

English Literature

Brief Overview of the Course

(for further details, please see our Sixth Form Prospectus
<https://strschool.co.uk/sixthform/prospectus>)

Exam Board: Edexcel

Specification web link:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/English%20Literature/2015/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/GCE2015-A-level-Eng-Lit-spec-Issue-6.pdf>

**Topics Covered:
Year 12**

- Component 1: Drama
First readings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams (Tragedy) and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare (Comedy).
Introduction of the Critical Anthology
- Component 2: Prose
First readings of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy
- Component 3: Poetry
First reading of contemporary poetry anthology: *Forward Poems of the Decade* (Post-2000)
- Component 4: NEA
Introduction to coursework

**Topics Covered:
Year 13**

- Component 1: Drama
Revision of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams (Tragedy), *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare (Comedy) and the Critical Anthology
- Component 2: Prose
Comparison of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy
- Component 3: Poetry
Revision of contemporary poetry anthology: *Forward Poems of the Decade* and introduction to either Chaucer or The Romantics
- Component 4: NEA
Completion of coursework

Please follow the instructions in the boxes below. The aim of these activities is to introduce you to the study of this subject at Advanced Level by:

- reinforcing your core knowledge and understanding of your chosen subject;
- encouraging you to think more deeply about your subject;
- supporting you to develop a deeper understanding of and appreciation for your subject as an academic discipline.

Core Knowledge and Understanding Task

Whether you have studied this subject before or not, there are elements of core knowledge and understanding that you must have prior to starting the A Level course.

Please provide a written answer to each of the following questions. There are links below to help you discover the answers.

In this extract from a novel called *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator describes Gatsby's lavish parties. The story takes place in the 1920s.

There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On weekends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York – every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough coloured lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing upstairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colours, and hair bobbed in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names.

The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the centre of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and colour under the constantly changing light.

Suddenly one of these gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes round that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the Follies. The party has begun.

At A Level, we focus on both why writers write in the way they do and study the contexts surrounding the texts.

Having read the passage above, please consider the following tasks.

Have a go at the tasks before scrolling down and seeing the suggestions.

1. The party described above is held at Jay Gatsby's house in the 1920s. We never see Gatsby at the party, but we can infer a lot about him from the description of the evening and knowledge about the time in which the party is set – this is one aspect of context. Find some images the narrator uses that helps portray what Gatsby could be like. Don't forget to explain your reasoning.

2. The narrator of *The Great Gatsby* (a contemporary of Gatsby's called Nick Carraway) is a character within the narrative, and you will remember this is termed a first-person narration.

What may be the benefits of choosing a first-person narratorial perspective?

3. Can you find evidence of language and structure use that shows the narrator's opinion of Gatsby? If you can, can you explain how the writer has used this language to demonstrate Carraway's perspective and influence the reader's opinion of Gatsby?

4. Developing from the above, what do you think of the narrator as a character? Do you like, admire, despise, remain ambivalent about him? Why might the writer want you to think this about the narrator?

Suggested responses:

These are not the definitive answers, but they are suggested aspects of interest. By the end of the course you will be able to read to at least this level of interpretations.

1.

a. In line 13, Carraway describes this as "a machine" which suggests he is unfamiliar with it. This could suggest Gatsby has all the modern gadgets.

b. In line 19, gin - an alcoholic drink which was banned under U.S. Prohibition laws, that ran from 1920-33 - is mentioned. Gatsby flaunts his wealth (and power?) by displaying illegal substances openly.

c. Consider the number of musicians in line 22. All of them need paying which will be a considerable expense. Gatsby has money to burn, yet he is not to be seen at the party. It certainly raises questions about his character.

d. In Line 26 "bobbed" is the style of the hair; "strange" suggests avant-garde. Gatsby invites the exciting and unconventional guests to his parties which may suggest to us he too is avant-garde.

e. In line 42, the adjective "erroneous" suggests rumour and misunderstandings are rife at the parties. Is Gatsby's projection of his character equally "erroneous"?

2.

