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Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Q3 Level 5 – sample answer with commentary: King Lear

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.

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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 A QUESTION 3

Explore how actors could portray the nature of their family relationships at the start of a performance. Justify your ideas with examples from the opening scenes of the performance text you have chosen for this question. **[15]**

At the start of your answer write the name of the performance text you have chosen. Choose 1 of the following:

Theme 2: Family Dynamics

King Lear – William Shakespeare

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg – Peter Nichols

Caucasian Chalk Circle – Bertolt Brecht

House of Bernarda Alba – Federico García Lorca

Live Like Pigs – John Arden

SAMPLE ANSWER

In Act One Scene One of King Lear, we see Lear demand that his daughters express how much they love him. This love test needs to hint at a troubled relationship within this family and perhaps an insecurity on Lear's part, or the first glimpse of his tragic flaw. The test is not about love, but about flattering his own ego so the performer playing Lear should use eye contact to check his daughters are always looking at him-his circles of attention should extend to all of his daughters; he craves their attention.

Actors will need to consider their style of performance and whether it should seem believable, or forced and rehearsed. Goneril and Regan's responses to Lear's test should seem extreme and rehearsed rather than naturalistic and believable because we need to start to question Lear's sanity. When Goneril and Regan speak, they should sound insincere through their use of hyperbole, '*I love you more than words can wield the matter.*' It should be said loudly as if to suggest that the volume reflects the amount of love. It should also sound rehearsed as they have practised this speech and it is not sincere, so much so that they could even take a bow or courtesy. To them, this is a performance. This forced response, in turn, makes the audience question how Lear could believe such exaggerated performances. An audience need to see this tragic flaw in Lear's character from the start - his inability to see his children properly. An audience in Shakespeare's time would have been instantly worried by the prospect of dividing up a kingdom; they had seen years of civil wars to know this would not end well. Today's audiences would not necessarily have this foresight and so will need to see Lear's folly through his inability to judge his daughters' false reactions. It is a trait we will see with another parent: Gloucester, who also fails to see his children properly and recognise their loyalty.

In comparison, Cordelia has to be played in a much more serious and realistic manner - her response has to seem honest and simple. In contrast to Goneril and Regan's volume, Cordelia must remain softly spoken; she is the quieter daughter, *'what shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent',* and she should stand detached from the other two sisters to show how different she is. Her distress at having to do this should be evident through non-verbal aspects, perhaps using anxious gestures such as clenching her first, rubbing her hands together, twitching etc. For her asides, she will need to be positioned closer to the audience (perhaps on a thrust stage) so that she can address lines directly towards them; she should not need to shout but speak in soft tones. Her asides will help to create a connection with the audience so that they feel more sympathy towards this tragic character than the other two sisters.

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When it is Cordelia's turn to declare her love, her lines need to be delivered in a completely contrasting manner to the other family members. Her blank verse should completely contrast with the gushing iambic pentameter of her sisters' lines. Cordelia's lines need to be spoken with pauses. Whilst her sisters might sound rehearsed and insincere, Cordelia is completely at a loss as to what to say. There should be long pauses between Lear's demands that she 'speak' and her answer, 'nothing'. Her sisters could smile in delight at what, to them, must seem like such a failure in Lear's test of love. To the audience however, it must seem the most sincere reaction; one that is spontaneous and not rehearsed.

However, before Cordelia's failure to articulate her love for her father, it also needs to be clear in the opening scene that Lear loves Cordelia more than his other two daughters. Actors need to show this subtext and this could be reflected through proxemics and positioning. At the start of the play, Lear planned to give Cordelia more than the other two, '*a third more opulent*.' It is clear that he favours her. This could be shown through their entrance - Lear could walk close to Cordelia, perhaps leaning on her for support and in return she should seem to be the obedient daughter who is helping her father. Cordelia loves her father and she acts within the social norms of the day. In contrast, Regan and Goneril could enter at a distance from their father.Whilst they might go on to proclaim their love for him; this is not the reality. They could pretend to fuss around him but then get bored and move away. They both view him in terms of his elderly failings, 'his infimity of age', they could both therefore roll their eyes impatiently at points, perhaps because he is moving slowly.

Cordelia's lack of answer should be seen to injure Lear's pride and show how vain/insecure he actually is. He could physically seem to crumple or deflate when Cordelia cannot verbalise her love. It is excessive pride or hubris which will lead to his downfall and we need to see how hurt he is by Cordelia's words. He is a fragile man and his subsequent angry outburst at Kent needs to show that he is now quite unstable and clearly affected by what he views as a rejection from his favourite daughter. The audience need to see that this moment will trigger tragic events within this family and will trigger Lear's tragic flaw. From this point on, it is now a very divided family.

Level 5

Commentary

An accomplished and at times sophisticated interpretation of the opening scene reflecting a full knowledge and understanding of the text and the different relationships between Lear and his three daughters. There is reference to the Elizabethan political context which is related to the argument. There is some loss of focus when the candidate talks about Lear's personality flaws but this is soon refocused. A range of performance techniques are referred to in detail including voice, use of space, gestures, body language, eye contact and subtext. There is a clear understanding of how meaning is communicated through such skills. The relationship of the King with his daughters and the daughters with each other is discussed with effective practical suggestions considered from the differing viewpoints of each character and actor. A well-structured argument with a range of specific moments and practical examples.

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