***Component 3: Approaches to Unseen Prose***

***Using the Supporting Extracts***

Total collapse/falling apart of **society’s** values and behaviour

Strongly critical of **society** at time. Showing faults – perhaps of those who should know better?

“…the novel is…a deep(er) indictment of contemporary civilisation because it chronicles social and moral disintegration so pervasive that the characters are unaware of it and the omniscient authorial voice reveals it primarily through implication.”

Robert Murray Davis, *Introduction to the Penguin edition of ‘A Handful of Dust’*, 1997

**Writer chooses** omniscient narrator. Implies rather than states.

**Characters** presented as naïve/ignorant/ complacent/blind

Writer intended two-dimensional **characters** or types rather than fully-rounded. Society as whole rather than individuals?

**Writer presents** characters from two perspectives?

“All fictional characters are flat. A writer can only give an illusion of depth by giving an apparently stereoscopic view of a character – seeing him from two vantage points […] I regard writing not as investigation of character, but as an exercise in the use of language, and with this I am obsessed. I have no technical psychological interest. It is drama, speech

and events that interest me.”

Evelyn Waugh, *Paris Review*, 1963

**Writer’s main focus** is on interaction of characters, speech pattern, what happens?

***Period 1918- 1939***

**2.** Analyse the following passage from Evelyn Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust*, published in 1934**.** You **must use** the supporting extracts which follow the passage to help you

consider contexts and different interpretations. [50]

***Brenda is married to Tony Last, a member of the landed gentry. They live at Hetton***

***Abbey, Tony’s ancestral home. Brenda has started an affair with John Beaver and has taken a flat in London to stay in when she visits him. While she waits for the flat to be furnished, she stays with her sister, Marjorie.***

Brenda's stay at Hetton lasted only for three nights. Then she returned to London saying that she had to see about the flat. It did not, however, require very great attention. There was only the colour of the paint to choose and some few articles of furniture. Mrs. Beaver had them ready for her inspection, a bed, a carpet, a dressing table and chair - there was not room for more. Mrs. Beaver tried to sell her a set of needlework pictures for the walls, but these she refused, also an electric bed warmer, a miniature weighing machine for the bathroom, a frigidaire, an antique grandfather clock, a backgammon set of looking-glass and synthetic ivory, a set of prettily bound French eighteenth century poets, a massage apparatus, and a wireless set fitted in a case of Regency lacquer, all of which had been grouped in the shop for her as a `suggestion’. Mrs. Beaver bore Brenda no ill will for the modesty of her requirements; she was doing very well on the floor above with a Canadian

lady who was having her walls covered with chromium plating at immense expense.

Meanwhile Brenda stayed with Marjorie, on terms which gradually became acrimonious. "I'm sorry to be pompous," she said one morning, "but I just don't want your Mr. Beaver hanging about the house all day and calling me Marjorie."

"Oh well, the flat won't be long now."

"And I shall go on saying that I think you're making a ridiculous mistake."

"It's just that you don't like Mr. Beaver."

"It isn't only that. I think it's hard cheese on Tony."

"Oh, Tony's all right."

"And if there's a row - "

"There won't be a row."

"You never know. If there is, I don't want Allan to think I've been helping to arrange things."

"I wasn't so disagreeable to you about Robin Beaseley."

"There was never much in that," said Marjorie.

But with the exception of her sister's, opinion was greatly in favour of Brenda's adventure. The morning telephone buzzed with news of her; even people with whom she had the barest acquaintance were delighted to relate that they had seen her and Beaver the evening before at restaurant or cinema. It had been an autumn of very sparse and meagre romance; only the most obvious people had parted or come together, and Brenda was filling a want long felt by those whose simple, vicarious pleasure it was to discuss the subject in bed over the

telephone. For them her circumstances shed peculiar glamour; for five years she had been a legendary, almost ghostly name, the imprisoned princess of fairy story, and now that she had emerged there was more enchantment in the occurrence, than in the mere change of habit of any other circumspect wife. Her very choice of partner gave the affair an appropriate touch of fantasy; Beaver, the joke figure they had all known and despised, suddenly caught

up to her among the luminous clouds of deity. If, after seven years looking neither to right nor left, she had at last broken away with Jock Grant-Menzies or Robin Beaseley or any other young buck with whom nearly everyone had had a crack one time or another, it would have been thrilling no doubt, but straightforward, drawing-room comedy. The choice of Beaver raised the whole escapade into a realm of poetry for Polly and Daisy and Angela and all the gang of gossips.

Mrs. Beaver made no bones about her delight. "Of course the subject has not been mentioned between John and myself, but if what I hear is true, I think it will do the boy a world of good. Of course he's always been very much in demand and had a great number of friends, *but that isn*'*t the same thing*. I've felt for a long time a lack of something in him, and I think that a charming and experienced woman like Brenda Last is just the person to help him. He's got a very affectionate nature, but he's so sensitive that he hardly ever lets it

appear … to tell you the truth I felt something of the kind was in the air last week, so I made an excuse to go away for a few days. If I had been there things might never have come to anything. He's very shy and reserved even to me. I'll have the chess-men done up and sent round to you this afternoon. Thank you so much."

And Beaver, for the first time in his life, found himself a person of interest and, almost of consequence. Women studied him with a new scrutiny, wondering what they had missed in him; men treated him as an equal, even as a successful fellow competitor. "How on earth has he got away with it?" they may have asked themselves, but now, when he came into Brat's, they made room for him at the bar and said, "Well, old boy, how about one?"