There are two types of first-person narrators. These are the hero-narrator (Pip in *Great Expectations*) and the witness-narrator (Nick Carraway in the above).

First-person narratives are close to how we live our own lives; we see life through only one perspective (our own). They allow us to recognise that what we see and feel in a narrative is what we might have seen and felt. These narratives are useful for exploring the mind.

3.

The narrator uses quite poetic language from the start "men and girls came and went like moths..." The recount is artistic rather than pragmatic.

The use of the conjunction "and" in "...toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before." suggests a breathlessness and admiration for Gatsby; the images come one after another as though the narrator is looking at the scene now.

The paragraph commencing on line 31 is interesting for two reasons: the tense changes to simple present (In his retelling of the event, Carraway is living the event, and this suggests the party (and by extension Gatsby) has had an enormous effect on him); the sentence structures become more fluid, less standard and more poetic in their structure, again suggesting an admiration of Gatsby.

4.

This is hard to gauge from such a limited extract, but our knowledge of narratorial voices suggests we are expected to be aware the narrator is not necessarily neutral. This may imply that, as the narrative continues, we are going to be asked to judge both the narrator and Gatsby.

We may be asked to make moral judgements of the characters.

This is an important aspect of A-Level literature study as in critiquing others, we may be critiquing ourselves.

The Bigger Picture Task

As well as reinforcing your core knowledge and understanding, our A Level curriculum will expose you to what are called the 'established orthodoxies' within each subject, which can include key research, important people who have contributed to the field, as well as broader methods and theories that exist within the subject.

Prior to starting the A Level course, it is important that you are aware of the following themes and topics so that you can develop an understanding of how they contribute to some of the established orthodoxies within English Literature.

Tragedy

Read *Tragic Theory: A Brief Overview* by Dr Sean McEvoy and answer the questions below.

- According to Aristotle, what is the most perfect example of a tragedy?
- Summarise Aristotle's model of tragedy.
- How rigidly does Shakespeare adhere to Aristotle's rules?
- Summarise Hegel's ideas about tragedy.
- Does tragedy have a place in modern times?

Comedy

Read *An introduction to Shakespeare's comedy* by John Mullan.

- Summarise the key characteristics of Shakespeare's varied comedies and the ways the playwright mixes genres by bringing comedy into his tragedies and tragedy into his comedies.

Tennessee Williams

Read the biography of Tennessee Williams, playwright of the set text for Component 1 (Drama), *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Read the article from The Guardian by Michael Billington entitled *The Quiet Revolutionary*.

- Summarise the key events of Williams' life.
- How might Williams' own life experiences be evident in his work?
- What were initial reactions to the first performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1949?
- What has Williams since been recognised for?
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* is often considered a modern tragedy: how far do you agree? Are Williams' plays tragedies or comedies, according to Billington?

Links to support:

Tragic Theory: A Brief Overview by Dr Sean McEvoy

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/articles/23716>

Login link: <https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/emag-login/>

Username: STRS Students

Password: Longlevens2015

Aristotelian Tragedy

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/agamemnon-the-choephoroi-and-the-eumenides/critical-essay/aristotle-on-tragedy>

An introduction to Shakespeare's comedy

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/an-introduction-to-shakespeares-comedy>

Tennessee Williams Biography

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/a-streetcar-named-desire/tennessee-williams-biography>

Tennessee Williams: *The Quiet Revolutionary*

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/jul/27/tennessee-williams>

Recommended Reading List and the Department's 'Top Pick' Title

As an A Level student, we want you to value academic endeavour (scholarship) and develop a thirst for learning in your chosen subject. Our curriculum will help you to understand that scholarship is not just about learning facts, it is about nurturing powerful knowledge.

We will help you with this by directing you to resources that will not only deepen your knowledge and strengthen your understanding of the A Level content, but also broaden it beyond that of the exam board specification.

Please find the full subject reading list alongside our prospectus on the Sixth Form section of the STRS website here: <https://strschool.co.uk/sixthform/prospectus>. We would encourage you to explore as many of these titles as you can.

