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GCE English Literature 9ET0 01

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Introduction

This was the third year of the qualification and, generally, strengthened candidate performance – particularly on AO5, where candidates are handling critical material with much more confidence - was noticeable.

SECTION A: Shakespeare

There were responses seen to all the Shakespeare plays but most were on *Othello*, with *Hamlet* possibly gaining a bit more popularity with centres this year. It was good to see a rise in the numbers of candidates answering on *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Measure for Measure*, both of which offered lots of scope to access all the Assessment Objectives.

Generally, students understood the texts well, but did not always engage with Shakespeare's craft. The best responses offered a detailed analysis of language and structure, going beyond word analysis to consider imagery, motifs, metre and staging. Character questions were best answered when characters were considered as vehicles for ideas and themes. Context was best handled when it was smoothly interwoven but also detailed, going beyond generalisations about 'women in the era', for instance, to discuss laws, for instance, or specific events occurring at court. Top responses often led their arguments with critical debates on the text, or returned to critical comments they had referred to a later point in their response. The knowledge of critical readings in some responses was exceptional.

Weaker candidates failed to engage with debates, and simply quoted from critics without engaging with what they argued. Top candidates were able to explore other readings through their nuanced readings of the texts and some thoughtful references to stage productions were also made.

It was particularly noticeable that candidates of all levels were referring to particular critics rather than general ones. There was a real sense that the critics had been studied in depth. It was good to see more centres teaching beyond the anthology (lots of students mentioned feminist critic, Marilyn French, for example).

SECTION B: Other Drama

A Streetcar Named Desire was by far the most commonly studied play here. *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Waiting for Godot* were also popular choices. Very few candidates had studied *The Pitmen Painters* or *The Home Place*.

Candidate responses were generally clear and nearly all, with very few exceptions, showed at least a general understanding of the plays. Responses generally had an awareness of genre and dramatic structure without always showing a full appreciation. Context was addressed, but there was often not enough of a discriminative link between these contexts and the text itself. This meant that, although links were clear, they often remained at Level 3 for AO3 as they were factors that were not easy to evaluate beyond their initial connections.

There was also, in some cases, a lack of sophisticated responses where candidates gave surface level readings – of characterisation especially. This was perhaps most obviously seen in question 24 on masculinity in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Students seemed to conflate Williams' presentation of various male characters, with differing types of masculinity, which wasn't necessarily the same thing.

The best responses always brought stagecraft into their textual analysis, rather than just considering language/verbal elements.

Once again, in some cases, the Other Drama responses suffered as a consequence of candidates spending too long on their Shakespeare responses.

Question 1

Antony and Cleopatra

The question asked about setting.

Most responses were able to identify the key differences between the settings of Rome and Egypt and related these to the characters of Anthony and Cleopatra. Some candidates got waylaid at this point, getting caught up in a study of the characters which they sometimes remembered to relate back to the setting, whilst others skilfully explored the themes and ideals presented by each setting. Some candidates gave interesting feminist readings, exploring the exoticism of Egypt and linking this to the representation of Cleopatra.

Here is an opening from a good Level 3 response:

Shakespeare takes advantage of setting to great effect over the course of the play 'Antony and Cleopatra', with the homelands of the titular characters encapsulating their overall actions and demeanor, whether this leads them to act for better or worse. The play is set primarily in Rome and Egypt, the domains of Antony and Cleopatra respectively, and each character is very much defined by their setting, and acts wholly differently depending on such, being easily influenced throughout, especially Anthony. Both prominent areas are presented wholly differently, with these differences defining the actions of those who reside in them. Rome is presented in concept as stoic, rational and efficient, an attitude reflected mostly in the actions of its inhabitants, especially Octavius Caesar and Enobarbus. On the other hand, Egypt is portrayed in a polar opposite light, with the country being seen as one of hedonism and base pleasures. The way in which Shakespeare utilises these aspects throughout the play shapes the actions and events that define it wholly.

The general points are sound and there is clear understanding of how Shakespeare uses settings, but for a Level 4 response we would expect much more precision in expression, with less repetition and a sharper focus; an introduction that gets to the point much more quickly and starts to shape some sort of critical argument.

Below is an extract from a high Level 4 response. Note how the candidate has used other critical views to sustain an argument that is fully focused on the topic of the question. The text is always used to substantiate points made.

Jones argues that the constant shift in setting is used to achieve wider narrative goals, firstly in reference to Act 3 scene 1, where Ventidius is used to portray the widescale perspectives on the tragic conflict we observe upon the stage: 'He purposeth to Athens, whither, with what haste/The weight we must convey with's will permit/ We shall appear before him.' Jones argues that in such a far-reaching set of settings, we are able to see how many human perspectives there are on what occurs on the stage. This also allows the audience time to consider how public actions are conceived without the context of private lives we are afforded. In this sense we may also draw upon Bradley who explained in 1904 that Shakespearean heroes are ones of high repute, whose actions ripple across the world and affect more that just themselves, close to what Aristotle said as well. In seeing how widescale the play is in setting do we see the true ramifications of the triumvirate being torn apart, as Antony, one of the 'triple pillars of the world' opts for love above his duty. Furthermore in Cleopatra's death, 'Egypt is dying'. This, Bradley believes, is the tragedy …

Question 2

Antony and Cleopatra

The question asked about the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra.

More successful responses explored the characters as dramatic constructs and looked at the ideas that they represent, integrating this seamlessly with exploration of contextual factors, such as the anxiety around a female monarch. The more straightforward responses tended to conduct a fairly one-dimensional analysis of the characters of both protagonists.

More sophisticated responses understood the complexities of the relationship and the ambiguity surrounding Anthony and Cleopatra's feelings for one another. They also explored the political as well as sexual and romantic elements of the partnership. There were some chronological approaches, tracing the development of the relationship. Candidates analysed elements of passion, deceit, and manipulation; most interesting were discussions about how Antony and Cleopatra represented contrasting cultures.

Here is a good opening paragraph that develops an argument early on:

It would be misleading to characterize the play 'Antony and Cleopatra' solely as a love-tragedy, as the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra is not purely romantic; rather in his portrayal of the lovers, Shakespeare explores the importance of a love affair enacted in the 'public eye' and on a 'world' scale, in direct opposition to the standard of 'honour' in the predominant world power, Rome. Simultaneously an intense romantic love and a 'dubiously moral and destructive match', as it is described by the critic Bradley, Antony and Cleopatra's long relationship appears to be defined by paradox and ambiguity.

The following is an extract from a high Level 3 response. There is a clear focus on the question, appropriate reference to the text and clear – if not detailed and discerning – understanding of critical views:

…Arguably, Antony and Cleopatra's relationship can be likened to the rival Greek philosophies: Stoicism and Epicureanism. Cleopatra epitomizes Epicureanism in her advocation for mental pleasure, saying 'There's not a minute of our lives should stretch without some pleasure new'. Contrastingly, Rome enforces Antony to be a regimented leader, not letting his desires control him. Shakespeare possibly creates this binary opposition to show how such distinct characters can be drawn to each other by love. Emrys Jones notes at how 'all events and personalities are in flux and alternating' which could symbolize the unsettling nature of the pairs relationship. The play regularly shifts from the events in Rome and Egypt which could show how the pairs love affair is constantly unsettling because of the predicament that Antony finds himself in; trying to balance his desires from his duties…

Question 3

Hamlet

The question asked about deception.

This question was extremely popular and was mostly fairly well attempted. Even weaker responses managed to identify a number of examples of deception and explore some quotations linked to these, although they did so in a fairly list-like way.

Stronger responses explored more complex ideas, for example Hamlet's self-deception, the debate around the trustworthiness of the ghost and the concept of madness (although this was a risk for some as they slipped into a pre-learned essay about madness and lost focus on the question).

Both straightforward and more developed responses tended to consider the question character by character, focusing on Claudius, Polonius, Hamlet, and sometimes Gertrude and Ophelia. More basic responses explained the ways in which characters were deceptive, while more advanced responses considered the extent to which deception was occurring (e.g. is Hamlet really being deceptive with his 'antic disposition' or is he actually mad?). Most responses focused on Hamlet himself, with the context of early modern courts and spying (especially Elizabeth I) being popular. The 'mousetrap' was frequently mentioned but often in a generalised way, as if some students didn't know the details of that scene. Hamlet's cruel treatment of Ophelia was popular, and better supported, although there was a tendency to divert into a mini essay on women in Shakespeare's time.

Candidates were fond of discussing the Ghost. Some good attempts were made to link it to the task, but these often fell flat as the section became about 'uncertainty' rather than 'deception'. However, the Ghost was analysed well by candidates who understood the Catholic versus Protestant understanding of ghosts and applied that to the text. There were some textual inaccuracies, e.g. assertions that England was a Catholic country at this time.

Examiners would remind students that they should pay attention to the 'how' of the question as well focusing on key moments of deception in the play. Quotations were often sparse or not directly relevant. Generally there needs to be closer reference to the text.

Here is an extract from a Level 5 response to this question. Its strength lies in its sustained, sophisticated argument and the way in which it makes close links between contextual and critical material and the words of the text itself:

Shakespeare pervades the court of Elsinore with the theme of deception to establish a play defined by its secrecy and uncertainty. Although offering soliloquies as moments of honesty and revelation, the dominant theme of deceptive characters and acts serves to override such honesty for the most part of the play, creating a dramatic reconstruction of the secrecy and deception of Elizabethan England at a time of spy networks and war.

Use of a morally ambiguous ghost creates a fear of deception that inhibits the development of a Senecan revenge drama by causing doubt in Hamlet's mind. Some critics suggest the ghost of Hamlet is deceptive by its very nature, failing to clearly define itself as a force of good or evil. Such a notion is evident in Hamlet's questions: 'Be thou a spirit of health or a goblin damned?' With such a line beginning a threefold antithesis, Shakespeare registers in the consciousness of the audience the moral ambiguity of the ghost, with Hamlet recognising it may be a deceptive instrument of Satan attempting to manipulate his melancholy, as seen in 'Early Modern' psycho-physiology notions where humours were

thought to influence a character's behaviour. The appearance of the ghost further supports this idea: embodiment as a man would suggest a good spirit, however its failure to teach the doctrine of the church and the fear it evokes in Hamlet, suggests a satanic instrument and a deceptive presence. The exclamation, 'till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away' further evokes notions of purgatory…

… Shakespeare's choice to set Hamlet's individual suffering within the context of a court of deception emphasises the immorality that Shakespeare perceives to drive the Elizabethan state. Claudius and Polonius embody the courtly realpolitik that was seen throughout the Tudor period, seen in Polonius' suggestion to Reynaldo that 'by indirections find direction out.' Such juxtapositions emphasise the deception that pervades Elsinore, with the noun 'indirections' reflecting the structure of the entire play itself, featuring subplots of scheming. Reynaldo's name is even linked to the trickster figure of 'Reynard' who could have been familiar to Elizabethan audiences. Such evocation of deception likely casts Polonius as the Wolseyian figure of Elizabethan England, employing vast spying networks to do his bidding, with Shakespeare presenting Polonius as feeding on Claudius' patronage and the seizing and controlling of power in such a 'rotten' state.

However, Shakespeare does offer a challenge to such deceptive realpolitik, with Claudius' soliloquy offering a genuine confession that he committed the murder of Old Hamlet for 'my crown, mine own ambition and my queen.' Such clear-eyed contemplation contrasts with his previous rhetorical hypocrisy, with Sean McEvoy even suggesting that such a confession reflects a form of tragic heroism. McEvoy is supported in the fact that 'murder I the name of love' humanizes Claudius, juxtaposing Hamlet's abrasive treatment of Ophelia and suggesting an honest Renaissance monarch who contrasts with the deceptive court system he upholds. The use of Horatio as a dramatic tool similarly undermines the deception of the court, with Shakespeare recognising him as the embodiment of truth and morality…

Question 4

Hamlet

The question asked about the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude.

Most candidates dealt well with the complex nature of the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude. Some focused on the closet scene at the expense of ranging more widely across the text and whilst some candidates used Freud to explore the possible sexual undertones of the relationship, others were side-tracked into a retelling of the Oedipus story or explaining Freud's theories without necessarily grounding these in the text. Some of the strongest responses dealt with the 'mousetrap' scene and the ending and used these to demonstrate the ambiguity of Hamlet's feelings towards his mother. Links were made to contextual factors including the ambiguity of the Ghost as a reflection of religious confusion at the time, and anxiety about a female monarch.

Better responses examined the text as well as critics, noting the initial tension between mother and son over mourning, Gertrude's dismay at Hamlet's lecture on the two brothers, her defence of him after killing Polonius, Claudius's comment on Gertrude's love for her son, and so on. There was a range of interpretations of Gertrude's motivation for drinking from the poisoned cup. Candidates were quite censorious of Gertrude, support for her difficult position sadly lacking compared to the usual sympathy for Ophelia. Some offered historical arguments e.g. importance of stabilising the kingdom after the unexpected death of the king, or that Gertrude might have been seeking to protect Hamlet by marrying Claudius, or simply trying to survive in a dangerous court.

Stronger responses offered a sophisticated analysis of Shakespeare's use of language, structure and form to present Hamlet's resentment towards Gertrude for her hasty remarriage, his perception of her relationship with Claudius, the significance of the play-within-the-play, the exchange between mother and son in Act III, scene 4 and the ambiguities of this relationship as presented in Act V scene 2.

Most candidates were able to comment on the use and effect of the imagery of sickness, disease, decay and the 'unweeded garden', and to look at a variety of critical approaches (with varying levels of depth and understanding). Weaker candidates tended to present feminist perspectives within the context of a general and vague argument about women in this period being victims of a 'patriarchal society'. Some did deteriorate into character studies on Hamlet and Gertrude, without really considering their relationship as set out in the question; similarly, many responses limited themselves to writing about Hamlet's feelings towards his mother.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response to this question:

Adelman argues the tragic trajectory of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' is not the young prince's mission 'to avenge his father, but to save his mother' and in this way Shakespeare re-locates the Senecan world of early modern revenge tragedy (i.e. 'Antonio's Revenge'; 'The Spanish Tragedy') to a narrative of a reforming mission at which the relationship between the high-status male and the unchaste and inconstant mother is at the heart. In this relationship, Hamlet plays the part of the reforming Renaissance Prince, trying to purify his mother to protect his own male transcendence and this relationship can be seen as symbolic of the post-Reformation Protestant patriarchy of the Elizabethan England of Shakespeare's contemporary audience. Shakespeare presents the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude as a contrast between honesty and performance (or, 'seeming') as well as Gertrude symbolizing the masculine preoccupation with female inconstancy, resulting in a generalized image of femininity that is wanton and weak –'Frailty, thy name is woman'.

Shakespeare presents the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude as the discrepancy between honesty and performance, the private and the public. This is perhaps most potent in the contrasting appearances of grief in the son for his lost father and the mother for her dead husband and Kerrigan discusses the Freudian notion that 'mourning plays a physical role in the detachment from memory'. In I, ii Hamlet is accused by his mother of 'seeming' to grieve, and retorts 'Seems madam. Nay, it is; I know not 'seems'. Shakespeare's repetition of 'seems' at the beginning of the line as the iambic line ending structurally envisages Kerrigan's argument further. Shakespeare places the word 'seems' in intimate connection with 'madam' in the iambic foot, suggesting that Hamlet is not only trying to detach himself from the memory of his father, but to displace that memory onto his mother, whose guilt and grief remain concealed behind the mask of the public appearances at the court. This argument is enforced when the audience get a private insight into the extent Gertrude's conceit dominates Hamlet's consciousness in his first soliloquy: the sinful gluttony imagery of 'she would hang on to him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on' sees Shakespeare exploit the sexual phonology of 'grown' (i.e. 'groan') when performed aloud to paint an image of the masculine perception of woman's sin – a dominant social preoccupation in the post-Reformation patriarchy of Elizabethan society.

Moreover, French places particular critical emphasis on the relationship between Hamlet and Gerturde, particularly in reference to Hamlet's response to the Ghost's vengeance mission. She argues that the fact that Hamlet's response to the Ghost isn't one of action, but one of intellect and emotion; his response is feminine and Leverez pushes this idea in arguing that Hamlet's 'disgust at his own inner femininity' is what drives him to force the abhorrence onto Gertrude. This is textually supported by the Ghost's speech, which places greater weight on 'the couch for luxury and damned incest' that Gertrude sleeps upon than on his own murder, and the metaphor of 'those thoughts that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her' is an image of religious guilt to emotionally disgust Hamlet and to drive him on his purifying mission with Gertrude as opposed to the typical vengeance mission against Claudius. Indeed, Adelman argues that in the Ghost's speech Shakespeare is 'revisiting the story of Cain and Abel in the story of Adam and Eve' but the thorn imagery of Gertrude's guilt speaks more to Hamlet's 'unweeded garden' than to the Edenic biblical ideal of her dead husband peacefully 'sleeping within my orchard'. Shakespeare presents the relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet in biblical terms as symbolising the woman's temptation and inconstancy resulting in the disturbance of natural order, and impeding the attempts of the Renaissance prince to transgress. It is also worth considering the contextual origins of the narrative of Hamlet which Shakespeare adapted from the Norse tale of Amleth, and a key distinction between the two is that in the former Gertrude is complicit in the murder of Old Hamlet. Therefore from the tragedy's narrative context we can discern that the religious guilt Shakespeare presents in the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude is perhaps not only due to the crime of incest, but also the crime of murder. Shakespeare contributes this ambiguity of the original narrative because, as Kastan argues, 'for Shakespeare, the uncertainty is the point.'

A crucial scene to explore in relation to the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude is the closet scene (III iv) and French emphasises the centrality of the episode to the tragedy's five-act structure to enforce Adelman's point that it is the mother who is the motive of Hamlet's mission. However, in the closet Shakespeare established a meeting of private and public spheres to reveal new depth to Gertrude's character. A. C. Bradley discusses the tragic concept that 'the feminine eyes turn inward to their internal pain as contrasted to the masculine eyes turning outwards to blame their pain on divinity. Shakespeare presents the gendered contrast through Hamlet and Gertrude in the line, 'you go not till I set you up a glass/ where you may see the inmost part of you' with the mirror imagery of 'glass' reflected in the chiatic syntax of the second line, and the superlative of 'inmost' gives emphasis to Hamlet's enforcement of Bradley's idea of turning the feminine eyes into the soul to purify the guilt within. Contrastingly, after the killing of Polonius, Hamlet's masculine eyes, as

Bradley argues, 'turn outward' to blame the 'capricious fate' which Kastan discusses as the motive behind his tragic trajectory. The line, 'heaven hath pleased it so / To punish me with this and this with me' sees Shakespeare repeat the chiatic line structure, but ironically Hamlet fails to hold the same mirror up to himself as he does to Gertrude. Shakespeare is also continuing a religious conflict here in the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude between Hamlet's protestant sense of providence yet enforcement of his mother's Catholic repentance. Indeed when he has 'turned' Gertrude's 'eyes into mine very soul,' she describes seeing 'such black ingrained spots as will not leave their tinct.' This is perhaps a biblical allusion to the Corinthians verse 'now we see through a glass, darkly.' When Gertrude looks at herself through a glass she sees darkness, but this is not necessarily representative of a sin for Hamlet to purify her of in the image of God, but rather representative of a dark, human ambiguity of character. This is particularly brave characterisation by Shakespeare in the post-Reformation context and shows a departure from the Aristotelian model of tragedy founded on plot for a Shakespearean model based on dark ambiguities of human character, epitomised in the Hamlet and Gertrude relationship.

Furthermore, Adelman also discusses the conflation of Gertrude and Ophelia in Hamlet's mind into a 'generalised image of femininity' reflective of the patriarchal attitudes of Shakespeare's time. This can be textually supported in the nunnery scene when between Hamlet's brutal interrogation of 'Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?' and his contrastingly humble preceding statement, 'I am myself indifferent honest,' the female figures of Gertrude and Ophelia collapse into one, as Shakespeare presents another ambiguity as to whether Hamlet and Ophelia are breeding sinners together, or whether Hamlet is the sinner and Ophelia, his lover, assumes the maternal role. The amalgamation of the female roles of lover and mother is supported by the following line where Hamlet confesses that he has committed sins 'it have better my mother had not bore me' revealing his preoccupation with the corrupt maternal figure in a confrontational scene with his girlfriend. Indeed Kerrigan argues that when Ophelia has 'remembrances of yours I have long long'd to redeliver' Hamlet is reminded of Gertrude and her refusal to remember and this can be supported by Hamlet's witty verse retort to Ophelia's comment on the play-within-the-play; 'Tis brief my Lord / H: As women's love'. Shakespeare presents Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude as blurring with his relationship with Ophelia, as the feminine roles of mother and lover collapse into an abhorred focus of what French describes as 'unchaste inconstancy'.

In conclusion, T.S. Eliot argues that Gertrude as a focus for Hamlet's tragedy is insufficient as an objective correlative (i.e. Hamlet's response to Gertrude's incest is too excessive for the balance of the art thus rendering Hamlet as a tragedy, to Eliot's eye, 'imperfect'). However, the view that Gertrude's 'unchaste inconstancy' is the dominant preoccupation of the baseline consciousness of the text, particularly in relation to Hamlet, whose response to the Ghost's mission is one of saving the mother rather than avenging the father, is justified in the context of Hamlet's social role as the reforming Renaissance prince, as opposed to the chivalric figure of his father's age. Shakespeare presents the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude as the infiltration of an ambiguous feminine presence into the conventional masculine revenge tragedy, shifting the prince's mission from one of retribution to reformation.

