



Trial Examination 2022

Sample Essays

QCE English Units 3&4

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ABOUT THE SAMPLE ESSAYS

The sample essays in this booklet are not intended to be prescriptive. Each essay represents one possible way to construct an informed and critical perspective in response to the question. It is recommended that these essays are dissected as learning tools rather than taken as exact models of what should be replicated in exam conditions.

For your reference, these essays include page numbers or act/scene numbers for direct textual quotations, though students are not expected to include these in their external assessment essays. The quotations are taken from the following editions.

- Kent, Hannah (2013) *Burial Rites*, Picador, Sydney.
- Atwood, Margaret (1988) *Cat's Eye*, Anchor Books, New York.
- Shakespeare, William (2012) *Hamlet*, Collins Classics, London.
- Brontë, Charlotte (2010) *Jane Eyre*, Collins Classics, London.
- Shakespeare, William (2014) *Macbeth*, Norton Critical Editions Classics, London.
- Orwell, George (2008) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Penguin, London.
- McGahan, Andrew (2005) *The White Earth*, Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest.
- Fowler, Karen Joy (2014) *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Serpent's Tail, London.

The assessment instrument is used to determine student achievement in the following objectives.

1. use patterns and conventions of an analytical essay to respond to an unseen question/task
2. establish and maintain the role of essay writer and relationships with readers
3. analyse perspectives and representations of concepts, identities, times and places in a literary text
4. analyse the ways cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs underpin a literary text and invite audiences to take up positions
5. analyse the effects of aesthetic features and stylistic devices in a literary text
6. select and synthesise subject matter to support perspectives in an essay response to an unseen question/task
7. organise and sequence subject matter to achieve particular purposes
8. use cohesive devices to emphasise ideas and connect parts of an essay
9. make language choices for particular purposes in an essay
10. use grammar and language structures for particular purposes in an essay
11. use written features to achieve particular purposes in an essay

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SAMPLE ESSAYS

Burial Rites by Hannah Kent

a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of love in *Burial Rites*?

In Hannah Kent's 2013 novel *Burial Rites*, the reader is invited to view the many different kinds and consequences of love for the characters in times of crisis. Throughout the text, Kent explores the boundaries of platonic and romantic relationships and how feelings of devotion or fealty can motivate people to do extraordinary things. However, Kent also explores the dangers of love as an exclusionary and coveted emotion that can incite jealousy in others, ultimately causing tragic consequences for all. Hence, *Burial Rites* is, in some sense, a cautionary tale about the extremes people can go to for the sake of love.

Early in the novel, Kent establishes the societal norms of familial love and devotion in 1800s Iceland. This is exemplified in the Jónsson family unit – a tight-knit and loyal nuclear family. The parents, Jón and Margrét, are devoted parents whose relationship with their children is characterised by endearing epithets like 'little Lauga' and 'warm look[s]' (p. 23) that underscore their affection. However, they are also highly practical and conscious of the burdens placed on them given their low socio-economic status. For instance, Margrét smiles and quips that she is 'often distressed [...] from having children and servants to look after' (p. 24). This casual attitude towards life's challenges is implied to be a natural result of their loving family bonds. Moreover, even when faced with the supposed threat of Agnes the 'murderess' (p. 27) living under their roof, Steina insists she doesn't 'want to leave' (p. 27), suggesting she feels safer with her family unit in the face of any danger. Through this, Kent emphasises the value of a loving home in facilitating trust between people, and by extension, the novel also highlights how this was lacking in Agnes' upbringing. The brief glimpses of her childhood memories are the antithesis of Margrét's maternal selflessness and Jón's protective instincts. Agnes is abandoned by her mother Ingveldur and, although she seeks solace in recalling 'golden moment[s]' (p. 59) of peacefulness sleeping with her mother and siblings, she notes that 'the memories [...] are cold' (p. 59) and hollow, given that she is now deprived of this kind of love. Her experience with her foster family exacerbates this sense of loss, particularly after she develops an attachment to Inga as a surrogate mother who later tragically dies when giving birth to a stillborn baby. Agnes is horrified by the visceral imagery of 'the baby's little blue face, with the dried blood still clinging to its cheek' (p. 148) and the sight of Inga's body, her white face stained with seemingly black blood symbolising the harrowing emptiness of death. However, she is more traumatised by the loss of this emotional bond, and her foster father's cruel remark that 'maybe you will die too' (p. 148) encapsulates the brutal callousness of a life without familial love. Thus, Kent examines the powerful consequences of the presence or absence of a loving family.

Consequently, Kent's depictions of romantic love build upon these foundations, and the novel explores how this can be a dangerous force leaving one vulnerable to exploitation. For instance, both Agnes and Sigga are depicted as lonely, single women during their time at Illugastadir, and although there are significant differences in their maturity levels, they are both emotionally abused by Natan and his womanising tendencies. His controversial reputation is implied to be common knowledge in Iceland, as evidenced by Margrét's remark to Róslín about how he 'spent more of his time in the beds of married women than in his Illugastadir workshop' (p. 66). Although this is presented as rural gossip, it nevertheless draws the reader's attention to the fact that Agnes and Sigga lack the kinds of close female friendships or sense of communal belonging that would have enabled them to be more cautious of Natan. Furthermore, whilst Agnes has contempt for Sigga's naivete, she herself falls prey to Natan's manipulation. He stokes her love for him with lines like 'you pretend you don't understand me, but you do. We're the same kind' (p. 219) and his repeated insistence that Agnes is 'different' (p. 219) and unique. Kent cleverly intersperses these romantic conversations with mention of Natan's misogyny, or his penchant for leaving 'bruises' on Agnes that she misses 'when they faded' (p. 221) – a clear indictment of their abusive relationship. However, the future tense in the promise of 'he would haul me out of the valley, out of the husk of my miserable, loveless life [...] he would give me springtime' (p. 222) is a testament to Agnes' desperation to cling to any form of affection no matter how toxic or unstable. Hence, the novel showcases the dangerous side of love in rendering characters vulnerable and at the mercy of more powerful individuals.

Ultimately, love is, above all else, a potent motivating force that propels the characters, most notably Agnes. The novel is peppered with the snide and prejudicial remarks of other characters who dismiss Agnes as a vile murderess, 'loose with her emotions, and looser with her morals' (p. 170), but Kent gradually reveals that the murder for which Agnes is convicted is a mercy killing after Fridrik mortally wounds Natan and leaves him to 'slowly die' (p. 302). Agnes even recounts the act of piercing the knife into him with the simile of 'like an ill-practised kiss' (p. 302), with connotations of love and innocence in spite of the gruesome imagery of 'his blood cover[ing]' (p. 302) Agnes' hand. Although Fridrik is ultimately responsible for the deaths of Natan and Petur, it is Agnes who carries the emotional burden of having ended her lover's life, and it is implied that this level of devotion is incomprehensible to authorities like Blöndal or commoners like Róslín who judge her solely for her actions and not her true intent. In fact, the only reprieve she has from her grief and self-described 'loveless life' (p. 222) is when she is shown a pure, selfless and compassionate love from Tóti. Where her bond with Natan is predicated upon a power imbalance and her 'hungering' (p. 194) infatuation, her connection with Tóti has a far more honest and compassionate basis, even though their time together is short-lived. His unconditional love and respect for Agnes bridges the divide between Agnes and the rest of society, allowing her to share her story with him and feel heard, even though Tóti cannot countermand her death sentence. Thus, Agnes' relationship with Tóti challenges the notion that being open to love is inherently dangerous, although, ultimately, Tóti is too late to save Agnes from her fate.

In essence, *Burial Rites* showcases the multifaceted nature of love as a force that can unite and divide people; either offering solace and connection or leaving one vulnerable to loss and suffering. Though love is a powerful motivating factor in the text, ultimately, Kent cautions against pursuing this at all costs as the narrative reveals how love cannot safeguard people from tragedy.

***Burial Rites* by Hannah Kent**

- b) Analyse the impact of Agnes' isolation in shaping her character.

Set amidst the vast solitude of rural Iceland in the 1800s, Hannah Kent's novel *Burial Rites* is an examination of how both physical and emotional isolation can have profound consequences. In fact, the cold and dangerous environment of Illugastadir is matched only by the coldness and danger that the protagonist Agnes experiences at the hands of the Icelandic authorities. Although she is physically isolated and imprisoned while awaiting sentencing for her crimes, it is the emotional isolation she endures that has the most profound effect on her wellbeing. Accordingly, the characters who attempt to overcome this and connect with Agnes are depicted as highly sympathetic and admirable to the reader, but ultimately, Kent suggests that such deep feelings of loneliness can dominate one's psyche.

The desolate setting of the novel is shown to exacerbate Agnes' sense of exposure, defencelessness and loneliness. Kent frequently employs the motif of inclement weather, such as 'dark clouds', 'grey swarm[s] of snow' and 'icy gust[s]' (p. 144) of wind that seem inescapable. During her time at Kornsa with her foster family, Agnes even personifies the wind as 'some form of ghoul demanding to enter' (p. 144) as she seeks refuge from the blizzard. Despite the brief solace she takes in the comfort of their badstofa, Agnes is eventually abandoned by her foster father after his wife dies in childbirth. In this sense, Agnes is only ever temporarily protected from the harshness of the world that is epitomised by the brutal Icelandic wind. Subsequently, when she arrives at Illugastadir, she describes it as a place where 'only the outlying tongues of rock scarred the perfect kiss of sea and sky – there was no one and nothing else' (p. 248). Here, Kent's visual imagery conveys both the harshness of the 'scarred' landscape and Agnes' sense of isolation and alienation within it. As a result, Agnes' sense of self almost diffuses, like a 'grey wreath of smoke' that will 'vanish into the air' (p. 1) when her life is finally extinguished, likening herself to something fleeting and fragile. However, Agnes maintains that 'it wasn't always so cold' (p. 1), implying that she has not always felt such profound isolation and futility. Thus, Kent's decision to give voice to Agnes' story enables us to connect with her despite her isolation. Although Agnes' life was suffused with loneliness, the novel encourages us to empathise with her experiences so that Agnes is remembered in death.

