



## Unit AS 1: Section B

# The Study of Drama 1900-Present

## Bolt: A Man for All Seasons

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03 and A05.

### A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

*In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of a selected play.*

*This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.*

### A01: Plot Overview

#### Act One

#### Scene One

The curtain rises on the Common Man who stands in front of a big property basket, implying that he will assume various roles. He addresses the audience directly, and provides details about the time ("Sixteenth Century") and subject matter ("Kings and Cardinals") of the play. He also shows by his actions in drinking More's wine that he, like all common men, is capable of pilfering and petty corruption. More and the ambitious Richard Rich are in discussion and Rich suggests that "every man has his price", implying that every man can be corrupted if offered the right temptation. This is an outlook that More abhors. Rich's philosophising comes from his study of the theories of Machiavelli, which he had been advised by Thomas Cromwell to read. More, realising the inevitability of Rich becoming corrupted by power, tries to steer him away from politics towards a position as a teacher, a suggestion with which Rich is unimpressed. The audience is then quickly introduced to More's family, Alice his wife and Margaret (Meg) his daughter, who are in the company of the Duke of Norfolk. More gives Rich a goblet he received as a bribe, and Rich succeeds in being taken on as Norfolk's librarian. More is summoned to Cardinal Wolsey's palace at Hampton



Court and he sets off by river. Significantly, the Steward notes More's generosity, stating that "More would give anything to anyone", but somewhat ominously he follows this with the remark that "some day someone's going to ask him for something that he wants to keep..."

## Scene Two

Wolsey's boorish and ill-tempered character is obvious from the outset as he keeps More waiting while he sits and writes. Wolsey seeks More's support for the King's divorce from Catherine of Aragon but More, lacking Wolsey's "moral squint", refuses to acquiesce. There is some sense of mutual respect between the two men, but Wolsey's political expediency is at odds with More's sense of the danger of forsaking "private conscience for the sake of...public duties". In the end, More refuses to be cowed by the Cardinal's threats or persuaded by his entreaties.

## Scene Three

After leaving Hampton Court, More meets Cromwell and then Chapuys, the Spanish ambassador. Cromwell, skulking in the shadows on the riverbank, engages More in stilted conversation; his insincere and platitudinous dialogue marks him out as sinister and plotting, but More is carefully neutral in his interactions. The appearance of Chapuys, the Spanish Ambassador, further intensifies the atmosphere of political intrigue and menace. Both Cromwell and Chapuys are aware that More has met with Wolsey and it is significant that both use the same phrase ("You have just left him, I think") to indicate that More's movements are being observed. In this scene, the pressure on More to compromise his beliefs is seen to be increasing. Wolsey's and Cromwell's persuasions come from a political perspective and Chapuys' from a religious point of view.

## Scene Four

More returns home at three o'clock in the morning and finds William Roper waiting for him. Roper wants More's consent to marry Margaret but More refuses. Despite calling him a "nice boy", and noting Roper's "strong principles", More will not compromise to allow a Lutheran "heretic" to marry into his family. More refuses to share the details of his meeting with Wolsey, thus demonstrating a conscious decision to protect his family from his public life.

The Common Man informs the audience that Wolsey has died and that More is the new Lord Chancellor. Wolsey's robes are thrown from the wings onto the stage, symbolising his fall from power. The Common Man's unceremonious bundling of the robes into his basket underlines the fact that a great man's fall from grace can be sudden and absolute. His comment that More is "a saint" who exhibits "wilful indifference to realities" suggests that More will also fall from favour and his saintliness will be immaterial to those who find him obstructing their political will.

## Scene Five

This scene underlines the furtive manoeuvrings of those with a hunger for power. It



demonstrates Rich's move towards corruption, as in conversation with Cromwell (and with a Biblical allusion to the Apostle Peter's betrayal of Christ) he denies More as his friend. Cromwell, meanwhile, explains that he now works as "The King's Ear" and somewhat sinisterly claims that when the King wants something done, he does it for him. The vying for political one-upmanship between Cromwell and Chapuys is seen in Cromwell's annoyance at the Spanish Ambassador's superior knowledge concerning the launching of the *Great Harry*. All three of the characters attempt to glean information from the Steward (the Common Man again) about More. They learn little, but the Steward earns the equivalent of two weeks' wages for his cunning delivery of non-information.

## Scene Six

The king pays a visit to More's house at Chelsea. Ostensibly this is a surprise visit but More knew of it a week before. More cannot be found but is discovered attending Vespers, wearing his cassock. Alice and Margaret fuss over More's undignified appearance, but he is unconcerned and remains calm amidst the fluster. In contrast to More's humility, Henry bombastically arrives in "cloth of gold" and to fanfares. Henry notices Margaret and, aware that she is educated, attempts to impress her with his command of Latin. Upon discovering that Margaret's skills are superior to his, Henry feels silly and immediately tries to reassert his authority by boasting of his dancing skills and asserting his wrestling prowess by boisterously seizing Norfolk. When More and Henry are alone, the king attempts to court More on the matter of his divorce. He tries flattery, reproach, entreaty and intimidation to cajole More into agreement but to no avail. The king is impressed with More's reputation as a just man and values his honesty, but when More cannot be persuaded, Henry ominously warns that he will "brook no opposition". In the end, the King makes his excuses not to eat with the family and leaves frustrated. Alice is exasperated by More's choices, telling him to "be ruled" by his King but More explains that he cannot give in to the King's wishes, stating "there's a little... little, area... where I must rule myself", thus hinting at the conscience that he later will not be able to betray. Roper then arrives and now that he has been offered a seat in Parliament, announces he is no longer a Lutheran and proceeds to speak in language dangerously close to treasonable. Rich appears and warns More that Cromwell has been collecting information about him. He then asks More for a job, exclaiming that he is "adrift". More refuses, aware that Rich is not "steadfast" and would all too easily sell himself to the highest bidder. When Rich leaves, Roper in a typically impulsive outburst demands his arrest. More refuses to take any steps against Rich, outlining his own position concerning the protection offered to all by the "thickets of the law". As someone who stands on the "wrong side of no statute", More believes in the sanctuary of a judicial system which will allow him to keep his beliefs without contravention of the law.