Note that all references to critical ideas and to the play's contexts are always linked in detail to the text itself.

Question 5

King Lear

The question asked about the presentation of Edgar.

The character of Edgar was explored with confidence by most candidates, with many seeing him as a foil for Edmund and looking at his disguise as an example of other reversals in the play. Links were made between Edgar and Lear and the themes of blindness and madness were explored with success, although as with most responses, there was the danger for some candidates of slipping into a pre-learned response around these themes. The ending was dealt with successfully and more able candidates were able to discuss Edgar's role as Poor Tom in assisting Lear's development in humanity and understanding, and in guiding and protecting Gloucester in Act IV, Scene 6.

Candidates provided relevant contextual details for this question, noting social hierarchy and primogeniture rules. This was relatively successfully in that the character of Edgar was really explored, firstly as a foil to Edmund and secondly as Poor Tom. Comments were made particularly on his legitimacy and his role in the play. Relatively few focused on the structure and parallels of the play which linked Edgar to his brother and Cordelia.

Critical readings about madness as a means of voicing the 'truth' were often applied well. Some candidates effectively explored the change in Edgar's language when he became 'Mad Tom'. The very best responses also showed evidence of confident, personal analysis of the character's function in the play. One examiner wrote:

'Thoroughly enjoyed a cogent and detailed hatchet job on Edgar. To summarise: he starts off gullible; his disguise as Poor Tom is inspired not by a moral duty to empathise with the indigent but by a cowardly instinct of self-preservation; his desire to make his father value life would surely have been better served by identifying himself rather than staging the cruel and preposterous charade on Dover cliff; he thinks Gloucester deserves blinding for fathering a bastard; every second he rabbits on in the final scene brings Cordelia closer to the noose; and he only becomes king when the other candidates withdraw. Hardly a promising CV for the post of King, and surely not auspicious for the future of Albion. The candidate concluded by asking what Edgar has learned from the whole chaotic disaster: if we should 'speak what we feel, not what we ought to say', that is exactly what Cordelia did, and look what that led to. Perceptive and independent thinking,..'

Here is a well-crafted introduction:

Shakespeare's presentation of Edgar shows him to be an example of learning through madness and suffering. Cedric Watts criticizes the inconsistencies of Edgar's character, writing that the fact that he 'flees instead of vindicating himself before his father implies a weaker character than is subsequently shown.' However, in claiming this to be a failing of the play, Watts overlooks the fact that Edgar's development, much like that of Lear and Gloucester, is used by Shakespeare to demonstrate that development in the form of stoic acceptance comes through madness and suffering.

Here is the opening of a Level 5 response to this question:

Critical discussion of 'King Lear' has often centred around the question of whether or not Edgar is a symbol of justice and morality in the play. Whilst on one hand it appears that Edgar blindly rejects the nihilism of the play, as suggested by Brooke, it seems more convincing to interpret Shakespeare's portrayal of Edgar as one that offers genuine hope for redemption...

Edgar's relationship with Edmund and the way that he is arguably justified in murdering him, portrays him as a force for good in the play. The tone of innocence created through the interrogative, 'armed brother?' suggests a total trust of his brother, something that would be admired at the time, yet something that Edmund dismisses through his manipulation of him. This manipulation serves to subvert the idea of natural chain of being at the time, as the first born was heir to all, while a bastard such as Edmund would have been seen as 'base' and illegitimate. This subversion and his betrayal at the hands of his brother arguably justifies his actions towards the end of the play, challenging and defeating him in a fight. Edgar's religious imagery 'the gods are just' furthers this sense that Edgar is enacting the will of some higher power of morality, presenting him as almost a saint-like figure. Brooke, however, claims that Edgar's claim here, 'is an affront to the human experience the play presents', arguing that Edgar is presented as nothing more than deluded in claiming that morality exists in such a nihilistic existence. On one hand, this is a tenable idea, as characters such as Gloucester and Kent hold an extremely bleak outlook on life, with Kent's final rhyming couplet: 'I have a journey sir, shortly to go; my master calls me, I must not say no' creating a tone of finality and implying suicidal thoughts. On the other hand, Brooke's claim can mostly be dismissed, as Edgar appears to be the last bastion of morality in the play, albeit contrasting almost all other characters. From a Marxist perspective, Edgar's murder of his brother is the tearing down of tyrannical power to allow equality. Furthermore, the negation, 'I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund' creates a solemn and sincere portrayal of Edgar as egalitarian in nature, justified in despising his brother but choosing not to. Edgar rejects the chain of being and sees others as equals. From a Kantian perspective this justifies his actions as he reveals he is capable of viewing other as ends in themselves rather than a means to an end. Edgar's relationship with Edmund, therefore, presents his as a character that represents justice, having a strong moral compass and being justified in his violence...

Question 6

King Lear

The question asked about the play's ending.

The ending of the play was generally well understood, with the better responses exploring its complexity and looking at it as a problematic aspect of the play. Some related this to the context of performance, exploring the ending as a reason the play was not performed for some time and sometimes touching on the idea of the alternative ending.

Most candidates managed to relate it to the rest of the text and consider it as a conclusion, however some candidates did not focus specifically on the ending. One candidate, for example, traced the development of the action across the entire play and, in an eight-page essay, only dedicated the final page to the ending. Others interpreted the word 'ending' very loosely, for example by trying to argue that the heath scenes were part of the ending. A number of candidates considered it successfully in the context of tragedy and explored critical approaches to the purpose of tragedy with the most successful responses evaluating these approaches.

There was much discussion of the dramatic impact of Lear's entrance with Cordelia's body following Edmund's death at the hands of Edgar; more able candidates were able to relate this to Lear's development as a tragic hero, and the powerful effect of this on the audience, particularly in terms of the king's agony at Cordelia's death and the extent to which there is seen to be justice in the bleak outcome of the play. The main weakness, as with other questions on texts within the genre of tragedy, was a lack of understanding of the conventions.

Many candidates engaged well with critical readings of the play's ending, and how it fails to provide the expected catharsis/resolution. The best answers considered the false sense of ending that is then undercut with Cordelia's death, or explored how Lear's initial decision foreshadowed the ending. The role of the Fool was discussed effectively by some candidates as well. There were also some thoughtful contextual analysis about how the ending of the play reflected concerns about monarchy at the time of writing. There were also some interesting essays that explored a modern response to the play – the nihilism of the play having more resonance in a post-religious era. There was confusion with some candidates about what constitutes 'catharsis' in the Aristotelian paradigm.

Here is the opening of a good conceptual approach to the topic – shaping an argument early on:

By the end of 'King Lear', Shakespeare offers a bleak future as the escalating violence that occurs throughout the play results in the disintegration of an already fragile social order. However, Shakespeare uses the increasing violence of the play in order to showcase the inherent fragility that was already present in the play's world. The final twist, the death of Cordelia and then Lear, serves to show that there is no conventional morality to the play…

The response continues with detailed engagement with critical ideas and debate. Note how the candidate roams across the play whilst remaining focused on the question:

Lear's actions from the beginning are the trigger for the collapse of society that can be seen at the end of the play. Edgar, believed to be the new king of Britain after the death of Lear and his familial line, ends the play with a couplet: 'the oldest hath borne most; we that are young / shall never see so much, nor live so long.' Whilst the rhyming couplets could be seen as a cohesion of a new country under a new ruler, Edgar is in fact offering a prophecy of bleakness and doom. The call that the 'young' will nor 'live so long' showcases a world so shaken and fragile by the events of the play that it cannot continue to function and Fintan

O'Toole's argument that the ending 'hints that the world may be coming to an end' is clearly seen through the despair of Edgar and the few other surviving characters. Although Anna Beer argues that by the end of the play 'Lear has learned nothing' and Susan Bruce believes the play 'begins, as it ends, in a fragile world', it is clear that Lear's one act of dividing his kingdom has caused a chain of increasingly violent and damaging events. Whilst Beer and Bruce may argue that the inherent structure of society in the play does not change and view Lear as merely a catalyst for eventual social disintegration, Lear's fatal error at the beginning of the play serves as the fundamental cause of its bleak end...

Here is another nicely shaped opening:

'King Lear' is widely considered to be one of Shakespeare's most powerful tragedies, yet its ending is decidedly tragically unconventional. Indeed, Shakespeare breaks the convention of an ending where the world justly rights itself in order to create a moral commentary on the unjust nature of the real world. Moreover, Shakespeare presents the death of Cordelia as symbolic of the death of virtue in order to criticise the amorality of Jacobean society, but equally ends with the hopeful conversation and coming together of the survivors Edgar, Kent and Albany in order to promote the idea of cooperation to his audience in a politically divided Jacobean Britain.

Notice how this candidate shapes the argument clearly right from the start and sustains it, embedding the details of context and critical views as she goes:

It is the opinion of many that the ending of Shakespeare's 'King Lear' is as bleak as the chaotic events which lead up to it. While it could be argued that the deaths of Goneril, Regan and the Machiavellian Edmund bring about a sense of restoration of old order values, it would be just as valid an argument to say that the deaths of the plain speakers such as Cordelia and the consequent demise of Lear – and probably Kent – outweigh the sense of justice that Jacobean and modern audiences would feel. Lear's statement in Act 4 that he is 'a man more sinned against than sinning' reflects and perhaps foreshadows the culminating events of the play. As a result Shakespeare concluded the play on an ambiguous note where we are just as unsure as in the beginning of the play what the future of this 'divided' kingdom will be.

Kent's question following the death of Cordelia,'Is this the promised end?' seems to speak for the whole audience and perhaps reinforces Fintan O'Toole's claim that the play 'reaches a moral conclusion when Edgar defeats Edmund'. Such an event seemingly restores order and connotes the idea that 'the wheel has come full circle'. As a result the audience is inclined to think this is 'the promised end'. This is, however, not the case once we find out that Cordelia is 'hanged'. Shakespeare's use of stage directions here, 'Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms' is possibly a deliberate reminder to the audience of the Pieta – the famous depiction of Christ having been taken down from the cross. Immediately we are reminded of Cordelia as a Christ-like figure and Samuel Johnson's comment that 'Shakespeare suffers the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause' seems to reinforce this interpretation. However, Cordelia, unlike Christ, does not die for other people's sins or their redemption. We remember that Edgar has already defeated his brother and restored order. In the light of this, Cordelia's death, despite Johnson's claims, seems unnecessary. Nahum Tate's re-writing of 'King Lear' in the seventeenth century serves as an indicator of the injustice felt among Jacobean audiences. This is a version in which Edmund is vanquished and Edgar ends up marrying Cordelia.

Question 7

Othello

The question asked about the presentation of Emilia.

This response was successfully dealt with by the majority of candidates, with most understanding, on one level or another, the transformation of Emilia through the course of the play.

Most candidates engaged with Shakespeare's use the character and her dramatic purpose. They considered her role in the unfolding of the plot, her relationships with Iago and Desdemona, and her pivotal role in the final scene. Weaker candidates tended to adopt a rather simplistic view of Emilia's role in resisting the expectations of women in the patriarchal society of the time by defying Iago, defending Desdemona and providing the voice of truth at the end of the play. Some became confused by wondering to what extent Emilia was a feminist, and candidates should think carefully before making sweeping statements about gender prejudice. Stronger responses looked at the questions arising from Emilia's willingness to provide Iago with the handkerchief, and at Shakespeare's development of her role here compared to the presentation of the incident in the original source material.

In terms of critical readings, best responses referred to how Emilia acts as Iago's downfall in his underestimation of her. Detailed analysis of her two main speeches, exploring her language and imagery, proved effective. However, students might like to note the following comments for an examiner:

'There was a standard pattern for responses to this question – the vast majority of candidates contrasted Emilia's obedience at the start of the play with her disobedience at the end of the play, often also considering her comments to Desdemona about men's treatment of women. Stronger candidates explored the extent to which she can be considered a proto-feminist and there were plenty of thoughtful comments on different possible reactions to Emilia between contemporary Elizabethan audiences and 21st century audiences. Again, as with the *King Lear* question about Edgar, candidates were desperate to roll out their Aristotelian terms, so we heard that Emilia's 'hamartia' is her desire to please her husband by giving him the handkerchief, and her 'anagnorisis' comes at the end when she realises his duplicity. If candidates wish to use this terminology with reference to secondary characters, they should, if they want to appear sophisticated, acknowledge that this is in breach of the critical tradition'.

This was a fruitful approach to the question:

Shakespeare's Emilia has long been a background figure in 'Othello'. In the Victorian period her significance was extremely overlooked; during productions her lines were cut dramatically in the final scene due to fears she would up-stage Othello. However, since then, Emilia has become a celebrated figure due to her ability to speak her mind and transgress the boundaries of her gender.

Despite this, Emilia is also a figure doomed to die: Shakespeare creates an intolerant society where such women simply cannot survive ...

And another confident opening:

Emilia, though far from as major a character as Othello, Iago or Desdemona, is one of Shakespeare's most intriguing women and certainly, I believe, the most interesting woman in 'Othello'. She is both good-hearted and worldly, a great example of Shakespeare's

contradictory characters, being first a foil to the innocence and angelic nature of Desdemona and then a triumphant hero in the play's final moments.

Here is a Level 5 response. Note how the candidate shapes a sophisticated argument throughout, moving well beyond a straightforward description of the character and never losing sight of her as Shakespeare's dramatic construct:

Shakespeare presents the character of Emilia in 'Othello' as being complex and not conforming to the 'categories created by the Renaissance patriarchy' (Karim-Cooper). However, this is not absolute, which Shakespeare most successfully presents through her relationship with her husband Iago, her outspoken feminist cries, and her eventual death. While Emilia may attempt to assert herself, she is ultimately silenced and punished for it. Her tragic outcome thus suggests she is more of a cautionary construction used by Shakespeare to warn that women who attempted to challenge patriarchal 'categories' are ultimately subdued.

Emilia's complexity is primarily shown by Shakespeare through her relationship with her husband Iago. Initially Shakespeare shows how actually Emilia does not struggle to fit in to the 'categories created by the Renaissance patriarchy', instead she rather willingly submits to them due to her loyalty to her husband, a trait that was expected of women during the Jacobean era. It is in this light that Neely argues that Emilia is 'prey to the domestic ideology of wifely virtue'. This is most clearly shown through Emilia's deliberate choice to steal Desdemona's handkerchief. Interestingly, in Cinthio's original play, it was Iago who stole the handkerchief. Shakespeare changing this to Emilia must therefore be questioned, and can arguably be in order to show that although Emilia serves as Desdemona's maid, her loyalty is primarily directed towards her husband. Indeed, knowing that the handkerchief was Desdemona's 'first remembered of the Moor', Emilia chooses to steal it anyway due to the fact that 'nothing but to please his fantasy'. The fact that Shakespeare demonstrates that Emilia has no ulterior purpose other than to please the needs of her husband is clearly indicative of her 'wifely virtue'. This is even more significant when considering Iago's treatment towards Emilia, describing her as a 'foolish wife' a 'wench', a 'whore'. The fact that Emilia submits to his demands regardless clearly shows she does fit into the 'categories created by the Renaissance patriarchy' to a substantial degree.

Yet, it is important to recognise how Shakespeare undermines this through showing how Emilia is significant in bringing down her own husband. At the end of the play Shakespeare portrays Emilia as being the 'one who tells the truth' (Ward), ultimately destroying Iago's self-constructed identity and epithet as 'Honest Iago'. Emilia declares, 'you told a lie, an odious, damned lie!/ Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie'. Shakespeare's repetition of 'lie' is highly significant in fully exposing the duplicitous nature of Iago, destroying his reputation and bringing him to justice. This becomes a highly notable point in the play, as it shows Emilia willingly and publically accusing her husband of a myriad of disreputable actions. This would have completely ruptured the Jacobean image of the woman staying obedient to her husband, and thus Emilia cannot truly be seen as someone who is prey to 'wifely virtue' – as she clearly overcomes this.

This sense of overcoming traditional expectations is proven again by Emilia through her outspoken calls for equality in conversation with Desdemona. However, this is to a degree undermined by her circumstances and her actions. It is in this light that Bradshaw discusses whether she should be called a 'crypto-feminist' due to her need to conceal her progressive ideals. Towards the end of the play, Shakespeare writes how Emilia calls out:

'Let their husbands know, wives have some like them'. Similar to Shylock's 'Hath not a Jew eyes' speech in the 'Merchant of Venice', Shakespeare depicts Emilia questioning and criticizing the prejudices and inequalities of Jacobean society. This is especially significant

when considering how important 'sense', or reason, was to the Jacobean idea of 'Chain of Being' – in which reason was the only thing that separated man from animal. Thus, by Shakespeare depicting Emilia as claiming women having 'sense' too, it can be seen as a clear 'feminist' call for equality.

However, Shakespeare undercuts this through his use of staging, in which Emilia is talking to only Desdemona at this point; there is nobody else on stage. By doing this, Shakespeare shows how Emilia is still bound by the 'categories of the Renaissance patriarchy', as Emilia does not air these views in front of men, and would indeed have been disavowed had she done so. Further to this, it must also be remembered that her views in no way nullify the fact that while desiring equality, she still conceded significant power to her 'wayward' husband. Thus, Shakespeare expertly depicts the multi-faceted dimensions of Emilia's character.

This is finally achieved through Emilia's devastating death by Iago which comes to form her purpose as a cautionary construct. On the one hand, Shakespeare depicts Emilia's sense of empowerment and willingness to assert her authority as a female, even in the face of physical threat. Emilia cries out: 'Let heaven and man and devils, let them all / All cry shame against me, yet I'll speak'. Here Shakespeare imbues Emilia with a clear assertiveness and power to 'speak' out against injustice – however this is again undercut – tragically – by Iago's subsequent murder of Emilia. Tennenhouse comments on how 'Jacobean tragedies offer up their scenes of excessive punishments as if mutilating the female could correct political corruption', and indeed, Iago's murder of Emilia does overwhelmingly seem to be a silencing of the female and her political voice. It is in this regard that Shakespeare presents Emilia as being punished for her fundamentally progressive views. Emilia's tragic doom taps into the literary convention, employed by Shakespeare among other playwrights, of a strong woman falling from power to a tragic doom – as is the case with Emilia, and other women like Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare thus goes to present how women like Emilia are ultimately trapped by the 'categories of the Renaissance patriarchy' despite attempts to challenge them.

To conclude, Shakespeare's presentation of Emilia is highly complex, but ultimately tragic. While Emilia may come to symbolise the voice of strong, female, authority in the play, the fact that this is ultimately silenced can be seen as a caution that women who attempt to challenge social expectations are ultimately punished.

Question 8

Othello

The question asked about reputation.

Many candidates chose this question, but significantly it was felt that some would have benefitted from spending a little more time thinking about the meaning of 'reputation'. Many failed to define what they understood by reputation, but bandied the word about, and floundered amidst Iago's reputation for honesty and Desdemona's reputation as a Madonna/ whore.

The most popular question in Section A also prompted the broadest range of responses. The best of these integrated ideas about race, reputation and gender without losing focus on the question. Weaker responses confused race and reputation and wrote an essay about racism rather than integrating this as part of a wider understanding of reputation which also included factors such as Othello's military success. Some candidates also successfully integrated feminist readings exploring the reputation of women and some also related this to setting. A number of responses considered the duplicitous nature of Iago and his use of reputation as a means of deception, showing awareness of stagecraft by considering the audience as the fourth wall. This question lent itself well to AO3 with candidates exploring the idea of reputation in the context of Venetian society.

The ability to analyse the text precisely was a determining factor in this essay, with the litmus test being the ubiquitously quoted 'reputation, reputation, reputation' from Cassio. Weaker answers simply said that the repetition showed how important reputation is; stronger answers focused on the 'immortal' / 'bestial' metaphor later in the speech. There were many good answers that used contextual understanding of blacks and women to show how characters fight against and eventually succumb to these stereotypes, or (in the case of Iago) use reputation for their own gain, and candidates then went on to explore how Shakespeare uses these characters to show the dangers of reputation.

Another discriminating factor when marking this essay was references to Venice: weaker candidates talked about the importance of reputations in Venice, or even appeared to think the play was written to be performed in front of Venetians; stronger answers explored the ways Shakespeare uses his exotic location to make veiled comments on his own society.

A consideration of structure and how and when Othello is introduced into the play yielded good results – how his racialised reputation precedes him. Most students linked a discussion of race well to Loomba's critical essay in the Edexcel anthology and this essay was used effectively by lots of candidates. This included considering how Othello ends up embodying the racial stereotypes that his initial portrayal defies. The debates between Bradley, Coleridge and Leavis about Othello's character also produced some excellent AO5 marks – as long as this material was used to answer the question. Best responses explored the othering of both Othello and Desdemona in terms of reputation. Strong response also explored the significance of the setting of Venice and Cyprus. Strong candidates used critical readings to enhance their discussion of context, for example with details about the status of Moors in Britain, or the reputation of women in Venice, while others explored how modern audiences may interpret race differently.

Students should note that a number of examiners commented on how critical views were often more of a focus than the play itself. Similarly, there was sometimes too much emphasis on historical context at the expense of literary analysis, resulting in responses that read like sociology essays.

Here is an example of a typical Level 2 opening – discussing characters as real/focus entirely on character/limited sense of a writer at work:

'Othello' is a tragedy by Shakespeare revolving around the main protagonist Othello, whose downfall in the play results from his lack of confidence in himself and his insecurities. Reputations throughout the play are tarnished mainly by the 'evil villain' in the play, Iago and we see the downfall of many characters.

