



Examiners' Report

June 2022

GCE English Literature 9ET0 01

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Introduction

Given that there had been significant disruption to learning over the past couple of years and that this was the first public examination for many, the examining team were very impressed by the performance of candidates on this paper, particularly on Section A. 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 had been very well-prepared 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 imagery and symbolism.

Although *Antony and Cleopatra* is becoming a more popular text with centres, relatively few candidates chose to answer this question. Strong responses explored Shakespeare's use of imagery and symbolism to create two contrasting world views. More general responses looked at imagery and symbolism associated with the two main characters. The challenge for some candidates was to keep focus on the question.

Here is an extract from a good Level 3 response. Note how the candidate is able to use a critical idea to develop his own argument:

... Images of instability are prominent throughout the play. The sense of the inconstant, shifting nature of our impressions that is expressed by the structure of the play and the preoccupations of the characters extends also to its distinctive images: 'Shakespeare seems to be creating his own vocabulary to establish the feeling of disintegration in the Roman world' (Cheney). The whole play portrays the gradual process of Antony's disintegration to the point when 'The crown o' th' earth doth melt'.

The 'Asiatic' style is a distinctive language and style in which Antony and Cleopatra express themselves. Antony's eloquence being not simply a verbal style, but a moral quality, an expression of his personality and way of life. Shakespeare fashioned this style for Antony and Cleopatra's way of speaking – which he used in none of his other plays – and it contributes to the extreme contrast between Egypt and Rome.

The most distinctive feature of this style is its hyperbole, its exaggeration. Cleopatra expresses a range of emotions, from joy to anger, but seems incapable of moderation as she expresses the intensity of feeling. Looking back on the love she shared with Antony, she conceives it in terms which are nothing less that transcendental: "Eternity was in our lips and eyes, Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor But was a race of heaven'. Upon hearing of Antony's marriage, she calls for the collapse of her empire: 'Melt Egypt into the Nile, and kindly creatures turn all to serpents'. After Antony's death, she does not say simply, that she has lost all sense of purpose, but that creation itself has ceased to exist...

Question 2

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

The question asked about a clash of cultures.

This question was popular with candidates, all of whom had something interesting to say. Some candidates commented on the clash between Stoic and Epicurean philosophies and there were those who noted Shakespeare's use of shifting locations and short scenes. Others explored differing notions of political leadership.

There was some excellent comment on Shakespeare's manipulation of his sources and on Renaissance views on race.

Weaker responses wrote about scenes set in either environment. Most candidates, however, wrote about the idea of tensions between cultures, focusing not so much on how each was depicted by Shakespeare, but how characters – particularly Antony, but also those around him – reacted to the conflicting values. The idea of Cleopatra symbolising Egypt was popular, though some responses degenerated into character study. Candidates in this series seemed very eager to compare Cleopatra with Elizabeth I. One examiner noted a problem where some candidates went into descriptions of a National Theatre production. Whilst this was interesting and sometimes relevant, too much attention was paid to it at the expense of close analysis of the text.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response. Its strength lies in its coverage of all the assessment objectives. While there is lots of interesting critical and contextual material, the candidate never loses sight of the text itself, nor of Shakespeare's craft:

Antony and Cleopatra centres on what critic, Ania Loomba, calls 'a dichotomy between Rome and Egypt in which each is defined by difference from the other'. The clash of cultures is therefore very complex because although they do indeed contrast each other, they are mutually constitutive and find their collective identities in opposition to each other. Shakespeare explores this clash of cultures using all three main characters: Cleopatra embodies the fluidity and passion of Egypt, Caesar the restraint and honour of Roma, and Antony the conflict between them. Ultimately though, this cultural clash is based upon the reductive, Orientalist Western view of the East, which not only the characters of the play, but also arguably Shakespeare himself, perpetuate.

Shakespeare uses Caesar to represent the values of ancient Rome – duty, honour, reputation, and therefore establishes him as a foil to Antony. Caesar staunchly rejects Antony’s hedonism, complaining of ‘boys’ who ‘pawn their experience to present pleasure’. This powerful alliterative phrase summarises what he sees as Antony’s foolish preference for hedonism over duty, making him the opposite of a ‘good Roman’. Critic Tony Tanner supports this interpretation, arguing, ‘For Rome, Egypt represents a great waste of time while the “business” of history is going on.’ It is of course the influence of Egypt that has made Antony so pleasure driven and so foolish – at least in the eyes of Caesar. This is not just the view held by Caesar, however, as Philo says in the very first scene of the play that Antony is, ‘The triple pillar of the world transformed/Into a strumpet’s fool’

As Jonathan Dollimore notes, there is a bathos to the cadence of this line, it ‘arches upward and outward’, ‘promising apotheosis’, only to reveal its sad conclusion. ‘Triple pillar’ of course refers to Antony’s status as a member of the Triumvirate, alongside Caesar and Lepidus, and he is then referred to essentially as the plaything of a prostitute – quite the fall from grace and from Roman honour. Caesar therefore establishes himself as the diametrical opposite to Antony and their identities become mutually constitutive. When Antony turns his back on the marriage to Octavia, Caesar exclaims, ‘You have broken the article of your youth/Which you shall never have tongue to charge me with’. The first line establishes promise keeping and honour to be the two key Roman values, which we know to be true – Ancient Rome was a culture built on reason, on pragmatism and on a strong sense of duty. The second line then allows Caesar to become a foil to Antony; he is asserting that he is completely unlike Antony, that he is more trustworthy, more honourable, more Roman, thus solidifying his position on one side of the culture clash. Caesar does this again on the boat with the other triumvirs and Pompey. When the men indulge in hedonism – eating and drinking and dancing – Caesar exclaims, ‘Our graver business frowns at this levity.’ This supports Tanner’s assertion about ‘the business of history’ and also further positions Caesar firmly on the side of Roman restraint and duty.

It can even be argued – and this is certainly the argument of Jonathan Dollimore – that the epitome of Roman values, Octavius Caesar, takes his attitude so far as to become Machiavellian. He does not just reject pleasure and passion and love, he uses them for the benefit of his honour and reputation. Dollimore claims that Caesar is ‘reminiscent of Machiavelli’s Prince’ and that he exhibits only ‘strategic expressions of love in the service of power’. This is perfectly demonstrated by Caesar’s marrying off of his sister Octavia for political gain. Caesar says ‘A sister I bequeath you, Whom no brother/Did ever love so dearly. Let her live/To join our kingdoms and our hearts.’ This statement of ‘love’ can be seen as purely strategic, purely political, and he appears only content for her to ‘live’ if it benefits him and Antony. We know from Suetonius’ ‘12 Caesars’ that this is a true trait of Caesar’s, whom Suetonius writes, ‘committed his affairs, not from passion, but from policy’. This becomes the defining characteristic of Caesar, and therefore of Rome. Rome is a culture of policy and politics, not passion or pleasure, and this inevitably results in a clash.

If Caesar represents the values of Rome, it is Cleopatra who does the same for Egypt. In fact, several times throughout the play, Cleopatra is referred to using the metonym, ‘Egypt’ by Caesar and also by Antony. Cleopatra therefore becomes a projection of the West’s Orientalist view of the East, which explains the clash of cultures. Orientalism is a term coined by Edward Said, who described it as ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.’ When applied to this play, Orientalism can be seen as the exoticisation, but also sexualisation of Cleopatra (and therefore the East) by Roman characters. The most explicit example of this is in Act 2 Scene 2, when Enobarbus recounts Antony’s first meeting with Cleopatra upon the Cydmus river. Enobarbus describes an almost supernatural level of beauty, claiming ‘The winds were love-sick’ with the scent of her ship, and the air itself had ‘made a gap in nature’ just to ‘gaze’ upon Cleopatra. Not only does this objectify and eroticise Cleopatra, it speaks to racist fears of the time that Eastern women, foreign women, were in some way tied to witchcraft. This links to Philo’s earlier use of the word ‘gipsy’. In her essay ‘Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism’, Ania Loomba notes that in Jacobean England ‘gypsies’ were a marginalised group, and one associated with crime and trickery. Regularly penalised by unfair legislation. Cleopatra therefore becomes a supernatural figure, whose beauty is simultaneously desired and feared. Enobarbus is using what Plutarch called ‘Asiatic discourse’ here to describe Cleopatra – hyperbolic, flowery language designed to evoke emotion. This only solidifies the idea that Egypt is a place of excess and of pleasure. Another way Shakespeare achieves this is through a water motif that connotes fluidity and dissolution. In the very first line of the play, Philo says Antony’s ‘dotage’ for Cleopatra ‘o’erflows the measure’, immediately tying Egypt to images of excess and fluidity. There are references to the ‘o’erflowing Nilus’ and Cleopatra’s boat supposedly ‘Burned the water’ as she is surrounded by women ‘like Nereides’ (sea nymphs). Egypt and the East therefore inevitably become linked to fluidity and dissolution, setting up a divided contrast between the two cultures.

As Jonathan Gil Harris, author of 'Narcissus in they Face' points out, we are however, 'invited to distinguish between the Cleopatra that is a Roman projection, and the "real" Cleopatra, who stands in seeming contrast to male images of her'. As there are no soliloquies by Cleopatra, and she is often described through a male, Roman lens, this certainly seems to be true Enobarbus others and pedestalises her, claiming 'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety,' thus turning her seemingly into some kind of transcendent force, some concept or idea, rather than a human being. He gives her almost supernatural power when he claims 'she did make defect perfection' and 'she makes hungry/Where most she satisfies'. This is one example of Shakespeare's food motif - Cleopatra also refers to herself as a 'morsel for a monarch' - and turns Cleopatra into an object, a commodity, something to be consumed. This of course implies desire on the part of Enobarbus. As Harris argues, 'Romans want only what the do not or cannot have'. It certainly seems that this is what Cleopatra represents. 'Egypt' - both the place and the woman - represents pleasure, passion, fluidity and these are the vary values Romans do not allow themselves to possess. The culture clash, then, is created by Rome projecting its desire for difference onto the East, and then constantly asserting its difference from it, echoing Loomba's reading of the play.

With Caesar representing Rome, and Cleopatra representing Egypt, Antony becomes a symbol of the clash between them. He is torn between the two cultures, constantly fighting a battle of duty versus desire, politics versus pleasure. Shakespeare uses him to exaggerate the dichotomy between cultures, but also perhaps ultimately to demonstrate the tragic conclusion of the culture clash. It must not be forgotten that this play is a tragedy, and with Antony as the tragic hero, it can be argued that his 'harmatia' - his tragic error - is choosing the culture of Egypt over the culture of Rome, choosing Cleopatra over Caesar. His first error is leaving Octavia for Cleopatra, when he asserts 'though I make this marriage for my peace'; 'In the East my pleasure lies'. This alliterative opposition of 'peace' and 'pleasure' emphasises the clash of cultures and spells out Antony's mistake. Rome is place of peace and Egypt is a place of pleasure according to this play and Antony chooses the wrong one. The real peripeteia comes in Act 3 Scene 10 during the battle of Actium, when according to Scarus, Antony 'like a doting mallard' abandoned the battle to follow Cleopatra. This is his true reversal of fortune, his final and tragic error in which he chooses East over West.

Scarus the says 'Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before/Did violate so itself'. This hyperbolic tri-colon sums up the core values of Rome and Scarus means to say that Antony has failed to uphold all of them. The use of the pronoun 'itself' though, seems to absolve Antony of some guilt, implying that these values have failed in themselves, or perhaps implying it was the influence of Cleopatra that was to blame. Antony does the same when he says 'Egypt, thou knowest too well/My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings'. The use of the metonym solidifies Cleopatra as a symbol of the East and the rudder metaphor (which was not present in Plutarch's Lives which Shakespeare used as his source) seems to relive Antony of some of the blame, indicating still a lack of self-awareness, a guilt unfairly placed on the East.

The complete loss of Antony's Roman identity is of course symbolised by his tragic suicide, which he botches and which is dragged on for several scenes making it all the more tragic. During it, Antony sadly states he is, 'No more a soldier'. In Jonathan Nunn's 2014 Globe production, actor Clive Best holds up his armour as he says this line - driving home the symbolism of Antony's loss of military, and therefore Roman, identity. It is clear, then, that Antony, and the other characters in the play, see the clash of cultures as the cause of Antony's tragic demise. Antony embodies the conflict between East and West, and his tragic death arguably shows the consequence of choosing the former over the latter.

To conclude, the clash of cultures between Rome and Egypt defines this play and Shakespeare uses every character to emphasise it. As Ania Loomba argues, those cultures are inherently dependent on one another and, as Jonathan Gil Harris argues, there is a false element to the dichotomy. Egypt is, to an extent, defined from a reductive, Roman perspective, simultaneously undermining but also exaggerating the culture clash.

Question 3

HAMLET

The question asked about heroism.

This was tackled by the majority of candidates who had studied *Hamlet* and was one of the most popular questions on the paper.

Responses here varied very naturally depending on the candidates' understanding and assumptions regarding "heroism". Most understood that discussing differing definitions of the term itself were a key part of engaging with the questions, and many stronger responses tied this into context.

Here is an introduction to a Level 5 response:

William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' struggles to assimilate heroism within the play, countered by the stronger forces of corruption. Hamlet remains torn over whether to carry out his heroic providence over the progress of the play, asking whether 'to be or not to be' and lamenting that 'conscience does make cowards' as the Dane contrasts with the martial heroes of Laertes and Fortinbras. Characters of heroic integrity such as Horatio are left out, while those of sycophantic dishonesty such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are immersed within the court. The marginalising of heroism corrupts the very genre to which the play belongs: the heroic and brutal revenge tragedies of Shakespeare's predecessors such as Thomas Kyd's 'The Spanish Tragedy' (1507). In what Sir Sidney Lee cast as a 'paralysis of the will', Hamlet struggles to invoke his heroic duty, inflicting upon his play a generic distortion ...

Weaker responses assumed heroism to be a pure synonym for decisive violent action. Some responses descended into overly long discussion of Hamlet's inaction, and a few candidates had clearly prepared answers on Claudius and madness and attempted to force these into their answers – rarely successfully.

The majority of candidates, however, interpreted this question to mean “tragic heroes”. Analysing the extent to which Hamlet was a tragic hero elicited some very good discussion, in which candidates fully demonstrated their critical reading and understanding of tragedy as a genre. Some went beyond this rather narrow approach by bringing in other characters: the “one character per section” approach was often rather mechanical, but useful insight was demonstrated by juxtaposing Hamlet’s ‘unheroic’ actions with those of, for example, Laertes. Interesting responses discussed Old Hamlet representing traditional models of heroism. This idea of heroism being somewhat metatheatrical – a self-conscious tragic hero being aware of their predetermined role – was explored by some high-performing candidates. Some wrote about “heroism as performative” and one candidate stepped back from the lengthy discussion about Aristotelean and Revenge Tragedy conventions to remark “despite subverting tragic conventions, he still remains the most poignant of tragic heroes”.

Here is an example of this type of response:

Shakespeare’s presentation of Hamlet’s metatheatrical awareness of his inability to present traditional heroism evokes pathos from the audience that introduces the question of perhaps it not being Hamlet that is the problem but our expectations of heroism, as supported by the critic Ryan who argues ‘Hamlet’s tormented resistance to performing the role of revenger expresses a justified rejection of the whole way of life’. 1601 England saw the Renaissance philosophy of doubt (such as Montaigne’s sceptical stain of humanism highlighting the human inability to ever know the consequences of our actions) in which Hamlet seems to be immersed...

For some, there was a tendency towards irrelevant discussion, such as Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the nature of the Ghost. Many quoted Kerrigan’s assertion that “Hamlet does not promise to revenge, only to remember”, but it was unclear how they were linking this to their argument.

It is worth noting that examiners generally felt that analysis of Shakespeare’s dramatic craft and use of language were less impressively handled overall and centres are strongly advised to address this with students, reminding them of the importance of Assessment Objective 2.

Here is an example of a low Level 5 response. Its handling of context and criticism is excellent, but there needs to be a little more focus on the text itself for the very top marks:

Shakespeare presents heroism in 'Hamlet' as a contentious discourse that runs throughout the play. Shakespeare crafts the characters concepts of Hamlet in the supposed role of the revenging hero, yet makes him fail to fulfil the role repeatedly. This creates dissonance for the audience as to whether the eponymous character is actually a hero. Character contrast is created through Laertes and Fortinbras epitomising heroism and contrasting Hamlet. However, as neither have the titular, complex role of Hamlet, the prioritising of heroism in 'Hamlet' can be contested, making its presentation contentious .

Shakespeare repeatedly presents Hamlet as lacking heroism at the start of the play. Shakespeare sets up the typical structure of a Revenge Tragedy, contextually topical perhaps due to the trailblazing success of Kyd's 'The Spanish Tragedy' as well as the Renaissance reviving interest in Seneca. Shakespeare's use of the Ghost revealing an unjust murder to Hamlet indicates this structure. At first, Hamlet seems to react towards revenge – as a Revenge Tragedy would command – in his line, 'O villain, smiling damned villain!' The trip – repeated use of the adjective 'villain' overwhelmingly presents Hamlet's feelings towards his uncle, the murderer. However, the end of his line indicates the hollowness of his passion – 'Now, to my word. It is 'Adieu, adieu. remember me' I have sworn't'. The previous revengeful, passionate display of heroism has dissipated into 'my words' and 'I have sworn't'. This suggests that Hamlet is a man of 'words, words, words' rather than action: although he has 'sworn't' he focusses on the oral/verbal and linguistic element of his oath. In spite of this, Shakespeare presents Hamlet as lacking the heroism that would spur him to revenge and action. This can lead to the conclusion. To audience and theorists, that Hamlet lacks heroism.

However, tension is key to audience sympathy and engagement with the supposed hero, and it is necessary for the play to function as a tragedy. A C Bradley declared that a tragedy contains a hero and the lead up to their death; in the play we have the latter, but do we have a hero? Shakespeare repeatedly has Hamlet struggle between words and action, epitomised in the 'Hecuba' soliloquy. Shakespeare begins the soliloquy with self-deprecation: 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!'. This sets the tone of the soliloquy as depressive, towards himself and therefore towards his lack of heroism/action. Hazlitt remarks that Hamlet is the least kind of hero due to his refinement of thought and sentiment, that leads to self-conscious awareness of his incapability / lack of heroism. This is seen in the rhetorical question, 'Am I a coward?' Taking the audience into consideration, this question would have been in their minds too, due to his current and proceeding lack of revenge. However, perhaps the self-conscious questioning resonates with the audience and leads them to feel the sympathy and pity required for a functional tragedy – which 'Hamlet' certainly is.

Theorists such as Kiernan Ryan focus on the type of tragedy 'Hamlet' can be seen as. In terms of the character Hamlet's relation to it. Ryan does not see heroism as an issue for Hamlet, as other theorists who strive to find meaning for the cause of his inaction do – like psychoanalytic theorists like Freud, who identifies Hamlet with Oedipus or Hazlitt who deems Hamlet incapable of deliberate action. Instead, Ryan divides heroism and revenge from action / inaction. This reading of heroism in 'Hamlet' is crucial for the discourse on it, as it focussed specifically on Hamlet and to what degree he is a hero – in relation to the type of tragedy – rather than hyper-focussing on the inaction perceived to be the result of lacking heroism. Ryan argues that, initially, Hamlet was (purposefully) 'miscast' by Shakespeare as the antithesis of an archetypal Revenge Tragedy hero. Therefore, in a Senecan/Kydian sense, Hamlet is not a hero in a typical Revenge Tragedy. However, Shakespeare does cast him in a Revenge Tragedy plot, with the real tragedy occurring from the injustice of this miscasting, rather than the death on stage in Act 5. Ryan notes that Shakespeare intends this 'miscasting', as indicated by 'The time is out of joint: o cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right!'. Firstly, it is 'the time' that is 'out of joint' rather than Hamlet, suggesting it is the situation/ circumstance of tragedy that is wrong / unjust, rather than whether Hamlet acts or not. Furthermore, his unwillingness in this stock role is clear, 'that ever I was born to set it right!' Ryan explains that in doing so, the action-inaction struggle shows his strength of character in battling against the Revenge Tragedy hero role, rather than showing him not to be a hero in any tragic sense; it is the confines of the genre that takes away heroism rather than a flaw of character.

The idea of flaw of character is also key to the discourse on heroism in 'Hamlet', centred around the eponymous character. This is due to his perceived inaction, that in comparison to characters such as Laertes, making Hamlet appear weak – therefore unheroic. For example, Laertes faces the same predicament of revenge and incites insurrection, with dramatic declarations, 'O thou vile king. Give me my father'. The adjective 'vile' mirrors Hamlet's condemnation of Claudius as a 'villain', however, the difference is Laertes' immediate, direct action. Furthermore, the K in king is not capitalised, suggesting a blasphemous lack of respect for the King that contextually would have commanded respect due to the divine right of Kings. Laertes disregards this, suggesting the overriding passion and power of his need for revenge. Lastly, commanding the King through the imperative, 'Give' thereby perverting the conventional chain of command to assert himself at the top. However, despite all of this, is Laertes heroic? Perhaps he would be in a Revenge Tragedy, however Shakespeare makes him unsuccessful and manipulated by the 'vile king'. Therefore this prompts discourse into what makes a hero in Shakespearean tragedy and is heroism prioritised?

Theorist A C Bradley describes a Shakespearean tragedy as one that enlarges the Chaucerian definition of tragedy as a fall from prosperity to wretchedness by creating contrast between the position of the hero – e.g. Hamlet being a prince – and their power / powerlessness within that position. This again, however, centres on the inaction of Hamlet being part of the powerlessness. Regan sees it as actually the result of the power of free will – Hamlet chooses not to act / comply with what he sees as a morally disgusting situation. This is similar to Ryan, and both come closest to focusing on the nature of heroism in Shakespearean tragedy, rather than on one part of the hero's nature.

Question 4

HAMLET

The question asked about settings.

This was the less popular of the *Hamlet* questions.

Candidates often interpreted 'setting' in interesting ways, dealing with it either in the literal sense, or as representative of themes and ideas. Responses ranged across a number of topics, including the decaying state of Denmark, social setting, religious setting, the use of public and private spaces and gendered setting in the cases of Gertrude and Ophelia.

It was one of the few Shakespeare questions where there was a genuine sense of stagecraft, and the indications within the text of the settings that Shakespeare was attempting to evoke, whether or not these would have been represented visually on his stage.

For example:

Shakespeare's choice to set the vast majority of his play within Elsinore's castle allows him to isolate Hamlet, therefore hyperbolising his feelings of claustrophobia and insecurity.

