

## **J2 Prelim Paper 1 Review**

### **Q1a.**

“Portrait of a Machine” and “This Excellent Machine”

- (i) Although both poems use images of the machine that portray its efficiency and perfection, closer examination reveals that the sinister images in poem A show how man is controlled by the machine while the images of destruction in poem B emphasise the divisive and harmful effects of the machine, which is a metaphor for (nuclear) war.
- (ii) The choice of diction in A conveys the laudatory tone towards the machine which then shifts to one of mockery as the persona reveals the irony of man’s enslavement, while the more direct choice of diction in poem B candidly presents the devastating effects of the machine and develops to a questioning of man’s passivity at the end of the poem.
- (iii) The sonnet in A, conventionally meant to laud and praise the subject matter of the poem, is apt as man has so much pride in his own creation of the machine, but this is highly ironic as man’s stupidity and enslavement is mocked. The rhyme scheme in both octets in poem B is consistent, an unwavering form which reinforces the certainty of the devastating effects that the machine can cause.

### **Q1b.**

“The Owl” by Ted Hughes and “The Owl” by Edward Thomas

- (i) In poem A, someone important in the persona’s life is described to have a very fresh and unique worldview—a perspective that is similar to that of an avian creature, the owl. In poem B the owl, an animal part of nature, becomes the reminder for the horrors that the persona has narrowly escaped from. Therefore for both poems, the owl serves as a kind of metaphor that reflects the inner sentiments of the persona.
- (ii) The choice of diction in poem A conveys the persona’s wonderment and sense of intrigue that he feels about the person adopting the perspective of the owl, whereas in poem B the persona’s meditative reflection of his own circumstance is communicated effectively through the choice of diction.
- (iii) The form of poem A is that of free verse, appropriate as this allows for him to directly speak to his addressee in a frank and conversational manner. In contrast, the rhyme in every other line in poem B, the almost same number of syllables in every line and use of quatrains in every stanza all emphasise a consistency that appropriately captures how the persona constantly thinks of the dangers he has escaped, and is similarly haunted by them.

### **Q2a.**

Discuss the significance of art in The Age of Innocence.

No. of student attempts: 24

Mark range: 5-17

## **Overall Comments**

1. This was actually the easier question in Section B but not many of you realised this. So, question selection is important—many of you *could* have done better if you attempted this question, as the points you could come up with are manageable.
2. “Art” refers to literary art (writing, novels, poetry), visual art (paintings, sculptures), drama/plays/operas (New Yorkers watch so many of these performances), and can also refer to how realities and people (women) are compared to artistic visions / works of art.
3. No, it does not mean “the art of fashionable behaviour” or “the art of artifice” or “form”. The question contains ONLY the word “art” and not those phrases, so (for the very few of you...) please do not impose your own definition irrelevantly and illogically.
4. Every point in your topic sentence needs to link closely to this keyword “art” and consider its “significance”, meaning its relevance to thematic concerns or larger issues in the novel, and also link to Wharton’s agenda. You should KNOW how to approach questions by now as we have reiterated this approach many times.
5. Good answers would have discussed a wide range of points, which span from what art might mean to some characters (eg. Newland’s obsession with wanting life to imitate art), to what the interaction with art reveals about New York society (New Yorkers being arrogant about their knowledge in art when they only have a very narrow exposure to certain kinds of art forms), to how certain segments of society (women) are compared to works of art. So in doing so, the links to pertinent thematic concerns and Wharton’s agenda would NATURALLY be discussed.

### **Suggested Points**

*\*Underlined portions—links to a wider significance in the novel (thematic concern, or reveals more about a wider issue in society)*

*\*Yellow highlights—links to Wharton’s agenda*

*\*Please note that the page numbers are included there for YOUR OWN reference so that you can make notes! There is no need to quote page numbers in your essay; too time-consuming.*

1. **The amateur knowledge in literature and art that Newland prides himself in (as a ‘dilettante’) is in fact narrow and limited, which also aptly represents New York’s narrow knowledge of art. Wharton therefore reveals New York’s arrogance about their artistic knowledge is based on a superficial and selective understanding, which has caused society to be insular and narrow-minded.**