Below is a much better approach – considering what Shakespeare was trying to do as a dramatist with his characters:

Shakespeare's use of the theme of reputation in 'Othello' is vital to the construction of the tragedy as it is used to develop both the protagonist and the villain. While Shakespeare uses the construction of a reputation to present Othello as a tragic hero, he simultaneously presents Iago's unique villainy as his ability to manipulate reputation with disastrous effects. Yet not only is it used to develop his tragic hero and villain, but he also creates a complex character in the form of Desdemona who, arguably of the three most prominent characters in the play, is the only one whose reputation is most true to her character yet most damagingly destroyed by Iago's villainy.

Some candidates failed to range across the play widely enough on question 8. For example, some did not venture much beyond Brabantio's racist assumptions about Othello in the opening scenes.

More perceptive candidates explored the character's reputation, both within the play and with the audience, noting elements of Shakespeare's stagecraft in manipulating this:

One way Shakespeare explores reputation in the play 'Othello' is through the contrast between Iago's reputation with the audience and his reputation among characters in the play. Shakespeare presents two sides, Iago the manipulator to the audience and Iago the friend to other characters. The play begins with Iago addressing the audience, telling them 'I am not what I am'. This immediately makes the audience untrusting of this character and worried for his revenge against the 'moor' ...

Exploration of Shakespeare's use of setting and the contemporary reputations of Venice and Cyprus proved successful:

In 'Othello', Shakespeare presents the instability of reputation. Not only the reputation of people, but also reputation of objects and places. From the very beginning of the play, Iago uses his own reputation to undermine the reputation of others and to 'make his superiors his puppets' (Cox). This climaxes in Act 3, scene 3, the 'Temptation Scene', when Iago tarnishes the reputation of Desdemona through her slanderous words. Although Desdemona's reputation is proven true in the final scene, the damage cannot be undone as her reputation is forever tarnished in Othello's eyes. Further more, the reputation of the play's setting with Venice not only as a cultural hub but also a 'byword for exotic vices' (O'Toole) shows how conflicting reputation can be. Similarly, the liminal Cyprus, which was invaded by the Turks in 1570, had a reputation for instability, lying at the boundary between Christianity and Islam...

Here is an example of a low Level 4 response, covering fairly typical character-focused material. There are weaknesses in expression, but the response is discriminating overall, using critical ideas appropriately and never losing sight of Shakespeare as a writer, nor of the theme of the question:

In Shakespeare's tragedy 'Othello' Shakespeare's characters' reputation to both his audience and one another, in the close proximities of Cyprus island, in which most of the play is set, is used effectively by Shakespeare to 'challenge' presumptions perhaps of his black protagonist in his racially prejudice contemporary Jacobean society. Shakespeare utilizes the reputation 'blackamoors' have to create his 'noble and tender' protagonist, and yet subsequently perhaps 'issue a warning' (Rhymer) as he 'pathetically' (Leavis) and tragically falls. Reputation is also presented as arguably a motive for his antagonist Iago who is seen throughout as 'next to the devil' (Coleridge) and as an important idea which all characters acknowledge and depend on throughout the play, and thus catalyses the tragedy.

Shakespeare, through exploring Othello's reputation, in the perspectives of other characters initially, allows his audience to conjure an idea, similar to racial stereotypes of the time, of this Othello. 'Muslims and black men are base and animalistic, they have less control of their emotions.' Shakespeare certainly allows for this reputation of black men to be seen as Iago is given first voice of Othello, calling him a 'ram' a 'lascivious moor'. Shakespeare thus gives Othello immediately a reputation of any black man who 'corrupted by spells and medicines.' The importance of reputation is suggested therefore by Shakespeare, as his protagonist is seen by his audience as no more than a 'base man.' Perhaps, then, through Shakespeare's use of dialogue, and a strong appearance on stage, Shakespeare allows Othello to defeat this reputation in his beautiful, heroic-like language of iambic pentameter as he calls to 'keeps up your bright swords for the dew will rust them.'

In introducing Othello in this complex way, reshaping the audience's expectations of Othello, Shakespeare uses Othello's now respectable reputation, shocking and unpredictable, to 'make a case for equal(ity)' (Dusinberre) and truly 'challenge his white patriarchy' (Loomba) as the progressive forward-thinking playwrite that Shakespeare is known to be. Othello's character has a clearly positive reputation within the Venetian senate, which again his language demonstrates, as he addresses 'most potent, grave and reverend signors'. Shakespeare again is exploring how base men can 'have a nobility in their natures' as the Duke declare 'your son-in-law is far more fair than black.' Through this Shakespeare allows his play to become a true tragedy, as this respectable reputation becomes overcome and overwrought with his tragic flaws as the play progresses, such as his jealousy that he is left at the end with no nobility, crying 'o' 'o', a devastating Christian like tragic fall from high reputation to a Judas like death, 'killing myself, to die upon a kiss'.

The importance of reputation as a drive for this tragedy's plot is therefore hugely evident by Shakespeare, and arguably even Desdemona's reputation is necessary for the play's outcome as Jardine comments compellingly that whilst Desdemona 'accepts her role in society' the reputation of the promiscuity of Venetian women is hugely relevant to Othello's predisposition to believe her adultery.

Shakespeare furthermore presents reputation as a drive of his antagonist Iago's machinations. Whilst Coleridge, arguably compellingly, explores Iago as having 'motiveless malignity', Hazlitt explores his motive as a primeval male 'Love of power' stemming therefore from a want of a good reputation. This can be seen as Shakespeare starts his play on the idea of Iago's desire for the role of lieutenant, almost therefore making it evident that this is Iago's reasoning for both Cassio and Othello's demise as he explains to the audience he 'is worth no worse a place'.

Shakespeare thus explores, through the idea of the reputation from being a lieutenant,

Iago's jealousy. Perhaps, as the play continues, Shakespeare comments more on Iago's malignity stemming from his desire of a wealthy reputation as he seeks to destroy others, even so far as to bringing Othello physically on stage down to his level as they both 'kneel' almost in a marriage ceremony. Arguably, however, as Bradley expresses, the audience's 'burning hatred and burning tears' for Iago, we as the audience, think less of his reasoning to 'o'er leap these moral fences' but the pure evil in which he did so, as Coleridge already expressed. Interestingly, from siding his audience with Iago through dramatic asides and soliloquies, leaves the play with Iago promising not to speak of his reasons for the chaos he brought. Perhaps this is to ultimately save his reputation.

Furthermore, through Shakespeare's use of minor characters such as Cassio, the importance of reputation is clearly seen. Shakespeare comments on the reputation Cassio feels pressured by; his love for Bianca, a courtesan, seen as he calls her 'most fair' 'sweet Bianca' is shamed by others and thus becomes less important than his reputation, as both Iago and Emilia call her a 'strumpet'. Shakespeare arguably criticises Venetian society for their intolerance for outsiders by exploring Cassio's dependence on his reputation which ruins his relationship. As a modern audience, this intolerance is picked up on far more, as seen by the critic Greer, who correlates the racial aggression of Iago to that seen today – a strong reason for Shakespeare's still current relevance. Shakespeare ultimately utilizes his minor character Cassio to pick up on the dependence of reputation in these societies, where one's status in their job is more important than their class or background, seen hugely as he cries on stage, distraught, 'My reputation! O my reputation!'

Overall Shakespeare presents his theme of reputation throughout his tragic play to catalyse his plot as racial and 'other' stereotypes are seen to be grounded in ones reputation. It arguably becomes the reason for the tragedy and tragic demise of each character.

Question 9

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The question asked about love.

Many candidates focused very closely on marriage, using Lisa Hopkins' critical essay from the Edexcel Anthology. Others considered the different types of love explored in the play, for example forbidden love, unrequited love etc. Most responses engaged well with contexts such as issues around patriarchy and power. The very best responses were those that did not lose sight of the text, nor of the play as a comedy.

This opening from a Level 3 response covered fairly common ground, looking at the various types of love in the play:

The theme of love in Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is one that is integral to the play. Within the opening scene of the play, and throughout Act 1 Scene 1, the audience can clearly depict the different natures of love. Shakespeare clearly presents the importance of love by quickly establishing it in the initial scene of the play, with Theseus and Hippolyta's relationship stemming from battle rather than adoration. The notion of forbidden love is further explored through Hermia being unable to marry her lover, Lysander, due to it going against her father's choice. Ultimately, the love stems from aristocratic and patriarchal norms, and how love is a consequence of these concepts.

The candidate shows clear understanding of the main points but note the repetitive, sometimes hesitant, expression of ideas.

Here are extracts from a Level 5 response:

In Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', his presentation of love demonstrates a sense of ambivalence as to whether it is a harmful force of control, as seen in Oberon and Titania's feud and the love potion, or a symbol of ordered prosperity, as evidenced by the lovers' marriages by the end of the play. Marriage and love are pivotal elements of a conventional Elizabethan comedy, as the plays were likely to be performed during marriage ceremonies, and Lisa Hopkins supports this, writing that 'marriage is an appropriate provider of closure' that focuses on happiness 'within a group' rather than the 'individualist' notions of tragedies. However, the play begins with the idea of love being effectively suppressed by the world of the court, with Egeus' 'threats of death' introducing connotations of a tragedy. As the lovers escape from this into the chaotic world of the forest in the hope of finding freedom in their affections, they soon find themselves thrown into a world of sexual mayhem.

These two facets of love are separated into displays of wholesome, courtly love between Lysander and Hermia in Theseus' court, and the sexual abandon from Act II upon entry into the fairy world. Kiernan Ryan comments that the 'Athenian scenes frame the scenes of erotic mayhem in the woods', suggesting that Shakespeare balances romance and carnal desire within the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy, with the former relating to the Athenian world, and the latter to the festive traditions of the pastoral. He also uses the character arcs of the lovers to explore the naïve, unawareness of sexual desire within Hermia, who represents the young woman of Elizabethan society who would have been sheltered from these ideas.

This is evident when Hermia suddenly becomes aware of her female vulnerability in being alone with Lysander as she tells him to 'lie further off, in human modesty', thus attempting to protect her chaste expectations from the court that have followed her into the woods. However, this suppression of her newly awakened desire proves futile in her nightmares: 'Methought a serpent ate my heart away, and you sat smiling at his cruel prey'. Emma Smith comments on the clear 'phallic' connotations of the serpent, and this dream occurs shortly after Lysander's betrayal, therefore introducing unsettling connotations of male sexual violence and threatening to undermine the pure reputation of love that exists within Shakespeare's comedies. Lysander appears to be both the snake who attacks her and the bystander watching with a content smile. Norman Holland delves into this further as he writes, 'The dream separates these two aspects of Lysander, the sexual and the affectionate, but has images of both as hostile'. Demetrius is also compared to a snake, as Hermia calls him 'a worm, an adder' and 'thou serpent' hinting that this subtle indication of male violence does not just lie with Lysander, but with both male lovers when under the influence of the love potion. This suggests an unexpected theme of cynicism when it comes to the theme of love in this play, with sexual desire portrayed as dangerous and courtly love as complicit and hollow ...

Question 10

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The question asked about the presentation of Puck.

This question elicited a range of responses from straightforward discussion of Puck's role in all three plotlines to more sophisticated ideas about how Shakespeare uses the character:

Shakespeare presents Puck as a vital element in his play, connecting all the myriad plots and scenes together. Not only does Shakespeare implement Robin Goodfellow to illuminate the world of the fairies, but if one takes on Emma Smith's argument, he also serves to present 'the subconscious of the Athenians'. Moreover, Shakespeare uses Puck to comment on the theatrical and linguistic elements of Elizabethan folklore – where fairies were pranksters and meddling sprites – and also to criticize elements of Elizabethan patriarchal society.

Here is an example of a good Level 3 response: clear and straightforward in approach, but lacking the driving argument we would expect for a higher Level mark:

Shakespeare uses the character of Puck in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' to introduce the creation of chaos among the other characters, set up the resolution and reinforce the magic elements within the play. Francois Laroque comments on the idea of 'festivity and mirth' in comedies. as a fairy, Robin Goodfellow (Puck) contributes to Laroque's idea as he speaks in a fast-paced, song-like manner.

Shakespeare uses the character of Puck mainly to create chaos. When Puck is introduced in Act 2, Scene 1, the stage directions state that 'Enter, separately, Robin Goodfellow and a fairy', Shakespeare uses the name 'Robin Goodfellow' to introduce him rather than Puck as a reference to English folklore. The contrasting names are used to portray Puck's mischievous but helpful characteristics, the second name 'Goodfellow' literally stating the good his character creates alongside the mischievous goblin 'Puck' foreshadowing the chaos he creates.

The first sign of chaos is acknowledged when Puck says 'this is the woman, but not this the man,' admitting to Oberon he has placed the magical 'love juice' on the wrong Athenian's eyes. Shakespeare purposely creates a calm tone as Puck states his mistake in a short, emotionless sentence to highlight his mischievous nature and to remind the audience of the comic genre and that the mistake is humorous rather than dangerous.

As well as this, Shakespeare uses Puck to contribute to the magic elements, as a main comic convention in his plays. In Act 2, Scene I, Puck says he will 'put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes' immediately implying the impossible, magical quickness and strength of his character. Also, in Act 3, Scene 2, his speech is written in a verse structure when stating he will 'lead (the Athenians) up and down' repeating the phrase 'up and down' four times. Shakespeare uses this phrase to imply the chaos Puck will cause as well as causing physical movement and conflict between Lysander and Demetrius as they are both lead off and on the stage by Puck. Puck's magic is further reinforced in this scene as he leads Demetrius to believe he is Lysander and vice versa. This is portrayed by Lysander asking 'where art thou Demetrius? Speak now' followed by Puck shouting 'Here villain!'. Shakespeare does this to reinforce Puck's magic ability as well as carry on the convention of mistaken identity and highlight the humour in Puck's chaotic behaviour.

The use of 'villain' implies that Puck is used to carry on the feud between the two characters in order to get closer to the resolution as they are both forced apart and led to Helena and Hermia by Puck in order to start to conclude the marriage plot.

Finally, Shakespeare uses Puck to appeal to his audience. As Shakespeare's plays were often performed in front of monarchs, comedies dealt with the 'dangerous present' suggested by R W Maslen, sometimes the plays could be controversial or offensive. In Act 5, Scene 1, the final scene, Puck is left on stage on his own. Shakespeare uses Puck to break the fourth wall to remind his audience that 'if we shadows have offended …no more yielding but a dream', this being Shakespeare's way of saying that the topics in the play are all used in a comic way and shouldn't offend anyone. The use of 'shadows' reinforcing that they are just actors and that his monarch audience are higher than them, in a way to elevate his audience and defend the innocent intentions of the play. Also, with reference to the play's title, that if they are offended to just think of it as a 'dream' as a way to end the play comically.

In conclusion, Shakespeare uses Puck to drive the chaos throughout the play in order to reinforce the comedy genre, as well as portray the topics in a humourous way that would leave his Elizabethan audience not offended by.

Question 11

Measure for Measure

The question asked about secrets and lies.

There were some excellent and immediate links to the genre debate of comedy versus tragedy. Many candidates were quick to recognise how secrets and lies could contribute to either genre, from the comic convention of the disguise and the Bed Trick to the tragic potential of deception from characters such as Angelo.

Some introductions tended to make philosophical assertions, or generalise about the human condition, and these were very rarely helpful. Other weaker responses took a character by character approach, never really engaging with the dramatic presentation and importance of secrets and lies. Other answers included ideas about the lies of authority figures and role of disguise in the play. There was a lot to say about the ambiguity surrounding the Duke's motivations. Some candidates were keen to link the Duke to Christ with little explanation as to how this was answering the question and, similarly, there were some tenuous links to Lucio.

Here is an extract from a Level 4 response which explored fairly straightforward aspects of the theme, but in convincing detail:

Throughout the play 'Measure for Measure' Shakespeare uses the theme of secrets and lies to blur the boundary between the comic and serious aspects of the play and to establish it as tragi-comedy. The theme is also used to explore the motives and more sinister character traits of characters within the play and how these crooked values can cause poor leadership.

The setting of the play itself in the city of Vienna could be viewed as the play's very first deception, as it is arguably actually a thinly disguised representation of London. As R W Maslen points out, unlike tragedy 'comedy dealt with the dangerous present, whose inhabitants had an awkward propensity for taking umbrage and seeking revenge'; therefore, by disguising London as Vienna, Shakespeare is protecting himself. During the reign of James I, there was an increase of censorship of plays, especially tragedies, with playwrights liable to arrest and imprisonment if the crown disagreed with their work. As 'Measure for Measure' was performed before James I, the importance of the play's setting being clearly foreign and therefore not representative of governance in England is clear. By blurring the boundary between London and Vienna, Shakespeare is able to establish an underlying theme of criticism of styles of leadership and address more serious issues. These underlying themes of deception temporarily expose the play's similarities to the genre of tragedy...

Another way Shakespeare uses the theme of secrets and lies is by making changes to his source material. The play is based on Promos and Cassandra, but Shakespeare makes key changes to the plot in order to establish the darker side of Vienna. For example, unlike in the source, the relationship of Claudio and Juliet is one of love; their scandalous pregnancy and their resultant arrests are a consequence of their 'most mutual entertainment'. One of the reasons Shakespeare makes this change is to establish the consequences of Claudio and Juliet's decision to 'hide' their love 'Till time hath made' Juliet's family 'for them'. This act of secret love is the event from which the play's plot stems, showing that Shakespeare firmly roots the events of the play in secrecy.

Another key change to the source is the involvement of the Duke in events, who does not simply leave town as his counterpart in the source does, but instead disguises himself as a friar. The Duke's subsequent secrets and lies that arise from this adaptation to the source establish them as key an allow us to question the Duke's motives...

Here is an interesting extract from a Level 5 response which is particularly strong on linking the text to its contexts:

... Shakespeare also uses the theme of secrets and lies to expose the sinister natures of some of the play's characters. One of the key characters here is Lucio. Although seemingly a comic stock character intended purely for comic relief, it is in Lucio's lies about the Duke and claims of 'secret' knowledge about him that his character is shown to be fully developed and malicious. Lucio's use of prose in Act 3 Scene 2 is representative of his lack of respect for those he is talking to, as to Isabella and Claudio we often see him use verse. Not only this but Lucio's crude humour and euphemisms about the Duke's 'use' being to 'put a ducat in her clack-dish' show his flagrant disregard for authority and his lies about being an 'inward' of the Duke expose his over-confidence. However, whilst these lies expose Lucio they also may expose some of the play's truths. While Escalus claims the Duke 'contended especially to know himself' and that therefore his absence is likely to achieve self-knowledge, in the play the opposite of this is shown. Far from learning about himself the Duke arguably becomes more deceived about his nature. At the start of the play he is aware that he is at 'fault' for giving the people 'scope' and requires Angelo to address this. However by the end of the play he has pardoned all the characters' crimes and begins to adhere to Lucio's description of him as an 'unweighting fellow' with Shakespeare's use of 'weight' imagery exposing the Duke's inability to pass judgement. David Lloyd Stevenson claims that 'the play was partly written to flatter James I as the Duke is based on his many attributes'.

So Shakespeare's presentation of the Duke as a secretive leader who is benevolent and uses his knowledge throughout the play to stop the deaths of Bernardine and Claudio and install a happy ending filled with the comic convention of marriage, can be seen as a way to flatter James I as Stevenson argues. However, it is through the Duke's lies to Isabella about Claudio's 'head' being 'off and sent to Angelo' and Lucio's exposure of his true nature as 'unweighting' that ultimately the Duke is intended to criticise James I. James I was already an established ruler as James VI of Scotland so his belief in the importance of self-knowledge in a leader, as explained in the 'Basilikan Doran', would already have been known. What was still questioned were the new king's motives and personality which Shakespeare appears to show critically through the Duke and how these might affect his ability to reign...

Question 12

Measure for Measure

The question asked about the presentation of Angelo.

This was a popular question - unsurprisingly so, given Angelo's depth and complexity as a character. There were some 'character studies' and some more ambitiously structured responses. Chronological approaches could often be successful - some attempts at more conceptual readings of Angelo's character failed as paragraphs were centred upon character qualities.

A number of candidates really engaged effectively with the critical debate around Angelo's character, and there was often some confident engagement with the critical anthology. At times this lost sight of the text itself, as candidates were so keen on engaging with AO5 that they neglected to support it with textual evidence (crucial for AO1) or sustained analysis of AO2. Middleditch was popular, as were attempts to incorporate Freudian theory. Critics mentioned were Hampton-Reeves, Maus and Wilton. The context is related well to James I, puritanism and the archangel Michael fighting Satan. The role of Angelo was to emphasise the importance of good governance and the importance of mercy. There was also a good focus on Angelo being one of the few characters whose mind the audience can access.

Other interesting approaches included how Angelo's character represents the intersection between public/political and private spheres; the balance between the body and the soul; and Isabella as a dramatic parallel. One very interesting response focused on Angelo being merely a mechanism for the Duke: the candidate was successful as their response was always closely focused on Angelo's dramatic role. Contextually, there was a pleasing awareness of the differences between court and city audiences, given the play's performance history; there were also more routine discussions of Aristotle's Golden Mean and the 'angel' coin imagery.

Here are some typical approaches:

In 'Measure for Measure', Angelo is presented as a corrupt, unjust and repressive character who provides a warning for the need to temper justice with mercy. However, it is also possible to take a sympathetic reading of Angelo – a character who is not intentionally immoral but one who is corrupted by Isabella. However it is more convincing to argue that Angelo acts as a comic figure who embodies the anti-puritan sentiment of the time in order to mock it.

