminist play at heart.' This certainly appears to be the case.**

**Shakespeare also subverts gender roles through his depiction of homosexual love and desire. Antonio's relationship with Sebastian has clear homosexual undertones. This is most evident in Antonio's use of declamatory rhyming couplets, for example, 'I do adore thee so, that danger shall seem sport ...**

## Question 17

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

### The question asked about the text as a Morality Play.

A common approach to this question was to recap the tropes of a morality play and find evidence for these within *Doctor Faustus*. For some candidates this was a sensible choice, and the focus this brought helped them to achieve a Level 3. Those who achieved Level 4, however, invariably went beyond this, identifying the sense of debate that was set up in the question: many candidates produced an interesting analysis of the extent to which Marlowe may have been subverting the genre entirely. The generic conventions of the morality play were widely understood and applied relevantly to Marlowe, both in what he borrowed and what he manipulated or omitted. Many pointed out that the Doctor cannot be seen as an Everyman figure, despite his lowly origins, because of his vast learning at the start of the play. The core battle between good and evil was recognised everywhere, as was the ultimately conventional moral that the wages of sin is death. Appreciation of Marlowe's stagecraft was not as greatly in evidence as the contexts of religion, humanism, the status of biblical imperatives and the Renaissance.

Here is an introduction to a Level 5 response to this question:

**Existing on the cusp between Medieval and Renaissance values, Marlowe's plays cannot be fitted easily into one genre. Although he incorporated many elements of Morality plays, such as personification of virtues and vices and the inclusion of a moral message, the play of 'Doctor Faustus' does not seem totally to conform to the Morality genre, and particularly its primary character - Faustus himself - seems far more of a Renaissance man than the Everyman typical of Morality plays...**

and another:

**Morality plays, popularized in the Medieval period, marked the transitions from liturgical to secular drama and many traces of their influence can be seen in Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus'. While 'Doctor Faustus' features many stock characters who would be seen in morality plays, other characters such as Mephistophilis are notably more complex. Marlowe also includes elements from Greek tragedy in his play, showing broad influences, most notably the use of a Chorus. However, the Chorus's final monologue is rather didactic and is perhaps similar to a morality play which would ultimately espouse a moral lesson, most commonly to respect God...**



## Question 18

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

### The question asked about conflict.

Candidates used the question to explore a variety of conflicts, including those between Faustus and his conscience, between Faustus and Lucifer, between good and evil, between medieval and Renaissance views of the world and religion, between the Christian message and Marlowe's alleged atheism and between our expectations of evil and Marlowe's presentation of Mephistopheles/Mephistophilis.

Most candidates headed directly for the reference to the good and bad angel characters as a starting point for this question and usually went on to discuss concepts of heaven and hell. The main focus would then move on to Faustus's decision of whether or not to repent. Lower-level responses tended to hover generally around these points providing evidence from the text while higher-level responses were more in depth and developed with reference being fluidly embedded within the discussion.

Stagecraft was more fully considered in discussions of conflict. The physical fight between the Angels in a recent production was often referred to in ways which focused on the dramatic impact of the play creatively.

Here is an example of a top level response to this question. A real strength here is the candidate's sustained focus on the writer's craft, never allowing contextual discussion to overpower a sense of the text as a piece of drama:

**Marlowe's depiction of conflict in Faustus is embedded within the conflicting cultural ideas which are conflated in his characterisation of Faustus: namely, the Medieval morality hero and the Renaissance man, an archetype which emerged due to the new found scientific discoveries such as the telescope, which encouraged the pushing of the boundaries of conventional available knowledge.**

**Faustus' personal conflict, between continuing his pursuit of earthly and mortal knowledge and the dark art of necromancy, is most clearly signalled in his opening soliloquy in Scene 1, the forward momentum of his decision making process enacted by the opening line 'Settle the studies, Faustus, and begin through the use of imperatives. Faustus' conflicted view of conventional occupations that they are too 'servile and illiberal for me' highlights the conundrum that faced many esteemed scholars during the Renaissance period: it is likely that Marlowe's Faustus was influenced by the renowned scholar John Dee who collected the largest library in England. Like Faustus, Dee felt that he had experienced all of the knowledge available to him, as during the Renaissance period knowledge was finite. And was later accused of 'conjuring' and was briefly imprisoned. Faustus' conflict through the soliloquy concluded upon the same decision as Dee, that Faustus will 'try thy brains to gain a deity'. The certainty of the decision which Faustus has reached is conveyed through the internal rhyme of 'try thy' and 'brains to gain' which, through the rhythm and lyrical tone, implies Faustus' mounting sense of childish excitement as he concludes that he he will pursue and achieve the desires which he established in the beginning of the scene. Furthermore, 'deity' is lent extra emphasis in its polysyllabic nature which disrupts the lilting rhythm of the rest of the rhyme; this emphasis communicates a finality in Faustus' decision. However, this finality is undermined by the uncertainty which Faustus experiences throughout the rest of the play, and though he sees to quell his inner conflict in the opening scene, the existence of conflict throughout the rest of the play signifies Faustus' weakness in**



succumbing to temptation and persuasion: this is the primary source of his conflict throughout the play.

The Good and Evil Angel are harnessed by Marlowe as a means of externalising Faustus' inner conflict, lending it more conviction and power through the creation of dramatic spectacle. Marlowe cleverly signals which Angel has more resonance with Faustus' conflicted state of mind by having this angel speak last; this is exemplified in Scene 5 when the Evil Angel urges 'No Faustus, think of honour and of wealth' and Faustus response 'Of wealth' echoes the Evil Angel's last words. The robotic tone implied by Faustus' mindless repetition of the Evil Angel's words perhaps suggests that the obsessive nature of Faustus; desires have led to an erosion of his individuality. Similarly, in Scene 7, the Good Angel tells Faustus 'Repent, and they shall never rase they skin' before the angels' disappearance, to which Faustus responds 'Ah, Christ my saviour, seek to save/ Distressed Faustus' soul'. Thus it seems, arguably, that Faustus' internal conflict is controlled by external forces; not only the Good and Evil Angel. But furthermore Lucifer and Mephistophilis. To some extent, Faustus does not personally deal with conflict, but rather submits to the argument of the most assertive of the external forces. This falls in conjunction with Fuatus; assertion that 'Sweet Analytics, tis thou has ravished me', the verb 'ravished; refers to both sexual violation, and to be seized by violent means. Therefore, Faustus seemingly cast himself in the subordinate, implying that magic and necromancy have taken him, not that he has taken an active role in solving the conflicting issues at hand. Perhaps through the allusions of Faustus as submissive in the face of conflict, Marlowe encourages his audience to de derisive on an age which was characterised by the motif of faith and doubt.

In 'Doctor Faustus' Marlowe also explore the contemporary religious conflict between the notion of predestination and freewill. Faustus' engagement and his assumption that he possesses the ability to usurp the divinely appointed order could be interpreted, by an Elizabethan audience, as an indication that he is predestined to be damned, if they viewed the play through the religious frame of Calvinism. Calvinism was a stringent form of Protestantism which maintained that individuals were predestined to be damned or saved, a notion which Marlowe would have been familiar with given his education at the university of Cambridge, which was a centre for radical Calvinism. However, Marlowe's incorporation of character who encourage Faustus to repent throughout the play suggest that he does possess free will, specifically the Good Angel, and more significantly, the Old Man. Not only does the Old Man act as a memento mori, and Elizabethan reminder of the inevitability of death, but his cleat and instructive rhetoric to Faustus demonstrates that the path to repentance is accessible: this conflicts with the play's previous implications that Faustus' fate is predestined and escape form it is impossible. Indeed, the Old Man contends 'call for mercy, and avoid despair'. The regular metre of this line further reinforces the notion that Faustus' path to redemption is available and easily accessed whilst the balance of the line serves to emphasise the Old Man's balanced and measured state of thinking, which contrasts to Faustus' volatile state. Subsequently, Marlowe expounds conflict through his demonstration that the escape of damnation both is, and is not, possible and thus the audience, in the uncertainty they experience as a result, emulate the uncertainty of Faustus which ultimately lends the play's tragic end more conviction.

Marlowe's portrayal of conflict throughout the play perhaps echoes the personal conflict he dealt with in his defiance of religious convention, as he was accused of being an atheist, and calling Christ a 'bastard', an accusation extracted from the playwright Thomas Kyd under torture. It is through this conflict which he generates, that the play is able to incite tension surrounding Faustus' fate; conflict is evident throughout the play even in Faustus' final line where he claims 'I'll burn my books' and suggests that he has decided to change his ways and return to Christianity at the very moment when he is being seized by the devils.

## Question 19

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

### The question asked about family relationships.

Candidates responded well to the toxic mix of jealousy, corruption and murder at the heart of the play. There were some confident responses, though a few candidates fell into the trap of discussing family itself, structuring their response by character studies of family members. Responses generally focussed only on the brothers and sister early in the play, rather than exploring the Duchess's attempts to create an alternative family on her own terms, her presentation as a mother and how Webster draws on this to increase sympathy for her, the horrific deaths of the children, and the survival of the single heir at the end of the play.

The best answers located the character of the Duchess at the heart of the responses and identified the threat she presents to male power and control of women. Some were able to identify the political allegory offered by Webster attempted to place this in the context of shifts in the Early Modern period between Catholic and Protestant approaches, and between aristocratic and middle class concepts of property.