#### **Elaboration and Analysis:**

- The plays that they watch are the same—the opera Faust in January (Chapter 1), the Sonnambula or “The Sleepwalker” (Chapter 7), another opera very popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is very ironic as this is one of the favourite operas of a society whose members unthinkingly follow conventions; they are dull and have become insular.
- For the literature they read, New Yorkers only choose to read romances, Ouida’s novels for the “Italian atmosphere”, and novels about peasant life due to its “descriptions in scenery and the pleasanter sentiments”—which all show that

they prefer literature that portrayed lower-class life in an idealised, romanticised manner that satisfied their preference for the 'pleasant'. In fact, they prefer reading novels about society whose characters are from their own class as the context was more familiar to their way of life, as evinced from how they interpret such "motives and habits (about people in society) were more comprehensible" and how they dislike Dickens' novels as he wrote about the middle and lower classes. They preferred Thackeray and Bulwer who wrote about the upper classes. (Chapter 5, page 28) Develop the point about how their understanding of what 'life' is like for other classes is very narrow and inaccurate from these novels they choose to read, and how they prefer to surround themselves with familiar ideas (about their class) which has **thus resulted in them being insular**.

- The only art work that they see are the 'mainstream' painters that were considered famous in the day, for instance Sir Joshua Reynolds (Chapter 5, page 28), Alexandre Cabanel, a French portrait painter (Chapter 8, pg 51), and Jean-Baptiste Isabey (Chapter 8, pg 51), another French painter known for his portrait miniatures. Those who bother going to the museum to view art (Newland being one of them) may know other mainstream artists famous in that period. Again this emphasises that they are only exposed to the more recognised/established artists (**narrow knowledge which has resulted in them being insular**), and are totally unfamiliar with other artists which may be more lesser known, such as the Italian artists.

**2. Art is a medium for people to express their own worldview, which therefore distinguishes foreigners or those with more unconventional tastes from the conventional New Yorker. Beyond just highlighting the differences between these groups of people, Wharton makes us see how **unconventional ideas, expressed through the artistic influences of such foreigners, may be necessary in helping to revitalise a society that has become dull and predictable in its artistic preferences and ways.****

**Elaboration and Analysis:**

- The art displayed in Beaufort's house ("Love Victorious", the nude of Bouguereau, Chapter 3) which was affronting to conventional New Yorkers as it was described that society interpreted it as him having the "audacity" (pg 19) to hang up that artwork that features a nude. However, the fact that society still very much liked to attend the ball at Beaufort's mansion, despite his unconventional artistic preferences, suggests that New Yorkers may find such a location refreshing as they wanted to hold their social gatherings in such a **foreign atmosphere**. **This is one of the ways in which they are being 'revitalised' in an unconscious manner.**
- Ellen's artistic tastes: you could refer to the 'artistic décor' of her house which was "charming" in the way she decorated them with unique, unconventional art pieces such as a delicate Greek bronze statue, some red damask on the wall and "some Italian-looking pictures in old frames" (pg 57) because they were very

unfamiliar to Newland. His knowledge of Italian art is very conventional and predictable, as he only knew Botticelli, Fra Angelico and Leonardo da Vinci, but his other sources of knowledge were (arguably) not the most direct or reliable—Italian poets who wrote about idealized love (Dante and Petrarch), and English and French essayists and critics (Symonds, Vernon Lee, Hamerton, Pater) who wrote about Italian art (very theoretical understanding of the aesthetics of Italian artworks). The fact that Newland was confounded and found himself able to really “see” (which suggests a more intimate exploration) and not just “look at” (which is more superficial) these art pieces does indicate that he was somehow intrigued by such art work and felt revitalised in that space as he was “more curious than mortified” by the intimate, foreign atmosphere of Ellen’s house, and he felt a “sense of adventure” (pg 57-58). This is the point where Wharton suggests is the kind of revitalisation that New York needs in terms of their exposure to not merely artistic influences, but also ideas pertaining to their way of life.