From the published reading list, the most highly recommended book(s)/article(s) to read before September are:

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini.

You may also like to read *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams and/or *Far From The Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy in order to familiarise with the writers and their chosen settings and themes.

Once you have read the recommended book/chapter/article, consider the following:

- What did you learn from the reading?
- Have you identified any patterns or made any connections?
- What unanswered questions has the reading left you with?
- Did you enjoy what you have read? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Are there any themes or topics that you would like to explore further?

Other Recommended Activities

Please find below a selection of suggested additional activities that the department feel it would be useful for you to explore prior to starting the A Level course in September.

Task 1: Drama

***A View from The Bridge* by Arthur Miller: Act One**

Miller intended this play to be a modern version of a Greek tragedy in which a central character is led by fate towards a destiny that cannot be escaped.

Read these two extracts from the play; they frame a conversation that the lawyer, Alfieri, has with the protagonist, Eddie. Eddie has gone to Alfieri's office to seek his advice as he cannot see his way out of a situation he finds himself in.

ALFIERI: It was at this time that he first came to me. I had represented his father in an accident case some years before, and I was acquainted with the family in a casual way. I remember him now as he walked through my doorway- Enter Eddie down right ramp. His eyes were like tunnels; my first thought was that he had committed a crime, (Eddie sits beside the desk, cap in hand, looking out.) but soon I saw it was only a passion that had moved into his body, like a stranger. (ALFIERI pauses, looks down at his desk, then to Eddie as though he were continuing a conversation with him.)

I don't quite understand what I can do for you. Is there a question of law somewhere?

EDDIE: That's what I want to ask you.

ALFIERI: Because there's nothing illegal about a girl falling in love with an immigrant.

EDDIE: Yeah, but about it if the only reason for it is to get his papers?

ALFIERI: First of all, you don't know that.

EDDIE: I see it in his eyes; he's laughin' at her and he's laughin' at me...

ALFIERI (sits on desk) There are times when you want to spread an alarm, but nothing has happened. I knew, I knew then and there- I could have finished the whole story that afternoon. It wasn't as though there was a mystery to unravel. I could see every step coming, step after step, like a dark figure walking down a hall towards a certain door. I knew where he was heading for, I knew where he was going to end. And I sat here many afternoons asking myself why, been an intelligent man, I was so powerless to stop it. I even went to a certain old lady in the neighbourhood, a very wise old woman, and I told her, and she only nodded, and said, 'Pray for him. . .' And so I- waited here.

Have a go at the tasks before scrolling down and seeing the suggestions.

1. In the first extract, Alfieri uses a simile to describe Eddie's eyes. How could this simile be linked to the idea of a destiny that cannot be escaped?
2. In the second extract, Alfieri says 'I was so powerless to stop it'. He doesn't specify what 'it' might be, but the audience is in no doubt that there will not be a happy ending. How does Miller convey this in these extracts?
3. Alfieri mostly directly addresses the audience in these extracts, though we also have the first few lines of his conversation with Eddie. Miller uses different tenses in the direct conversation and the addresses to the audience- why do you think he does this?
4. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero has to possess a flaw that contributes to his downfall. In your opinion, what might Eddie's character flaw be?

Suggested responses:

These are not the definitive answers, but they are suggested aspects of interest. By the end of the course you will be able to read to at least this level of interpretations.

1.

If we bear in mind that Miller intended *A View from The Bridge* to be a modern version of a Greek tragedy, then Miller's choice of simile to describe his protagonist Eddie's eyes as 'tunnels' is very apt, as he is trapped on a metaphorical path that will lead him to his downfall. Describing his eyes as tunnels emphasises the overwhelming feeling of inevitability and entrapment; tunnels, through their nature, remove choice from those who have entered them – they must follow where the tunnel takes them if they wish to exit. It is no coincidence that Miller is describing his protagonist's eyes, the organs of sight, in this extract, suggesting that Eddie is only able to focus on one, narrow point ahead and cannot divert from it or see any other way of resolving his situation.

