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Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Question 4 Level 5 sample answer with commentary: Caucasian Chalk Circle

Version 1

www.ocr.org.uk/drama

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 4

Explain how an actor playing a leading role could communicate tension within the family. Justify your ideas with examples from at least three scenes from the performance text you have chosen for this question. **[15]**

SAMPLE ANSWER

Theme 2: Family Dynamics

Brecht wanted to reject the classical Aristotelian idea of drama which focuses upon stories about individual characters. To this end, he did not want audiences to identify with certain characters, instead he wanted them to witness the characters and, rather than identify with them, he wanted them to consider their situation in terms of their social conditions. Theatre was a political tool for Brecht in order to prompt social improvements. Therefore, when considering how to convey family tensions, Brecht's political intentions must be considered.

When presenting the Governor's wife, an actor needs to think carefully about how to present this role in terms of her family relationships. When we first see Natella in Act One, she should not be presented as a believable, loving mother. Instead, she needs to be shown as a device by which to promote Brecht's political messages - in particular his Marxist ideas about the ruling classes.

Brecht wanted to show, through characters such as the Governor and his wife, that the ruling classes had little humanity or sympathy for others, especially those beneath them. This lack of humanity should be conveyed in their family interactions and family tensions.

In Act One Scene Two, when actors perform the Governor and his wife as they leave their palace to go to Church, the audience need to see Natella's tensions towards her own child. When carrying him and interacting with him, the Governor's wife should seem stiff in her movements and cold. She should barely look at the child and instead seem more focused upon her own appearance and needs, perhaps constantly checking her hair and make-up as well as looking around material possessions such as the area where a 'new wing' is to be built on her house. When her child coughs, she could leap back in fear of catching germs from him. Whilst she wants to receive medical advice about his cough, she is only doing so because she realises how financially important this child is - he will inherit everything - it is not out of love or concern for her baby. This lack of maternal instinct needs to be conveyed to the audience in order to contrast sharply with the unconditional love Grusha will later display towards the child.

Natella should try to get other characters to hold her child whilst she performs her own actions and should always try to keep a slight distance between herself and the child. Whilst she is the natural mother of this child, her attitudes and actions towards him should appear very unnatural and imply a tension between the two. This can be effectively shown through spatial positioning.

This loss of humanity within the ruling classes should also be evident in her relationship with her husband. When talking about her husband, she should seem angry and jealous, suggesting more tensions and divisions within the family; there is little love present within these people. She should speak in a sulky voice as she whines that her husband 'will only build for his little Michael.' She should constantly seem unhappy with what her husband has provided for her and even calls the palace she lives in a 'slum'. She should look at everything with a distasteful look to show the tension and lack of affection she feels towards her family members. This was Brecht's criticism of the uncaring, insensitive and selfish ruling classes.

When Natella realises that she is in danger and must flee, her child is the last thing on her mind. She should be more interested in material possessions such as her dresses than her child. When she interacts with material possessions and props, she should hold them almost like she is cradling her child. She should carefully and delicately pack away her dresses which would contrast sharply to how stiffly she holds her real child. She places more value on her dresses than she does her child.

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When we see Natella again in Act Five Scene Five, she should seem like the same cold, harsh mother we saw in Act One, however, this time it should seem like the only motive she has in getting her child back is because he now has some financial worth to her; she needs to secure his return in order to take over the Governor's former estates. When it is explained that a 'servant' has abducted her baby, Natella should shudder at the word 'servant'. This will show that she is not really upset that she lost her child, more upset that it was a member of the lower class who looked after the child. Her facial expressions should reveal her horror at this thought and her contempt towards lower classes.

When Natella first sees the child again, after his abduction, she calls the child an 'it' - '*it's in rags*.' This again reveals the lack of maternal feelings she has towards her son and the lack of love she has towards him. She should turn away from him as if repulsed by his common appearance. She should use facial expressions to convey her horror at what he is wearing. She should not behave like a mother who has been estranged from her child. Again, she could try to maintain a distance between herself and her child.

When Azdak then draws the chalk circle in order to decide who the real mother is to Michael, the Governor's wife has no problems pulling the child out of the circle to claim her possession. She should pull strongly and harshly, not for one minute considering the harm she could do to her child with such violent actions. This should be in complete contrast to Grusha who refuses to pull because she asks, '*am I tear him to pieces?*' Natella does not think about her child in this way nor does she really care about him. To her, at this point, it is not about winning back her child, it is winning back a possession over a poor person. Natella could even wipe her hands after pulling him to suggest that she doesn't really want him, she just wanted to win. She could even stand back from him as if he smells, just like the common people she complained about at the start of the scene and how their smells, '*brings on my migraines*.' She should always remain distant from him.

All of Natella's interactions with her child must help to reveal the tensions and divisions within this family unit because this portrayal of an uncaring mother will support Brecht's political ideas of an unsympathetic and uncaring ruling class.

Level 5

Commentary

There is knowledge and understanding of Brechtian principles which is reflected in the development of the essay and the role of Natella. How the role should be played is given in detail and reflects an understanding of how performance techniques are used to communicate ideas. Three scene are discussed in depth and how the character demonstrates the tension between her role as a mother and her child.

Improvements

The candidate should look for any moments where further detail in terms of performance skills could be added.

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