

AS LEVEL

Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459

For first teaching in 2016

Section B: Question 7 – Hamlet (1) 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 7 – Hamlet

- 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]

Hamlet, XXXX Theatre, DD.MM.YY

The staging at the Theatre was a Proscenium thrust staging, with ten entrances and exits. When the stage was revealed we were shown into Hamlet's private quarters, with him sitting by a record player, which aligned with him sharing a nostalgic moment which then leads the audience to hear the music as an outsider. This was the manipulation towards the music, which set the tone of the whole play, where we were constantly being presented with different perspectives. Then with an impressive reveal we saw a banquet hall, this scene revealed the actor's use of levels and the status of each character. This was conveyed by the hoodie that Cumberbatch was wearing and the way he was slouched in the chair, all the other actors wore Elizabethan clothing making Cumberbatch stand out, showing that Hamlet doesn't want to show off his status and is putting on a modern interpretation of Shakespeare's hero. Whereas usually all actors would wear the same style of clothes, so they would all be wearing Elizabethan clothes and Hamlet's lower status would be shown through the way he acts or speaks to other characters.

Conaghan acting as Hamlet's uncle was shown to be a proud man in charge of the conversations around the banquet, walking around the dining table and leaning over Hamlet's chair. This showed that he had a much higher status and a more assertive manner.

The themes and issues that Shakespeare explores within the text are moral corruption, revenge, appearance and reality and also morality. The company successfully showed the themes of revenge and moral corruption within the performance by expressing Hamlet's feelings and showing how his reactions change in different situations such as when Hamlet acts as if he is a child again, changing into a military jacket and trousers mimicking a toy soldier, and walking across Claudius's work desk showing his insanity. Also the production used appearance and reality by showing how Hamlet reacts according to which characters he is around and when he shares his thoughts with the audience, they had everything else around him in slow motion, showing the reality of his life.

Shakespeare and Brecht's approach are very similar as Brecht wanted his audience to remain detached and critical of the action, rather than becoming emotionally involved. He wanted his audience to think about the meanings of his plays in terms of society and how it could be improved. Shakespeare often wrote tragedies, making his audience feel spooked, but yet again it made them think about the meanings of his plays and how they could stop the tragedies he expressed in society.

I believe that the director of Hamlet used the stylistic theories of Brecht by making the characters and the movements in the play exaggerated. Also a bit of physical theatre was used with the actors using various tempos and including different speeds of movements in different scenes. Instead of using naturalistic speech, Lyndsey chose to use stylised scenes in which characters' speech was suddenly slowed down and there were dreamlike sequences, where actors would move in slow motion while characters were saying soliloquies or monologues. Those scenes were very effective in conveying Hamlet's thoughts towards the audience.

In charge of the video within the play was Luke Halls, who made an impressive display when Hamlet was poised over Laertes and a bubble projection effect exploded from Cumberbatch to all of the other performers instantly, prompting a series of slow motion twists and turns before the effect then began to reverse and the bubble effect sucked back into Cumberbatch triggering his movement to stab Laertes.

The performers used relatively naturalistic acting throughout the play as shown when Brooke used subtle idiosyncrasies such as twitches and using a dart eye line, which slowly became increasingly manic and over stated, and where slightly

more believable than Cumberbatch's use of exaggerated movement clowning around, which was intentional for the performers to convey.

The 'Oh what a noble mind' soliloquy seemed to be less introspective than many of the other soliloquies so Brooke appeared to use direct address with the audience, instead of talking to anyone around her. Whereas some directors may interpret the soliloquy differently.

At the theatre we were put on the top floor, sitting on some black leather like seats attached together like at a cinema and on our tickets it said 'view slightly restricted at times' and on my left were automatic doors that closed as the acting took place. Sitting on the upper circle did not help me with my view point and perspective as all I could see was stage centre and stage right and I didn't have a clue what was happening on stage left where most of the dramatic action was taking place, so I cannot comment on that part of the action.

Within their performance near the start, I found their acting quite confusing and childlike as they had someone dressed up as a stag chasing after a woman outside. This made most of the audience laugh, but I was confused and didn't understand why they added that into their performance.

When Hamlet died within the performance I didn't think the actors set it out well enough. Although I had someone's head in front of me stopping me seeing all the detail within the action taking place, I was closely watching what was happening in the last scene, but I didn't see the poisoned dagger go anywhere near Hamlet and was quite astonished when I saw him slowly dying on the floor.

In my opinion, I think Lindsey had some good and bad ideas; I quite liked the slow motion sequences she used, as it gave the audience a chance to reflect on what was happening and understand what was going through Hamlet's mind. However I didn't like the scenery as it wasn't very realistic and I couldn't tell which part of the stage was inside the castle and which bit was Hamlet's garden. Altogether I think Lindsey directed the company quite well as she put a lot of thought into the actors' costumes, making them represent the characters' class and characteristics.

Marks

AO3 - 6

AO4 - 16

Commentary

There is a clear understanding from the candidate of what they saw but a lack of analysis of theatrical elements. Evaluative comments are made but there is little reference to theatrical aim or effect.

There are a number of issues raised which are not fully investigated and leave the reader thinking why? The effect of ideas or creative decisions of the director are not always fully explored or explained. There is lack of detailed analysis at times of the theatrical aim behind ideas or the performance elements used.

There is an awareness of style and stylistic aims although there is a sense that the candidate was confused by the style and aims of the piece; they fail to explain why things did not work effectively. Evaluative comments are made but not always clearly or effectively justified.

There is structurally a clear line of reasoning. Technical discussion is competent with use of relevant vocabulary.

How the answer could be improved

A more skilful approach is required to the analysis of the production seen. The question clearly requires the performance style to be identified and this must be clearly established before the candidate breaks down the conventions that worked towards this style. More description of what was seen followed by detailed and supported analysis of the theatrical meaning behind what was seen is required. All ideas seen must be explained whether the candidate agrees or not that the conventions used reflect the performance style of the drama.



We'd like to know your view on the resources we produce. By clicking on the 'Like' or 'Dislike' button you can help us to ensure that our resources work for you. When the email template pops up please add additional comments if you wish and then just click 'Send'. Thank you.

Whether you already offer OCR qualifications, are new to OCR, or are considering switching from your current provider/awarding organisation, you can request more information by completing the Expression of Interest form which can be found here:

www.ocr.org.uk/expression-of-interest

OCR Resources: *the small print*

OCR's resources are provided to support the delivery of OCR qualifications, but in no way constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by OCR. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions within these resources. We update our resources on a regular basis, so please check the OCR website to ensure you have the most up to date version.

This resource may be freely copied and distributed, as long as the OCR logo and this small print remain intact and OCR is acknowledged as the originator of this work.

OCR acknowledges the use of the following content:
Square down and Square up: alexwhite/Shutterstock.com

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the accessibility of resources we offer to support delivery of our qualifications:
resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk

Looking for a resource?

There is now a quick and easy search tool to help find **free** resources for your qualification:

www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to-find-resources/

www.ocr.org.uk/alevelreform

OCR Customer Contact Centre

General qualifications

Telephone 01223 553998

Facsimile 01223 552627

Email general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

OCR is part of Cambridge Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge. *For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored.*

© **OCR 2016** Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registered office 1 Hills Road, Cambridge CB1 2EU. Registered company number 3484466. OCR is an exempt charity.