Furthermore, Kent portrays the harrowing effects of emotional coldness as prejudicial values breed social isolation that constantly precludes Agnes from forming bonds to overcome her isolation. Tragically, this is even shown to be self-perpetuating, as her traumatic childhood and experiences with abandonment render her 'determined to close [her]self to the world' (p. 29). Kent suggests that Agnes is perhaps justified in mistrusting others, and many characters dismiss her a 'murderess' (p. 27) at worst or merely as a 'landless workmaid raised on a porridge of moss and poverty' (p. 52) at best. Most prominently, Agnes is repeatedly dehumanised and degraded in Blöndal's correspondence with others – even though Agnes is not privy to these letters or conversations, Kent's inclusion of them deepens our understanding of how Agnes has been treated as an outsider throughout her life. On a micro level, the reader also observes these prejudicial attitudes in minor characters like Róslín, who expresses her horror that Margrét must 'keep a murderess under your family's roof' (p. 66), or even Poet-Rósa, who decries Agnes in verse for having 'thrown [her] life to the Devil to deal' (p. 113). Through this, Kent juxtaposes the public perception of Agnes with her true character and further underscores how these prejudicial attitudes compound her isolation and suffering. Consequently, Agnes internalises these attitudes, as evidenced by her unwillingness to trust or open up to others. This existence becomes so hollow that, at times, she wonders whether she is 'not already dead' (p. 8). Thus, the novel emphasises the extremely detrimental effects of social isolation for Agnes' development.

However, there are some characters in the text who endeavour to alleviate Agnes' suffering by forging new bonds with her, no matter how short-lived they may be. Her time at Kornsa with the Jónsson family is shrouded by the knowledge of her imminent death by execution, leaving her to confront the dark isolation of mortality. Yet characters like Steina, Margrét and Tóti bring a metaphorical lightness to Agnes' final days by treating her with compassion and dignity. Both Steina and her mother consistently endeavour to make Agnes feel like a member of their family, conversing with her and taking an interest in her life from the mundane inquiries like 'how did you sleep' (p. 123) to profound discussions about her innocence.

Margrét also serves as a mirror of Agnes' own pragmatism and acceptance of her situation; Margrét's poor, damp living conditions afflict her with a chronic sickness that ultimately unites the women in having to understand their likely premature and unfair deaths. Even Lauga, who had regarded Agnes with suspicion and derision from the start, eventually overcomes her prejudices and is distressed by Agnes' fate, offering the woman her brooch as a symbol of her respect and friendship. These gestures, coupled with the patience and kindness shown by Tóti in his spiritual counselling sessions, break through Agnes' self-imposed detachment and culminate in her decision that she does not want to die, instead declaring 'I want to be here!' (p. 324) Unfortunately, the reader is aware that her hopefulness occurs too late, and her execution is made all the more tragic by the knowledge that Agnes' future may have been brighter than her past. Ultimately though, the novel ends with the bittersweet revelation that overcoming isolation is a tumultuous journey, and although this does not save Agnes from her unjust fate, the fact that this is possible even for Agnes offers a glimmer of hope to the reader.

Thus, Kent depicts Agnes' harrowing experiences of loneliness and isolation as having stifling effects on her self-image and worldview, though she also celebrates the potential of empathetic characters who help to reassemble Agnes' trust through their compassion and understanding. Therefore, although isolation has a profoundly negative impact on Agnes' life, it also serves to highlight the invaluable nature of human connection for both Agnes and the reader.

***Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood**

a) What perspective on childhood is communicated in *Cat's Eye*?

Margaret Atwood's bildungsroman *Cat's Eye* is a profound exploration of childhood and the reverberations that childhood memories can have throughout our adolescent and adult lives. Over the course of her reminiscing throughout the novel, protagonist Elaine Risley traces many of her adult beliefs and behaviours to her childhood experiences, particularly in terms of her complicated and often unhealthy relationships. To some extent, Atwood portrays these memories to be inescapable and inextricable from one's identity. However, the novel also suggests that it is our recollection of childhood and the way we conceptualise the narrative of our lives that gives us meaning and purpose.

Many of Elaine's childhood memories are presented with an air of innocence and naivete, though the retrospective narration of Elaine in adulthood provides a constant reminder that such innocence is temporary. For instance, some of the first memories she imparts from her friendship with Cordelia are about childish games like imagining how they will exercise complete freedom in adulthood to 'have a pet iguana [...] and wear nothing but cerise' (p. 5). Elaine follows this with the admission that 'cerise' was 'a word [she had] recently learned' (p. 5), thereby drawing the reader's attention to her childlike curiosity and wonder. However, she also undermines her idyllic recollection of the two girls, united by the anaphora in 'we're impervious, we scintillate, we are thirteen' and the imagery of 'we wear long wool coats with tie belts [and] the collars turned up' (p. 4) by confessing that this vision of Cordelia is 'one I have conjured up' (p. 6). Here, Atwood introduces the notion of unreliable memories and aligns the reader with Elaine as she grapples with which memories or interpretations are the most real or meaningful. Furthermore, Atwood explores how Elaine eventually sheds some of her naivete when she finally finds the strength to 'turn and walk away' (p. 213) from Cordelia's bullying, recognising that her imperatives like 'don't contradict me' and 'you get back here right now' are merely 'an imitation [...] an impression of someone much older' (p. 213). Hence, Elaine's adolescence is marked by her important revelations about what maturity looks like, and it is only as an older, wiser adult that she can look back on these childhood memories with a more informed worldview.

Atwood also showcases how childhood relationships can set an indelible template for one's adulthood. Most prominently, Cordelia's capacity to make Elaine 'believe [she] was nothing' (p. 219) has severe implications for Elaine's sense of self-worth throughout her life, manifesting in a complicated fear and fixation on the memory of her childhood friend. Even her decision to give 'sensible names' (p. 15) to her own daughters, Sarah and Anne, is done out of fear for 'what happened to Cordelia' (p. 15), suggesting that Elaine's insecurities and lingering trauma have warped over the years into something irrational but still inescapable. Similarly long-lasting impacts can be seen in Elaine's recollection of her family unit and her sense of detachment that has its roots in her childhood experiences. In her mother, she observes a discontent with domesticity and conventional womanhood, which could be seen as a source of Elaine's later commitment to pursuing a career in art, epitomised by her painting entitled *Pressure Cooker* that examines the nuances of her mother's ambition. However, her relationship with her mother is also tinged with sadness as Elaine considers that she 'must have realized what was happening to me' (p. 166), particularly when her childhood bullying resulted in palpable forms of self-harm like 'the dark scabs on [Elaine's] lips where [she]d pulled off patches of the skin' (p. 166). In this sense, Atwood examines how major relationships in childhood can have a significant impact on one's sense of self as well as one's expectations of others.

The unique narrative structure that weaves together the entirety of Elaine's childhood and adolescence with a few brief days in the present allows Atwood to explore the abstract ideas of time and mortality. From this perspective, the reader could interpret the novel's opening about being able to look down through time 'like water' (p. 3) as a warning about the possibility of becoming too submerged in one's memories. Elaine is also cognisant of how always looking backwards can exacerbate feelings of regret at not having 'accumulated [enough] things by now: possessions, responsibilities, achievements, experience and wisdom' (p. 13) leading her to feel as though she is 'dragged downward' (p. 14) by her childhood into 'liquified mud' (p. 14), implying such memories have congealed into an indistinguishable bog. Furthermore, since

Atwood presents the narrative through Elaine's first-person perspective, she reveals how Elaine's habitual rumination of her past has now solidified her childhood as an inextricable part of her identity, however harmful this may be in the present. Although the narrative resists linearity, it is only when Elaine can confront her childhood as a closed chapter of her life that she is able to confront the present, acknowledging that 'finally, Cordelia is no longer there' (p. 460). By the novel's end, Elaine's voice takes on a calmer, more resigned tone as she comes to accept her mortality, even gazing upon a pair of elderly women on a plane who seem 'amazingly carefree' now that 'responsibilities have fallen away from them, obligations, old hates and grievances; now for a short while they can play again like children' (p. 462). Here, Atwood draws the reader's attention to Elaine's lighthearted observations as evidence of her inner peace and acceptance – she does not begrudge these strangers their close friendship, but merely recognises that what she misses most from her childhood is 'not something that's gone, but something that will never happen' (p. 462).

Through this, the novel explores the complications of childhood in setting the foundation for one's life. Thus, Atwood suggests that unflinchingly examining one's childhood can help make sense of one's past and present, though she also cautions against becoming entangled in reliving or relitigating memories at the expense of one's future.

***Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood**

- b) Analyse the influence of Elaine's romantic relationships on the development of her character.

In Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Elaine experiences a range of radically different romantic relationships that change the course of her life. Her relationships with Josef Hrbik, Jon and Ben each shape her self-image and fulfil different needs throughout her life. Although there are common threads throughout these relationships, such as Elaine's desire to care for her partners despite often feeling emotionally detached from them, there are also noteworthy differences in how she regards each of these men, especially in her retrospective narration as she contemplates their impact on her development in adulthood.

A particular commonality in Elaine's romantic relationships is her tendency to pursue an idealised version of her potential partners only to inevitably discover their fallibility later. For instance, her tryst with Josef begins when the adolescent Elaine realises she 'feel[s] sorry for him' (p. 306) having fled Hungary and survived the upheavals of war. This crystallises into her belief that 'Mr Hrbik needs protecting, or even rescuing' (p. 312) despite barely being an adult herself. Atwood's use of hindsight narration also gives the reader a greater understanding of how Elaine will later come to regard her own naivete, as she informs us that there are many truths about people and relationships that she hadn't 'yet learned' (p. 312). Although Josef becomes infatuated with Elaine, tenderly declaring 'you are my country now' (p. 325), Elaine confesses that she is soon 'miserable' (p. 325) in this relationship. His abandonment of Susie after getting her pregnant is Elaine's breaking point – when she discovers Susie in a critical condition after attempting an abortion, Elaine too feels 'that [she has] been abandoned' (p. 348) as she comes to view Josef's weakness as something pitiful rather than romantic. This gradual disillusion can be seen in her relationship with Jon, exemplified in her pithy acknowledgement that 'Jon had potential' but 'potential has a shelf life' (p. 289). Early in her relationship with him, the young Elaine is smitten by Jon's 'mattress on the floor' and 'tide line of empty cups and glasses and plates with scraps of food' (p. 196) – symbols of his immaturity and inability to care for himself. However, she is also confronted by an aggrieved ex-girlfriend who accosts Jon and Elaine in his home, throwing a paper bag of spaghetti sauce at them both. This evidence of infidelity is laughed off by Jon, and only in hindsight does the adult Elaine recognise that this other woman 'must have had a key' (p. 197), indicating that Jon had at one point welcomed her into his life and then betrayed her trust. Thus, through these depictions of eventual disaffection as Elaine learns to recognise flaws in her partners, Atwood underscores the dangers of romanticising others and being blind to their complexity.

