

AS LEVEL

Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459

For first teaching in 2016

Section B: Question 7 – 1984

Version 1



Question 7 – 1984

- 7 Evaluate a live performance you have seen, explaining how closely the production reflected the conventions of that performance style of drama. At the start of your answer state the name, venue and date (month and year) of the live performance you have seen. [40]

1984 Headstrong Theatre Company, Month Year, Venue

There have been many interesting adaptations of George Orwell's dystopian novel and Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan's theatre remodel of 1984 is no exception. The original novel, which gives a haunting concept of a totalitarian world, is reshaped in this stunning production, which encapsulates the audience in a state of suspense throughout the whole uninterrupted and significant 101 minutes. The original novel is immediately referenced, with the opening a recorded audio of the futuristic appendix of the novel, played whilst a projection of Winston writing in his diary is shown. This direction choice suggests that the appendix is integral to the structuring of the play, and the idea that the party was abolished, whereas in the novel it is purposely put in the end, offering a whole different understanding.

The abstraction of time periods is deliberate in this production, with the beginning and end reflecting the future, sometime near 2050 or beyond, then the main era set in 1984. This social context is shown through the use of neutral, reserved costumes, which also reflects the uniformed, controlled manner of the Oceania state. These are not visually self expressive of the characters, so the audience are put in a position with a lack of awareness. The contrast between naturalistic and stylised acting works effectively to juxtapose the freedom we now have, with the restrained lives of those caught up in 1984, distancing the audience and giving a sense of alienation. Scenes which oppose this are those between Winston and Julia, reflecting how they are rebelling against Big Brother. The closeness between them contrasts with the uniform regularity of life under Big Brother's eye and emphasises how mechanistic real life has become.

The lighting contributes to this, with strobes creating disorientation, to aid the atmosphere of constant uncertainty, placing the audience on an equal mentality to the characters. Time is a recurring theme throughout which is important in 1984, with props symbolising this. One significant prop which effectively reflects the entrapment of Winston is the snowglobe. This gives the idea of lives being frozen and not being able to move forward, and subtly references a wider theme of voyeurism and the idea of looking in on another world.

Technology is dramatically forced upon the audience throughout the duration of the play, but is a deliberate choice to put the audience in different positions, rather than just onlookers. The set is reflective of this mass mediated culture, with a domineering screen giving the contrast of a live feed of what is happening on and off set, and also pre recorded messages from the party. This perpetual background coverage makes the modern audience, in an age of neoliberal capitalism think about their own experiences with technology and the ideas that this kind of control is still existent today.

The build up of atmosphere was essential to the creating of a tense piece of theatre, which Headstrong achieves beautifully. The lack of interval allows the piece to build and maintain ambiance and the unknown, putting the audience in a position of vulnerability, easily manipulating their emotions. The visual aspects add to this, with the frequent blackouts and use of backlighting to create shadows, playing on the notion of looking idea, putting the audience at unease, constantly forcing them to adjust. Aural elements also contribute successfully to building an atmosphere, with continual high pitched static sounds subconsciously making the audience feel uncomfortable.

The whole piece revolves around an idea reflective of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. The relationship created between the audience and the actors is an intimate one, heightened by the use of live feeds and lighting. A poignant moment is when the house lights are brought up, allowing the audience to be effectively a part of the play, addressed directly by O'Brien, giving the astonishing desired effect of willing and anticipation to urge Winston to say something. Emphasis on light and sound, another technique enforced by the practitioner, is used, especially sound and light which is piercing and hypnotising, assaulting the audiences senses. This stimulates an unconscious response from the audience, which is

strongly achieved through the use of violent and terrifying actions and images, prominent in the scene depicting the 2 minutes of hate, and the frightening ideas of subliminal messaging and brutal images of murder, accompanied with a low bass sound which pulverises the audience's feelings, making them question the way they view the world.

1984 leaves the audience with a lasting impression and makes them question their own society and lives, which in my opinion makes it an exceptional piece of theatre, well received by audiences who witnessed this adaptation of a controversial classic. There are implications that the party could still exist, having O'Brien sitting facing downstage whilst the final scene closes, suggesting that it could never be destroyed, making myself question how relevant the piece is today.



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