In 'Measure for 'Measure' Shakespeare uses the character of Angelo to demonstrate the need for good governance and the importance of mercy within the administration of justice. In 1604, a year that saw a new regime in England under James I, questions of sovereignty and the workings of the state were all the more prominent, and it is arguable that Shakespeare, and his company 'The Kings Men' use Angelo as a character to demonstrate how a state should be governed. However, Angelo is perhaps the victim of the state himself and may be seen as a tragic hero by some audiences. Therefore Shakespeare uses the character of Angelo as a warning about governance but simultaneously presents Anglo as a victim of poor governance himself.

Below is a mid Level 4 response, sometimes lacking sophistication and detail, but covering a lot of ground with discrimination and engaging with critical and contextual material in an integrated way:

Shakespeare presents Angelo as a troubled character in 'Measure for Measure'. His initial presentation is that he is humble. Angelo insists that more 'test be made of (his) metal before so noble a figure be stamped upon it' (1.1.40-50). This is not only a pun on the word metal (mettle) but also a pun on his name, which means angel and is also what gold and silver coins were called. The audience immediately get the impression that Angelo underestimates his ability to take on the proposed role of Deputy. However, by Scene two we learn that Angelo has Claudio publically shamed and sentences him to death for getting Juliet pregnant. The audience at the time the play was written (1604) would not have been surprised at Claudio's punishment. In fact critic Katherine Maus comments on how 'sexual infractions were punished' including things like 'fathering a bastard and committing adultery'. The audience is made aware of the fact that Claudio and Juliet are not married, although they had a formal contract and were waiting for Juliet's dowry. This aligns with couples in Jacobean London who would have had a similar relationship status to Claudio. A critic mentions that Claudio's crime is therefore a 'technicality' and that Angelo's punishment is 'tyrannical' and this evokes a feeling of sympathy from the audience.

It is understandable that Angelo has punished Claudio for Juliet being pregnant 'with child by him' (1.2.82) as Angelo's character reflects strict Puritan views. In fact, Angelo can be seen as a Puritan as he is described as 'precise' and this was associated with Puritans in Jacobean England. Therefore we know that Angelo would have demonstrated strong opposition towards sexual deviancy, as would Shakespeare's audience. However, it comes as a surprise that he is enforcing his control so quickly, especially due to his uncertainty in the first scene. This suggests to the audience that Angelo is 'two-faced' which aligns with his reference to his 'metal' and a coin which has two-sides and the audience cannot help but be wary of Angelo.

The playwright further presents a dual side to Angelo's character who is supposedly 'precise' and against sexual immorality when Angelo proposes that Claudio's sister, Isabella, should sleep with him so that her brother's life can be saved. Angelo claims he shows pity when he shows 'justice' (2.2.103) however, by asking Isabella to sleep with him, 'You must lay down the treasures of your body', he shows the complete opposite of justice and pity. Shakespeare therefore presents Angelo as an abuser of authority and as a hypocrite, which the audience clearly see in Angelo's actions that contradict his Puritan beliefs. This highlights the irony of Angelo telling Escalus that 'it is one thing to be tempted' and 'another thing to fall' as it shows that Angelo perceives himself as a strong-headed individual, unable to be 'moved' (which he mentions in his monologue after Isabelle leaves). However, in reality Angelo is only human and still susceptible to temptation like everyone in the rest of society. Angelo recognizes this and is almost in a state of disbelief and is disgusted with himself. The playwright portrays Angelo as conflicted through his dramatic monologue in Act two, scene two, in which he refers to himself as a 'nothing carcass' and doesn't understand why he desires Isabella 'foully for those things / That make her good'. A critic, Mortimer, suggests that Angelo's 'sudden sexual desire moves the focus away from the criminal's guilt to ...the judge's guilt'. This is a way in which Shakespeare presents Angelo as a troubled and conflicted character.

F R Leavis also states that 'if we do not see ourselves in Angelo then we have taken the play very imperfectly'. This idea can be further explored as Shakespeare knew that the audience would have been quick to judge Angelo for his behavior. However, we cannot completely ignore the fact that Angelo was sexually repressed, like Isabella, and a psychoanalytic view would be that he needed to release his sexual tension, hence why Isabella seduced him so much. St Augustine even noted that lust needed to be released. This therefore suggests that Shakespeare did not want Angelo to be completely viewed as a villain, as he is only human

and was tempted like many others.

Shakespeare presents Angelo's character as weak as he is unable to resist temptation and ends up sleeping with Mariana, although he believed it was Isabella. This reinforces the idea of Angelo being 'two-faced' as he punished Claudio for the same act he committed - adultery. However, in Act 5 Scene 1, Angelo does admit he is guilty, and requests an 'immediate sentence and then the sequent death'. This shows that he is taking responsibility for his actions and is prepared to face the consequences of equal measure. Angelo represents the Old Testament in the Bible, so believed in 'an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth'. This is a moment in the play that links to its title, 'Measure for Measure' which derives from the Gospel of St Matthew in the Bible ('and what measure you use it, it will be measured to you'). The audience and other characters in the play, like Isabella, would have believed this was a fair punishment, as although the New Testament is more based on forgiving and mercy, Jesus also taught his disciples to 'do unto others what you would have them do to you'. However, as the play is a 'tragicomedy', nobody dies and Angelo is instead made to marry Mariana, which he was meant to do originally.

It is clear by the end of the play that Shakespeare aims to present Angelo as an individual who was just like you and I and other members of the audience – human. The Duke, who critics suggest was a representation of King James I, wanted to test Angelo and see how he would use the power given to him. The Duke ends up sparing everyone's lives as he wanted to appear merciful (similar to King James I) and he probable knew from the beginning Angelo may not have been an adequate leader, so the Duke maintained his image by essentially saving the day.

This therefore demonstrates that Shakespeare presented Angelo as a vulnerable man, who was manipulative and unfair at times, as the audience observes, however at the same time, he took responsibility for his downfalls and this depicts him as a troubled character, who shouldn't just be seen as a villain. Hence Angelo could be viewed as very similar to characters like Claudio and Lucio, whose 'downfalls' were their sexual immorality.

This is an extract from a Level 5 response:

'Measure for Measure' is set in dirty, disease ridden Vienna, filled with brothels run by bawds. Angelo, who is implicitly a puritan, is employed to take over the city on the Duke's departure and in doing so he tries to sort out the city's issues with the law. However, Shakespeare uses the character to explore how people can become corrupted by power. In the Folio, 'Measure for Measure' is under the heading of comedy; however, Mulan notes how 'modern readers don't find it particularly comic.' A key reason for this is the actions of Angelo and their potential consequences which Shakespeare thoroughly explores in a play that combines aspects of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period.

One way that Shakespeare presents Angelo's corruption is through the idea that he is a fallen angel who has succumbed to temptation. This idea of Angelo being angelic and god-like can initially be seen in his name. Escalus recognizes from the beginning that he is a strong candidate to take the Duke's position as he says, 'If any in Vienna be of worth to undergo such ample grace and honour it would be Lord Angelo.' His respect from fellow members of government highlights how he is recognized as honourable. Angelo reinforces the idea of himself being angel-like by telling Escalus, 'Tis one thing to be tempted Escalus; another thing to fall'. The repetition of religious terms when Angelo is speaking and tropes of biblical imagery highlight Angelo's presentation as God-like. This can be associated with his implicit Puritan beliefs, a movement which was becoming popular in 17th Century Britain. However, it is also associated with an increase people found guilty of sexual offences, as the Puritans were keen to cut down this behavior.

Nevertheless, Angelo, despite his beliefs, falls from grace. Isabella unknowingly tempts him into sin. Maus notes how 'Angelo's disastrous career shows the highlighted effect of sexual self-denial. He becomes tempted by Isabella's purity, his confusion highlighted by his repetition of 'What's this?' He simply does not understand his emotions. He describes how temptation is 'dangerous' and how 'saints dost bait thy hook', suggesting that this is a test of his holiness. Despite recognising the temptation, he still knowingly commits the offence and subsequently falls from power, grace and high position as an 'adulterous thief' and a 'virgin-violator'. Ideas of temptation would have resonated with Shakespeare's audience through the biblical tale of Adam and Eve and suggests that everyone, even angelic characters can fall victim to it. The contrast from the beginning from a man who appears 'precise' to one who is guilty of almost all the seven deadly sins highlights how he has become a fallen angel due to the power of temptation...

Question 13

The Taming of the Shrew

The question asked about features of comedy.

This was the less popular question on this text and candidates tended to struggle to get much beyond exploration of various characters and incidents in the play.

Stronger responses explored Shakespeare's craft in more detail and noted his use of features of the commedia dell'arte form and some candidates explored the potentially more serious response to Kate's 'taming' by a modern audience.

Here is a Level 2 response – there is lots of repetition and general assertion. The focus is mainly on learned bits and pieces of context rather than on the text itself:

During the period in which 'The Taming of the Shrew' was written, the patriarchal society and the economic marriage market were key issues. In 'The Taming of the Shrew', Shakespeare uses the features of comedy to explore and critique the societal gender constructs of the time.

Throughout the play Shakespeare is seen to use the Italian 'commedia dell'arte' conventions to explore romance and the patriarchal hegemony of the 16th Century in a deliberately artificial way. This can be seen in the induction (with Sly being tricked) where Shakespeare had deliberately reminded the audience that this is no more than a play; in fact he uses the structure of a play-within-a-play arguably to disconnect the audience further from the controversial happenings within the play. The induction can be seen as a construct which not only gives comic relief to the main plot but also foreshadows the deceptive happenings throughout the rest of the play.

The use of 'commedia dell'arte' also allows Shakespeare to explore comedy in a more traditional way with the use of stock characters and situations, which would ultimately reinforce and emphasise the shrewish behaviour of Kate and the courting of Kate by Petruchio. Traditionally in 'commedia dell'arte' there are staple types of characters and stories, these being: stories of young lovers (Romeo and Juliet and Much Ado About Nothing) or a key plot is the courtship of a young woman by a wealthy old buffoon, just like that of Bianca and Grumio. By having 'commedia dell'arte' traditions within 'The Taming of the Shrew' it reinforces and highlights the disparity of the taming process and allows Shakespeare to strictly critique and explore the treatment of women like Kate. By The Taming of the Shrew not being a typical 'commedia dell'arte' play, it demonstrates that Shakespeare could be inferred to be doing so in order to show criticism for the society in which issues of patriarchy were not often addressed. Although in the 17thcentury many more playwrites followed in the footsteps of Shakespeare and began to write plays based on 'shrewdish' females and compassionate marriage.

It can also be argued that Shakespeare uses the conventions of 'commedia dell'arte' to create a more comedic atmosphere for such a controversial play. He uses the conventions to explore the nature of romance and courtship without the play being too heavy-handed. This is reinforced by Walter Kerr who talks of comedy as "speak(ing) of no more than limitation", meaning that there is no way around the patriarchal issues of the time. Shakespeare is seen to use 'commedia dell'arte' to drive the subplot of the play (the love story of Bianca and Lucentio) which takes away from the harsh reality of the main plot, making the play a comic relief from Elizabethan society.

As well as 'commedia dell'arte' Shakespeare also makes use of the features of classical comedy to explore and critique the restraints that were put on women in the contemporary period. Classical comedy is seen to relate to and come from Greek philosophers like Aristotle. Aristotle explained comedy to be just 'ordinary unheroic people' who come to grief through their 'own folly' and to 'teach a moral lesson'. This definition of comedy can be seen to be portrayed by Shakespeare through his characterisation of Katherina. It is argued by some that Katherina was stuck in her shrewdish ways and could not escape without help. It seems as though Petruchio has set her free. Although ultimately it is her final speech in Act Five Scene Two which suggests she has 'come (through her) own folly', 'thy husband is thy lord, thy life , thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign'. This is in stark contrast to the Katherina presented in Act Two Scene One, 'If I be waspish, best beware my sting'. This suppression in Kate's behaviour suggest she has been taught 'a moral lesson'. Here Shakespeare has used classical comedy to explore and highlight the social conventions towards shrewdish females. A contemporary audience would have viewed Kate as a 'shrew' due to folk law and ballads and so therefore would've been familiar with the punishment of women like Kate (scolds bridle and ducking stool) and so therefore would've expected Kate to be taught a 'moral 'lesson' as she deserved to be tamed. However, although a contemporary audience would have appreciated and related to the use of classical comedy features, a modern audience would give more reason and cause for Kate's distemper, therefore seeing Shakespeare's use of classical comedy as no more than following social convention of the time, and would therefore view the play more comedic rather than serious like that of a contemporary audience.

Overall Shakespeare uses features of comedy as a way in which to explore and demonstrate the societal expectations of the time. As Thomas Heywood said "comedies start in trouble and end in peace' and although some characters find this, Shakespeare does suggest that not all characters were going to have the happy ending they should. This would've been evident in the 16thCentury because women had no say in their future due to the patriarchal hegemony.

Question 14

The Taming of the Shrew

The question asked about the presentation of Kate.

The question was handled competently by most candidates. Debate centred around what Shakespeare intended to do with her character with weaker responses relying on assertion here, rather than on the text. Stronger responses used critics such as Hopkins and Newman to explore Kate's role in terms of the comedy genre. Others described how Kate was a tool to demonstrate the theme of deception, externally and internally.

Here is a straightforwardly clear approach, typical of Level 3:

Shakespeare's 'The Taming of the Shrew' revolves around his presentation of Katherina, who is the titular shrew. She is presented immediately as a difficult and undesirable woman, but as the play progresses Shakespeare also shows her intelligence and her compatibility with Petruchio. By the final scene, which features Katherina's famous speech, it isn't entirely clear if she has submitted to her husband's will or if she is simply smart enough to play along with Petruchio's game.

Here is a good example of using critical arguments to develop one's own. The response is nicely integrated:

Katherina is also presented as being quick-witted and smart. As soon as their wedding is over, Petruchio begins his plan of 'taming' Katherina. She seems helpless against his abuses at first, such as when she begs Petruchio to let her have the meat but he refuses, telling her that 'The poorest service is repaid with thanks/ And so shall mine before you touch the meat.' He continually refuses her anything for as long as she refuses to be in agreement with him –even when he is clearly wrong. Katherina seems to catch onto this and 'submits' to him as she agrees with him when he tells her that the moon is out when it is not. Petruchio uses this as a chance to test her saying, 'Nay then you lie, it is the blessed sun' but Katherina is quick to respond, telling him 'Then God be bless'd, it is the blessed sun. / But sun it is not, when you say it is not / And the moon changes even as your mind'. On the surface it seems as though Katherina has become subservient and is doing exactly as she is told after being broken down by Petruchio. However, as Stanley Wells notes, 'it is a spirited reply in its acknowledgement of absurdity'. When Kate tells him 'the moon changes even as your mind' she is subtly calling him insane with her reference to the moon and lunacy. This suggests that Katherina is still just as independent as she was before ...

She is also smart enough to realise that if she wants to get anywhere or anything, she needs to play along with Petruchio. Shakespeare develops this idea of Katherina being self aware and that she and Petruchio are simply playing a game as a couple in the scene where they come across an old man. When Petruchio calls him a young woman, Katherina doesn't hesitate to approach the stranger and ask, 'young, budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet, / Whither away or where is thy abode?'. This exaggerated language of 'fair and fresh and sweet' plays into the idea that Katherina knows what she's doing is ridiculous and is simply treating the situation as a game...

Question 15

Twelfth Night

The question asked about the play's ending.

Responses to this question generally dealt with the ending in the context of the play as a whole, but weaker responses did not focus sufficiently on the ending and instead mentioned it almost in passing when exploring earlier parts of the play.

The best responses explored the ending of *Twelfth Night* in terms of comedy conventions - marriage and resolution of mistaken identity. The ambivalent ending created by the treatment of Malvolio was explored well by some candidates, and this also produced some thoughtful context discussion in terms of Puritanism. The role of Feste was also explored well.

Many successfully debated whether the final scene was a way of satisfying the Elizabethan audience or whether it left characters without resolution and hence unsatisfying. Contextual understanding of comic conventions, Epiphany celebrations, Puritanism, and gender were often used discriminatingly. The best answers considered the extent to which the ending was conventional and joyous or sombre and problematic, with some answers focusing on the meaninglessness of the supposedly loving couplings as evidence of the latter. Other discriminating answers discussed the meta-theatrical potential of all-male casts.

Here is an introduction to a Level 5 response - note the early engagement with critical ideas:

The ending of 'Twelfth Night' both sticks to the traditional convention of 'marriage as comic closure' (Hopkins) whilst also 'habitually disrupting' them. Shakespeare gives those who fit Elizabethan societal norms a positive ending where they can 'enjoy the sweet possibilities of romance' (Kerr) whilst outsiders are stuck in a life where they have to bear witness to other people's happiness.

The ending of the play arguably has the 'clear signs of conservatism that so flourished in comedy' (Hopkins). The play ends in multiple marriages with most of the main characters 'having a share in this most happy wrack'. Shakespeare allows happiness to ensue despite the 'unusually satirical' nature of the subplot. Shakespeare also allows romance to flourish in the end, filling it with sweet declarations of love, perhaps to fool the audience into ignoring the almost farcical nature of these relationships. He uses prose to show Viola's declaration of love for Orsino who she loves 'more than she loves these eyes, more than life, more by all mores, than ever shall love wife'. The hyperbolic repetition of 'more' highlights how everything in this play is about indulgence and excess, as Hollander suggests, even their love. This portrayal of love as something to be placed on a pedestal is almost Petrarchan in its presentation.

Here is a later section from this same essay. Note the engagement with Shakespeare's craft:

Furthermore, despite 'drinking music and songs' being key parts of Shakespeare's festive comedies (Laroque), the parting song of the play is one that is rather bleak. Feste's final song has two repeating lines: 'with hey, ho, the wind and the rain' and 'For the rain it raineth every day'. Rather than use pathetic fallacy to portray sunshine and such, Shakespeare uses the final part of the play to present quite a sobering message. He also again breaks the fourth wall as Feste sings, 'but that's all one, our play is done, and we'll strive to please you every day', mirroring the scene in Act 3 where Fabian explains, 'If this were played upon a stage now, I would condemn it as an improbable fiction'. This could be done by Shakespeare

to highlight how life may be somewhat dreary, facing 'rain every day', but theatre and comedy speak of nothing but 'sweet impossibilities' and therefore need to be protected…

Here is another Level 5 response to this question –well-shaped in its argument and wide-ranging in reference to critics and contexts:

'Twelfth Night' draws to a conclusion with many couples entering into marriage and most of the problems in the play being seemingly resolved. Shakespeare follows the typical structure of the Elizabethan comedy through the multiple marriages at the end of the play, which was a common trope of comedy at the time. Although many find this ending to be satisfactory in that there is a resolution and normality is returned, a number of critics have discussed the 'open ending'. Sue to misfortune of some characters that is never resolved.

Shakespeare presents a satisfying resolution at the end of his play due to the number of heterosexual marriages that take place and the reunion of Viola and Sebastian. CL Barber describes the structure of 'Twelfth Night' as 'through release to clarification', in reference to the festivities that occur, 'Twelfth Night' is set in Illyria, and the title itself refers to the 'Twelfth Night' after Christmas which was known to be filled with festivities. The audience witnesses common tropes of such festivities during the play, from Viola's cross dressing and Malvolio's dreams of a higher status, to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's excessive drinking and partying. Barber's 'release' is shown through Bakhtin's carnivalesque inversion of hierarchy in Malvolio's character, when he indulges in dreams of status through marriage to Olivia, his mistress. This would have shocked the Elizabethan audience, as they would have been aware of the great chain of being. Plotinus, Plato and Aristotle devolved the theory of the Great Chain of being to highlight the different ranks in society. Any attempts to surpass one's god-given rank in society was seen as extremely blasphemous, and the audience would revel in Malvolio's punishment for such dreams. Malvolio's exclamation of 'some were born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them,' would have infuriated the audience, and Malvolio's final state of failure would been greatly pleasing. Michael Dobson expresses that 'the play is not just about comedic sexual self-delusion, but offers a glimpse of potentially subversive upward mobility. Malvolio's final cries of 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!' contrasts with Olivia's somewhat condescending 'Poor fool! How they have baffled thee!', making Malvolio's threats seem empty and pathetic. The use of 'fool' highlights a carnivalesque inversion of hierarchy, as Malvolio has become what he despised, a clown. Similarly, the reuniting of Sebastian and Viola would have greatly satisfied the audience due to the great troubles they have encountered, and the dramatic irony of mistaken identity woven throughout the play. Shakespeare himself had twins, and previously wrote 'The Comedy of Errors' about mistaken identity and twinship, following the Plautine tradition. As twins often held negative connotations due to beliefs around their conception, through his comedies Shakespeare is able to detract from negative beliefs. During Act Five Scene One, when Antonio expresses that 'An apple, cleft in two, is not more twin/ than these two creatures', the simile of an 'apple cleft in two' sparks the image of an object becoming whole again as the twins reunite. This would have been a particularly satisfying ending to Shakespeare as his son Hamlet died at age eleven, leaving his daughter, Judith, without her twin. In creating the image of the twinship being restored, Shakespeare creates a particularly satisfying ending.