## Scene Seven

The scene opens with the Common Man as publican of the ironically named pub "The Loyal Subject". He conveniently pretends not to comprehend the principles of a man of such "deep nature" as More. He then turns a blind eye to the scheming of Rich and Cromwell in the inn's alcove, his behaviour echoing his words earlier in the play when he stated he would "go deaf, blind and dumb" when he felt out of his depth. This scene between Cromwell and Rich is as much an attempt at seduction as the conversation in the previous scene between the King and More. Cromwell's satirising of Henry's



“No ceremony, no courtship” phrase echoes the King’s intentions but Rich is an easy victim compared to More. Rich is promoted to Collector of Revenues for York Diocese; he drinks his wine and admits (“much struck”) that the loss of his innocence had not meant very much to him. Once Cromwell has Rich in his grasp, the pace of the conversation quickens as Cromwell turns to the subject of the silver goblet that More gave to him. Rich betrays More. The finale of the scene demonstrates Cromwell’s single-mindedness in pursuing the King’s business. The sadistic act of holding Rich’s hand in the candle flame deepens the impression of Cromwell as one ready to abuse power and the fact that he “enjoyed it” demonstrates his lust for absolute control. Ending Act I on such a malicious action effectively foreshadows the treachery which will become evident in Cromwell’s removal of More, a man of “administrative inconvenience”.

## Act Two

### Prologue

The Common Man explains that an interval of two years has passed and during that time the Church of England has been established.

### Scene One

More is in conversation with Roper who, in contrast to his Lutheran beliefs at the beginning of the play, is now a professedly loyal son of the Catholic Church. In a time when such pronouncements are dangerous, Roper’s zealotry puts not only his life at risk but, since he is now Margaret’s husband, hers too. In their discussions, More states he will resign his office if the Bishops in Convocation that morning agree to the Act of Supremacy. But despite Roper’s direct questioning, he refuses to state his own opinion, hiding behind the proviso “so far as the law of God allows”. When the outspoken Roper threatens to voice his opinion, More quiets him for fear that his words may be seen as treacherous. Through this dialogue the audience is clearly informed that the times have become more dangerous. Chapuys arrives, flattering More as “the English Socrates” and hinting that if More were to take a stand against the King, it could be seen by loyal Catholics in the North of England as a “signal” for “resistance” in defence of their faith. In a dramatically effective piece of staging, just at this moment Roper bursts in announcing the arrival of Norfolk with news that the Convocation of Bishops has “knuckled under”. On hearing this, More takes off his chain of office, this symbolic gesture indicating that he has reached that point beyond which he is not prepared to go. Reactions to More’s decision vary: Norfolk is disappointed for the sake of the country; Roper is pleased at what he sees as a “noble gesture” and a “moral” (though not “practical”) act; Alice reproaches him because she realises that for all his legal acuteness, More is a “poor silly man” whose faith in the law is ill-advised; and Margaret, though she intimates that her father’s morality is “a gesture” too much for most people, is willing to support him in whatever he does. More argues that as long as he keeps his silence and makes no statement concerning the King’s supremacy, he will be safe in the technicalities of the law. More asks the Steward (the Common Man) to stay on for a reduced wage but the Steward refuses.

### Scene Two

In a conversation between Norfolk and Cromwell, the former advises that More be



allowed to stay silent. Cromwell, however, maintains that More's silence is "bellowing" through Europe, being widely viewed as a moral stand against the King's wrongdoing, and he cannot be left alone. Cromwell forces the issue in summarizing a conversation where Norfolk had told him that More had given him information about Chapuys' visit to the North of England. He argues that in making such a disclosure to Norfolk, More is hostile to Spain and supportive of the King. Importantly, he underlines that there is no "third alternative" for More, no neutral position between support and opposition for Henry's position. Cromwell wants pressure brought on More to declare his loyalty to the administration by publicly endorsing the Act of Supremacy and Henry's divorce. Cromwell states that he has evidence that More accepted bribes while a judge; he has found willing witnesses in the woman who sent the silver goblet and in Richard Rich, who was given the goblet as soon as More realised it was intended as a bribe. Norfolk realises, however, that he was present on the night when More gave the goblet to Rich and he is able to corroborate More's version of events. Cromwell admonishes Rich for his lack of attention to the details concerning the night the goblet was given and realises More must be trapped by "a net with a finer mesh", claiming that if they can't find the right law to indict him, they'll simply create one. Once again, Cromwell's disrespect for the law shows his Machiavellian affinities and provides a stark contrast to More's respect for it. When Rich takes on the Common Man as his Steward it is a reminder that Rich's star rather than More's is in the ascendant. More's social fall is further corroborated by the Steward who tells the audience that "Sir Thomas More's gone down a bit".

### Scene Three

At the beginning of this scene, the political pressure on More to declare his allegiance continues to escalate. Chapuys arrives at More's home with a letter from his master King Charles thanking More for taking a stand against the divorce of Catherine of Aragon. Paralleling the words of Cromwell in the previous scene, Chapuys tells his attendant that "there's no third alternative" for More, though he believes that More is opposed to Cromwell. Neither Chapuys nor Cromwell understands that for More the question is not one of sides but of personal conscience. More proves his loyalty to Henry by refusing to accept Chapuys' letter from Charles II, insisting that his views must have been "guessed at" because he never voiced them. Margaret enters with a large bundle of bracken (a sign of worsening times in the household) and when Alice appears, More uses them both as witnesses to see that the seal on the letter remains unbroken. More returns the letter to Chapuys who leaves in frustration, claiming More is "unreliable". Alice then complains that the house is cold and scoffs at More's suggestion that a bracken fire is a luxury. The family are facing straitened times, with no money for food or fuel. More, deaf to the entreaties of Alice and Margaret, turns down the Bishops' gift of four thousand pounds lest this be construed as being in the pay of the church and thus treasonous. Roper enters and informs More that he is to face charges in front of Cromwell at Hampton Court. Alice warns that Cromwell is a "nimble lawyer" but More sees his case as "watertight" and Cromwell as a mere "pragmatist", helpless against the safeguards of the law.