Some weaker responses tended simply to describe the various settings in the play:

Throughout 'Hamlet' Shakespeare uses setting to convey thoughts and feelings among the characters besides setting the scene for the imaginations of audiences. Many scenes are described and represented, such as the castle, the room where the 'Mousetrap' play is performed, Gertrude's closet and the lake of Ophelia's death ...

Discussions of the "royal court of Denmark" sometimes tended to lead to rather long-winded contextual discussions, although there were a few candidates who noted the play's mediaeval setting and intelligently considered how this affected the concepts of heroism and other social expectations.

Here is an introduction to a strong Level 5 response that looked at 'settings' from an interesting variety of perspectives:

Hamlet's primary locale is that of Elsinore, an English rendering of Helsingor which was a military fortress on the east coast of Denmark. Itself an electoral monarchy, Elsinore allows the play to concern itself with the politics of such a stronghold, whilst Shakespeare's own concerns over Elizabeth's succession filter through into the drama. At the same time, the play is 'dragged by the ghost into the past' as Rebecca Smith remarks, which visits from an ephemeral place itself - an emissary of the Devil as Ludwig Lucifer purported ghosts to be, or a visitation from his loving father, a pragmatic ghost embroiled in a Catholic purgatory offset from a Protestant play? Yet not only does Shakespeare exploit the military setting, contrast with the past and position on the afterlife, he also turns to the inward setting of the mind. One third of the lines belong to Hamlet and the seven soliloquies reveal his inner monologue to the audience, Shakespeare overhauling the genre by transposing action into the mind...

Question 5

KING LEAR

The question asked about loyalty.

Half of all candidates who studied *King Lear* answered this question.

While many candidates had a sensible but unambitious character-led approach, assessing how each is loyal, there were a good number accessing the top levels through their argumentation about familial versus national/monarchical loyalty.

There were some interesting feminist readings of Goneril and Regan; loyalty as a theme lent itself to engaging debate and interesting parallels were drawn between James' court and Lear's.

Other approaches explored the Gloucester subplot as a comment on loyalty or looked at the loyalty of various servants. Many focussed on the play's ending and the absence of justice for loyal characters, citing Samuel Johnson's description of the play as one where 'the wicked prosper and the virtuous miscarry'.

Here is an example of a mid-Level 4 response. Level 5 would require a sharper focus on the topic of the question and a clearer overall argument: this response drifts off into character study at times. We would also expect more acknowledgement of the text as a piece of drama to be performed. Nevertheless, this candidate shows broad and discriminating understanding of the text in its critical and social contexts:

Revolving around the themes of kingship, through Lear's gradual descent to poverty, Shakespeare's 'King Lear' examines the theme of loyalty on many different levels. Indeed, Shakespeare not only observes the loyalty, or lack of loyalty, characters hold for the King in accordance with the Divine Right of Kings, but also depicts how loyalty operates between family members. Perhaps one of the most striking instances of loyalty is within the relationship between Lear and his two daughters Goneril and Regan. Shakespeare presents these two characters to maliciously capitalise upon 'the poor, infirm old' King and tactically manipulate him to satisfy their own agenda for power and land. This lack of loyalty between children and their fathers is mirrored in the Gloucester plotline as Machiavellian villain, Edmund, also deceives his father in a bid to escape his identity as a 'bastard' and gain power.

However, Shakespeare contrasts the underhand behaviour of Goneril, Regan and Edmund with the virtuous characters of Edgar and Cordelia, who remain loyal to their father's despite being outlawed and disowned by them. Here, Shakespeare crafts a conflict between good and evil within the theme of loyalty, with the more virtuous characters evading the Divine punishment of fate in which the evil characters inevitably face.

Shakespeare crafts Edmund as an amoral Machiavellian villain who holds no loyalty towards any of the other characters in the play. Instead, Edmund professes all his loyalty to Mother Nature, who he professes 'art [his] Goddess'. Indeed, after being 'out for nine years' Edmund has no sense of commitment or love towards his father and encounters no issues of morality when deceiving him in a bid to inherit the power and privilege of his natural brother Edgar. This is predominantly evident in Act 1 Scene 2, where Edmund uses a forged letter to mislead his father into believing that Edgar has plans to murder him. Upon reading this letter, which Edmund insists is '[his] brother's...hand', Gloucester asserts that 'these late eclipses in the sun and moon portend us no good'. Here, Shakespeare uses the semantic field of the stars and fate to convey the inevitable evil which the play will soon descend into. Despite privately revealing his belief that talk of fate and fortune *...is the excellent foppery of the world', the duplicitous Edmund agrees with his father, pretending to subscribe to his father's belief in astrology. Here, Shakespeare presents Edmund to exhibit a false sense of loyalty to his father; he aspires to form an allegiance with his father against Edgar so he can later deceive them both and acquire their power. Gloucester's horrified reaction, reducing Edgar to an 'abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain', captures the extent to which Edmund will go in order to attain his brother's power. Here, Shakespeare's use of the emphatic utterance 'unnatural...villain' cleverly forces the audience to consider Edmund's soliloquy which contested the negative attitudes Jacobean society held towards bastards, 'why must they brand us with baseness...bastardy?'. By doing this, Shakespeare highlights the extent of Edmund's disloyalty to his father and brother - he is willing to let his father assign Edgar with the 'unnatural(ness)' that he so desperately wants to escape. This interpretation lends itself to O'Toole's criticism that 'there is no clear sense of morality - of what is virtue and what is vice - in King Lear' virtuous characters are manipulated and deceived by evil characters into turning against the innocent, enabling the distinction between good and evil to become less clear. In this way, Edmund's distinct lack of loyalty to his family leads him to not only deceive his father but destine Edgar to a life of poverty and suffering as poor Tom.

Edmund's lack of faithfulness to his family is mirrored in the Lear plotline, with Goneril and Regan also exhibiting duplicitous behaviour as a mechanism to acquire their father's wealth and status. This is evident as the sisters decide to 'hit together....and in the heat' after their father divides his Kingdom between them. Indeed, Lear's two daughters consistently work together to reduce Lear and catalyse his descent to becoming no more than 'an unaccommodated man'. When Lear retreats to Regan's home, pleading she will '...vouchsafe [him] with...food and bed', Regan defies her father and refuses to house his train of a hundred knights, 'I entreat you to bring five and twenty, to no more will I give place nor notice'. Here, Regan tactically capitalises upon Lear's weakness as a 'gracious aged man', manipulating him into sacrificing his status, represented by the one hundred knights, in return for the shelter she will provide him. In addition to this, Goneril also attempts to reduce the status of Lear, supporting her sister's efforts to rid Lear of his unnecessarily large train by claiming 'what need twenty? ten? five?'. As a result of this, Shakespeare crafts Goneril and Regan to antagonise the social impotency of Jacobean women – they use their language to influence Lear's behaviour for their own personal gain. This debatably disproves Rutter's criticism that 'women curse. They curse because they cannot act'. Here, Rutter suggests that expletive language is the only form of linguistic power women have, yet it is clear that Goneril and Regan use their language for much more than 'cursing' – they use it to spur social change.

The fact that Shakespeare presents Goneril to employ the semantic field of numeracy and monetary value enhances the impression that the sisters have ambitions of reaping all of Lear's worth. By doing this, Shakespeare encourages his audience to form connections back to Scene 1, where the sisters express their love for Lear in terms of monetary value, 'prize me at [Goneril's] worth.....I am made of that self metal as my sister'. Through consistently implementing terms of numeric value into the discourse of Goneril and Regan, Shakespeare offers insight into the fact that they are solely driven by their greed for power instead of '...love, dear love and our aged father's right' as their virtuous sister, Cordelia, is. In this way, it can be perceived that much of the discourse which Goneril and Regan share with their father is empty and meaningless – for them, interacting with their father is solely a ploy for power, not any expression of affection. Reflecting upon this, it is clear that Goneril and Regan share Edmund's lack of loyalty towards their father and critic Rutter's notion that 'Lear's story is overwhelmingly about fathers and their paternity perhaps isn't a comprehensive evaluation of the play. Instead, one could argue that Shakespeare's King Lear isn't about paternity, but a distinct lack of it, with all of the indicating factors of loyalty one would expect a child to have for their father being unobservable within Goneril and Regan.

The lack of loyalty Shakespeare presents can be exhibited by Edmund, Goneril and Regan is countered by the extreme devotion of Cordelia, who continues to love and appreciate their father despite being treated poorly by him. Lear impulsively disbands Cordelia from his court when she defiantly refuses to flatter him in a bid to become 'a third more opulent' and be responsible for part of his Kingdom, 'I cannot heave my heart into my mouth'. As a result of her refusal to partake in the superficial act of professing her love to her father, Lear warns his court not to 'come between a dragon and his wrath', professing his desire to disown his daughter as a result of her noncompliance. Despite this, Shakespeare presents Cordelia's loyalty to Lear to be unwavering and consistent throughout the play. Once Cordelia finds out about Lear's enlightening, yet traumatic descent into madness, Shakespeare presents her to possess a devout desire to aid him back to health, ultimately allowing him to resume his rightful status as King, 'let this kiss repair those violent harms that my sisters in thy reverence made'. Here, Shakespeare reveals Cordelia to have a deep affection for her father as well as an acute awareness of her sisters' lack of loyalty towards him – she wants to revenge the harm they have knowingly inflicted upon him. This impression is furthered by Shakespeare's use of contrast between the verb 'repair' and the adjective phrase 'violent harms'. Here, Shakespeare explicitly displays the opposite dispositions of Lear's three daughters; Cordelia's sole aim is to 'remediate this good man's distress', whilst Goneril and Regan act together to convince Lear to accept 'some other discretion [to rule his] state better than [himself]. Rutter's comment that 'the two who speak are monsters, the one who does not is monstered' has great significance when considering the differing dispositions the three sisters have in regards to loyalty. Goneril and Regan are driven by savage motives for power and do not display any affection for Lear, whilst Cordelia portrays an unrivalled sense of loyalty to Lear, despite being heartlessly 'monstered' by him and her sisters in Act One. There's already part of a power already footed'. By presenting Cordelia to confirm her allegiance to Lear and loyalty to her father despite his earlier negligence of their familial relationship, Shakespeare presents Cordelia as not solely a devout daughter, but simultaneously aligns her with other virtuous characters in the play such as Edgar and Albany.

Reflecting upon the discussed points, it is an obvious assertion that 'King Lear' observes the interplay of relationships and how loyalty affects how characters treat one another. Shakespeare immediately informs his audience of the 'degenerate.../and]barbarous 'nature of both Goneril and Regan – they are driven by the sole aspiration to inherit their father's worth and status before Lear is even released from his title and position. Edmund shares the sisters' desire to rise up the social ranks with haste, maliciously deceiving Gloucester into viewing him as a 'loyal and natural boy, consequently deceiving him into *....making the [Edmund] capable.... for his land'. It can be interpreted that Edmund's lack of loyalty towards his father even transcends that of Goneril and Regan; he does not only catalyse his father's downfall, causing him to 'renounce' the world, but maliciously subjects Edgar to the life of a bastard. In this way, the only sense of loyalty Edmund has in the play is to himself and his devotion to nature. However, Shakespeare contrasts the behaviour of these disnatured characters with the virtue of Cordelia and her attempts to cure Lear of the burden of his madness, 'all you unpublished virtues of this earth, spring with my tears. Be aident and remediate this poor man's distress'.

Question 6

KING LEAR

The question asked about Goneril and Regan.

Again, around half of all candidates who studied *King Lear* answered this question.

There was, predictably, much focus on the 'love test' – sometimes to the exclusion of anything else. Other approaches looked at the pair in contrast to Cordelia and covered feminist readings of the two characters, contemporary notions of unconventional women and even Lear's parenting skills.

Examiners commented:

This was generally well-answered; the main issue was when candidates wanted to include Cordelia and attempted to justify lengthy explorations of her through her contrast – this was a legitimate avenue to explore but required more integration than simply stating her contrast at the start of the paragraph and then analysing Cordelia in isolation... Some candidates wanted to present the idea that these characters deserved a certain amount of sympathy because they were not loved by their father. All candidates focused on the love text and offered relevant language analysis as well as referring to the Jacobean court and the Divine right of Kings... Contextual knowledge of the early Jacobean era was often impressive, although some candidates tended to simply 'bolt on' contextual remarks rather than integrate them in their answer.

Here is an extract from a strong Level 3 response. It's clear and relevant, but lacks the discrimination and development of ideas we would seek at Level 4:

Shakespeare seemingly presents the two sisters to be masculine as their power and sadism grows. Carol Rutter proposes the idea of gender performativity and argues the blunt and cruel language of the sisters shows a rejection of their gender expectations. When asked to perform in the 'Love Test' the sisters use beautiful imagery, such as 'as much as child e'er loved, or father found, / A love that makes breath poor', however when in power their language shifts. 'This house is little. The old man and people / cannot be bestowed' using short sentences being blunt, rejecting this expectation of femininity. This masculine image is furthered when Lear curses Goneril to a barren womb in the line 'from her degenerate body never spring / A babe to honour her[. 'King Lear' was written over 1605-1606, the same time as Macbeth, and this idea is seen in lady Macbeth's 'unsex me here' soliloquy. Furthermore, Goneril's line, 'Milk livered man' connotes the sense of cowardice in Albany, emasculating him. Lear also presents this masculine image of Goneril by saying 'Ha! Goneril with a white beard?' At this moment, Lear's complete descent into madness elicits the use of prose, not blank verse, showing this fall from power and sanity, contrasting the stark, blunt blank verse of Regan and Goneril...

This is a more nuanced approach from a Level 5 response:

Coppelia Khan argues that King Lear is a feminist play, through which Shakespeare presents his female characters as powerful and influential, starkly at odds with their traditional role in Jacobean society. However, arguably, Khan's argument is flawed and this is demonstrated most viscerally through Shakespeare's presentation and treatment of Goneril and Regan. Throughout the play Shakespeare presents them as manipulative, cruel, but ultimately powerless and, rather than using them to encourage more radical views on feminism, he instead provides a reality of the consequences of changing the established hierarchy and a reminder that in Jacobean society it is extremely difficult for a woman to subvert the entrenched patriarchy...

Question 7

OTHELLO

The question asked about jealousy.

This was by far the most popular question in Section A, with the vast majority of those who studied *Othello* attempting it.

Given its popularity, a wide range of responses were seen. Most focussed on Iago and Othello, but some wrote about Bianca and Cassio. There was interesting discussion of Othello's jealousy being a product of desire to conform with white male Venetian ideals, rather than his race. Some candidates also saw Roderigo's immature sexual jealousy as almost comic and a counterpoint to Othello's fury. Purely character driven analysis, however, was dominant and often limiting. There were many responses that were simply character studies of Iago and/or Othello.

Loomba, Honigmann, Smith and Ryan were popular critics, well used in stronger responses. Many candidates had clearly prepared for this specific question and had pertinent critical views and quotations to use. However, there were also many weaker responses where AO5 was not well-handled and many candidates were very keen to demonstrate everything they had learned, regardless of whether it was useful: whilst Iago's "motiveless malignity" and Loomba's discussion of race in the play were often relevant, there was the sense that candidates were slowing themselves down by feeling obliged to link their idea to a critic. We often saw pages of Leavis v Bradley with no reference to the text whatsoever. A common tendency was to link jealousy to race, but some candidates then seemed to forget the specific question at hand. A tendency to focus very heavily on the first few scenes remains an issue.

Again, as with other Shakespeare questions, some candidates neglected AO2 altogether and there was very little sense that a literary dramatic text was being discussed. On the other hand, there was also a good deal of unedifying word-level analysis, with one candidate spending two pages discussing the line, 'An old black ram is tupping your white ewe'.

Here is an extract from a high Level 4 response, where AO2 is addressed very well:

Shakespeare presents the theme of jealousy in 'Othello' by outwardly expressing Othello's own personal struggle with his own reputation. Othello's sense of 'other' is a prominent theme in the text, which leads to a dynamic relationship between his feeling of alienation in Venetian society coupled with his jealousy regarding Desdemona. In Act One, scene three, we can see how Othello's drastic attempts to prove his worth in the eyes of Brabantio could be foreshadowing his later fall into envy and low self-esteem. Othello speaks of 'battles, sieges, fortunes' and there is a clear semantic field of nobility and battle, with 'hair-breadth scapes I' the imminent deadly breach' or his being taken by 'the insolent foe'. Shakespeare included, in Othello's monologic form, a semantic field of good versus evil, with religious allusions to 'prayer of earnest heart', 'pilgrimage' and 'hills whose heads touch heaven'. Othello's own words seem to be a pedestal of self-centred ego. English critic, F R Leavis understands Othello's words for himself to be 'a matter of self-centred, self-regarding satisfaction' or 'a manifestation of his love for himself. Leavis' evaluation of Othello's reputation echoes the alter stages of Othello's trajectory as it becomes clear that Othello's hamartia is himself, and the jealousy that feeds off his own expectation of himself.

Yet, in the same scene, we also see the social challenges that drive Othello to envy and threaten his sense of reputation. For example, in contrast to Othello's semantic field of religious allusion and nobility, Brabantio contrasts this with themes of darkness, hell and witchcraft. He sees his daughter as 'abused, stolen from me, and corrupted by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks'.

Here we can see the contextual nature of the play seeping through, with Brabantio's views of Othello relating to a typical 16th century perspective. Shakespeare often wrote his plays with relation to topical issues ongoing in England at the time. We may potentially regard Brabantio's archetypal portrayal of Othello engaging in 'witchcraft' or 'spells and medicine' as being a common interpretation of the time, leading to Othello being isolated and seen as 'other'. Critic Helen Gardner understands that 'the main thing that sets [Othello] apart is his solitariness. He is a stranger, a man of alien race, without ties or natural order'. This contemporary assessment of the dynamic between Othello and the other characters in the play can suggest to the audience that Othello's reputation, or ideas regarding his own ego, are inherently lessened by Venetian society, therefore leading to gaps in his self-esteem and ultimately leading to his jealousy.

Shakespeare's portrayal of jealousy can also be seen in the prevalent attitude towards women throughout the play, especially the coercive nature of the male characters. Othello seemingly begins the play with a genuine love for Desdemona. It appears to the audience that Othello understands Desdemona's liberty, as "Free and bounteous to her mind". However, Shakespeare's structural double-timing shows a reduction in this respect as the play goes on. The audience cannot truly understand the time period and passing of junctures in the play, which helps provide a sense of movement to the play, but also creates a distance between Desdemona and Othello. It is also necessary to understand how the play takes place across two countries, Cyprus and Venice, which could metaphorically relate to an emotional distance between Othello and Desdemona, therefore leading to jealousy. Furthermore, the attempted invasion by the Turks on Cyprus could further suggest a metaphorical representation of Othello's own struggle with jealousy – as Othello sees Desdemona as a territorial advancement, or in a military context, constantly at threat from the power of other men. The dramatic emphasis of the storm in Act Two, scene one is a geographical prelude to the chaotic result of Othello's possessive stance on Desdemona, foreshadowing the climactic events to come. As Caryl Phillips asserts, 'Desdemona is the love of a possession. She is a prize, the spoil of war'. Phillips interprets Othello's love for Desdemona as being a necessary boost for his own ego and reputation, which is the cause of his jealousy.

We see later on in the text how Othello's treatment of Desdemona, and the language he uses, has severely shifted in the face of jealousy. In Act Four, scene one, we see Othello hit Desdemona. Despite Othello's words being enough to exemplify the bitter jealousy overcoming him, it is the stage direction, 'He strikes her' that most poignantly suggests his reversal of nobility and grace under the nose of jealousy. Furthermore, Othello noticeably hits Desdemona whilst Lodovico looks on – he is a character that metaphorically represents the world of gentlemen and sophistication. This is important to suggest to the audience explicitly, through his newly depraved treatment of women, that Othello's reputation has been damaged by his jealousy. In Act Four, scene two, Othello's language is further shown to be obscene when talking to Desdemona: 'Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, made to write 'whore' upon?' Here we see a juxtaposition between 'fair' and 'goodly' with 'whore' which again emphasises how Othello's jealousy has corrupted his views on women. Othello also questions, 'Are you not a strumpet?' which reflects a common view expressed at the time about women suspected of promiscuous activity. We can see echoes of 16th century societal norms in Othello's treatment of Desdemona, portraying the various social injustices that women often received. Critic, A C Bradley interprets the play as being 'the subject of sexual jealousy rising to the pitch of passion'. Othello's use of the word 'strumpet' very closely relates to Bradley's assessment of the text, as we see Othello's jealousy has become heavily sexualised, also relating to his own insecurities, where the physical and emotional abuse he directs towards his wife has reached 'the pitch of passion'.

Jealousy can also be regarded as one of the centrifugal forces that drive the play, seen mainly through the conductor, Iago. From the first scene, which begins in medias res, we see how jealousy impacts both Iago and Roderigo. Iago is disappointed that Michael Cassio, referred to as 'a Florentine' (which further related to this idea of 'the other') is made lieutenant instead of himself. Iago's disdain is made clear through the alliterative summary of Cassio's career: 'mere prattle without practice'. Roderigo echoes Iago's displeasure at being 'his Moorship's Ancient' by stating, 'By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman'. It is important to consider this Venetian society through a 16th century lens. Venice was a leading port for economic trade and military outpost and Iago and Roderigo's jealousy of both Cassio and Othello's military positions would particularly resonate with the 16th century audience. Furthermore, Iago's jealousy can be seen through the structured placement of his soliloquy at the closing of the scene. Shakespeare's presentation of Iago's own thought process is important in making the audience aware of his true intentions. E.A.J. Honigmann understands how this 'dramatic perspective allows us to see with his eyes and to share in his jokes'. This is seen most explicitly at the end of Act One, scene three, as Iago tells the audience, 'Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now: To get his place and to plume up my will in double knavery?' By asserting Cassio as a 'proper man' we can see how Iago intends use his reputation. Iago's soliloquy ends with rhyming couplets, 'It is engendered. Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light'. Yet again, we see the connotations of religious allusion and the theme of dark and light. The phrase 'monstrous birth' is particularly striking, as if acting as a metaphor for the outcome of the seeds of doubt he will plant in Othello's mind...