Another interpretation of the play's ending is that is is unsatisfactory as a result of conformity feeling forced and leaving many loose ends. Cesario's transformation back to Viola reminds the audience that through returning to female, Viola enters back into a world of strict gender roles for women. When Orsino addresses her with 'Cesario, come -/For so you shall be, while you are a man/ But when in other habits you are seen, Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen', we are reminded of Viola's inevitable return to normalcy. CL Barber expresses that, 'Just as a saturnalian reversal of the social roles can serve to consolidate social structure, a playful, temporary reversal of sexual roles can renew the meaning of the

normal relation'. While Barber is correct in that Viola achieved Orsino's love through crossdressing, thus 'renew[ing]' the meaning of the normal relation', it is evident that Viola's identity has changed, but she is forced back into the mould of 'clarification' through the ending of the play. Orsino's description of Viola as 'Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen' reminds the audience that time is sparse before normalcy must be returned to Illyria. The use of the word 'Orsino's' is possessive reminding the audience of a woman's role in society. Women in Shakespeare's time were frequently subject to objectification, from the tradition of dowries to arranged marriage, women were used as a tool for gain. John Knox, a Protestant Reformer during Shakespeare's time, wrote: 'women in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey women', highlighting the inescapable misogyny in society. This leaves a somewhat foreboding tone for the future of Viola's character with the audience.

The character of Malvolio lacks resolution at the end of the play, as he is left abused by the revellers without a happy ending. Charles Lamb expresses that even in his abused state of chains and darkness, a sort of greatness never seems to desert [Malvolio]. Although this is seen in his final threat of 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!', the audience is left with a cliff hanger through not knowing Malvolio's final outcome. Ivo Kamp, expresses that 'Malvolio is perfectly sane by Illyrian standards - the plot makes him perform his madness'. This is somewhat true, as the excessive festivities are highlighted when Malvolio questions Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, 'Are you mad? Have you no manners wit nor honesty', as the tricolon of 'manner, wit nor honesty' reminds the audience of their indulgent mannerisms. This evokes sympathy for Malvolio as he is punished for behaviour that may be considered fair by many audience members. Furthermore, Malvolio's final description of the 'Malvolio baiters' as a 'pack' reveals their true animalistic, savage ways creating pathos for his character. Mark von Dobson reveals that 'modern audiences have bestowed more sympathy on Malvolio than perhaps Shakespeare intended, highlighting that while Elizabethan audiences may have revelled in the Puritanical Malvolio's torture, modern audiences find this ending much more unsatisfactory.

To conclude, Shakespeare's ending to 'Twelfth Night' remains ambiguous in whether or not it is satisfactory, with a large factor of this being the time period in which it's performed. While Elizabethan audiences may have enjoyed the comedic resolution the play, modern audiences are more likely to question the evident plot holes in the play, such as the almost forced heterosexual coupling and Malvolio's lack of revenge.

Question 16

Twelfth Night

The question asked about the presentation of Maria.

Some candidates were able to discuss Maria's character with ease, particularly through her trickery of Malvolio.

There were some interesting ideas about how she challenges the social hierarchy. There were also some quite limited responses with many candidates struggling to find enough material. The best responses explored an interesting debate about how much Maria is a social climber and compared the more positive outcome of this with that of Malvolio. There were also interesting discussions of where she sits in the battle between Lent and Carnival (Laroque).

Here is an extract from a really good response on the role of Maria, closely linked to context and genre and considering Shakespeare's intent:

... in her first interaction with Sir Toby in Act 1 Scene 3, Maria exclaims that 'quaffing and drinking will undo you', and asks him to 'confine' himself within the 'modest limits of order.' The use of the imperative here and her assertive language introduce her to the audience as a character who asserts authority over others in the place of her mistresses. Essentially, she keeps order for Olivia. This role, according to Romano, was put in place so that masters and mistresses 'could ensure the efficiency and smooth operation of their households'...hers is a duty paralleled with Malvolio and the similarity in their behaviours is portrayed clearly in Act 3 Scene 3 when first Maria enters and then Malvolio, both asking for peace. The similarity would have been made obvious onstage to an audience, with their entrances in quick succession. However, this play's title, 'Twelfth Night' connotes ideas of role reversal and 'departure from the norm', as Gay suggests and consequently Maria's conversion begins to come clear.

After Malvolio complains about the 'uncivil rule' Maria is failing to prevent, she herself begins to participate in the revels. As suggested by Lindheim, 'she succumbs to the lack of limit and control that she earlier condemned in Sir Toby's behaviour.' This is clearly reflected in Maria's transition from suppressing the revelry to participating in it as she develops the desire to turn Malvolio – who she says is 'like a puritan' into a 'common recreation'... Maria's idea to write him 'obscure epistles of love' suggests she is willing to participate in what Crane argues is the 'cruel heartlessness' of the gulling of Malvolio. Thus the fast pace at which a person can become subject to the festivities of Twelfth Night becomes clear. Maria's ability to change like this stems from the idea of the festive season after which Shakespeare named the play. Twelfth Night celebrations marked a tradition begun by the Romans in dedication to the sun god, Saturn. These winter celebrations often involved the inversion of social roles ... Maria's swift transition from duty to revelry demonstrates the power of the festive atmosphere but Shakespeare enhances this, empowering Maria further by electing her the leader of this festive period...

Another opening to a response on Maria. Note the early, confident engagement with critics:

In 'Twelfth Night', Maria is presented in a number of ways. Most importantly, she acts as a medium between the idyllic revelry of her social superiors and the themes of courtly love so prevalent in the main plot of the play. In this way she is a very important part of the plot and in many ways is the only character who firmly identifies the 'contrast of romance and social realism' (Penny Gay, 1980) brought upon the play from the i' at the end of the play (Lisa Hopkins). Her marriage to Sir Toby means that she epitomises the social mobility possible in Illyria, a land of misrule and acts as a warning for 'social climbers' like Malvolio (RA Levin) that social mobility comes not from wanting it, but by being modest and almost avoiding it ...

Question 17

Dr Faustus

The question asked about time.

This question appeared to be less popular than the 'temptation' question and it elicited a range of responses.

Some candidates focused in a rather list like way on examples of time in the play, whereas the better responses looked at the representation of time, for example how the Chorus represent years of events and how the comic scenes mock Faustus' use of time. Successful responses sometimes linked the idea of time with the idea of redemption, looking at how Faustus changes as a character over the timeline of the play and exploring at what point, if at all, his downfall becomes inevitable.

There was some interesting discussion of Marlowe's handling of the passage of time with regard to its speed and the various forms it takes; some candidates also looked at the importance of the conflict between Faustus' desire to control time and his submission to it through the signing of his contract, and at the ultimate controlling of time by God as opposed to the Devil. Ideas were linked to some sophisticated reference to the philosophical aspects of Renaissance thought. More able candidates were able accurately to discuss Faustus' role as a tragic hero and the binary oppositions within his character, and to consider the questions Marlowe raises regarding the nature and power of God.

Here are some extracts from a Level 5 response to this question:

Marlowe was writing during a period of much religious upheaval in the post-Reformation climate of Elizabethan England. With conflicting debates between Lutheranists and Calvinists concerning the fate of man, Marlowe's play is informed by the idea that Faustus is confined by the bounds of time, presenting ambiguity concerning whether he could possibly repent. The play takes place over a period of twenty four years, seeing Faustus' futile use of his time on the earth, underscoring his ignorance and undermining his intelligence. It appears that it is his pride that leads him to his fatal end, with the passage of time constantly hanging over both Faustus and the audience as he draws closer to his inevitable end.

Time is presented as an inherent limit to human life and achievement in 'Doctor Faustus'. The pace of the play increases overall, Faustus' 'four and twenty years' passing quickly until he has 'but one bare hour' to live. Crucially, however, Marlowe does not present this limit as a terrible thing, using the genre of classical tragedy to communicate the idea that eternal life may be a curse rather than a blessing, and especially focusing on the anagnorisis undergone by Faustus wherein he realizes that finite existence may be a desirable thing when faced with the expanse of the infinite.

The finite nature of human existence and the limits that this imposes are condensed into the example Marlowe creates of Faustus' 'four and twenty' years. Faustus is depicted as seeing this time period as a considerably long time to live in 'voluptuousness', and considers it worth giving away his soul for. The audience, however, can see that any length of time is not worth eternal damnation in hell, which creates dramatic irony. This irony is perhaps analogised by Marlowe through the character of the Clown: when discussing what he would sell his soul for, he comically asserts that raw 'mutton' is not enough and that 'good sauce' is needed 'if I pay so dear.'

Marlowe uses comedy to point out that humans have wildly different perspectives on what lives are worth and that Faustus is foolish for signing away his time on earth for any amount of 'voluptuousness' …

And later:

Faustus not only shows a lack of understanding concerning time, but he proves to use the time he has in futile and unfulfilling ways, creating a sense of stagnant progression. The scene with the Pope in Rome serves as a reflection of the types of things that Faustus has been doing during the twenty-four years: the beginning of the scene sees an accumulative list of all the places that Faustus has visited. However this list serves to show the illegitimacy of his pact as he has not had 'them fly to India for gold / Ransack the ocean for orient pearl' as he desired to do at the beginning of the play; rather he describes his travels from the perspective of a tourist. Thus, Faustus is de-elevated from the aspirations of the Renaissance spirit and Age of Discovery – to explore and colonise new places in the manner of Christopher Columbus – to a travelling performer who uses his time on earth hopelessly …

Note how the candidate, despite engaging in quite a detailed way with contextual issues, never loses sight of the text itself.

Question 18

Dr Faustus

The question asked about temptation.

This question produced some good responses with most students able to comment on the battle between good and evil.

Successful answers often focused on the Prologue and the references to Icarus, and how that foreshadows the ending and result of temptation. Good answers also considered the play in terms of the morality play legacy and how Mephistopheles both embodies but also subverts the stock character of Medieval plays. Discussions of Renaissance Humanism also worked well. Those who discussed the Seven Deadly Sins in terms of morality plays, not to mention to psychomachia with the Good versus Bad Angels, also performed well. Top responses also explored Marlowe's language and imagery.

In general, candidates identified a number of examples of temptation with some relying heavily on the opening scene and the Helen of Troy scene, whilst others roamed more widely across the text. Stronger responses require a secure grasp of the religious context of the play and candidates who had this were able to explore the nature of religious temptation against a backdrop of early secular beliefs. Weaker responses focused instead on the exchanges between Faustus and Mephistopheles which, at times, descended into paraphrasing or word level analysis.

Here are some extracts from Level 3 responses – clear and relevant, but without the development we would expect at Level 4:

In Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus', temptation is a key and inescapable theme that Faustus frequently succumbs to throughout the entirety of the play. From Faustus' initial temptation to magic as a means to excel in all fields to his sexual temptation from characters such as Helen to the temptation to repent, Doctor Faustus highlights the many temptations a Renaissance man must face...

and:

'Doctor Faustus' is one of the most controversial tragedies in the history of the English language and tells a classic tale of temptation. John Faustus, a respectable scholar, is tempted into the dark arts and signs his soul over to Lucifer. Marlowe presents temptation is several ways throughout the tragedy: the temptation of knowledge in juxtaposition to the scholarly pursuit of knowledge in criticism of censorship; the temptation of the Evil Angel in juxtaposition with the Good Angel to illustrate free will and criticise Calvinism and the temptation of the Seven Deadly Sins in order to give a moral message to his audience, as well as criticise the upper classes.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response, offering sophisticated and convincing arguments with excellent integration of contextual material:

Marlowe presents temptation as being irresistible for his eponymous protagonist as he dares to defy the religious convention of the Elizabethan era and attempts to gain knowledge outside of the ideals of the Renaissance. By subverting the tradition of the Morality Play, Marlowe presents his audience with the message that succumbing to temptation is irredeemable, since Faustus is eternally damned. This can be seen to serve as a critique of Catholicism, since the clergy were famed for their indulgent behaviour. Thus,

Marlowe not only warns his audience of the dangers of temptation, but also offers a critique of the Catholic Church.

Marlowe immediately presents Faustus as tempted by forbidden knowledge, attempting to abandon the scholastic traditionalism of the Medieval era and superseded his position as a Renaissance man. Through his vituperative rhetoric in regard to the established works of Aristotle, for example, Marlowe communicates that Faustus is abandoning the Medieval mode of thought that stressed tradition. Faustus' desire of 'power, of honour, of omnipotence', however, highlight how he desires to become godlike, with the triadic structure here denoting a steadfast conviction on his behalf. The plosives in 'power' and 'omnipotence' also draws the audience's attention particularly to his desire for absolute authority, thereby rivaling God and abandoning Elizabethan religious dogma.

The emerging humanist school of thought denounced simply following the church's commands, advocating the use of reason to direct one's own duty. Marlowe, however, presents Faustus as failing to adequately apply humanist philosophy, using a bizarre and twisted logic to justify his temptation. This is present in Faustus' use of oxymoronic statements, claiming the 'necromantic books are heavenly'. Thus, Marlowe presents Faustus as defying religious convention and fallaciously subverting humanist though, demonstrating the folly in pursuing temptation.

Indeed, Marlowe presents Faustus as truly foolish, with Faustus ignoring the many signs which attempt to warn him of his error. In the tradition of the Medieval Morality Play, which still had great influence in Marlowe's time, Faustus' conscience is personified in the form of the good and evil angels. Marlowe presents Faustus, however, as only acknowledging the final statement the angels make, with the Evil angel stating, 'No, Faustus, think of honour and of wealth' and Faustus repeating 'of wealth!'. Consequently Faustus can be seen to once again defy the emerging humanist tradition which stressed the dialectic as the chief means by which to gain knowledge with his exclamation expressing his commitment to pursuing temptation. Through only listening to the final statement of the argument, therefore, Faustus does not engage appropriately with the humanist school of thought, with Marlowe presenting this as leading to an error of judgement. Consequently, pursuing temptation is presented as both defying God's will (personified in the Good angel) and as contrary to the Renaissance philosophy of humanism, for which Marlowe was a strong advocate.

Faustus' indignation in pursuing necromancy, succumbing to temptation, is also presented in his ignoring the ambiguous statements that Mephistopheles makes. This is presented when he states, 'Faustus, I swear by hell and Lucifer / To esteem all promises between us made', with the use of enjambment highlighting the ominous nature of this promise. Marlowe also presents Faustus as ignoring the momento mori of the Old Man at the close of the play, instructing Faustus to think of 'thy Saviour sweet'. The use of sibilance here highlights the extent of the delights Faustus is depriving himself of; regardless, Faustus invariably ignores this advice and refuse to repent. Marlowe could possibly be seen to profess a deterministic philosophy here, given that it almost appears that Faustus is fated to be damned. Such a philosophy gained prominence with the rise in popularity of Calvinist theology, which Marlowe's protestant audience would have been accustomed to. As an alleged Atheist, however, this seems an unlikely message for Marlowe to want to impart: thus, Faustus' ignoring of the many warning signs he receives can be seen as simply further emphasizing his foolishness.

Marlowe can also be seen to criticize the Pope and Catholic clergy for their foolishness in succumbing to temptation. Anti-Catholic sentiment was strong amongst Marlowe's audience, largely due to the Spanish Armada which sought to remove the Protestant Elizabeth and reinstate a Catholic monarch. Marlowe seemingly panders to this sentiment, highlighting the hypocrisy of the Catholic friars through their anaphoric chant 'curse be

he...'. This chant they offer only attacks Faustus and Mephistopheles for their affronts on the Pope, rather than damning them for their loyalty to Lucifer. Consequently. The friars appear more concerned with their personal well-being and power rather than ensuring that divine will is adhered to. Their statement of 'Cursed be he that stole away his Holiness' meat from the table' may also be read as a bid to protect their personal power. Read metaphorically, this can be seen to refer to their dismay at the insurgent Renaissance thinking that took away from their personal power and influence. Thus, through presenting the Catholic clergy as abandoning their religious duty and succumbing to the temptations of wealth and power, Marlowe provides both a criticism of Catholicism and an advocacy for the Renaissance ideals.

Temptation, therefore, is presented by Marlowe as causing Faustus to act contrary to the humanist philosophy for which he was an advocate, whilst also defying God's will. Faustus is even presented as descending to the lower social class due to his indulgence in necromancy, abandoning the dignified iambic pentameter in which he originally speaks in order to converse with the horse –courser in Scene XI in the more lowly blank verse. Social status was of utmost importance for the Elizabethan audience, who equated loss of social identity with loss of personal identity. Thus, through succumbing to temptation, Faustus seemingly loses everything, ultimately becoming eternally damned. Marlowe presents temptation as leading one away from the ideals of the Elizabethan society for which he wrote.

Question 19

The Duchess of Malfi

The question asked about religion.

The full range of performance emerged on this question.

At the bottom end, there were several character studies of the Cardinal, being a 'religious figure'. There were several Ferdinand character studies and some were so determined to make the question about political corruption that they included the 'crooked plum tree' simile and then struggled to make it a religious symbol. It was common for more developed responses to consider the Duchess, and her comparative religious purity, as a contrasting view. Overall, there was a large number of clear but ultimately rather simple responses, giving fairly straightforward readings.

More positively, some responses demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of both AO2 and AO3, with references to the Council of Trent. A few went beyond the play's Catholic environment to include pagan influences, such as astrological imagery. A few responses were very focused on context and well argued, but under-achieved by having limited use of the text itself.

Here is an example of a Level 5 response which is convincing, well-sustained and sophisticated in its exploration of the text in context:

Webster presents the theme of religion in 'The Duchess of Malfi' to criticise Catholicism and praise the Duchess' virtue. As anti-Catholic and a Congregationalist himself, he presents characters, such as the Cardinal, who corrupt religious morals and thus are in contrast with the Duchess, who has strong religious faith and virtue. Ultimately, the theme of religion is central to the play and important in portraying Webster's values of love, virtue and morality.

The Cardinal is presented in the play as using his status for fulfilling immoral deeds and desires. His red religious garbs would immediately indicate to the audience his religious status, however it also connotes danger, violence and lust. This is evident in Delio's comment that Bosola spent 'seven years in the galleys' due to 'a notorious murder and 'twas thought the Cardinal suborned it'. This immediately indicates to the audience that not only is the Cardinal dangerous, but he uses his religious status in order to be corrupt without receiving consequences for such. This also installs fear in the audience for the duchess, since her virtue is evident from the start, and the brothers attempt to control her, but she defys them. As an anti-Catholic, Webster is therefore critical of the Cardinal, and highlights his immorality and evil, since it is suggested that he 'were able to possess the greatest devil / and make him worse'. The religious imagery of the Cardinal corrupting the 'devil' himself and making him 'worse' emphasises the extent of his evil and consequently Webster's criticism of Catholicism.

Not only does the Cardinal use his status to enact evil, he also directly goes against the ten commandments and is shown to be having an affair with Julia. This in itself is immoral, yet he continues to use his religious status to fulfill his desires by using religious language in an inappropriate context, telling Julia 'I pray thee kiss me'. Furthermore, his misogynistic language emphasises the Cardinal corrupting religion and using it for his own ends – 'I have taken you off your melancholy perch / Bore you upon my fist'. The metaphor and dehumanizing language of Julia as a 'bird' reflects the power imbalance in the relationship, and therefore reflects the Cardinal using his religious status to assume dominance.

Ultimately, Webster presents the Cardinal as one who notabley corrupts religion, but also the life in the Italian, Machiavellian court. He is referred to as corrupting and fretting the evil within the court, and encouraging 'death and disease' in both politics and religion. The common Jacobean construct of the Body Politic is therefore evident in the Italian court, since those at the 'head' 'poison't' the court. This is a direct criticism of James I's court, which was known to be rife with corruption and Webster himself was critical of. Ultimately the imagery of 'poison' and 'disease' in the court and politics is also reflected in religion and the Cardinal. At the end of the play, he presents Julia with a poisoned bible – 'thou poisoned with that book' – which kills her as she kisses it. The bible itself is therefore symbolic of the Cardinal, as he has corrupted religion and used his status for his own immoral desires. Therefore, Webster presents the Cardinal as a corrupting influence on the court and religion itself to be critical of King James I and Catholicism.

In direct contrast to the Cardinal, the Duchess is presented as having a strong religious faith and virtue when proposing to Antonio, she states that 'In heaven / I am making my will'. The dual meaning of 'will' as either her will contract after death or desire to marry Antonio, ultimately suggests how she acknowledges the virtue of their marriage since she makes this will 'in heaven'. Her faith is shown to be constant and unwavering throughout the play, as her belief in the afterlife indicate – 'who would be afraid on't / knowing to meet such excellent company / In th'other world?' Not only does this show her faith in going to heaven, due to her Christian devotion, but it is also in contrast with the Cardinal who questions the afterlife, but it is also in contrast with the Cardinal who questions the afterlife – 'I am puzzled in a question about hell'. In contrasting the cardinal and the Duchess, Webster is able to show a contrast between virtue and immorality, good and evil, and subsequently criticize the cardinal and the hypocrisy in Catholicism simultaneously.