### Scene Four

Cromwell, with Rich now his personal secretary taking notes, informs More that he is going against the universities, the bishops, Parliament and the King. More's reply is stony. He then tries to trap More by accusing him of supporting the "Holy Maid



of Kent”, a woman executed for “prophesying against the king”. More replies that his conversations and correspondence have been witnessed and Cromwell realises that More has protected himself. Cromwell’s third charge is that More instigated the writing of Henry’s book *A Defence of the Seven Sacraments* for which Henry was named ‘Defender of the Faith’ by the Pope. More easily deflects these accusations but is taken aback when Cromwell reads the King’s charges accusing him of “great ingratitude” and of being a “villainous” servant and “traitorous” subject. More’s reply “So I am brought here at last” shows that despite his faith in the legitimacy of the law, this is the outcome he had been envisaging since events first began to unfold. Cromwell then dismisses More but his tone is ominous. When he tells Rich that he will “do whatever’s necessary” to reach his desired outcome, he shows himself a master tactician, his amoral logic flawless - either More blesses the King’s marriage or More will be destroyed. In stating “Either will do” he shows himself unconcerned about the morality of the situation or the rights of the individual, caring only for political practicality.

## Scene Five

More, evidently out of favour, cannot find a boatman to row him home. He is met by Norfolk on the waterfront who tells him that he is “behaving like a fool” and is “dangerous to know.” Norfolk is being used in a state conspiracy against More, and More tells him to cease being his friend because he must demonstrate “obedience to the King” and he has responsibilities to his son. More’s nobility is highlighted here as he tries to protect his friend in a situation where he understands that “no one’s safe now”. Norfolk argues that, like everyone else, More must give in to the king but More believes this is impossible and states that “you might as well advise a man to change the colour of his eyes”. More tries to break his friendship with Norfolk but Norfolk says this is “daft”. In the end, More has to resort to repeatedly insulting Norfolk. Roper arrives and announces that Parliament has passed an act requiring an oath supporting Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn upon penalty of treason. More wants to study the wording, hopeful that he may be able to speak the oath without compromising his morality. He explains his position to Meg and Roper where he suggests that if God brings man to a position where his life is to be lost, then it will delight God to witness his “splendour” in death. However, once again More shows that he is a man of reason rather than zealotry by stating that his “natural business lies in escaping” martyrdom if at all possible.

## Scene Six

The Common Man sets a new scene. A rack is suspended and a cage lowered to the floor. More has been in prison for a year and has aged considerably. Cromwell, Norfolk and Archbishop Cranmer sit at the three chairs arranged by the Common Man. This is the seventh Commission to interview More. Rich stands behind them. More will not assent to the Act of Succession, agreeing only that the offspring of Queen Anne are legitimate heirs to the throne as the King in Parliament decreed. He again refuses to explain his reasons and argues that, because he simply refuses to swear, the Commission cannot “lawfully harm (him) further”. Cromwell is frustrated and threatens More that “the State has harsher punishments” but More simply retorts that he is “not threatened by justice.” In an act of petty vindictiveness, Cromwell refuses to allow More to see his family or to have more books. In the final part of the scene, Cromwell contemplates using the rack to extract a submission from More but



knows the king would not permit such torture. Instead he plans a gentler method of persuasion. Rich, thinking only of self-promotion, asks for the position of Attorney-General for Wales.

## Scene Seven

Cromwell allows More's family to visit him in prison. This is his final attempt to win More over by stealth. More's family test his steadfastness because they could have been his foremost reason for diluting his principles. Margaret valiantly tries to persuade her father to swear to the Act of Succession but More argues that he must stand fast against the nation's vices if he is to remain human. He tells his family to leave the country, from separate ports, on separate boats. He tries to persuade Alice to concede that she understands him and his perspective, saying he could die a "good death" if he knew that Alice fathomed his motives. She complains that she doesn't understand, but she finally says she understands he's "the best man that (she) ever met or (is) likely to". More, thinking of others as always, sends half of his food parcel to Bishop Fisher. The family chaotically bids farewell in the face of the "babble" of the jailor's cajoling, the ringing bell and Alice's anger. It is obvious that More realises that to heed their words was his last chance.

## Scene Eight

This is More's trial scene. The stage is set up as a court of law with the Common Man as Foreman of the Jury. Cromwell intentionally lets slip that Bishop Fisher had been executed that morning and More is shocked and grief-stricken. More's silence is once again raised as evidence that he deprived Henry of his title "Supreme Head of the Church in England". More, as he has done consistently, maintains that "silence is not denial" but has a growing sense that the trial has been "rigged in some way." Cromwell argues that since More's silence betokens his opinions, it is an eloquent denial of the King's position. More replies with the letter of the law which states that rather than a denial, "silence gives consent". He maintains that the law must protect the individual and that he must be loyal to conscience and "self". He then equates his "self" with his "soul". Cromwell, unable to beat More with legal wit, calls Richard Rich, who testifies that he heard More deny Parliament's competence to make Henry Head of the Church. More asks for witnesses to this and is told they are in Ireland and cannot be produced. More realises his fate, and the jury, without retiring, finds him guilty. At this point, having "fulfilled all his obligations", More gives voice to his opinions concerning the Act of Supremacy which he considers "directly repugnant to the Law of God", but he directs his anger and scorn at Cromwell who sought his blood not for the Supremacy but because he "would not bend to the marriage!" In other words, Cromwell had no issues with More's views on The Act of Succession but simply sought More's death because he would not agree to Henry's divorce. Norfolk then reads the sentence condemning More for High Treason.