**3. In the way that women are compared to works of art and how they are expected to only be exposed to certain kinds of art or artistic works, Wharton reveals how New York puts women in a fixed mould where they are only expected to be feminine, innocent or as objects to be desired.**

**Elaboration and Analysis:**

- Chapter 6: While Newland is open to ideas that question long-accepted beliefs, as he reads books about anthropology and evolution (Darwin’s work), it is ironic that he is rigid in his expectation of May to remain more ‘innocent’ about such progressive ideas as he prefers her reading works on safer subjects such as poems by Tennyson, novels about their social class by Thackeray, a ballad (“Babes in the Wood”) that is based on a plot found in fairy tales. His view of May here is in fact representative of how New York society does prefer to see women as being unable to handle these more unconventional, unusual ideas as they should remain innocent about them.
- Chapter 8: Mrs Van der Luyden is compared to a painting done by Alexandre Cabanel and Mrs Archer is compared to one of the miniatures painted by Jean-Baptiste Isabey (Chapter 8, pg 51). Women are often looked upon as ‘works of art’ meant to be admired and appreciated, especially when in the same chapter, there is a lot of attention given to what kind of jewellery and clothes they wear, which made them ‘handsome’ and considered ideal from society’s perspective. Even when May is compared to Diana (pg 53), it is not due to the strength of what Diana stands for, but for her aesthetic appeal as she is described as wearing a “dress of white and silver, with a wreath of silver blossoms in her hair”, which again emphasises how Newland (and society) judges women like they are aesthetic works. Ellen is also compared to a portrait (pg 85) by Carolus Duran the new painter, which features a woman in a provocative outfit with her muffled throat and bare arms exposed, which was perceived by Newland to be “bold”,

“perverse” and “pleasing”—again emphasising how **women are seen as objects to be looked at and desired.**

4. **Newland’s constant obsession with how life should imitate art is not merely a matter of characterisation; it is also **Wharton’s way of warning us that indulging in visions instead of facing reality will ultimately lead one to have an unfulfilled, unhappy life.****

**Elaboration and Analysis:**

- (pg 84) Newland wants his life to mimic art/the literature he reads: he imagines how life would have been like as works written by Merimee, Thackeray, Browning or William Morris. While these novels and poetry are about worlds that are unfamiliar to Newland (and may suggest that he has more ‘unconventional’, eclectic tastes), they present an idealised, romanticised outlook of life which again reinforces how he has idealistic visions about his life and his romances that will not come true.
- The contrast between Newland’s idealism and Ellen’s realistic outlook via the literary works she reads is obvious: she reads novels by Paul Bourget, Huysmans and the Goncourt brothers, works that are to do with realism. Wharton does **posit that one needs to be realistic instead of indulging in visions, especially when she punctures Newland’s visions (*relating to art*) on several occasions.**
- One such instance is how he relates his leave-taking from Ellen as parallel to the scene from “The Shaughraun” (pg 93). The way he was moved with sorrow when he watched this scene encapsulates for him the sorrow and poignancy that he felt when he left Ellen after that confidential talk about how she must not insist on divorce because she needs to put the reputation of her family first. However, unconsciously, the parallel he has drawn to this play is indicative of how he wants his life to mimic art, and does hint at how he might unconsciously already view him and her as lovers in that same scene, and how he was so certain to conclude that Ellen’s life had a “dramatic” quality that was “mysterious” and “thick with drama”. In fact, it is more like his view of their relationship as being overly dramatic and unreal.
- Wharton **undercuts his obsession with visions here** when Ellen later makes a reference to the yellow roses she received in relation to the actress in that scene (“Do you think he will send her a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning?”). Although this makes Newland very delighted and he said he was going to “leave the theatre in order to take the picture away” with him (again indulging in this vision based on the ‘art’), Ellen quickly **raises the topic of May, which is Wharton’s way of showing how Ellen is deeply aware of his reality**—in which he is a married man who ought to be committed to May. This sentiment of **warning us against indulging in visions** (for him to be together with Ellen) **and facing reality instead** is most obviously reinforced in the last part of the novel where Newland was already being shunned by his family (they no longer turn to him for advice about Ellen and other matters), and May’s hurt and pain is shown very

obviously to us on at least three occasions (pg 219, pg 233, pg 260, pg 269).

Newland would have led an unhappy life if he did elope with Ellen, and would have suffered being an outcast of society as he had gone against his duty to May.

### Good scripts to refer to:

Tan Jia Yi (CG 22/15): Very clear understanding of what “art” refers to and the link to Wharton’s agenda is clear and well developed

Lee Qing Ping (CG 22/15): Well-sustained essay with relevant evidence and clear analysis and development of points; just need to complete the last point.

