

AS LEVEL

Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H059

For first teaching in 2016

Section A – Question 5 **Othello with commentary**

Version 2



INTRODUCTION

This resource has been produced by the A Level Drama and Theatre assessor team to offer teachers an insight into how the assessment objectives are applied.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

The sample assessment material for this answer and commentary can be found on the A Level Drama and Theatre web page and accessed via the following link:
<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/>



QUESTION 5 – OTHELLO

- 5 “Life is not simple, and people can’t be boxed into being either heroes or villains.” Discuss how an actor could use vocal and facial expression in their interactions with others to characterise the complex personality traits of a hero. Justify your ideas with examples from at least three scenes from the performance text you have chosen for this question.

[20]

SAMPLE ANSWER

When questioning the notion of heroes and villains, it is impossible to realise them as separate entities - they exist as antitheses but, by definition, have similarities. In terms of theatre studies, they arguably exist because of their close links raising the wider yin yang argument of good living in evil - in terms of complex and complete characterisation, this must be appreciated in actor performance and preparation. Iago is argued as Shakespeare’s most famous villain - but through the text, Iago is a seeming companion and support system for Othello, and thus making Othello the ‘hero’. We, as an audience, through use of dramatic irony, are aware of the major objective of Iago, being to control Othello. However, a portrayal of a simply satanic Iago would do no justice to the text nor would it show the complexity of the role. To build the catharsis of the action within the text, and make the audience believe Othello is a hero, we must see the bond and relationship, through the medium of visual and aural expression, to both connect with Othello and, become alienated by Iago - this questions the idea of the sympathy for the devil technique used within this form of literature. My argument is that successful characterisation of Othello being a hero relies on our connection with Iago and thus relies on the audience being able to suspend their disbelief of Iago being an actor through effective characterisation and furthermore, understand why Othello believes him in parts of the text through his machiavellian characteristics with not simply ‘boxing’ Iago into the straight villain pile and Othello in the hero pile, similarly.

To understand Othello’s hero character, we must also understand Iago’s character; we must appreciate his motivation for villainous objectives - he has doubts over Emilia and her possible interactions with Othello. This gives Iago the bed on which his hatred grows. What’s worse is that Othello trusts and applauds Iago, specifically in Act One Scene Three, giving him the job to deliver the Senate. ‘Honest Iago’ Othello proclaims - this adds insult to injury for Iago a man who hates Othello. To understand the complexity of this relationship we must see the levels of tension within Iago when interacting with Othello... His objective in this scene is to appease Othello so his body language and facial expression must be welcoming and open ensuring that Othello has no hint of his disingenuous traits. However, there must be a juxtaposition of these expressions when Othello isn’t looking. Shakespeare, through his use of asides, allowed the audience to see the action unfold before them. For this reason Iago must use his facial expressions to the audience to act as asides to the audience. This explores the multifaceted layers of Iago. An ideal rehearsal technique to explore this would be through annotating the text for moments when Othello can be caught ‘off-guard’ whilst pondering Othello’s words and allowing time for Iago to communicate through nonverbal communication with the audience. The scene could be acted out using only facial expressions to show the divide in the connection with the audience and Iago spliced with the genuine looks to Othello. This matches the cultural expectations of this text being able to see the tragedy unfold. Othello throughout this would carefully have to play his interactions so he doesn’t see these asides to the audience - thus confirming the motif within the play that there is a game being played on him. We see hero archetypes as those who hold the power-play but this is not the case. Othello’s strength as a character is his ability to prevail in Iago’s action; he is a hero by proxy and not simply ‘boxed’ as on as the questions statement suggests.

The use of voice can be excellently executed to explore the complex personality traits of a hero with Act Three Scene with the question of the ‘Green Eyed Monster’. There is real scope here for the use of voice to act as a framing device for the power play within the scene. Here we see Iago, the true villain, acting with meekness and modesty with his subtle suggestions of Desdemona’s unfaithfulness and in contrast, our hero is enraged and dominating the scene through vocal dynamic in his anger and discontent with what he is hearing. In relation to the question statement this scene argues that life is not simple here. Through Iago’s characterisation he seems to be the ‘good friend’ and loyal person to Othello, abusing his role as ‘honest Iago’ misinforming Othello’s of Cassio’s actions with Desdemona. Whereas our hero, Othello, is seeming disheveled and unhinged in his anger. Vocally, Iago must deliver with a varying use of pitch and pace, allowing

him to seem as though his is softening the blow to Othello and seeming nervous in his interaction as though his is telling him only through friendship and not actually wanting too. This use of voice can develop in the scene and become more fragmented and broken through delivery exploring the minor objective of making him believe. In contrast we must see the opposite in Othello, as the scene develops the use of voice must build and become deeper and projected further... This contrast in the archetypal roles confirms that heroes and villains are not what they seem. An effective rehearsal technique here could be the actors of Othello and Iago numbering their lines of dialogue from 10-1 and 1-10 in a bid to ensure there is a cross over in the power play. This will allow the audience to see the seesaw effect in the narrative line of these two protagonists/antagonists.

Act Five Scene Two is where villainy is truly exposed. This scene contextualises the play and reveals how all is not what it seems. This scene should be explored through showing a tableaux of facial expression exploring how the events of the play have all had the most tragic effect on all people involved. In this tragedy the hero does not prevail. Othello during this scene must show his tiring anguish for all of the events and we must also see the interactions with Emilia explore his betrayal from Iago. As he learns of the set up by Iago and that his murderous actions are unjust, he must explore this through extended looks of disbelief with his interactions. This is a stripped back Othello questioning everything, linking to the existential context of the play text itself. This should be matched by his use of voice, breaking and cracking exploring the demise of his character... We see no hero here but only by proxy of Iago's simply demonic actions throughout the play. The interaction between Othello and Iago, just before he tries to kill him should be tense, and vocally resonate through the use of pause to show the realisation of Othello as he looks at Iago. Voice is best explored here through the lack of it. The final lines should be introverted as a sign of digestion by Othello of the actions of those around him. This could be best explored through the use of softer vowels through the vocal delivery matched with solemn and relaxed facial expression confirming the feelings of anguish, guilt, torment and fear of Othello's own actions.

Characters are not simply heroes or villains, they often develop into one archetype whilst oppressing and suppressing characteristics of the other. Othello is only a hero in that he searches to do good but badness lives in him provoked by the actions of the villain Iago, a serpent of mixed personalities.

Marks: 12 out of 20

Commentary

There is an effective knowledge and understanding of the characters of Iago and Othello within key moments of the play. The argument presented is over-complicated by the candidate but there is an understanding that both characters are not either one thing or the other in terms of being good or bad, villain or hero.

It is at times difficult to ascertain as to whether the essay is focused on Othello or Iago. At times the focus is on Iago with more practical exploration of Iago and his intentions and character than of Othello.

There is an excellent knowledge of the text and an exploration of their relationship. It is clear that Othello's villainous side is drawn out by Iago – which is the overriding argument presented in the essay. The ideas are interesting and backed up with effective analysis but there is more analysis of the text than the performance techniques and conventions of voice and facial expressions which is the focus of the question. Arguably the candidate has made the essay far more complicated than it needs to be.

How the answer could be improved

The essay is a focused character question which simply suggests that any character should be a mixture of hero and villain in order to be worth watching. A detailed character study is required with each personality trait being explored in relation to how the character point will be presented in a performance using the full range of vocal and facial expression.

Candidates should ensure that the answer gives a balanced discussion between rehearsal and performance techniques.



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