Elaine's relationships are also pervaded by a sense of dissatisfaction, often leading to unfaithfulness as she or her partners seek emotional fulfilment elsewhere. Her partnership with Jon begins to deteriorate into arguments and absences, culminating in his hypocritical disdain for her affair with Josef. When Elaine confronts Jon about his own disloyalty, he retorts 'at least I was open about it [...] I didn't pretend to be so goddamn pure and faithful, the way you did' (p. 406). In characterising Jon and Elaine's vastly different perspectives of their relationship, Atwood portrays the irreconcilable divide between them. Elaine rationalises this as them both having been 'survivors of each other' (p. 18), employing the analogy of having been both sharks and lifeboats, connoting both danger and rescue. This symbolises the duality present in many of her relationships, which also manifests in her behavioural changes. For instance, she attributes her healthy habits in middle age to Ben's presence in the conditional statement 'when I'm with Ben I eat at regular times because he does' (p. 195). However, when alone, Elaine 'indulge[s] in junk food and scavenging, [her] old singular ways' (p. 195) because she feels the need to maintain a sense of 'what bad for me is like' (p. 195). This malleability is precisely what allows Josef to 'rearrange' (p. 331) her by altering her physical appearance to cater to his desires. Even her brief affairs with nameless men in late adulthood are recounted with succinct dismissal as 'rushed and unsatisfactory' (p. 416) as Elaine is unable to forge healthy, genuine connections. Since she fears that these men may reject her, she doesn't 'give them the chance' (p. 416), maintaining a pledge to 'keep away from the edges of things. From anything too bright, too sharp' (p. 416). However, Atwood implies that this guarded self-protectiveness from dangers is precisely what prevents Elaine from discovering the brightness of true happiness with a romantic partner.

Each of Elaine's relationships reveal her priorities at different stages in life. With Josef, it is undoubtedly 'his need, which seems to [Elaine] at times helpless and beyond his control' (p. 322) that she finds intoxicating. However, with time and maturity comes a greater degree of wisdom, as Elaine explains 'I know more things about Josef now than I did then [...] because I'm older [...] the corners of emptiness in him that needed to be filled. I know the dangers' (p. 341). After she becomes a mother to two girls, she is also horrified in hindsight to think of what Josef was doing with two students 'fifteen years younger than himself' (p. 341) and under his duty of care. Here, Atwood aligns her protagonist with her contemporary readership who would also likely be more attuned to the abuse of power inherent in Elaine's first serious relationship. Meanwhile, Jon offers 'escape, running away from the grown-ups. He offers fun, and mess. He offers mischief' (p. 345). Atwood's anaphora and terse sentence structures emphasise the simplicity of Jon, as well as the more enlightened perspective of Elaine who can look back on this desire for escapism and accept that she no longer finds this enticing or sufficient. Finally, with Ben, Elaine seeks and finds stability and predictability. She describes him as someone 'so uncomplicated, and easily pleased' (p. 218), and though she gently mocks some of his more old-fashioned or even 'dull' (p. 416) characteristics, her tone when describing him is consistently fond and appreciative. He also has a stabilising effect on Elaine's character; after they move in together, she hears her voice on their shared answering machine and notes how 'cheerful and in control [...] placid and helpful' (pp. 45–46) it sounds. Thus, Atwood invites us to celebrate Elaine's success in establishing a comfortable sense of shared domesticity in which her doting husband cares for her 'like a potted plant' (p. 417) – a living and evolving thing, as opposed to someone rearrangeable or disposable like Josef and Jon had previously.

Ultimately, Elaine's romantic relationships underscore her values during each chapter of her life, but her ability to reevaluate and recontextualise how these relationships affected her also evokes the reader's admiration for the wisdom she has developed. Hence, Atwood reveals how relationships can greatly impact our self-image and view of others, though she suggests that what matters most is our ability to learn the right lessons from these interpersonal experiences.

***Hamlet* by William Shakespeare**

a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of stability in *Hamlet*?

The world of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is pervaded by instability, corruption and uncertainty. This is evident on a macro level as Claudius' sin of regicide subverts the divine right of kings and throws the kingdom of Denmark into moral upheaval and disorder. However, it is also evident on a micro level in characters like Hamlet and Ophelia, who have a tenuous grip on their own mental stability and are both ultimately unable to regain stability in their lives. The play depicts many volatile characters and relationships, and through this, Shakespeare reveals how the body politic is irrevocably unstable and rotten.

The concept of mental stability is largely elusive and ambiguous in *Hamlet*. For instance, Hamlet uses the perception of instability to achieve his ends, his madness being a useful tool for inciting political confusion and disorder. However, in adopting the pretence of derangement, he essentially compromises his own mental state. Audiences past and present have been divided over the question of how much of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' (1.5.172) is a façade, though the fact that he can so convincingly act mad is a testament to his unstable personality. This eventually unravels in Act 5 when he begins to speak of himself in the third person, asking 'was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet [...] Hamlet denies it. / Who does it, then? His madness' (5.2.225–229). This fractured dialogue betrays his instability, though Shakespeare leaves some ambiguity as to whether this madness truly consumes him. Less ambiguous, however, is Ophelia's descent into melancholy and insanity. As the archetype of idyllic womanhood in Elizabethan England, her death is a particularly tragic loss of innocence and rationality, furthering Shakespeare's portrayal of a kingdom in decline. Even Claudius remarks that her unstable ramblings 'give [him] superfluous death' (4.5.122), implying the loss of such a noblewoman represents not just a death of a daughter and sister, but more broadly a senseless death for the entire kingdom. To this end, Shakespeare positions the madness and death of both Hamlet and Ophelia as tragic but unavoidable consequences in an unstable kingdom.

The play is also suffused with unstable relationships and a lack of trust, perpetuating feelings of uncertainty and apprehension in the characters and an atmosphere of tension for audiences. Hamlet's complicated relationship with Gertrude is a prime example of this uncertainty as he wavers between a sense of filial devotion to his mother and his desire to 'speak daggers to her' (3.2.386) for wedding Claudius, which Hamlet perceives as a betrayal of his father. He also maintains that he wishes to 'speak daggers to her, but use none' (3.2.386), suggesting that he wants to cause her distress through his persuasive use of language rather than the physical harm he wishes upon Claudius. However, the chaos of Act 5 sees Gertrude fall victim to the unstable men around her as Hamlet's prioritising of revenge makes it impossible for any character to emerge unscathed. This also contributes to the play's unstable notions of good and evil as Hamlet's arguably well-intentioned plan to avenge his father's unjust murder results in the deaths of several innocent people. Furthermore, Hamlet's accidental killing of Polonius inspires Laertes to follow a similar quest to avenge his father's killer, prompting audiences to question whether Hamlet's plot is any more justifiable than Laertes'. From the uncertain beginnings when all audiences know is that 'something is rotten' (1.4.90) to the chaotic climax that sees almost every major character die, Shakespeare denies audiences a clear, stable sense of good and evil, forcing them instead to reckon with the play's depiction of moral ambiguity.

Ultimately, the play is dominated by a sense of instability in the realm. The ghost of King Hamlet is an embodiment of Denmark's unrest, haunting the play from the very first scene and later imploring his tormented son to 'let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for [...] damned incest' (1.5.83). The murders and suicides from Act 3 onwards are direct consequences of Claudius' regicide by poisoning – a symbol of corruption and sinister intent. His 'leprous distilment' (1.5.64) is described as having a gruesome effect on the king's body, making the act even more destabilising and unnatural. This can also be seen to affect the body politic and the common man, epitomised by Horatio whose equanimous nature is distressed by the thought of the ghost's suffering as well as by the political instability that may enable Fortinbras from Norway to invade. However, when Fortinbras does arrive at the end of the final scene

to discover the consequences of ‘carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts; [...] accidental judgements [and] casual slaughters’ (5.2.373–374), his presence is a stabilising one as he heralds the restoration of order to the kingdom in the wake of such bloody chaos. The death of King Hamlet is the catalyst for much of the play’s action, and things can only be stabilised by the chaos and death at the end of the play, setting the stage for a new Denmark.

Shakespeare’s emphasis on the irrefutable instability that pervades the kingdom and the characters highlights to audiences how the socio-political landscape of Denmark is impacted by the moral upheaval of regicide. Hence, the tragic conclusion of the play affirms the divine right of kings as Shakespeare endorses the need for stability and certainty in the body politic.

***Hamlet* by William Shakespeare**

- b) Analyse the significance of procrastination and delay in shaping Hamlet's character.

In William Shakespeare's 1603 tragedy *Hamlet*, the eponymous character is haunted by his own tendencies to procrastinate, prevaricate and postpone taking action. Much of Hamlet's psychological turmoil comes from his moral indecision and desire to delay making serious commitments to his pursuit of revenge for his father's death. However, there is also a more profound kind of procrastination evident in the play as Shakespeare explores Hamlet's suicidal ideation and contemplation of his own mortality. Ultimately, these thoughts and habits corrode Hamlet's mind and propel the play to its tragic end, and Shakespeare examines the fatal consequences of refusing to act until it is too late.

Hamlet's desire to delay underscores the moral dubiety of his quest for vengeance. He repeatedly uses the pretence of logistical difficulties to postpone reckoning with the morality of murder, even cursing himself 'that ever was I born to set it right' (1.5.189). Contextually, the crime of regicide would have been a profound sin in Elizabethan England, so on some level Hamlet's apprehension would have been very understandable to audiences. However, his procrastination continues well into Acts 3 and 4 with even the ghost questioning whether Hamlet's purpose is 'blunted' (3.4.111), connoting a lack of sharp, precise intent. Instead of pursuing a bloodthirsty vengeance or allowing a sense of biblical justice and retribution to steer his moral compass, Hamlet seems to have insufficient motivations to justify such rash action. In the words of the Player King, 'what to ourselves in passion we propose, / The passion ending, does the purpose lose. / The violence of either grief or joy / Their own enactures with themselves destroy' (3.2.190–193). These lines could almost be read as Hamlet cautioning himself against acting out of passion and losing sight of his purpose, destroying himself in the process. However, the Player King goes on to justify his Player Queen's decision to remarry after her first husband's death, thereby reminding Hamlet of Gertrude's betrayal and renewing his desire to act out of passion once more. These early acts therefore emphasise the cyclical nature of Hamlet's procrastination that stifles his development.

Hamlet is also portrayed as frequently ruminating about the prospect of suicide but delays making a commitment to either life or death until it is too late. In the audience's first scene with Hamlet, Shakespeare has his protagonist openly wish that 'the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (1.2.131–132) and that suicide were not seen as such a moral failing, as this would make it easier for him to melt his own 'too solid flesh' (1.2.129). His choice of words in 'self-slaughter' is particularly visceral, evoking imagery of gruesome wounds that contrast greatly to the high-minded rhetoric of the Danish court throughout the rest of the scene. In these soliloquies, Shakespeare unearths Hamlet's true fears and moral quandaries – though his pondering is conveniently interrupted by the arrival of Horatio, meaning Hamlet 'must hold [his] tongue' (1.2.159) – but Hamlet never forces himself to act with urgency. Subsequently, in the 'to be, or not to be' (3.1.56) soliloquy, Hamlet distils this dilemma to these six short words. He remains unable to identify what is 'nobler' (3.1.57) – suffering the misfortunes one is dealt, or 'by opposing end[ing] them' (3.1.60). Aside from his fear of mortality and the finality of death, he also delays making this decision because taking his own life would mean breaking his promise to avenge his father, yet this is also his only recourse from the moral peril of killing Claudius, his kin and his king. His repeated procrastination gives him time to consider the many ways in which vengeance is morally questionable, as he cannot repay such a 'foul and unnatural murder' (1.5.25) committed by his uncle, 'the serpent that [...] now wears the crown' (1.5.38–39) without committing the same act of kinslaying and regicide himself. Thus, Shakespeare depicts Hamlet as a character torn between two impossible and immoral courses of action, thereby rendering the protagonist unable to overcome his hamartia of procrastinating.