### Q2b.

**Write a critical commentary on the following passage, relating it to the relationship between Newland and Ellen, here and elsewhere in the novel. (Chapter 17, the conversation between Medora Manson and Newland)**

No. of student attempts: 48

Mark range: 5-15

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### Overall Comments

1. This was actually a tricky context question which we modelled after the 2015 A level paper; in that the passage doesn’t contain the character (in the relationship) that we wanted students to analyse. So the approach was not so direct. The points about Newland and Ellen’s relationship need to be linked to wider, more significant thematic concerns and issues, and this is challenging, given the nature of the context.
2. These essays were mostly poorly attempted because many of you just reduced your essays, which are supposed to be ARGUMENTATIVE, to just merely NARRATIVE ones. I was reading ‘O level type’ of *observations* (not argument points) like “Newland and Ellen are close”, “Newland desires her”, “Medora Manson admires Newland” (how does this even answer the question) and “Archer overreacts in this section”... BUT SO WHAT? You cannot say very much BEYOND these very low-level, DESCRIPTIVE OBSERVATIONS. These are **not ARGUMENTS** or particular POSITIONS that you can develop which concerns Newland and Ellen, and which **develop a THEMATIC CONCERN or AGENDA**! WHY have you thrown all that we taught you about question answering techniques OUT OF THE WINDOW?
3. This is the absolute LAST time I will say this about the Context Question (hence its name, right?). **Analyse at least 70% of the context to support your ARGUMENTATIVE point, and develop your points with relevant CROSS-REFERENCES to the other parts of the novel.** WHY? This is to argue that this particular point / technique / concern / agenda is CHARACTERISTIC of the novel or Wharton’s writing/style. For those who have not bothered to do this or did not manage to even sear this into your brain, the sad, crying faces (doodled) on your scripts may just FINALLY drive home this point. If not, then I have wasted my artistic abilities so you may remove them promptly with correction tape or the stroke of your pen.

4. You still need to know the text VERY well in order to answer the context question.  
Do not choose it because you think this is the 'easy way out'.

### Suggested Approach

*\*Underlined portions—links to a wider significance in the novel (thematic concern, or reveals more about a wider issue in society)*

*\*Yellow highlights—links to Wharton's agenda; cyan highlights—cross-references*

*\*Please note that the page numbers are included there for YOUR OWN reference so that you can make notes! There is no need to quote page numbers in your essay; too time-consuming.*

1. Newland has an awareness of one's duty and society's expectations that forces the individual to sacrifice his/her personal desires, but there is a lot of contradiction with respect to how Newland treats Ellen. Wharton does not condone such a behaviour, as evinced by the way Newland reacts and how Medora Manson talks to Newland about the relationship between him and Ellen.

#### Elaboration and Analysis:

- Medora Manson makes a reference to the "wise advice" that Newland gave Ellen, which is when Newland earlier claims (to Ellen) the importance of sacrificing one's own desires (in this case, to divorce her husband) to protect society's interest and to keep the family together (pg 91). Here it does seem that he has shown "courageous firmness" and is the "instrument of...Providence" since he emphasises the need to do the right thing and put one's duty to family first, although this might be a difficult and unattractive choice to Ellen. So this seems to suggest that he is a principled man who is aware of the importance of adhering to duty over succumbing to one's (selfish) desires.
- Cross reference: (pg 138) Even Ellen confesses that because of this intervention by Newland where he emphasises the importance of sacrificing her desire (to want to divorce her husband), it was Newland who "showed [her] how selfish and wicked (divorcing) was, how one must sacrifice one's family the publicity, the scandal" and she understands that she "can't love [Newland] unless [she] give[s] him up" (pg 141). Ellen demonstrates that she truly understands what it means to give up her own desire to divorce her husband and carry out an affair with Newland, because she does not want her family to suffer, so she needs to give Newland up.
- However, in this context, he already shows signs of betraying this Pharisaic claim which he promotes. Although he claims that he was merely giving a "legal opinion", meaning that he was being objective and not emotional or personal, his reactions to the possibility of Ellen returning to her husband reveals how he does not practice what he preaches to Ellen. Although Medora Manson thought that Newland had a "firm stand" about Ellen's situation, this is quickly proven untrue as he immediately exclaims violently many times in this extract that if Medora Manson was to convince Newland that Ellen "ought to go back", he "would rather see her dead", which indicates that he cares a little too much for



Ellen. He also openly shows his disapproval with his exclamations of “Good God!” and calls her marriage a kind of “hell”, which shows his disparaging attitude and how he disagrees with her return to her husband. This shows how quickly Newland contradicts his earlier ‘firm’ position about how the individual should sacrifice one’s own selfish desires and consider the family’s needs and reputation, because his reaction does hint at how he bears some affection for Ellen which makes him abhor the thought of having her return to her husband.