Here is an extract from a Level 4 response. It shows sustained, discriminating engagement with the writer's craft and with context, although the expression of its argument lacks the sophistication expected at Level 5:

**... the brothers' attempt to control her is palpable as they deliver a speech 'so roundly off that it could only have been rehearsed. Therefore, Webster instantly emphasizes how the brothers do not have her interests at heart but rather their own self-interest, as Ferdinand is motivated by his incestuous feelings towards her and the Cardinal wishes to maintain his own position. Therefore, the Duchess is established as a sympathetic character ... Furthermore it is clear she underestimates their power (or perhaps overestimates her own) as she tells Antonio to 'not think of' her brothers, dismissing his fears. Moreover, her naivety and trust of them is reinforced as she accepts Ferdinand's recommendation of Bosola to be 'Provisor of the horse' without a second thought.**

**Therefore, Webster emphasizes how family relationships are not always positive and perhaps should be feared...Not only does their immorality make the audience regard them as a threat, it also forces the Duchess to marry 'under the eaves of night' and makes her family a secret. This jeopardises her moral status as she is forced to deceive, even if it is a 'noble lie'. This reflects the Jacobean belief that a fish rots from the head down or 'some cursed example poison't near the head, Death and diseases through the whole land spread.'**

**Yet despite this, for a period of time, the Duchess and Antonio manage to create a home of domestic bliss as shown in Act 3 scene 2, when the Duchess and Antonio and Cariola joke as the Duchess gets ready for bed and Antonio urges Cariola to 'forget this single life' and extols the value of marriage and family. Here, Webster creates a beautiful picture of a loving family environment. Yet dramatic irony is used as the audience knows that this bliss is about to be corrupted by Ferdinand who has 'a false key'. Moreover, the Jacobean audience would have regard the failure of this family as inevitable because the Duchess had dared to tamper with God's natural order by marrying beneath her status. Therefore, the audience would have felt the impending destruction ...**

## Question 20

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

### **The question asked about reputation.**

Weaker response to this question tended to focus on individual characters and the extent to which they were concerned about reputation, rather than on exploring the theme across the play as a whole. However, many candidates seemed well prepared in respect of AO3, which underpinned answers and enhanced discussion of reputation and they enjoyed the opportunity to explore Webster's exploration of reputation as a key factor in social standing in Jacobean society. Candidates also considered reputation in respect of gender and family hierarchy. There was some tendency to write about key scenes as if they exist in isolation, rather than as contributing to the tragedy as a whole.

Here is an extract from a Level 3 response which, typically of this level, relies on character sketches rather than on a discriminating argument using the whole of the text:

**Webster presents reputation in the Duchess of Malfi to be an element of power within the Jacobean court, this is shown through the corruptive powers of both Ferdinand and the Cardinal, and through how the Duchess is eventually killed because she refused to conform to the reputation that her brothers had expected of her.**

**The character of The Cardinal is presented by Webster to be a character who is obsessed with keeping his reputation as well as using his status to exploit others...**

**Webster presents the character of the Duchess to be a character who does not care for reputation, but instead acts on what she believes is right. This is shown through how the Duchess marries her steward, Antonio, who is a man of lower class. During the engagement the Duchess defies the traditional gender norms of the Jacobean period by placing the ring on his finger. Webster shows this physically through making this action a stage direction, showing the Duchess is physically choosing to defy both the stereotypes surrounding gender, but also she does not care for her reputation...**

**Equally, Webster also presents the character of Ferdinand to be obsessed with the reputation of the Duchess and status, however unlike the Cardinal, Ferdinand's obsession with his sister is presented to be dark and twisted; whereas the Cardinal is only obsessed with keeping their reputation clean and looking respected. Their rotten personalities are first highlighted by Bosola towards the beginning of the play when he uses a simile to compare the brothers to 'plum trees' ....**

## Question 21

### THE HOME PLACE

#### The question asked about identity.

The very small number of centres whose candidates had studied this play had clearly prepared well for AO3. Candidates generally used this question to explore the identities of individual characters by linking them to overall political and philosophical themes in the play. Here is an example of a typical opening argument:

**The idea of identity is key throughout The Home Place. The troubles which have existed in Ireland throughout the centuries, in this play and even in current times have been the result of conflict within one's national identity. Friel bases his whole concept of the play within the idea of identities as it was written in the aftermath of "the troubles" in Ireland between 1968 and 1998 and the attempt to resolve the violence in the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The idea of identity is key throughout different characters as it is clear each character represents a different perspective on identity. Just as the theme of identity conflicting in Ireland throughout history it is what causes the conflict within the play and the presentation of the idea that one's national identity affect one's role in society.**

However, at times, contextual material was allowed to swamp a response. Not only was focus on the dramatist's craft lost, but the candidate's own argument is fractured by pointless recount of historical detail. Here is an example:

**Christopher struggles throughout with his identity as he wants to be part of the nation of Ireland and yet his English ancestry and links to the Protestant Ascendancy always prevail him to be an outsider in Ireland. One of the key ways in which Friel presents this idea is through the fact that Christopher mentions the 'home place in Kent'. 'Home' is synonymous with the idea of belonging and although he has resided in the Lodge and within Balleybeg his entire life he still links himself to England. This is because of his links with the Protestant Ascendancy which is key when discussing how Friel presents the ideas of identity. The Protestant Ascendancy was prominent throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and one can argue that it was this which set off the years of violence and anger in Ireland. Ireland had a catholic majority whilst England traditionally had a Catholic majority, the English ruled Ireland until it was given independence in 1922 after a long and arduous fight for Home Rule. The English wanted to have those who aligned with their beliefs in power and thus sent many English and Scottish protestants to be the landowners over the people of Ireland. The land owners still owned family houses in England and in fact many of them remained living in England whilst their tenants were in Ireland. This caused much anger and violence between them and is what sets the tone for the relationship which both Christopher and the other members of the Ascendancy had with the Irish.**

## **Question 22**

THE HOME PLACE

### **The question asked about a sense of insecurity.**

This question directed candidates towards Friel's dramatic craft and successful responses explored his use of setting, symbolism, imagery, dialogue, stage directions and other techniques to create a sense of insecurity that candidates were then able to link to the political insecurities of Ireland, both in 1878 and at the time of writing.

As with Q21, weaker response allowed often irrelevant contextual detail to get in the way of AO1 and AO2.

- Chosen question number: **Question 17** ✕ **Question 18** ✕ **Question 19** ✕  
**Question 20** ✕ **Question 21** ✕ **Question 22** ✕  
**Question 23** ✕ **Question 24** ✕ **Question 25** ✕  
**Question 26** ✕ **Question 27** ✕ **Question 28** ✕  
**Question 29** ✕ **Question 30** ✕ **Question 31** ✕  
**Question 32** ✕

Explore the ways in which Friel creates a sense of insecurity in *The Home Place*.

Friel sets the scene in the everytown of Ballybeg, ultimately meaning small town. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Friel's Irish small town setting was a simplistic portrayal of Irish life, instead Friel exposes the fragility of security through a play which targets essential human behaviour.

When introduced to the setting in <sup>the</sup> late summer of 1878, it is the end of August, the end of Mary's time, there is an immediate sense of insecurity. The nature of the setting on the "unkept lawn" of "the Lodge" immediately introduces the reader to the harsh reality of politics in Ireland during the 1800s. ~~It could~~ <sup>it could</sup> be argued that deteriorating nature of 'the Lodge' is reflective of the decline of the Protestant Ascendancy, particularly as the "unkept" lawn whose mowing all of the ~~same~~ <sup>same</sup> place is quite ironically ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> probably taken from Native Irish Catholics through plantation. Furthermore, the "ethereal" singing



of Thomas Moore's 'Off in the Shilly Night' is seen to enrapture Margaret as 'she stands motionless'. Again this calm music juxtaposes strongly with the political unrest in Ireland and ~~pro~~ perhaps prevents Margaret as a character caught between two identities. It is clear through Friel's setting that there is a sense of 'insecurity and 'the Lodge' and its inhabitants, and it is through the course of ~~the~~ one day that Friel explores the meaning of such fear.

It is immediately clear that Christopher acts as an embodiment of the decline of the Protestant Ascendancy, and his insecurities about his future are presented throughout the play. The way in which Friel sets the play in such a short space of time allows him to explore the insecurities of his character in greater detail. On primary introduction, Christopher is presented as "effusive, bumbling and ebullient", his very character seeming to embody the possibility of political change in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Christopher's naive character is essential in creating a sense of insecurity throughout the play as Friel portrays how blind benevolence is made in a ~~struggle~~ <sup>race</sup> for political power. Christopher's short concise sentences at the beginning of the play present the audience with a self-assured man of confidence, ~~that~~ particularly as he compliments Margaret saying "you're so elegant in that dress. Everything you wear you adorn." However, his excessive compliments also way to the true trouble in play, Lord Littlewood's Death. The list of

rhetorical questions that Friel employs to discuss the plot, as Maggie asks if there was "a big turn-out", portrays the insecurity of the two characters. The fact that there were "eleven" only "eleven" people at the funeral, heightens the dramatic tension of the play whilst also raising insecurities as the political tension brought about by the Civil War becomes ~~was~~ a reality due to "the list". Insecurities are again heightened when Christopher <sup>asks</sup> "which of us next is on the list?". Again the use of the rhetorical question emphasises the uncertainty of life in Ireland, particularly for those of the Protestant Ascendancy <sup>during</sup> a time when the Land League were gaining momentum.