Ultimately, because of this procrastination, tragedy unfolds as Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes' plans all unfold in one cacophonous climactic scene of senseless death. In Act 5, Hamlet's dialogue is rife with fatalism as evidenced in lines like 'if it be now, 'tis not to come [...] if it be not now, yet it will come' (5.2.212–215), in which he appears almost apathetic towards his imminent death. However, he is no less burdened by his habitual desire to delay, choosing to wait for Laertes to, 'as a woodcock [in his] own springe', be 'killed with [his] own treachery' (5.2.297–298). Similarly, it is only when Laertes confirms

to him that 'thou art slain' (5.2.305) that Hamlet takes decisive action in stabbing Claudius. Yet even this gesture is accompanied by a diffusion of responsibility as he cries 'venom, to thy work' (5.2.314), as though the poison blade is what kills the king, not the person wielding it. Thus, Hamlet's life ends by echoing the last lines of his famous soliloquy: that 'conscience does make cowards of us all' (3.1.83) with his 'hue of resolution [...] sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought' (3.1.84–85). It is clear through these references to cowardice and a sickly, pale complexion that Shakespeare is intimating that inaction is fundamentally unhealthy for one's psyche. Hence, Hamlet's efforts to delay are a major contributing factor to his declining mental state that inevitably leads to his death and the play's tragic close.

Ultimately, Hamlet experiences a great deal of psychological torment as he ponders whether the crimes of murder and suicide are too cruel, futile, unjustifiable or self-destructive, and his hamartia of procrastination and delay lead to tragic consequences for the entire play. By drawing the audience's attention to how inaction can also be immoral and deleterious, Shakespeare condemns fatalistic thinking and implies that one cannot live life paralysed by such fears of mortality and sin.

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

a) What perspective on religion and morality is communicated in *Jane Eyre*?

Set against a backdrop of Victorian era repression and morality, Charlotte Brontë's Gothic novel *Jane Eyre* explores the boundaries of religion, ethics and personal philosophies through its complex array of characters. Throughout the text, Brontë depicts various perspectives on religion and the degree to which this guides the lives of certain characters. Controversially, she also questions the extent to which religious values can be considered bastions of morality, presenting the reader with many moral ambiguities. Thus, although Brontë conveys both the positive and negative implications of religious belief, she also does not shy away from endorsing personal freedom and her protagonist's capacity to make independent decisions based on her best moral judgement, not on religious orthodoxy, for as Brontë herself states in the preface, 'convention is not morality' (p. xiv).

Brontë celebrates Jane's willingness to question the religious and moral intentions of those around her from a young age. In particular, her harrowing time at Gateshead Hall prompts her to doubt the benevolence of God, especially since cruel, authoritarian figures like Miss Abbott invoke God's name as a means of instilling fear and obedience, taunting Jane by remarking that 'God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums [...] if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away' (p. 7). Here, Brontë's emphasis on the threatening undertones of Miss Abbott's moral posturing encourages the reader to distrust the way she and similar characters utilise religious justifications for their own ends. Likewise, the character of Mr Brocklehurst is dominated by a sense of severe religiosity, but also moral hypocrisy. He aggressively imposes his sententious attitudes on the girls at Lowood School, though notably his own wife and children are not expected to adhere to the same rigid self-denial and 'shame-faced [...] sobriety' (p. 62), instead described as being 'splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs' (p. 62). These symbols of upper-class wealth, comfort and indulgence are ironically juxtaposed with Brocklehurst's insistence that girls should not be 'accustom[ed] to the habits of luxury' (p. 60). He even orders that Julia Severn's naturally curly red hair be cut off because 'we are not to confirm to nature' (p. 61), bemoaning 'I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly [...] I see others who have far too much of the excrescence' (p. 61), before his own family enters with elaborate and artificial 'French curls' (p. 62). Through this, Brontë lays bare the hypocrisy of those who adduce warped religious morality as a means of furthering their own agendas.

The novel also encourages the reader to question the validity of an all-consuming devotion to religion and one's abstract moral beliefs at the expense of personal freedoms and desires. This is especially evident in her depiction of how characters like St John Rivers and Eliza Reed willfully forego love and passion in pursuit of their religious objectives, which Brontë presents as a highly moral yet unfulfilling choice. St John is portrayed as somewhat admirable for his steadfast principles, sacrificing his relationship with Rosamond Oliver to pursue missionary work. However, his proposal to Jane, unapologetically loveless and pragmatic in framing her as his 'help-meet and fellow-labourer' (p. 409), does little to inspire Jane or speak to her passionate nature. Like Brocklehurst, St John invokes religious fatalism in stating that 'God and nature intended [Jane] for a missionary's wife' (p. 409). This establishes him as the antithesis of Edward Rochester's unbridled passions and moodiness; through this foil relationship, Brontë aligns the reader with Jane in preferring a life full of passionate, mutual devotion rather than merely a shared dedication to a higher power. In essence, St John's religious values override his personality. Even though Jane admits his offering of a new life's purpose may objectively be 'the most glorious man can adopt or God assign' (p. 411), she boldly defends her unwillingness to 'abandon half [her]self' (p. 411) by marrying St John, likening it to a 'premature death' (p. 411) and proclaiming 'such a martyrdom would be monstrous' (p. 412). Through this, Brontë contends that a life of self-denial and complete commitment to religion cannot be as fulfilling as staying true to one's personal values.

However, Brontë complicates this by also considering how religion can be a balm and a source of moral guidance, and Jane embraces such morals when they are rooted in empathy rather than other people's selfish interests. Jane's first exposure to the consolation offered by religion is in her brief but meaningful

friendship with Helen Burns. Although Brontë emphasises their vastly different personalities – Jane being fiercely independent and brash where Helen is timid and compliant to authority, though Helen’s piousness and docility does not render her naïve or susceptible to peer pressure – she too is capable of acknowledging that ‘Mr Brocklehurst is not a god: nor is he even a great or admired man’ (p. 67). Helen also earns Jane’s respect when Jane laments that she is hated by everyone else who knows her, to which Helen retorts that she disregards the moral judgements of others, informing Jane that ‘if all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends’ (p. 67). Sadly, Jane is robbed of this meaningful friendship just a few chapters later when Helen succumbs to sickness, though she gracefully accepts this ‘escape [from] great sufferings’ (p. 80) and dies secure in the knowledge that ‘God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgiving’ (p. 80), reassuring Jane that she should not grieve. Even when confronting her premature death, Helen’s moral compass compels her to consider Jane’s emotional state and offer her the same comfort she herself finds in religion. Thus, in Helen, Brontë offers the reader an optimistic portrait of how religion need not be the sole dominion of corrupt and selfish authority figures – rather, it can sometimes be a source of great personal comfort and guidance.

Ultimately, through Brontë’s radical focus on the individual and the empowerment of Jane’s character to ‘be [her]self’ (p. 263) and ‘respect [her]self’ (p. 320), the novel juxtaposes her happiness and freedom with the discontented lives of those who single-mindedly pursue their own flawed understanding of religious dogma. In this sense, the novel endures as a resonant reminder to contemporary readers of all faiths to not compromise their own independence for the sake of others’ religious moralising, reminding us that staying true to one’s own moral values and desires is far more important.

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

- b) Analyse the significance of self-esteem in shaping Jane's character.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë's eponymous protagonist confronts many challenges to her self-esteem and self-confidence as she traverses an often cruel and unforgiving world. Over the course of the novel, countless characters seek to undermine Jane's boldness, particularly given the context of Victorian era gender norms that make Jane all the more unconventional. However, Jane is celebrated by readers both past and present for her defiant pursuit of autonomy and refusal to compromise her sense of self, ultimately achieving both love and freedom without conceding either.

Throughout her life but particularly in childhood, Jane is forced to reckon with many characters who attempt to destabilise her self-esteem. The Reeds' attitudes towards the orphan girl are best summarised in the imperative 'until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent' (p. 2), as the family are frustrated from the outset at Jane's refusal to conform. At Lowood School, Mr Brocklehurst even has the gall to denigrate her as 'not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien' (p. 64), dehumanising her and calling upon her peers to 'shun her example [...] avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse' (p. 64). Hence, Jane is confined to a life similar to that of a caged bird throughout much of the novel, beset by poverty, loneliness and misfortune due to her socioeconomic status and the cruelty of others. Later in life, she comes to resent having been deprived of self-esteem and respect at Gateshead Hall and Lowood School, knowing herself to be worthy of affection. However, even when Edward Rochester pleads for her to marry him so that he may care for her, she proclaims 'I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself' (p. 320). Her conviction and repetition of the word 'I' establish her as a uniquely independent female character in Brontë's era, evoking the reader's empathy and respect for her plight to assert herself and preserve her self-esteem.

Brontë further contends that self-esteem begets self-sufficiency, and Jane's commitment to staying true to her values is what ultimately grants her financial freedom and self-determination. As she grows older and more experienced, Jane's speech is more frequently dominated by bold declarations and first-person pronouns, such as when she rebuffs St John Rivers' lacklustre proposal of marriage and asserts that it was 'my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force' (p. 427). With these powers, Jane rejects the prospect of a secure but loveless life, instead capitalising on her status of being 'my own mistress' (p. 444) to actively pursue matrimony with Rochester. Although some readers could interpret Jane's dedication to Rochester as proof of her sacrificing this autonomy – particularly since Jane would need to care for him with his blindness and loss of one hand – Brontë instead seems to endorse this decision as a testament to Jane's liberation, having earned 'the means of an excellent education' (p. 83) and a career as a schoolteacher, not merely settling for being dependent on wages from Rochester. That she suddenly inherits a fortune from her late uncle undoubtedly contributes to Jane's self-sufficiency, though Brontë also uses this revelation to emphasise Jane's maturity and shrewd judgement. Her reaction upon hearing the news is not to 'jump, and spring, and shout hurrah!' (p. 388) but to 'consider responsibilities, and to ponder business' (p. 388). Thus, the novel frames Jane's well-founded confidence and security in her sense of self as being integral to the success and happiness she acquires.