2.

It is through the character of Alfieri that Miller is able to convey a distinct atmosphere of impending doom in these extracts, of a story drawing to an unhappy ending. Alfieri speaks directly to the audience and, though he never reveals Eddie's downfall to the audience, the language he uses has a distinctly sinister tone to it; he evokes a 'dark figure', walking 'step

after step', towards a 'certain door'. Although this figure could represent the troubled and shadowed protagonist, the 'dark figure' is a familiar image, reminiscent of the personification of death and, as such, it is possible to draw the conclusion that Eddie is being drawn towards his downfall – most likely his death – behind that 'certain door'. Alfieri's desperation in the second extract confirms the terrible nature of Eddie's downfall; the lawyer recounts his visit to a 'wise old woman', presumably to see if anything could be done to prevent Eddie's fate. It is disturbing that a lawyer, someone whose very profession relies on dealing with hard facts and logic, would resort to witchcraft and 'magic' in an attempt to find a solution to what the audience must now assume is a dreadful ending.

3.

The switch in tenses in these different situations highlights the inevitability of this tragedy; Alfieri is speaking to the audience in the past tense, as if he is recounting a story: he is speaking about events that have already happened. Alfieri knows the outcome of this story and is just revealing to the audience how it came about. When he speaks to Eddie, it is a flashback to the moment when Eddie turned up to his office; the present tense is used here and the audience listens to the conversation in 'real time', with the knowledge that whatever is said and done on the stage in front of them, the result will be the same; it will end badly for Eddie.

4.

There are clues to Eddie's character in the few brief lines of conversation in this extract, as well as what is said about him by Alfieri. In the first extract, Alfieri describes Eddie, telling the audience that 'a passion had moved into his body like a stranger'. The word 'passion' indicates powerful, potentially obsessive feelings and the fact that it has possessed his body 'like a stranger' clearly shows that Eddie is no longer himself, but is at the mercy of these prevailing emotions. While he is at the mercy of his 'passion', his reactions will be purely emotional, his decisions based on feeling rather than facts and understanding. During the exchange between the lawyer and the protagonist, we discover Eddie's overriding 'passion' or emotion and the cause of it. When Eddie describes his unease about his situation, it is interesting that one of the things he seems most anxious about is the fact that he feels someone has got one over on him and is 'laughin' at me' for it. His reaction to this situation suggests that Eddie is a man who is quite thin-skinned; he keenly feels a slight against him and it seems to be pride that causes his disgust at the possibility that he has been outwitted by someone. It seems quite likely that it will be this developed sense of pride that will prevent him from acting reasonably or considering other points of view – he will not be able to see beyond a perceived slight until he feels his honour has been satisfied. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Eddie's fatal flaw is his sense of pride.

Task 2: Poetry

***Anne Hathaway* by Carol Ann Duffy from *The World's Wife* (1999)**

'Item I gyve unto my wief my second best bed...'
(from Shakespeare's will)

The bed we loved in was a spinning world
of forests, castles, torchlight, cliff-tops, seas
where he would dive for pearls. My lover's words
were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses
on these lips; my body now a softer rhyme
to his, now echo, assonance; his touch
a verb dancing in the centre of a noun.
Some nights I dreamed he'd written me, the bed
a page beneath his writer's hands. Romance
and drama played by touch, by scent, by taste.
In the other bed, the best, our guests dozed on,
dribbling their prose. My living laughing love –
I hold him in the casket of my widow's head
as he held me upon that next best bed.

Have a go at the tasks before scrolling down and seeing the suggestions.

1. What are your thoughts on the epitaph? How does it shape your perception of Shakespeare and of Hathaway?
2. That opening metaphor is gorgeous, don't you think? The list is overflowing and rich. What do you think it suggests about Hathaway's attitude towards her husband?
3. Why would Hathaway be describing her body as being a "rhyme" to Shakespeare's? You might want to consider the epitaph and after what event Hathaway would be saying this line.
4. The next line is exquisite: "Some nights I dreamed he'd written me..." Stepping back from the techniques of the poet, what do you think this line suggests about the relationships between men and women?
5. In lines 10-11, the speaker seems to be very critical of the "guests" – why? Notice the contrast between their prose ("dribbling", even!), and the poetry of Hathaway and her husband.
6. A Shakespearean sonnet's rhyming couplet often includes a 'turnaround'. What is meant by the final rhyming couplet in Anne Hathaway. Is there a turnaround?