Friel could be criticised for his use of simplistic stereotypical characters in 'The Name Place'. However, one could also argue that by reducing his characters to archetypes he can instead use them as vehicles through whom he seeks to explore the ~~extensive~~ political tension. It is clear that the ~~play begins~~ ~~from the beginning~~ his very introduction that Richard is going to cause trouble in the play. It is almost as though his excessive confidence as he belittles and infantilises both Maggie and Sally acts to have the opposite effect on the audience; there is a sense of insecurity ~~that~~ introduced ~~at the character~~ through Richard's unwavering arrogance. However, Friel offers this with a focused interaction between Perkins and Richard, whereby Perkins is seen to repeat almost



Everything Richard says, ~~and~~ always calling him "Su". The respect and distance portrayed through Perkins creates a sense of insecurity or the self-entitlement of such seemingly ridiculous men appears almost dangerous. Despite the fact that at the beginning of the play, Richard comments on the native Irish seem amusing and playful his dialogue quickly descends into his anthropometry and even racist views. He describes <sup>the</sup> "extraordinarily long faces, and black eyes" of the native Irish, in the presence of Sally, ~~again~~ portraying his insensitivity. ~~which creates~~ The way in which Richard employs the descriptive adjectives in such an adjective tone is almost dehumanising, ~~and~~ which in turn ~~exaggerates~~ Richard's self-assured position and the heterotypical attitude of British colonials. It is clear here, that Friel, ~~through~~ ~~a~~ stark presentation of the Cartesian Eugenicist is essential in portraying the insecurity of politics.

The gentle racial mockery seen at the beginning of the play, quickly give rise to what can only be described as the ~~main~~ ~~the~~ ~~crux~~ of the action. When the native Irish villagers of Ballybeg enter "staring and curiously, one by one behind the obvious other", it becomes immediately clear that there are insecure of being at the lodge! Furthermore Christopher's over-enthusiastic welcoming of them, ~~and~~ through "Welcome! Welcome!" portrays how inappropriate his behaviour is in this situation, particularly when he appears

"known [their] routine into dissaray." The use of the word raising again acts to emphasise ~~that~~ the way in which he imposes higher class norms on people with little or no money. Furthermore, the way in which Mary Swany is presented as she "Needs money for food... There's six young..." prevents the neat difference between the obtrude and the natives, which in turn creates insecurity as the audience becomes aware of the extreme division between citizens. This is particularly apparent as the Great famine was only ~~20~~<sup>30</sup> years earlier. Friel employs foreshadowing throughout the play to create insecurity. Despite its subtlety Tommy's small usurpation through the use of the word "Major" foreshadowed the later confrontation with Con O'Cherry. The audience associates Con O'Cherry with danger from the beginning of the play as he is seen to "emerge from the thicket", the stealthy manner of his entrance coupled with the word 'emerge' infer that Con is perhaps part of some clandestine activity such as the Land League and moreover the looming presence of Soling Macdonn as the score unfolds into a political confrontation perhaps reflects the ever presence of history in Ireland. Friel through Friel's presentation of the continual insecurity in the play it suggests that he believes that history in Ireland should remain as just that, history.

The final scene in the play whereby Christopher is seen to break down, "his resilience gone" reflects the decline of the Protestant Ascendancy. The way in which David "speaks white" ~~with~~ ~~about~~ Christopher as a large white oak tree, Christopher's chest and the "pocket record" portrays how just like the 'doomed tree' the Protestant Ascendancy is marked for removal. Furthermore, trees are seen to represent longevity and stability, which is ironic considering the fragile position of the Protestant Ascendancy in the final scene. It is noteworthy that the "pocket record" is dated 1739, the date of Thomas Moore's birth, a poet laureate (England's national treasure) who songs with melancholy tone embodied the insecurity and damage throughout Ireland.

It is clear that there is a sense of disenfranchisement that permeates Friel's work through the use of stereotypical characters. However, Friel adds verisimilitude to the play through his detailed exploration of the impact and history race on private lives in 'The Home Place'.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

Here is an example of a response that was awarded a high Level 4 for its sustained focus on the question and its consideration of Friel's craft. Its focus was rather narrowly on character at times which is why it did not achieve Level 5.

## Question 23

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

**The question asked about characters' inner lives.**

This was a popular question, attracting a wide range of candidates.

The most obvious area of focus was Blanche: only the weakest of candidates stuck to a character study, and many considered how her self-conception as a Southern belle came into conflict with the New America developing around her.

Candidates were generally able to discuss the symbolism of Blanche's inner life, shown through stage craft, staging and costumes. Many focused on the shift in characterisation from the Southern Belle dressed in white at the start and the more sordid character that emerges throughout the play. There were a wide range of ideas surrounding Stella and Stanley's inner life, however stronger responses also focused on Alan and Mitch and how their more emotional sides were a sharp contrast to Stanley. Ideas around patriarchal construct were sometimes too generic and the stronger responses went beyond surface reading of the characters actually experiencing these events and instead discussed how Williams enabled the audience to see the inner lives of characters. Many discussed Blanche's descent into madness as symbolic of the fading old Southern values. Less successful candidates discussed Stanley in speculative terms and claimed, for example, he suffered from PTSD without this being substantiated with evidence from the play.

A key discriminator on this question was the extent to which candidates addressed the 'how' of the question and engaged with Williams's dramatic craft.

Here is an example from a fairly typical Level 3 response that generally keeps its focus on the question and shows clear – if not detailed or discriminating – awareness of the writer's craft:

**Blanche's descent into madness and her underlying inner conflict between giving in to an idealistic dream world or reality is arguably the primary way in which Williams presents characters inner lives.**

**It is evident from the start that Blanche, whose appearance is 'incongruent to the setting' is already attempting to lead both an inner life whilst maintaining a superficial, Southern Belle image. Williams makes us aware of Blanche's portrayal of an outer life through the use of the 'paper lantern' which she immediately places over the light in her bedroom. Whilst Blanche passes this off as an attempt to improve the room, it shows us immediately her insecurities about her looks.**

**The audience is presented with a very visual representation of Blanche's failure to maintain this inner life as Williams uses the contrast of the grotty apartment and Blanche's 'white suit' and 'fluffy bodice' to instantly alienate Blanche which has the effect of the audience beginning to question the blurred lines between Blanche's inner life and truth and her outer image.**

**Additionally, presenting Blanche as concealing her inner life through a Southern Belle image could be Williams demanding the audience see Blanche as a personification of the downfall of the south rather than a psychoanalytic review of a mentally unstable woman who has difficulty in portraying her inner life outwardly and vice versa.**

**Williams, born and raised in Tennessee saw the prolonged outcomes of the Civil War and the**



**effect the South's loss had upon its previously rigid structure based upon hierarchy and slavery. Like many other authors, this crumbling of society fascinated Williams and led him to explore 'southern Gothic literature' evident in 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. Therefore by presenting Blanche's inner life through symbolism, Williams could be personifying the slow downfall of a society that had held such a prestige image for so long, much like Blanche...**

More successful approaches went beyond the character of Blanche. Here is an extract from a Level 5 response that looked at the inner lives of the male characters as symbolic of contemporary concerns around class and gender:

**However, Williams is also keen to present the issues and insecurities which impact the inner lives of male characters in the play – particularly Mitch and Stanley. The audience might initially categorise Mitch as part of Stanley's hypermasculine collective due to Mitch's first entrance where he 'comes round the corner' with Stanley and they are both dressed in 'blue denim work clothes' – with their synchronicity adding to this presumption. However, Mitch's arguable emotional dependency on his mother who doesn't 'go to sleep' until he returns, distances Mitch from the rest of the men as well as his reluctance to fully participate in the boorish risk-taking at the 'Poker Night' when he repeatedly states, 'I'm out'. Furthermore, Mitch's poignant statement that 'you are all married' but 'I'll be alone when she goes' is a telling allusion to the ways in which Mitch's inner life is controlled by his insecurities concerning marriage. Therefore, through Mitch, Williams dramatises the insecurities of working class men in 1940s America where the pressure to marry was almost as great as it was for women...**

**...most importantly Blanche dredges up Stanley's class insecurities, stating, 'you [Stanley] healthy polack, you don't know what anxiety feels like' – an ironic statement which marks out Stanley as emotionally underdeveloped and goes right to the heart of the insecurities of Stanley's inner-life. The curt tone of Stanley's response ('I am not a polack') in combination with angry plosive alliteration of : 'People from Poland are Poles not Polacks', illustrates how he attempts to defend and conceal the insecurities of his inner life. Williams encourages the audience to view the challenge Blanche presents to Stanley's inner life from the perspective of the hostility between the Old South with its aristocratic social prejudices and the New South with its more egalitarian view of class conflict...**

## Question 24

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

### The question asked about confrontation.

This was by far the most popular question on Section B, but one that needed careful handling. Many responses simply conflated 'confrontation' with 'conflict' and focussed almost exclusively on Blanche and Stanley. Unsurprisingly, then, maintaining question focus was often a key discriminator with candidates frequently straying and addressing all they knew about the play. Candidates also often ignored the words 'make use of' and listed examples of confrontation without addressing Williams's intentions. AO2 was variable and again a discriminator – many candidates listed methods that had been discussed in class but did not effectively apply this knowledge to 'confrontation'. Higher-level responses analysed Williams's presentation of many characters, and paid particular attention to his use of plastic theatre and recurring motifs. The best answers critically considered the significance of the post war context in terms of the message Williams's was trying to convey.

Approaches to AO3 were varied. Some responses made assertive claims of Williams's personal experience influencing his writing, mentioning his abusive father, his mentally ill mother and his struggle with his own sexuality. More successful responses discussed the internal confrontation Blanche had with her past, and the symbolic confrontation between Old and New America, although this sometimes lacked sophistication or clarity. Examiners felt that some candidates lacked basic knowledge of American history, such as when slavery was abolished, that New Orleans is not in the North and when the civil war occurred.

As with many questions in this section, contextual material was, in some cases, included at the expense of AO2 and AO1 with frequent and often ineffectual 'bolted-on' references to Williams's family, homosexuality and changes to the play's name.

