

Candidate A evidence

Drama

Discuss in detail the dramatic techniques used to present the character of Margaret to the audience. (SQA 2021 textual analysis assessment resource)

Throughout the extract of "The Amen Corner" James Baldwin uses a number of dramatic techniques to cleverly present the character of Margaret to the audience.

Throughout the dialogue in the entire passage, it is made evident to us how devout "Maggie" is as a person. As she and the other church members enter her house they begin to sing holy songs and Maggie states that "It sure is nice to be here with my real faithful children". It is also indicated to audiences that Maggie perceives herself to be superior to the other members as she says to Sister Moore "the Lord ain't placed you where he's placed me." Baldwin is using the technique of dialogue to present Maggie as someone who holds her position in the church very highly and who is very devout in her beliefs. She also makes comments such as "The Lord comes before all things" which suggests to audiences that her faith plays a key role in her making of decisions. Her repeated mention of the phrase "Praise the Lord" also greatly indicates this. Rather than looking to help Luke when he falls, she simply tells the other to "pray and hold onto God for him" Baldwin is setting Maggie up to be a character of great religious belief.

Furthermore, in Maggie's interactions and conversations with her estranged husband the audience are able to get a deeper understanding of her character. In Luke's attempts to talk to her and compliment her, we see that Maggie is hesitant and uncooperative to accept his advances. He says to her "Maggie you aint hardly changed a bit. You still the prettiest women I ever laid eyes on." She then repeatedly mentions his name. "Luke", "Luke". This would infer to audiences of her discomfort of the situation. Luke further tries to engage in conversation with her and says, "Cat get your tongue Maggie?" Maggie's response to him is very hostile and unapproachable, "I never knowed my son and he to me neither. God don't like wars" Her harsh response could subtly refer that Luke had previously lied to her in their relationship. Her unwillingness to talk to him indicates that she is perhaps still hurt by what happened. Luke then says to her "You aint changed none neither" She responds with "Why did you come here" and "I'm glad to see you and all but -" Her complete lack of any attempt at a conversation indicates that she is perhaps still hurt with their relationship. We then discover in the dialogue that it wasn't Luke who left the family, but it was rather Maggie. In an open scene of conflict between the two, Luke repeatedly asks Margaret who it was that left. "Who left? Tell him.", "But who left?". Maggie then exclaims that it was her. "I did. I left!", "To get away from the stink of whiskey-to save my baby-to find the Lord!" This indicates to us, the audience that Maggie's hurt and resentment from Luke stems from his drinking that she believes is what drove her away. She then goes on to say to him "Leave us alone, Luke. Go away and leave us alone." Her lack of feeling towards him is made quite clear here. Her outburst could infer that she still is hurt by the whole ordeal and could be ashamed by her leaving, as it took Luke several times to ask her who left before she gave a response. In their petty quarrels, we see that both Maggie and Luke have different values. As Luke wants his son to visit him, "Come down and see me. Please come down and see me". Maggie states that she "don't want him hanging around downtown." This rather childish disagreement between the two indicates that Maggie is presented to be a stubborn character, both stubborn in her beliefs and her actions against her husband. Baldwin has used the dialogue

in the extract to present Maggie as a hard-headed character who is clear in her beliefs. Her resentment of him could also be translated into her hurt. Her hurt of his drinking which she believed drove her away.

We also see Maggie's character through the big movement in the extract when her husband Luke falls. Indicated in the stage directions, "Luke sways, falls against the table." We see the panic of the other characters and yet not Maggie's. As it is the other characters help Luke up, Maggie is quite clear in staying away and keeping her distance. Luke then moans her name "Maggie" as he is hurting. Maggie quite clearly feels nothing about the situation. She says "The Lord don't do nothing without a purpose. Maybe the Lord wants to save his soul." Her flippant response to her ex-husband's fall, both shows that she is very unempathetic and her feelings are very little for him. She also says "The Lord made me leave that man in there a long time ago because he was a sinner." When her son informs her that Luke had been calling her she says "tell him to call on the Lord!" Her complete disregard to her husband is shown in both the dialogue and stage directions. Her actions of leaving him present her to be a hard-headed and also hurt woman. Despite her saying at the start of the extract that she missed him; her ability to do nothing in his time of need highlights her resentment and anger towards him. Her only response is to say "praise the Lord and to encourage the others to do so". She states to her son that "I don't want to go. I got to go." Baldwin could be trying to suggest that Maggie is trying to make some sort of excuse for not staying. Her hurt at him could be so strong that she's willing to leave him. As Maggie leaves the church, indicated by the stage directions, Luke repeatedly calls out her name. "Maggie – Maggie – Oh, Maggie." The stage directions then highlight to us that the others all get onto their knees and sing, except Maggie's son. Maggie's departure and the others all singing could indicate that not only are the other characters devout too, but that Maggie holds a power over them as their pastor as they are exactly what she says "to praise the Lord", rather than trying to get help for her husband. Also, when her son David tells Maggie "But I reckon you don't care, do you?" Maggie avoids answering this question altogether and simply tells him "Don't you talk to your mother that way son." She could be ignoring this statement because she doesn't want to admit to her son that she doesn't care, however, her hesitation when she says to Odessa to send her a "telegram to see if anything happens" indicates that she does have some sort of care for him and would be greatly hurt if something were to happen to him. Baldwin has uses dialogue here to present Maggie's very complex character. Despite only being able to see her character at surface level and her resentment towards her husband, subtle signs are made throughout that she cares deeply about him more than she lets on. Her hesitance and the idea of something happening to him for one, could infer that she is not as hard-headed as Baldwin has initially presented her to be and that her feelings are deeper than she lets on.