Suggested responses:

These are not the definitive answers, but they are suggested aspects of interest. By the end of the course you will be able to read to at least this level of interpretations.

1.

An epitaph is a (normally small) number of lines quoted from another poem that precedes the main poem. There are many functions for including one: framing the poem,

introducing a key idea, acting as an idea to be rebutted by the poet, or even paying homage. The epitaph in *Anne Hathaway* seems to have two broad ideas.

First, it shapes the way we see Shakespeare and Hathaway's relationship. As man and wife, it seems bizarre to our twenty-first century thinking that a man – and especially one with not inconsiderable wealth – would bequeath to his wife only their "second best bed". Therefore, the epitaph reflects Shakespeare as being relatively selfish and even dismissive towards his wife. Being neglected, you might feel sympathy for Hathaway. However, have a read through the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's thoughts on the real importance of a "second best bed":

"In Shakespeare's time, a bed was an expensive and luxurious item, generally regarded as a valuable heirloom to be passed down the generations rather than given to a surviving spouse. In a world where social status was highly prized, people were keen to show off their wealth at every possible opportunity. It wasn't uncommon for the 'best bed' to be kept in one of the rooms downstairs, as a way of making sure all your visitors could see how well you were doing. It was also the bed that would be offered to staying guests, so the 'second best bed' referenced in Shakespeare's will is likely to have been the actual marriage bed, the one that he and Anne shared as man and wife."

That contextual information changes our twenty-first century view considerably. The gift of the second-best bed alters from a 'snub' to a gesture of love and care. You could by extension argue that the poem is set up to explore the relationship between 'expectations' and 'reality'.

Secondly, we need to consider our relationship with Shakespeare as an audience. What we know of Shakespeare is extremely little; what we know of his wife, even less. Although we have his plays and poems, these are only representative of Shakespeare's voice as a playwright or poet, using characters or the poetic voice as a medium. They are not, strictly speaking, his authentic voice. The will is a sole example of his authentic voice crossing through the ages. Most of our information about Shakespeare's life comes from dull, quotidian documents, in fact, of which there are very few.

What does this have to do with our relationship with Shakespeare and his wife? It suggests that in looking back in time, the writer has a responsibility to 'fill in the gaps' of knowledge that we don't have access to. We do this all the time with Shakespeare himself, but rarely is it done with Anne Hathaway. In her collection, *The World's Wife*, Duffy takes it upon herself to give 'voices' to past women who have been neglected – to voice their opinions and feelings, thereby empowering them. Perhaps it is with irony that Shakespeare, as a man, is given the first word in this poem. It might even be with a sense of wryness that the reader recognises that Duffy, in representing a woman from the turn of the 17th century, must rely up on an unreliable man's voice.

2.

You could look upon this metaphor in numerous different ways. First, you could make a link between the aspects of the 'spinning world' ("forests, castles, seas...") with some of Shakespeare's most recognisable plays (respectively, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*). Therefore, the speaker is saying a couple of things here: not only was the act

of love between Shakespeare and Hathaway an aesthetically rich one (think of how diverse and luscious these settings are), but it was also deeply transformative. Their love enabled both to traverse everyday life.

More provokingly, although the metaphor is extended to include Shakespeare diving for “pearls” (presumably his play, or even deeper shades of love in the couple’s relationship), the act of creation is centred upon joint and requited love. It is not Shakespeare loving Anne exclusively (or vice versa): it is a mutual act. The fame, the creative mastery, and the legacy of Shakespeare could be said to have relied upon the strength of love. That is provoking: how often do we infer from Shakespeare’s repertoire that is solely wrought from his creative genius. Is there an invisible woman hidden behind every man? Dorothy Wordsworth, sister of the great Lake Poet, William Wordsworth, and only now a celebrated Romantic writer in her own right after centuries of neglect, would likely agree with that sentiment.