Here is the opening of a response whose strength is its clear focus on the topic of the question and on the play's dramatic qualities:

**Williams often uses confrontation between characters to further the plot and reveal more information about each of them, as well as to address directly and discuss the complicated themes of the play. The arguments between various characters almost function like soliloquies in places, in that a character's thought process and opinions on the events taking place are directly addressed and revealed to the audience. The volatile confrontations between Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski exemplify this – it is rare that the two characters are on stage together and not directly confronting one another. In scene two, Stanley confronts Blanche over her reasons for leaving Belle Reve –“(booming) Now let's cut the re-bop! Don't play so dumb. You know what!”- and this establishes his lack of respect for indirect or superfluous speech (and of course Blanche speaks that way constantly) and wanting to get to the 'point' of a conversation. This is in stark contrast to Blanche, who avoids conflict and confrontation for the same reason she avoids bright light – she is afraid of the truth. In scene eight later on in the play, she tries to de-escalate the possibility of confrontation with Stanley by asking him to tell a joke ...**

Here is the introduction to a strong response that demonstrates effective engagement with the writer's craft (AO2):

**In 'A Streetcar Named Desire,' Williams uses confrontation to explore the differing views and attitudes of the characters, as well as the conflict within wider society. Different types of**

confrontation are used, with physical and violent, the verbal between characters and finally the mental, such as in the case of Blanche trying to avoid confrontation with reality.

The Poker Night in scene three is the first real physical confrontation in the play, where 'Stanley charges after Stella' and 'There is the sound of a blow'. Although this is in direct response to Stella calling him a "Drunk - animal thing" it is really the result of tension building throughout the scene, building up to a confrontation between Stanley and Blanche...

The building tension between the two culminates in a final physical confrontation with the rape. Williams uses techniques of plastic theatre to add to the atmosphere of fear and violence, with 'inhuman voices like cries in a jungle'. These animalistic sounds could signify that civilisation itself is being overpowered by the primitive, suggested also by Stanley's domination of Blanche. 'Shadows and lurid reflections' highlight Blanche's vulnerable mental state ...Stanley tells her 'We've had this date with each other from the very beginning!' suggesting the rape was inevitable...the use of the word 'date' seems almost like a cruel mockery, as it lacks any romance...

Here is another approach to the question, keeping AO2 in sight:

The location of the play's events, Elysian Fields, can be argued to be a location at war with itself and useful for Williams' direct method of confronting the flaws of the 'new' South as well as the flaws in the older, 'golden' South through his use of contrasting elements of plastic theatre. The name itself is in direct contrast to the events that occur there - in Greco-Roman mythology the Elysian Fields was a place of tranquil harmony where the 'good' were sent in the underworld after death. This is not to say that Elysian Fields is wholly confrontational and discordant - its racial diversity is described by Williams as 'warm and easy'. It is more the arrival of Blanche, who is 'incongruous to the setting' in both her appearance and her attitudes towards the events she witnesses: she directly confronts the equilibrium where violence and profanity are valued over politeness and kindness. Her iconic line, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" is a good example of this.

Elysian Fields is used by Williams to present a microcosm for the 'old v new' debate that is present throughout the play and shows that he views the importance of some of the older Southern values when these are confronted with those it seemed to embody at the time...

Finally, here is an example, from a high-scoring response, of an interesting approach that considers the confrontations between male characters:

... Confrontation is also manifested through the relationships between male characters in the play, as they confront one another in an attempt to impose control and gain power. This is seen through Stanley and Mitch's interaction in the poker scene, where Stanley's imperative language suggests he is trying to control Mitch. Stanley instructs Mitch to 'get off the table', and the monosyllabic first two words of the instruction give the audience a reason to believe that Stanley is desperately trying to assert power. The male confrontations aimed at achieving power are also seen through the mise-en-scene employed by Williams, who, arguably humourously, portrays Mitch and Stanley not wanting to be the first person to stand up from their seat, as it would be seen to demean their power over the other. Williams, notably, saw male relationships differently to the majority of society did at the time, for he himself as a homosexual and, like Hart Crane (who he quotes from 'The Broken Tower' in the epigraph), who implies that the physical nature of society is an aspect of 'the broken world' that is governed by conflict. Crane, like Williams, had to suffer societal views on homosexuality and both writers also had alcoholism. Interestingly, Williams subverts the

**fact that New Orleans was allegedly progressive in its toleration of male relationships when Allan Grey is labelled 'degenerate', suggesting that male relationships were in fact a deep confrontation with the traditional values of society...**



## Question 25

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

#### The question asked about Algernon.

In answering this question the majority of candidates tended to go beyond the straightforward 'character study' and to consider Algernon's dramatic function and role. There were many strong responses in regards to how Wilde mocks the upper classes in Victorian society through the character of Algernon. They discussed his portrayal as a dandy who behaves badly to comedic effect. Weaker responses saw him simply as an alter ego to Oscar Wilde or placed a lot of emphasis on the romantic aspects of his liaison with Cecily; however, stronger responses discussed more his function in a comedy of manners. A few were unsure what the idea of 'Bunburying' actually meant and thought it was a common expression in Victorian society. There were also some weaker responses that read the satirical comments literally and made speculations about characters based on this. AO2 was perhaps the most challenging objective for candidates here: while most candidates could talk about Algernon's witty repartee, only the very best responses explored Wilde's stage craft, such as props and costumes, in relation to this character.

Here is an introduction to a Level 5 response to the question. Note the strong focus on Wilde's use of the character:

**In the society comedy 'The Importance of Being Earnest', Oscar Wilde presents the character of Algernon Moncrieff in a number of ways. This multi-faceted character adopts the role of the 'dandy' archetype, treating all matters of seriousness in life with utter triviality, thus seeming to be solely concerned with the satisfaction of his own desires and whims. Although Wilde had employed the characterisation of the 'dandy' in a number of his past works, he portrays the character of Algernon as being thoroughly amoral rather than immoral – as dandyish characters often were in Victorian literature. Instead of pursuing villainy, Algernon instead seems to be content with his pursuit of pleasure – making the character defined by his hedonism, whether it is his excessive consumption of food and drink or his relentless pursuit of Cecily Cardew. Wilde's characterisation of Algernon also seems to reflect many of the playwright's ideas outside of the play, such as his role in the philosophical movement of aestheticism which he praised in 'The Decay of Lying'. Algernon also is presented by Wilde to satirise the 'landed aristocracy' within late Victorian society ...**

**...Wilde believed that a piece of art - be it a poem, painting or novel – should be valued for what it is, not for its imbued symbolic or allegorical meaning. The character of Algernon seems to reflect this idea, for he treats all matters of seriousness in the play with a lack of earnestness – such as how when he is in 'trouble ...eating is the only thing that consoles' him. He does this instead of addressing or trying to fix the problem at hand. This characterization of Algernon makes him a seemingly perfect match for the young 'pink rose' of Cecily Cardew whose contrived experiences in her 'diary' seem to reflect the aesthetic idea that life is a work of art. The 'triviality' of Algernon's character is largely derived from his use of language, which often employs epigrams, puns and paradoxes in order to distort truth and lies, suggesting he cannot draw a distinction between the two. This can be seen in the line 'At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy...Besides I am particularly fond of muffins' which shows his lack of care and concern about his current predicament with Cecily...**

## Question 26

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The question asked about double lives.

This question had a wide range of approaches although many focused on Jack and Algernon's deceit and its portrayal of Victorians maintaining a façade but at the same time committing indiscretions in private. Some stronger responses also focused on the female characters and how their double lives were differently portrayed from the men due to gender constraints at the time. Again, accessing AO2 was a challenge for some candidates. Clear knowledge of the texts was evident, but candidates at times seemed at a loss as to how to apply this knowledge to the question posed. Students could have explored wider scope of the play in terms of satire and the conventions of comedy of manners or farce and there was often a lack of Wilde's dramatic methods being explored. Some candidates offered a narrative overview, listing examples of doubling, while others provided a comparative response with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – often not very effectively, with unnecessarily lengthy treatment of Gray.

The best responses sustained focus on the text as a piece of drama. Here is an extract from a Level 5 answer that was strong on AO2:

**Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism represent the stern, stereotypically accurate figures of contemporary Victorian and Christian values and morals throughout the play. However, the play's biggest shock comes when it is revealed that lady Bracknell began her life very differently and married into the upper class, having been seen to violently campaign against such action throughout the entire, disdainfully calling the class from which she originated, "the purple of commerce". The reveal of Lady Bracknell's other life is a shock to the audience, and is a device used by Wilde to mock members of the upper class who are likely watching the play. Whilst Lady Bracknell's interview of Jack is ridiculous and she, as playing the 'block' character, is continuously entirely unreasonable with the other characters, contemporary members of the upper class cannot help but sympathise with her wishes to preserve the chaste purity of the upper class. However, upon revealing that, by the audience's own standards, she herself has tarnished the reputation of a class she has been striving to protect throughout the play, Wilde points out the hypocritical nature of the upper class that surrounded him daily. Wilde's presentation of Miss Prism also denounces the Christian values that the strict Victorian society in which he lived cherished. Whilst she spends the majority of the play as the stern, yet sensible and honest, voice of reason to Cecily, close to the end of the play she reveals her past and, like Lady Bracknell, undermines the audience's view of her, again allowing Wilde to mock the true nature of the upper class compared to their often farcical front as she has in fact kept his dark secret of losing a baby for many years. The role that these two women play in 'Earnest' is as the most blatant and continued mockery of the upper class audience, used to humour the audience while Wilde mocks them.**

Here is an example of a Level 5 response to the question; it is strong on all three AOs:

**The presentation of double lives is a central theme in Wilde's "Importance of Being Earnest". Much of the plot, and hence much of the comedy, revolves around the, often incongruous double lives of Wilde's characters. Whilst Wilde's primary focus in his exploration of duality to create comedy, he perhaps also seeks to criticise a society which forces its members to live double lives in order to escape the strict moral code it enforces. The idea of a 'double life' can also be applied to Wilde's own life as a homosexual man in a society where being gay was illegal.**

Wilde presents the idea of double lives through creating a contrast between appearance and reality. He achieves this through the use of comedically circumlocutory language: 'May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?' GWENDOLEN: [with elaborate politeness] thank you. [aside] detestable girl! But I require tea!' Here Wilde creates comedy through the creation of a seemingly polite encounter which is used to disguise his character's honest feelings toward one another. The use of precise stage directions here ([with elaborate politeness]) ensure that the duality of the scene is overtly obvious to an audience; the incongruous politeness creates humour here. In addition, Wilde's use of asides in this scene further the humor, as the audience is acutely aware of the two lives these women lead; one which requires 'excessive politeness' and couched language and another which can perhaps be aimed toward the audience, including them in the comedic duality, furthers the humour of the scene. In addition, Gwendolen's exclamation that she 'requires tea!' furthers the sense of incongruous humour and duality; she is faced with the possibility that her fiancée is engaged to another woman (and leading a double life, which comedically happens to be true, although in a way which she does not expect) and her main concern is upholding a polite exterior and drinking tea. This scene undoubtedly is comedic, but we can also perhaps see a deeper, more critical purpose in Wilde's presentation of duality here; Both Cecily and Gwendolen suppress their true feelings and hide behind a façade of forced politeness ([sweetly]), ([superciliously]); perhaps Wilde is revealing and criticising the forced double life which Victorian people could have been forced to lead due to the strict and repressive ideas on proper manners and decorum which were rife at the time.