## Scene Nine

Bolt uses the Common Man in his last role as executioner. He chooses careful staging methods - the harsh roar of kettle-drums and total blackout - to shock the audience. The two endings are consciously cynical. In the first, Cromwell and Chapuys exchange glances, then smiles, and link arms, chuckling as they leave the stage. They recognise the politic rationalist in each other, both having seen More only as a man to be used in



their power struggles. Such men are not driven by morals or devotion to principles but by a ruthless desire to exploit the world for their advantage. The alternative ending leaves the audience more challenged. The Common Man identifies himself with the audience by suggesting that the difficulties of surviving, or “breathing”, affect him and the audience equally. He further classifies himself with the audience by using the affectionate term “friends”, and by suggesting that “I don’t need to tell you” that the way to survive is to avoid trouble, implying that the audience is fully aware of their shared attitudes towards self-preservation. The final line, “recognise me” suggests that we all see the common man in ourselves and that all of us, no matter how we may dislike the association, would act in the same cowardly, snivelling, self-serving manner to ensure our survival.

## Characters

### Sir Thomas More

More as depicted by Bolt is physically unassuming - he is described as a man in his late forties, pale, middle-sized with spindly legs, not robust. He is moderate in his movements, intellectual and quick to become delighted. The sparkle of his mind illuminates him. He is described as “debonair” and his charisma and sophistication can be seen throughout the drama. For the audience More’s moral and intellectual superiority is balanced by his easy charm, kindness and good-humour. For example, his teasing of his Steward for drinking his wine is probing but affectionately tolerant too. He knows Matthew has lied to him but responds “mildly” and does not pursue the matter.

There is no sense of self-importance with More, but an underlying sense of self-assurance. When speaking with Rich early in the play, More advises him of the rewards to be found in a quiet life. Here we see More’s perceptiveness as well as his lack of ostentation - he knows that Rich is potentially corrupt and that a career in the political world will probably cost him his integrity, yet he is patient and understanding (in contrast to how Matthew and Cromwell treat Rich). He offers Rich a job as a schoolteacher, and tactfully and patiently explains the benefits of a life free from temptation. In giving Rich the silver goblet, he shows his integrity and his generosity. In the final scenes of the play, when Rich provides this same goblet to be used as evidence against him, and when he ensures More’s death-sentence through his act of perjury, More retains his humour as he feels for Rich who gave his soul, not for the whole world, “but for Wales!”

More is also a warm family man and this can be seen particularly in his interactions with Meg. He shows his affection for Meg when he tries to prevent her from marrying Roper because the young man is inconstant in his opinions and lacking in judgement. While More is firm and forthright with Roper, he is also humorous and respectful of his principles, erroneous as he considers them to be. He is respectful too of Meg’s intelligence and, though he tries to separate his political and his family lives, he does indulge in good-humoured joking about the state of the nation. The scene with Meg in the prison further demonstrates the closeness of their bond. More has been strong against temptation but when Meg draws his attention to the straitened family circumstances, More feels tortured. The final scene where Meg clings to her father as he ascends the scaffold is genuinely moving, as More “holds her head and looks down at it”. The warmth of their relationship and More’s awareness of what he is sacrificing are made all too clear.



More's role as family man is contrasted throughout the play with his role as statesman. As a father and husband he may be humorous, warm and loving, but when placed against the machinery of the state he is firm, constant, and rational. More from the outset makes clear that he did not seek political self-aggrandizement. When he tells Rich that he "was commanded into office" with power being "inflicted" upon him, his view of his role as one of loyal duty is made clear. Rich's scepticism is indicative of the irregularity of a moral position such as More's in the amorality of the political world.

In his dealings with Henry VIII, More is loyal, warm and honest. He loves and respects the king and his devotion to the Crown is never in doubt. When Henry states that "those like Norfolk...follow me because I wear the crown...those like Master Cromwell...follow me because they are jackals with sharp teeth...there is a mass that follows... anything that moves - and there is you", he recognises that More is different and a man of conscience, a man whose agreement by virtue of his reputation alone would be enough to validate the King's divorce. But despite his allegiance to the King, More, unable to "find the other way", stays strong to his beliefs and refuses to support Henry's divorce.

More's wit and legal mind are underlined as he repeatedly defends his position against Cromwell, and his inner strength is demonstrated when he resists Cromwell's threats and temptations. In the rigged trial scene, More, knowing his fate, drops his silence and is magnificent in his repudiation of the Act of Supremacy. As he goes to the scaffold he dies as he lived - dignified, resilient and content to meet his God. In *A Man for All Seasons*, More is a man of many roles - scholar, legal authority, talented statesman, family man, and humorous raconteur. He is neither rebel nor religious zealot, he is unwilling to be a hero or a martyr. At the end of everything, he is a humble man of conformity, integrity, and conscience.

## The Common Man

The Common man is the conduit between the audience and the story. Speaking directly to the audience, he underlines that the themes of Renaissance life are equally valid in a modern context. Through the device of the wardrobe basket he is able to set the scene and comment briefly on the action. Thus in the opening scene he assumes the role of Matthew the Steward, the spokesman of common sense and a self-serving opportunist. He later plays a variety of small supporting roles - boatman, gaoler, executioner - in which his role is that of ironic observer, the man with no delusions, who reminds the audience of his worldly-wise perspectives through his unerring pragmatism. His language is colloquial and straightforward and his humour and cynical sense of self-preservation allow the audience to view him as a Darwinian survivor. He is wily and shrewd, and active only when his own survival or opportunity is concerned. In many respects his inconstancy and disloyalty, and his willingness to move with the tide of circumstances and private opportunity are in direct contrast to the unwavering integrity of More.

