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A LEVEL
Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Q7 Level 5 (middle) - sample answer with commentary: Hedda Gabler

Version 1

www.ocr.org.uk/drama

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 here: http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242806-unit-h459-31-analysing-characters-for-performance-sample-assessment-material.pdf

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SECTION B QUESTION 7

Analyse a live performance you have seen, outlining the director's interpretation and how effective you think it was. At the start of your answer state the name, venue and date (month and year) of the live performance you have seen. **[30]**

SAMPLE ANSWER

On the 15th September 2016, we watched director Katie Abrahams' directorial vision of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler at the Edge Theatre.

Written in 1890, Henrik Ibsen wrote the play to convey messages about society in Norway at that time. He especially wanted to show class differences and females' status.

The entire play takes place in one location - the Tesman's drawing room. The director of the production remained faithful to this constant location. However, because the scenery didn't have to change, the director chose to small symbolic changes throughout the entire three acts, for example, in Act One, the fire place showed a small fire burning in the stove, however, as the production progressed and tensions increased, the size of the fire increased and was at its most intense at the moment in Act Three when Hedda burnt the manuscript. This was an effective symbolic detail to show Hedda's increasing emotions and her inner turmoil within a family who are not the same class as herself.

A director of this production faces a challenge by the fact that, although most of the action takes place in one setting - the drawing room - there does need to be a distinction between Hedda's inner room and outer room within the same setting. The director for this production chose to use the back of the stage to show the location of the inner room in which Hedda sometimes retreats. Both areas were visible to the audience at all times, however there were effective differences between the two spaces. The inner room was painted in darker colours to symbolise the darkness of Hedda's thoughts. It was also much smaller and seemed more claustrophobic to symbolise how trapped Hedda feels in her new marriage and her role as a wife. It was appropriate that this character's suicide took place in this confined, darker space and it seemed to raise more pity for Hedda.

Spatial positioning of props was an extremely effective and distinctive part of this production. The positioning of the portrait (Hedda's dead father, a military general) loomed over Hedda - it was hung from steel wires from the heavens. It literally hung over Hedda's head symbolising her aristocratic background - a lifestyle that she is now very much disconnected from due to her recent marriage. The portrait looked large and out of place in the environment and this symbolised how disconnected Hedda felt from her new family. When Hedda held the pistol, the director used an effective touch when the actress looked up the pistol as if looking for her father's approval.

The director effectively portrayed the differences in classes that are present in this play. Hedda's expensive, designer-looking dress revealed her upper class background and she also wore small accessories such as a string of pearls. In contrast, small details in the costume choices for her husband revealed his lower class status - such as his broken spectacles which had been repaired by a piece of tape. This not only effectively portrayed the class differences but hinted at the fact that the couple do not have much money. This was further emphasised by small details within the mise en scène such as the faded blue sofa or the curtain that appeared to have been repaired with a patch of fabric.

The production was staged on a large proscenium stage which enabled the director to make use of the high ceiling space to hang items such as the portrait. The venue's stage space also enabled the director to use a back wall that was made to look like the interior wall of the Tesman's house and had a window through which yellow light was shone to signify daylight. The lighting was successful because it showed what time of day it was but the light was also effective because it took on a symbolic effect when Hedda entered the scene and she constantly tried to close the heavy curtains to block out the daylight and the natural world. This helped to show the audience that Hedda is a character who wanted

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to go against the natural order of the day and break free from her stifling marriage and her role as a new wife.

In terms of spatial positioning, the director clearly wanted to use positioning to convey messages about the family's relationships. At the start of Act One, the family members were positioned close to each often within touching distance - this helped to convey the Tesman's closeness particularly between aunt and nephew. The chairs and sofas also seemed to be designed to be close by each other. However, when Hedda came into the scene she would constantly try to change the spatial positioning - either trying to turn away from characters or even trying to move furniture at one point. This was a good way of showing that she didn't really fit into this family and their way of doing things and that she didn't want to conform to the typical role of wife.

In conclusion, the director effectively used many devices to help convey Ibsen's messages about class status and women's position in society at that time.

Level 5

Commentary

The candidate has provided a full range of examples of techniques and creative choices made to convey meaning including set, staging, costume, props, acting, proxemics and lighting. Some sophisticated points are made which demonstrate an excellent knowledge and understanding of theatrical elements, social and cultural context of the play, character and theme. Analysis is thorough and consistent and points made are supported by knowledge and understanding of the text. The work is well-written and the structure is clear. Technical vocabulary is used to support these points accurately and coherently.

Improvements

A more extensive reference to acting which is a vital part of the performance of Ibsen's realist plays would develop the essay further which does appear to end abruptly.

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