Here is an extract from a Level 5 response – fully focussed on the question, it is excellent on AO5 where the candidate takes on various critical ideas and runs with them, connecting them to the text itself and weaving them into his own argument:

Honigmann states that 'jealousy is a monster of the imagination', whilst Flanagan argues that 'jealousy drives most of the action in 'Othello'. This monstrous nature of jealousy is clearly exemplified in Iago's ironic warning of, 'Beware, my Lord, of jealousy for it is the green-eyed monster that doth mock the meat it feeds on.' Here, the irony is found within Iago's warning of the destructive and monstrous nature of jealousy as the audience is aware this is the exact emotion that Iago is trying to evoke in Othello. Jealousy is metaphorically described as manipulative, destructive and able to evoke strong emotions within an individual; these destructive powers of jealousy being the ones that eventually lead to what Michael Long describes as Othello's 'collapse of identity'. Alternatively, jealousy here is also demonstrated as a consuming force that 'feeds' on the individual, in this case Othello. Although despite serving as a personification of jealousy it could be argued that Iago is also consumed by jealousy as, even though he takes pleasure in mocking others who experience this feeling, he himself is manipulated by it. Furthermore, Iago's metaphorical description of jealousy continues the gustatory motif of food and eating that occurs throughout the play. Most notably it is evident in Othello's misogynistic statement of 'O curse of marriage that we call these delicate creatures ours but not their appetites' supporting Granville-Barker's statement that Othello is an 'idealist turned misogynist'. Here, the misogynistic imagery and gustatory motif serve to emphasise how Othello has begun to internalise the misogynistic prejudices of the Venetian patriarchal society due to the disintegration of his one authoritative, but artificial, identity. In particular, the motif of food and eating evoked in the word 'appetites' serves to demonstrate the anxieties of men, within the patriarchal society, that surrounded the uncontrollable nature of female sexual desire. As Stanley Cowell states, 'the tragedy arises from a horror of female sexuality' which, when supported by the word 'ours', serves to emphasise how the emasculating nature of female sexuality that cannot be possessed by men, fuels their jealousy as it becomes 'the monster of the imagination'. Perhaps Shakespeare wanted to evoke the theme of jealousy in the play in order to emphasise its destructive power as it not only consumes the individual's sense of judgement and corrupts their identity, but also forces the individual to embody this destructive power, forcing them to damage the relationships and people that have allowed them to form their life and identity.

Shakespeare also demonstrates how jealousy forces the 'borders of individual character to become permeable' as stated by O'Toole. This notion of a 'permeable' identity is emphasised in the harmony of Othello and Desdemona's love evoked by: 'She loved me for the dangers I had passed/ And I loved her that she did pity them'. Here, the use of iambic pentameter serves to reinforce the harmony and strength of Desdemona's love as Othello's exotic tales awaken his wife's individual spirit. This emphasises the power of words in the play in a positive light, through Othello and Desdemona's relationship, and in a negative light when it is abused by Iago's jealousy driven and Machiavellian manipulation of Othello, supporting Coleridge's statement that Iago is driven by 'motiveless malignity'. However, the 'permeable' nature of Othello's character only becomes evident through his statement 'If I do prove her haggard' in juxtaposition to his earlier idealisation of Desdemona. Here, Othello's dehumanisation of her into a 'haggard' – an untamed female falcon – emphasises the extent to which jealousy has corrupted Othello's identity. The metaphor of falconry is continued through Othello's promise that he will cut off her 'jesses' and 'whistle her off' suggesting he will cut off his relationship with her and leave her to pursue other lovers. This dehumanising metaphor heavily contrasts the harmony presented between the pair earlier in the play, emphasising once again the destructive nature of jealousy. However, the true destruction and 'collapse' of Othello's identity isn't proven until the end of the play when Othello, in the act of murdering his wife, fails to acknowledge his own jealousy, demonstrating what Leavis describes as 'no tragic self discovery'. During the death of Desdemona we are also exposed to the vulnerability of Othello's identity as his focus on the 'whiteness' of Desdemona's skin shows how he perceives whiteness as a superior value, suggesting that jealousy has forced him to internalise the Elizabethan prejudicial stereotypes surrounding Moors, that they were lascivious, highly emotional and driven by jealous natures. Alternatively, Othello's focus on Desdemona's skin that is 'white as snow' could allude to the trope of Renaissance literature that viewed whiteness of the skin as a signature of female beauty and purity. This allusion evokes irony as purity and innocence are the qualities Othello fails to see in Desdemona due to the jealousy that obfuscates his sense of judgement. Perhaps Shakespeare uses jealousy in the play as a tool to demonstrate how it corrupts an individual's identity causing it to become 'permeable' and evoking a sense of vulnerability within the person as they are forced to re-construct their identity based on the prejudiced social and misogynistic stereotypes the society is built on.

Question 8

OTHELLO

The question asked about the relationship between Desdemona and Emilia.

This was the less popular question on *Othello*, but there were some very strong responses. Weaker answers ignored the instruction to write about the *relationship* between the two characters, but others explored their relationship against that of Iago and Othello. They also looked at the bonds between women and used criticism from Loomba about deviant Venetian women. Context was heavily focused on the patriarchal rule of the time. Close analysis of the 'Willow' scene – some of it nicely nuanced – was common.

Here's a well-argued Level 4 response that is fully focussed on the question:

Shakespeare explores sisterly bonds through the characters of Emilia and Desdemona.

The platonic relationship between Emilia and Desdemona is established in Act IV Scene III, the 'Willow Scene', and in this scene Shakespeare establishes the trust there is between them. In the early Jacobean period, it was not uncommon for a mistress and her maid to have a close relationship; however, to have a bond like Emilia and Desdemona's would be considered sacred. As Carol Neely states: "Friendship between women is established"; I would thoroughly agree with this statement as a sisterly bond is very clearly established in this scene; Desdemona reminisces about how her own "mother had a maid call'd Barbara" and how close their relationship was with each other. Also in the 'Willow Song' it is clearly revealed to both the audience and Emilia that Desdemona is distraught that her beloved husband Othello thinks she has done something wrong. Desdemona is willing to let Emilia see this vulnerable and upset side of her due to the trust between them. In the 'Willow Song', it says "Her salt tears fell from her, and soften'd the stones": this vivid imagery of a lady's delicate tears being powerful enough to effect stones portrays the extremity of the emotions Desdemona is feeling due to her confusion as to why Othello is vexed at her. In the Royal Shakespeare Company production (2015), when Desdemona sings the 'Willow Song' the actress playing Emilia joins in with her. This deviation from the script highlights the unity between the two women.

Some may argue that the relationship between Emilia and Desdemona goes beyond being one of sisterhood to that of motherly nature. Although Emilia initially appears to be a typically ideal wife to her husband, Iago, throughout the play we see that she is a wise woman. Through the use of full rhyme in the line "The world's a huge thing: it is a great price / For a small vice", Emilia being a knowledgeable woman is highlighted to the audience whilst she is imparting her knowledge onto Desdemona. In the Olivier National Theatre version (2013), it is highlighted that Emilia is put on the same level of status as Desdemona due to her worldliness because the two of them are doing the same actions. In this production, the two actresses are drinking cans of beer which also emphasises the extent to which Desdemona feels comfortable in the company of her maid. In this scene, the relationship between the two women is one of trust and that there is a sacred bond between them.

Shakespeare highlights how the social pressures during the Elizabethan era were able to affect relationships through the contrast between two pairs of friendships. While Emilia and Desdemona's relationship is centred around loyalty and trust, Iago and Othello's has deception at the heart of it. In the early Jacobean period, one of the most humiliating ways to lose your reputation as a man was to be cuckolded by your wife: this fear of cuckoldry was installed in the majority of men during the Elizabethan era and Iago uses this to manipulate Othello into believing that his beloved Desdemona has betrayed him. The critic Leavis states that Othello is "unusually open to deception" and I would partially agree to this. On the one hand, one could argue that his love for his "Sweet Desdemona" should be unfaltering if it is true love.

Conversely, perhaps the fact that Othello does not trust his wife is Shakespeare commenting on how destructive the Jacobean societal views were and how the force of masculinity can lead to tragedy. Shakespeare highlights how pure Emilia and Desdemona's relationship is through Iago's manipulative relationship with Othello.

The themes of loyalty and betrayal are explored through the relationship between Emilia and Desdemona. Emilia has a sense of duty towards her husband and this is seen through her stealing of the handkerchief. During the Jacobean period, it was expected for women to be submissive and subservient to their fathers, and once married, their husbands. As the critic Neely states: women were expected "to be silent, obedient" and this is shocking to read as it truly encapsulates how in the Elizabethan society women were viewed as prizes and that the love between many couples was in fact simply "the love of possession" (Carol Phillips). However, although it may initially appear an act of betrayal towards Desdemona, Emilia does this act of duty, stealing the handkerchief, without the knowledge of her husband Iago's villainous intentions. In the final scene of 'Othello', it is revealed to her Iago's plotting and this leads to Emilia's loyalty firmly standing with Desdemona only. When the truth is revealed to Emilia that her husband has betrayed her and Desdemona she exclaims: "Villainy, villainy, villainy!". Shakespeare's use of repetition and exclamation in this line highlights how distraught Emilia is and that she will no longer obey the societal laws that a woman should be quiet; she is determined and not afraid to expose her husband's evil doings due to her unwavering loyalty for Desdemona and it also highlights to the audience the proto-feminist aspect of Emilia's character. In the National Theatre version (2013), Emilia is shot to her knees and falls into a similar position as Desdemona, who is lying deceased on her bed, onto the floor. This difference in physical levels, with Emilia being on the floor and Desdemona being high up on her bed, symbolises the difference in status between them; however, both of them lying in the same position emphasises that they share a sacred bond as there is a sense of unity between them. There is undoubtedly pure and loyal friendship between the two women.

To conclude, Shakespeare explores pure, and loyal friendship through the presentation of Emilia and Desdemona's relationship. It is undoubtedly, as several critics state, "what remains whole in the debacle of 'Othello', and the relationship between the two women cannot be flawed which is unlike the deceiving friendship between Iago and Othello.

Question 9

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The question asked about fantasy versus reality.

Few candidates answered this question, but most of those who did were able to explore Shakespeare's satirical purpose and discuss typical features of festive comedy, such as the use of double-framing.

Here is the introduction to a sound Level 3 response:

Shakespeare presents the relationship between fantasy and reality in his sixteenth century comedy 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' through his use of the Green World. In these woods just outside of Athens, the lawlessness and mistakes of Puck when using the love juice potion cause a confusion between what is fantasy and what is reality. Subsequently causing the characters to feel as if they were in a dreamlike state, hence the title of this comedy.

In 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' Shakespeare exhibits a confusion between fantasy and reality through the lovers. Egeus having 'complaint against my daughter' is not allowing Hermia to marry Lysander, so the couple venture off into the 'woods' near Athens in search of a 'widow aunt' to do it for them. This Green World that they have stumbled into is where the confusion between fantasy and reality is most prominent. The setting of 'watery glass' referring to a glistening lake or pond that is 'decking with liquid pearl' exhibits the fantasy. The 'liquid pearls' that are in fact drops of dew are significant for the Elizabethan audience who believed they fell from the moon.

The Green World was defined by Northrop Frye in his Anthology of Criticisms with critic, Francios Laroque persuasively arguing that it was an 'escape from the constraints of law and from everyday life'. The relationship between the fairy queen and king. Titania and Oberon, further represents the lack of reality in this fantasy world. Their dispute over a 'little changeling boy' illustrates this, as changeling's were thought to have been left by fairies, further showing the distance between fantasy and reality ...

Question 10

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The question asked about gender.

This was the popular question on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and most responses were successful in accessing all the AOs. Candidates offered relevant contextual background on the role of women in the sixteenth century as a starting point to discuss gender. Topics covered looked at the subversion of gender roles and gender stereotypes as well as features of festive comedy as they relate to gender. Weaker responses failed to create an argument, looking instead at all the examples of women in the play.

Here is an introduction to a low Level 3 response:

Within 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Shakespeare presents gender and how the 'Green World' (Frye) provides the opportunity to the young lovers to challenge the social norms of the time.

Shakespeare presents the strict conservative laws within Athens through the characters of Theseus and Hippolyta. The play begins with Theseus winning Hippolyta, claiming he had 'woo'd thee with my sword'. This also has sexual implications which a Victorian audience may find quite shocking, as he speaks so proudly of that accomplishment despite Hippolyta not being pleased about the situation, as she tells Theseus that 'four days will quickly steep themselves in night', implying that unlike Theseus who dramatically sates that the 'moon wanes', she can wait until their marriage, whereas he is portrayed as impatient. Theseus's sudden infatuation with Hippolyta adds an element of dramatic comedy to the play and shows that it is not only the young lovers who show fickle natures when it comes to love ...

And here is the start of a more developed response, accessing all the AOs:

Gender roles are a central theme within 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', as they drive many of the comedic forces through swift changes from conservative order to challenges to authority and disaster, alongside driving most of the plot itself. Shakespeare explores gender roles through the nature of the couplings within the Athenian court, such as Theseus and Hippolyta and Hermia and Lysander's plight alongside a transition to the 'Green World' with Titania and her relationships.

Shakespeare presents an immediate failure to challenge traditional gender roles through Theseus and Hippolyta's union in Act 1. Critic, Andrew Scott, has argued that a 'social inversion' is key to the comedy. This is initially unconvincing as the first relationship presented to the audience reinforces traditional gender roles... Indeed this forceful adherence to traditional gender roles was accentuated in the 2020 Bridge Theatre production of the play, where Hippolyta was presented in a glass box, physically representing her situation. Theseus' 'triumph' over Hippolyta, solidified by their approaching marriage is reminiscent of many traditional English laws and customs of the time. For example, the concept of 'coverture' ensured that a woman's legal rights were subsumed under her husband's in marriage ...

Question 11

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The question asked about justice.

This was the more popular question. Many candidates were able to analyse tensions within the play such as the relationship between justice and morality, or justice and mercy. Another original approach was how Shakespeare focuses on the effects of justice through the voices of the marginalised (Greenblatt), and it was interesting to see how often Pompey and Mistress Overdone were included in answers where, perhaps, the 'main' characters would have been expected. Candidates are increasingly sensitive to the female experience in this play, and some explored this question through the lens of female and male power.

Some candidates were very keen to suggest, in every section, that Shakespeare's presentation of justice was a way for him to communicate his own views, for example:

Shakespeare explores the need for severe justice in order to reflect society and deter a 1601 audience from criminality. Angelo's attempt to apply justice is regarded as 'surely for a name' as he is a 'man straining to divinize himself' as Walter Kerr postulates. However, it could be argued there is some suggestion that Angelo's strict justice is Shakespeare's attempt to deter criminality in act two scene two. By sharing lines with Isabella 'Yet show some pity'/'I show it most of all when I show justice' Angelo is sanctioned some rationality. He is sharing Isabella's mercy by sharing lines as Shakespeare asks audiences to think about who criminality affects 'for then pity those I do not know'. This brief change of perspective provides some logic to Angelo's actions. Shakespeare perhaps creates this platform of insight as severe punishment was extremely common in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras...

While there were some very pertinent contextual connections between the courtly politics of Shakespeare's time and his criticism of them, and current political events, as with some responses to *Antony and Cleopatra*, a few candidates seemed to believe Shakespeare's plays were written solely to educate King James VI & I.

It is worth noting that a few high-performing candidates were so keen to incorporate their knowledge on the Duke/Angelo/Isabella/Jacobean London that the question was rather an afterthought and the links to the task became slightly forced, which really precluded a Level 5. Some ignored language in favour of overly detailed AO3. Another example of slightly misdirected enthusiasm was the idea that justice was deemed impossible, often focusing on the ending of the play: candidates often wrote eloquently and persuasively, but simply could not progress far beyond Level 3 without judicious use of the text to support their arguments and analysis of Shakespeare's crafting.

Here's an extract from a Level 5 response that addresses all the AOs:

In 'Measure for Measure' Shakespeare uses the theme of justice to suggest that both harsh justice and mercy are necessary to deal with criminality, but ultimately suggests that a balance between both is impossible to find.

Through Angelo and the Duke's wishes for change to Vienna's laws, Shakespeare presents the necessity of justice in society, whereas through the Duke's trickery, Shakespeare also presents mercy as a virtuous quality in leadership. The final act brings into question whether the Duke's approach to justice is satisfactory, and this may be an attempt by Shakespeare to criticise the new King, James I, and his attempt to find a 'middle way' in ruling England.

However, Shakespeare also makes the case for mercy through 'Measure for Measure', suggesting that a merciful approach to justice is effective in dealing with criminality. Shakespeare uses Pompey to deliver a pragmatic case for mercy, as he asks 'Your worship' if he would 'geld and splay all the youth of the city' to deal with sexual immorality. Through Pompey's potentially sarcastic tone to Escalus, yet his thought-provoking stance on eliminating crime in Vienna, Shakespeare may be using the comic character to distance himself from any notion which opposed the rule of James I. This may be to protect him from prosecution whilst making suggestions to radical changes to justice in England – Shakespeare's contemporary, Jonson, was imprisoned for similar subversive notions in his plays. The Duke's approach to saving Claudio may also be seen as Shakespeare advocating for mercy and pragmatism, as the Duke reassures Isabella that 'the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof'. The Duke's almost poetic language, describing the consequences of his 'bed trick' in a way a biblical passage would be described, suggests that the Duke's merciful approach to justice is just as sophisticated as Angelo's 'stricture and firm abstinence'.

We could argue that Shakespeare uses the 'theatrical solutions' of the Duke (Brockbank) to advocate for mercy in a manner which conforms to the comic structure of 'Measure for Measure'. Although critics like Dunkel argue that Isabella only agrees to the 'bed trick' because 'a holy man advises her to do so', we could instead argue that Isabella simply understands the Duke's pragmatism; when told the news of her brother's fate by Lucio, she initially exclaims 'O let him marry her!' Her exclamative and short statement suggests that Isabella loses. Momentarily, her preoccupation with her religion, and see the case for mercy. The Duke's proposal to Isabella by the end, as a continuation of all the marriages of the final scene, could be seen as the Duke's mercy applied to removing Isabella from her extreme religious following, to, as Hopkins argues, the 'most basic of all props' of society.

In an attempt to save what appears to be a 'problem Play', a term coined by Boas, Shakespeare uses the Duke's mercy, and marriage to Isabella, to suggest that mercy is a necessity for a functioning society.

Question 12

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The question asked about comedy.

This was the less popular option, but it was a successful question, and candidates had evidently enjoyed their study of the play.

Responses often focused on comedy as an ironic reflection of the play's broader themes, with even malapropisms being revealing. Other approaches were character-driven – Barnadine/Lucio/the Duke, with much of the critical AO5 debate involving the latter. One candidate wrote on the Duke's first line, memorably evaluating it as "circumlocutory, prolix, knotted, and oblique"! Less successful responses went through the play chronologically and, quite laboriously, explained why some scenes were funny. There was frequent focus on the lower-class characters – the idea that Shakespeare was using comedy to voice social concerns. Here is an extract from one such response:

Shakespeare juxtaposes the lofty, yet ineffective rhetoric of the ruling class with the bawdy, but expressive, discourse of the lower classes in order to illustrate the fragmentation of society that occurs as a result of lack of communication. In an attempt to assert his dominance over the 'two notorious benefactors' Elbow's speech becomes littered with malapropisms and oxymorons, making his efforts to punningly 'lean upon justice' futile.

Shakespeare arguably presents the constable as foolish, undermining the potency of Angelo's strict enforcement of law, in order to challenge the assumption inherent within 'The Great Chain of Being' that individuals in positions of power will always act accordingly. Moreover, Pompey, after managing to absolve himself through equivocation (a demeaning linguistic defence against religious judgement) exposes the brutality of the ruling class's corporal punishment with rhetorical questions: 'Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?' The violent, zoomorphic imagery of animal castration, in combination with their irreligious 'wish' for complete submission displays the excessive force used by the God appointed upper class. Consequently, Dollimore's assertion that the working class 'is positively anarchic' in their use of 'heteroglossia' against 'authoritarian oppression' appears to be bolstered by Shakespeare's staging of a character who would be considered a stock, stupid gimp in a typical comedy; as a source of satirical commentary on human nature and the nature of rule.

Overall Shakespeare undermines the sanctity of social hierarchy by revealing that 'ruling powers' are never 'as holy as severe through a more satirical employment of comedic tropes.

Engagement with AO5 was relatively weak with this question, which was a little surprising given that this was essentially a question about genre. Very little theory of comedy (from Part I of the Critical Anthology) was discussed. Though candidates sometimes made reference to Hopkins's essay and quoted her opening statement on the comedies' "pervading obsession with marriage", there was little analysis of her actual argument here. Centres may wish to direct students' focus towards this section if they are studying a comedy for Section A.

Another relative weakness was a tendency to focus almost entirely on AO3 and AO5 and almost completely forget the text itself. Here is an example from a borderline Level 3/4 response:

Shakespeare uses comedy to comment on the judicial system and highlight its incompetencies in order to avoid upsetting the King. Shakespeare cleverly sets the play in Austria and not England and makes a mockery of the lower class characters, like Barnadine and Elbow, not the powerful and important characters like Angelo and the Duke who King James is more likely to sympathise with. The literary critic Hampton-Reeves in 'Measure for Measure and the Politics of the Time' stated that the play was performed in two very different venues and for two different audiences. The humour in 'Measure for Measure' appealed more to the audience in the city at the Globe theatre as the audience would have consisted of normal, common people who enjoyed the satirical digs at the government and the crude humour employed by the lowly characters, like the jokes about syphilis. The other audience was the court of King James I and he would have seen the play as affirming his political beliefs but also enjoyed the humour of characters like Elbow who mirror a court joker or fool. Elbow, like the constables in other Shakespeare plays, often mangles his language and mixes up similarly sounding words, for example saying 'two notorious benefactors' instead of 'malefactors', 'detest' when he should have said 'attest' and even unwittingly mocks the duke by saying 'the poor Duke's constable' instead of 'the Duke's poor constable'. These malapropisms present Elbow as a fool and show how the justice system was a joke. The justice system at the time was not standardised or reformed and the officers would not have been highly educated so it could be argued that the character of Elbow was based in reality. Laws in the Jacobean era were highly subjective and reliant on the whims of the monarch. For example James I installed the witchcraft act as he was very superstitious and wary of the supernatural. Elbow's incompetency could highlight how he is practically redundant as the law was really inflicted by those high up in power like the Duke and he would not make much difference...

Question 13

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

The question asked about imagery and symbolism.

Only a couple of candidates answered this question and the responses were fairly under-developed, not focussing on imagery and symbolism much at all but merely making general points about the play and the idea of Kate as a 'shrew' and pointing out a few examples of the use of animal imagery in the play.

Here is an extract from a fairly general response (Level 2/3):

...Thus Shakespeare's use of dehumanising imagery at the expense of Katherina highlights male attitudes towards women. It suggests an implicit power dynamic amongst men and women around how men don't take women seriously and view them as a subject of comic relief.