## Thomas Cromwell

Cromwell is the archetypal Machiavellian villain. He is a farrier's son and a high achiever within the new meritocracy, but he is a "devil" with a lust for power and an absence of moral scruples. He is first mentioned by name at More's party and it is clear that his reputation precedes him. Bolt sees him as something of an intellectual bully - sadistic, vindictive and sarcastic - and all of these traits are evident in the



manner in which he treats his acolyte, Rich.

He is an expert in double-talk and devious tactics, and prides himself on being a man of action. It is notable that when he is first introduced, he is skulking in the shadows along the riverbank, quick with obsequious remarks for More, unsubtle in his attempts to gather intelligence.

Later, as Cromwell's power grows, he becomes "the king's ear" and his actions are limited only by what is expedient to eradicate matters of "administrative inconvenience". Cromwell's satisfaction in the "rigging of the law" and his encouragement of Rich's perjury to bring about More's execution mark him as unscrupulous, immoral and unjust.

## **Richard Rich**

Richard Rich is the traditional Renaissance malcontent, the man who benefits from benevolence but betrays the person who provided the kindness. At the beginning of the play he is seen to be studious but unsuccessful, ambitious but lowly. More recognises Rich's weak nature and points him towards a career in teaching, but Rich is only prepared to work for self-advancement and fawns upon his social betters.

Rich's reading of Machiavelli at the beginning of the play marks him as a willing disciple of Cromwell. In the scenes between Rich and Cromwell, the audience can see his susceptibility to Cromwell's teaching of the dark political arts. He easily confesses that he has his price and, once plied with wine and career progress, he admits he has lost his innocence and betrays More. Ominously, Cromwell states that, "You'll find (betrayal) easier the next time".

In the final scenes, Rich exhibits the trappings of success - he is "splendidly official in dress and bearing" and has been knighted. He easily swears his oath and perjures himself, ironically sinking to his lowest moral level whilst achieving his political pinnacle. He leaves the court "stiff-faced, but infrangibly dignified", a man of wealth and status but morally impoverished.

## **Henry VIII**

The play is entirely concerned with manifesting Henry's wishes and desires, though he only appears once. In this scene he appears as a young king who enthusiastically talks about himself. He is by turns childishly excited to get mud on his shoes, proud of his artistic and musical achievements, proud of his wrestling, and proud of his Latin scholarship. But he does not like to be crossed and takes it badly when Meg's Latin is better than his own. He is used to getting his own way and in all activities must be first.

His power as an absolute monarch, other people's flattery, and his arbitrariness, mark him out as a man to be feared. He breaks his promise to More "not to pursue him" about the matter of the divorce, and despite telling More that "you are the man I would soonest raise", he allows Cromwell to administer policies based on unashamed self-regard.

## **Margaret**

Margaret is More's favourite. Their relationship is warm and loving and she exhibits



more of her father's character traits than her mother's, being kind, gentle, scholarly and witty. Her interactions with More show us the contrast between the family man and the statesman. She accepts his position more readily than Alice, but in the prison scene shows a sense of worldliness as she admits she has been brought to persuade More to accede to the Oath. She valiantly tries to persuade him, the to-ing and fro-ing of their arguments demonstrating their intelligence and closeness. The final scene where she throws herself at her father's feet is a touching reminder of how much More has had to sacrifice to keep his conscience.

## **Alice**

Alice is the opposite of her husband. Where he is unworldly, she is practical. She does not understand the demands of More's conscience but only sees the family's lack of food, fuel, and heat. "Born into the merchant classes", Alice "worships society" and is something of a harridan, but she is "hot-hearted" and "brave". She speaks frankly and, as the family's difficulties become more severe, she becomes more dignified. In the end she shows her love for More by stating that he is "the best man that I ever met or am likely to."

## **Roper**

First introduced as Margaret's suitor, William Roper is a young lawyer just called to the bar. Roper is a man of "inconvenient conscience", but unlike More who adheres to his principles, he experiences changes of heart. More may be exasperated at times by Roper's desire to ostentatiously brandish his beliefs but he understands that his earnestness and strong principles are heartfelt. More likes him, even if he often questions the validity of his judgments.

In some respects, Roper acts as a foil to Rich. Both are about the same age and both are lawyers but where Rich sells out for money and status, Roper maintains a sense of integrity.

## **Norfolk**

Norfolk is representative of the aristocratic classes. He voices the proper opinions and carries the certainty of those used to power but is "attractively aware of his moral and intellectual insignificance." He is unsophisticated in language and understanding. He is a man of the countryside who knows birds and dogs and hunting but has never read Aristotle and knows Machiavelli's "nasty book" only by repute.

In court, he is outmanoeuvred by the thinking of Cromwell and More but he tries to protect More as best he can. He dislikes Cromwell but is trapped when Cromwell tells him that he is incurring the king's displeasure, and becomes part of the machinery of government working against More.

He is a representative of those who are happy to drift along in life until their world is challenged by ethics and moral responsibilities. When such a crisis occurs, such people will instinctively depend on self-preservation rather than the wider moral good.

## **Wolsey**

Cardinal Wolsey appears only once but gives the impression of being boorish, crude and powerful. More is wary of Wolsey because he knows that the Cardinal will have no



scruples about using his power immorally. He has that “moral squint” that More lacks and is able to see how matters can be dealt with most expediently. In their meeting, Wolsey tries a barrage of threats and entreaties, behaving more like an ambitious politician than a churchman. His crude language describing Henry as having “been to play in the muck again”, and describing Anne Boleyn as “that thing out there”, mark him as amoral and ruthless. He scorns church edict, mocks the power of prayer and intends to force the pope to make a political rather than a moral decision with respect to Anne. He suggests or threatens that civil war will be the outcome if More decides not to support the marriage.