There are further examples of circumlocutory language use to hide emotions and uphold a false, polite, exterior during the 'bin fight' scene; Jack and Algernon are faced with the break down of their double-lives as 'Ernest', and comedically address the issue by arguing over cake: 'I wish you could have tea cake...' Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden ...)Algernon, I wish to goodness you would go'. Yet again, Wilde uses comedy to show how his characters must suppress their true emotions and uphold a superficial façade. In addition, this scene is made to be even more comedic as it integrates with the plot of the play at this moment; Jack and Algernon are faced with large issues concerning the revealing of their dishonest double lives, but Wilde has them argue about cake instead of discussing the serious issues at hand. This perhaps furthers the presentation of duality and double lives; the two men choose to avoid responsibility and act in a comedically child-like manner. This is further emphasised through the incorporation of physical comedy, which intensifies one visual spectacle which on stage" '[rising] [takes muffins] [he seizes the muffins]'. Perhaps Wilde's use of incongruous comedy in his presentation of duality is a reflection of his belief in the Aestheticism movement; he believed that 'art was for art's sake' and that art should have no other purpose than to entertain. As a result, we can interpret his comedic exploration of emotional repression and duality as just that: comedy.

Wilde also uses manuscripts and works of literature in order to explore the idea of double lives. Perhaps works of literature are used as creative and emotional outlets which allow the characters to escape strict Victorian morality and live a 'double life', allowing them to be emotionally and creatively expressive. Many of the characters lead such literary double lives, with the most obvious example being Cecily and her diary: 'And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. (...) ALGERNON: My letters! But my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.'" Cecily's works of fiction, which have allowed her to escape her isolated and dull life as a ward, are a comedic and ridiculous expression of the need for a double life; she uses her letters and her diary to live an imaginary life of drama and exciting romance ('The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful') which strict Victorian morality does not allow her to live in actuality. The absurdity of Cecily's imagined double life both creates comedy through the overtly hyperbolic and dramatic language and pathos in the audience; we pity the restricted life she is forced to lead. Miss Prism also uses a form of literacy to escape Victorian morality, express her creativity

and live a double life, through her 'three part novel', which, in actuality, becomes the main driver of Jack's double-life as Ernest: 'I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette and placed the baby in the hand bad!' the hilarious coincidence here on the revelation which both substantiates Miss Prism's double life (as both a sincere governess and a creative novelist) and deconstructs Jack's double life (he becomes the 'Ernest' he has always pretended to be) show the extent to which double lives were required in order to endure harsh Victorian Society. Perhaps this allows us to also reflect in how Wilde himself used literature to lead a double life; toward the end of his career as a play write, he became very unhappy as a result of his hidden homosexual life; perhaps he uses the comedically trivial world of his writing to lead his own double life and escape his unhappiness?

## **Question 27**

THE PITMEN PAINTERS

### **The question asked about setting.**

This play is studied in only a few centres, but candidates are clearly well prepared and have explored a range of approaches to the text. There is a sense, however, that candidates are perhaps less confident about discussing dramatic structures here than with the classical drama texts in Section A. While there was appreciation of the emotional impact of the play, there were also supported criticisms: that it was 'undynamic', 'muted and predictable', and that dramatic variety was at times 'stifled' by its didactic purpose.

Many saw the hut as a metaphor for the enclosed austerity of the mining community. Many saw the contextual significance of the fact that it was under the aegis of the WEA, but few picked up on the writer's satirical purpose in George's insistence on 'the regulations'. The use of projections to highlight socio-economic conditions and historical change was treated effectively, but the contrasts between Ashington, Rock Hall, London and Edinburgh were less well grounded.

Chosen question number: **Question 17**       **Question 18**       **Question 19**   
**Question 20**       **Question 21**       **Question 22**   
**Question 23**       **Question 24**       **Question 25**   
**Question 26**       **Question 27**       **Question 28**   
**Question 29**       **Question 30**       **Question 31**   
**Question 32**

Lee Hall's use of setting in *The Pitmen Painters* is incredibly deliberate and furthers the playwright's exploration of the key themes of aspiration, inequality, and class divisions as Hall portrays through stage directions and dialogue the implications on various settings on the characters' actions and sense of self-worth, ultimately with the goal of portraying the overwhelmingly negative impositions of class structure and the de-facto segregation of 'high' and working class culture in 1930s, ~~in order~~ pushing modern audiences to examine the nature of art and culture in today's society.

Throughout the play, Hall makes consistent use of stage directions to highlight the 'misplaced' and temporary nature of the miners' presence in more affluent social circles. "A change of light", "a crashing noise" and "noises of drilling" are all audible and visual symbols of reality interjecting during the miners' presence in prestigious settings such as the "Laing Art Exhibition", "The Tate Gallery", and "Rock Hall", highlighting that despite their current acceptance into the ~~at~~ realm of art, their lives are dominated by their jobs. In doing this,



Hall presents to a modern audiences the reality of 1930s Britain, which was socially polarised and saw a ~~great~~ vast difference in the lifestyles of the upper-class inhabitants of cities like London, which actually saw a mini economic boom in the wake of the Depression, and those of people living in colliery towns like Ashington, (where the play is set) where unemployment reached up to 70% in comparison to the national average of 25% due to lack of modernisation after WWI. Therefore, Hall's use of stage directions is integral to portraying the miners as out of place. Moreover, the fact that Ashington is not named as the play's setting by the first slide, "1934: 1.2 million men work in the pits", portrays the men as part of a much larger demographic, imparting a sense of universality onto their story. In these ways, Hall's use of setting is essential to providing audiences with contextual background, increasing their ability to engage with the narrative.

Hall also uses different settings as representative of different feelings. "The Hut" is in many ways representative of the miners and the bond they share, and is made more important by the fact that it is the play's first and final setting, therefore following the men from their first WEA art appreciation class to the aftermath of their immense success, and thereby making the play's other settings seem fleeting whereas The Hut is a cornerstone of the men's lives.

This is particularly evident in the final scene, where "George is up a ladder hammering in a sign" in order to "celebrate getting the hut back. No WEA, no Robert Lyon, no borrowing stuff from the Scouts." After two acts' worth of trials and tribulations, including the group's realisation and frustration that "How things are presented doesn't belong to the working class at all", ~~and the~~ the hut presents an untainted space where the miners have ownership. ~~In contrast~~ This contrasts heavily with their unease at their "First Exhibition" for example, where Lyon praises their achievements on the basis that they are "ordinary people", counterproductively addressing the upper class attendees, "We as a society have got it wrong", thereby excluding the miners from his very definition of society in trying to defend them. ~~Sim~~ The exhibition also reveals Oliver's grappling with his sense of identity: "Oliver Kilbourn, miner, but that's not quite right, is it?" as he struggles to reconcile his being a miner with ~~art~~ being an artist. <sup>seeing the two as mutually exclusive</sup> In this sense, Oliver's character represents to audiences the attitude of most miners and members of the working class in 1930s England, who derived much of their sense of identity from their jobs and viewed those who aimed for social mobility (which the characters have, as art was seen as the exclusive domain of the elite) as something of class traitors.