The novel also extols self-esteem as a necessary foundation for equality in relationships. Jane's union to Rochester is only plausible and fulfilling because Jane cultivates her self-esteem and independence, actively choosing a life devoted to the one she loves. Crucially, her self-esteem never oversteps the boundary into egotism or a sense of entitlement, which contrasts Jane with figures like Blanche Ingram, who divulges her intention to secure a husband who will give her 'undivided homage' (p. 180) and whose devotions 'shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in the mirror' (p. 180). Here, Brontë subtly critiques Blanche's selfish intent for absolute submission, juxtaposing this with Jane's desire to find her equal and only meet with him when the two are on equal terms. The motif of fire is used to convey this passion, but also hint at how Jane and Rochester are kindred spirits, his 'flashing, flaming eyes' (p. 291) stoke the 'lighted heath' (p. 33) of her fiery personality, connoting both dangerous potential but also warmth and liveliness. Her decision to marry him even challenges Rochester's own reductive

views of women following his unfortunate entanglements with Céline Varens and Bertha Mason, as Jane only acquiesces after he humbles himself by acknowledging 'Jane suits me' but asking 'do I suit her?' (p. 454) Thus, although Jane's trajectory with Rochester at times challenges her values, at the novel's end she triumphs as an esteemed woman with agency who only makes sacrifices on her own terms.

Overall, the union of Jane and Rochester communicates the importance of preserving one's self-esteem and establishing mutual respect and understanding in love without requiring sacrifices from either party. In this sense, Jane's proud declaration to the reader that 'I married him' (p. 458) revels in her agency and autonomy, and through this, Brontë conveys her belief in the necessity of self-esteem in securing happiness.

***Macbeth* by William Shakespeare**

a) How is the audience invited to view the concept of guilt in *Macbeth*?

William Shakespeare's portrayal of guilt in the tragic play *Macbeth* would have strongly resonated with Elizabethan audiences who placed their faith in divine consequences. The playwright highlights this theme through two of his central characters: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who both choose to deliberately disrupt the Great Chain of Being, a hierarchal societal structure that reinforces the authority of kings over their subjects, and God's authority over humanity. Hence, to defy this structure is to ultimately defy God. As the Gunpowder Plot – the failed attempt to assassinate King James – was still fresh in the minds of his audience, Shakespeare displays the moral decline of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth through their complex characterisation to serve as a warning to those who might entertain the idea of treason and regicide.

Lady Macbeth has been described as one of Shakespeare's most villainous literary creations. The audience can track her spiralling downfall into all-consuming guilt as she meddles in the supernatural and steps outside the gender-constricted boundaries of her time. Women, in Shakespeare's time, were stereotypically expected to be gentle, submissive and obedient, yet Lady Macbeth embraces qualities that enable her to manipulate her husband into furthering his political career and ultimately making her queen. After the murder of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth calmly returns to the scene of the crime to plant the daggers. She cold-heartedly and callously states that her blood-soaked 'hands are of your colour' (2.3.68) and that 'a little water clears us of this deed' (2.3.70). Lady Macbeth's desire to exceed her gender expectations is developed further as the play progresses; she mocks Macbeth's fears after he murders Duncan and admonishes him when he sees Banquo's ghost. It is not until the end of the play that Shakespeare delivers to the audience a Lady Macbeth who is haunted by guilt, a complete transformation from the powerful and self-assured woman she was at the beginning. Lady Macbeth becomes a tragic figure who symbolises the toll guilt can take on one's soul. Shakespeare skilfully makes use of the motif of blood as the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth repetitively wails 'out damned spot!' (5.1.30) and frantically tries to wash her hands clean, actions that are in stark contrast to her earlier confidence in being able to wash away the blood with 'a little water' (2.3.70). As she sleepwalks, she recounts Duncan's death and subconsciously acknowledges the disappearance of the Thane of Fife's wife, proclaiming that 'Banquo's buried, he cannot come out on's grave' (5.1.56). Her fractured state of mind cannot comprehend all this information while she is awake; however, the relentless nature of her guilt prevents her from sleeping and ultimately drives her insane. Hence, it is through his powerful and disturbing characterisation of Lady Macbeth and her moral decline that Shakespeare highlights the divine consequences of meddling in the Great Chain of Being.

Macbeth is first introduced to the audience as a powerful, noble and patriotic soldier. Unlike his wife, he experiences guilt even before the murder of King Duncan. Shakespeare expertly employs the literary techniques of asides and soliloquies to give audiences an interior view of Macbeth's complex guilt. We first witness this guilt after Macbeth is given the prophecies and he questions 'why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair' (1.3.136–137). Immediately plagued by internal conflict, Macbeth's guilt is evident. After hearing that Malcolm will be the Prince of Cumberland, he privately states 'stars, hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires' (1.4.50–51). Shakespeare makes this reference to stars as they were symbolically seen to be the eyes of heaven and Macbeth, in his guilt at deeply wanting to be king, is not yet ready to acknowledge this desire. After Lady Macbeth informs him of her murderous plans for Duncan, Macbeth's internal struggle is most evidently displayed in his first soliloquy where he contemplates whether to commit regicide. This self-reflection clearly displays the complexity of his character as he concedes that it is only his 'vaulting ambition' (1.7.27) that acts as a catalyst, and he decides to 'proceed no further in this business' (1.7.31), though audiences quickly learn that he is already on a path to irrevocable guilt and moral dubiety.

Macbeth's strength of character is called into question when he quickly succumbs to his wife's manipulation of both his masculinity and honour. Guilt manifests itself again through the 'heat-oppressed brain' (2.1.39) when Macbeth sees 'a dagger of the mind' (2.1.38) as he is about to kill Duncan and again when he sees Banquo's ghost. Both hallucinations serve as visual warnings from Shakespeare to highlight the dire consequences of disrupting the Great Chain of Being and the horrendous consequences of a guilt-ridden

mind. Perhaps most poignant is Shakespeare's use of the motif of blood and how it symbolises the physical and metaphorical manifestation of guilt. For Macbeth, this is seen when he laments 'will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?' (2.2.63–64) after murdering Duncan; when he screams at Banquo's ghost 'thy blood is cold' (p. 3.4.96); and when he howls to his wife 'blood will have blood' (3.4.124). Finally, Macbeth admits that 'I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning was as tedious as go'er' (3.5.138–140). Consequently, Shakespeare's characterisation of Macbeth from a noble soldier to a murdering tyrant accentuates how Macbeth's guilt ultimately destroys his relationships and inner peace, leaving him alone and wracked with paranoia.

Through the complex characterisation of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare highlights the devastating effects of guilt on the mind. After the Gunpowder Plot, Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* would stand as a stark reminder of the dire consequences that affect those entertaining the idea of disrupting the Great Chain of Being.

***Macbeth* by William Shakespeare**

- b) The measure of a man is what he does with power.
Analyse this statement in relation to the character of Macbeth.

Throughout his 1606 play *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare positions the audience to see the dangers of the corrupting force of power through the central character, Macbeth. Macbeth succumbs to the allure of power first offered to him by the three witches and defies the constraints of his time, namely the Great Chain of Being, before ultimately dying a lonely death as a result of his murderous rampage and crumbling relationship with his wife.

Shakespeare begins his play with a supernatural scene of witchcraft, portraying the witches as powerful, malicious characters who should not be underestimated. As Shakespeare wrote the play under the royal patronage of King James, employing stylistic devices such as chaotic weather to foreshadow the witches' sinister plans would have aligned with King James' highly superstitious and spiritual beliefs. It is these prophecies and the repetitive, chant-like 'All Hail Macbeth...' (1.3.49) that tempt Macbeth into thinking 'deep and dark desires' (1.5.50) that he, too, could have the ultimate power in Scotland and rule as king. The motif of darkness is introduced early in the play, clearly alluding to the unnatural idea of usurping the throne and the belief that evil intentions can only be birthed in the blackness of night. After hearing the news that Malcolm is named Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth privately acknowledges 'that is a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap, / For in my way it lies' (1.5.48–50). Macbeth, tempted and lured by the promise of power from the witches' prophecy, now begins to entertain the idea of multiple murders. Ultimately, it is the malevolent nature of the witches that wield the promise of supremacy to Macbeth, highlighting the corrupting force of power.

Elizabethans believed that God divinely appointed the king and determined the societal structure to ensure that the natural order, the Great Chain of Being, was maintained. After the witches delivered their prophecy to Macbeth, he begins to entertain the idea of regicide. Initially, the audience can see the inner turmoil of this central character through his soliloquy in which he acknowledges that Duncan is 'his kinsman' (1.7.13) and that he should 'not bear the knife' (1.7.16). However, he is easily convinced and manipulated by his wife to plot the ultimate betrayal – the murder of a king. The consequences of this diabolical decision are immediate when Macbeth admits that he 'could not say "Amen"' (2.3.35) followed by 'Macbeth does murder sleep' (2.3.39). This inability to pray would have appalled Elizabethan audiences and highlights that Macbeth has lost his connection to God. This is further exemplified through the chaotic happenings within nature and 'strange screams of death' (2.3.51). Shakespeare's motif of sleep and the personification of Macbeth murdering it highlights the dire consequences of his actions. Sleep, clearly linked to those with a clean conscience, was known in Shakespeare's time for its restorative powers. With Macbeth's loss of the ability to sleep, audiences are positioned to recognise his downward spiral and the true corrupting nature of power on one's soul.

It is directly after the murder of King Duncan when we see a change in the dynamics of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. In the early stages of the play, Macbeth refers to his wife as 'my dearest partner of greatness' (1.5.9) and later 'dearest chuck' (3.2.44), initially portraying this atypical (especially by the principles of its time) relationship as mutually beneficial. However, this closeness is replaced with indifference as Macbeth fully embraces his role as king and the power that comes with it. Macbeth's character descends further into depravity as he embraces the idea that society's rules and laws no longer apply to him. He begins to lose the ability to feel empathy and becomes heartless in his decisions; he employs murderers to kill his best friend Banquo and Banquo's son Fleance because he sees them as a direct threat to his power. More horrific is Macbeth's quick and callous decision to kill the innocent Macduff household – an action he undertakes without involving or confiding in Lady Macbeth. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's once close and supportive relationship is plunged into one of loneliness and despair as they become isolated from each other. This separation ultimately leads to the presumed suicide of Lady Macbeth after she is driven insane by her participation in the destruction of the Great Chain of Being and succumbs to her sleepwalking nightmares with the realisation 'what's done cannot be undone' (5.1.60). Upon hearing the news of his wife's death, Macbeth is cold and detached, replying 'she should have died hereafter' (5.5.17).

Though this could be interpreted as Macbeth's desire for his wife to have lived longer, it is nevertheless apparent that he is certain that she too is deserving of death for her part in their treasonous plot. Finally faced with the ultimate price of his desires, Macbeth is left to face a lonely end with his famous soliloquy 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' (5.5.19), where the perils of perverting power have resulted in a 'tale told by an idiot [...] signifying nothing' (5.5.25–27). It is at this moment Macbeth's intense suffering is exposed and Shakespeare reveals the corrupting force of power.