Webster uses religious imagery throughout the play to reflect a conflict between good and evil. The first instance of this is in Act 1, when Ferdinand bribes Bosola to spy on the Duchess. Despite his moral awareness that 'let good men, for good deeds, covet good fame / Since place and riches of are bribes of shame', he still accepts the bribe and concludes the rhyming couplet with 'Sometimes the devil doth preach'. The scene itself is reflective of the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden, in which the snake / Satan bribed Eve with the apple. By using this religious imagery, Webster presents Ferdinand as the snake / Satan, highlighting his evil, and Bosola as Eve, However, Bosola is shown to be morally confused. since he morally diverts the 'silver coins' symbolic of the apple, from 'angels' to 'devils'. This shows his moral awareness in which he acknowledges the immorality of the bribe and ultimately accepting it. Not only does this mirror the Garden of Eden, it is also shown to be reflective of the biblical themes of mystery and morality plays, which aim to teach moral lessons. Therefore, Bosola's acceptance of the bribe and his comment 'I am your creature' supports the notion 'radox malorum es sum' – the love of money is the root of all evil. Consequently, Bosola's dehumanizing metaphor of himself as a 'creature' thus shows that Webster suggests losing your morality is akin to losing your humanity. This temptation scene and religious imagery is paralleled in Bosola's bribing of the Duchess with 'apricots'. Once again, the scene reflects the Garden of Eden temptation, in which Bosola, symbolic of Satan / the snake tempts the Duchess – Eve – with 'apricots' symbolic of apples. Ultimately, the role reversal of Bosola becoming the snake shows his acceptance of evil, which is accentuated by his use of 'Asides' throughout the scene. Ultimately, the Duchess' acceptance of the apricots leads to her downfall, as her pregnancy is exposed. Not only by the 'loose-bodied gown' she wears but her susceptibility to deception and evil. Therefore, by Webster's use of religious imagery and notions, which the audience would be able to recognise, shows him highlighting morality and immorality in the court.

The Duchess' death is presented in the play as symbolic of a Christian martyr's death. She encourages her executioners to 'pull and pull strongly / for your able strength / must pull down heaven upon me', which indicates her faith in going to heaven, because of her virtue. Furthermore, Webster shows how the Duchess' religious faith gives her strength and power in the face of death. The act of kneeling and saying 'come violent death' is reflective of one at prayer, but also of the marriage proposal in Act 1. The Duchess' comment, 'heaven's gates are not so highly arched / As prince's palaces' reflects how corrupt the Italian, Machiavellian court is and therefore Webster's criticism of James I, but also her faith in going to her heaven, since she kneels. Ultimately, the noose with which she is strangled is an emblem of Christian martyrdom, but also of the wedding ring, as this is its virtue. Webster takes influence from mystery and morality plays, which often presented biblical themes and the lives of saints and martyrs. In doing so, he is able to highlight the duchess' virtue – which is also in contrast to Julia whose death by means of the poisoned bible which she kisses 'most religiously' highlights her lack of devotion and her as a sinner and adulteress. Therefore Webster is able to promote the Duchess' virtue and devotion to faith, which results in the audience's catharsis and pathos in her death and suffering.

Question 20

The Duchess of Malfi

The question asked about excess.

This was the less popular of the two on 'The Duchess of Malfi'.

The theme of excess was often reinterpreted to mean 'excess of' something (including 'excess of deceit'). Some candidates gave the impression of having prepared for a different question, for example reputation or corruption. Some only wrote one page. Better answers focused on the theme of greed in the play. Surprisingly few responses looked at Ferdinand. As was the case with quite a few of the Section B responses, a number of candidates did not have the dramatist's craft in mind.

Here are a few extracts from higher level responses to this question where the candidates have shaped convincing arguments that go beyond simply pointing out where excess lies:

...Excess is presented in 'The Duchess of Malfi' as something intrinsic to the upper classes and as a cause of stagnancy and evil. As such, through the presentation of excess in lust, ambition and greed Webster appears to criticise Jacobean society's social structure which allows the upper class to become stagnant ...

Webster portrays the Italian court of Malfi as excessively corrupt and stagnant. During James I's reign in which Webster was writing, there were growing concerns about favouritism as James regularly rewarded those like George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. As such Webster reflects this by having Ferdinand encourage sycophancy: 'take fire when I give fire, that is, laugh when I laugh'. Through the use of imperatives Webster shows how Ferdinand forces the lower classes to flatter him. Webster also uses Bosola to note how that brothers are 'like plum trees grown crooked over standing pools'. The simile highlights how although the brothers are meant to 'feed' those below them, they are 'crooked' and their excessive stagnation is highlighted by the image of 'standing pools'...

...Webster presents excess as indulgence and a crucial aspect of the corruption within the court and wider politics of the play. Excess manifests itself most within the cardinal who repeatedly betrays his religious piety and modesty. Yes the Duchess also indulges in excess of desire, while Bosola's pursuit of excess damns him and perhaps brings about the entire tragedy...

Yet even the Duchess is excessive, as she indulges in too many marriages which is prohibited by her brothers and society. In Act 1 her brothers accuse the Duchess of excessive sexuality, 'those lustful pleasures, are like heavy sleep which do fore-run man's mischiefs'. The simile of comparing sex to 'sleep' foreshadows the danger within the Duchess' desire, as sleep suggests death and she is ultimately executed for her marriage. The adjective 'lusty' reminds the audience of the trope 'lusty widow'. Elizabethan society discouraged widows away from unbridled lust, yet the Duchess displays this excessive, carnal passion in her courting of Antonio. She is authoritative and active in her pursuit of him, despite his status as a social inferior: 'this flesh and blood, Sir; 'tis not the figure cut in alabaster'. Her biological language objectifies her and she reduces herself to her body.

She defies her brothers and indulges in sex. To a modern audience this may appear empowering and even feminist, but to a contemporary audience, the Duchess is greedy and excessive. Her marriage to her servant shows she is slave to her desire and the three 'cubs' she produces also suggests an excess of sex in the marriage …

Question 21

The Home Place

The question asked about setting.

There were very few responses to this question and candidates found it challenging to remain on topic, often drifting off towards discussion of characters or to offer lengthy descriptions of Anglo-Irish history.

Better responses explored Friel's use of symbolism in creating a setting for his play and made links between his dramatic craft and the context in which the play is set and received.

Here is an extract from a low Level 3 response – clear, but a little laboured in expression – which shows a typical approach to the topic:

...The set description at the start of the play presents a time of uncertainty for the Gores as Brian Friel depicts nature to be warning then about the fated decline of the Protestant Ascendancy and the rise of the native Irish. This can first be shown by the 'unkempt lawn' which creates an image of the grass rising up against the Gores...Friel continues this pressure of nature against the Gores as the 'crescent of tress encloses the entire house and lawn; it seems to press in on them'...

Friel also makes use of setting by using stage directions to hint at the lurking destruction of the Protestant Ascendancy and the Land League. Once again he uses Margaret, a character torn between both sides to spot this symbol. 'She catches a glimpse of a bird flying above ...she steps and looks for it but it has vanished'. Friel subtly includes the falcon as a bird of prey that causes destruction. He mentions the falcon a few times – 'the falcon's back' – to impose the certainty of the decline of the Protestant Ascendancy...

Question 22

The Home Place

The question asked about belonging.

Again, there were very few response to this question. Weaker answers explored 'belonging' simply by focusing on various characters and their sense of national identity. Too many responses began with a potted history of Irish politics rather than a clear exploration of the question. Candidates need to be able to link context directly to the play – in detail, for Level 4.

There was also a tendency not to treat the text as a piece of drama. A number of responses showed very little sense of Friel's crafting – only some sweeping generalisations about his political views.

Here are some extracts showing typical approaches to the question:

...During a scene in which Christopher and David are marking specific trees with whitewash, there is a description of all the different variety of plants found in their back garden. In one sentence, David says that 'the soil's too alkaline' for a certain plant, to which Christopher replies with 'do you thinks so?' Brian Friel is using these plants as symbolism for talking about humans and where they belong... (Low Level 3)

... It is evident from the outset of the play that Margaret feels a sense of nostalgia towards the valley and the Thomas Moore song that is echoing up to the lodge owned by the Gores, a Protestant Ascendancy family. This fact alone highlights Margaret's divided loyalties. The way in which she is so 'enraptured' in 'Oft in the Stilly Night' highlights her Irishness and misplacement at The Lodge ...

It is interesting to note the way in which the choir appears to be singing to The Lodge itself, which is reinforced when Clement later states to Christopher that he 'performed (their) new piece for him'. This acts as an indirect message from the native Irish to the Protestant Ascendancy and the Planter. Moore's music was such that it brought hope to many native Irishmen and spoke of the great hardships during the Great Depression. Thus it acts as a warning to the Gores that they do not belong in Ballybeg and are no longer welcome ... (High Level 3)

There is a duality to the nature of belonging seen by Magret as she fits either nowhere or in multiple places. Friel further implies her loyalty to her childhood home in his clear separation of her from them at the time of Richard's study. Magret is placed with the Irish native 'specimens' through Christopher's suggestion that Perkins 'take a photograph of Magret here too'. This would further place her with the people of the valley and away from the Gores...

Finally, Margret's last reponse to the music of Thomas Moore seems to suggest that she has chosen between her childhood home and the Gores. Friel describes Margret as 'mesmerised, absorbing, submitting, remembering'. Through this it could be inferred that she has given in to her unconscious desire to return to the place of her childhood where she feels she better belongs. This is reinforced through her stating 'in a short time father will come up here for me'. This ambiguous sentence seems to imply that she is returning to he valley. Through the character of Margret, Friel highlights how a person cannot force themselves to belong somewhere and that belonging to somewhere is a natural process. (Level 4)

Below is an example of a low Level 3 response. There are issues with expression and some generalised comments on context, but there is just enough clear understanding of the topic and some relevant reference to the text to bring it just into Level 3:

Belonging is a key theme in 'The Home Place'. Although it's being subjected further onto the dual sense of belonging. Before delving into the theme of belonging and how it's portrayed by Friel there are some deep contextual factors that must be adhered to. The story is set in the late 1870's. This is shortly after the Irish potato famine and many Irish people still felt very bitter about the lack of English support. Also after the English landlords were allowed most of Ireland by parliament, even many years later, many many people felt that it was stolen and felt the right to walk wherever they liked. Friel being a true Irish patriot, reflects his views in his play and the Anti-anglisized pro-Irish feeling pervades his writing.

Friel presents the theme of belonging through his various characters. The most obvious is Christopher Gore but through Margret, David and Richard as well. Christopher Gore is presented as an anglisized landlord in Ireland but his inside turmoil as to where he belongs becomes quite evident. Almost immediately, when Margret asks if any locals were present at the memorial service, Christopher reacts by saying 'What am I Margret.'

Christopher obviously wants to feel as if he belongs in Ireland and wants to regard himself as a local. But at the same time he is evidently terrified about there being a list of Anglisized landlord's which he clearly thinks he would be part of. 'There isn't a list is there' and 'There is a list'. The obvious terror in which he asks the question speaks volumes of how is views himself. But then again Friel confuses the reader when Christopher remarks how "this is the only home I've ever known".

What Friel is doing by creating this confusion around belonging is make clear the difference between where one belongs and where they want to belong. This level of confusion is kept up by Friel throughout the play.

Another character to whom the theme of belonging seems particularly pertinent is Margret. Margret is presented at the start as a typical Irish servant but her true self emerges very soon and the anglisized Margret seems to emerge. Her anglisized way of speaking becomes clear e.g. 'we will be having tea out here' and is noticed by Sally, who airs the audiences suspicion – 'You'd do anything to be one of the toffs'.

Even though the audience is still unclear about where Margret's loyalties lie until the scene where Con threatens Christopher. Margret insists on defending the gores and wants the police. This scene is particularly significant in how belonging is presented. Con – who's views seem to sit perfectly with Friel – represents the native Irish. He is the one willing to use violence to protect his country and is the one who stands up when Richard is mistreating the Irish people. Margret by standing up to him is truly showing her desire to anglisized – shows where she wants to belong to.

Again Friel is portraying belonging with a torn sense of it to create this difference between true belonging and one's desires.

But Friels true message is that in the end true belonging always wins over. Christopher who truly desires to be Irish – at the end when he is losing his mind admits 'I was aware how alien I sounded' and 'I can't die here'. Whereas Margret who truly desires to be English refuses to leave in the end.

David is the most interesting character regarding a sense of belonging. On the one hand he is in love with Margret – shows a love for Irish people which is the complete antithesis of

Richard who despises all things Irish. But then again unlike Margret he shows no hesitation about leaving Ireland – his homeland – to go live somewhere else. He tells Margret 'We'll run away to Glasgow' and 'Kenya – it will be wonderful'.

So with careful analysis of the characters a picture emerges. There are two types of people – people who feel a sense of belonging – like Christopher and Margret and people who don't feel a sense of belonging like David.

Richard is the character who epitomizes both points of Friel. He feels a sense of belonging to England and he actually truly belongs there. This is the reason Friel depicts Richard as a pompous and despicable person – because this in Friel's eyes is a typical Anglsized person. But Richard is an important character for he brings it all together.

In conclusion, Friel presents belonging through his characters with a purposefully confusing dual sense of belonging to create a barrier between truly belonging somewhere and actually belonging. This subtle difference is what makes these characters so real. He also portrays belonging through definitive characters to differentiate between those who feel a sense of belonging and those who don't.

Question 23

A Streetcar Named Desire

The question asked about the play as a tragedy.

It was possible to address this question vis-à-vis classical tragedy or by using the word 'tragedy' in a looser sense.

The best answers probably did both – they knew what was expected in classical tragedy (having studied a Shakespearian tragedy probably helped in most cases), but could also show how Williams modified those conventions. The really good answers showed what was gained and lost in so doing (and that also tended to pick up on the word 'extent' in the question). Weaker responses took tragedy to mean suffering without exploring it as a literary concept, but a misunderstanding of Aristotelian tragedy, with words such as 'hamartia' or 'anagnorisis' being used incorrectly, also caused problems.

Successful responses explored Aristotelian (or in some cases Nietzschean or Hegelian) concepts of tragedy and applied them to the play including the unities of time and place. They also linked Williams' use or subversion of these conventions to his commentary on post-war America. Top responses also explored stagecraft effectively, such as the claustrophobic apartment setting, the use of expressionistic techniques, in particularly the Varsouviana, symbolism, costume and motifs. Some students explored the title in relation to tragedy, which worked very well when connected to the concept of fate and Blanche's 'inevitable' tragic fate.

The following comments from examiners are worth noting:

'This question gave rise to a fascinating range of responses, which fell broadly into two camps – those who had a secure understanding of the conventions of tragedy and applied these to the text and those who did not. The latter group understandably found this question more difficult to score highly on, but some did so by evaluating the impact of negative events. On the whole though, students who did not apply tragic conventions to this question tended to lapse into a character study of list-like accounts of sad events. A number of candidates re-wrote a pre-practised essay on Blanche, twisting this to view her as a tragic hero with rather mixed success'

'There were some very tenuous links to Aristotelian tragedy. Theatricality was included through simplistic comments about plastic theatre and this might be an area to work on in the future. Greek mythology epitomised by the Elysian Fields was discussed and, when this was linked to predestination, was effective. Other more daring discussions claimed that Stanley was Dionysus and Blanche was Apollo, although they seemed a little confused about the point of this comparison and how it linked to tragedy…'.

'There were some very pleasing responses from candidates who clearly had a sophisticated grasp of the conventions of tragedy; weaker candidates seemed very confused about these. Stronger candidates were able to focus on Williams' development of Blanche as tragic hero and to look at the subtler aspects of Blanche's promiscuity and sensitivity in relation to Williams' own background. Weaker candidates did not seem to see this connection and took these elements of her character at face value. Williams' use of plastic theatre was generally discussed, together with basic elements of context such as Williams' experiences with his father and sister as well as his homosexuality…'.

'One very interesting response argued that *Streetcar* is in fact a subversion of most Aristotelian conventions…'.

Here is an example of an outstanding response to this question that manages to avoid getting bogged down in inappropriate terms from Greek tragedy whilst remaining fully focused on the question. There is also a well-sustained focus on the text as a literary construct. Integration of contextual material is seamless and effective:

In 'A Streetcar Named Desire', Williams does include numerous features of a tragedy – including the presence of a tragic hero (Blanche DuBois) and the journey from relative strength to downfall. However, it can be argued that this downfall that Blanche experiences is not necessarily due to any fatal flaw (another key element of tragedy) but is a result of her external surroundings shaping a predetermined fated doom. This is achieved through Williams' linking of Blanche to the old social order, and his use of the Kowalski apartment as a threatening domain for Blanche. It is in this sense that 'Streetcar' cannot be branded a tragedy in its entirety due to the insignificance of any dominant 'fatal flaw'.

Blanche's sense of tragic downfall being premeditated from the offset is portrayed by Williams through his contrast of the urban vitality of the working class setting of New Orleans, with the decaying gentility of the Old South, which Blanche comes to embody. Williams most successfully achieves this through his imbuement of colour. The play opens with reference to the setting of New Orleans, with its sky 'a particularly tender blue, almost turquoise, which invests the scene with a hand of lyricism'. Here, Williams' use of 'tender blue' to describe the sky indicates an overarching sense of vivacity and life in New Orleans – 'tender' almost personifying the colour to a degree, through its connotations of humane gentleness. This entrenched sense of vitality in his setting of the play is seen throughout. For example, at the poker scene, an example of the typical working class lifestyle, Williams depicts in the stage directions, the lurid nocturnal 'brilliance' of the kitchen with the 'raw colours of childhood's spectrum' and the 'vivid green glass shade'. This emphasis on primary, bold colours in connection to the working class of New Orleans gives light to its sense of burgeoning life, and new social order which saw urban industrialised cities grow after the decline of slavery and agriculture. It is in this setting of overwhelming vitality that Williams chooses to place Blanche – immediately creating a sense of fated tragic downfall. This is due to Williams' deliberate choice of costume, symbolising Blanche's propensity to her demise. Described as 'incongruous to the setting', Blanche is depicted as being 'daintily dressed in a white suit... necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat'. Here Williams shows Blanche to us embodying the traditional southern Belle, who upholds the southern ideals of feminine beauty, and opulence ('necklace and earrings of pearl'). By placing Blanche, a symbol of the Old South, within this context of thriving New Orleans, Williams depicts a brutal clash of cultures. This becomes overwhelmingly tragic for Blanche when observing the colour symbolism of her clothes – 'white' indicating an absolute lack of colour, and thus of life. Thus, Williams creates a sense of decay of Blanche's lifestyle and of Blanche herself due to the contrast of colour. This speaks to Williams' writing as part of the Southern Gothic movement, which focused on exposing and exploiting the mythic nostalgia of many towards the old south in its ante bellum heyday, and how attempts to sustain this image automatically failed. By inextricably binding Blanche to the Old South, Williams suggests a similar sense of tragedy. Thus, Williams initially shows the importance of her surroundings in ultimately crafting her downfall – not entirely in line with the conventional tragic plot.

This is seen further through Williams' use of the Kowalski apartment as the predominant site of the play's action. This is used to suggest that Blanche, out of no choice of her own, is subject to danger and subsequent downfall. This is primarily achieved through Williams' use of portieres showing that Blanche is victim to Stanley's possessiveness. Indeed, Williams portrays Stanley's desire to drive out Blanche from his home, exploiting the portieres to do so. In the poker scene, Williams highlights how when Blanche is in her assigned 'bedroom' cordoned off by the portieres, Stanley 'stalks fiercely through the portieres into the bedroom... tosses the instrument off the table'. Here Williams depicts the extreme violent threat Blanche is subject to as a result of her surroundings. By describing how Stanley

'stalks' – indicating a predatory and animal like urge, 'fiercely' – implying an impulsive need – Williams ultimately shows Blanche's tragic fate as being shaped and catalysed by her 'surroundings', as opposed to any innate flaw that leads to downfall. This is furthered by the fact that Williams uses portieres, thick curtains, as opposed to anything concrete – indicating the temporariness of Blanche's stay, and the ominous inch of security she has under Stanley's roof. While this may be intended as a means of creating pathos, for the contemporary audience who would have experienced the tumult and disorder of World War 1, the idea of protecting one's home (as Stanley does) and restoring it to normalcy, would have appealed to the experiences of many.

While there is much to argue that Williams portrays the downfall of the tragic hero as being rooted in external circumstances as opposed to any innate flaw, attention must be given to the fact that Blanche's inability to accept the reality of her situation does serves to catalyse her demise. Williams displays this through Blanche's aversion to light – something which symbolically connects the truth and reality. Williams's shows how her desire to not be 'looked a in this merciless glare' and her hatred of 'naked bulb' is ultimately exploited by other characters, causing her to fall into a state of mental distress. For example, towards the end of the play, just as Blanche is about to be taken to the mental asylum, Williams shows how Stanley 'seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the lightbulb, and extends it towards her. She cries out as if the light bulb was herself'. Ultimately, Blanche's incessant need to conceal her past and true identity as someone with a questionable past and faded beauty, is destroyed and Blanche is forcibly made to live with the harsh reality of her life. Clearly, then, some importance must be assigned to Blanche's personal failing in catalysing her own downfall.

