"Explain how three playwrights of your choice use one playwriting technique of your choice to achieve their desired impact* on the audience."

In the play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, playwright Oscar Wilde uses setups and payoffs to achieve his desired impact of both landing a comedic effect and offering a satirical critique of the superficiality of high society in his time. The plot is kept moving by this initial setup of fabricated identities being repeatedly fortified, in increasingly convoluted manners, which evoke a comedic effect for the audience as they witness their web of lies unravel in ludicrous ways.

The setup begins in the play's first scene, which establishes that Jack has been using the name Ernest as an alias in town while he keeps his real name, Jack, in the country, while saying that Ernest is his brother. There is a huge emphasis on the idea of fabricated personas.

> ALGERNON.
> You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

As the scene develops, Jack professes his love to Gwendolen—Algernon's cousin—to which she responds,

> GWENDOLEN.
> Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [**Jack** looks at her in amazement.] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

Here, the setup of misunderstanding over fake identities is fortified. Wilde's intention to comment on high society is further surfaced as he exposes the shallowness of the characters. Gwendolen only loves Jack because she believes his name is Ernest. This is also rendered comedic with Wilde's use of dramatic irony, as the audience is aware that Ernest is not even Jack's true name.

Then, Algernon decides to use Jack's town alias "Ernest Worthing" to visit Jack's countryside estate, posing as Jack's brother, to seduce his ward, Cecily. Cecily responds,

> CECILY.
> You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [**Algernon** rises, **Cecily** also.] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

Again, we see the second side of the misunderstanding developing, tension and suspense increases with the audience's growing sense that Algeron's and Jack's lies will catch up to them. The setup is further fortified, and the pretentiousness of characters is seen, as they obsess over trivial matters like names and lineage.

This begins to pay off when Gwedonlen and Cecily meet and realise they are both engaged to an "Ernest Worthing." Jack and Algernon's fabricated identities then begin to fall apart:

CECILY.
[Rather shy and confidingly.] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLEN.
[Quite politely, rising.] My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

This payoff also builds tension as both pairs of characters, once in love, are now in conflict. At the same time, there is the element of humour as Cecily and Gwendolen who had been bickering, now quickly bond over being deceived, showing the superficiality of relationships between characters.

CECILY.
Are you called Algernon?

ALGERNON.
I cannot deny it.

CECILY.
Oh!

GWENDOLEN.
Is your name really John?

JACK.
[Standing rather proudly.] I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

CECILY.
[To **Gwendolen**.] A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

GWENDOLEN.
My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY.
My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN.
[Slowly and seriously.] You will call me sister, will you not? [They embrace. **Jack** and **Algernon** groan and walk up and down.]

The ultimate payoff comes when Lady Bracknell's investigation uncovers Jack's true identity, ironically revealing that his deceitful alias was his intended birth name.

JACK.
The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. [Rushes to bookcase and tears the books ou
M. Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutena
Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. [Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.] I always told you, Gwendolen, m
name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

Followed by the final payoff in the play's last line:

JACK.
On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

A name-drop of the title that plays on the word "earnest" as Jack is not only acknowledging now the importance of sincerity but also humorously recognising the significance of his fabricated persona.

In *Eurydice*, playwright Sarah Ruhl uses setups and payoffs to comment on and reinforce themes in her play. She highlights the nature of predatory men and the poignant tragedy of young love.

First, the setup-payoff pair of Hades as "A Nasty Interesting Man" in the real world then becoming "A Child (Lord of the Underworld)" is where Ruhl comments on predation. When Hades meets Eurydice for the first time, he appears as an ordinary man.

A man wearing a trench coat appears.

MAN:
Oh. I'm on my way to a party where there are really very interesting people. Would you like to join me?

MAN:
You must be a very interesting person, to leave your own party like that.

MAN:
You mustn't care at all what other people think of you. I always say that's a mark of a really interesting person, don't you?