Shakespeare's play highlights the dangers and corrupting forces of power through Macbeth succumbing to the witches' temptations, defying the divine right of kings and breaking his spiritual connection to God. The devastating consequences of this pursuit for power are exhibited in Macbeth's irrational decisions, leading him on a murderous rampage and destroying his once close bond with Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare's moral tale is clear; if you want to test a man's character, give him power.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell**

a) What perspective on love is communicated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?

In George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the concept of love is inextricably tied to notions of loyalty and devotion. In the totalitarian world of Ingsoc, the only permissible experience of love is a love for Big Brother and an all-consuming subservience to Party ideology. However, the narrative explores the natural human instinct to seek affection and acceptance from real people, not just abstract, authoritarian figureheads. This is most clearly seen in the romantic relationship between Winston and Julia, maliciously cut short by the Party and supplanted with an exclusive love for Big Brother. Thus, Orwell explores the dangerous power of love, both for individuals and societies, and reveals how even the purest of emotions can be corrupted by a tyrannical regime.

The endearing and hopeful beginnings of Winston and Julia's loving relationship only makes its demise all the more tragic. Their almost juvenile romance stands in stark contrast to Winston's relationship with his wife Katharine, who embodies the Party's intention to 'remove all pleasure from the sexual act' (p. 68) by tacitly 'submitting' (p. 70) to sex solely for the purposes of 'making a baby' (p. 70), which she equates to 'our duty to the Party' (p. 70). Conversely, the seductive 'girl with dark hair' (p. 111), whom we later learn is named Julia, comes to represent the spirit of revolution as well as prohibited erotic desire for Winston. Her 'I love you' (p. 113) note, much like Winston and Julia's subsequent affair, is undoubtedly 'a political act' (p. 133), given that it both represents and galvanises the couple's rebellion. Orwell also depicts this exciting initial phase of their relationship as having a transformative effect on Winston's psyche – Julia's declaration of love instantly makes 'the afternoon [...] more bearable' (p. 114) and inspires in him 'the desire to stay alive' (p. 115). Their relationship is shown to be a far more vibrant and meaningful form of love than Winston's obligatory sense of duty to the Party or his Party-approved wife. However, his infatuation also brings out his naivety, with his self-described greatest fear being that 'she would simply change her mind' (p. 115) and the emboldening promise of love would be lost to him. Hence, Orwell's portrayal of the relationship's inception demonstrates the transformative, exciting nature of experiencing fervid, first romantic love, though the novel soon undermines this as Winston is forced to confront his real greatest fear.

Winston and Julia's relationship also speaks to the universal and inexplicable elements of love between individuals, particularly given how little Winston and Julia know of each other. Before they even exchange names, Winston's disclosure that he is thirty-nine years old to her twenty-seven and has 'varicose veins [and] five false teeth' (p. 126) is met with Julia's easy dismissal of 'I don't care' (p. 126), followed by a rapid escalation of their physical relationship. This first union is accompanied by her offering of black-market chocolate, a fitting symbol for pleasure and indulgence that the Party has deemed illegal. Yet Winston also delights in Julia's 'corrupt[ion]' (p. 132), declaring 'the more men you've had, the more I love you [...] I hate purity, I hate goodness!' (p. 132) Here, Orwell's use of such unambiguous declarative statements conveys Winston and Julia's mutual willingness to embrace such carnal passion and 'undifferentiated desire' (p. 132), and implies this to be an irrepressible human instinct. Winston acknowledges that his feelings cannot simply be described as love because 'no emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred' (p. 133). Yet, Orwell also implies their relationship is not purely a political act – it is also an innately human one that underscores the characters' desperate desire for emotional fulfilment in a world that seeks to deprive them of all feeling for and connection with one another.

Tragically, the novel reifies the dystopian reality by having O'Brien and the Party corrode and destroy Winston and Julia's relationship. After being abducted by the Thought Police, they are taken to the ironically named Ministry of Love to be tortured and dehumanised, forcing them to refute all other forms of love except for a love of Big Brother. Within hours, Winston 'felt no love for [Julia] and he hardly even wondered what was happening to her' (p. 240) as the Party strips citizens to their most basic instincts for self-preservation. Here, the experience of love is utterly annihilated as this instinct in Winston is warped into a horrifying gratitude and affection for his torturer. After O'Brien gives him some relief from the abject pain of electrocution, Winston describes how he 'had never loved him so deeply as at

this moment' (p. 264), as he feels the experience of interrogation has forged a bond between them. To the reader, this may at first seem easy to dismiss as the lunacy of a tormented mind, but Orwell's graphic description of the physical and psychological abuse Winston endures effectively compels us to empathise with his desperation. Just as the novel provokes us to consider whether our society could likewise decline into a totalitarian nightmare, so too does Winston's experience force us to question, on an individual level, whether we would betray our loved ones in such circumstances. Ultimately, Orwell implies that doing so is just as natural an instinct as seeking love and connection – in the words of O'Brien, 'everyone knows what is in Room 101' (p. 273), because everyone, Orwell implies, has a deep-seated fear that can be exploited.

This insidious truth motivates the Party to decree that 'it is not enough to obey [Big Brother]: you must love him' (p. 295). Thus, Winston's authentic romantic connection with Julia, however fleeting or unfounded, serves to highlight the disparity between this natural human experience and its unnatural, sinister conclusion of having succumbed to a love for Big Brother. Through Orwell's examination of this duality of love, the reader is offered both a hopeful glimpse of the irrepressible nature of desire as well as a stark warning about how such feelings can be corrupted.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell**

- b) Analyse how the manipulation of language is significant in the novel.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a confronting exploration of totalitarian oppression and how this can permeate every aspect of a society and its people. This is particularly evident in Orwell's depiction of the Party's strict, centralised control and manipulation of language, which has profound consequences both politically and psychologically. Orwell uses the concept of Newspeak to draw the reader's attention to how language can obfuscate and oppress, but also extols the power of language as a means of rebellion against the Party's regime. This critique is one of many elements that solidify the novel's place in the literary canon as a timeless and universal warning about the potency of language.

From the novel's opening line, the reader is thrust into a surreal world that is familiar, yet unnerving, as Orwell's deft use of language establishes Oceania as a place of contradictions. The fact that 'it was a bright cold day in April' (p. 3) would not be unexpected for Orwell's contemporary British audience; by contrast, the notion of 'clocks [...] striking thirteen [o'clock]' (p. 3) destabilises our expectations, but only slightly, as this is not too far removed from the idea of a normal clock striking twelve o'clock. Hence, the novel's language transports us not into the fantastical realm of science fiction but into the eerily prescient world of a not-too-distant future where all is not quite right. This sense of dystopia is compounded by the description of 'gritty dust' and 'boiled cabbage' (p. 3) – imagery that evokes despair and hopelessness. In stark contrast, the capitalisation of terms like 'Thought Police' (p. 4) and the 'Ministry of Truth – Minitrue' (p. 5) juxtapose the suffering of the proles with the imposing force of an authoritarian regime that controls language as a means of controlling people. Although the reader – both in Orwell's time and in the present day – can see the inherent contradictions evident in slogans like 'WAR IS PEACE', 'FREEDOM IS SLAVERY' and 'IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH' (p. 6) or the irony in the fact that the Ministry of Peace 'concerned itself with war' (p. 6), such blatant and ever-present examples of language manipulation create a sense of overwhelming and inescapable oppression. In the novel's appendix, Orwell describes Newspeak as a method of 'mak[ing] all other modes of thought impossible' such that 'heretical thought' is 'literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words' (p. 312). The appendix also explains the revisions involved in the 'Eleventh Edition of the Dictionary' (p. 312) and the plans for complete Newspeak fluency by the year 2050, emphasising the necessity for constant and ever-expanding totalitarian powers, as the Party's grip must continually be tightened and readjusted to ensure its absolute supremacy and the absolute love and loyalty of its citizens. In this sense, Orwell showcases how the manipulation of language can pervade the minds of characters and readers alike.

The pervasive consequences of this manipulation are especially evident in Winston, who undergoes a dramatic journey of self-discovery followed by the total destruction of his sense of self. One of his first actions in the novel is to write a diary entry, knowing full well that 'to mark the paper was the decisive act' (p. 9). Indeed, the intentions of Newspeak seem to have come to fruition as he struggles to begin, not only having 'lost the power of expressing himself, but even to have forgotten what it was that he had originally intended to say' (p. 9). However, once he unleashes his torrent of stream of consciousness, 'a totally different memory had clarified itself in his mind' (p. 11), implying the act of using language as a form of self-expression can unearth realisations and consolidate one's sense of self. It is no wonder then that the Party prohibits such activities for outer-Party members such as Winston in order to induce blind obedience. Through this, Orwell also offers the reader an examination of class consciousness; in Winston's words, 'if there is hope [...] it lies in the proles' (p. 72) and their potential to acknowledge the manipulation they have been subjected to. Moreover, Orwell juxtaposes this with how Winston is forced to manipulate language at his job in the Records Department where he suppresses information and manufactures narratives, emulating the expected style and hypophora of Big Brother by 'asking questions and then promptly answering them' (p. 49). Although Winston barely conceals his contempt for his job, letting out a 'deep, unconscious sigh which not even the nearness of the telescreen could prevent him from uttering when his day's work started' (p. 40), the reader is nevertheless confronted by how effectively an oppressed citizen can be used as an instrument of oppression. This can also be seen in Syme's casual reference to how his editing of the Dictionary involves 'destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day' (p. 54),

his fragmented speech conveying an almost breathless enthusiasm for ‘cutting language down to the bone’ (p. 54). Thus, Orwell draws parallels between the reduction of the human experience and the reduction of language as a means by which people can conceive of or communicate their experiences to themselves and others.

However, if accepting the contradictions and manipulated language of Newspeak is akin to accepting the Party’s ideology, then subverting or reclaiming language can be seen as an act of defiance. Despite the novel’s bleak ending, Orwell suggests that perhaps some defiant impulses can never be truly repressed. When Winston writes ‘DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER’ (p. 20), he does so ‘by automatic action’ (p. 20) and in smooth, neat handwriting that differs from his first diary entry in childish, ungrammatical scrawl. Then, when a knock at the door interrupts him, his instinct for self-preservation in hiding his treasonous writing is almost overridden by his desire not to smudge the words while the ink is still wet. This could be interpreted as Winston’s natural, irrepressible urge to use language in an independent way, and moreover his desire to not have his self-expression stifled. His quiet rebellion of reclaiming language culminates in Julia’s ‘I love you’ (p. 113) note. Upon seeing this, Winston describes how ‘the desire to stay alive had welled up in him’ (p. 115), which serves as further evidence of Orwell’s celebration of the positive potential that language has in inspiring emotions. Although Winston and Julia’s relationship is corrupted by the Party’s psychological and physical torture, the fact that such a union is even possible in these circumstances offers some solace to the reader. If Winston, as the embodiment of the everyman, can find the words and the impetus to rebel, perhaps others can too. To this end, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* serves as a stark, cautionary tale about safeguarding personal liberties and fundamental rights to free expression through language, reminding readers through the ages of the power of words for whoever controls them.