Wolsey is an arrogant man who uses the pretence of spirituality and the church as a political weapon when it suits him. He is expedient in judgement, Machiavellian in methodology, and amoral in matters demanding principles.

## **Chapuys**

Chapuys, the Spanish Ambassador, is a professional diplomat who is self-serving and heartless. He is sophisticated, charming and urbane but carries an obsequious air that marks him as untrustworthy and scheming. He visits More to ascertain More’s allegiances and to recruit him as a political ally, and his charm offensive is smooth and well-oiled. In the alternative ending of the play, the realities of men like Cromwell and Chapuys are made clear. They understand that sacrifices such as those More has made may be noble but that the world is not controlled by noble gesture; rather it is won by insincerity, deception, and policies based on expedience.



## The Themes

A number of themes will be noted in *A Man for All Seasons*. In the above summary some themes are touched on, and these and others may be further investigated.

### **Integrity and Conscience**

The dominant aspect of More's character is his integrity and conscience, recognised by all, even his enemies. Whilst other characters ignore or sacrifice their scruples for political expediency, material comfort or social advancement, More, in contrast, is willing to sacrifice all of these aspects of life to protect his conscience. Cromwell sees conscience as "a miserable thing that lives like a bat in a Sunday school", Wolsey sees it as an "individual affair" and an unnecessary consideration in political actions, Rich sells it for social and financial advancement, but for More, conscience is what guides the individual and it cannot be compromised.

### **Selfhood**

More is the hero of selfhood - a man with an "adamantine sense of his own self", a sense of respect and reverence for the basic morality found deep in one's heart, someone dignified, modest, generous and sympathetic. For More, the self is synonymous with the soul and the soul is the very essence of the person. The soul cannot be yielded - either to enemies or to loved ones - without destroying the person; without the soul life is valueless. So for More, once he reached the "little, area... where I must rule myself", there is no deviation. When he explains his position to Meg, he describes a man taking an oath as "holding his own self in his hands. Like water (*cups hands*) and if he opens his fingers then he needn't hope to find himself again."

### **Law**

The law is viewed by More as sacrosanct, an institution which protects the individual against the vagaries of an inconsistent world. More's trust in the law is his trust in society. His discussion with Roper and Margaret concerning their idea to have Rich arrested sets out his belief, as he argues that Rich should not be arrested but allowed to go free "if he was the devil himself until he broke the law". More believes that all innocent men should find protection in the law and that fairness under the law is one's best defence. Consequently, when he is on trial, he puts his faith in silence giving consent and it is only when Cromwell engineers the law and Rich commits perjury that More is betrayed. In this situation, it must be realised that Cromwell's contrived verdict against More is not merely an act of political expediency to remove an administrative hurdle, but a fundamental assault on the legal foundations that protect all members of society.



## A02: Dramatic methods

*In this examination, the candidate should analyse the playwright's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.*

*The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in drama. This means identifying dramatic methods and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.*

Discussing dramatic methods - advice to teachers and students:

As this section is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail which can be provided. It is anticipated that the larger-scale features of characterisation, structure, language and staging will be most useful in constructing a relevant response in the time available.

### Structure

The two part structure of the play presents the rise and fall of More in a chronological fashion. The audience is shown More's good times with his family and his promotion to Lord Chancellor, his attempts to hide in the law, under pressure from Church and King, and at the highpoint of the drama, his trial and execution.

The play is ordered to provide variety in the scenes. More is presented in domestic and political situations, with characters of varying degrees of power and influence. Thus a rounded picture is built up of More as a family man, statesman, legal mind, and, ultimately, martyr. There are also scenes where More is not present and these allow the audience to contrast other characters' amorality with More's conscience, and they allow Bolt to present other characters' views on More.

### Character interactions

The play is centred on the conflict between vested authority and those untainted by worldly equivocations, as evidenced in More's dealings with the world around him. The character interactions between More and his family are realistically domestic - he is a loving and caring father, humorous, amicable and witty, and, with Alice and Roper, occasionally a little exasperated. These interactions show More as a family man, and the close family bond demonstrated adds to the audience's understanding of the sacrifice that More must make. More's interactions with political figures are in contrast because More knows the value of words and so is measured and discreet in everything he says. It is not until the verdict of execution that More speaks in an unguarded manner of his views on the Act of Succession.

### Language

The play's language combines both sixteenth-century language and realistic, modern demotic diction. More's language is logical and statesmanlike, measured and careful; the Common Man speaks in coarse language, making use of base humour to relate to the audience; the politicians' language is duplicitous and used as a device to entrap rather than enlighten; Norfolk is straightforward and unsophisticated in language to reflect the privilege rather than the ability of inherited aristocracy.



## Symbolism

### **Water and land symbolism** (just a few examples of many in the play)

In the Preface, Bolt states his rationale for his use of water and seafaring imagery, which symbolizes the “superhuman context” of governments and freedom. More finds that he cannot navigate “the currents and eddies of right and wrong” which Roper finds “such plain sailing”. When More returns from his interview with Wolsey, he states the Thames “looks black” and is “silting up”, the image suggesting foreboding as the legal process is being reduced to a deepening channel out in the middle.

When disputing with Roper about his request to arrest Rich, More compares human law to a forest of trees firmly rooted in the earth. He argues that, in contrast to his inability to navigate the waters of right and wrong, he is a forester on the solid ground of the law. To emphasize his belief in law as a guide to action, More tells Roper that “the thickets of law” are a protection from whoever hunts for him, be it God or Devil.

## The Common Man

### **Entertainment, exposition and commentary**

The Common Man is used as a Brechtian device to address the audience in character from inside the play. He is intended to be a universal representation of humanity, so that his self-preserving actions and thoughts, his avoidance of involvement, and his preference for observation rather than action, can be seen by the audience as actions “common to us all”.