Regardless of the cause, Williams demonstrates a clear tragic element in 'Streetcar' through his use of expressionism and plastic theatre used to portray Blanche's tragic downfall. Wanting to explore a more subjective sense of reality, Williams utilised unconventional means – including lighting and sound – in order to expose Blanche's infer suffering. For example, prior to Stanley's rape of Blanche, Williams shows how Blanche is surrounded by 'lurid reflections' and 'shadows' of a 'grotesque and menacing form'. While not explicitly communicating the exact inner thoughts Blanche is experiencing (in contrast to what verbal dramatising might do), Williams' lighting creates and increasingly menacing and ominous atmosphere which allows the audience to feel a sense of unnerve similar to what Blanche is enduring. This sense of inner suffering and mental downfall is further enforced by Williams through his use of sound, particularly that of the Varsouviana polka – an artificial sound heard only by Blanche and no other characters. Being the music that was played minutes before Blanche's young husband Allan Grey committed suicide, the Varsouviana represents significant trauma for Blanche, causing her to experience distress and panic, Importantly, the Varsouviana comes to symbolise no only her past trauma but precludes her future trauma – acting as a warning of imminent disaster. This link is only solidifies when considering the Polish origins of the Varsouviana, and how this relates to the cause of much of her current plight: Stanley. Williams uses this music as a key indicator of Blanche's tragic downfall in the last scene, as she is being taken away from Elysian Fields. Williams describes how: 'The Varsouviana is filtered into weird distortion, accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle'. The fact that the Varsouviana, a noise that already bears significant trauma for Blanch is 'distorted' goes to highlight Blanche's complete sense of distress and her lack of grasp on reality. By accompanying this with the 'noises of the jungle', Williams creates an overwhelming cacophony of noise and sense of danger which the audience gets to experience alongside Blanche. This attempt to highlight Blanche's downfall via sound and lighting is indicative of William's more plastic approach to theatre, in which he attempted to explore the human condition but tapping into different 'truths'. This was a significant break from the controversial realist drama of the period which focused much more on structure and what Arthur Miller called 'engineering'. By choosing to engage with a variety of dramatic modes, Williams creates a much more subjective experience of reality for the audience.

Arguably in this case it only serves to enhance the tragic hero's tragic downfall, as the audience are able to witness the chaos of her inner thoughts.

Overall, 'A Streetcar Named Desire' can generally be accepted as a tragedy, through its depiction of a tragic hero experiencing a downfall. Whilst there is debate as to whether the personal failings of Blanche constitute a fatal flaw, and whether it is this which catalyses her downfall, Williams succeeds in creating a pathos in the audience as they witness the mental downfall of the protagonist.

Question 24

A Streetcar Named Desire

The question asked about masculinity.

By far the most popular on the paper, this question elicited a wide spectrum of responses, with weaker answers engaging in a character study of Stanley and/or Mitch, while stronger answers explored what Williams was suggesting about post-war masculinity, relating it to his romantic attachment to the Old South and his critique of the brutality of New America. Best responses had an over-arching thesis on Williams' representation of masculinity, as well as recognising the fact that masculinity is not monolithic in the play.

Once again, when stagecraft was addressed, students performed better. Williams' lyrical stage directions often meant that some students analysed the secondary text for language techniques, for example noting onomatopoeia or alliteration in the stage directions, rather than exploring how this would translate on stage. Some students referred to the rape scene, without analysing how it is staged, missing opportunities to explore Williams' expressionistic techniques. The best responses explored the nuances of this scene e.g. the non-diegetic jungle noises, inhuman voices, use of off-stage, body language, foreshadowing, or even the transparent screen.

Most students did embed context, but weaker answers did so clumsily, just asserting that Stanley represents the New South. There was also some confusion over the temporal setting, with some students confidently referring to 1950s (or even 1960s) America, or even claiming this took placed straight after the First World War, not to mention confusing the American Civil War with the Old versus New South conflict in the play. However, there were also nuanced responses to context, referring to the American Dream and post-war consumer society – and how this relates to masculinity – in complex ways. Top responses also considered masculinity in terms of 'tragedy'.

Biographical context was referred to with varying success. Weaker responses just bolted on the fact that Williams was homosexual or abused by his father. Top responses dealt with biographical context in a more speculative and nuanced way, using quotations from Williams about his exploration of, and affinity with, fragile characters, or his use of the 'off-stage' Allan Gray as a way of exploring alternative masculinities in the play.

The comments of examiners are worth noting:

'Candidates responding to this question focused mostly on Stanley as an example of toxic masculinity. Only a few candidates were able to view Stanley as a more complex character- most dismissed him as misogynistic and abusive but stronger answers also looked at his insecurity as the root for his deviant behaviour. Some candidates explored Alan and Mitch as examples of different aspects of masculinity and this was usually successful, although not everyone identified the contradictions in the character of Mitch. Some explored Mitch as a foil for Stanley. There was excessive word level analysis of Stanley in the opening scene. There was also a tendency to make generalised and speculative links to various aspects of Williams' life, including his homosexual relationships, his violent father and his abused mother. Again, it was rare to see these details integrated into a line of argument. Comments on the contrast between masculinity and femininity sometimes produced some insightful analysis, but those who claimed that Blanche had her own brand of masculinity seemed to be somewhat missing the point…'

'Stronger answers went deeper than the argument that masculinity was threatening/bad. Some strayed from masculinity to only focussing on Stanley's violence. Many successful answers explored Stanley's influence on Mitch, and better answers extended this to explore how this represented the

masculine elements of the New South. Weaker responses split an essay into three sections for each male, better answers could link these.

One interesting answer explored masculinity as an escape for each of the men for varying reasons …'

'… the strongest answers considered the interrelationship between masculinity and femininity and ways in which the two are interdependent, or the simultaneous repulsion and attraction of brutal masculinity. Contextually, comments on Williams' personal biography invariably felt weaker than comments on new South versus old South masculinity: candidates who view writers as commentators on their times invariably write more perceptively and with a broader understanding than candidates who view writers as screw-ups who find personal therapy through art…'

'The phrase 'toxic masculinity' was at the heart of many weaker essays - but with very little exploration of what toxic might mean, other than not very nice. Weaker responses focused exclusively on Stanley and his red package of meat. Some included brief reference to Mitch. Some drifted into essays about Blanche, initially presenting her as a foil to Stanley's masculinity, but never really making it back to the central idea in the question. Often they wrote about the opening stage directions, the poker scene and the rape, which is understandable to some extent, but led to narrow responses, lacking in nuance. There were also many references to Williams' sexuality and his father. More interesting context was linked to post-war America economically/socially etc. Better answers looked at what masculinity means in the world of the play, how and why it is presented as it is. They avoided a character driven response, looking at aspects of masculinity…'

Below is a simple but clear response to this question:

Masculinity is an interesting topic within 'A Streetcar Named Desire' as there is such a wide range of male characters, from Stanley (who is the epitomy) of masculine power to Alan Gray who is presented as much more feminine in contrast.

Undoubtedly, Stanley Kowalski is the embodiment of masculinity due to his 'brutish' nature and impressive confidence within the play. Williams constantly uses powerful verbs such as 'stalks … jerks … hurls' to emphasise his apparent strength and power. The harsh sounds emphasise the dangerous aura Stanley creates as the use of animalistic imagery further highlights his unquestionable power. Both 'ape-like' and 'howling like a baying hound' reflect his brutish behaviour, as the simile dehumanises him, which only further suggests to the audience his control within post-war America, in which characters such as Stanley embodies the American dream, which therefore only further increase his masculinity in the eyes of the audience.

Interestingly, Mitch is a character in which Williams divulges from the stereotypical American worker, and provides Mitch with a 'great capacity for devotion'. In contrast to Stanley, Blanche highlights Mitch's ability to care for the sick, which provides the audience with a version of masculinity which is different to Stanley. However, interestingly, Williams degrades this alternative from of masculinity by mocking Mitch with animalistic imagery. Seperate to Stanley's 'primitive' stance, Mitch 'moves in an akward imitation like a dancing bear'. This humerous image is only further emphasized when compared to Stanley's dominant, powerful aura as the image of a 'dancing bear' suggests Mitch's inability to dance; resulting from a foolish attempt to attract a mate. so the audience finds Mitch's attempt to dance dismal and his interpretation of masculinity lowered to a point in which Mitch's compassion could be regarded as weakness in the modern world.

On the other hand, Williams also chooses to encorporate some very effeminate male roles within the play, perhaps to further highlight Stanley's obvious strength and power. The vulnerability of young male roles such as Alan Gray and the postboy are apparent

throughout as Blanche preys on their youth and inexperience, indirectly distancing herself from the new, masculine world. Blanche uses derogatory terms such as 'honey lamb' and 'a nervousness, a softness and tenderness' in which she is trawn too. The vulnerability is highlighted in these characters as the image of a lamb is one of innocence. Williams uses their youth to remove the 'brutish' masculinity the other characters possess. Interestingly, Williams involves himself within these scenes, associating with these characters as a reflection of his own vulnerability he feels within a society which doesn't accept homosexuality. The minor male roles provide a clear contrast to Stanley and only emphasise his superior masculinity further to the audience, whilst providing Williams with a cipher for his own emotions.

Undoubtedly. the poker night is the accumulation of masculinity and cultural differences – as the game requires skill and the ability to deceive, both of which Stanley excels at. The physical brawl between Stanley and his 'rough bunch' of friends creates an atmosphere of danger and raw power as Stanley is 'pinioned' and the 'sound of blows' is heard. The audience visually can see the physical strength of these characters as it creates an intimidating sense of foreboding. Williams uses this scene to highlight the dangers of the new world and how 'brutish' some have to be to survive.

Throughout, masculinity is strongly associated with Stanley, as the minor male characters only emphasise his strength. The use of animal imagery reflects the degree of masculinity each character possess – as whilst Stanley is a 'brutish ... hound' Mitch settles for 'dancing bear' – still deadly, but not as threatening... The addition of the 'young ... lamb' undeniably only highlights Stanley's strength, as Williams uses the characters as a metaphor, as new-world society acts like a 'hound' hunting down the vulnerable and ultimately destroying them – something Williams commonly felt, being less masculine than the typical man in 1940's America.

This sits on the Level 2/3 border: some clear understanding with some relevant use of the text. Ideas are straightforward, often repeated and not developed. References to context are generalised and assertive – much more Level 2 than Level 3. There is, however, a sense of a dramatist at work.

Here is an extract from a Level 5 response which is nicely discriminating about Williams' craft:

...Williams famously introduces Stanley to Blanche and the audience by discussing his 'animal joy'. This creates the precedent for masculinity being animalistic in nature and the most interesting use of this is him likening Mitch to a 'bear', who is not initially similar to the aggressive Stanley. A bear is often associated with tenderness and, conversely, danger. Mitch, like Stanley, cannot handle women. This is perfectly encapsulated in this stage direction: 'Mitch is bearing, upside down, a plaster statuette of Mae West' which is the first visual gag. Mitch literally doesn't know how to handle women as he holds the movie star and sex symbol upside down. This visual metaphor is an example of Williams' idea of 'plastic theatre' – using props to make the play's psychology physical and more potent. The gag speaks to the wider epidemic of men not understanding women of the play, whether it be Mitch's unease around the eccentric and wild Blanche, or Steve and Stanley's abusive, passionate relationships. Williams sees the animal masculinity he portrays as something that varies in intensity. It is dormant in Mitch but later, as I will discuss, comes out in full force...

And this is another example of a candidate truly getting to grips with the play as a dramatic construct and exploring the question in a way that is fully integrated with the text:

Williams uses plastic theatre to show how masculinity leads to the fall of weak feminine character. A key sound associated with masculinity is locomotives, such as when 'a train approaches' in Scene 4 covering up the sound of Stanley entering and also before the rape scene in Scene 10 where the 'roar of an approaching locomotive' causes her to 'crouch' and 'press her hands to her ears'. The effect of the locomotive on Blanche, which is symbolic of the concept of approaching fate, is also metaphorical for the idea that the consequences of masculinity are approaching rapidly. At first in Scene 4, the sound of the oncoming train doesn't cause her to stir, but later she can't stand it, showing that she knows what is coming. The sound of the locomotives is associated with Stanley and his masculinity. This is a form of plastic theatre which mirrors Stanley, the blue-collar worker, representing the new America which is supersceding Blanche's 'Old America' which is now only romaticised by herself and Southern Gothic literature. As Blanche's mental state begins to decline the effect of his masculinity becomes overbearing. The 'lurid reflections' which appear on the walls in Scene 10 are a subjective form of plastic theatre, to demonstrate to the audience the effect that Stanley and is masculinity is having on her. Her mental state is now seen by the objective audience and shows the consequences that the brute force of this man has had on Blanche. His masculinity is highlighted through theatricalism, both objectively and subjectively, to demonstrate the catastrophic effect it has on Blanche. She has fallen victim to the masculinity of New America ...

Question 25

The Importance of Being Earnest

The question asked about relationships between men and women.

Candidate performance was often quite polarised on this question with some responding really well, but others being limited to a rather pedestrian run through of the various interactions between male and female characters.

The quality of the contextual discussion was good and many responses linked their argument to the emergence of the New Woman. Candidates were able to comment successfully on Lady Bracknell's business-like approach, Gwendolyn and Cecily assertive personalities, and their control in arranging their own marriages to suit them.

At times, however, it appeared that candidates really wanted to write about female characters, rather than relationships between men and women. Some responses explored the concept of social satire very successfully and focused on men and women as representative of hypocrisy. Others considered the relationship between Lady Bracknell and Jack, and were rewarded where discussion explored how Wilde satirised this particular relationship. Less successful candidates tended to discuss the characters as real people.

Most responses were successful in considering Wilde's audience and the balance he played between mocking them and staying popular.

Here is an example of a top Level 5 response to this question. Its strength lies in its detailed consideration of Wilde's dramatic craft:

In 'The Importance of Being Earnest', Wilde satirises the traditional Victorian view of the proper relationship between men and women, either as sanctified by marriage or dominated by the masculine.

Firstly, marriage was an integral part both of the mores of society and the conventions of comedy in Wilde's day. The Victorians were severely Christian and only sanctified sex within marriage, whilst the comedies of the day such as 'the well made play' put marriage at their centre and as their quintessential happy ending. However, the opening of 'The Importance of Being Earnest' greets us with Algernon, who is portrayed with an eminently enviable lifestyle, as the stage directions specify a 'luxuriously and artistically furnished room:, who yet calls 'marriage, so demoralising as that', indicating this character who acts as the audience's first window into the plot, is against marriage. He even pontificates in an epigrammatic style that 'there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal' and even the scandalous 'If I ever get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact'. These speak to a part of most of the married, upper class audience who chafed at the social restrictions of marriage and wanted something more 'romantic' in Algernon's terms. He even remarks that on the subject of proposing: 'I call that business', emphasising the bored and mediocre element of marriage.

But this is more than a simple character portrayal: Algernon actively tries to convert the other characters, and by extension, the audience, to his anti-matrimonial standpoint. He tells Jack that he thinks he was 'a confirmed and secret Bunburyist', the adjectives 'confirmed and secret' adding to the air of excitement as well as the as of yet unknown nature of bunburying, infusing this ritualized 'sexual immorality' as the Victorians would have seen it, with a sense of the mysterious and the uncertain – the exact things Algernon

claimed is the 'essence of romance'. This need for bunburying, aphorised in the phrase 'in married life three is company and two is none', is even solidified by the adulterous connotations of Gwendolyn's 'she would never be allowed to know the enduring pleasure of a single month's solitude'; the evasive and long-winded language indicating the socially taboo nature of what she is implying. Wilde, himself a man whose sexuality did not lie in his marriage, found married life chafing and restrictive, and Algernon's pronouncements of this relation between men and women could almost have come from his own lips.

However, in the second act, and indeed foreshadowed in the first with Jack's off hand remark that Cecily is 'excessively pretty', Wilde employs a trope of Victorian comedy: the cad falls in love and is reformed. Algernon even says this explicitly: 'I want you to reform me'; the ambiguity here whether this is Algernon's genuine wish or a ploy to get closer to Cecily, somewhat undermines the sanctity of marriage and the relationship of the woman as the improving presence on the man. But Algernon's change of heart seems genuine, even stating in private to Jack 'I simply want to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her', the hyperbole of 'adore' emphasised by the metaphor later of his eating muffins as sexual desire – both imply a real and genuine change of heart in the man, reinforcing marriage as an important relation between men and women if not the supreme relationship. Wilde here is setting up the play to follow a 'reformed' arc, reminiscent of the 'well made play' that was so popular in his day: the bad become good through the institution of marriage.

And yet in the third act, whilst Wilde does deliver on his dramatic promise, he exacerbates the melodrama to ridiculous levels in order to satirise comedy's reliance on marriage. All the characters bar Lady Bracknell, cry out their beloved's , the last three followed by 'at last', a particularly jarring phrase as Algernon hasn't known Cecily for more than a day, drawing attention to the artificial wholesomeness of the resolution. This is exacerbated by Chausable and Miss Prism's embracing, which whilst foreshadowed earlier with Miss Prism's recommendation of marriage, is in no way caused by anything. Lady Bracknell even vindicates Algernon's indictment of marriage by turning it into a business transaction, noting 'distinct social possibilities' in Cecily's profile, as if she were a horse to be bought, not a person.

In the end Wilde uses marriage as deus ex machina and draws attention to its contrived nature, showing his audience that marriage is artificial and imposed. In the 2015 Vaudeville production the embracing in the final scene was staged identically in an almost choreographed manner, again to emphasis the artificiality of marriage in Wilde's eyes.

But if Algernon is used to break down the Victorian convention of marriage, Jack and his interactions with women serve to undermine another Victorian convention on the relationship between men and women: the superiority of men. It was generally considered that men were dominant and women subservient in Victorian times, and indeed most of history, yet Jack is often at a lower status than women and Wilde uses rhetorical style to show the dominance of women in relationships. In Jack's conversation with Lady Bracknell, it is she who asks all the questions, with his reply always on the back foot. Her speeches are often much longer and fully punctuated, giving Lady Bracknell, both in terms of plot and rhetoric, control over any scene she is in, which gives her focus and power theatrically usually reserved for men. Indeed many productions such as the 2015 Vaudeville play cast Lady Bracknell as a man (in the 2015 case, David Suchet) to emphasise the usurpation of what the Victorians would ordinarily deem the masculine by the feminine. This powerful matriarch figure embodied in Lady Bracknell, could be a reference to Queen Victoria and her societal dominance. The Lord Bracknell, by contrast, is never seen, showing his lower status in terms of the play, and Gwendolyn discusses the man's femininity openly, calling him 'painfully effeminate', 'very attractive' and the pontificating statement, 'The home seems to be the proper sphere of the man'. This ties into the Victorian phenomenon of Dandyism where effeminate and intellectual men, such as Wilde himself (and Algernon, it is argued)

were more attractive to women than the masculine, traditional men, playing on this anxiety to deliver a critique of the perceived social superiority of men.

However, it is not just Lady Bracknell who is presented as the superior to men. Gwendolyn too dictates exactly what Jack should say: 'Mr Worthing, what have you got to say to me' in a very patronising manner, ironically just as a mother would to a child. Her conversation with Jack is just as dominated by her long run on sentences as her mother: the speeches and pontifications showing the dominance of women in 'The Importance of Being Earnest' to be the rule rather than the exception. Wilde, as an Irishman, is often said to have had a critical eye for noting incongruities that the English upper class were too immersed in their own culture to see and this presentation of women being more dominant in relationships than men seems to be a pointed jab at the real social hierarchy in Victorian England that perhaps men wanted to ignore: the implicit yet vital power of women.

In conclusion, Wilde uses melodrama to ridicule the traditional relationship between men and women – marriage – and uses pacing and rhetorical style to show inherent absurdity in the Victorian conception that men dominated women.

Question 26

The Importance of Being Earnest

The question asked about setting.

There were some very successful responses to this question. One examiner remarked:

'This was the most enjoyable question to mark out of the whole paper. There was an extremely high level of skill and knowledge in most responses. It is a truly wonderful experience when candidates make you, as an examiner, see the play in a new light. There was evidence of excellent teaching and the candidates' own enthusiasm was evident.'

A few candidates, however, seemed able only to make general comments on town and country with little further detail. However, the more successful responses looked at how Wilde used his settings to explore notions of class and how setting was used to represent duplicity, linking this to the idea of Bunburying. Some candidates also looked at the use of food, furniture and flowers as examples of setting. Very few candidates dealt with time setting. All candidates were able to make comments on various aspects of Victorian society and to link these to the question.

Here is the opening section of a really well-integrated response, exploring the text in detail and fully focused on the question:

In 'The Importance of Being Earnest' Oscar Wilde uses setting to reflect the aesthetic ideal of 'art for art's sake' as he expresses in his dialogue-based essay, 'The Decay of Lying'. Wilde, having come into contact with the works of Ruskin during his time a Magdalen College (Oxford) was an advocate of the aesthetic movement and utilizes it with his settings to subvert societal convention. however, it might be argued that the very nature of the aesthetic movement precluded Oscar Wilde from using his plays subversively since he wrote that 'Art never expresses anything but itself.'

Wilde demonstrates artificiality in his settings in a manner which reflects the aesthetic movement and dandyism. The opening stage directions place Algernon's address at 'Half Moon Street' which Wilde's society audience would have recognized as a strictly aristocratic and extremely fashionable address, thus developing a sense of aestheticism as well as Algernon's dandyism. This is highlighted further by the fact that the room is 'luxuriously and artistically furnished' the confines of which Wilde assumes a reader may understand, but more importantly Wilde later contrasts this setting with the fact that Algernon is 'more than usually hard up'. With the juxtaposition between the setting and the money available to Algernon, Wilde further develops a sense of aestheticism and dandyism: it is clear that Algernon has spent all available money on living in the most artificially beautiful way possible, this showing him to be a dandy. It is unsurprising that Wilde explores 'dandyism' in his plays considering that he made his name promoting the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta 'Patience' which dealt primarily with dandies and might be said to be referenced by Wilde in the directions that Jack and Algernon should whistle 'some dreadful popular air from a British opera'. Thus, Algernon's flat embodies the artificiality of aestheticism.

