

Candidate 4 evidence

Specimen question paper

Section 1

Question 4 – The Pillowman

'The Pillowman' by Martin McDonagh explores many aspects of the character, Katurian's, personality. In this essay I will describe several moments where Katurian's personality is highlighted within the plot and how I would achieve this in performance.

The first moment that shows an aspect of Katurian's personality is seen in Act 1, Scene 1, where he discusses his disturbing stories he has written with the detectives who are interrogating him, Katurian speaks about his stories and quotes 'a great man'. Katurian quotes:

"The only duty of a storyteller is to tell a story"

This highlights Katurian's creative personality, as he creates imaginative and original yet extremely disturbing and tragic stories. This shows how creativity is both an outlet and a coping mechanism for Katurian, shaped by his childhood trauma and a need to make sense of a cruel world. Even under pressure and during a police investigation, Katurian still talks about his work with passion, highlighting how central his creativity is to his identity. When acting this moment, playing Katurian, I would have an upright posture to show the eagerness he has with his stories and use both an excited and serious tone of voice depending on the story being referenced, to show Katurian's emotional connection to his work. Furthermore, I would maintain eye contact with the detectives to emphasise how much he cares for his stories, highlighting Katurian's creative passion and dedication to his work. The impact this would have on the audience would be for them to have mixed feelings towards Katurian, as they might admire his creativity and dedication to storytelling yet also feel disturbed by the content of his stories. This contrast emphasises how connected Katurian's creativity is with his trauma and asks the audience to decide whether Katurian's creativity and stories prove Katurian is evil or the way Katurian was raised made his art so dark and gruesome.

Another moment when an aspect of Katurian's personality is shown in Act 1, Scene 1, when Katurian is being interrogated and finds out that his brother, Michal, has been taken into custody too. Katurian screams at the detectives:

"I'm scared my brother is all alone in a strange place [...] you should just f***ing go and f***ing let him out of here right now!"

This highlights Katurian's compassionate and protective personality, especially towards his disabled brother. Despite being under suspicion for horrific crimes, Katurian takes the attention away from himself and tries to ensure Michal is safe and not being hurt. This also highlights the theme of love, as Katurian's attention towards Michal emphasises how much he cares for Michal, even when being intimidated by police officers. When acting for this moment, playing Katurian, I would be positioned centre stage, sat on a chair, with a concerned and stressed facial expression to highlight Katurian's eagerness to make sure his brother is okay, as well as the stress of the situation he is in. I would be speaking with broken fluency and screaming at a loud volume to further highlight Katurian's stress for Michal. The impact this would have on the audience would be to make them feel sympathetic towards Katurian despite his obviously traumatic and violent side, as he shows his compassion and love for Michal in a situation that he himself is in danger. This builds an emotional connection between the audience and Katurian early on in the play and highlights his compassionate and protective personality.

Another moment which shows an aspect of Katurian's personality is shown in Act 1, Scene 2, during a monologue where he explains the abuse he and his brother suffered as children. He says:

"And his stories [...] they got darker and darker, due to the constant sound of child-torture"

This highlights Katurian's traumatised personality, as the explanation of his stories, which involve pain, death, and children, emphasises the abuse that Katurian faced growing up and how his trauma is the driver of his violent and disturbing behaviour. His trauma has affected him deeply, shaping his view of the world and even his creativity. He grew up in an environment where suffering was a regular part of life which disrupted his view on normality. His traumatised personality also explains why he writes such disturbing stories, not because he is evil, but because he has been raised with the idea that torture and death are normal. When acting for this moment I would, playing Katurian, show this trauma by speaking with a quiet volume and emotional tone as well as avoiding eye contact with the audience and fidgeting with my fingers throughout the monologue to highlight his pain and sadness Katurian feels as a result of the trauma he faced in his childhood. The impact this would have on the audience would be to feel a mix of pity and shock, as they are horrified by the degree of violence Katurian displays but also would have an understanding that Katurian's dark stories come from a place of real-life horror, meaning his violent actions are a result of psychological damage and therefore the audience would see him as a victim of his past.