3.

This is a soft and melancholy metaphor in the poem. To be a “rhyme” to someone else is to suggest that you are lesser than them: you exist in the shadow of them, and only because of them. Considering the poem is probably written from the perspective of Hathaway after her husband’s death (remember: the epitaph is his will), the dramatic monologue has an elegiac feel to it – and maybe not just for Shakespeare, but also to her own sense of self. Without her husband, who is she now? Worse, maybe her sense of self is, regrettably, always going to be defined by her husband: she is an “echo”, so just a mere repetition of Shakespeare.

4.

Some critics believe that Shakespeare made the ‘modern human being’, in the sense that he mastered the skill of depicting flawed yet deeply rich and authentic individuals on the stage. His mastery then resonated throughout literature, influencing all and sundry. Arguably, no one has since surpassed him in ability. From this perspective, what might it feel like, then, to be “written” by Shakespeare?

On one hand, it could be deeply empowering. To have the emotional complexity and the humane nobility of Hamlet, for example, would be an incredible thing. To be elevated beyond mere mortality to stand immortal on the “page” could indicate the sense of self-fulfilment that Hathaway secures through her husband.

On the other hand, to be written by a “man” could feel quite unsatisfactory. Hathaway is just a creation – even though she might not even know it. Why can she not stand on her own two feet? What is worse is that she sometimes “dreamed” she had been written by Shakespeare. This could imply that she doesn’t even feel a sense of fulfilment from him, for it is on the distant horizon in imagination and beyond reality. It’s one thing to be defined by a man, and another to ‘want’ to be defined by a man.

The relationship between men and women, in this line, could be summed up as such: a man has the ability to lift a woman up beyond her station, but why shouldn’t she be able to do that in the first place?

5.

Duffy's uses a semantic field of writing/literary methods throughout the poem. The sly allusions to Shakespeare's plays, rhyme, assonance, word types (verbs and nouns), genre, form: Hathaway seems like an accomplished writer herself. Looking back, it is tragic that her gifts (or, at least the gifts that Duffy seems to bestow upon her), were not realised or acknowledged fully. She is an eloquent and skilled individual – not, as some might see it, a provincial bumpkin from Stratford-Upon-Avon who lucked out in marrying Shakespeare. The expectation we have of Hathaway is dispelled by Duffy to show a different reality.

The guests, in contrast, "dribble prose": they are unskilled, infantile, and slightly shambolic in contrast to the magical ability of Hathaway and her husband. They lack imagination. The speaker seems to look down upon her guests, feeling a sense of pride over the relationship she had with her husband. Perhaps she is implying that others – and by "guests who dribble prose" we could extend her meaning to not just courtiers and sycophants of the Shakespearean age, but also critics and analysts – are asleep to the intimate and intense passion that exists between her and Shakespeare. Duffy then could be said to be celebrative of the love men and women have for each other.

6.

A turnaround is used to indicate a change or shift in a sonnet. So, the poet might set up an idea in the first three quatrains (my mistress isn't that good after all (Sonnet 130)), but then contradict it in the final two lines (but my love for her has no match). In Duffy's rhyming couplet, the speaker holds Shakespeare in her head as he held her in his bed.

Despite the elegiac feel of the poem, these last two lines could be quite life affirming. Just as Hathaway was brought to life via Shakespeare's love, so does she render him ageless by not forgetting him. She does, after all, describe him joyfully as her "living laughing love", the alliteration suggestive of a free and animate spirit.

However, the lines could be ironic. Consider the role of a female during this time: should Hathaway be compelled to cherish Shakespeare as much as she does? If not, then her willingness to keep him alive is tinged with sadness. The metaphorical "casket" of her head is less a shrine and place of respect, and more her own casket as she is consigned to death and an everlasting inferiority to her genius of a husband.