Ultimately, Orwell’s novel is a scathing critique of authoritarianism and, although the extremities of Newspeak may seem hyperbolic, the text’s depiction of language manipulation has ensured it has an enduring place in the cultural zeitgeist. To control, warp, corrupt and destroy language is conveyed to be a cornerstone of authoritarian oppression, but Orwell also quietly lauds the potential of language as a means of helping humanity overcome such forces.

***The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan**

a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of independence in *The White Earth*?

Andrew McGahan's novel *The White Earth* presents the reader with the confronting duality of independence – a concept that can perpetuate suffering or inspire people to triumph despite their circumstances. Accordingly, McGahan also highlights how a desire for independence can manifest differently in different characters, such as John McIvor's toxic selfishness in contrast to William's innocent curiosity. Although the novel suggests that striving for independence is an innate right and instinct for all people, McGahan also cautions against pursuing independence at the cost of compassion for others.

Much of the novel concerns itself with land ownership as an analogy for personal independence and prosperity, and nowhere is this association more evident than in the character of John McIvor. His sense of entitlement over Kuran Station is so deeply ingrained that, when Elizabeth White sells the property to someone else, John feels like she 'had wielded an axe upon his life' (p. 71). This bitterness festers and corrodes John's ability to care for others, and he instead obstinately insists on 'show[ing] everyone how badly the world has treated him' (p. 261). Here, McGahan implies that John's perception of his independence being undermined or infringed upon is the source of much personal turmoil, contributing to his 'loath[ing of] his own helplessness and poverty' (p. 74). However, even when he rectifies this perceived slight by acquiring Kuran Station, John is unable to break free from this self-centred mindset and sense of deprivation, refusing to repair Kuran House despite being financially capable of doing so. Instead, he prefers to funnel funds into the Australian Independence League, a thinly veiled racist organisation similarly obsessed with entitlement and perceived grievances. This contrasts with John's remarks to William about the importance of 'knowing where you belong and taking responsibility for that place' (p. 109), thereby highlighting the hypocrisy of his worldview. Thus, whilst John's journey to reclaim Kuran Station is a testament to his determination and sense of independence, McGahan encourages the reader to understand how such pursuits can blind a person to the consequences of their actions.

This selfish independence is also evident in John's disregard for authority and tradition, which he attempts to pass on to William. He emphatically dismantles any inclination William has to rely on others, warning him never to be 'too impressed by the authorities [...] they'll try to make you do all sorts of things throughout your life' (p. 137) and that 'you have to make your own decisions in the end' (p. 137). His diatribe against politics includes his proud declaration that he 'gave up voting' (p. 138) and his assertion that everything he accomplished at Kuran Station was something he did 'alone' (p. 139). His bitter tone is juxtaposed with his veneration for the Australian Independence League, in particular the symbolic significance of the Eureka flag which he contrasts to the Australian flag – 'that monstrosity with the Union Jack' (p. 127). However, even when celebrating his values, John's independence is inextricably linked with his rejection of establishment and grievances, epitomised by the charter that begins by listing everything the League rejects, including 'government interference [...] excessive immigration and the dilution of traditional Australian culture' (p. 133). The fact that even nine-year-old William quickly discerns the flaws and prejudices innate in this brand of aggressive independence enables McGahan to critique its foundations, as the novel ultimately exposes John's worldview for its racist short-sightedness. Hence, McGahan encourages the reader to critically examine the rationale for independence and to instead see the value in a more inclusive, compassionate approach.

This is exemplified in the character of William, who McGahan depicts as developing a sense of independence, albeit as a result of parental neglect, that becomes a positive guiding principle in his life. Initially, independence is a survival mechanism for William following the death of his father, emotional distancing of his mother and intimidating figure of his uncle. This vacuum of emotional connection causes William to turn inward, though simultaneously he is then able to better appreciate the land his elders squabble over, fostering a 'magical connection' (p. 181) with his surroundings. Consequently, William's broader understanding of the land's spiritual significance enables him to be open-minded about Ruth's radical perspective in contrast to John's, and though he does not fully grasp the intricacies of the Native Title Act, he is 'shaken by doubts' (p. 337) when Ruth explains the history of the Native Mounted Police. By contrast, John is utterly unwilling to consider things from alternate points of view, staunchly adhering

to his belief that he is the most innocent and victimised party in any situation. Even when confronted with Ruth's proof, John adopts a 'venomous' (p. 347) expression and insists that the genocidal actions of his ancestors were justified. However, his venom is unable to poison William, despite John literally and metaphorically 'gripp[ing] so hard it hurt' (p. 353) in his quest to mould William in his image. Instead, William's capacity for independent thought allows him to observe the fallibility of all the adults in his life, and his experiences give him the confidence to conclude that Ruth's deductions about the significance of the land to First Nation Australian peoples are not 'lies' (p. 353) but rather because it is '*their* place' (p. 353). In this sense, the novel reveals how essential independence can be in facilitating empathy and seeing things from others' perspectives, even when such perspectives may be outside of one's realm of understanding.

Ultimately, John fails in his plot to bestow upon William the same preoccupations with ownership and independence that defined his own life. In place of this, William cultivates a more mature, compassionate and well-rounded independence that grants him a wisdom beyond his years. Through this characterisation of John, McGahan evokes pity and contempt for his selfishness, and through this characterisation of William, McGahan extols the power of independence in enhancing one's worldview.

***The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan**

- b) Analyse the significance of William's mother on the development of his character.

In *The White Earth*, Andrew McGahan explores the harrowingly dangerous consequences of child neglect for William, who is emotionally and physically abandoned by his mother Veronica. Although both characters experience the trauma of the violent death of William's father, this does nothing to unite the two in their grief; in fact, this is the impetus for an irreparable rift in their relationship as Veronica is more concerned with using William to establish financial security than she is with his own wellbeing. Hence, much of William's development and turmoil in the novel happens precisely because of Veronica's absence as a parental figure, culminating in his tragic realisation that she is unable to protect him. Through this, McGahan harshly critiques Veronica's greed and unwillingness to prioritise her child's safety, elucidating the many ways this negatively impacts William's childhood.

The reader's introduction to Veronica establishes her as a volatile and harmful presence in William's life. Upon realising that her eight-year-old son witnessed his father's death in a harvester explosion, her instinct is not to comfort him but to give him a 'painful, piercing smack' yelling 'Stupid boy. You just sat there and watched?' (p. 4) Not only is this act a confronting indication of their relationship, William's narration further reveals that 'it was not the first time his mother had hit him' (p. 4) but that he always forgave her, knowing that she 'hadn't meant it' (p. 4). He also demonstrates throughout the novel an ability to cautiously read his mother's behaviour and act accordingly, identifying the 'familiar sign[s] that she had a migraine' (p. 32) and anticipating the 'irritable fits and bursts' (p. 32) that would follow. Hence, McGahan underscores William's emotional maturity despite his mother's callous treatment of him. However, this smack leaves him with a 'ringing in his ear' (p. 4) and an earache that worsens throughout the novel as a motif of his neglect. Gradually, his mother becomes so distant and unconcerned with him that when John brings him to the water hole and tells him not to tell his mother, William notes that he 'hadn't thought of that' (p. 104) as he is so far removed from considering his mother a trustworthy bastion of comfort or security. Instead, he is aware that she has no interest in his growing fascination with the landscape of Kuran Station, only paying attention to him in conversations about solidifying his position to inherit the property. Thus, the reader views Veronica as a negligent parent whose emotional distance renders William vulnerable to the insidious influence of his uncle.

Moreover, both Veronica and John are united in their desire for William to inherit Kuran Station, though they both have their own means of manipulating him to ensure this happens. Veronica's motives are purely monetary as she is driven by the knowledge that 'this property is worth a lot of money – we could sell it and move away to somewhere nice' (p. 113). When she tells William this, she is described as 'solicitous' and 'stroking his hair' (p. 113) – one of the only loving gestures she shows in the entire novel. The fact that this is accompanied by her compelling him to ingratiate himself with John signifies that she only sees William as a method of securing financial stability. However, McGahan also describes William as being 'relieved when her hand finally dropped away' (p. 113), indicating that he has learnt not to depend upon his mother and now regards her affections as suspicious or duplicitous. He is more accustomed to her 'vacant hostility' (p. 273) than any loving gestures, and this lack of a caring parental figure inevitably leads him to seek approval from John instead. Unfortunately, John is an equally selfish, surrogate father figure who attempts to mould William in his own image despite knowing how miserable his life has become. John likewise ignores clear signs of William's suffering and deliberately compromises his education by colluding with Dr Moffat to withdraw him from school to take on responsibilities at Kuran Station. As the novel progresses, McGahan explores how some of John's staunch individualism and masculinity pervade William's thoughts; for example, William tolerates the pain of a badly infected ear, assuming that it is 'something that every child had to put up with, and he didn't want to sound weak' (p. 174). His condition deteriorates as he develops a cholesteatoma and nearly dies, yet neither Veronica nor John ever notice the smell of 'something rotten' (p. 322) in his ear, as ultimately the characters responsible for William's welfare are more concerned with advancing their own interests.

Consequently, a major turning point for William is the revelation that his mother cannot be relied upon to keep him safe. It is possible that his subconscious realises this before he does, as when he gets lost walking to the water hole, he hallucinates a dead man who taunts him by saying 'your mother's not

coming' (p. 310). At this stage, he still holds out hope that she will rescue him, and when Ruth finally finds him in a state of delirium, he moans 'mum?' (p. 320) However, he later acknowledges how feelings of 'anger and resentment awoke in him' when met with his mother's 'falsely bright' remark that 'we found you before any real harm was done' (p. 323). Here, McGahan aligns the reader with William in justifiable outrage that Veronica could neither protect nor rescue her son, and thus William's lack of forgiveness for her is a tragic but necessary sign of his growth and independence. His last 'remnant of faith' (p. 325) in her is destroyed by her hesitancy to take him to a legitimate doctor for fear of others seeing evidence of neglect. Indeed, when he is brought to hospital by Ruth, the doctors 'noted that the boy was malnourished, dehydrated, extensively bruised and badly sunburnt' (p. 374) – this listing of extreme conditions and forms of suffering amplify the reader's pity for William as well as their fury at Veronica. This culminates in the novel's tragic conclusion of the Kuran House fire in which Veronica abandons William once more to run into the burning house and save John's will. This is the most palpable indictment of her priorities, deserting her son in pursuit of money even at the expense of her own life. Ultimately, this solidifies William's development into a boy who has no confidence in his mother, and the unusually advanced emotional maturity he develops in her absence allows him to empathise with her struggles whilst also acknowledging that she cannot meet his basic needs as a guardian. By showcasing William's capacity to grow and avoid the fate that befalls his inattentive mother and egotistical uncle, McGahan celebrates his protagonist as a representation of escaping cycles of trauma and abuse.