Shakespeare utilises animalistic imagery through Petruchio and Katherina's fighting match to suggest that being a shrew was to resist patriarchy as a woman. Thus, the portrayal of women being aggressive and intolerable is a natural resistance to patriarchy as women and the patriarchal aggression is a toll to assert humanity and identity when some actively try to strip it. When Petruchio says in an aggressive manner, 'Come, come you wasp. I'faith, you are too angry,' Katherina fights back 'If I be waspish, best beware my sting' ...

Question 14

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

The question asked about marriage.

This was the much more popular question on *The Taming of the Shrew* and candidates covered a range of topics in the responses: contemporary patriarchal attitudes; social and economic benefits of marriage, modern audience reception; Shakespeare's mockery of social norms and marriage as a typical feature of comedy. Weaker responses simply described each of the marriages in the play and AO5 was often neglected.

Here is an example of a high scoring response. It is not always sophisticated in expression, but there is full engagement with the text and the question: the candidate never stops seeing the text as a piece of drama:

In 'The Taming of the Shrew', marriage is not only a central plot point and theme, but also a significant symbol of societal order and patriarchy. Furthermore marriage was incredibly important in Shakespeare's comedies as a way for the world to return to balance and normalcy. As Hopkins states, 'multiple marriages are the 'telos' or ultimate purpose'. The significance here of multiple marriages relates to the Commedia dell'arte theatre's tradition of group ensembles and thereby group identity is reinforced with multiple marriages by the end of the play. Marriage in 'The Taming of the Shrew' is presented both in toxic form and in amusing form, with some scenes seeming to support the institution and other satirising it and criticising its relation to women and its treatment of them.

Katherina is known by the world as a 'shrew', with Hortensio even referring to her as 'Katherine the Curst'. This title and the adjective 'curst' demonstrate the mocking disrespect the men in the play – and Elizabethan society in general – have for an unmarried and outspoken woman. Imaginative descriptive metaphors like 'combe your noddle with a three-legged stool' demonstrates how violent this unmarried woman is, and this harsh language and quick wit is only neutralised by a sharp-witted and competitive man when Petruchio begins to court her. Their exchange in Act 2 Scene 1 is filled with imaginative figurative language and swift lack-and-forth like, 'In his tongue' 'Whose tongue?' 'Yours if you talk of tails, and so farewell' 'What, with my tongue in your tail/ Nay, come again'. This scene serves to show how to match a 'frowned' and outspoken woman with returned quick wit and the fact that Petruchio eventually bests her and secures her father's permission for her marriage suggests that this feisty woman has finally met her match. Furthermore, her silence at this fate is telling, suggesting a level of confusion and mental withdrawal as she stares helplessly at her fate. This is contrasted to her long speech at the end of the play where she speaks uninterrupted for two pages, suggesting that she has grown into the idea that marriage will provide her status and respect in society, after capitulating to Petruchio. While some critics read this as a beaten acceptance of fate – such as demonstrated in Dionisotti's performance in a 'spiritless unreal voice' – others note that she has here regained her voice and sharp tongue and is therefore using this marriage to her advantage.

Newman states that Petruchio 'provides Katherina with an identity acceptable to society;' and here we see that through this identity she can become even more outspoken than at the beginning of the play and more herself.

Marriage is also presented as a way to boast and demonstrate masculine bravado. Petruchio is revered by the other men in the play for 'taming' a shrewish woman and earns highly from this, both materially and reputationally. He self-admittedly came to Padua to 'wive and thrive', suggesting that just as marriage improves a woman's standing in life, so too does it improve a man's. Katherina's father is wealthy, making her a target for Petruchio's aims to earn wealth, and her shrewish nature and requirements of taming provide him an opportunity to demonstrate himself, a formidable and admired man among his peers. When he asks Baptista if he has a 'daughter called Katherina, fair and virtuous' this is completely juxtaposed to the language others – and he himself – had used to describe her earlier, suggesting he is here setting himself apart and accepting the challenge of 'wooing' Katherina. Yet Baptista – although he treats both of his daughters' marriages like business deals (shown clearly when Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, and Gremio compete to see who is wealthiest and Baptista accepts the victor as worthy of Bianca) adds the stipulation that Petruchio must obtain 'that special thing...that is, her love' implying that he doesn't just view marriage as a transaction, but also something ultimately connected by genuine feeling. Shakespeare here may be expressing his more genuine views that love and marriage are connected and that the woman's feelings should be taken into consideration, as he himself married a woman much older than him, going against the older, dominating man / younger submissive woman norm of Elizabethan times. Nevertheless, while Baptista seems to value this clause, emphasised with the noun phrase 'special thing', most productions don't show Katherina anywhere close to loving Petruchio until much later, suggesting that Baptista takes his daughter's mere lack of objection as love, demonstrating his reductive view of women and their ability to speak their own minds. This, combined with Petruchio's earlier use of the noun phrase 'irksome scold' links to the Scold's Bridle, a device used in Tudor times to silence a woman with painful consequences if she speaks, tying in with Nicholas Breton's assertion that a good wife is 'quiet' not 'unquiet',

An example of someone Breton may view as a good wife is represented in Bianca's character early on in the play. She is described by her suitors as 'fair', as having 'beauteous modesty' and 'mild behaviour and sobriety' and these descriptions are heavily juxtaposed to the views of Katherina as being 'curst' and 'froward'. Bianca therefore is pursued by three men, with two disguising themselves as tutors to get close to her. The way she expresses her love, through repetition of Lucentio's Latin phrases, is contrasted to the bold and descriptive language used by Katherina and Petruchio – as pointed out by Newman – and therefore she adheres as closely to the Elizabethan ideal of a silent woman as possible. However, her behaviour at the end of the play suggests that the earlier submission was merely an act to find a husband similar to her father, in that she could manipulate and fool him. Her refusal to come when Lucentio calls her in the last scene and her description of the act with the noun phrase, 'foolish duty' implies that her earlier perfection was orchestrated with the intention of securing her social position with a husband. Katherina arguably comes to the realisation of this tactic in the end of act 4 when she finally capitulates.

Petruchio's taming of Katherina and the events of their early marriage are ripe with humour. Rightly so, as Kerr asserts that 'comedy speaks of nothing but limitation' and limitation is exactly Petruchio's tactic. He denies Katherina food and sleep, embarrasses her by being late and ill-dressed for their wedding and forces her to admit that the sun is the moon. His treatment of her introduces the idea of the hawking metaphor and – while undoubtedly harsh – is so ridiculous that the audience can't help but laugh. His admission that they are BOTH choleric suggests he knows exactly what he's doing (as Bates states, his 'madness is crafted by meaning') but also suggests a level of attempt at relatability and comfort. Furthermore, his eventual elation when she finally capitulates and his previous use of metaphor 'kill a wife with kindness' implies he was rooting for her to figure out that the best tactic for her status and happiness would be to pretend to agree and appear 'tamed' rather than a 'wild Kate'.

Hopkins' idea that marriage to end a comedy is the reinforcement of 'one of the most basic social and patriarchal props' to bring a resolution to the story is correct, however Shakespeare plays with the idea a little as, although many people end up married and the men may think that they are stronger for it, the patriarchy is arguably weaker at the end. Bianca and the widow are disobedient and successful in their social certainty, and Katherina delivers a speech that on the surface agrees to patriarchy, but more in depth clearly mocks and satirises it with hyperbolic imperatives like, 'place your hands below your husband's foot' which is so ridiculous as to mock the very idea of patriarchal domination over women apparently too meek and submissive to make their own choices of be heard. The conclusion of this with Petruchio declaring they are off 'to bed' can be interpreted in two ways - either as reinforcement of woman's exploitation within marriage for sex, or as a reward for Katherina's convincing but fake performance by consummating their marriage and securing her place in a higher social position than when she was an unmarried pariah.

In conclusion, marriage in Elizabethan times was an institution of misogyny and patriarchy, but Shakespeare plays on and satirises that with Bianca's disobedience to a foolish Lucentio and Katherina's successful performance after Petruchio's 'taming'. Nevertheless, Bates notes that Petruchio's 'success' is linked to that of the play, and by the audience being 'captivated' the sanction his cruel treatment of Katherina. However, the comedy in his exaggerated actions somewhat undercuts that cruelty and Katherina's sarcastic speech implies she is now in on the scam to appear to conform to societal ideals of marriage only externally.

Question 15

TWELFTH NIGHT

The question asked about Feste.

Twelfth Night was the most popular of the comedy texts and around half the candidates who'd studied it chose this question. Successful approaches included Feste as Shakespeare's mouthpiece; his function as a comment on puritanism; Malvolio's nemesis; his use of wit; his role outside the social hierarchy – the 'allowed fool' speaks truth to power; as a link between the two plotlines; as a comment on both merriment and melancholy.

Weaker responses were those where candidates had clearly prepared thoroughly to answer on Malvolio and used the idea of Feste as his antithesis to then dedicate as much or even more of their answer to Malvolio than they did to Feste himself. Another area of weakness was where a response was stuffed full of critical comment without any exploration of the play itself.

Here is an example of a good Level 3 response: it is clear and makes relevant reference to the text and to critical ideas, but points are underdeveloped and the response at times relies of description rather than analysis:

'Twelfth Night' is an epiphany play marking the time of confusion and chaos leading towards Christmas. Shakespeare, reflects upon this confusion in the play with the themes of, mistaken identity, disguise and love. The character Feste or 'the clown' has an omniscient view of this confusion and chaos, and almost gives the audience a narrator perspective through his quiet remarks and the songs he sings towards the audience and characters.

Feste's role in the play is to provide a link and connection between the humorous subplot and the more serious main plot of the play. Throughout the play, each character is presented as "have(ing) masks" (Summers), either through metaphorical or physical disguises, Feste's 'mask' however, is derived from his subtle and secretive intelligence. Each character who has an interaction with Feste seems to be surprised from his intelligence, omniscient view and wit due to the usual role of a clown in the Elizabethan era which was to entertain, and to create folly, rather than to mock and reveal truth.

Feste's power to display truth to each character is based on the character Olivia's (the countess and head of the household) permission to speak openly. This is first evidenced in act one scene five, as Feste and Olivia argue about who is 'the fool'. In this scene, Olivia's character openly states "make your proof" to Feste suggesting that she is curious by his naming her a fool, and intends to know why. From this interaction Olivia's statement permits 'the clown' to tell her truth, presenting to the audience the twisted concept in the play, that low social status does not restrict a character from being powerful in 'Twelfth Night'. As the scene continues, Feste's intelligence and wit is confirmed to the audience as he reveals the truth about how Olivia's mourning of her brother and states "I think his soul is in hell Madonna". This statement hints to the audience how Olivia's mourning is empty and a way of avoiding life as she is mourning her brother for 'seven years' which Feste reveals is too long to "mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven". For a member of lower classes to address the head of the household in this bold manner would be shocking to an Elizabethan audience. The critic Gibson concludes this idea as he names Twelfth Night and Illyria "a topsy turvey world of confusion". Illyria's "world of confusion" due to twisting social status, further reflects the chaos of the 'Twelfth Night' period and could be a possible reference to the 'Lord Of Misrule' celebration in which a member of the lower classes switches roles with the head of the household, gaining power for a short time.

Feste's role of power and intelligence is further evidenced through Shakespeare's use of songs. Through the main plot of the play Feste sings very serious songs about love, reflecting the feelings of characters. These songs, not only address the characters, but also break the fourth wall between audience and play, emphasising the importance of Feste's words. Feste's breaking the fourth wall also gives the audience a narrator perspective as he is addressing the events that are taking place and the feelings characters have towards each other. The songs subvert the 'carnival spirit' (Laroque) of the play and reflect a very serious tone of melancholy evidenced as he sings towards Orsino and Viola in act two scene four. The characters Orsino and Viola (Cesario) have had conflicting feelings of love and attraction throughout the play, but are frightened to admit their desire. Feste's character reflects these feelings as he uses the metaphor of 'death' to mirror the character's lustful feelings towards each other. As his songs begin Feste sings "come away, come away death" which presents a heavy tone of melancholy. The songs use of the metaphor of death to describe melancholy could contextually link towards the five temperaments of melancholy, which were used to diagnose the feelings of love in the Elizabethan era, the symptoms included, melancholy feeling, black bile, blood, phlegm and bile. Shakespeare could be symbolically referencing these disturbing symptoms of melancholy through the metaphor of death, and therefore reflecting the characters emotions. The audience is also further presented Feste's intelligence through the song as his character is aware of Orsino and Viola's feelings toward each other, the further emphasises the idea that his character is omniscient throughout the play.

Although, Feste's perspective can be very serious and powerful, he also plays an important role through the subplot of the play. Feste's character presents how "folly is a positive force" (Tromley) in the subplot, through his gulling of the character Malvolio. Feste's character attitude changes in the subplot as he becomes a representation of the play's genre of comedy. This is presented as Feste places on a literal 'mask' (summers) through the persona of Sir Topas. In act four scene two, Feste fully indulges in the mockery of the "sober-sided performance of Malvolio" (Bevington) as he disguises himself as a priest named Sir Topas, and informs Malvolio that "Sir Topas the curate... comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic". This interaction presents dramatic irony to the audience as they are aware of Feste's disguise but the character Malvolio is not. To an Elizabethan audience this mockery of the 'puritan' (Bevington) Malvolio could create much entertainment and enjoyment due to the comedic element of disguise and mistaken identity which was very common to the Elizabethan era. However, to a contemporary audience, Shakespeare's presentation of Feste in this scene is more negative as he is essentially clarifying Malvolio's insanity falsely, and making a fool of him. This scene further emphasises Feste's intelligence as he is capable of gulling a character of greater status than him such as, Malvolio the steward. This comic interaction concludes the idea to the audience that Feste does "not wear motley for a brain", and his status as a clown does not reflect a lack of intelligence.

To summarize, the character Feste is presented by Shakespeare as a very flexible character, as his attitude changes from serious to comical throughout the play unlike most other characters who present one persona and a very static perspective. Feste's character offers much information to the audience, from intelligence about character feelings to intelligence about character actions giving the audience an omniscient view as well as him.

Question 16

TWELFTH NIGHT

The question asked about gender.

This was a popular question and there were many successful responses to it, exploring Cesario's disguise and the play's challenges to gender stereotypes, as well as broader discussion around features of festive comedy and of comedy generally as a subversive genre.

Here is an example of a high Level 4 response. Again, for Level 5 we would expect more focus on the text as a piece of drama:

Although Twelfth Night' is arguably famous for its presentation of androgyny, and therefore shows how Shakespeare presents challenges to not only his own contemporaries' expectations of gender but our contemporaries' also. Shakespeare also, notably, presents challenges to expectations of masculinity and femininity. Shakespeare explores and challenges contemporary expectations of femininity and how women in his play are arguably shown as the stronger sex, as well as criticisms of traditional masculinity. Moreover, he explores and challenges contemporary expectations of gender via androgyny not only through Viola but also through Sebastian, and ultimately uses the character of Cesario to challenge contemporary expectations surrounding gender and love. Also Shakespeare presents challenges to contemporary expectations around the female gender with his presentation of Olivia. Olivia is presented both as virtuously feminine and as almost jarringly masculine, embodying a form of androgyny also exhibited by Queen Elizabeth I.

Shakespeare explores the contemporary expectation of Olivia's sex and her femininity in Act 1 Scene 2, when she is not even present, through the descriptions by other characters; the Captain describes Olivia's femininity with 'A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count that died some twelvemonth since - then leaving her in the protection of his son, her brother, who shortly also died: for whose dear love (they say) she hath abjured the company and sight of men.' This presentation of Olivia as dedicated yet somewhat fragile, as she is left 'in the protection of his son', suits Shakespeare's contemporaries' expectations of the female gender: she is in need of protecting, almost subservient to the man, and her life as a result evolves around the mourning of said men. Indeed, she is also depicted as virtuous in how she seems to embody virginity with her refusal to marry, thus also embodying the feminine image of Queen Elizabeth circulating at the time.

However, Shakespeare presents how Olivia, in a mirroring of Elizabeth, challenges contemporary expectations around the female gender with how she is presented as a strong leader. This is commented upon by Sebastian, and Shakespeare's use of a secondary realisation of this challenge suggests that this is something the audience is meant to understand is concrete rather than speculative: 'Or else the lady's mad, yet if t'were so, she could not sway her house, command her followers, take and give back affairs and their dispatch with such a smooth, discreet, and stable bearing as I perceive she does: there's something in't that is deceivable. But here the lady comes.'

Shakespeare's addition of 'There's something in't that is deceivable' suggests that Olivia, in the eyes of contemporary expectations to gender, poses such a startlingly masculine challenge with her ability to lead and administrate as a noble would that, to one of Shakespeare's male characters, it is borderline fiction. Yet, we see this administrative ability in Shakespeare's monarch of the time, Queen Elizabeth. Thus, Shakespeare presents a challenge to the contemporary expectations around the female gender by presenting an almost androgynous character in Olivia – like Elizabeth she has the body of a woman but the heart of a man, and Shakespeare challenges contemporary expectations by seeming to suggest that it is perfectly normal, and commendable no less, for a woman to be independent and strong rather than weak.

Indeed, Shakespeare also presents a challenge to the contemporary expectations surrounding masculinity and the male gender not only with his presentation of Orsino, but also his presentation of Sebastian. Hollander describes Orsino as having an 'ursine temperament' that can clearly be seen in how Shakespeare presents and describes a masculine form of love in Act 2 Scene 4, explored in 'For boy, however we do praise ourselves, our fancies are more giddy and unfirm, more longing and wavering, sooner lost and won, than women's are.' Shakespeare presents a challenge to the contemporary expectations surrounding masculinity with how here he seems to suggest that feminine forms of loving triumph and are more romantic than masculine loving, seeming to criticise how his character Orsino, with that 'ursine temperament' Hollander acknowledges, wants to dominate Olivia with his love, in line with contemporary expectations, yet his love is 'sooner lost and won'. Shakespeare challenges the contemporary expectations of chivalric romance on the part of the man, and almost depicts Orsino as the weaker out of him and Olivia, and perhaps by extension Viola, as his love is "more giddy and unfirm.' He goes against the romantic character of Petrarchan sonnets, who stands at gates and is stubborn, by presenting a challenge in the form of the men being weaker, more likely to give into whims of desire, whilst women appear stronger in how dedicated they are. Thus, Shakespeare overall challenges the contemporary expectations surrounding masculinity and the male gender by criticising Orsino's masculinity.

Shakespeare's challenge to the contemporary expectations surrounding masculinity and the male gender can also be seen in his presentation of Sebastian. Although it could be argued that, through Sebastian, Shakespeare certainly does fulfil the contemporary expectations of masculinity, as he is able to stand up for himself in a fight with Sir Andrew, for any of the disguise plot in 'Twelfth Night' to work Sebastian must be equally somewhat feminine as Viola is masculine. Shakespeare presents a challenge to the contemporary expectations surrounding masculinity through his presentation of Sebastian as a somewhat androgynous character, something acknowledged with 'So it comes, lady, you have been mistook; but nature to her bias drew in that. You would have been contracted to a maid; nor are you therein (by my life) deceived; you are betrothed both to a maid and man.' Whilst it can certainly be acknowledged this was possibly just Shakespeare acknowledging how Olivia was to marry Cesario, a man, being played by a woman Viola, though she ultimately ends up marrying the male twin Sebastian, it could also be taken as a confession of Sebastian's own androgyny. 'You are betrothed to both a maid and man' could be understood to be Shakespeare showing Sebastian professing his own understanding of how he must embody both a feminine and a masculine side for him to be the perfect counterpart to Cesario, whom Olivia initially hoped to marry. Indeed, it could further be argued that the understanding of Sebastian as androgynous helps the audience to accept the concluding marriages of the play; if he was entirely masculine, he would be nothing like Cesario, and thus the marriage between him and Olivia would be something disrupted. Therefore, Shakespeare presents a challenge to the contemporary expectations of the masculine gender by putting forward an argument that it is better for one to embody both feminine and masculine traits, and it is more realistic also, than to be entirely feminine or entirely masculine, which he showcases in the cases of Orsino's 'ursine temperament' being used as a criticism against him, and the virtue of Sebastian as an androgynous character.

Finally, and arguably the most famous challenge Shakespeare presents to the contemporary expectations surrounding gender would be Viola, Cesario, and their androgyny. Throughout the play, Shakespeare seems to present an argument that gender is almost fluid, as Viola seems to switch between feminine and masculine, and that fluidity is shown through Shakespeare's use of clothing. This can be seen in 'If nothing lets to make us happy both but this my masculine, usurped attire, do not embrace me till each circumstance of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump that I am Viola; which to confirm, I'll bring you to a captain in this town, where lie my maiden weeds...' Shakespeare uses the contrast between the revelation that Viola is a woman, the 'masculine, usurped attire' and 'maiden weeds' to suggest that Viola, in that moment, stands between the two genders: she is not a man, as it has been discovered, but her clothing dictates she is not a woman. Furthermore, contemporaries of Shakespeare, who took it upon themselves to write behaviour manuals, would chastise the prospect of women wearing men's clothes, arguing that these unformed men, as it was believed women were simply men who had not fully finished developing, were trying to become men. This adds credence to the argument that gender was believed to be dictated by clothing, and thus that Viola, in that moment, seems to stand between the two genders.

Shakespeare also supports this hypothesis with how Orsino follows up this revelation with 'Give me thy hand, and let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.' Through this, Shakespeare suggests to the audience that Viola is not truly a woman, nor is she truly a man, as other characters seem to acknowledge that she must be in women's clothing for her to be considered truly a woman. Yet, with all of this in mind, it begs the question whether Viola, dressed as Cesario, was truly a man in those moments. Thus, Shakespeare presents a challenge to the contemporary expectations surrounding gender by suggesting that gender is only determined by clothing and societal expectations surrounding gender, and that gender alone can be as fluid as putting on a different set of clothes.

Arguably, Shakespeare also presents this androgynous challenge to the contemporary expectations and understanding of gender on a metatheatrical level also. Shapiro argues that 'reflexive allusions to the maleness of the actor' causes the audience to become distinctly aware of the layers of gender identity, and that this ultimately 'counters the emotional crosscurrents' of the heteronormative ending. Although Shakespeare notes that Viola is only becoming a true woman in the eyes of the Illyrians and Sebastian by changing into her women's weeds, she would have been played by a male actor. By having not only Viola but her actor change into a woman's clothing, Shakespeare asks the question of whether the actor himself would be a woman in those moments, and thus the argument that 'reflexive allusions to the maleness of the actor' draws awareness to the 'layers of gender identity' is supported. Moreover, Shapiro argues that this also 'counters the emotional crosscurrents' of the heteronormative marriage. Indeed, Hopkins also notes that the comedic tradition of 'marriage providing comic closure' is a 'tradition Shakespeare habitually disrupts.' Shakespeare presents a challenge here to the contemporary expectations and understanding of gender, especially gender in love and marriage, with how Orsino continues to refer to Viola as 'boy, and even then during their romantic scenes such as Act 1 Scene 4 Orsino is under the assumption that Viola is a boy. This could also arguably be a representation of those reflexive allusions Shapiro notes, and thus Shakespeare presents the challenge to the contemporary expectations and understanding of gender by seemingly suggesting that love transcends traditional gender roles and identities, and thus delivers one final yet undeniable challenge to the contemporary expectations and understandings of gender.

