**Section A (ii): Balancing AOs Effectively**

* **Discuss how effectively this candidate has applied the view in the question (AO5) to engage creatively with the text and structure a relevant line of argument (AO1).**
* **Consider how effectively the contextual information is integrated into relevant discussion of the text (AO3) and used to support analysis and enhance a critical appreciation of the poetry (AO2).**

Confident engagement with task.

Outlines clear trajectory for response

Purposeful use of relevant critical view in support

Chaucer’s ‘The Merchant’s Tale’, written as a part of The Canterbury Tales which depict 29 pilgrims travelling to St Thomas a Becket’s shrine, can be described as presenting a serious examination of obligation and loyalty. For example, the issues of the loyalty of women in marriage, the loyalty of social inferiors and loyalty to God are strongly presented throughout the tale under the satirical and humorous tone, evidencing that Chaucer ‘provides malicious amusement at the expense of society’, claims critic Burnley.

Uses critical view productively to explore text.

Develops point with secure textual reference and sound consideration of narrative perspective

Uses outlined trajectory to organise ideas effectively.

Academic style and register

Firstly, throughout the poem there is a heavy theme of female betrayal and adultery. The critic Schleusener claims that ‘May’s fall takes us by surprise and yet confirms our worst suspicions’. Indeed, from the first page of the tale Chaucer’s employment of a Merchant narrator who has a tragic marriage taints the tale with images of women as a ‘shrewe’, the noun reducing women to a rodent and pest to reflect the misogyny prevalent in the Chaucerian period as female sexuality and power was frowned upon and condemned as a result of distrust justified by the Book of Genesis and the story of Eve as Eve eats the forbidden fruit and subsequently condemns man to an existence of pain and disgrace. This concept is reiterated when Chaucer employs the rhetorical question ‘*hir hye malice*?’, the rhetorical question used possibly to create a dramatic pause to reinforce the line to the reader. The use of the adjective ‘*hye*’ presents women’s capability for treachery and betrayal as overwhelming and dominating, condemning all female characters to this standard that women are sinful and hellish and thus should not be trusted. Thus, as the critic suggests when Chaucer writes that May ‘*harde him twiste’* and ‘*warm wex emprented’* as she makes a copy of the key to the garden to allow Damayan to enter, the reader, while slightly shocked as the epithet ‘*fresshe*’ is continuously used to describe May as tender and innocent, is not outright shocked as the Merchant narrator’s misogynistic attitude dominates the tale from the beginning. The adjective ‘*harde*’ is significant as it connotes strength and power which subsequently presents May as dominant and perhaps desperate for Damyan’s affection and physical love, thus depicting women as adulterous and betraying to their vows of loyalty and fidelity. Moreover, the verb ‘*emprented*’ is significant as it reflects May copying the key which is emblematic of a phallus, showing her to challenge her loyalty to January as she allows Damyan to ‘t*hrong*’ inside her, Chaucer’s utilisation of the explicit verb here perhaps used to show the audience the violent passions that women will go to to betray their husbands and fulfil their desires.

Confident, apt support

Perceptive use of terminology

Confident link to relevant historical context.

Biblical refs integrated into discussion of text

Confident analysis of Chaucer’s language choices

Confident discussion of implicit meaning

Creative engagement with text and task.

