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Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Q3 Level 1 – sample answer with commentary: King Lear

Version 1

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INTRODUCTION

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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

Some critics have noted that what makes an actor's job difficult in this play is the fact that Shakespeare does not give his characters a past and so this makes their current motives difficult to understand. When exploring roles, it is often useful to portray subtext, but Shakespeare does not provide much information about the backstory of these families.

We do not learn anything about the type of childhood they had, their mother, their upbringing etc. There is no such information supplied in the opening scene about the subtext behind this family and the nature of their relationships, or why the sisters hate each other, or why Cordelia seems to be the favourite daughter at the start. Actors will have to fill in their own detail from the contextual knowledge of women at this time. They should spend a lot of time rehearsing this subtextual information in order to give a truthful performance.

Women would not have had access to any power or status because of their gender. It was a patriarchal society and women had little power over men whether it be their husbands, fathers or even their brothers. This needs to be made clear to an audience and they need to see that such power struggles can cause family divisions and tensions.

We see, in the opening scenes, Lear set a challenge for his three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. He wants to know who loves him the most. The differences between the daughters needs to be made apparent: Goneril and Regan should want to win this challenge. They should answer him quickly. In contrast, Cordelia should be slower in her response. She is not after a reward.

It needs to be clear that Goneril and Regan are partners in crime; they should scheme and whisper together in secret whereas Cordelia is very different to them and so should stand apart to show this division.

There are many divisions in the opening scenes between brothers and sisters, not just in Lear's family. When we first see Edmund (who was born out of wedlock) he is unhappy about his half brother Edgar because Edgar will inherit their father's wealth. It seems that most of the children are focused upon money and are greedy and this causes tensions between siblings. Edmund should also act in a secretive and dishonest manner just like Goneril and Regan. He could wear clothes to suggest the idea that he is greedy.

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Gloucester has a child (Edgar) who is loyal to him, just like Cordelia is loyal to Lear and we need to see this in the opening scenes. He also has child who will do him harm (Edmund), just like Goneril and Regan. However, the fathers do not see the truth and they mistake their children and their loyalty. Gloucester should seem easily fooled by Edmund's lies during their interactions. Perhaps he could even act a little deaf, as if he can't hear properly. Both fathers should also wear glasses to suggest a metaphorical blindness which will later be developed in the play, especially in the famous storm scene.

The family relationships and divisions are all about power. Goneril and Regan want to take the power from their father and Edmund wants to take control from his father. Therefore, these children need to act superior when talking to their fathers. They need to appear powerful and power-hungry perhaps through their costume choices and the way they stand. Cordelia does not seem to be as power-hungry and so should instantly be seen as more simple and undemanding in comparison to her sisters. This would make an audience side with Cordelia rather than Goneril and Regan and then feel sorry for her when she meets her tragic ending.

Level 1

Commentary

There is a competent knowledge and understanding of the two different family relationships in the play – Lear and his daughters and Gloucester and his son. Neither are developed or explored in any depth of detail and whilst there is reference to subtext, there is a lack of discussion of techniques and conventions to be used by the actors to convey meaning. There is reference to the cultural and social context in terms of the role of women and knowledge of the text but little in relation to a theatrical performance of that text.

Improvements

Improvements would centre on the need to discuss the relationship between Lear and his daughters focusing on the differences in his relationship with Cordelia and his two older daughters and then explore how these differences would be conveyed through a range of performance and production techniques.

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