

AS LEVEL

Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H059

For first teaching in 2016

Section A – Question 6

Othello

Version 1



QUESTION 6 – OTHELLO

- 6 Explain how an actor could use body language to emphasise the social status of a villain in the opening scenes of the performance. Justify your ideas with examples from the opening scenes of the performance text you have chosen for this question.

[20]

SAMPLE ANSWER

Othello - Shakespeare

Othello is portrayed as the tragic hero with fatal flaw, but I believe that it is Iago who is the true villain. Without Iago's stirring Othello would not have become jealous and would never have been so enraged as to kill Desdemona.

In the opening scenes of the play Iago is straightaway portrayed as a villain. He is angry with Othello for not promoting him to be his second in command and jealous of Cassio getting a promotion when he does not have the experience. I would show this agitation straightaway by having him pace all around the stage. He is a servant and of a lower class than the other characters and because of this we might expect him to remain passive and towards the edges – the fact that he contradicts this expectation by pacing all around the stage and 'owning' it shows how much power he has and makes the audience concerned about how far he will go to seek revenge on Othello.

Iago is very conscious of his status as a servant but is quick to share that he only plays the part of being the passive servant and really he only behaves like this towards Othello in order to get what he wants. An actor could show this by coming forward and confiding in the audience with open gestures and breaking the fourth wall with direct eye contact. This would make the audience have a connection with him and understand his motivations even if they do not endorse his behaviour. It would be good to show Iago's facial expressions as reflecting all the hurt and frustration he feels at having been overlooked to induce an element of sympathy in the audience. He could lower his eyes brows and rub his head to show how confused he is by Othello's actions. It would be important for the audience to have some sympathy for him rather than immediately casting him as an outright villain as it adds to the depth of the play.

With Roderigo, Iago is honest and open. His voice should be bitter and cracked and he should stand close to Roderigo in a conspiratorial way. He recognises that Roderigo can be an ally to him as he also hates Othello - for stealing Desdemona (the woman he loves) We should see Iago's manipulative ways by having him physically manoeuvre Roderigo around the stage – having control of him and incensing his anger further. He should touch him on the arm as if to offer sympathy but really be pushing him to action. This would show that although Iago is a servant he is a powerful man and one who is pretending to serve in order to achieve his own gains.

When Iago speaks to Brabantio, his language is full of crude sexual references which reveals his lack of education and sophistication. This contrasts with Othello who is very controlled and speaks with military precision at the start of the play. I would emphasise this by having Iago do explicit gestures to add images to the rank words he says – such as thrusting forward in a sexual way when he says 'making the beast with two backs'. His actions are bold and lewd and show the nasty side of his character while helping the audience to make sense of what it is he is saying. This is perhaps a glimpse of the 'real Iago' who is not controlled and keen to dwell on sordid and unpleasant thoughts. His voice should become louder and harsher as he says this and there should be no doubt left in Brabantio or the audience's mind that he is talking about physical sex rather than romantic love. This shows that he is perhaps not able to feel the same depth of emotions that Othello does – making him more a villain and Othello more a tragic hero. He could also do some respectful bowing towards Brabantio to make it clear that he is the servant and Brabantio is the master. On the surface he plays this act as if he believes and accepts it but the audience will recognise that he resents being overlooked and resents his inferior social status.

Towards the end of the scene, when Iago talks to Roderigo he should be whispering and up close to Roderigo again to give the idea of plotting and meddling. His quick changes between overt displays to secretive whispering show how he presents a fake front and how skilled he is at meddling with other people's lives. This foreshadows the dark deeds he carries out in the rest of the play. He might be a servant but he has a lot of power – hidden below his subservient exterior.



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