Overall, it is clear to see that Shakespeare delivers multiple challenges to not only his own contemporaries' expectations of gender, but our own too. Shakespeare presents a startlingly modern exploration of androgyny and what gender identity actually means, dipping in and out of gender roles and how they can be subverted. Olivia, for example, is prescribed feminine virtues yet also masculine strength unexpected of a woman. Orsino is criticised for his overwhelming masculinity. Sebastian, Viola, and their combination of characterisation in the form of Cesario explores androgyny in a way that is refreshing, interesting, and challenges conservative, contemporary expectations of gender roles, gender identity, and its impact on love. In this way, Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' is timeless.

Question 17

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

The question asked about the character of Robin.

Doctor Faustus is a popular text on this section, but few candidates chose this question and those who did clearly had an understanding of the character and were able to write about his being a dramatic foil to Faustus. Other approaches involved his function in the morality / cautionary tale or in providing comic relief in the tragedy. Some candidates noted the dramatic paralleling between Robin and Ralph, and Faustus and Wagner and AO2 was addressed with particular attention to Faustus' blank verse and Robin's prose.

Weaker responses to this question tended to show limited textual knowledge and struggled to engage beyond superficial levels

Here is an extract from a Level 4 response that showed discriminating understanding of text and context but did not quite sustain the focus on Marlowe's dramatic craft:

...Marlowe presents Robin in chiastic structure to Faustus in order to comment on the insufficiency of the assumptions of the feudal system by conveying to his audience that how a person acts does not depend on their class. This is most obvious in the consecutive scenes of Faustus teasing the pope and Robin teasing a vintner, the only evident difference being the class of their victim, showing that action does not depend on class. Marlowe's use of the simplistic form of comedy, slapstick, in both scenes as the characters manipulate and move objects in order to deceive their victim shows how Faustus has been reduced to the same base level despite his unlimited powers and knowledge. Marlowe makes the similarities unavoidably evident by having Robin carry out the exact same act of Faustus [snatching the cup] as he steals and hides a goblet from the vintner. In fact, whilst Faustus does it with magic, Robin does it without, suggesting that Faustus' magic has but only reduced him to the level of those he scorned at. The main difference in these two scenes is in the consequences as while Mephistopheles aids and even encourages Faustus in his mockery of the pope by giving him an invisibility robe, Robin and Rafe are punished, which reflects the unequal treatment of the two classes. Mephistopheles's words to Faustus, 'now do what thou wilt, thou shalt not be discerned' compared to his exclamation at Robin and Rafe, 'how am I vexed with these villains charms!' presents how more commonly the upper class are able to get away with their wrongdoings whilst the lower class are written off and condemned. Moreover, Marlowe presents how this unequal treatment creates unequal responses. Whilst Faustus indulged in his anguish with a soliloquy before his punishment of being condemned to hell, Robin says only two lines in response to being turned into an ape, the contrasting mean line of utterance showing the relevance of each class in society. Also, Marlowe wants us to admire Robin's response, 'How, into an ape? That's brave. I'll have fine sport with the boys; I'll get nuts and apples enough' as it so quickly transforms a punishment into an advantage. By having a lower character speak such simple yet intelligent words, Marlowe encourages his audience to consider that a low birth right does not mean they can have no contribution to society.

As a supporter of meritocracy over aristocracy Marlowe thought people should be valued by their mind not their birth right, and although Robin is of low class and uneducated, he still speaks words that hold wisdom. Thus, Marlowe presents Robin as counterpart to Faustus to both show how Faustus has reduced himself through the pursuit of magic and that Robin's class does not mean his words should be any less important than those above him as only a substantial education, an advantage of the upper class, sets them apart...

Question 18

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

The question asked about free will.

This was the more popular question and there were many highly competent responses, covering a range of the play.

Examiners commented: AO3 was often strong in terms of historical context, but some discussions became too philosophical and showed limited appreciation of the text as a play. Equally, there were candidates who had very relevant contextual knowledge, but found it tricky to craft an argument with several ideas. Answers very much focused around Faustus, which is understandable. There did tend at times to be very lengthy and verbose exploration of the Icarus imagery, and often a very heavy focus on the opening exposition.

Here is an example of a very full Level 4 response where there is not enough engagement with the text itself to merit Level 5:

Written at a time of radical, social, theological and scientific upheaval, Marlowe's polyphonic text explores the theme of free will from a variety of perspectives, reflecting the wider ideological conflicts at work within an Elizabethan society as it transitioned from a medieval to a renaissance world view. Through contemporary ideas of Calvinistic teachings of predestination, perhaps Marlowe is critical of these beliefs and therefore shows that no matter what Faustus attempted to do he was always destined for Hell.

Marlowe explores free will consistently throughout the play, such as revealing Faustus to be foolish in his complete disregard of warnings from a stock devil, exemplifying that his free will is completely real and he himself chooses damnation.

Initially, Chorus 1 foreshadows Faustus' tragic downfall through his hubristic desires. 'Till swollen with cunning of self-conceit, His waxen wings did mount above his reach, And melting heavens conspired his overthrow'. The foreshadowing of Faustus' downfall is evident in the allusion to Icarus here, who defied the limitations set by God to escape Crete and flew too close to the sun with his 'waxen wings' and subsequently plummeted to his death. The phrase 'till swollen with cunning of self-conceit' exposes Faustus excessive intellectual appetite for knowledge, to which he is 'swollen' with greed, therefore showing that his free will enables him to transgress against the divine to pursue these intellectual endeavours that are not accepted within the boundaries.

Alternatively though, Marlowe may be critiquing Calvinistic beliefs in predestination by the description 'And melting heavens conspired his overthrow' which hints at the subversive notion that God is not loving, forgiving and kind but rather vindictive, evil and Machiavellian. Perhaps Marlowe is suggesting that Faustus was doomed from the start, which is what Henderson argues Faustus was 'doomed to hell from Chorus 1', and therefore obfuscating any chance that he may be saved as a result, because teachings of predestination taught that if you were not one of Gods 'elects' and instead a 'reprobate' no matter your life choices, good or evil, you were damned to hell regardless. This reinforces the idea that Faustus may have no free will. This quote could also link to atheism. Marlowe himself was accused of atheism as his roommate Thomas Kyd confessed under torture that Marlowe was making atheism plays. As well as this Marlowe apparently stated that 'the bible was so filthy written, he could have written a better version', so the subversive notion of 'conspired' could hint at Marlowe's contemporary atheism that God does in fact exist, however he is evil.

Alternatively though, Faustus arguably could be presented as a sinful heretic who wilfully chooses damnation, his free will completely belonging to him and his imminent damnation is at no fault other than his own. In scene 3, his 'conjuring' of spirits, although later we learn Mephistopheles was sent by Lucifer, can be described as a hubristic attempt to use Necromancy to obtain God like powers of omniscience and omnipotence. Mephistopheles subverts the cliched conventions of stock medieval morality play conventions by warning Faustus of the 'unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer'. Which again shows that at this point there is no evil spirits waging for Faustus' soul rather he has his own free will to choose. Typically in Medieval morality plays, the devil's soul purpose was to persuade the hero into sin and damnation. However, here Marlowe takes a different approach by giving Mephistopheles a wider form of human characteristics which perhaps reflects the more Renaissance change to a more anthropocentric view rather than just solely religion, this further shows Faustus' foolishness in choosing damnation in his free will. Mephistopheles claim that Hell is a psychological place 'why this is hell nor am I out of it. Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God, And tasted the eternal joys of heaven, Am not tormented with ten thousand hells' reveals a change in the perception of hell as a psychological state of eternal punishment, rather than physical. This could perhaps again reinforce the changing ideas within Marlowe's society to a focus on a more anthropocentric view.

Alternatively though, Mephistopheles is a Machiavellian tempter who leads Faustus to damnation and obfuscates his free will. Marlowe uses an aside to reveal Mephistopheles' true cunning ambitions to wager war on Faustus' soul, 'O what will I not do to obtain his soul!'. This reveals his true motivations from the start and would revert the audience's initial stereotype of him as a Machiavellian tempter. This cleverly makes Marlowe's polyphonic play so ambiguous that it is open to a range of interpretations, is Faustus a hubristic overreaching individual who has full free will to go against the divine? Or is he manipulated by evil forces or Calvinism and therefore has no agency in his pursuit of damnation.

The final scene creates huge tension within the audience about whether Faustus will be damned or saved, his free will, or lack of, is a huge point. Faustus states 'Now hast thou but one bare hour to live, And then thou must be damned perpetually'. The eleven monosyllables reflect the time, eleven, and the ephemeral nature of Faustus' existence as he comes to the end of his life. The speed in which the final scene approaches within the play, demonstrates how Faustus' deal for 24 years of magic was ultimately futile as all he really did was fulfil his hedonistic desires of meaningless pranks. However though, the carnivalesque aspect of the comic scenes involving the pope not only show the foolishness of Faustus as he uses his necromancy for pranks, but serves as a direct critique of the Catholic church as Faustus slaps the pope and critiques them for their greed of food which is a recurring motif within the play.

Overall, Marlowe's polyphonic text could perhaps show that Faustus is a hubristic overreacher who wilfully chooses damnation through his clear free will. Alternatively though, Faustus could arguably have been damned to hell from the start, with the subversive notion 'conspiring' which hints at the contemporary, atheism belief that God is evil and therefore has no free will, or even a more modern interpretation which Bevington states that 'God is starkly absent in the play' and therefore Marlowe could be arguing there is no god at all.

Question 19

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The question asked about imagery and symbolism.

Over half of all candidates who had studied *The Duchess of Malfi* chose to answer this question.

Unsurprisingly, nearly all candidates demonstrated a particular focus on AO2 for this question. The key differentiator was AO1. There were many essays with individual paragraphs of strong, discriminating, Level 4 AO2 analysis, but with little attempt to form an argument. Common approaches tended to be either three or four sections on different kinds of imagery or symbolism or three or four sections on different themes or characters and how imagery/symbolism was used to present each or a focus on a particular theme in the play and how imagery and symbolism are used to present it. The question gave candidates considerable freedom, as long as they chose an appropriate topic and ensured their chosen evidence was consistently relevant to the title. Corruption worked well.

Here is an extract where the candidate is linking their ideas successfully, and has a clear overarching argument, but has taken care to ensure that their response to AO2 focuses on the title:

...Nonetheless, following the birth of her son in Act2, the themes of life and freedom seem to triumph in the play. In contrast to this newfound liberty, Webster uses the relationship between Julie and the Cardinal to work as dramatic foils, using imagery of birds and domestication. The Cardinal asserts, 'I have broken you off your melancholy perch, bore you upon my fist and showed you game and let you fly for it. The listed actions executed seem to give complete accountability and control to the Cardinal. Described as a 'tame elephant' Julia's lack of autonomy is stressed. Interestingly, following this interaction as Julia is confronted by Delio, Webster has her adopt the language of the Cardinal' I have a bird more beautiful...'

Some candidates decided to focus on individual, extended images in each paragraph, for example the similes beginning "prince's court is like a common fountain", or "like plum trees... over standing pools". The issue here was that 'zooming in' on elements of the image often led to some very mechanical, explanatory AO2. Additionally, this could be at the expense of the play as a whole. Responses that focused on three very short extracts were unlikely to demonstrate an overall clear understanding for a secure Level 3.

Here, however, is an extract from a Level 5 response that explores the use of one symbol over the course of the play:

... One of the most significant symbols in the Duchess of Malfi is that of the Duchess' ring. Webster employs the ring as a symbol of her inevitable doom at the hands of her brothers. The ring is first introduced when Ferdinand enters. He questions his courtiers, 'Who took the ring the oftenest' in the jousting contest. This is a subtle reference which the audience may only notice later in the play: Ferdinand's interest in the ring is immediately foregrounded by the demanding tone of his questioning and suggests a desire for control which he will eventually gain.

As the duchess attempts to seduce Antonio the symbol of the ring appears again. Antonio initially refuses to take it from her as he sees a 'saucy and ambitious devil...dancing in the circle'. The ring is explicitly linked to hell in this exchange, and it becomes a bad omen for Antonio's and the Duchess' marriage. This event occurs immediately after the Cardinal warned 'the marriage night / is the entrance to some prison' and so, while the interaction between Antonio and the Duchess appears light hearted, there is an ominous association with imprisonment and suffering surrounding the ring.

Later in the play the Duchess is banished from Malfi. The Cardinal exerts power and control over her by taking her ring from her finger 'with such violence'. The seizing of her ring foreshadows suffering for the Duchess, for the Cardinal has been continually linked with hell throughout the play and thus it is suggested that the 'devil' in the ring is the wrath of the Cardinal. This suggestion is backed up when an observing pilgrim notes, 'He vowed shortly he would sacrifice it [the ring] to his revenge'. This implies that the cardinal is not yet finished in his revenge on the duchess.

Webster uses the symbolism of the ring once more in the scene where the Duchess dies. It is significant that she dies by strangulation as it is the ultimate 'ring' she will encounter. The omens of death, suffering and control culminate in this final and inevitable image of the brothers' power over her...

Question 20

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The question asked about features of revenge tragedy.

Although this was a popular question, a number of candidates seemed not to be confident in exploring revenge tragedy nor tragedy itself as a genre. The latter was surprising, given that many of the candidates will have studied a Shakespearean tragedy for Section A and would therefore have read the material on the theory of tragedy from the first half of the Critical Anthology. Even if they had studied a comedy, both sections of the Critical Anthology are freely available from Pearson; given that Webster's play was first performed within a decade of *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, candidates should be encouraged to consider how theories of so-called 'Shakespearean tragedy' could apply to the works of his contemporaries. Whilst AO5 is not credited in this part of the paper, the literary context of tragedy (revenge tragedy, Aristotelean conventions, and so on) remains relevant as AO3.

Here is a fairly solid introduction:

Jacobean revenge tragedy 'The Duchess of Malfi' first performed in 1614 and written by John Webster utilise, as well as subverts, multiple common features of revenge tragedies. These features include the utilisation of typical tragic character types: the malcontent and the machiavellian characters for example, as well as including the typical tragic theme of madness and the intensely dark and gory imagery ...

This response is typical of a high Level 3, in that we are told very clearly what the candidate intends to tell us about. However, the listing approach does show a very clear understanding of the conventions of revenge tragedy, with appropriate critical vocabulary. The use of "utilises, as well as subverts" offers a hint that the candidate may show a more discriminating and nuanced understanding.

There were many essays on the "theme of revenge", often written in a fairly explanatory way about the exact moments where revenge was taken. A significant number of responses lacked relevance, focusing on general discussions the Duchess or Bosola, and only mentioning revenge in the introduction or conclusion. Much more successful responses explored the generic roles and other features of the revenge tragedy and analysed the ways Webster usurped these.

Here is an example of a good Level 4 response:

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster makes use of the revenge tragedy conventions to explore gender, mostly the role of women. Revenge tragedies were popular in the Jacobean period, with Webster known for *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*, sometimes regarded as sensationalist plays only with the intention of being popular by other playwrights. Therefore, these revenge tragedy features would have been used to characterise the play to an audience and exhibit what was popular at the time. The conventions such as a bloody ending with multiple deaths on stage, a foreign court, and themes of corruption are all explored, with the archetype of the revenger, the use of poison, and themes of family honour reflecting beliefs about women and exploring the revenge tragedy as a masculine genre.

The features of revenge tragedy, such as the male titular character taking the role of revenger, are mostly subverted in the *Duchess of Malfi*, the titular character being the Duchess herself which would have been unusual to a Jacobean audience (even though Webster continues this trend in the *White Devil*, it would have been unusual for other plays). Despite being the titular character and plot of the play revolving around her, the *Duchess of Malfi* could still be argued as a male story, with the Duchess dying in the fourth act; her death acting as a catalyst to the remaining action. Breaking revenge tragedy conventions, the titular character does not take the role of revenger and is instead used as an explanation for other characters to inact their revenge: it could be debated which male character is the revenger, with multiple taking revenging roles. Bosola could be interpreted as the malcontent, initially taking part in the Duchess' murder but then shifting to a revenging character after he is disgusted with what he has done, or perhaps after being refused payment for his services by Ferdinand who instead gives '[him] a pardon for this murder'. Bosola vows to revenge the Duchess with 'I will speedily enact worth my dejection', establishing him as a character in this scene who is giving himself the role of a conventional revenge tragedy protagonist.

However, Antonio could additionally be argued as the revenger, initially wanting to 'draw the poison' out of the Cardinal, until he discovers his wife's murder in which he decides to 'lose all or nothing'. However, this argument is limited, with Antonio being accidentally murdered by Bosola in the scene after the echo, leaving Bosola to enact the revenge in the final scene typical of revenge tragedies where multiple bloody deaths take place on stage. Ferdinand could additionally be interpreted as the revenger who aims to revenge his family's bloodline, however with his role as an antagonist who is consumed in his madness limiting this argument, due to the protagonists usually revenging against a corruption instead of being the corruption itself. Evaluating these arguments, all characters who exhibit revenger qualities are male, despite the protagonist of the play being female, demonstrating how this role is fixed as masculine regardless of the revenge tragedy's narrative.

A convention of revenge tragedy that is used to express the genre as gendered is the theme of honour and family honour. In revenge tragedies, the male, higher social class protagonist typically aims to revenge against tainted or destroyed honour within his family. This theme of family honour and revenging family honour is depicted, however in a different way. Ferdinand and the Cardinal plan for the Duchess to never remarry, potentially due to it tainting her honour and her bloodline, more significantly when marrying down in social status (as she marries Antonio who is below her in status). Those who are most luxurious will wed twice' immediately establishes the brothers' fears about the Duchess when they are alone with her in the first act. The semantic field of poison and contamination is used in 'livers are more spotted than Laban's sheep', 'poison your fame', and 'give the devil suck' reflects the fear that remarrying will 'sway [the Duchess'] high blood', with the direct reference to honour made. In the Jacobean period, it was conventional for women to marry for social and economic stability, with their marriage arrangements controlled by the men in their family. However, it was becoming slightly more fashionable for women to marry for love, therefore creating tension in upper class families as the fear arose of women tainting their high blood by marrying against their father's (or in the Duchess' case: brothers') wishes. This fear is evaluated in the play, with the next scene presenting the Duchess marrying supposedly for love to a man below her in social class, the very thing upper class families feared that their daughters would do. As she proposes, she metaphorically raises Antonio up in social standing, reflected in her *[raising) him' as she 'puts the ring upon his finger'. This marriage is her undoing, perhaps in revenge tragedy convention acts as her harmartia, where in a similar fashion she is strangled on her knees so she can raise herself up to Heaven. However, despite her flaw of remarrying below her, she is represented honourably in her death, reflecting how a Jacobean audience could have recognised this new trend of marrying for love and have been sympathetic to her character. Within this, the theme of honour present in typical revenge tragedies is explored, commenting on the male concerns regarding family honour and how they must protect it, in addition to perhaps a more sympathetic outlook Webster makes use of the revenge tragedy convention of a physical poison that represents a metaphorical poison, shown in the murder of Julia. With the revenge tragedy being a male dominated genre, this poison is used on a character who is a mistress for the Cardinal and who attempts to woo Bosola, reflecting the latter half of the virgin-whore dichotomy. Julia is reduced to being an animal through the use of lexical codes, such as the extended metaphor 'taken you off your melancholy perch, bore you upon my fist, and show'd you game, and let you fly at it', emphasised further by the simile like a tame elephant' where Julia is an animal to be tamed by men, and later by Bosola who calls her a 'creature'. With this, a more archetypical (compared to the Duchess) representation of women is shown. Julia is murdered by the Cardinal from kissing a poisoned bible after being revealed the secret of the Duchess' murder; the physical poison could represent the metaphorical poison of the secret Julia states 'lies not in [her] to conceal', a poison from the Cardinal's corruption that causes her death. The poison – as a revenge tragedy tool – is used to silence her, just as the Duchess is silenced in her death, at the hands of the men around them.

However, ultimately, her death is used as a plot device to further Bosola's role as a revenger and can be argued as insignificant, further exploring the revenge tragedy genre as inherently male: the corruption of men causes the murder of women, who are used to further the narratives of male characters and fulfil their revenge tragedy roles.

Overall, revenge tragedy features are used to establish the play's genre in a clear way that would be accessible to a contemporary audience. However, they are also used to explore Jacobean ideas about gender in binary opposition, where women cannot fulfil the revenge tragedy roles of men, despite being potential protagonists, and are the victims of their corruption. Despite this, the Duchess remains a ruler represented as 'right and noble' 'prince', masculine qualities that could reflect the success of the late Queen, and therefore could be Webster exploring less fixed roles of women within the male dominated genre.

AO2 language and structure analysis was sometimes very difficult to find. Some responses, however, managed both to integrate the assessment objectives, and to focus on the question in a way that demonstrated their knowledge of the genre.

Here is an example of a borderline Level 2/Level 3 extract:

The revenge begins as male authoritative figures attempt to take back control and power over women and society. The Duchess' rebellion causes anger and instability to occur especially within Ferdinand, 'I could kill her now'. His lust for revenge seems overwhelming as Webster forces uncontrollable anger onto him. Allowing the audience to view the corruption of societal male figures and their need for dominance. Ferdinand presents violence and destruction 'Till of her bleeding hear tI make a sponge to wipe it out'. The use of 'heart' links to the Duchess' want for love and marriage, creating vivid imagery of the violent murder of his sister. This is known as siblicide ...

This is clearly expressed: the opening sentence sets up an argument, and there is general relevance to the question. A quotation is provided in evidence; discussion of this is essentially descriptive but it does help to develop the argument clearly. There is then an attempt to incorporate AO2 – “presents violence and destruction”, “the use of heart”, “vivid imagery” demonstrates the general approach to language characterising Level 2. It is also, perhaps, not the best part of the quotation to focus on. Clearer analysis of this imagery, that focused primarily on Ferdinand's violent motives, would have merited a fairly secure Level 3 mark.

Question 21

THE HOME PLACE

The question asked about confrontation.

All candidates chose this question. Approaches taken tended to explore characters who were in conflict with each other. Better responses looked closely at confrontation in dramatic set pieces and linked this to Friel's exploration of wider social conflict.