He assumes many roles in the drama: narrator, commentator, philosopher and props-master. Though many of his roles may be insignificant in isolation, by giving them to one actor and making clear that they are inter-linked, Bolt develops the Common Man as a universal figure in the play.

The Common Man’s language is a mixture of worldly cynicism, base humour and self-serving logic. The audience finds it difficult to disagree with the logic he presents, even though it is clear that its morality is often dubious. When he deals in aphorisms and proverbs such as “better a live rat than a dead lion”, there is humour in his pragmatism and the audience is involuntarily drawn towards his perspective.

In many respects he is representative of the adaptability and changeability of the audience who, although they may like to view themselves as being morally upright, are more likely to be “deaf, dumb and blind” when their own circumstances are not being directly affected. When we simply perform our duties rather than be true to our conscience, we are all betraying ourselves.

## Use of stage machinery

Bolt makes extensive use of “varied lightings” to create changes of place and atmosphere. Such effects are used to create spectacle in the play. Some examples are: when Henry enters and *the rear of the stage becomes a glittering source of blue light*; when More is to be executed and *The lighting is now composite, i.e., darkness save for three areas of light, the one at the head of the stairs now dazzlingly brilliant*;



when the execution occurs and there is *total blackout at the head of the stairs*.

Bolt also uses stage machinery to make symbolic comments about events. Two such examples are witnessed in the imprisonment and execution scenes. When More is imprisoned, *Iron grills now descend to cover all the apertures. Also a rack which remains suspended and a cage which is lowered to the floor*. Not only is More now caged but the stage machinery of the suspended rack indicates the state's constant threat of torture to the individual. When the execution is to take place, the scene change indicates that *The trappings of justice are flown upwards*, an obvious symbolic reference to the inequitable actions of a legal system which finds an innocent man guilty in the interests of political convenience.



## A03: Contexts

*In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the play.*

*No particular type of context will be stipulated in the question. However, contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.*

The information below is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It replaces some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text and context in a response.

**A twenty-first century audience's** reactions will be governed by the fact that the ideals in the play are as relevant today as in the sixteenth century. Today's audience, through social and printed media and television, is likely to be mindful of the ever-increasing power of the state, the corruption of democracy, and questions of legitimacy of conscience and the rights of the individual against the state. There is likely to be an interest in those enmeshed in political corruption and, because of this, there may be a sense of respect (or cynicism) for those who are uncorrupted.

**Historical context re. Sir Thomas More:** More was a scholarly man who studied at Oxford before becoming a lawyer, then entering Parliament in 1504. In 1529 he was chosen as the successor to Cardinal Wolsey as Chancellor of England. Following Wolsey's attempts to have Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled, More found himself in the increasingly disconcerting situation of being expected to develop stratagems to sever England's connections with the Catholic Church. This direction of policy went directly against More's conscience - if anything, More was a conservative who wanted to reform the church rather than break away. He feared the Protestant Reformation raging through Europe and was actively involved in writings against Lutherans, defending the fundamental edicts of Catholicism; as Chancellor, he was instrumental in the increase in the number of heretics killed during his office.

When Henry declared himself "Supreme Head of the Church of England", thus establishing the Church of England and allowing him to end his marriage, More resigned the Chancellorship. He continued to argue against the king's divorce and when he refused to take Henry's Oath of Supremacy, was arrested, tried for treason and executed on July 6th, 1535. When news of his death was brought to Henry, he is said to have turned to Anne Boleyn and declared, "You are the cause of this" before falling into a state of depression.

For more biographical information on Sir Thomas More, the following links may be of

benefit: <http://englishhistory.net/tudor/citizens/sir-thomas-more/>  
(The following article requires a *History Today* subscription)

<http://www.historytoday.com/ja-guy/sir-thomas-more-and-heretics>



**Literary context of Historical Drama:** Historical drama reflects historical facts but not necessarily in a completely accurate or reliable manner. (“Not truth but verisimilitude is the dramatist’s aim for the stage is the realm of appearances”: William Archer.) Although historical personages, details and situations may be woven into the drama - for example, Bolt’s use of More’s actual words in the trial scene - the dramatic imperative always supercedes the requirement for historical accuracy. Thus time periods may be compressed (note the two years’ passage of time between Acts One and Two in *A Man for all Seasons*), events conflated and characters may be exaggerated or distorted (Bolt treats More as a melancholy, intellectual aristocrat trying to preserve private conscience rather than as a zealot who tortured heretics) in order to highlight certain points of meaning or to create suspense, or for other dramatic purposes. Historical drama should always aim to go beyond its historical moment and deal in timeless truths and universal themes.

**Brechtian theatre and the concept of alienation:** alienation was a distancing effect aimed at by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Techniques of the alienation effect are intended to estrange the audience and prevent them from becoming emotionally involved in the performance, and to encourage the audience member to be a consciously critical observer.

Brecht believed that if he could ‘alienate’ the audience then they would consider the play rationally rather than emotionally, and be enthused to leave the theatre and effect change in society. Some examples of Brechtian alienation techniques are: use of archetypes & stereotypes; use of gesture; placards; an actor playing many roles; breaking down the “fourth wall” on stage by having actors communicate directly with the audience; specific uses of lighting and sound.

For further information see:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/zwmvd2p/revision>

**Robert Bolt: biographical context:** Bolt’s own life reflected the conflict between individual conscience and the demands of society. He became a member of many left-wing organisations such as the Communist Party and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament’s Committee of 100, where he was involved in protests against the government’s nuclear weapons programme. Arrested and imprisoned after a Ban the Bomb march, he was imprisoned for four weeks but was persuaded to accept terms for his release after a fortnight. He bitterly regretted his decision and always felt he had become a traitor to selfhood.