MAN:
So would you like to accompany me to this interesting affair?

However, archetypally, he is seen wearing a trenchcoat, therefore he can appear as a suspicious character as he engages with Eurydice. He is prying and manipulative—knowing she likes "interesting" people and wants to be regarded as "interesting" herself. He limits and insists upon his vocabulary, using the word "interesting" in almost every line, doubling down on his efforts to captivate her attention.

He looks at her, hungry.

He is even directly portrayed as "hungry" in Ruhl's stage directions—it is in this predation that insinuates and sets-up that he is Death. The Man is clearly set-up to harbour ulterior motives, creating a sense of unease and tension among the audience.

When Eurydice dies, she meets the same man, this time as a child and lord of the underworld. His portrayal with diminished stature and immaturity while having so much power is also commentary on society. This pays off Ruhl's earlier set-up of a predatory man, reinforcing and conveying to the audience her statement of how society empowers those who are unfit for power or abuse it. Specifically, she critiques the role of men, the patriarchy, wherein predatory individuals can ascend to positions of authority.

Second, how Orpheus and Eudryice's relationship was set-up to fall apart even though they were so clearly in love comments on young love.

Even from the first scene, which perfectly encapsulates young love, there is so much contrast between the characters that sets-up their relationship's downfall. They are respectively talkative and quiet, intellectual and musical; they have different ways of thinking.

ORPHEUS:

I didn't know an argument should be interesting. I thought it should be right or wrong.

EURYDICE:

Well, these particular arguments were very interesting.

ORPHEUS:

Maybe you should make up your own thoughts. Instead of reading them in a book.

This setup begins to pay-off when Eurydice dies and begins to realise her dissatisfaction with her first love:

Scene 16

Eurydice and her father in the string room.

EURYDICE:

Orpheus never liked words. He had his music. He would get a funny look on his face and I would say what are you thinking about and he would always be thinking about music.

If we were in a restaurant sometimes I would get embarrassed because Orpheus looked sullen and wouldn't talk to me and I thought people felt sorry for me. I should have realized that women envied me. Their husbands talked too much.

But I wanted to talk to him about my notions. I was working on a new philosophical system. It involved hats.

This is what it is to love an artist: The moon is always rising above your house. The houses of your neighbors look dull and lacking in moonlight. But he is always going away from you. Inside his head there is always something more beautiful.

Orpheus said the mind is a slide ruler. It can fit around anything. Words can mean anything. Show me your body, he said. It only means one thing.

Again, the idea of the innocence of young love and the realisation that, despite its genuineness, it is not meant to be, is paid off. The audience begins to understand that though there's a glimmer of hope for a reunion, there's a lingering understanding that they're fundamentally incompatible.

EURYDICE:
Orpheus?

HE TURNS TOWARDS HER, STARTLED.
ORPHEUS LOOKS AT EURYDICE.
EURYDICE LOOKS AT ORPHEUS.
THE WORLD FALLS AWAY.

ORPHEUS:
You startled me.

The next payoff comes when Orpheus looks back at Eurydice, separating them forever. Ruhl's commentary on the naive and passionate nature of young love underscores the tragic inevitability of Orpheus's mistake. The audience witnesses the authenticity of their love, yet are not surprised by its ultimate failure.

EURYDICE:
Dear Orpheus,

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I was afraid. I'm not worthy of you. But I still love you, I think. Don't try to find me again. You would be lonely for music. I want you to be happy. I want you to marry again. I am going to write out instructions for your next wife.

To my Husband's Next Wife:

Be gentle.
Be sure to comb his hair when it's wet.
Do not fail to notice
that his face flushes pink
like a bride's
when you kiss him.
Give him lots to eat.
He forgets to eat and he gets cranky.

When he's sad,
kiss his forehead and I will thank you.
Because he is a young prince
and his robes are too heavy on him.
His crown falls down

around his ears.

I'll give this letter to a worm. I hope he finds you.