Here is an example of a Level 4 response, that is a little under-developed but keeps the focus on the text as a piece of drama:

In Brian Friel's contemporary Anglo-Irish tragic play, 'The Home Place', written in 2005, and set in 1878 in the imagined town of Ballybeg, he makes use of confrontation, understood here to be intense and direct conflict between two opposing sides, through the intense tension in Ireland that surrounds the play, setting it just a year before the Land Wars. Equally, Friel makes uses of confrontation at the climax of the play, in which Christopher's initial decision brings about his peripeteia and exile.

Friel makes use of confrontation in the first Act of the play through the social tension that surrounds the Lodge. The play starts at Christopher's return from Lord Lifford's funeral, another Anglo-Irish Ascendant and plantation owner. Lifford's death, based upon the real murder of the Earl of Leitrim of the same year, occurred while he was on his way to evict one of his tenants in which he was hit with a 'granite rock'. This rock, native to Ireland, is extremely dense, and is symbolic thus of the strength of the feeling behind it, as farmers and tenants were becoming more resentful and hateful towards the Landlords eventually leading up to the Irish Land League and therefore the Land Wars. Furthermore, this rock can be seen to symbolise the Irish soil itself fighting back against the control of the English.

Therefore, Friel makes use confrontation that preceded the start of the play to create enormous tension in the build up to the structural climax. This confrontation is directed by the presence of the Fenian, Con, a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood formed in 1858, who is, in the initial stage directions of the play, seen 'to emerge briefly from the thicket' of the That surrounds the Lodge, and that simultaneously isolates and traps the Gores. Con, here, represents the intruding threat of the same Irish hatred that killed Lifford. Furthermore, the presence of Christopher's cousin, the eugenicist, Richard Gore, a stereotypical follower of Galton and A.C. Haddon, and the craniology experiments he carries out on the 'specimens', the label he gives to the Irish townsfolk he measures, the word entirely dehumanising and depersonalising, serves as a direct and intense contrast to Con's nationalist views.

Thus Friel makes use of confrontation in the first act of the play by building enormous tension, both through previous moments of confrontation, but equally, by creating enormous tension through the hugely conflicting principles of Richard and Con, making tragedy inevitable.

Friel makes use of confrontation in the second act of his play, by depicting a total reversal of Christopher's fate. Christopher starts the play in a position of nobility, as is essential for an Aristotelian tragic protagonist, as he has both racial links to Kent and physical links to Ireland, however this is entirely reversed by the critical decision he is forced to make. During Richard's experiments, in which he himself conducts the poor townsfolk that volunteered, shouting monosyllabic commands e.g. 'up!' and 'next!' and thus totally dehumanising them, Con appears at the Lodge. He calmly demands that Christopher must 'tell your cousin to pack his things and leave', the verb 'tell' delivered in the imperative indicating Con's control, and Christopher initially 'orders' Con to leave, affirming that 'this is my home', the first person singular possessive determiner 'my' here being extremely politically charged, due to the Irish penal law of 1695 banning the Catholic Irish from owning land, thus enforcing the power and ownership Christopher should have. However, due to the sense of conflict Friel creates in the first act of the play, the allusive threat of the man that 'acquired some little fame' from killing Lifford and his associates is enough to lead Christopher to conclude that Richard and Jenkins will 'leave immediately', his urgency here conveying his fear. Thus, having been labelled a 'traitor' by Richard, Christopher is exiled from his English family and his ... of Kent, and becomes an 'exile' in Ireland, having lost his respect. Therefore Friel makes use of confrontation in the second act of the play to bring about his tragic protagonist's downfall, leaving Christopher an entirely broken man by the end of the play.

In conclusion, Brian Friel makes use of the intense confrontation at the dawn of the Land Wars in Ireland to elevate the tension in the first half of the play, in the build up to its climax. Furthermore, Friel portrays confrontation through the critical decision Christopher is forced to make, that leaves him entirely exhausted and destroyed by the end of the play.

Question 22

THE HOME PLACE

The question asked about the play being about myth.

There were no responses to this question.

Question 23

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

The question asked about an uncertain world.

A Streetcar Named Desire is by far the most popular text on Section B, and about a fifth of candidates chose this question.

Most responses focused on Blanche's uncertain world, but more interesting answers considered Stanley, who seemed to exude certainty and confidence, but this was actually fragile and easily shaken by the arrival of Blanche. Other effective responses looked at the techniques Williams used to create uncertainty in the audience and considered the play in the context of the 'Southern Gothic' genre.

Examiners commented:

- It was frequently the case that candidates wrote laboriously and at considerable length about the opening stage directions, and then about the ending, but not much in between, leading to very narrow responses.
- For several candidates, there was the sense that they were really answering Question 24: predominantly focused on an analysis of the Old South vs New South, rather than nuanced dissection of the concepts in the play. A lot of very character-driven essays were prevalent – limited to Blanche being representative of the past, Stanley the present and Blanche is incongruous – therefore in an uncertain world. Straight character-driven responses again were very limiting for students though analysis of plastic theatre often helped engage the students with more than just character representations.
- The responses were significantly focused on Blanche's 'incongruous' placement in the setting of Elysian fields. Context heavily relied upon Williams' own life being uncertain, with his alcoholic and abusive father, his own homosexuality, Rose's frontal lobotomy and New Orleans v the Antebellum South.

Here is an example of a high level response to this question. It's very well-argued, there is sustained focus on the question and Williams' dramatic craft is consistently front and centre:

The world of America in which Williams sets *Streetcar* at first seems completely determined and firm. The ideals of the old south had been abandoned after the civil war in favour of building the new America, shown by the dominant masculinity of Stanley and the aggression of the setting of New Orleans. However, Williams uses the play to criticise this dramatic U-turn in ideology, with his sympathetic portrayal of Blanche.

It might seem at first glance that the world in which *Streetcar* is set couldn't be less uncertain. New Orleans is presented as a haven of the masculine values now seen as important in America – after the Civil War and then the Second World War; the ideals of the Old South were left for dead while young, virile working men were thrust into the spotlight as America's new heroes who would build a new world. It's notable that Stanley wears a red silk bowling shirt – the richness and regality of the colour red and expensive silk elevates this working class attire, implying that the working class holds the power in this new America. Men like Stanley are praised for their physical vitality – though the men calm him down after he hits Stella, they all seem in awe of his physical prowess. All men in the play are constantly likened to animals, with Stanley compared to 'a richly feathered male bird among hens', 'stalking' across the stage and pursuing Blanche like an animal pursues prey. Even the domesticated Mitch is a 'dancing bear'.

In fact, New Orleans is almost an urban Garden of Eden, where its inhabitants are free to pursue their desires exempt from traditional morals and ethics. Williams's descriptions of life in New Orleans imbue it with an almost religious quality – after sleeping with Stanley, Stella has an expression like that of 'eastern idols'. The commotion of 'street cries' sounds like a 'choral chant' – this implies that the chaos of the city is what makes it a paradise. Whereas the Old South used Christianity to dictate the values and etiquette of society, Williams here implies that the new America follows a religion based on violence, chaos and sex. And if New Orleans is a paradise, it is one from which Blanche is markedly cast out from.

The name 'Dubois' means 'of the woods' in French, implying something pastoral and idyllic. In contrast, New Orleans is often likened to a jungle, which is instead uncultivated and uncivilised. Before Stanley rapes Blanche, she hears 'inhuman cries like voices in a jungle' – she feels so cut off from the world that those around her are not even of the same species. Her subsequent rape is seen by some critics as the triumph of Stanley in ridding the world of the ghosts that held it in the past – although Williams of course generates sympathy for Blanche, many earlier audiences, who were caught up in the new belief in the need to establish a new American world, found that this violence was necessary in order for the world to progress. The play could therefore be seen simply as a parable for the fall of the Old South and its traditional values.

However, Blanche's defeat does not come easily, and leaves a lingering impression on the audience as well as the other characters in the play. The play hinges around the battle between Stanley and Blanche and the ideals they represent, but there is a sense that this battle will never end – the world will always be uncertain and torn between vitality and culture.

The foremost meaning of the battle between Stanley and Blanche that takes place throughout the play is that it epitomises the battle between old and new taking place in America, with the winner deciding America's uncertain future. After the second world war, men like Stanley who had been praised for their violence on the battlefield now needed an outlet for their masculine energy – Stella and Stanley's tiny apartment thus becomes a warzone between the two polarised forces of Stanley and Blanche. Both engage in a combat for power and territory – Blanche spreads dainty silks over the furniture as a reminder of the femininity and high class that she represents, and the jasmine perfume which she spreads throughout the air of the apartment is reminiscent of the pheromones emitted by animals to secure territory. Stanley in turn pollutes this with his masculine sweat and cigarette smoke and combats her dainty accessories with physical violence – he finally destroys all reminders of Blanche in the apartment as he "seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light-bulb...she cries out as if the lantern was herself".

But although Stanley achieves a temporary victory, by the end of the play he is clearly a villain figure, jarring with the final portrayal of him as a perfect family man as he stands with his wife and child. Modern audiences are likely to at first praise Stanley for his refusal to accept being called a 'Polack' and his assertions that he is 'one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on the earth and proud as hell of it', while Blanche in contrast seems snobby and xenophobic as she describes Stanley as 'sub-human'. However, as the play progresses we realise that these are characters that exist outside of time and social context. Blanche's connections to slavery are never directly addressed, implying that she isn't intended to carry all the moral weight of the old South – instead she represents ideas like culture, femininity and vulnerability that will always exist.

Furthering this is the fact that in a stage direction, Williams says of Blanche that it is 'as though all human experience showed on her face.'. Williams takes a story which seems at first to be the triumph of a new masculine America and complicates it, creating an uncertain a narrative that leaves the audience questioning the values of the new America.

Williams presents the character of Blanche as being unable to keep a firm grip on the reality of the world around her. He was a pioneer of expressionist theatre and uses its innovative techniques to show the interior of Blanche's mind, allowing for far more explicit depictions of mental illness than had been seen before. In Williams' set, walls melt with a change of lighting, signifying the uncertainty and instability Blanche feels in New Orleans, and figures are projected onto the wall to show the street outside as well as the inside of Blanche's head – even the audience is uncertain of how we should perceive this world. The play's ending of Blanche being sent to an asylum is even further complicated – we can see her mental illness but know that this is also based on Stanley's dangerous violence and Stella's own decision that she 'couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley', her wording making it clear that she is purposefully deluding herself. Even the fact that she doesn't die at the end leaves the play with further uncertainty.

Williams refutes the idea of dramatic societal change being progressive by highlighting the uncertainty and grey areas constantly prevalent in the world. Though Williams draws on a narrative that might suggest the certain supremacy of the new American world, he subverts this common idea with his negative depiction of the men that were increasingly seen as heroes. Eventually we are left with the impression that the morals of the world are uncertain.

Question 24

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

The question asked about tension between the past and the present.

This was the overwhelmingly popular question on the paper. There were many clear and straightforward responses, and an important distinguisher of higher levels was consideration of the word 'tension' which was rather overlooked by some candidates. Quite a few responses were character-driven, for example, Blanche being unable to escape her past; Blanche representing the past, while Stanley represents the future. Many candidates explored the play as a reflection of a changing society, of the tension between the Old and New South and others commented on Williams' use of plastic theatre techniques and other dramatic approaches to create tension and establish a sense of the past intruding on the present.

Examiners commented:

- Weaker responses tended to take a narrative approach to the presentation of 'past and present' and did not address the 'presentation' of the theme in sufficient depth. Stronger responses effectively integrated context and made perceptive points about the loss of Blanche's past, although the play's plangent atmosphere in relation to Belle Reve was identified quite rarely.
- Some candidates simply read this question as 'tension between the Old South and the New South' and re-hashed their prepared Blanche v Stanley arguments, missing a lot of the nuances of Williams' style and the way sets mood in the play.
- The highest marks were awarded to responses that focussed fully on the question, i.e. 'tension' and 'past and present'. Too many simply re-hashed the Old South v New South material and failed to explore the means by which Williams crafted tension in his drama.
- Many responses *contrasted* past and present; not all focused on tensions between past and present. It was common to see fairly long sections discussing Blanche as a representative of the Old South and Stanley as a representative of the New South: whilst these often contained clear AO2 and AO3, they were not directly addressing the question itself.
- More developed answers considered Stella as the epitome of that tension, the way at times she mirrors and mimics Blanche, but ultimately chooses Stanley.

- A volume of answers had passages which were very similar to each other and were essentially repetitions of analysis available on popular online revision websites. This did not directly affect their score but it is clear that students are very heavily learning analysis of both *Blanche* and *Stanley* – in particular at the opening of the play – and then taking an approach whereby they refer to the specific question at the start and end of paragraphs in order to make it relevant and then repeat their learnt material in between. *Blanche* and *Stanley* dominated responses and some students established them as symbols of the past and present but then left behind the question once that point had been briefly made. A few students went awry because they identified the word “tension” in the question but then left behind the “past” and “present” to talk about tension in general.
- Candidates who engaged more genuinely with the specific question throughout had some very interesting evaluation of Williams’ messaging and intentions. Diversity has been a welcome focal point in the teaching of Literature and some high-level students had some very thoughtful consideration of the racial complexities in the background of how past and present tensions relate to context – particularly in comparison to answers in past years in which students’ views on context have been remarkably forgiving of the culture of the plantation-owning South.
- Time seemed to be a factor generally in Section B and this cohort may have been impacted by online learning and therefore suffered wrist fatigue. There was lots of biographical detail about Williams himself and this rarely impressed unless it was used as part of an evaluation regarding the dramatist’s purpose. Few candidates mentioned the epigraph or explored the southern gothic genre. AO2 was disappointing in a lot of responses that relied on analysing the ‘white bodice’ and little else. Quite a few used quotes to narrate the plot or to support a point but didn’t analyse these. There was lots of useful discussion of plastic theatre and expressionism which helped to show an appreciation for the text as a play.

Here is the introduction to a fairly general, Level 2 response:

In 'A Streetcar Named Desire' tension between the past and the present can be shown through a number of factors. One way the tension between the past and the present is shown is through Blanche's harsh critique of Stanley and Stella's apartment. Also, tension between the past and the present may be viewed through the clothing of Stanley and Blanche. Moreover, tension between the past and present may be shown through the actions of Stanley and the violence in the play. The past and present may refer to the Old South and the changing North of America. The Old South had traditional values which ultimately caused conflict between the North and south of America.

And to more focussed, more discriminating, Level 4 response:

Williams opens the play with stage directions depicting post-war life in New Orleans, the rich details which contribute to the 'raffish charm', familiar to him as a resident of the city. The optimistic present of the setting's diversity, however, quickly becomes clouded by mention of the 'redolences of bananas and coffee' which bring the reader back to connotations of the slave trade. This shift between past and present ideals remains evident and is strongly built upon against this vivacious backdrop of a setting; with Williams using the oppositions of music, contrapuntal differences in the ideals of Blanche and Stanley and Blanche's choice of 'magic' over realism to depict tensions between past and present worlds.

Here is an example of a Level 4 response. It begins in a fairly straightforward way, but moves beyond the obvious clash between Blanche and Stanley to consider Stella's role in establishing tension and, more effectively, to consider how Williams uses expressionist techniques to convey the past/ present tension in Blanche herself:

The premise of 'A Streetcar Named Desire' lies in the exploration of two very different eras and the battle between past and present. The main cause of tension and conflict within the play centres around the characters of Stanley and Blanche, whose starkly different backgrounds and outlooks on life cause tension, and ultimately, catastrophe.

The character Blanche is initially presented as an archetypal 'Southern Belle' in her outward display of innocence and purity, from her 'white suit' to her 'pearl earrings'. Blanche is portrayed as being emblematic of the Old South, part of an ancient Southern aristocracy who gained money from the exploitation of slaves. Blanche appears proud of her heritage, asserting that her family descended from the 'French Huguenots'. Blanche is, outwardly, presented as a woman with prudish, chaste values so revered by this old era and she clings desperately to this identity. Despite this, however, her penchant for illusion and her ultimately unstable mindset set her apart from this innocent yet antiquated figure – she relies on a façade of 'magic' to cover her promiscuity and lies.

Blanche and Stanley's relationship sheds light on the conflict between old and new. Stanley, a working-class immigrant from Poland, can be viewed through a Marxist lens as being a champion of the working class. Williams shows Stanley to be symbolic of the new 'melting pot' nation of America – he is described a 'gaudy seed bearer' asserting the dominance of men over women in post-war America and the reversion to traditional gender roles. Williams utilises Blanche's superiority to create tension between the two characters – she calls Stanley a 'Polack', a racist slur for a Polish person, emphasising old attitudes on immigration and race relations. Stanley's insecurity at being part of this new society comes to light – he insists that he is 'one hundred per cent American' and we can infer from this that perhaps ancient prejudices still take their toll on the new society presented in 'A Streetcar Named Desire'.

Throughout the play, Williams reflects on the gradual demise of the Old South through the character of Blanche, presenting her gradually declining mental state. In this way we can associate Williams' work with that of the 'Southern Gothic' genre, depicting the destruction of old eras and old families. Stanley's violence and aggression towards Blanche, for instance, when he 'kicks the trunk' containing her things, gradually escalating throughout the play ending with his picking up her 'inert figure', implying his rape of her, suggests the ongoing battle between the past and the present. When Stanley eventually rapes Blanche, as is implied by Williams, we could view this as the ultimate destruction of the Old South. This transgressive act is potentially the climax of the play so it is fitting that such a thing would be tied to a wider victory – the destruction of the old America, with its prejudices and prudishness, as depicted by Blanche, and the rise of a new social order of a hard-working, physical and dominant working class, as represented by Stanley.

Stella, Blanche's sister and Stanley's wife, is important to consider when exploring the relativity between past and present. Stella comes from the same background as her sister, however, her 'natural passivity' as suggested by Williams, has allowed her to adapt to the present instead of being blindsided with the past like her sister. Stella's assimilation with the present society is suggested by her pragmatism in response to Blanche's pretentious exclamation that the train tracks are like the 'ghost haunted woodland of Weir!' Stella responds plainly with, 'Those are just the L&N tracks, honey'. Williams' use of plain language compared with Blanche's ostentatious discourse suggests that Stella does not attempt to resist the change from past to present. Moreover, Stanley boasts that her 'pulled' (Stella) down off 'them columns', alluding to the columns of the DuBois plantation; however, it is perhaps debatable whether or not Stella was really 'pulled' down or whether she jumped willingly. Either way, Stella's assimilation with the present social order allows Williams to use her as an axis between Blanche and Stanley in order to represent the extensive tensions between these two metaphorical figures, as well as presenting Stella and her baby as a fusion between the past and the present.

Within the character of Blanche, there exists an inherent tension between her own past and present. She is haunted by the death of her husband and even more so by knowing that it was her condemnation of his homosexuality that caused his suicide. Williams here imbues the play with a sense of personal suffering in the sense that the writer himself was homosexual and struggled to embrace his own illicit past when homosexuality was illegal in America. This translates into the character of Blanche and it is suggested that her desire for illusion in her excessive consumptions of alcohol, despite the fact that she says she 'rarely touches it' is what helps her to mask her continued connections with her own past. Expressionist techniques such as plastic theatre are used as part of Williams dramaturgy to symbolise Blanche's psyche - the use of the Varsouviana polka creates a direct link with the night of her husband, Allan Grey's, suicide. The sound is diegetic, but only to Blanche, insinuating that her own past, and the guilt that lies with it, continue to catch her up and prey on her mental state. The polka tune plays in a loop in her head until the shot of the gun occurs, after which it 'always stops'. The attention to these small details suggests that Blanche remains utterly wrapped up in her past, no matter how much she attempts to distance herself from it. Her veneer of lies surrounding her sexual promiscuity are what eventually destroy her, and we can infer from this that Williams is trying to represent the 'destructive' impact of society on the 'non-conformist individual' - Blanche is an anachronistic figure who cannot survive in a present wherein transparency and mental strength are so key to survival.

In conclusion, Williams uses Stanley and Blanche as vehicles to represent the tension between past and present. Blanche's entire character is stuck in the past – she is haunted by the death of her husband and by the change to her ancient bygone status as an antiquated Southern Belle. Stanley is intolerant of this, being a member of the new working class, a man emblematic of the present in the play. Stanley's overcoming presents the ultimate destruction of the past and a focus on the rise of the new social order. Within this, however, Williams sheds light on society's lack of acceptance and suggests that Stella is only able to escape her sister's fate due to her adaptability to the present.

Finally, here is an example of a Level 5 response. Succinctly expressed, with pertinent and wide-ranging reference to the text, it remains sharply focussed on the question and Williams' craft is evaluated throughout:

Williams' modern American tragedy, 'A Streetcar Named Desire' is harrowing in its depiction of a progressive, practical present society that brutally rejects the sensitivity and vulnerability of its past. The past and the present, in their juxtaposition, are forced onto each other, and the consequence of the unpleasant tension that arises as a result of this conflict is what Williams hopes his audiences will reflect upon.

The relationship between the past and the present can be argued as being inter-dependent: the tension of the play and the success of Williams' portrayal of the tragedy relies on the past and uncovering it, expressionistically and naturalistically, in the present. Williams' use of stage directions to introduce the past, almost as a character in itself, helps to establish the tension of the play. The play's very first scene opens with an explosion of energy: the portrayal of New Orleans' atmosphere in the blatantly obvious present. The naturalistic cacophony of action that runs rampant in this scene, the vendor screaming 'red hot', Stanley 'bellowing' for his wife while hauling a package from the butcher's introducing his overt masculinity, the liveliness of all the characters as 'they all laugh'. This energy of the present is then superceded by the darker insecurity of the stage directions that introduce the past. The 'warm breath' of the Mississippi river brings 'faint redolences of banana and coffee', perhaps an ode to the southern slavery of the past. The 'faded white stairs' that accentuate the decaying atmosphere of New Orleans remind us of the 'white columns' of Belle Reve, a past reminiscent of Blanche as the Southern Belle, now, too, fading in the presence of the lively present.

Tension is established, our concerns for a tainted yet sensitive past interacting with the promise of the progressive American present are formed.

The past's attempt to conceal itself within the present generates tension – an interaction that is represented by the characters, Blanche and Stanley. Stanley, the working-class champion who flashes his 'primary colours' like a 'richly feathered hen' stands in stark contrast to the faded Blanche, whose appearance from the first scene is reminiscent of a 'moth': colourless and vulnerable. First establishing their appearance as metaphors of the progressive present and the deteriorating past respectively, Williams sets out to force an interaction between Stanley and Blanche. Contemporary audiences, according to Elia Kazan, were, to his and Williams' dismay, sympathetic of the present; the sensitive past potentially being crushed by the present in their interaction would be a larger cause for concern in modern audiences, a tension that carries throughout the play.