In this sense, the journey of William's mother is a cautionary tale about the perils of prioritising money over the happiness and safety of family, and the fact that William successfully navigates this turbulent relationship gives the reader hope for his future. Although William is undoubtedly scarred both physically and mentally by parental neglect, McGahan implies that he is stronger than his mother and, in her absence, has developed into a character with the power to build a more fulfilling and stable life.

***We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler**

a) What perspective on trauma is communicated in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*?

Karen Joy Fowler's bildungsroman *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* examines the profound and long-lasting impacts that trauma can have on one's self-image and perspective on relationships. The novel's protagonist Rosemary grapples with extensive childhood trauma surrounding loss, abandonment and alienation, scarring the memories of her upbringing and indelibly affecting her adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, Fowler explores how internalising trauma or otherwise being unable to satisfactorily resolve it can lead to even more detrimental consequences. However, the novel also celebrates Rosemary's capacity to overcome her unconventional and deeply affecting upbringing, championing her as a flawed but highly sympathetic character who is ultimately strengthened by her experiences.

The novel's distinctive retrospective narration plays an important role in shaping our understanding of the traumatic lives of the Cooke family. It also aligns us with Rosemary as she reflects, with the advantage of hindsight, on her parents' or elder brother's behaviour, enabling both her and the reader to better comprehend the complex circumstances of her upbringing. Rosemary has particular moments of clarity surrounding her parents' decision-making, such as their willingness to let Rosemary decide to abandon Fern. As an adult, she is keenly aware of how amoral and scarring this decision is, rhetorically asking 'what kind of a family lets a five-year-old decide such things?' (p. 224) This contextualises much of Rosemary's inner turmoil, as from a young age she is cognisant of the fact that 'unfairness bothers children greatly' (p. 66) and yet unfairness follows her at every turn. Despite her yearning for familial closeness, her parents inadvertently cultivate a sense of detachment by 'wrap[ping antagonism] in layers of code, sideways feints, full deniability' (p. 20). These connotations of passive-aggressive tension make it clear that although the Cooke children rarely experience physical trauma, their childhoods are rife with emotional and psychological trauma that is beyond their control or understanding. However, it is from Rosemary's highly astute and sophisticated adult perspective that we make these inferences, meaning that Fowler is perhaps subtly reminding us of the importance of personal reflection in coming to terms with one's traumatic past.

Another troubling aspect of Rosemary's life is the lack of communication in her close relationships – this is often shown to perpetuate her suffering. For instance, she sardonically remarks that it is supposedly a 'family tradition' (p. 26) to refuse to talk about the past, underscoring how each member of the Cooke family harboured their own private griefs and grievances without confiding in one another. At times, this can manifest in startlingly harmful ways, such as Lowell's misdirected rage towards Rosemary when blaming her for Fern's absence. The novel describes him punching his five-year-old sister 'high on the arm so the bruise would be hidden' (p. 64), all the while Rosemary is simply 'happy to see [him]' (p. 64) and be shown any kind of attention. At no time do Rosemary and Lowell's parents show an awareness for this tragic and toxic dynamic. This is immediately followed by Rosemary's recounting of how she 'developed a phobia about the closed door to [her] parents' bedroom' (p. 65), having overheard them arguing. This closed door can be seen as a metonym for the emotional divides in the family, which only superficially abate when one of them does not 'remember to be mad' (p. 65). Hence, this denial and unwillingness to share and confront emotional realities only compounds the shared experience of trauma for the Cooke family.

Through her depiction of the Cookes, Fowler offers the reader a spectrum of trauma resolution. Lowell, like his father, is shown to be too emotionally detached to fully come to terms with his experiences. Both men withdraw from the family unit with Lowell 'stopping his stories into knives' (p. 58) and lashing out at others, while his father – notably nameless throughout the novel – is a 'professional man used to having his own way' (p. 15) and readily dismisses the feelings and welfare of his wife and children. Although both men also attempt to channel their anguish in more constructive ways, Lowell's animal rights activism and his father's single-minded scientific pursuits ultimately leave the rest of the family adrift with worry and loneliness. Such feelings are also profoundly felt by Fern, regardless of her 'simian-ness' (p. 77). Rosemary's mother recounts how when Fern was a baby, 'she used to grip me so tightly [...] that's how it works in the wild – the baby chimp clings to its mother' (p. 286) and likewise, when they finally reunite,

Rosemary describes how Fern's 'grip was tight enough to hurt Mom' (p. 295). Moreover, the fact that Fern 'keeps a careful track of where Mom is, much more than with anyone else' (p. 295) hints at a profound insecurity and fear of abandonment which Fowler contends is just as valid and worthy of empathy as the feelings of the human characters. However, the novel is ultimately optimistic about the possibility of overcoming trauma as seen in the unity of the Cooke women as Rosemary establishes a healthier, more honest relationship with her mother in adulthood, and even facilitates a reunion with Fern despite how upsetting they know it will be. In this sense, Rosemary and her mother's ability to confront their trauma and the fallibility of the entire family suggests that, even in profoundly challenging circumstances, those who are willing to seek a resolution will be able to find one.

Although the novel's endearing ending presents an optimistic portrait of rekindled relationships, Fowler does not shy away from revealing how trauma can irreparably damage people and their connections with others. Ultimately, trauma is a pervasive and inescapable part of the lives of the Cooke family, but whilst it undoubtedly has lasting consequences, Fowler implies it is still important to strive for self-betterment and closure.

***We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler**

- b) Analyse the influence of Rosemary's memories in shaping her character.

In her 2013 novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Karen Joy Fowler explores the tensions and tragedies that resound through the lives of the Cooke family as shown through the recollections of the protagonist Rosemary's memories. Her conscience and self-image are greatly impacted by her unconventional childhood and the subsequent emotional trauma resulting from the breakdown of her family unit. The novel suggests that such strong memories are inescapable and inextricably linked with who Rosemary is; thus, Fowler reveals that memories play a significant role in shaping one's identity.

Throughout the text, Rosemary repeatedly demonstrates that she is haunted by unresolved issues from her past which permeate her memories. This manifests in the novel's unique structure, opening with the line 'so the middle of my story comes in the winter of 1996' (p. 5). This subversion of normal chronology allows Fowler to first establish Rosemary as an 'ordinary' (p. 5) college student, before going on to reveal the startling abnormalities in her early life. However, Fowler also encourages us to view Rosemary as an unreliable narrator who acknowledges that 'language does this to our memories – simplifies, solidifies, codifies, mummifies' (p. 48) and likens telling stories about the past to a photo in a family album that 'replaces the moment it was meant to capture' (p. 48). Here, Fowler's use of metaphor makes the reader aware of the potentially flawed or biased recollections in Rosemary's narration, given that she has revisited her own memories so often that they have become a 'solidifie[d]' (p. 48) part of her. Even snippets of memories are shown to have a lasting impact on Rosemary's psyche; for instance, she recounts how a kindergarten teacher told her parents that she 'had boundary issues [and] must learn to keep [her] hands to [her]self' (p. 30). She then recalls her 'mortification of being told this' (p. 30), before chiding herself about 'always making mistakes like that' (p. 30). Her shift from past to present tense is indicative of how such small memories still carry through into her present self-conception. In this way, Fowler presents us with a protagonist who is deeply affected by her past but also constantly revisiting, reliving and re-examining her memories to give her life meaning in the present.

Another key element of Rosemary's memories are the spectres left behind by those no longer in her life. In particular, she seems constantly aware of how Fern or Lowell would behave or respond to things after she is left to the 'business of being my parents' only child' (p. 46). The loss of her simian twin leaves Rosemary adrift; in the wake of her being sent away, Rosemary reveals that she 'saw [Fern] everywhere, but I never said so' (p. 87) and although being able to recall Fern's physicality in such detail offers her some comfort, she is undoubtedly tormented by having to remind herself of this loss. Her relationship with her parents is also irrevocably changed by the decision to give Fern up – even as a kindergartener, she recalls how 'we were careful with each other. We tiptoed' (p. 88). These references to suppressed emotions and a lack of communication haunt Rosemary well into adulthood, and with the advantage of hindsight, she can recognise that, despite being the youngest member of the family, 'there were ways in which [she] was the one who carried the damage' (p. 107). Fern's arrival happened in the middle of their stories but, for Rosemary, 'Fern was the beginning. I was just over a month old [...] Whoever I was before is no one I ever got to know' (p. 107). In this sense, Rosemary's memories are also tainted with the knowledge that things could have been different were it not for the extreme deprivations she suffered as a result of her father's ill-conceived experiment.

Ultimately though, the novel suggests that memories are made meaningful through our conception of them, and it is only when Rosemary examines her childhood from a more detached distance that she can develop a clear sense of self. When Lowell discloses that Rosemary was the one who made their parents send Fern away by 'mak[ing] Mom and Dad choose' (p. 222) and being a 'jealous little kid' (p. 222), Rosemary is struck by the revelation that she had no memory of this. However, she makes a conscious effort to dismiss feelings of guilt and instead think about 'what kind of a family lets a five-year-old child decide such things?' (p. 224) Though this indicates Rosemary is still scarred by her childhood and desperately trying to untangle things as a young adult, it also underscores her emotional maturity and ability to place memories in context. This enables her to examine her life and the actions and attitudes of those around her more accurately. Thus, instead of internalising this trauma and focusing her attention on self-criticism

like how she is ‘always making mistakes’ (p. 30), Rosemary is better placed in adulthood to appraise her memories in more constructive ways. This is best seen in her reunion with her mother as they look back through family photo albums together, reminiscing about the moments these photos were ‘meant to capture’ (p. 48). The disparity between Rosemary’s mother’s memories of her daughter as ‘a happy, happy child’ (p. 289) contrast greatly with Rosemary’s own recollections, strengthening Fowler’s message that memories are subjective and unreliable, but also affirming Rosemary’s understanding of how other people’s perspectives are valuable in piecing together her burgeoning sense of self.

Overall, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* depicts Rosemary as a complex and intelligent yet deeply traumatised character for whom memories are both a source of pain and comfort. Thus, through her depiction of Rosemary’s fraught relationship with her own past, Fowler reveals just how intensely our memories can reverberate throughout our lives.

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