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Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Question 5 Level 5 sample answer with commentary: Othello

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 5

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 3: Heroes and Villains

It is important when considering the role of Othello as a hero to acknowledge that, even though the term 'hero' is being used, he is far from perfect and an actor must show this depth to the audience. Othello is a tragic hero with flaws and an actor should use a variety of acting techniques to help convey this depth of character to an audience so that he is presented as a fully rounded being; rather than a stereotype of one-dimensional character.

Many would argue that jealousy is Othello's main flaw and it is this jealousy that will lead to his downfall and the death of his wife. However, it is important not to approach this interpretation in too simplistic a manner. Whilst this aspect may be a major flaw of Othello's, it is not the only one and actors should look deeper and use rehearsal techniques to also spot smaller flaws and his emotional depth and range.

At the start of the play, Othello is clearly a military man and is used to the rules and strict discipline of his military background. It is because of this disciplined, military approach, he sees things in black and white and never looks for the grey areas in between. Despite being a proficient warrior on the battlefield, he lacks the skills to navigate relationships and he is often very gullible in aspects not relating to warfare. He believes what people tell him without question and we see this happen extensively when Iago begins to tell him lies about his wife. Therefore, an actor could use a rehearsal technique to help explore Othello's gullibility. An actor playing Othello could be asked to improvise a conversation with Iago. Iago must spend the conversation making up rumours and lies about Desdemona and Cassio. Ask the actor playing Othello to have a pen and piece of paper and he should write down only the inflammatory words that he seems to hear from this conversation or the words that will start to make him jealous. This rehearsal technique would help the actors explore how part of Othello's gullibility is his quick response to Iago's words, the jealousy that quickly enters his body. Instead of listening to all words and questioning them, he listens to certain parts and reacts in an unmeasured and irrational manner. It is this flaw that Iago is able to easily manipulate.

An actor must understand that Othello's hamartia or his tragic flaw is that the jealousy he feels so quickly builds and enables his vulnerability or his ability to be tricked. Once jealousy strikes, he is no longer measured and rational. It seems that his military instinct to fight then comes out and he can no longer act in a measured way. This depth of emotion could be explored by using movement. Once jealously has entered his body, Othello should adopt positions that we would see someone in the military use. His body must stiffen, as if he is on a parade ground. He must stand tall and still. He could even use a slight march as he moves. The audience has to realise that it is the aggressive fighter that it brought out by Iago's lies, not the loving husband. Othello instantly switches to military mode because of jealousy. An actor could try to explore this switch using a rehearsal game. They could pretend that they are an action figure toy. They should imagine that they have a switch on their back. When one person presses this switch, they should instantly adopt the movements and gestures of a skilled military man. However, when this switch is pressed again, they should become a civilian; a kind and loving husband. Some critics have argued that Othello could possess savage and instinctual passions relating to his Moorish ancestry and this game could be extended further to show that when the button is flicked, he must act in a more instinctual and savage manner. Actors could think about how the movements and gestures change and transfer this into a performance to show the changes in Othello once jealousy enters his body.

By using such rehearsal techniques, an actor will start to see the emotional depth of the role. Othello has the capacity to show a romantic side and is, at times, sometimes poetic. When he talks about Desdemona he has the capacity to use romantic and even metaphysical language, 'you chaste stars', 'it is the very error of the moon.' Such romantic words and images seem a world away from a the savage Moor or the skilled soldier. Therefore, an actor needs to convey the softer

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side to his character at points. His vocals could change, he should adopt softer, even quieter tones and look up towards the sky (over the auditorium) when delivering such lines. He should also be positioned closer to the audience (perhaps on the edge of a thrust stage) when making such softer comments so that they clearly see a different and softer side to the man. This will add depth to the role and even make an audience more sympathetic when they start to see the jealousy take over the softer elements of his nature. Iago could perhaps view such softer moments and his vulnerability and even smile when such words are mentioned, as if thinking that he can easily manipulate someone who has a softer nature such as this.

Another way of portraying the depth of this character and how easily Iago preys on his nature is to show the idea of him being a man who is not very observant. Whereas Iago could be constantly moving around the stage and looking all around, intently watching people as they speak, Othello could be the opposite. He could, at points, seem to stare into space. Rather than think or dwell on matters inside his head, he should look outward and seem free from introspection or the inner scheming of Iago's mind. It is because of this outward looking nature and his lack of scrutiny or analysis that he acts on impulse and does not think through his actions. He has to be shown as spontaneous in his movements and gestures. As soon as a thought seizes him, he acts upon it. Therefore, his dialogue should be performed in a swift manner and his movements should often seem spontaneous and without thought. The culmination of this fast action and lack of thought will be seen in Act Five Scene Two. In the conversation the couple have before her death, Othello's lines should be quick and rapid, Desdemona's answers could have pauses and seem more drawn out, almost sleepy sounding at first to show that she just woken up. Once Othello announces, 'thou art to die', he should seem mechanical and efficient in his actions, when she tries to persuade him not to do it in emotional and frantic tones, his voice should remain steady and calm. He does not give thought to his actions and he will not change his course of action. Just before he kills her, she asks if she can say a prayer and he replies that 'it is too late'. The audience need to see that he wants to perform this action promptly without hesitation because he is not thinking about it. The sound of a ticking clock could be heard in the background as if he is working to a precise military schedule. Once he has done the deed, he could even check his watch. He is now treating the death as a military task that needs completing.

In conclusion, it is important that, when approaching the role of Othello, an actor does not treat the role as a simplistic hero. Othello is much more complicated than this. He is a hero with flaws, a man who is both a professional fighter and a romantic. His main flaw is that he struggles to balance all of this aspects of character and this makes him vulnerable to the manipulations of someone like Iago. Othello must be conveyed an emotionally deep character.

Level 5

Commentary

There is a clear and focused line of development that holds the argument together. There is a concise understanding of the question and knowledge and understanding of the text and role. The argument is sophisticated and a range of examples are given to explain how lighting and sound might convey specific meaning to the performance for the audience. An appropriate link is given to Artaud and the ideas are in line with the style referred to by the candidate. There is a coherent and sophisticated knowledge and understanding of how distorted lighting and sound will impact on the audience and create meaning in specific scenes where Othello is villainous. Creative ideas are followed through and explored with some extensive detail and with some effective technical references at times.

The answer is considered to fulfil the requirements of level 5 in the mark scheme and no further improvements are suggested.

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