The final scene at The Hut also sees the miners embracing their dialect, a hallmark feature of the play used by Hall throughout to reflect a desire to assimilate. In the final scene, the miners speak freely in unadulterated Geordie vernacular, "This is wor hut", in contrast to their attempts to make themselves more intelligible to Lyon in act one, as seen through the comedic interaction "Ye de de art, div vint ye?" <sup>becoming</sup> "Do you teach art?" after Lyon's confusion. ~~This sense of pride is epitomised by Hall's use of stichomythia to end the play~~ This sense of pride perhaps increases in the build-up to Harry's impassioned speech, as he celebrates the "inexorable rise of the working classes" in a long, free-flowing section of dialogue that would present to audiences a genuine release of emotions, and this is followed by Hall's use of stichomythia, which vividly portrays the unity of the group, expressing both their sense of aspiration and the real zeitgeist of <sup>the</sup> post-WWII English working class, whose increasing anti-capitalist sentiment led to Attlee's landslide victory in 1945. Hall's decision to place this poignant moment, emphasised by the playing of a "beautiful, stirring" hymn, in The Hut, makes the ending far more poignant and full-circle in nature as audiences feel the disparity between the groups initial insecurity, first shown in this same setting, and their ultimate sense of pride and aspiration.

conversely, despite being a more visually enticing setting, ~~with~~ described as a "spiritual sanctuary", "Rock Hall" is used by Hall to present the deceptive nature of mobility. The setting serves as the backdrop for Oliver's <sup>first</sup> sense of hope as an artist, where he is in disbelief ~~the~~ at Helen's stipend offer, but is also the backdrop to his eventual disillusionment as it is where

he and Helen have an intense argument where she derisively presumes he is "scared" as he desperately tries to explain the tight-~~to~~ knit nature of a colliery community, ~~the~~ saying <sup>of</sup> "the miners, "They are my family... They are everything I've got", ~~the~~ and dismissing her <sup>frail</sup> attempts to understand, "You are 'them' - I'm a pitman", understanding ~~the~~ inevitable tenuousness of any claim he has to being an artist before the scene erupts, almost symbolically, with "sounds of war." Through his use of the setting of "Rock Hall", Hall therefore portrays the unbridgeable nature of class divides and true lack of opportunities that exists as, despite a desire between the classes to understand one another, ~~they~~ <sup>they are</sup> fundamentally distinct. Therefore, despite the fact that 'The Hut' also sees disagreement (such as when ~~the~~ <sup>with</sup> the slide "The Group at War") the honesty of all the conversations in The Hut and the vulnerability of

the men there make clear to an audience that this is more of a "sanctuary" for the characters than a setting like Rock Hall could ever be:

In conclusion, Hall is highly successful in using setting to further his exploration of class divisions, <sup>and</sup> aspirations, and ~~character~~ the development of the play's main characters, as audiences <sup>are compelled to</sup> successfully associate different settings with <sup>distinctly</sup> different aspects of the men's lives, ultimately portraying the way in which the questions of classism and the ownership of art <sup>raised by the play</sup> continue to pertain to our society today.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

Here is an example of a Level 4 response where the candidate demonstrates a firm grasp of Hall's dramatic craft.

## Question 28

THE PITMEN PAINTERS

### **The question asked about the play as comedy.**

Those who equated 'comic' with 'funny' tended to be self limiting. There were more or less detailed examinations of Susan, the bickering and banter between the pitmen, and the mutual incomprehension of different classes. One candidate offered a thorough and sensitive analysis of the Young Lad, feeling that his comic contribution is ultimately overshadowed – he is nameless, jobless and doomed.

In both questions, candidates seemed most confident in writing about language, and often profitably imported terminology from English language – convergence, divergence for example - to support their comments.

This was a typical approach to the question, focussing heavily on the clash of cultures at the heart of the play:

**The Pitmen Painters heavily exploits the characteristic of comedy that is juxtaposition or clash of worlds. Hall, by putting the worlds together, creates humour and the play follows the journeys of characters as they navigate new situations, so evidently far from their own comforts. By juxtaposing high class and working class; grasp of art and grasp of work; and expectations versus reality, Hall masterfully takes advantage of the naturally occurring comic circumstances the pitmen and their counterparts find themselves in, as well as creating poignant commentary.**

## Question 29

THE ROVER

### **The question asked about Florinda.**

As was noted last series, for a text that was a popular choice for coursework, *The Rover* was the choice of surprisingly few candidates and very few chose to respond to this question on Florinda. Weaker responses tended simply to describe the character or to respond as if she were real. Stronger responses explored her presentation as representative of Restoration woman's struggle to gain agency in marriage; her plot function in foregrounding the hypermasculine, even violent, culture of the libertine' and her role as a foil to her more daring sister.



- Chosen question number: Question 17  Question 18  Question 19   
Question 20  Question 21  Question 22   
Question 23  Question 24  Question 25   
Question 26  Question 27  Question 28   
Question 29  Question 30  Question 31   
Question 32

The Restoration era opened up many new freedoms which had been restricted by the Puritan society. There was now the freedom of sex, however the patriarchal control over marriage still remained.

Through the character of Florinda<sup>in the play 'The Rover' by Aphra Behn</sup>, explores the notion of female independence with the setting of carnival and pre-Lenten excess.

<sup>first act of the</sup>  
~~At~~ Immediately, in the<sup>n</sup> play we are introduced to the rebellious nature of Florinda and her sister Hellena, through her harsh descriptions of her <sup>incoming</sup> ~~arranged~~ arranged marriage. She is fully subjected to the marriage economy and the control that her father and brother have over her future, "ill customs of our country." This was the reality of many women during the

Restoration period where on the basis of their virtue they were sold to the highest bidder - ~~throughout~~ Behn uses Florinda as a vehicle to put across her own ideas and ~~the~~ criticisms of how marriage is treated as a financial advancement. Behn uses the metaphor of a "slave" to broadcast the true restrictions placed on women with the <sup>barbaric</sup> ~~new~~ custom of arranged marriages. Florinda ~~also~~ projects in blank verse how she "ne'er till now perceived my ruin near", as she believes that if she doesn't marry for love her life will no longer have meaning.

Behn demonstrates the proactive nature of women when Florinda is in the disguise of a gypsy ~~in~~ in order to "ramble" in the streets. This rebellion of females would've enticed the boisterous crowd of the Restoration theatre as the infringement of danger adds an alluring quality to the women - Behn knew how to write her female characters in order to keep the intrigue of her audience, which is emulated through King Charles requesting a private audience

to watch the play. In her disguise, Florinda is able to interact with Belville ~~and~~, see if his attention strays elsewhere and to test his devotion to her.

Through this we see a strong-willed female character and this would've been uncharacteristic of plays during that time as up until <sup>6½</sup> Charles' ~~last~~ reign, female characters had been played by men as ~~the theatre was seen to be an~~ <sup>the theatre was seen to be an</sup> ~~unsavory~~ <sup>unsavory</sup> place for a 'pure' woman to attend. Her aside, "So, if I find him false, my whole repose is gone", shows how even though she is proactive and rebelling against ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~family~~ <sup>family</sup> patriarchy, she still wants to be subject to the confines of marriage and the control of Belville; in this quote from Act 3 Scene 1, the overuse of commas is Behn's technique to symbolise Florinda's desperation for Belville to be an honest man.

However, in Act 3 Scene 5 we are introduced to another dimension of Florinda's character when we see how her flirtation with disguise and independence had led to her being in a position of danger. ~~Behn~~ Behn has engineered the plot so that Florinda is



standing in a secluded place, on her own, waiting for Belville - but the libertine rake stock character of Belville intervenes and acts as a threat to the marriage economy. Florinda is described as a "delicate shining wench" which showcases that Willmore is aware of her nobility but still wishes to "ruin" her - this verb showcases the Restoration sentiment that women were seen as virginal and one incident (where it not be their fault) can tarnish their virtue, which was the basis of the marriage economy. Behn uses the metaphor of "your cobweb door set open, dear spider ... to catch flies" which is her criticism of male ~~hypoc~~ hypocrisy and how men ~~of~~ of the 17<sup>th</sup> century wanted a 'pure' woman but at any given opportunity ~~then~~ they would blacken her innocence. However, Behn knew the role of a rake and used this scenes ~~is~~ in a comic ~~to~~ sense through the mitigation of Willmore's drunkenness as she knew her audience ~~had~~ had a ~~majority~~ majority of men. ~~The~~ The playwright presents Florinda as a figure of a 'damsel in distress' in order to provide the male

audience with a laugh.

Once again, but with very different intentions, Behn places Florinda in another situation with the threat of rape in Act 4 Scene 5. After having <sup>been</sup> "gulled" by Lucetta, the fop and Essex calf, Blunt, swears to

have his revenge ~~on~~ women kind - unfortunately, Behn structures the play so that Florinda has been confined to Belville's lodgings. Here we see Florinda presented as a "damsel" who once again is subjected to the misogyny and hypocrisy of men, but this time in a more menacing way. Blunt declares her as a "pleasure of ... revenge" and showcases how ~~we~~ women are placed in fragile situation due to men's pride - this highlights how women were treated as objects such as the fact that women wore masks at theatres in order to protect their identity and ~~stay off~~ purity.

~~The swartiness of Blunt's utterance,~~  
~~there's no resisting your denisting~~ Behn presents Florinda as a vulnerable women through her utterance, "I conjure you to treat me with

more gentleness", as her nobility has protected and secluded her from the hypocrisy of men.

Due to 'The Rover' being a comedy, with the resolution of the play there are numerous marriages and we see that Florinda's proactive characteristic has paid off and she is now able to marry Belville who she loves and sees as her "dear preserver." She is now free from the pressures of the marriage economy and has escaped the patriarchal control of her father and brother. There is the argument that she had the retrospective permission from Don Pedro her brother who "sudden changed" and now "approves her choice" and so hasn't fully escaped patriarchal control, but Behn has presented her as a character who has fulfilled her aims and represented a ~~the~~ woman's fight for independence.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

Here is an example of a high Level 4 response to the question. We would expect more sophisticated and nuanced expression of its ideas for Level 5, but it is a very strong response, particularly in its grasp of contexts and of the dramatist's purpose.

## **Question 30**

THE ROVER

**The question asked about the conventions of Restoration Comedy.**

Most candidates chose to respond to this question and the quality of responses was generally very high. Arguments were confident and most candidates had an excellent understanding of the conventions of the genre. There were some responses, however, where candidates had clearly prepared other topics and their arguments soon veered off into discussing the carnival setting or the patriarchy with limited focus on the question asked.



- Chosen question number:
- Question 17 ☒
  - Question 18 ☒
  - Question 19 ☒
  - Question 20 ☒
  - Question 21 ☒
  - Question 22 ☒
  - Question 23 ☒
  - Question 24 ☒
  - Question 25 ☒
  - Question 26 ☒
  - Question 27 ☒
  - Question 28 ☒
  - Question 29 ☒
  - Question 30 ☒
  - Question 31 ☒
  - Question 32 ☒

Plan - conventions of R. Comedy - force  
 snark character  
 honourable, dishonourable.