Overall Baldwin very cleverly uses techniques of dialogue and stage directions to present Maggie as a complex character. The subtle indications of her feelings towards her husband could imply that she isn't as heartless and blunt as she initially seemed. These techniques are very cleverly and prominently used throughout.

Candidate B evidence

Drama

Discuss in detail the dramatic techniques used to present the character of Margaret to the audience. (SQA 2021 textual analysis assessment resource)

'The Amen Corner' by James Baldwin displays through the use of dramatic technique the character of Margaret, a woman whose life and soul is dedicated to the church, and nothing will come in the way of her and her religion. Throughout the extract, we see the effective use of techniques such as stage direction, character development and the religious theme to help display and develop Margaret's complex characterisation.

At the beginning of the extract, we are immediately introduced to the theme of religion which will be highlighted throughout the act: "what a mighty God we serve!", and this sharp introduction to religion helps show the audience how important a role religion plays in the extract, but also Margaret's life, and she continues to illustrate this when she says: "Bless your hearts, children; that sure done my spirit good. You all ain't like them wayward children up in Philadelphia. It sure is nice to be here with my real faithful children"; as soon as Margaret says this, "[David enters the alley, slowly]" and this interaction could suggest to the audience that there is some possible tension between Margaret and her son, as through the skilful timing and placing of the stage directions, the audience would see this as Margaret seems to be implying that her son is unfaithful, which is foreshadowing the events later in the extract. Another example of foreshadowing is shown once again through stage directions: "[Jazz version of 'Luke's theme' begins]". This is possibly an example of dramatic irony in that it is unknown to Margaret that her estranged husband, Luke, will be entering the stage soon, and this possibly makes the audience feel tension as they feel that they can see that there is something untoward on the horizon, something which will have a powerful impact on the unsuspecting Margaret. This subtle use and choice of religious song is a clever way that Baldwin hints at the future conflict and tension which is about to take place.

We get a further insight into Margaret's character and the religious power she holds over her fellow members of the church: "the Lord ain't placed you where he's placed me ... You just remember that I'm your Pastor," and here the audience can clearly see how Margaret's identity revolves around her religion, as does her power which she exerts over others through her seemingly self-appointed religious position, a power dynamic we see being developed through the remainder of the extract.

The audience's first impression of Luke is shown by further effective use of stage directions as he "walks through slowly", showing that he seems to be self-aware of the not-so-positive reaction which may await him from Margaret. Again, the stage directions highlight the apparently unresolved tension between the pair: "[Silence. Everyone stares, first at Luke, then at Margaret. Margaret stands perfectly still.]" and furthermore allows the audience to better understand the coming tensions in the relationships between Margaret, Luke, and their son David. Luke, in some ways, could be seen to be delivering insults to Margaret, but disguised as compliments as he states: "I might have lost a little weight, but you gained some. You notice how men, they tend to lose weight in later life, while the women, they gain? You look good, Maggie." This interaction may slightly perturb the audience and possibly prepare them for the inevitable conflict which is forthcoming. David's reaction to his father may also suggest to the audience that David has some trepidation about his father's appearance: "Yes. Yes sir. I did." The use of "sir" in addressing his father would be a typical

reaction to the father's authority at this time as he should respect his father, yet, to David's knowledge (furnished mostly by Margaret) his father left him which may raise questions in the audience as to why he is acting this way. However, this apprehension could be directed towards his mother as she reacts emotionally when she states: "I never knowed my son to lie to me, neither. God don't like liars." Maggie clearly don't like the influence Luke has on her son; this is the first proper sentence that Margaret has said since Luke's arrival, and once again she brings religion into the conversation. Both Luke and David add to the progression and presentation of Margaret's character as their dialogue dictates how Margaret will react, and this reaction will also help the audience learn more about Margaret's character.