- Medora Manson also sees this, but it is crucial that Wharton has her commenting on the reality of Ellen’s duty to her husband when she says towards the end of this context, “Am I to understand that you prefer that....” “marriage is marriage... and my niece is still a wife...” **This is Wharton’s way of using Mrs Manson as her mouthpiece to communicate her agenda** that because Ellen is still married and Mrs Manson is indirectly also reminding Newland of his own duty to his wife, them having an affair will be forbidden and unacceptable. Mrs Manson’s comment **serves as a warning to Newland that he should not contradict his own advice, and thus reinforces how Wharton stresses on the importance of not succumbing to one’s desires and neglecting one’s duty to marriage and family as this is not a noble thing to do.**
  - Reinforce with a **cross reference** to how Ellen later reminds Newland to face the Gorgon, a mythological reference which represents reality, as he cannot merely have an affair with Ellen and disregard his family.

2. **Through the relationship and earlier interaction between Newland and Ellen, this context also reveals that personal matters which have an impact on the family, and hence society, will never remain private in a society where everyone is watched closely because the stability of society is something its members want to ensure.**

**Elaboration and Analysis:**

- Newland felt some “considerable embarrassment”, meaning that he was uncomfortable that Ellen had shared with Mrs Manson about how he had advised her about “her private affairs”. While he tried to downplay the importance of his involvement by saying that Ellen “exaggerates” and that he only intervened with his professional advice because “[Ellen] asked me to”, this is his way of claiming that this was a ‘professional’ and objective affair. However, the fact that “he wondered” who else Ellen had shared this incident with proves that he is affected by Ellen’s actions because he did interpret the sharing as a “private” one, hence he intended for it to be kept only between Ellen and him.
- However, New York society is one where such news will not merely be kept private, especially when Ellen’s personal affairs with her husband have a direct impact on her family, and hence upper class society.

This is why (**cross reference**) the family is the one who regulates Ellen’s behaviour through their direct interventions. Newland had already warned Ellen that (pg 89) “New York society is a very small world compared with the one you’ve lived in”, emphasising the impossibility of anything remaining secret or private as everyone knows what everyone else is doing. He also tells her that



society is “ruled, in spite of appearances, by a few people with...rather old-fashioned ideas”, and the one that directly affects Ellen is that New York’s “legislation favours divorce—[their] social customs don’t.”

The family is the one who instructs Letterblair to task Newland with advising Ellen to stay with her husband, and over the next few months they continue to ‘police’ Ellen’s actions because they know that she chose not to live with her husband, and they frown upon that. Newland’s family talks about Ellen’s situation many times, such as before May’s wedding (pg 118), and even May comments that (pg 178) “After all I wonder if she wouldn’t be happier with her husband”, who is **a mouthpiece of a society that truly feels that the wife ought to remain with her husband (regardless of any reasons).** Whenever the family talks about Ellen, it is described that (pg 213) they it was with an “accusing yet deprecating tone” because she has “surprised and inconvenienced them by remaining obdurate to her husband’s advances”, which is clearly a show of their loss of support for her as she has gone against what they believe would ensure a stable family, and hence society. This **‘incomplete marriage’ now becomes a stigma for Ellen’s family, and they feel embarrassed as their firm belief in the stability and unbreakability of marriage is challenged.**

- 3. While Newland claims to understand Ellen and her plight, he misunderstands Ellen’s intentions towards their relationship as he thinks that she would want to be with him despite their married statuses. However, this is characteristic of how Newland **is most often mistaken in his perception of women and imposes his own inaccurate views on them.****