However, as May is left without consequence we see that Chaucer himself is not a misogynist who is complicit in this idea as he presents January and the Merchant who have been cuckolded as weak and sinful for viewing marriage as a transaction, and therefore it is apparent that the fabliau mocks those of a high social status for failing to be loyal to the Bible’s desire of marriage for procreation rather than lust. This idea is articulated when Chaucer writes that January would ‘*lede my lyf in avountrye’* if his wife was not young and beauteous, the noun ‘*avoutrye’* referring to adultery which subsequently depicts that January is marrying to have recreational sex frequently without sin rather than because it is a ‘*hooly sacrament’*. Therefore, this presents January as loyal only to his desires rather than the Christian morals of the time. This confirms the critic Tatlock who claims that ‘religion itself is bemocked’ as the sanctity of marriage to please God is subverted for indulgence in ‘appetit’. This is strengthened by the fact that the poem is a fabliau with bawdy themes and sexually explicit language which is in contrast to the pilgrims who are narrating these tales on their journey, subsequently evidencing that Chaucer is highlighting the lack of loyalty to Christianity and to morals as pilgrimages themselves became viewed as a method of cleaning sin easily without dedication, highlighting the deterioration of faith in Chaucerian society. This notion is finally seen at the end of the poem via the setting of the ‘garden’ as this edenic in description, subsequently reminding the reader of innocence and purity before the fall of mankind. However, this image is tainted by the presence of Pluto and Proserpina who are classical gods, and thus they challenge Christianity and loyalty to God and the Church as they are infiltrating the image of Eden. This further confirms Tatlock’s statement and also validates the critic Jenny Steens who claims that Chaucer ‘weaves the biblical and classical’ as the loyalty to one religion and to the confessional state within England, tarnished by the use of classical gods. Subsequently, there is no loyalty to God or Christianity in the humorous tale.

Confident discussion of range of contextual influences

Confident, apt support

Confident discussion of critical view (line 19-21)

Productive use of literary context to further argument

Finally, Chaucer presents a lack of loyalty within the patriarchal system via Damyan and May’s affair. As the critic Zeaslin suggests when he declares that ‘Damyan places the old man in a figurative enclosure’, Damayan challenges the social hierarchy by cuckolding January the ‘*knight*’ when he is only a ‘*squier*’. This presents a challenge of the Chain of Being and social order in which social inferiors are loyal to their superiors as the worst insult for a man in Chaucer’s times was to be cuckolded, as this implied that he could not satisfy his wife. As Damyan actively sought May out with a ‘*bille*’ as he ‘*dieth for desire’* and has sex with her in that tree, Damyan is depicted by Chaucer to be treacherous as he betrays his superior and elder in advocacy of indulging his own desires. Thus January is figuratively enclosed as he is trapped in a marriage with an adulterous woman whilst also being locked in the garden where the affair was committed.

Productive use of contextual information to support argument and inform perceptive analysis of text

Biographical context used to make relevant, purposeful point about Chaucer’s language choices and linked to wider, more universal contextual influences: central important of church, social hierarchy

This focus on patriarchy may have been inspired by Chaucer’s own life as he was made controller of the customs on hides, skins and wool in 1374 alongside having a role as a diplomat, and thus he was exposed to high members of society regularly. The fact that the tale is written in English instead of the typical French of the court, or Latin as favoured by the Church, is also significant as it illustrates Chaucer himself challenging the patriarchal system by writing for the middle class instead of the upper class as would have been typical of the time, thus his heroic couplet poem is defiant both in its themes and its format to perhaps advocate a weakening of the social hierarchy which demands strict loyalty.

To conclude, Chaucer humorously mocks the patriarchal system, religion and marriage to articulate a lack of loyalty in society to morals and superiors. Chaucer emphasises the increasing decadence of society in his fabliau to allow for entertainment but also perhaps to advocate a change in ideas, such as his opposition to unsuitable marriages and the patriarchal system.

**AO1: Band 5**

*Clear evidence of creative engagement. Thoughtful, individual response to text. Fully engaged with text and task. Some confident application of literary concepts and terminology. Precise vocabulary demonstrates some flair. High levels of technical accuracy. Academic style and register sustained.*

**AO2: Band 5**

*Some perceptive analysis of use of language and poetic devices to create meaning. Confident, apt support. Confident discussion of implicit meaning.*

**AO3: Band 5**

*Productive discussion of range of relevant contextual influences. Confident analysis of connections between text and context.*

**AO5: Band 5**

*Mature and confident discussion of other relevant interpretations of text. Evidence of autonomous, independent reader.*

**(OER Component 1, Section A, Candidate 1)**

Highly accurate expression.

Confident conclusion