For a more detailed discussion of Bolt’s biography and beliefs, visit:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-robert-bolt-1574410.html>



## A05: Argument and interpretation

*In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the text, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument. This AO is the driver of Unit AS 1: Section B and is of primary importance.*

A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be:

- used with understanding;
- incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion;
- not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion; and
- properly acknowledged.

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing, development, and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

### Specimen Question:

In the play, Sir Thomas More is a foolish rather than a wise man.

With reference to the dramatic methods used in the play, and relevant contextual information, **show to what extent** you agree with the above statement.

In order to construct a meaningful and cogent argument (and to move beyond making simple assertions and offering unsupported opinions) students should use A02 and A03 elements to support and enhance their point of view. Convincing arguments will be based on a secure understanding of how Bolt has used dramatic methods (A02) to convey his message. Students will also encounter difficulties in presenting an argument which is focused on the stimulus statement without knowledge of the context(s) in which the play is set (A03).

It is not necessary for a candidate to fully agree or disagree with the stimulus statement. Indeed, it is likely that a sophisticated argument will negotiate a response to the key terms of the question in a more considered and tempered fashion than is suggested by the stimulus statement.

Contextual evidence is likely to focus on: More's **wisdom** as a legal mind; his reputation as an intellectual - friends with many of the noted minds of the day - Erasmus, Holbein, Colet etc.; More's ideas as set out in *Utopia*; More's unconventional attitudes with regard to education for women; Robert Whittington's coining of the phrase "a man for all seasons" to describe More; Dean Swift's description of More as the "man of greatest virtue this kingdom has ever produced"; perhaps mention of the aspects of More's career ignored by Bolt

- More's polemic against Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation; More's



support for the burning of heretics etc. (Other contextual areas/information will of course be accepted provided relevance is demonstrated.)

- Through his political interactions More is presented as a man of unimpeachable integrity. His conscience stands in stark contrast to the political expediencies of Wolsey and Cromwell, the sycophancy of Rich, and the amorality of Henry. His place at the end as the sole dissenting voice against the Act of Succession may be seen as **wise** - he stayed true to the values that make a man, or **foolish** - he died for a point of religion not worth arguing over. There may be some argument as to whether such integrity constitutes **wisdom** or **foolishness** in the amoral political climate More inhabits - perhaps some kind of “moral squint” is **more realistic and worldly-wise**?
- Through the alternating structure of political and domestic interactions, More, in contrast to his gravity as a statesman, is seen in his family life as a man of warmth, care and good-humour. Interactions with Meg show joy in language and wit; discussions with Roper show his respect for Roper’s principles, if not his insecure beliefs; Alice’s view of More as “a poor silly man” shows an inability to understand his motivation which extends beyond the individual; his happiness at the custards and wine brought to prison by Alice, and his desperation that she should understand his reasons for not signing the Oath, show his love for his wife. Candidates will have their own opinions whether such domestic joy was **foolishly** given up by More’s stubbornness or was a necessary casualty of the **wisdom** of remaining loyal to his conscience.
- The Brechtian device of the Common Man’s interactions with the audience concerning More’s character may influence thoughts about More’s **wisdom or foolishness**. Is it “better a live rat than a dead lion”? Is it foolish to die for a cause? Is it wiser to die a “hero of selfhood” with one’s conscience intact than survive living the life of a “rat”? Is it wise or foolish to agree with the Common Man when he states that the secret to life is “just don’t make trouble”?
- The staging of the rigged trial, the portentous music and the prop of the hour-glass, coupled with Cromwell’s pun on the “rigging of the law”, suggests that More was in a situation where honesty could not overcome treachery. His belief in the law was sound until the law ceased to represent integrity and became an expedient apparatus for Cromwell to realise Henry’s wishes. Was he therefore **foolish** to continue in his beliefs when the law lacked integrity and was merely a political instrument? Or was he **wise** to show that one’s beliefs should remain constant even in the face of the inconstancy of legal process?
- The hero of selfhood - candidates will have their own opinion about the value of selfhood. Some may agree with the Common Man that the self is an equivocal commodity in the modern world and that survival is all that one can hope for - in this case More made a **foolish** decision; others may argue that without a sense of oneself, without a line in the sand beyond which we will not be pushed, life is in itself meaningless, and in such a case, More made a **wise** decision.



## Links

Articles inspired by *“Wolf Hall”*, a modern historical television drama which provides a revisionist account of Cromwell and a less saintly perspective on More. The popularity of *“Wolf Hall”* underlines the enduring popularity of historical dramas:

The Daily Telegraph: *Sir Thomas More: Saint or Sinner?*

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/bbc/11355685/Sir-Thomas-More-saint-or-sinner.html>

The Guardian: *Thomas More is the villain of Wolf Hall. But is he getting a raw deal?*

<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/jan/18/wolf-hall-thomas-more-man-honour-fanatic-hilary-mantel>

Hilary Mantel, the author of *Wolf Hall*, talks about Thomas Cromwell (a revisionist view of Cromwell)

<https://youtu.be/yBdxzPoB5uw>

Marvin O’Connell: *“A Man for all Seasons: an Historian’s Demur.”* Catholic Dossier 8 no. 2 (March-April, 2002). A general overview of More, his beliefs, and some references to the importance of concepts of selfhood and conscience

[http://www.evangelizationstation.com/htm\\_html/Political%20&%20Social%20Issues/Political%20Issues/a\\_man\\_for\\_all\\_seasons.htm](http://www.evangelizationstation.com/htm_html/Political%20&%20Social%20Issues/Political%20Issues/a_man_for_all_seasons.htm)

Summary of Machiavelli’s models for ruling in *The Prince*

<http://www.emachiavelli.com/The%20Prince%20and%20Machiavelli%20with%20Quotes.htm>