**Elaboration and Analysis:**

- He claims to understand Ellen’s true desires: That if she goes back to her husband, it will be “hell”; he believes that she may “forgive” her husband but that she will not “go back” to him; the way he sees Mrs Manson as a “guise of a messenger of Satan” suggests how he knows that Ellen would disagree with her aunt’s desire for her to be back with her husband, which is why he felt “numb with amazement” because Mrs Manson’s claims about how Ellen would be “giving up... Art and beauty...[and] the homage of the greatest [and] the remorse of an adoring husband” are what he believes Ellen does not desire as she wants her freedom instead. This is why he vehemently turns down Mrs Manson’s request to “count on [his support]” to tell Ellen to go back, and responds with how he will not do so and “would rather see her dead”.
- **(Cross reference)** However, the fact that he came to Ellen’s house was because he thought it was a personal, intimate date when she invited him (“Why had she bidden him to come early if she was having people to dine?” pg 127) and his intentions were made very obvious in the next chapter when he said that he loves Ellen (pg 139) and that since May is “ready to give [him] up” (pg 141), this means that he has the “right” to want to be with Ellen. However, the only way in which Ellen and him can be together is only through a clandestine affair, which is

exactly what Ellen does not want because although she loves Newland, she knows that she needs to stay away from him (“give you up” pg 141; ), all because she would not want to “bring notoriety, scandal on the family—on [him] and May” and that “one must sacrifice one’s self to preserve the dignity of marriage” (pg 138). Ironically, although this is the dignity that Ellen has learnt from Newland, Newland does not show this dignity and misunderstands Ellen by assuming that she would want to have an affair with him.

- (cross-reference) This is coherent with how Newland is most often mistaken in his perception of women as he imposes his own inaccurate views on them. Give examples of how he misunderstands May’s strength and intelligence—you should know this by now.

### Good script to refer to:

Tan Siew Keen (CG 22/15): Some well-phrased ideas that are linked back to Wharton’s agenda and some good use of cross-references; however she can link to the issues of ‘duty vs desire’ and ‘privacy’ more closely.

### Q3a.

#### Question Definition:

Perverse

- contrary to the accepted or expected standard or practice
- Inappropriate and unorthodox
- What aspects of the Perverse do we see in DOM?
  - Morality: pervasiveness of the corrupted Malfian court and its impact on the characters
  - Religiosity: subversion of Christianity
  - Sex: Cardinal's adulterous affair and Ferdinand's incestuous lust
  - Revenge: characters to seek their own vengeance resorting to violent means
  - Macabre: manifested in dramatic staging of multiple deaths

Inevitably

- ▶ certain to happen; unavoidable
- ▶ Is perverse display inevitable in DOM? What circumstances have resulted in characters resorting to perverse acts? Consider the context:
  - ▶ Rampant corruption
  - ▶ Lack of divine restoration and order

Which characters are shaped by the circumstances and therefore lack agency and are forced to act in a perverse way? Alternatively, you could argue that he is cognisant; he has agency and choice to act nobly but chooses to take justice into his own hands and that can never be justified.

#### Misconceptions / Definitional Challenges:

- ▶ Only demonstrated how the world of Malfi is perverse through relevant textual examples but did not show how it was unavoidable

- ▶ This means that you have to show us how the corrupt context translates to character action in a way that characters are forced or coerced by circumstances to act in a perverse way
- ▶ Are there any exceptions? Does anyone rise above?
- ▶ Rehashed prior lines of arguments made for essay questions on corruption without engaging the key requirements of the question
- ▶ Content overload as opposed to meaningful selection of key scenes and moments that addressed the question in a succinct yet thoughtful way
- ▶ Proving moral transgression does not necessarily show that there is moral perversion. E.g. The duchess defying her brothers to marry Antonio is a moral transgression but the unjust punishment inflicted on her by the brothers who take pleasure in her suffering; that is moral perversion.

#### Lines of Argument:

- ▶ Pervasion of corruption in the Malfian court is due to a lack of divine order as a check to prevent perpetration of misdeeds
- ▶ Lack of divine justice leads characters to seek their personal revenge thereby engaging in more acts of moral depravity that leads to disaster and retribution
- ▶ This is manifested through the macabre
  - ▶ Dumb show and perversion of religious acts
  - ▶ The Cardinal's perversion of the bible using it as a weapon to kill Julia
  - ▶ The perversion of the wedding ring that symbolises everlasting love and how it transforms into the emblem of death through the noose
  - ▶ The anti-masque and perversion of the wedding scene
  - ▶ Tableau of wax figurines where art imitates life (or more fittingly, the multiple deaths to follow)
- ▶ Hence DOM is aptly described to be inevitably perverse.
- ▶ People in power perpetuate moral perverse behaviour so is it even possible to aspire to moral goodness amidst widespread corruption?
- ▶ Yes this is evinced through the character of the Duchess who remains virtuous despite the harrowing punishments she has been put through in a bid to break her resolve.
- ▶ Webster suggests a correlation between morality and perversion in the way in which it is manifested:
  - ▶ Misogynistic attitudes towards women perpetrated by patriarchal oppression
  - ▶ Sexual perversion e.g. Ferdinand's obsessive need to control and possess the Duchess and his resultant descent into madness
  - ▶ Moral corruption leads to the manifestation of perverse actions that culminates in revenge and self-destruction
- ▶ Webster offers an alternative solution of forgiveness as a means to navigate the perversion of the Malfian Court