Stanley's disapproval of Blanche's concealment is aggressive in nature, a representation of the new America's disdain towards the sensitivity, femininity and appreciation of the sublime held by the old southern American attitude. His oppression is alarming, and the consequences of his influence are presented in Blanche's mental deterioration. She wishes for 'a Barnum and Bailey world'; to return to a past where her long-sought security can be achieved – the 'searchlight' that she found in the effeminate Allan Grey. In stark contrast, Stanley's obsession for a world where 'Every man is a king!'; his pulling Stella 'off of those columns' and saving her from the past; his overt masculinity fuelling his drive to succeed in the New America, all stand in opposition to Blanche's incongruous desperation to return to the past.

Williams portrays the harrowing consequences of a society insistent on displaying a stubborn motivation to oust and abandon the past as being tragic. Blanche is forced into a position where the present interrogates her tainted past, much to her dismay. The light that Mitch shines on Blanche to reveal her true identity causes Blanche to see 'lurid shadows' dancing on the walls. This expressionistic display of Blanche's mental state, paired with Williams' use of plastic theatre in the Varsouviana that represents her traumatic past, reveals to his audiences the consequences of that 'tension between the past and the present'; the effect the present has in its merciless refusal to accommodate the past – a relevant dynamic that Williams' homosexual self would have shared.

In conclusion, the interaction between a faded embodiment of the past and an oppressive, determined metaphor of the present displays the tragic dynamic that a contemporary audience would have found themselves in. The implications of this tension between the past and present serve as a warning presented by Williams, in the hope that the tragedy that befalls Blanche's vulnerable generation of 'the Southern Belle' may be made an example of in the real world.

Question 25

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The question asked about deception.

Around half the candidates chose this question. Some responses were substantially character-driven, e.g. Algernon is deceptive and Jack is deceptive and so on. Other more fruitful approaches considered deception as a driver of the plot and as a source of comedy and satire; yet others noted deception as a feature of the 'comedy of manners' genre and explored the notion of 'doubling' in Victorian literature generally.

Examiners commented:

- Much was written about Wilde's own deception/double life. Some responses had no AO2 at all even though they were intelligently written; others wrote solely about irony.
- There seemed to be two major strands to candidate responses here: deception as reflective of society, and a tool for social criticism, and deception as a way of creating comedy. The best candidates interwove the two.
- Candidates found this question very accessible but some answers tended to build up from a descriptive identification of who is being untruthful, rather than having a more evaluative approach. There were some rather overly literal readings of Cecily's 'deception' which perhaps ignored the comedic aspects of the play. Comparisons between Algernon and Jack's deception were stronger, especially when they went beyond quotes which simply outline deception and delved into the linguistic and structural ways in which it is explored. Comments on Lady Bracknell were often clear but somewhat overblown. There was good contextual engagement with Wilde's life and with the comedy of manners genre.
- Responses were generally 'clear' in their communication and grasp of the play; however, context felt a little 'samey' with repeated ideas about Victorian standards. There was limited reference to the text as a piece to be performed.

Here is an extract from a sound Level 4 response:

Deception is first presented in the duality of Jack and Algernon maintaining double lives. To blow off steam, the men create false personas to go 'Bunburying'. The creation of the verb implies it is both a common pastime and not entirely unpopular. The deception is an example of the tight restraints of society because the men could not even relax without judgement. Jack maintained a façade of morality but gained a reputation when acting as Ernest. In Act Two, Cecily refers to Ernest as 'wicked', casually as if his reputation was common knowledge, showing that the double lives were necessary to being a respectable figure. However, Jack's deception became harmful when he lied continually to Gwendolen. Even telling her his name was 'Ernest' was a lie, appealing to her fascination with the name, rather than the truth... At first, Jack's lies were harmless but his continuation led to fabricated stories that would harm those he loved. We can see this when Gwendolen finds out he is actually Jack, and when Algernon assumes his Ernest personality and pursues Cecily, embroiling his young ward in his mess. The increasingly harmful nature of his lies is Wilde's way of highlighting the controlling oppression of upper-class society, that Jack had to go to such lengths just for some freedom...

And from another Level 4 response:

...The undertone of deception in the play is further demonstrated by the dual settings of town and country. Like Algernon, Jack uses a dual identity to escape social responsibilities and duties by being 'Ernest in town and Jack in the country'. This elaborate deception is made comical through the use of irony that the other characters are so oblivious to the deception. Miss Prism, for instance, praises Jack as she 'knows no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility', Like Algernon. Jack is able to conform on the surface to traditional social conventions in the country, but lead an immoral and hedonistic lifestyle in the town. Wilde also makes use of theatrical props such as the cigarette case to compound the sense of deception. Wilde's audience would have recognised such an item as that of a gentleman, someone respectable. However in this instance Wilde uses it as a motif of deception and a symbol of Jack's double life in the town and country, causing his deception to be revealed to Algernon and to the audience...

This is the opening of a Level 5 response that successfully focussed throughout on Wilde's dramatic craft:

The gulf between characters' expected behaviour and reality drives the comedy of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As upper-class characters are subjected to the expectation of 'noblesse oblige'. Their hedonism and triviality subvert the seriousness of their characters. Wilde hints at the inversion of these expectations in his seemingly paradoxical subtitle. 'A Trivial Play for Serious People'. Indeed, the blatant shirking of social duties acts as an exigency for characters in the play to deal with the repression of pleasure in preference of more serious matters, which was strongly influenced by the strict censorship and sententiousness which characterised literature in the earlier Victorian era. As Wilde was interested in Gothic literature, his division of the protagonists Algernon and Jack and their hedonistic counterpart, Bunbury and Earnest, represents a division of the human, moral and amoral. This parallels the explorations of the personality explored in Wilde's other works, such as 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', yet here Wilde's farcical plot renders the conflation of personality and social codes absurd, and comical.

First, Wilde explores the deception in the gulf between characters' internal impulses and their ingenuine behaviour. This is captured as Gwendoline and Cecily indirectly spar with one another through their polysemic pleasantries, while Wilde's precise stage directions exaggerate the falseness in their application of social codes. For instance, as they have tea, Wilde inflates their politeness as they speak '[sweetly]', '[superciliously]' and '[with elaborate politeness]'. The overt hyperbole in their actions renders their practice of social decorum absurd, as they both suspect the other of being with their lover. Moreover, Wilde's use of polysemy in their pleasantries, such as Cecily's comment on 'the agricultural depression' indirectly insults the other's way of life.

By juxtaposing seemingly mild conversation with hyperbolic displays of manners, Wilde presents the upper-class's unwavering practice of social codes absurd, as it is incongruous with the reality of the situation. Wilde furthers this in his use of asides, as Gwendoline confidently reveals her thoughts to the audience, 'Detestable girl. But I require tea!' The stark antithesis between the girls' thoughts and actions captures the upper-class's preference for deceptive pleasantry over honesty. By using asides and inflated mannerisms to inflate this gulf, Wilde satirises the codes for the upper-class. As their deceptiveness is rendered comical...

Question 26

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The question asked about satire.

Around half the candidates chose this question. It was a little disappointing to note that some appeared unfamiliar with features of satire and failed really to understand Wilde's craft.

High level responses fully explored Wilde's purpose and were able to evaluate his use of satire, resulting in some excellent AO2 analysis. Weaker responses tended to revolve heavily around marriage and treated the question as a conduit for answering about this topic, rather than exploring other avenues.

Here are two examples of high mark responses that successfully address all three assessment objectives:

Wilde uses satire to poke fun at the artificiality of the conventions, gender roles and the superficiality of the upper class, typical of a comedy of manners. Satire is to be defined as subversively making fun of a person or group of people, in the 'Importance of Being Earnest', the victims of Wilde's satire are the upper class. In his use of satire, Wilde creates both comedy and the room to be subversive. In a time when the upper class were under threat from the Darwinist assertion that all humans were the same with nihilist bombings in London and memories of the French revolution threatening their status as an untouchable class, Wilde uses satire to make fun of their desperate attempts to cling on to their status, asserting that behind the masks of manners and convention, the upper class is no different to the servant, riddled with the same imperfections of human nature.

Wilde uses satire to make fun of the absurdities of Victorian convention. One such convention Wilde mocks is their attitude towards death and mourning. In act 2, Wilde gives the direction 'enter Jack slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crepe hatband and black gloves'. Here Wilde satirises Jack's willingness to use the conventions of mourning to pursue his own pleasure. Wilde asserts that Jack is in the 'deepest' mourning, creating comedy in the moral bankruptcy of Jack, who is meant to symbolise honour and truth. Indeed Miss Prism asserts at the beginning of act 2 'I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility'. Structurally, Wilde reveals to the audience Jack's deception before the characters become aware of it, creating satire through this continuous dramatic irony. Indeed, in the Victorian times, one had to mourn for four years as a widow and 6 months as a sibling, imitating the mourning rituals of Queen Victoria. This hierarchy of mourning convention created restriction even in how people mourned, and created an artificiality in the upper class attitude to death. Therefore, Wilde satirises this convention which is meant to be a symbolism of upper class propriety by reducing it in the play to a convention which is mask, devoid of reality and full of superficiality.

Wilde also satirises Victorian superficiality through the attacking of the Victorian convention of *pas devant le domestique*, in act two. After the women realise some sort of deception has taken place, they are moved not to anger, but to a combative fight through the guise of food. When the servant enters Wilde directs 'the presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence under which both girls chafe' referring to the convention that the upper class should set an example for the lower classes. Instead their anger is shown through the stage directions. Gwendolyn asks for tea with 'elaborate politeness', with Cecily responding 'sweetly'. Gwendolyn 'superciliously' says 'No thank you, Sugar is not fashionable any more', with Cecily serving instead offering 'Cake or bread and butter?'. Wilde satirises this 'restraining influence' of the *pas devant le domestique* convention by creating a feud over food.

The uses of stage directions show the artificiality of this convention. Gwendolyn, though angry, asks for tea with 'elaborate politeness'. The adjective 'elaborate' adds to this idea of artificiality, as Gwendolyn puts on a mask of manners, unable to talk about the reality of her situation. Indeed, the comedy of this is furthered by the direction for Gwendolyn to speak 'superciliously'. This tone of superiority plays on the convention that the town was more 'fashionable' than the country (a theme often explored in the comedy of manners). To be superior over the eating of bread and butter, is absurd, and thus Wilde satirises where the Victorian upper class place their pride, in things of no consequence to reality. In a time where Darwinism challenged the notion that the upper class were superior and the first liberal Prime minister being in power, David Lloyd George enacting reforms like the Education reform act in 1870, the threat of change is satirised here in the 'Importance of being Earnest', providing both comedy and subversion. Wilde therefore uses satire to suggest that distinctions between the upper class and the rest of society were increasingly insignificant, much to the fear of the upper class.

Furthermore, Wilde uses satire to make fun of gender roles in Victorian society. The expectation of the man in Victorian times was summed up by Ruskin, saying 'man was the doer, the creator, the discoverer and the defender'. And yet Wilde satirises this expectation of men by reversing gender roles in this comedy of manners. Instead, the females, meant to embody the angel of the house (Patmore 1854) take on the masculine role. Jack 'nervously says 'Miss Fairfax, every since I met you I have admired you more than any girl I have ever met since...I met you'. This is comedic because of Jack's stuttering, the pauses show him to be vulnerable if not incapable. The muddled syntax furthers this idea, and therefore when Jack asks Well., may I propose to you know?', roles are reversed and the man is asking permission to propose to the women. Similarly, Cecily controls Algernon's proposal to her. Jack's interrogative line is an example of Wilde satirising this expectation of man as the 'doer' and instead, places women in charge of events. Indeed, this role reversal is continued later in the play when Gwendolyn refers to the separation of the spheres debate saying 'The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man'. Here Wilde satirises the expectation that women's sphere was the home. Comedically, he makes fun of this idea, however, in showing Gwendolyn and Lady Bracknell to be capable women, he subversively shows amidst his satire, the absurdity of the convention that women were incapable, and asserts their capability. Indeed, Josephine Butler, a late 19th century feminist said 'If women's sphere was the home, then so was man's' for 'equality to exist there must be a blurring of gender roles'. Therefore, Wilde, by showing that the blurring of social roles is possible, he subversively challenges the Victorian attitude to women through his use of satire. Therefore, Wilde is very effective in his use of satire, as it both creates comedy, and also allows for subversion.

Overall, Wilde created a world of absurdity in convention and standards, however within the artificiality of this world, Wilde effectively uses satire to show the absurdity of certain conventions of the Victorian upper class. He shows their expectations of gender and convention of upper class behaviour to be a mask of manners, a futile attempt to avoid the reality that the upper class is no different to any one else. Therefore, satire is Wilde's chief tool, a weapon that creates comedy and undermines the social constraints which held Victorian society bound in chains.

In his play, 'The Importance of Being Earnest', which drew inspiration from the comedy of manners dramatic form, Wilde offers a contemporary reflection on the Victorian upper class through the play's satire, derived from the continuous construction of dramatic irony. The comic contrast between appearance and substance amongst the upper class (often to a hyperbolic extent) Wilde is able to portray them as akin to the moral degradation of the fin de siècle that they so feared, in his construction of the artificiality of the plot, as well as its language and setting, Wilde uses his 'trivial comedy' to satirise these seemingly 'serious people' drawing attention to their vapid and trivial morals.

In using the setting of the play as a satirical tool to enhance his comic mockery of the 'serious' upper class, Wilde weaves his satirical message into the fabric of the play. Act One opens in Algernon's – a passive and dandyist member of the landed gentry – flat in 'Half Moon Street'. The room is 'luxuriously and artistically furnished' in a decadent manner, reflecting his affluence but also his appetite for indulgence. Wilde, although his work relates more to the 'comedy of manners' genre of drama, known for its satire of the elite, employs tropes of Naturalist drama (the common dramatic form of the period) in the portrayal of Algernon's apartment as the details of its image and description create realism on the page. This would heighten Wilde's satire as by conflating the two dramatic genres, recognisable to the audience, he highlights the truth and verisimilitude of his satire. In Act 2, as the play moves to Jack's manor home. Wilde uses setting to symbolise the comic contrast between the image of the elite and their actions, hence relating them to the decline of the Establishment in the fin de siècle period. The stage directions set out the 'old-fashioned' manor house with 'stone steps', 'roses' and 'a large yew tree'. Chausible's presence also infers the proximity of the manor to the church, both metaphorically and physically. Wilde creates an absurd image of the English Establishment: the stone steps represent its foundations, the roses signify both Englishness and antiquity, and the yew tree, given their age and being often synonymous with country churchyards, embodies these qualities further. Thus, Wilde uses symbolic imagery to demonstrate the proximity of the cast and upper class to the Establishment. Later in Act 2 also sees him consistently underline this as Algernon 'cuts' a 'pink rose', for his buttonhole, demonstrating superior tendencies and, symbolically, the amputation of the Establishment. Under the yew tree, Cecily rejects her 'Horrid, horrid' education that Victorian morality would impress upon her as a means of self-improvement, as does Miss Prism abandon her teacher role to flirt with Chausible in a licentious manner: 'I would hang upon her lips'. This Wilde highlights the comic contrast between the setting and the plot, using symbolic images of the Establishment as well as dandyism to satirise and undermine the upper-class righteousness that would distinguish them from the decadence of the fin de siècle, instead demonstrating their involvement in it.

Moreover, Wilde also draws the play's satire into its language, portraying the upper-class cast as shielding their trivial morality and lack of substance behind their verbal dexterity. In the opening conversation between Algernon and his servant, Lane, Wilde sets the tone for the social conduct and conceit of the play. Lane is presented as intellectual equal to Algernon as he answers in witty remarks, such as, 'I have only been married once', a comic inversion of the sanctity of marriage, and is able to attest to Algernon's lies without prior suggestion, as he claims that 'there were no cucumbers in the market'. This sets the precedent for the following acts as it undermines the superiority of the upper-class, creating a polarised satire at them for having equal 'sense of moral responsibility' as 'the lower orders' who they believe have none. Wilde maintains this satire of the elite's lack of morality in Algernon's many epigrams. Using proverbial language to give his thoughts a tone of respectability, Algernon declares in an epigrammatic style that 'divorces are made in heaven', a re-appropriation of the proverb 'match made in heaven'. Again this highlights the comic contrast between the indignance of the upper class and their disillusionment with Victorian morality, in which marriage was regarded as a pillar of society, and social expectations. In fact. Much like his lavish apartment, Algernon's epigrams link him, especially in the audience's eyes, to the figure of the dandy; a subversive character who bent Victorian expectations. Dandy, Wilde being one of the most famous, were known for their witty epigrams, even to the extent that Wilde self-plagiarise his own, stressing the importance of 'style not sincerity' ; a contrast again to the more ascetic belief of Victorian morality. Thus, in creating Algernon as a satirical character, hyperbolic in his language and image, Wilde presents him as a caricature of the upper-class bachelor and again through his comic contrast between his image and the substance behind it, draws attention to the upper-class complicity in the degradation of Victorian morals during the fin de siècle.

Finally, Wilde characterises the play as an intensely artificial construction, embracing his aesthete view of 'Art for Art's sake'. However, not only does this highlight the posed nature and artificiality of the upper class once again, especially in regard to the inclusion of the settings, it also affords a sense of truthfulness for his satire. The play presents courtship, marriage and even invalidity as topical themes in the 1800s, as artificial constructs. The plot itself is symmetrical with Act One showing Jack and Gwendolen's courtship, Act Two showing Cecily and Algernon's and Act Three showing an expected conclusion (typical of comedies of manners) where they all 'embrace', exclaiming 'At last!' The pairing construct as a whole, an important value of the upper class, is satirised as being void by Wilde. His characters certainly trivialise it. Lady Bracknell says that Lord Bracknell 'would have to dine upstairs' as a consequence of Algernon not eating with them, subordinating the rituals of family dinner and foregrounding the importance of social image, as we assume this is because she needs an evenly arranged table. She also, undermining the philanthropic attitudes of the 1800s and its 'modern sympathy with invalids', complains that the Lord 'never takes much notice' of her suggestions for him to overcome his illness. It is inferred she sees weakness and sickness as a choice, trivialising the severity of an ill Lord (her social superior) and reducing him to a comic invalid. In this way, the construct of the family is proven to be artificial in the characters of the play, reflecting Wilde's artificial crafting of the plot and structure. Thus Wilde satirises further the upper class's indignant righteousness at being exemplars of social morals.

To conclude, Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest' is a prime example of Wilde using satire, facilitated by the stable irony of the play's consistent comic contrast between image and substance, as a comedic tool towards the upper class. Having embraced decadence as a cultural movement, Wilde seems impatient with the upper-class hypocrisy towards the decadence of the fin de siècle period and thus, through satire, seems intent on spotlighting their complicities.

Question 27

THE PITMEN PAINTERS

The question asked about personal growth.

Around half the candidates chose this question. Responses showed a detailed knowledge of the play and background, as well as knowledge of the playwright's other works such as *Billy Elliott*. Some focused on the disparity in the way the men's lives developed in relation to Lyons and how they were used by him to further his career.

Here is the opening of a typical Level 3 response that is clear and relevant, but without the detailed development we would expect at Level 4:

Lee Hall wrote 'The Pitmen Painters' to reveal the truth about the working class and their inclusion in the art world. He came from a working class background so this depiction of mid twentieth century Britain comes from his real life. I will be exploring Hall's presentation of personal growth in his play.

Firstly, personal growth of the pitmen is depicted as drastic as the level of hope the men have for their futures at the start and at the end juxtaposes greatly. The viewpoints of the men start off negatively. They think art to be a waste, 'Should've done Economics instead'. Harry states that something like Economics would have been a lot more beneficial to the men. This then shifted at the denouement of the play, with the men being filled with hope for their future stating their aspirations for the group. George: 'There will be a university at Ashington - pitmen poets and painters'. The use of this proleptic reference creates a sense of hope for the men, the audience is rooting for them. Furthermore, the use of plosive alliteration has connotations of power. They view themselves as exploding into the art world. All this heightened sense of hope built up by the men is crushed in a moment of pathos at the end of the play, with the use of the epic theatre tool of sing a projector to display information. The screen reads, 'the university of Ashington was never founded'. The tone is brought right back down as the audience is returned to reality. Hall uses this dramatic moment to remind the audience of the realities for the working class. All of their hard work and aspirations were shattered by Thatcher as the mines closed and then during the 1984 miners' strike even more shut. The pitmen's livelihoods ended. Their immense personal growth ended tragically due to the nature of our country.

Contrastingly, the personal growth of Lyon is depicted as substantial and meaningful. 'I've been appointed as professor at Edinburgh College of Art'. The use of the title 'Professor' shows how Lyon has a secure and substantial future, whereas the pitmen have no title and no security. Furthermore, Lyon achieved this title by using the pitmen without their knowledge.' What dissertation?' Lyon didn't inform the pitmen of the fact that he was writing about the men for his own personal gain. The use of Harry questioning Lyon depicts his genuine confusion and the fact that he was completely unaware. The use of this personal growth for Lyon being permanent is intentional from Hall as the fascination with the working class was merely a wave which would pass, which Lyon realised and used for his own personal gain. The pitmen were merely a temporary intrusion on the art world which was locked behind a class barrier. Hall uses the depressing denouement of the play to lament the nature of reality into the minds of the audience; the rich stay rich and the poor stayed poor, no matter how much personal growth they have achieved...

Question 28

THE PITMEN PAINTERS

The question asked about contrast.

Many responses focussed on the contrast between Lyon and the pitmen or the function of Helen Sutherland's character. Some looked at class contrast in general as a theme and others looked at Hall's use of setting to explore contrast.

Here is an example of a response that meets all the criteria for Level 3:

'The Pitmen Painters' by Lee Hall was written and published in 2007 yet set in 1934 – 1984. The play is set in the industrial decline of mining as Thatcher closed the pits in 1984 resulting in large quantities of the working class unemployed. Lee Hall's Pitmen Painters is a play of contrasts as it explores the dichotomy of education in society, culture in society and the contrasts in societal norms between classes.