Context

Charles II → restoration of all theatres → take adv. of  
 his

English puritanism → Cromwell's proctorate (cavaliers escape  
 want to express freedom)

excluded lead → status/class of women - typicality - women.  
 - set in 1650's → published in 1677  
 aristocrats.

- Benn - anonymous.

laughing at selves in epilogue

to Dutch love → sex for intermarriage of  
 Dutch.

Theme of Carnival

> sexuality of  
 women.

> music

> chaos

> classes of people meet

reception/  
 disguise

> cross dressing

ref. of  
 Argelia

enjoyable for  
 contemporary  
 audiences

- Helena

- scene in the den!

↳ wit

→ Helena + Willmore - intelligence

- as she is aristocratic she can  
 express sexuality due to  
 status = oppressor???

## Essay

Benn adopts the conventions of Restoration comedy in order to ~~big~~ emphasise the freedoms and shift in society. Benn achieves this through exploring the clash of social boundaries by subverting characters which in itself ~~was~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~the~~ comedy for contemporary audiences, as it presents change. Particularly, with Benn's use of the themes of carnival, wit and deception, the play ~~is~~ <sup>becomes a</sup> symbol of societal freedom opposed to the strict patriarchal rules experienced before hand, and before Charles II restoration. Benn published in ~~the~~ 1677, ~~the~~ <sup>Benn</sup> play exploits and takes advantage of ~~the~~ the restoration of <sup>the</sup> theatres by Charles II in England, which signalled for a change in typical attitudes. Therefore, ~~the~~ as a result, the aspects of a Restoration comedy were fulfilled.

~~Firstly, Benn's use of the theme of~~

Firstly, Benn uses the theme of carnival to exploit sexual freedoms, ~~and~~ <sup>by breaking typical social</sup> chaos and <sup>expressions</sup> ~~the~~ clash of differing social classes. It can be argued that ~~to~~ all characters benefited from carnival, due to its social aspects, particularly related to class. For Helena, ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Benn's use of carnival contradicts <sup>what would have been</sup> her future position 'in a nunnery'. This was initially expressed

by Florinda, seen in ~~the~~ Behn's use of the exclamation 'an impudent thing is a young girl bred in a nunnery!' This evidences traditional attitudes of high aristocratic women ~~who~~ <sup>hypocritically</sup> were expected to have well manners, and to protect their honour for ~~the~~ <sup>the purpose of</sup> their families' reputation <sup>\* and this is entered as the exclamation.</sup> Helena responds to Pedro's ~~st~~ (adopting his view) by defending herself and her sister in the aside "It is not enough you make a nun of me, but cast my sister away too" (relating to Florinda's ~~supposed~~ mechanical organised nunnery). This aside symbolises Helena's exhaustion felt by hypocritical attitudes, therefore she uses carnival as a vehicle to escape this. Callis states also in an aside that she has a "youthful itch to of going" to carnival, with this metaphor again symbolising all three women's desire to explore carnival, which wasn't usual for high aristocratic women. Therefore <sup>Behn's</sup> ~~the~~ use of carnival subverts traditional roles played by aristocratic women, which wasn't usual and ~~it~~ would have therefore been appealing to contemporary audiences, and so execute the conventions of a restoration comedy.

Secondly

Secondly, Behn uses the theme of wit to project a shift in gender roles in *The Rover*.



This is particularly evident with the sychrony in  
the exchange between Willmore and Hellena. For example  
the witty humour Behn utilises in Hellena's line  
'care now you ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> ~~me~~ <sup>with me</sup>, Sir, lest I pick  
your pocket'. <sup>It is clear that</sup> This wasn't the typical response  
Willmore was expecting to his dominant <sup>and confident</sup> approach  
to Hellena of "what luck he's like  
to have?". Hellena's wit continues as she  
breaks the typical boundary of social class by  
stating she has 'but very little (money) to lose'.  
<sup>There is no doubt</sup> Hellena's confidence would have been exceeded  
through her disguise. Behn practices the <sup>new</sup> use of  
wit in order to ~~control Willmore's~~ <sup>enforce</sup> Hellena  
<sup>how</sup> is able to control Willmore, an exiled  
cavalier. Therefore, the wit is used as a tool to  
control what would have been, in the 1650's,  
~~English~~ English Royalists escaping Cromwell's ~~prosecute~~  
limiting their freedom. ~~It can be~~ This subverts  
the typical gender roles of the period before hand  
where women were expected to be submissive to  
men, yet Behn ~~subverts~~ However it can be  
argued that wit is ~~a sign~~ in Hellena's case  
is a symbol of oppression, as she cannot use  
anything other than her intelligence to  
express her sexuality due to her social  
status. ~~Therefore a mask is create~~ <sup>either way</sup>

Behn utilises wit in order to subvert gender roles which ~~was~~ can be seen as a feature of Restoration comedy.

Finally, Behn uses disguise and deception in order to create confusion and hence comedy for contemporary audiences. The theme

of disguise in Behn's play may ~~refer~~ symbolise ~~Behn's~~ the restriction of ~~women~~ female play writes in the late 1660's and 1670's. This is evidenced by the fact that the first copy of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Rover was published anonymously, which suggests Behn's fear of social reaction of her gender. Despite this, her identity was soon discovered and, she became the first paid female play write - and this success is arguably mirrored through Hellena's success in winning the loyalty of Willmore. ~~For~~ In order for this to have happened, ~~Hellena~~ Behn used cross dressing ~~as~~ in her play. Hellena disguised herself as a 'proud boy', which played a significant role in discouraging information about her lover. This significance is seen in ~~the~~ ~~her~~ ~~quote~~ Hellena's aside 'Oh lord, what does he say? Am I discovered now?' & Hellena's uncertainty



result, Behn utilized this to present the typical conventions of a Restoration Comedy.



Here is an example of a low Level 4 response. There is clear awareness of some of the conventions of Restoration drama and the candidate is able to talk in detail about context, but the argument tends to drift and the response lacks the sharp focus of higher level work. Nonetheless, there is evidence of discriminating understanding in parts.



## Question 31

WAITING FOR GODOT

### The question asked about the absurd.

Not many centres use this text, but candidates' responses were of very high quality, showing an excellent grasp of Beckett's place within modern theatre and philosophical movements, e.g the absurd, existentialism. As one examiner commented, along with *Dr Faustus*, this was one of the most rewarding texts to mark in terms of AO3, as autobiographical contexts were almost completely absent, with candidates choosing to engage with far more sophisticated issues.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response that shows sophisticated reflection on the concept of the absurd as it relates to this play:

**In 'Waiting for Godot' the absurd becomes the premise of the play itself; a play in which nothing supposedly happens, which ends as it begins, is absurd because it breaks all conventions of conventional theatre. As termed by Martin Esslin, 'Waiting for Godot' can be seen in the context of a theatrical movement - 'Theatre of the Absurd' - that considers the absurdity of human existence in a post-war age. The absurd in 'Waiting for Godot' is present in the play's cyclical nature, its use of mechanical repetition and, the ultimate absurdity of the entire action of the play, waiting for a figure who appears not to exist.**

**The cyclical nature of the play - the fact that it ends as it begins - represents the absurdity of human inaction. Vladimir and Estragon's inability to move is repeated so many times that it becomes ridiculous to the audience. The sequence of :**

**Estragon: Let's go**

**Vladimir: We can't**

**Estragon: Why not?**

**Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot**

**Estragon: [despairingly] Ah!**

**is repeated exactly - word for word - six times in the duration of the play, making their commitment to waiting absurd in its demand that they should not move. The cyclical nature of this repetition also becomes mechanical, which in itself is absurd given the context of the times. Beckett's interest in Chaplin's films suggests how mechanization in 'Waiting for Godot' is seen to be absurd in the sense that it is an object of humour. One of Chaplin's films gives a comedic account of a man on a production line, and his futile attempts to be in rhythm with the industrial process. The mechanization of Vladimir and Estragon's relationship also achieves this effect - their cyclical dialogue is ridiculous because it is so mechanical. In the second act, the insane sequence of switching hats also presents Vladimir and Estragon's mechanization in an absurdly comic light. The process of : 'Estragon takes Vladimir's hat'. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir continues with several more exchanges until the sequence ends as it began. The absurdity of this mechanical process, highly evocative of Chaplin's film, is created through the extreme futility of the sequence, something added by the characters ending up with the same hats that they began with. Mechanisation is also present in the process of humanity turning into machines, a process which Vladimir and Estragon fulfill in**

the cyclical habits and which is absurd as a distorted image of normal human existence. As Camus says in his essay, 'The Myth of Sisyphus'. 'the revolt of the flesh is the absurd'. For Vladimir and Estragon, flesh, or in other words humanity, is made machine-like in the absurdity of their cyclic inaction.

Just like Vladimir and Estragon's relationship, the practice of theatre itself becomes absurd through the consciously mechanical stage directions. At the end of Act One, the mechanical transition between night and day suggests the mechanical nature of acting itself: 'The light suddenly falls. In a moment it is night. The moon rises in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the screen'. The fact that the light is 'falling', what seems like a fault in the production, becomes the transition between night and day. This is absurd as a self-conscious awareness of the processes of the theatre. An awareness of the mechanical nature of the production of theatre translates to a self-conscious comment on the nature of acting itself, which is mechanical as an assumption of pre-scripted roles. Metatheatre, and the idea that the production of 'Waiting for Godot' is itself absurd, is also present in the concept of the play itself - one which intentionally alienates the audience. As Martin Esslin observes the idea of an audience applauding and absurdist play - 'Waiting for Godot' included - despite the obvious reality that they could not understand the subject matter of absurdist plays, is in itself absurd. In the influence of Brecht's theory of alienation between characters and audience, absurdist plays like 'Waiting for Godot' intentionally alienate the audience by presenting a setting that is a distortion of the normal world. In 'Waiting for Godot' all notions of place are removed from the play. At the beginning, after Vladimir asks: 'A ditch! Where?' Estragon replies '[without gesture] Over there.' The absence of gesture means that communication is impossible; Vladimir cannot ascertain where Estragon slept, just as the audience cannot hold onto a sense of time or place. It is this inability for the audience to connect with the setting of the play, right from the beginning, that alienates them from its action, making the fact that they applaud absurd in itself.