Love,
Eurydice.

Though that was the end of their relationship, the final payoff is in Eurydice's last letter to Orpheus before she allows herself to forget him forever. This payoff marks her resignation to the end of her first love, leaving with the audience a sense of poignancy.

In *Rabbit Hole*, playwright David Lindsay-Abaire uses setups and payoffs to establish important plot points, enhancing the realism of the piece, centred around the grieving couple, Becca and Howie, coping with the loss of their son.

In the first set of stage-directions,

> (Late February. A kitchen with a comfortable living room and dining room nearby. Saturday afternoon. Becca, late 30's, is folding the laundry, kids' clothes, and putting it in neat piles on the dining room table. Her sister Izzy, early thirties, is in the middle of a story, getting herself a glass of orange juice from the refrigerator.)

Lindsay-Abaire meticulously details Becca folding "kids' clothes" into "neat piles". This seemingly innocuous action subtly sets the stage for the overarching plot point of their deceased child and the characters' ongoing grief.

And far later in the scene, Becca says,

> BECCA
> I'm washing all these clothes to give to Goodwill, I might as well save them for you. In case you have a boy. No sense in my giving these away.

This serves as a payoff to the earlier setup. Though Becca has not divulged specific details as to why she is donating the clothes, and there's still a possibility of innocuous reasons for giving away the clothes, the deliberate pacing between setup and payoff builds tension, which evokes tension and a sense of dread in the audience.

Then Izzy says,

> IZZY
> It'd be weird, that's all. If it's a boy. To see him running around in Danny's clothes.
> (beat)
> I would feel weird. You would too, I think.
> (beat)
> I'm sorry.

The setup has been paid off, strongly insinuating a more tragic truth behind the packing away of children's clothing. The subtle yet effective deployment of setups and payoffs leaves the audience with an unspoken, unsurprised understanding of Danny's passing, the catalyst of the play, eliciting empathy and sorrow for his family.

Another setup-payoff pair is when Howie's cherished VCR tapes are overridden and lost. This is first hinted in the stage directions,

> (Becca heads for the stairs with the monkey under her arm. Howie watches her go. He sits alone for a couple beats. Then he gets up and goes to the TV cabinet. He rummages around quietly, looking through videotapes. He finally finds what he's looking for.
>
> He glances up the stairs, then pops the video in. He shuts off the lights, then sits and watches, the light from the TV flickering on his face. He's watched this tape dozens of times. He doesn't tear up. He just watches it, occasionally smiling at something he hears. The volume is low, but we can hear some of it.)

These reveal Howie's deep fondness for this tape, his frequent and careful viewing of it, and his secretive nature in watching it without Becca's knowledge. The scene further establishes that it is a recording of Danny, watched by Howie as a coping mechanism in private. However, any action conducted in secrecy carries the risk of discovery or mishap, which set-up the stage for the inevitable loss of this cherished recording.

In a later scene in the next act,

> Meanwhile, the lights rise on Howie in the living room. It's later that night. He clicks on the TV, then hits play on the VCR. We
>
> hear a documentary on tornadoes playing. Howie is confused. Something isn't right.
>
> He gets up off the couch and ejects the tape. He examines the tape, panic starts to set in. He pops the tape back in and hits play again. More tornado documentary.)

Howie discovers that the recording has been overwritten with a tornado program, resulting in the irreversible loss of the video. This horrifies the audience, evoking sympathy for Howie's loss of something so dear to him. However, despite the emotional impact, the audience is not entirely surprised by this outcome—it is extremely realistic. Given Becca's unawareness

of Howie’s late-night viewings, it was only a matter of time before she unknowingly tampered and recorded over the tape.

Throughout the play, Lindsay-Abaire has established that despite Becca and Howie's love for each other, their grief and contrasting coping mechanisms inevitably created distance between them. Becca’s accidental misstep further underscores this plot point, emphasising how their loss has caused strain on their relationship