Lee Hall presents the dichotomy of education as the contrast through class division. This is first explored through the interactions between Jimmy and Lyon when Lyon says, 'Let's see. Titian.' By which Jimmy says 'Bless you!' in their first art appreciation class. This highlights the contrasting education through bathos as Titian a well established artist is mistaken for a sneeze as Jimmy is uneducated. However, this lack of education is only seen a miners had to leave education at the age of 12 and work down the pits to provide for their families. Whereas upper classes like Lyon had money so could spend time in education. Furthermore, the lack of education in the miners is not the only lack of education explored as Lyon states 'Look how well it conveys the sheer bulk, the brute force of the miner at the coal face' which conveys his misconceived idea of miners through powerful imagery. For example, Jimmy interrupts and juxtaposes Lyon by stating 'You send little wiry fellas' also emphasised by the slang used. Therefore, Lee Hall perfectly conveys a contrast in education in both the educated upper classes but also the working class. However, it also conveys the contrasting types of education such as political and book smart which both Lyon and Jimmy lack one of. Dichotomy of education is also explored through language. For example, Helen's rhetorical question "Are these the peonies?" by which Jimmy's unintentionally comedic response of 'No. They're flowers actually' highlights the miner's lack of education. Overall the contrasting education reflects the lifestyles of the working class and upper class.

Lee Hall purposefully depicts the play as full of contrasts through contrasting societal norms and culture. For example, Lyon when first teaching art appreciation to the miners asks if the hut has electricity to use his projector, to which Jimmy states 'There's no electricity in here, son' highlighting the economic divide and contrasting quality of life through Lee Hall's use of setting.

Furthermore, contrasting culture is explored through women as Susan says 'Where do you want me to take them off?' in reference to her clothes shocks the miners whereas Lyon sates 'It's completely normal practice' which highlights how the art world was littered with the upper class especially shortly after Contrasting culture is powerfully explored through Helen as Young Lad states 'There's a wife getting out' highlighting their old stereotypes of women being identified by their husband. The stage directions and epic theatre further enhance this moment as Lee Hall purposefully shows that as Helen Sutherland enters they are agog, which is also emphasised the stichomythia of 'What is it?', 'It's a Rolls Royce!' 'With a chauffeur!' Combined with the questions and exclamatory phrasing. Overall, Lee Hall intentionally highlights contrasting culture through ideals of women in class. Another moment Lee Hall powerfully explores contrasting culture is when Helen is furious she does not get what she wants. Helen offers 'two pound ten shillings' to Oliver to work for her by which he responds, "I couldn't just abandon them'. This dichotomy of culture highlights how the wealthy upper classes want more and more whereas the working class are happy with what they have. Furthermore, Lee Hall contrasts their language. Helen previously depicted the job as a 'gift' but in her change describes it as a 'lifeline' and the juxtaposition further portrays the lack of culture upper classes had for the working class by saying Oliver should escape from mining which is his community and family.

Lee Hall explores the extent to which the play is a play of contrasts through class divisions. This is seen at Newcastle train station where Lyon states 'I'm in First Class' by which Lee Hall cleverly uses stage directions as 'The guys all look in amazement' to highlight how deeply class division is integrated. Lee Hall grew up in mining towns and understood the mining culture so could capture and portray accurate emotions. Furthermore the use of the dry-ice machine in the scene change to depict steam from the train highlights how the miners' lives are rapidly changing as they are being consumed by a culture as after the change 'a long Chinese painting' appears on the screen. Lee Hall perfectly depicts contrasting class through Lyon. For example, Lyon uses the working class (miners) for self gain which is a microcosm of a society as he is 'appointed Professor at Edinburgh College of Art' for writing his 'dissertation' on the miners. This is comedic as the miners are angered in the first scene as Lyon is not a professor 'You're not Professor Lyon!' further showing the upper-class benefits. Lee Hall intentionally contrasts this with the final projection stating 'No University of Ashington was formed and the Woodhorn Colliery closed further conveying sadness and futility in the working classes effort to break through.

Therefore, to a great extent 'The Pitmen Painters' is a play of varying contrast but the upmost being class. Lee Hall uses these contrasts to highlight modern issues of equality and wealth within society.

Question 29

THE ROVER

The question asked about freedom v control.

Almost all the candidates chose this question. There were many high-level responses with candidates showing excellent knowledge and understanding of this text in its contexts. Approaches to the question ranged from a consideration of male v female control within the bounds of contemporary patriarchy to the subversion (or not) of class and gender norms offered by the Carnival to an exploration of the text as typical (or not) of carnivalesque literature, based on Bakhtin's theories.

Here is an introduction to a Level 5 response:

In *The Rover* Behn presents ideas about freedom and control through the explorations of gender politics and rivalries. The carnival atmosphere of Naples allows for a shallow perception of freedom for those normally at the lowest level of society, however it is debatable as to what extent these groups are still controlled. Disguise and deception allow for women to gain some freedom, but this is often subverted and violence towards women is rife throughout the play. However, for the men of the play in carnival time, particularly the cavaliers, they gain both more freedom and are able to exert control over the women and their classic rivals, as was known in Restoration England, the Spanish...

Here is an example of a Level 4 answer. It is a convincing response, but it lacks the sharp focus on the question and the sophisticated consideration of context that we would expect at Level 5.

Aphra Behn's 'The Rover' emphasises the uncertain transition in Renaissance society and literature in which women were afforded greater freedom in the mistress market particularly, which the suitable setting of the carnival should facilitate. However, the direct conflict between awarding women a greater sense of liberty and the already male-dominated patriarchal autonomy evident in the carnival setting is clear to see, with Behn perhaps forming a commentary on the underlying futility of attempting greater freedom on the woman's end.

The character of Florinda successfully portrays the confusing and partly ineffective transition of women attaining more freedom. In the private sphere of the bed chamber at the beginning of the play, Florinda and Helena are able to openly discuss their ideological stances on love, which on the surface would be seen as an early sense of established female power, given that during the play's composition it was unusual for women to be granted a space to discuss matters of love and sex, due to the male control over such issues. Florinda openly sets about defying the patriarchal confinement of marriage, which Don Pedro is keen on enforcing. Florinda notes, 'that hated object, I shall let him see I understand better what's due to my beauty, birth and fortune', which itself seems again on the surface to be an empowering statement where she firstly subverts the notion of female objectification and imposes such on Don Antonio, as well as acknowledging her qualities that would make her desirable. However, aren't such qualities of 'beauty, birth and fortune' the already existing patriarchal standards of women, from which she wants to break free? A further example of such a contradiction appears later in the play in Act 4.2, where she glorifies her lover Belvile as someone who 'dares fight for me'. Again, Florinda confuses freedom with submission, as she both hints at her importance of having males fight for her, while not considering the immense patriarchal connotations of chivalry and cavalier culture of which Belvile is part. Thus her motives are presented as unclear, as Behn attempts to highlight the struggle for women suitably to gain liberty within an already male-empowering society.

Such confused ideas and motives of achieving female autonomy are shown by Behn to have a direct impact on the welfare and safety of women themselves. Florinda, oblivious to the dangers of male aggression that permeate the carnival setting, leaves her gate open in the garden while in an 'undress', as a symbol of physically exerting a sense of liberty. However, ironically, this allows Wilmore to enter, rendering her attempts as naïve and also rather dangerous as Wilmore subsequently attempts to rape her. Wilmore interestingly proclaims such an action as Florinda's fault, where he asks, 'Why, at this time of night, was your cobweb door open, dear spider, but to catch flies?'. This is a brutal implementation of guilt upon the woman, but within the carnival setting, where men were commonly encouraged and condoned in pursuing courtship freely with women at any time, such a statement is understandable. Even when Florinda is saved from the hands of Belvile and Frederick, the liminal space between the private sphere and the public sphere, in the garden, is immediately invaded by both Englishmen and the Spanish men, Pedro, Stephano and other servants. Florinda's vulnerability is thus constant, while Behn's conflation of male nobility and aggression in the scene evokes a link between females' efforts of achieving power and the underlying Anglo-Spanish conflict.

This is further exemplified through the character of Angelica, whose own elevation of herself through the commodification of the portrait particularly incites an increase of male violence and aggression aimed at her. Angelica, as a courtesan, is entirely different to Florinda on the social ladder, yet the incitement of male aggression is constant between both characters in their attempts to gain greater control and invert the patriarchy – suggestive of what might be termed the ‘virgin-whore complex’. Angelica has an overt desire to be desired which she tries to achieve by elevating her commercial form of love to an overly exaggerated courtly love where she attempts to portray herself as the ‘Petrarchan mistress’. However, she lacks the necessary component of chastity to be awarded such a label and hence she compensates by exaggerating her beauty in the staggered reveal of her character. It is interesting to note that in the subtext of Killigrew’s ‘Thomaso’ which Behn was accused of plagiarising, Angelica appears in person while holding the portrait; however, in ‘The Rover’ she is first mentioned by word of mouth, then by portrait and then behind a ‘silk curtain’, attempting to control and increase the male desire for her. Although to some extent she is successful in achieving this, she, like Florinda, is subject to a burst of male aggression, firstly through the duelling over the portrait and finally through her falling victim to Wilmore’s rakish and manipulative language, which ultimately undermines her authority. Angelica confuses Wilmore’s lust with love. Wilmore admits ‘the flames [my heart] feels are but so many lusts...for had it been the purer flame of love...’ where the fire imagery is accentuated by repeated fricatives, highlighting Wilmore’s animalistic and aggressive control over Angelica even in her private sphere, similar to how Florinda ends up confined by the male figures within her own private setting. Thus, the distinction between ‘virgin’ and ‘whore’ is blurred given that both women are subjected to male control after having tried to attain their own desires which seemed promised by the carnival setting.

To conclude, Behn provides a representation of women’s attempts to seek freedom and autonomy. These plans are undermined by male control within society and an underlying sense of futility remains throughout the play, calling for a critical evaluation of such issues to be had among the audience.

Question 30

THE ROVER

The question asked about the relevance of the title.

Very few candidates chose to answer this question and those who did mostly used it as an opportunity to write a character study of Willmore. Stronger response explored more fully the notion of the 'libertine' and looked at gender roles in the play generally. A few interesting answers considered Helena in the role of Rover'.

Here is the introduction to a Level 4 response, straightforward in that it looks at each of the male characters in turn, but well-argued:

In Aphra Behn's 'The Rover' the titular Rover is Willmore. The title describes him as a Royalist figure with a libertine outlook on sex which aligns him with the Rake archetype. Blunt, the roundhead, attempts to fulfil this same role, but his Parliamentary views makes him an outsider to their cavaliering. Belvile, by contrast, claims to fit an older archetype of courtly love, but the audience is invited to wonder if this is a true reflection or his nature.

Willmore shows his outlook on sex from his first appearance, using innuendo, 'baked with thee between a pair of sheets' to try and entice a 'courtesan'. Yet this rakish behaviour is enabled by control of his identity. He shows disdain for the masking habits the others wear, which make them 'disguised and muzzled'. 'Muzzled' shows how he sees those who mask themselves as like dogs, below him. Yet he also shows an ability to recognise the identity of others. When first meeting Hellena he sees she is a 'damned honest person of quality' recognising virtue and wealth. He sees no problem in buying sex from other women in a purely economic exchange, offering Florinda a 'pistole' and claiming to 'never give more' showing his lack of care for sexual partners. Yet Hellena remains in his power for his ability to recognise her in her 'breeches' part, seeing through her deception and threatening to leave her 'undone'. Thus Willmore's position as a Rover is enabled by his ability to recognise opportunity in the chaos of carnival.

By contrast, Blunt fails to fulfil the archetype, despite his attempts, instead becoming a fool. He sees Lucetta as a 'person of quality' like Hellena, not believing someone with 'such clothes' could be a whore. He also allows her to deceive him, thinking he has 'beauties [his] false glass at home did not discover'. The ignorance to trust another over the image of himself in the mirror, even calling an unbiased reflection of himself, 'false' shows plainly to the audience that he is no Rake, but rather a fool ...

Question 31

WAITING FOR GODOT

The question asked about the extent to which it's a political play.

This was the less popular of the two questions on *Waiting for Godot*, but most of the responses were of high quality. A few candidates wanted to write only about religion and, as is often the case with this text, some responses were a little too focused on existentialism and other conceptual ideas rather than on analysis of the text and the writer's craft.

Here is the opening of a Level 5 response. Note how the candidate is focussed on the text as drama to be performed:

'Waiting for Godot' is a play that does indeed offer political insights into dynamics of power and authority as well as a response to the political horrors of a post-war world where forms of authority were being challenged in the 1950's by movements such as the break up of the British empire, or being submitted to in a proliferation of fascist and communist regimes.

By contrasting two pairs of characters, Vladimir and Estragon who are equal in their position in society, with Pozzo and Lucky – a master-slave pair, Beckett immediately constructs a situation in order to explore the dynamics of power. The character of Pozzo can be read as a comment on the role of the oppressor in society. Beckett describes that the rope that Pozzo ties his slave lucky to must be 'long enough to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before Lucky appears'. This introduction to the pair firstly highlights the extremity and intensity of oppression to an absurd degree but also makes the audience encounter the suffering of Lucky the oppressed and then see the cause of this suffering, which provides a stark contrast to the way in which Pozzo's verbose dialogue dominates the conversation. This induction to their characters perhaps parallels Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in its scary 'hit' at the audience – we hear Pozzo shout 'On' and a 'crack of whip' offstage before Pozzo appears, building in the audience a sense of horror, drawing out subconscious sympathy for the oppressed.

Pozzo's language establishes a hierarchy from its inception. Vladimir and Estragon even think he is Godot, their source of meaning and salvation, before he speaks, which is perhaps a comment on how easily humans turn to hierarchy as a form of salvation, played out in the Fascist regimes of the 20th century that centred around dominant authority figures:

'Pozzo (halting) You are human beings none the less. (He puts on his glasses.) As far as one can see. (He takes off his glasses.) Of the same species as myself. (He bursts into an enormous laugh.) Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!'

This is a clear satire of the way in which those in power or at the top of the class structure treat the lower classes. Beckett voices unedifying assumptions of those in power in a way that seems at once absurd and shocking, but readily relatable to the audience. Pozzo's 'thank you for your society' suggests an individualistic distance from social solidarity, reminiscent of mature capitalism.

Beckett complicates the role of Pozzo as evil oppressor, however, by emphasising the hypocrisy and two-faced nature of those in power. On the one hand, Pozzo is furious that Vladimir and Estragon were waiting – he says 'Here? On my land?', which is a satire on the obsession with land ownership of Western Capitalism, given that the setting of the play is a wasteland of nothingness. Then shortly after he refers to how the 'road is free to all' saying 'It's a disgrace, But there you are', Pozzo's contradictory statements continue, such as "leave him in peace! Can't you see he wants to rest? Basket!' and even the absurd statement, 'He's killing me', regarding Lucky, when the audience observe the exact opposite as Lucky has 'a rope passed round his neck'. These sudden shifts of tone and register and contradictory statements destabilise the sense of any genuine political legitimacy, and suggest that being in a position of power does not exempt one from irrationality that characterises the human condition ...

Question 32

WAITING FOR GODOT

The question asked about variations of mood and tone.

The majority of candidates responded to this question and there was lots of clear engagement with the text and its contexts. The nature of the question meant there was less scope for avoiding AO2 which has been a feature of the some of the responses to this text in the past.

Here is the opening to a Level 4 response that focussed on the tragi-comic nature of the play:

'Waiting for Godot' is an existentialist play that reflects the post-war zeitgeist of hopelessness and suffering. The absurdist play follows little plot with no distinction between time and space. This emphasises the 'waiting' aspect with little classification of who or what the characters are waiting for. This further brings about a general atmosphere of uncertainty which provides a metaphorical umbrella for the varying cycle of constantly contrasting moods and tones which highlights the essential meaningless of the play.

Estragon and Vladimir contrast in both looks and formality. Estragon, often presented as round and short is much more feeling than the logical, tall and thin Vladimir. This connotes an instant comic contrast between the two characters. The contrast is introduced at the start of the play with Estragon struggling to remove his boot. As Estragon takes on the sisyphian task of removing his boot, 'He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before'. This physical comedy is connected with the phrase of 'nothing to be done', introducing a hopeless tone. However, the quick interruption of physical comedy once again changes the tone with the introduction of Vladimir, 'Advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart '. This absurdist entrance is then contrasted, once again, by Vladimir's misunderstanding of Estragon's seemingly innocent phrase, saying 'All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle.' Vladimir's philosophical response to Estragon's comedic hopeless remark regarding his boot creates a duality of comedic non-sequitur and melancholy existentialism. This variation in tone displays the tragi-comic form of 'Waiting for Godot' and reflects the fear of nuclear war that loomed over society during the Cold War. This fear dictated, in the population, a general philosophical movement as thoughts of mortality became part of everyday life...

Paper Summary

Paper Summary

Candidates and their teachers should be proud of their performance this summer. It has been a genuine privilege to see so much engagement and commitment in candidate responses. If there is one piece of advice for all centres in the future, it is to keep reminding students that this is a **drama** paper and the texts we are looking at are meant to be performed (including Shakespeare, of course).

It might be useful to note the Learning Outcomes for this paper in the Specification (page 11), the first of which is:

Students are required to:

- *show knowledge and understanding of how playwrights use dramatic forms to shape meaning in drama texts and evoke responses in audiences*

Study of the playwright's craft needs to go beyond simply looking at the use of language and dialogue – although this is obviously important, I noted a comment from one examiner who said: 'Sometimes close analysis often detracted from the candidates' train of thought conceptually and some really struggled to embed meaningful analysis and terminology (often getting distracted by individual verb/noun analysis)'.

Students need to be directed towards a wide range of dramatic forms and structures, such as setting, characterisation, aside, monologue, soliloquy, dramatic irony, satire, juxtaposition, costume, sound, symbolism, motifs, humour, contrast, special effects, foreshadowing, foils, props, stock characters, subplot, exposition, mood, tone, conflict, framing and so on, and continually bear in mind audience response when they are analysing the texts.

Section A

The following general points were raised by examiners at the end of the 2022 series:

AO1

- Candidates who had planned clearly, tended to establish a line of argument more confidently and fluently. In some cases, candidates wrote very long essays, which weren't improved by the length. If anything, the final pages tended to be the weakest – unsurprisingly, maybe.
- The most common issue was with candidates 'narrating' their response. It invariably meant the response couldn't score above a Level 3. If you are telling the story of the play, you are not engaging critically with the question.

AO2

- Slightly concerning is a trend towards prioritising AO3 over AO2: some essays have so much AO3 that this is prioritised over textual support (AO1 and AO2) and analysis of the writer's crafting (AO2). For many candidates, there was simply neither the textual evidence nor the discussion of the text's literary features to warrant a mark above Level 3.
- A narrow range of examples from the texts also tended to be a feature of the weakest answers, the stronger ones ranging widely, confidently and, most of all, selectively across the texts.
- Answers that considered form, structure, genre, methods, rather than only language level demonstrated understanding of how the text worked on a broader level. At the other end of the spectrum, word level commentary has become a feature of many answers. Identifying nouns and verbs does not deepen the quality of analysis. Focus on when characters use personal pronouns has also become routine – it would be far more noteworthy if they only ever spoke of themselves in the third person!
- Responses that included detailed analysis of longer quotations, often demonstrated careful and precise use of terminology to extend interpretation.
- Often candidates employed a word level focus. This often limited, rather than illuminated, the argument's application to the text itself, as a whole. Stronger responses had a tendency to contrast different moments in the text through the language used, and to highlight exactly why the use of language being commented on was significant. Some candidates were perhaps excessively concerned with phonological features and asserted a great deal of meaning behind the sound qualities of words.

AO3

- Context seems to be increasingly strong and text-specific. Fewer candidates are relying on general comments regarding past attitudes and opinions. The exception to this is in regard to kingship in Shakespeare, where there is a tendency to over-assert the primacy of the Divine Right of Kings and its moral implications to the audience.
- Some candidates had a tendency to "telescope" their history: whilst the *memory* of Elizabeth's reign and the uncertainty over the royal succession may well have been in the mind of a Jacobean audience, the relevance of other events in her reign was tenuous. A few candidates implied that events in Henry VIII's reign were of contemporary relevance.

AO5

- Candidates have clearly put in plenty of effort learning critical views and material and this was generally used very well. AC Bradley is a popular choice but tends to be used descriptively in relation to the 'tragic hero', whereas many other critics' views are more skilfully used to present and develop engaged arguments.
- Some candidates are quoting critics with the clear intent to score marks on AO5, when this is really AO3. When 'critics' are stating a historical context without offering an interpretation of the text, this is not something that candidates really can engage with. (cf Loomba in the Tragedy anthology – you can critically engage with her points about how Othello has *internalised* the racism of his society, but you cannot really question when she is stating simple historical facts).
- Candidates should choose their quotations carefully, remembering that they are being marked not on how many critics they remember, but how they are integrating/challenging/refuting/arguing with/evaluating them.
- Well integrated AOs are often a discriminator – AO3 and 5 underpinning interpretation and argument. Very few responses had not included any AO5 and in fact many candidates used critics with increasing confidence.
- Passing comments such as: 'this links to what A.C. Bradley believed' showed a somewhat desperate attempt to refer to wider reading, but surface level comments highlighted a detachment between the play and respective critics.
- When candidates did attain marks in Levels 4 and 5, their wider reading challenged their own perceptions and interpretations of key concepts. More sophisticated responses provided a stark contrast between two respective critics' ideas, before drawing a conclusion which illuminated their own viewpoint.
- There was good use of stage/filmic productions. These were used successfully as supporting arguments, e.g. to exemplify Hamlet's madness, as well as to make interesting AO3 contextual links. Similarly, film/stage adaptations were used interestingly to support/refute AO5 critical interpretations.

Section B

The following general points were raised by examiners at the end of the 2022 series:

AO1

- On some occasions, candidates chose to try and bend the questions (especially with *Streetcar*) to fit in with essays they'd probably practised before, and it really doesn't work, nor do pre-learned introductions help.
- Candidates should be discouraged that abbreviating text names to ASND or TIOBE or similar – it saves them very little time and impedes the fluency of their answer. Far better simply to say 'Streetcar' or 'Earnest'.
- A significant discriminator was unpicking the question properly, e.g. tension between past and present etc. Weaker responses often didn't acknowledge this.
- Candidates who established a line of argument in their introduction were much better able to structure their essay successfully and engage with all of the AOs. Many introductions stated it was an important theme/idea or simply set out a description of where in the play the theme or character was and then proceeded to explain where the theme was seen throughout the play – this was limiting.
- Candidates should read the question very carefully and look for clues on how to put together an argument: the approach of "write an essay about this theme" rarely works.

AO2

- In relation to questions 23 and 24, many candidates appeared to focus too heavily on addressing AO3, with AO1 and AO2 being underdeveloped. Whereas context is a key factor in understanding character roles and a shift in attitudes within 1940's America, when studying *A Streetcar Named Desire*, candidates must be made aware that each AO is equally weighted.

AO3

- There has been a marked improvement in candidates' ability to integrate contextual material in this Section and there is much less reliance on biographical material to explore a play's contexts.

Grade boundaries

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

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>