Another moment which shows an aspect of Katurian's personality is in Act 2, Scene 1, when Katurian discovers that Michal really did help kill the children

and then Katurian decides to kill Michal by smothering him with a pillow. This is shown when the stage directions state:

“Katurian takes the pillow and holds it down forcefully over Michal's face. As Michal starts to jerk, Katurian sits across his arms and body, still holding the pillow down. After a minute Michal's jerks lessen. After another minute he's dead.”

This shows Katurian's violent personality as, even though Katurian killing Michal is done out of what he believes is mercy, he still commits an act of extreme violence, especially towards someone he loves and cared for. This act of violence is even more disturbing by the fact that it is represented as calm and gentle, rather than chaotic, which worsens the horror of this violent act. This also comes as a shock as Katurian has seemed mostly protective and calm towards Michal which contradicts his sudden burst of violence. This moment provides an insight into Katurian's conflicted morality within his personality as he thinks he is saving Michal from worse pain, but he still chooses to take his life. In addition to this, Katurian's traumatised personality is emphasised here as due to the trauma he has endured, he believes that this violence is the correct way to deal with the situation he is faced with. When acting this moment, I would be positioned centre stage left, kneeling on the ground and use a serious facial expression to reflect the gruesome yet natural act of violence Katurian portrays here. I would move slowly when smothering Michal, showing that Katurian is trying to stay calm, but is also emotionally numb. The impact this would have on the audience would be to make them feel uncomfortable and disturbed by Katurian's violent outburst yet also sympathetic, as they understand why he believes it is the right thing to do. Highlighting a moment of inner conflict and his violent personality.

Another moment which shows a key aspect of Katurian's personality is shown in Act 3, when he bargains with the detectives to have his stories saved if he confesses and therefore will be executed. He says:

“Because, for reasons known only to himself, the bulldog of a policeman chose not to put the stories in the burning trash, but placed them carefully with Katurian's case file, which he then sealed away to remain unopened for fifty-odd years.”

This shows Katurian's controlling and obsessive personality as he wants to take back some power in a situation where he has almost none by controlling the outcome of his own story and ensuring that his horrifying and disturbing stories live on after his death. He knows he is going to be executed, but he still wants to protect the legacy of his writing. This moment shows his obsession with his stories, and how important it is for him to control and shape how they will be remembered. It shows that being a writer is the most important thing for Katurian which he values above all else. When acting for this moment I would, playing Katurian, be positioned centre stage to highlight Katurian is

the one in control and has the power. I would also use an upright posture and smug facial expression as well as speaking with more certainty and firmness than in earlier scenes and at a louder volume. This would highlight Katurians assertion as well as his need for power over the detectives an ability to take charge and control over what happens to his stories when he's not there. The impact this would have on the audience would be to make them resent Katurians character by the end of the play, as he has caused not only the death of his brother, but in an indirect way, the death of several children due to his manipulative and controlling behaviour. However, the audience may also admire his perseverance and dedication to preserving his stories, making the audience have mixed feelings towards him.

In this essay, I have described several moments in which aspects of Katurians personality have been explored and how I would use acting concepts to display this in performance of Martin McDonaghs 'The Pillowman'.

Section 2

Question 8 – I, Daniel Blake

Mark Calvert's adaptation of 'I, Daniel Blake' (a film originally directed by Ken Loach starring writer Dave Johns as Daniel Blake), calls out the numerous flaws that lie deep within Britain's social security system and echoes one of the most important stories of our generation, to be more than a play but a hard truth. The play explores an evocative adaptation through the acting and directing that is exceptionally gripping for the audience and communicates extremely well the social context. The play constantly draws us away from the story and places us back into reality.

The first moment which stood out to me in communicating the social context was during the opening scene with Daniel, sat on a chair in his home centre stage on the phone to a government helpline. Daniel has been signed-off work by his doctor due to heart problems and wants his benefits. However, the healthcare professional on the other end of the line, standing nearly off stage right – but still visible – isn't giving him the help that he needs. The comedy arising from the conflict between plain-speaking Daniel and the grumpy woman on the phone, engages the audience from the start. The director's decision to direct this scene with comedic undertones is effective at engaging the audience as we have all had trouble getting hold of businesses and companies over the phone, no matter our class bracket. This moment was also effective in engaging the audience in the relevancy of the lack of genuine, friendly healthcare professionals who don't attempt to help their clients but just speak to them as if reading from a script. The acting conveys this extremely well through the lady speaking into a microphone. Her facial expressions and tone are blank and bored, making me as an audience member realise that in the world we live in today, we should feel angry towards those responsible for not trying hard enough to make a difference.