The slow and subtle tension between Margaret and her son continues to grow: "Nobody told me (she looks at David). Nobody told me – you were here –". In Margaret's eyes, Luke has corrupted her Christian son in some way and, if he is around him more she believes he will turn into his father. Both men have typical biblical names which Margaret seems to believe they do not deserve, as we continue to see how God will always be the most important thing in her life. The tension between Margaret and Luke stems from Margaret's view of Luke's morality, and Luke's inference that Margaret's faults are as they have always been:

M: You ain't changed, have you? You still got the same carnal grin, that same carnal mind — you ain't changed a bit.

L: People don't change much, Maggie —

M: Not unless the Lord changes their hearts —

L: You ain't changed much, neither —

Margaret, in many ways, finds it important to be perceived by all as religiously pure and superior to all around her – including Luke and David – but there is a sense here that Margaret's religious zealotry could have played a part in her separation from Luke. Margaret's projected image as a woman of God begins to unravel though, letting her son believe that his father had "run off and left us", and Luke's repetition of "Who's left?" five times adds to the increasing tension as Margaret is clearly caught out on her lie and tries to defend herself, with her justification once again featuring God: "I did! I left! To get away from the stink of whiskey – to save my baby – to find the Lord!" Margaret's character seems to justify almost every action with a religious excuse, and her character is now beginning to show more flaws that she had ever intended to be shown.

The climax of the tension in the extract helps once again to show Margaret's character extremely well to the audience. Once she mentions of leaving, and taking David again, "[Luke falls against the table]" and David's reaction is to attempt to help his father. Luke is clearly desperate not to lose Margaret again, despite her past actions, as he "[moans] Maggie". Through the dialogue and stage directions at this part of the extract, some truths have been revealed to the audience, who now begin to see Margaret as a calculating and callous woman who has to carry much of the blame for the family breakdown. Yet, Margaret's response is telling; "This here's a holy ghost station. The Lord don't do nothing without a purpose. Maybe the Lord wants to save his soul." Instead of getting Luke some help, she seems willing to let him possibly die and let her sinister actions be covered again by religious intent, a common theme we have seen throughout the extract with Margaret's characterisation. She continues with this attitude when she states: "And Luke, if he want to keep on being hardhearted against the Lord, his blood can't be required at our hands. I got to go." Religion seems to be the only stable thing in Margaret's life, so she clings to this with all her power. Once again, she shows how easily she is able to justify her actions to the

other church members: “I don’t believe that man’s long for this world.”; she has so much religious fervour and influence over her flock that she seems to be able to get them onside by imposing her religious will and knowledge over them. Yet David is not so controlled by his mother’s religious power; he has a more sensible and humane way of thinking: “you don’t know whether he be living, the time you get back ... But I reckon you don’t care, do you?” Due to religion consuming Margaret’s character, she has also now lost the respect of her son even though she clearly knows what she is doing, and is aware of the possible consequences: “send me a telegram if – if anything happens”. She is self-aware of what she is doing and prioritising what is important for her, and she does not seem to care at all for Luke’s well-being, or for her son’s emotional well-being where his relationship with his father is concerned, with the request for a “telegram” – one feels – only an act to look good in front of her religious peers.

The last piece of dialogue we get from Margaret is an accurate description and conclusion of her characterisation: “[to the others, dangerously] Praise the Lord I say”, a command which has an almost threatening tone to it. Her dialogue throughout the entire extract involves religion; she knows her power over “the others” and will continue to abuse this to get what she wants, even when she is not there, knowing they will obey her through the power of her character: “[slowly, all except David go to their knees. They begin singing.]” She seems to have retained all her influence and power over her flock, but the price she has ultimately paid is to lose the respect of her son.

The final lines of the prayer would be slightly haunting to the audience, all gathered around Luke’s (seemingly) dying body singing: “He said father, if you will, let this bitter cup be past”, an act which seems to insinuate the congregation in letting Luke possibly die, and show Margaret’s power over her flock.

Throughout ‘The Amen Corner’, by James Baldwin, we see the progression of Margaret’s character, initially described as faithful woman, showing her love for the Lord, to move towards a revelation of a character consumed by zealotry and her own power over those around her. By the end of the extract, in some ways, Margaret sees herself almost equal to God, dictating who deserves to live and die. Through the development of Margaret’s character, we see how religion can take a dark turn once a person totally shrouds themselves in religion and dedicates their entire life to the ‘Lord’, but ends up using their religious belief as a shield and a weapon.