#### Other interesting points:

- ▶ The way in which Antonio is wrongfully killed by Bosola reveals the insignificance of his death that undercuts the value of his virtuousness

- ▶ Could use this to drive home the point about how the good characters cannot survive in the court of Malfi because of the rampant corruption.
- ▶ The farcical way in which the Cardinal dies where he falls victim to his own doing serves to critique his extremism of wanting full obedience and control over his subjects. This dramatic irony presented shows that the perversion and abuse of power is his own undoing.
- ▶ The ending where Delio remains with the Duchess' son and heir does not give us the certainty and hope of a new future
  - ▶ The illegitimacy of the son's birth, the flattering sycophants who are left behind- can he overcome all odds to purge Malfi of its corruption? Or would it continue to perpetuate? Webster offers us no concrete or satisfactory answer.

### **Q3b.**

#### **Setting the Scene:**

- ▶ Establish setting: Cardinal's abode
  - ▶ "ancient abbey" that "grew from ruins": religious connotations associated with the place and yet it is in dereliction and decay
  - ▶ Symbolism of moral corruption that has taken root in Malfi
  - ▶ Now it has been transformed into a fortress and a "fortification"; think about how this mirrors the scene of the "Cardinal's instalment in the habit of a soldier" at the shrine of Our Lady of Loretto where he dons a militaristic stance in persecuting the Duchess as opposed to abiding by his religious affiliations that would advocate forgiveness and penance.
  - ▶ Webster's commentary and critique of how religion is a farce in the court of Malfi

#### **Dramatic Effects:**

- ▶ Echo that is "so hollow and so dismal and withal": what is the dramatic effect created?
  - ▶ Haunting and discomfiting; foreshadows the disaster that is to come
  - ▶ Ominous repetitions of Antonio's words in an ironic refrain: what is the larger significance of this? A kind of warning? Or perhaps to show the inescapable fatality of the fates of Webster's characters
  - ▶ it is "a spirit that answers": Invoking of the supernatural which is significant given the fact that Antonio at this point has no knowledge of the Duchess' death. Do we see this as a means of communication of the Duchess to her husband from the netherworld?
    - ▶ How is her presence still felt even after her death? How is her disembodied voice a representation of female agency? Could comment on this notion of transcendence.

#### **Cross References:**

- ▶ Bosola tells the Cardinal and Ferdinand that "we are only like dead walls or vaulted graves/ That, ruined, yields no echo." (Act 5 Sc 5)

- ▶ Image that depicts the finality of death that yields no life. This is significant given that we associate the Duchess' echoes in this scene as a reverberation of her presence and influence even after death.
- ▶ This corroborates her characterisation as virtuous and pure amidst the ignoble villains in the play.
- ▶ Delio at the end of the play says, "Integrity of life is fame's best friend,/ Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end" (Act 5 Sc 5)
  - ▶ The idea of "crowning" the end is reminiscent of the Duchess's self-identification as a prince
  - ▶ Her integrity and good moral character extends beyond death and the echoes serve as a motif to glorify and eternalise her.

#### **Other Interesting Points:**

- ▶ Think about how the spatial possibilities of the stage is used to contrast the Duchess' legitimate rule with her brothers' tyranny.
  - ▶ Stripped of political authority, her voice manifests as an echo that runs through an abandoned ruined abbey: is this a representation of the cultural and religious decay of Malfi as a result of secrets, scandal and corruption?
  - ▶ Think about the gothic atmosphere created and how this links to the macabre
  - ▶ The fact that the warnings go unheeded: how does this present to us dramatic irony? How does this foreshadow the horrors of Antonio's fate that is to come?
  - ▶ Her echoes remain: does this underscore the tenuousness of foreboding about the political milieu that would persist even after all the deaths that would ensue?
  - ▶ How does this present the play's ending as unsettled and tenuous?