Much the same can be said of Jack's country house. The stage directions here too are specific: the month is July, however the 'old fashioned' garden is full of roses. This demonstrates artificiality since traditional English annually-flowering roses such as an 'old fashioned' garden would contain, flower between late May and early June. In this way the setting can also be said to demonstrate Wilde's assertion in 'The Decay of Lying' where, in a manner typical of Wilde, he inverts a common aphorism, saying "Life imitates Art.' The fact

that nature in this play is in its very essence unnatural clearly demonstrates this idea. Moreover, Jack and Cecily are clearly from the industrial upper class that emerged in the latter years of the industrial revolution since Jack holds the majority of his wealth 'in investments' and since 'Mr Thomas Cardew' is a gentleman lacking a title. Nonetheless the garden of Jack's country home contains 'a large yew tree'. Here Wilde implies that the house is long-standing since yews take a considerably long time to grow and are associated with aristocratic stately houses and so it is unlikely that one would grow in the garden of a family whose wealth comes from new money. Therefore, artificiality is shown to be central to the setting of the country house, just as it is to Algernon's apartment, demonstrating aesthetic ideals in both settings ...

Question 27

The Pitmen Painters

The question asked about the play as a political text.

There were very few responses to this question and, unfortunately, candidates tended to be very generalised in their answers, often making sweeping statements about Hall's own political position or very broad comments about context, forgetting to evaluate the text as a piece of drama.

Here's an extract from a Level 2 response. The expression of ideas lacks clarity and understanding of context is general at best:

Lee Hall focuses on the mining industry in 1934, his play seemingly telling us a story when in reality it's a warning to the watcher. This is explored through the rich/poor divide, as well as the subsequent death of the mining industry.

Hall uses agitprop drama to get his point across, he first begins with the political diversion of the rich and poor. We are quickly introduced to the character of Lyon in 'Pitmen' who is first alienated to the nature of the pitmatic dialect, which is hyperbolized by how Oliver uses repetition of the same sentence, 'ye de de art, divvint ye?' However the third time diverging pitmatic language with Lyon's, by asking, 'Ye de de art. De ye not?' which is seen through the change of 'divvint' with 'De ye not?' although meaning the same thing. 'divvint' was commonly used in Ashington. In addition how Lyon is always standing while all the pitmen are sitting suggest a hierarchy through each of their status and although George attempts to challenge this he always ends up sitting with the rest of them. This divide is further explored through Oliver, who does not understand what a 'stipend' is and again this is hyperbolized through repeat questioning until he understands it is payment. Yet Oliver denied this offer, as under the WEA rules once you leave the mines you can't come back as you'd be turning your back to what you're born into. 'you can't change people by throwing money at them' Which when looked at the modern day has almost been forgotten, with recent affairs being found out that university credit can't help everyone and how people with more money can get into university, the pitmen painters only scrapes the surface of a greater issue.

Question 28

The Pitmen Painters

The question asked about the play's ending.

This question was handled successfully by those few candidates who responded to it. Candidates looked at the play's ending in the context of the whole text and only a few strayed off topic. The very best responses focused on Hall's dramatic craft, exploring his manipulation of set, projections, language and so on to create powerful emotional effects on his audience at the end of the play.

Here's an example of a low Level 4 response that presents a straightforward, but well-developed argument with detailed links between text and context. There is some loss of focus towards the end, however:

The ending of the play 'The Pitmen Painters' is of key importance in relation to both its impact on the audience and also the messages highlighted by Lee Hall, the creator of the play. The ending is used to explore the loss of community as a result of pit closures, the development of the miners' artistic skill as a result of the access to education and finally the political message highlighted by the miners emphasizing the independence the working class painters have achieved as a result of their journey through the mid 20thCentury. Hall reflects not only his own attitudes, such as the supposed need to access the arts for all, but also the events of both 20017 and the 1930s and 1940s in which the play is set. The Brechtian influences in the comedy allow the audience to think about change within mining communities, provoking their own attitudes towards the events of the play.

Firstly, the ending of the play is used by Hall to highlight the incredible loss of community within mining areas as a result of deindustrialization. The final projection is used as a contrast to the slide at the very start of the play to emphasise this loss. The Projection which states that 'No University of Ashington was founded' and 'Woodham Colliery was closed in 1981' directly juxtaposes the initial slide that reads '1.2 million men work in the pits'. The use of Epic Theatre here by Hall through the projections allows him to powerfully encourage thought within a contemporary audience in 2007. As many audience members would have lived through the Miners' Strike of the 1980s and subsequent pit closures, particularly as the first play took place in Newcastle Upon Tyne, they would be able to realize and understand how a whole culture and community had been wiped out. The final closure of the last operating pit in 2015 would mean, to a 2019 audience, there is little left to show that mining communities had ever existed. The idea of loss is further evident through the effective contrast between the miners' dreams at the end of the play and the final projection. Their dreams of 'nationalisation' and 'socialism' with the use of political imagery, emphasise the idea that the miners were foiled by the government and have subsequently lost everything. The fact that 'In 1995, the call foe the 'common ownership and the means of production, distribution and exchange was erased form the Labour Party Constitution' is Hall directly emphasizing how the miners have largely been forgotten despite their immense struggle. Clearly the ending of the play and the final projection in particular is used by Hall to emphasise the loss that has taken place within mining communities, with the aim of provoking a response from the audience.

Furthermore, Hall uses the ending of the play as a final highlight of the miners' artistic development as a result of the access they gained to the arts. The dialect used by the miners is one of the most effective and explicit examples of their development. When George explains that 'An allegory is a figurative mode of representation' the complex language directly contrasts with the North Eastern dialect used at the start of the play when he says 'I

beg yer pardon' for example. The change in dialect can also bee seen through Oliver who shows significant development and subsequent understanding of art. He questions Lyon when he says that Lyon's art is 'full of facility but signifying nothing'. This suggests that by the end of the play Oliver has overtaken his once teacher and has developed a greater understanding of art through access to education. Similarly, his questioning of the group's 'banner' as to whether it could be seen 'as art' again subtly shows how he has realized that not everything can be taken at face value, clearly emphasizing his powerful development. Hall uses the development of artistic skill at the end of the play as a way of highlighting the need for access to the arts amongst the working class. He expresses his own view that 'it is both a joke and a tragedy as the working classes ... are excluded ... from the arts so ravenously enjoyed by their exploiters'. For a contemporary audience this may provoke thought as to whether education has become more assessable. The Workers' Educational Association for example offered 8000 educational course since its founding in 1903, clearly demonstrating how opportunities did and still do exist. Similarly, the miners' children and grand children do now have greater access to education than in the 1930s. The audience may wonder whether the arts and education as a whole are equal despite still being dominated by the upper classes ultimately. Hall uses the play's ending to efficiently highlight the benefits of education for the working class as a reflection of his own view that art should be accessible for all classes.

Finally, Hall uses the ending of the play to explore the independence gained by the miners as a result of art and how their political attitudes have developed as they begin to challenge the exploitation of the working class, first highlighted by George on the 'eve of nationalisation' when he says 'Ne WEA, ne Robert Lyon, Ne borrowing off the Scouts'. The use of the list here effectively shows how George has broken free from the groups and organisations that once had control over him. His reference to 'Lyon' is particularly powerful. Lyon did exploit them to an extent through the use of the miners in his dissertation and so the ending of the play signifies the gaining of independence and removal of exploitation. Hall uses a return to local dialect as an exposition of their new found independence. The strength of their community is considerable at the end of the play and so George's use of 'ne' demonstrates how their community had strengthened as they have gained independence.

Similarly, the political attitudes gained by the miners towards the end of the play shows how the working classes have been given a voice which will challenge the treatment of the poor in society. The banner that reads 'forward to socialism' and also Harry's reference to 'Marx' subtly suggests that should the workers get political rights, they would be able to enact serious social change. However, once again Hall uses the final slide to show how the miners' dreams would never come true. The failure of the labour party throughout the 20thCentury to provide significant social reform is reflected in this slide. Hall would have drawn upon Tony Bair's New Labour as a motive for the depiction of failures of government in helping and supporting miners. To a 2019 audience attitudes may be different. Corbyn's push towards the left wing of socialism could provide the change needed for the working classes, however in Hall's view and for the miners this has come far too late overall. Hall uses the ending of the play to explore both the gaining of independence and also the political failings of the government to help working classes, which reflects Hall's own views on the need for social reform within the working classes.

Question 29

The Rover

The question asked about changing ideas about women.

Surprisingly few centres teach this text which was a popular one for comparative coursework on the legacy specification. This is a pity for it offers rich pickings in terms of interesting discussion around both gender studies and dramaturgy.

Candidates who responded to this question did so very successfully in the main. Perhaps the only issue was that sometimes, in their rush to talk about the significance of context in the way the text is produced and received, candidates failed to explore the text itself – as a piece of drama – in enough detail.

This is an example of a high Level 4 response - great arguments and confident integration of context, but it needs more convincing evaluation of the text for Level 5:

With the rising popularity of the bawdy comedy and the legalizing of women on stage during the 1670s, evidently there came a change in the way women were represented in plays. In Aphra Behn's 'The Rover' this is reflected in the assertive female characters, the blurring of the distinction between chaste and unchaste women and the open female interest in sex on stage. However, whilst these features are all relatively progressive for the 17thcentury, the reasons as to why they were popular can result in an ambivalent stance on female progression being taken by Behn.

'The Rover' contains numerous examples of women being agents of their own design, marking a changing perspective on women. Florinda, Valeria, Hellena and Angellica all appear in scenes dictating their own lives. Even the meekest of these characters, Florinda, states:

'Yes, you may force me even to the altar,

But not the holy man that offers there

Shall force me to be thine!'

The use of 'yes' to open the line creates an assertive tone as it implies clarity of thought and the religious references show the extent of her emotion: even a priest, a holy father, cannot dissuade her.

The agency of these women is not only limited to speech either. Hellena takes the breeches' role when dressing as a boy to try and 'vex' Willmore by sabotaging Angellica and Willmore's conversation. Similarly, in Act 5, the image of Angellica with a pistol, an 'unbecoming instrument of death' is a visual representation of female empowerment. The adjective 'unbecoming' reflects the view that women cannot be aggressive or violent, which Angellica's actions directly contradict. However, this female agency is not completely progressive and only represents a small change in attitudes towards women. The Breeches role was used in Restoration comedies to maximize skin shown by actresses and often culminated in a bearing of flesh at the moment of revalation to arouse the audience, and although Angellica is assertive and takes a masculine role by searching for revenge, she is quickly forgotten by Willmore who marries Hellena.

Thus, although the play itself demonstrates the changing view on women having agency, the context diminishes the extent of the changing attitude somewhat.

Behn's play also successfully challenges the dichotomy between virgins and whores, making a criticism of sexual double standards in 1677. She does this by paralleling her prostitute characters with the women of quality, and through the language that specifically Angellica uses in speech. At the time Behn wrote, a woman expressing interest in sex was viewed as immoral and a 'whore'. The dichotomy between the two positions was so pertinent that only respectable women were allowed to perform onstage, otherwise it was seen a 'lewd'. There are several similarities between Florinda, Hellena and Angellica which appear to question the popular position of the time that 'virgins' and 'whores' are radically different. Foe example, both Florinda and Angellica use their picture to communicate with their love interests, and both Hellena and Angellica mark a source of lust and money for willmore. Additionally, Hellena, like Angellica, uses her beauty to captivate Willmore:

'(pulls off her vizard) How do you like it, Captain?'

The use of question shows a confidence in Hellena as she essentially asks Willmore for compliment and praise, marking a similar confidence that Angellica displays by using her picture to attract a suitor outside her home. However, Angellica appropriates a type of sexual language to discuss her emotions, which further challenges this dichotomy. When using phrases such as 'my virgin heart' and 'my first desires' Angellica not only demonstrates that prostitutes also have emotional capacities but would have challenged contemporary viewers by discussing herself a 'virgin'. She subverts the meaning of 'virgin' to represent the innocence and purity associated with honest love, much like her role subverts the meaning of prostitute at the time in that half her plotline is mainly concerned with love and not lust. Behn presents another change in societal attitude, showing 'virgin' and 'whore' characters to be more similar than different.

Finally, Behn also presents the new notion of sexually interested women in her play. This is most evident in the character of Hellena, whose open discussions of sex make her the libertine 'gay mistress' who featured often in Restoration comedy. This character was a woman with interest in sex, and was often a woman of quality. We see this in lines such as

'let's ramble'

which show her sexual interest, as the verb 'ramble' had sexual connotations and her assertive character, as the syntax is clear and direct. The characters were popular on the Restoration stage as they aroused the male audience, and so once again can be seen to be equally progressive and regressive. Yet, they still marked a change in attitude as it demonstrates that women could have the same sexual appetite as men. Moreover, Hellena is also clever and controlled in her persuit of sex, again showing that women can still be intelligent even if they desire sex. This was a new idea in the 17th century, which Behn herself helped to bring to life as a female playwrite writing plays about the persuit of sex, who was even accused of being a prostitute. We see that intelligence and sexual desire are not mutually exclusive for Hellena in lines such as:

'And if you do not lose what shall I get? A cradle full

of noise

and mischief, and a pack of repentence on my back?'

the use of rhetorical questions show her assertive character and her confidence, undermining the problematic impacts of the libertine rejection of marriage. Her use of

imagery also enhances the strength of her argument, as they depict an unenviable situation. This also marks her intellect as it demonstrates Hellena's mastery of language. By using Hellena, Behn is able to demonstrate the possibility of a shrewd and sexual woman, which was a new developing idea in society.

Therefore Behn's 'The Rover' shows new ideas about women being assertive and sexual and blurs the distinctions between 'chaste' and 'unchaste' women. However, some of these changing attitudes were only prevalent on stage, and not in the 17th century society, and were even used to reinforce the objectification of women.

Question 30

The Rover

There were not many responses to this question. Most wanted really to write about Carnival and made straightforward links between the play's setting and the potential for deception.

Here is an example of a Level 3 approach:

Within the play 'The Rover' Aphra Behn highlights the power of deception, especially due the time period in which the play is set. 'The Rover' is set during the harsh Cromwellian regime, however all of the action takes place in Naples where Carnival is taking place. In the 17th century, Carnival was a time of sexual liberation, where the social order and hierarchy were confused. Due to this, the play allows lots of deception to occur…

Better answers showed a much more conceptual grasp of the notion of deception:

In Aphra Behn's play, 'The Rover' the them of deception is at the centre of many of the issues and mishaps which occur in the play, as it is fuelled and encouraged under the liberating spirit of 17th Century Carnival. Though used as a tool for harmless fun and selfish gain by some, deception may also be said to be portrayed in a somewhat positive light as it enables Behn to explore the issues of gender roles within the 17th Century whilst still working within the literary conventions of Restoration Comedy …

Question 31

Waiting for Godot

The question asked about human relationships.

This text continues to grow in popularity with centres and responses to the question were clearly written by candidates who had been well prepared and had a secure understanding of the complexities of theatre of the absurd. As might be expected, some weaker responses struggled to get to grips with humour in the play.

Students looked primarily at relationships between Estragon and Vladimir, sometimes also looking at Pozzo and Lucky. Candidates generally understood the interdependence between the characters. Many candidates also understood the characters as representative of different aspects of society.

Here are three opening paragraphs from responses which were awarded high Level marks:

Throughout 'Waiting for Godot' Beckett stages the importance of human relationships, and in particular companionship, through Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon's (Gogo) interdependent relationship. Didi and Gogo rely upon one another to survive their repetitive lifestyles of constantly 'waiting' for the character of 'Godot' to arrive. Perhaps Beckett is therefore staging a wider view through the concept of Did and Gogo's close relationship, concerning the importance of companionship and unity following catastrophic events, such as war. This seems likely since 'Waiting for Godot' was first performed in 1955, ten years following World War II, and thus the loss and pain felt by the audience following the war was still prevalent. Pozzo also appears highly dependent on Lucky, although their relationship is characterized by Pozzo's power over Lucky, in contrast to Didi and Gogo's mutual dependence on one another...

'Waiting for Godot' is not traditional in its conventions; its relationships follow a similar pattern. Vladimir and Estragon, act as the broad scale of humanity throughout the performance, from their clownish and somewhat anthropomorphic demeanour, very reminiscent of the Laurel and Hardy-esque era, to their black comedy, absurdist reality. Whilst they are a primary example od human relationships, one must also consider their impact on the audience and the question of metatheatre which is often explored ...

In the barren landscape of 'waiting for Godot' human relationships are all that the characters have. While Vladmir and Estragon's relationship with each other and with secondary pair, Pozzo and Lucky, provides ways to 'pass the time' they are also suffering. especially where characters abuse their social power. Subtle changes from the first act to the second reveal how relationships deteriorate and suffer as 'victims' to 'time'. As the Irish philosopher Berkley described, 'to be is to be perceived' hence relationships are the way characters can maintain 'the impression ...[they] exist'. Lastly, Vladimir and Estragon can be viewed as a comedy double, such as Laurel (mirroring Estragon) and Hardy (Vladimir), placed into a world of tragedy and the absurd, hence Beckett's subtitle 'a tragicomedy" ...

Question 32

Waiting for Godot

The question asked about communication.

As with the previous question, most candidates showed confidence in their handling of this one, linking the text productively with what they knew of the social and philosophical context of the play's production.

More straightforward approaches tended to look at, and comment on, character dialogue. Here is an example from a borderline Level 2/3 response that relies mainly on word-level analysis and sometimes paraphrase :

Waiting for Godot is a modernist play about two men, Vladimir and Estragon, as they wait for someone called Godot. This essay will discuss the different ways communication is presented.

Firstly Lucky's speech in the first act fails to communicate clearly with both the characters and the audience – absurd language is a common convention of the theatre of the absurd. Which is a movement within the term modernism – modernism itself deals with how to confront a universe without meaning, while the theatre of the absurd presents one way of doing so by creating non-logical art. Luckys speech could be a symbol of the rise of modernism and communication itself. If we break apart the speech into three parts and select certain words, the first part deals with mans original relationship with God: 'Given the existence … of a personal God …with white beard.' The word 'Given' suggests man has not worked for this stereotypical image of God, implying the foundations are weak. The second and main part discuss the fall of the stereotypical image…

Better approaches involved looking more broadly at Beckett's craft and keeping in mind a sense of the text as a play:

In Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' the uncertainty that surrounds both the nature and purpose of Vladimir and Estragon's predicament has prompted much debate among critics and readers alike about what its 'true' meaning might be: some have argued that Beckett evokes Freudian ideas of the Id and the ego through the not dissimilar nicknames of 'Didi' and 'Gogo', while others have suggested that the play represents an allegory for political strife, perhaps of the Cold War or religious division within Ireland. Yet this essay will look at the ways Beckett intentionally encourages us to search for meanings that are not necessarily there, both through the communication of the characters on stages and the way in which Beckett communicates his ideas to the audience through theatre more broadly…

and

Samuel Beckett's 1955 play 'Waiting for Godot' was written during a time when communication (whether between humans or states) and its various roles was being questioned. As a result of the social and political climates in a post-war world, communication and its ability to convey meaning was doubted. Additionally, the rise of Kierkegaard's existentialist school of thought portrayed language as a vapid means of 'passing the time'. Beckett, as a playwright, also places specific emphasis on visual communication with vaudevillian tropes and tableaus used to convey what he believes language would be unable to…

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on the 2019 paper, candidates are offered the following advice from examiners.

AO1

- This Assessment Objective must not be forgotten. Some essays had no introductions, no real argument, weak paragraphing and some essays contained many basic technical errors.
- Some allowance is made for exam pressure, but candidates should be careful, in the first instance, of repeating themselves and, in the second, of simply labouring points. Sometimes, obviously bright candidates took a paragraph (or more) to make a point that could have been made in a sentence or two.
- Most candidates understood the need to write in a formal style. There were still some candidates who seemed to know the writers very well and addressed them by their first names, but on the whole, it was reassuring to see that candidates of all levels were writing in a formal style and realising the need for introductions, arguments and conclusions.
- The best essays are the ones where a strong argument was stated in the introduction.
- Some longer answers were quite rambling – which only goes to show the value of making a plan for the response and sticking to it.
- Make sure that enough time is left to tackle Section B properly. This year it was evident that candidates had spent too long on Section A and their performance in Section B suffered as a result.

AO2

- A key discriminator tends to be the awareness of and ability to illustrate the writer's craft. Weaker scripts say what happens; stronger ones show how it's done; even stronger ones show how it's done and assess how well it's done.
- The weakest responses spent too much time drilling down and analysing individual words in order to support ideas.
- There were some examples of complex literary terminology being applied, but with no meaningful engagement with the actual purpose of it – avoid this.
- With *Streetcar*, too many candidates were confused about stage directions and were analysing the plosive sounds made by the word 'slap' rather than the action itself or the 'dynamic verbs' to describe Stanley's movement - rather than how that would look on stage. Don't lose sight of the text as a piece of drama, written to be performed.

AO3

- Avoid including too much contextual material which will affect the balance of your essay. The key word is 'relevancy' rather than quantity.
- Avoid making sweeping statements about different audiences - feminist, modern and contemporary - based largely on assumption.

- The best responses make apt reference to social/historical context and integrate this well, as part of a coherent personal response.

AO5

- Take care not to allow critical material to swamp discussion of the text itself.
- Avoid merely stating 'I agree/disagree' with x critic rather than responding to alternative readings in an evaluative way.
- Bear in mind that critical reference, just for the sake of it, is unlikely to be rewarded.

Overall message – keep the text itself at front and centre of your responses.

Grade Boundaries

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