The only tangible truth from Vladimir and Estragon - that they're waiting for Godot to come - is made absurd by the extent to which Godot is completely intangible and the construction of his identity is comedic in its ridiculousness. In determining the nature of their arrangement with Godot, and the reason why he has failed to arrive so far, Vladimir and Estragon conclude that he said 'that he couldn't promise anything': V: That he'd have to think it over / E: in the quiet of his home. / V: Consult his family. / His friends. / V: His agents. / E: His correspondents. / V: His books. / E: His bank account. / V: Before making a decision. / E: It's the normal thing to do'. This rapid exchange of dialogue between the two characters is absurd in the sense that it constructs an identity for a character who, for the purposes of the play, does not exist. As Godot is innately a symbol of God, even though Beckett claimed this was not his direct intention, then this absurdity turns into a more general comment on the absurdity of the human inclination to impose images of themselves onto the cosmology of the universe.

Notwithstanding Beckett's protestations, references to God in connection with Godot legitimise this reading. Just before their construction of Godot's identity, Estragon describes their communication with Godot as 'a form of prayer', to which Vladimir responds. 'Precisely'. The absurd construction of Godot's identity therefore becomes an image of the anthropomorphism of God. This is absurd in its comedy: talking about God having a 'bank account' seems to suggest the absurdity of humans projecting themselves onto positions of ultimate power and authority.

The absurd, therefore, underpins multiple aspects of 'Waiting for Godot's comedic portrayal of human existence. The mechanical nature of the play, both in terms of character and metatheatre, presents an image of humanity that is absurd in itself.



## Question 32

WAITING FOR GODOT

### **The question asked about frustration.**

There were some really interesting discussions about the repetitive patterns of language and the non-linear sense of time that created the sensation of being trapped. Many candidates linked the theme of frustration to how the audience would respond to the play.

There was evidence of excellent learning in most of the responses. Virtually all answers were well informed with an excellent knowledge of theatrical contexts.

Here is an extract from a Level 5 response in which the candidate explored the theme of frustration by linking it to modernist theories:

**Beckett presents the theme of frustration in *Waiting for Godot* as a result of impotency manifested not only within the play itself, but also in the original audience. Indeed, when the play was first produced the audience members left the theatre, and when Vladimir asked for a bit of rope, someone called, 'Just give him one!' This original audience was responding to the sense of impotency within the play. Namely this is apparent in the physical and mental inability to progress, emphasized by the cyclicity and the references to a figure of non-arrival in Godot, manifested in Vladimir and Estragon who continuously wait for him. The presentation of frustration is thus achieved by Beckett through the presentation of impotency which is manifested in Vladimir and Estragon as they are incapable of progress.**

**There is a sense of pessimism within the play which is fuelled by the inability to progress, epitomized by Vladimir and Estragon. Beckett wrote that he would rather 'return to occupied France than remain safe in Ireland.' This desire for action is the antithesis of the characters of Vladimir and Estragon. Beckett himself is thus perhaps frustrated by their impotency as we can draw from his own desire to 'take arms'. Indeed the opening stage direction of the play finds Estragon attempting '[to take off his boot]' however as is the case for the rest of the play Estragon is described as '[Giving up again]', paired with the first verbal statement of the play, 'Nothing to be done!' Immediately the audience is made aware of the sense of impotency and complacency. The sense of frustration is furthered by attempts to progress that are immediately thwarted. For instance 'Let's hang ourselves immediately!' is met with the inability to act - 'pity we haven't got a bit of'. This impotency is manifested in the metaphor of presence of empty vessels in which Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly try to find things, such as the 'boot'; 'hat' or even 'Godot'. This offers a visual presentation of the characters being trapped in their circumstances and perpetuates the sense of frustration...**

**The use of cyclicity as a theme is another of Beckett's means of presenting frustration in the play. There are, for instance, many repetitions of phrases such as 'we're waiting for Godot' or 'Shall we go?' followed by, 'Yes, let's go'. such repetitions create a sense of their inability to progress. Indeed a characteristic of the Modernist writer was that instead of seeing progress in modernism and industrialization, they saw the instrumentalism of man...In the same way, Vladimir and Estragon are mechanized both in speech and movement. The use of stichomythia in, for instance, 'No' 'Then we can't' 'Let's go' is a feature**

**throughout and shows an almost inhuman level of rapidity, as though they have become mechanized...this shows the sense of frustration as characters are rendered powerless even in their own actions...**

## **Section A**

Candidates, in general, approach the Shakespeare questions with confidence and enthusiasm. The range of references to critical arguments for AO5 and to contexts for AO3 was genuinely impressive and centres are to be congratulated on having engaged with these objectives so enthusiastically. It was rare to read a script where one did not read something genuinely interesting about the plays. The differentiator here, of course, is the degree to which a candidate is able to link these references directly to the text and embed them in their own arguments. Weaker candidates tended to introduce material which, although clear and detailed, was often irrelevant.

By far the most challenging objective for candidates on this section is AO2. Many seemed to get caught up in word-level analysis probably more appropriate to the study of poetry. They seem hesitant sometimes about Shakespeare's dramatic craft. The key is to encourage students to keep focus on the text as a piece of drama; to always consider the impact on the audience and to explore elements of contemporary stagecraft (for example, aside; soliloquy; entrances and exits; masque; eavesdropping; plays within plays; prologue; epilogue; stylized speech patterns; patterns of imagery; conflict; tone; atmosphere) and genre features of comedy and tragedy with the same degree of confidence as they approach the other Assessment Objectives.

## **Section B**

Something seems to change as candidates approach Section B. Somehow – possibly because they are not being asked to refer directly to critical material – they appear to be far more emotionally engaged with the texts and this can sometimes result in their dropping a scholarly approach and discussing characters and situations as if they were real rather than literary constructs. This was true not just of the more modern texts, but of *Dr Faustus* and *The Duchess of Malfi* too. It meant that, as was the case in Section A, accessing AO2 at high levels became a challenge for some candidates. Again, the key lies in encouraging students to keep the dramatist's craft in focus throughout and sustain a critical distance from the texts.

Another issue on this section tended to be the over-use of biographical material to explore a play's contexts. This was particularly the case with more recent drama such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* where there is so much material available to students; it was less so with texts such as *Dr Faustus* and *Godot* where candidates were forced to explore other, often more interesting, philosophical and social contexts.

Nevertheless, candidates again were clearly well prepared for this section and it was great to see so many interesting and varied approaches to the study of these plays.

## Paper Summary

The following general points were raised by examiners at the end of the 2018 series:

- AO1: for thematic questions, simpler responses quite often adopted a character-by-character structure, although at times the quality of analysis within each section was enough to achieve Level 4. Nearly all candidates were able to use quotations confidently to support their points. Literary terms need to be used appropriately and sparingly. Too often candidates included terminology at the expense of effective follow-up analysis. Some candidates would benefit from writing in a more scholarly style and employing more sophisticated phrasing – a number were colloquial in expression while others took a pedestrian approach, 'I will start by discussing... I will now explore... finally I am going to comment on...' To achieve Level 5 it is not sufficient to use 'effectively', 'convincingly' etc. in an attempt to signpost that evaluation has been undertaken. Development of the point to explore the effectiveness of a method is required
- AO2: this was perhaps the objective that presented most challenges to candidates, particularly on the Shakespeare questions. Knowledge of texts is certainly evident, but this must be extended to an exploration of the writer's craft. It is important to address the 'how...?' of the question. Only the best responses looked beyond language and characterisation and unfortunately structural aspects were often neglected. At this level, candidates should be encouraged to go beyond the rather mechanical word-level analysis that so often appears at GCSE – certainly, they should avoid expressions such as 'the use of the word...' and focus instead on how the dramatist creates meaning for the audience through plot and structure, patterns of imagery and symbolism, characterisation, conflict, staging considerations, setting, dialogue and so on
- AO3: as in previous years, autobiographical context is rarely useful, and there were too many responses that were overly focused, for example, on the personal lives of Williams and Wilde. Contextual details often met Level 2 (general) or Level 3 (clear) criteria. Candidates need to avoid making sweeping generalisations and actually analyse how contextual factors play a role in aiding a deeper understanding of 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 response
- AO5: in this second year of the specification, it was very clear that centres are much more confident in teaching AO5 and the *Critical Anthology*. The vast majority of candidates were able to refer specifically to critical responses to support their argument, and so were able to achieve at least a Level 3. Hardly any candidates missed this key objective altogether. It was pleasing that some centres are starting to branch out and explore a greater variety of criticism than that provided by Pearson Edexcel. One notable difference, however, was how centres and candidates are treating Section A of both the Comedy and Tragedy Anthologies, which focus on genre theory. Most answers on Shakespeare's tragedies are able to incorporate, for example, A. C. Bradley's discussion of the tragic hero where relevant; similarly Mack's discussion of madness was often well integrated into questions on *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. Few responses on comedy, however, made many useful references to this part of the anthology, limiting their critical exploration to the responses focusing on their particular play. It is perhaps worth reminding candidates that higher levels for AO5 will not be attained by merely listing critic after critic – candidates are required to actually engage with the ideas proposed and integrate into their own argument. Likewise, it is not enough simply to state 'I agree/disagree with...'

## Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>