Another moment which stood out to me in conveying the social context was the decision to use in-your-face theatre to communicate the social contexts of the play. One time where this was exceptionally effective was during the harrowing scene where Katie returns home after a stressful experience at a food bank, trying to gather food for her family. Out of pure panic, she devours an entire tin of baked beans in secret, centre stage when her façade falls to pieces. The directors decision with stage proxemics, to have her so close to the audience, lit with an invasive bright spotlight as she falls to the floor covered in a mess on the stage was especially effective at engaging the audience and left me sitting with an overwhelming feeling of empathy towards her character, as we are seeing a woman in the privacy of her own home, dealing with the inability to feed for her family due to the injustice faced towards her by the benefits system. It displayed the heartbreaking truth to how impossible it can be for parents to supply meals for their children, but also themselves, meaning all that was going through my head was anger towards the government. The acting choices in the scene create for a climactic moment as the actor who played Katie, went into a lot of depth with her characterisation, as throughout the play we see her as a bubbly, kind and selfless character to her daughter, so in this key scene we see just how broken she is, with curled over posture, her body language makes her seem so fragile, with her hands covering her face as she devours the tin of beans and conveys a real tense atmosphere as we are force to consider the social context as our government care more about the money than the people.

We are met with the difficult social context yet again when Daniel, painfully drags himself into the job centre, hoping that with any luck he will finally be recognised as a vulnerable individual in need of money, but sadly he sits centre stage opposite a stubborn, privileged job seeker worker who totally denies him of any hope. Infuriated and tired of being constantly denied any answers, Daniel makes the bold decision to protest for himself, but also for others in his trapped situation. He suddenly makes his presence known, pushing off sheets

of paper on the table, flipping chairs and starting havoc. He climbs onto the table centre stage and turns away to face the projector where he spray-paints in big, bold letters "I, Daniel Blake, demand my appeal date before I starve" on the side of the job centre building. The director's decision to use the projection screen to display Daniel Blake's determination to fight for social injustice, it is a visual reminder for the audience of the play's intended social and political message and does an extremely good job at conveying social context. During this scene everyone in the audience began cheering and clapping, it was moving as those in the audience will be from all different backgrounds and classes, showing us that the director created such a crucial actor-audience relationship and made us realise the social context. The social context of just how exhausted and fed-up people in the UK are of being treated like nothing and not being cared for by our government is conveyed exceptionally well by the actor of protagonist Daniel, through his projection and emphasis as he demands change. As well as his grounded body language, shoulders held high, and fists clenched. His eye contact is made clear to be at us, the audience, conveying the social context that if we don't make a difference and act, nothing will change.

A final key scene where social context is made clear to the audience is near the end of the play, when Katie turns to prostitution to make more money for her family. Daniel, after he finds out about her working in the business in the previous scene where he sees her business card inside her home on the dining table, takes it and carries it to this scene, as he walks out of their home down the stairs of the main centre stage, to round the back behind the projection so we really get that unfamiliar, dissociated feeling that Dan feels. Dan is seen upstage right, in a natural flood of light and Katie is seen dressed in a promiscuous outfit under pink and red LEDs and a smoke machine. The directors use of using different areas of the stage and contrasting lighting techniques to convey the social context of the play, gives the audience the understanding that the characters relationship dynamics had changed and that without friends and family, having to struggle with money alone can

sometimes be the worst thing to do and how lonely it is. The acting choice made by the actor of Katie, to have her not making eye contact with Daniel creates for real dramatic irony that we know that he knows but she doesn't. As well as the actor of Daniel's decision to have his movement become very slow, and his facial expressions just dropping to convey that he is just numb. This expertly conveys social context as it shows how much the world that we live in now makes people so unrecognisable from themselves that they are forced to become new people to fit into the world.

In conclusion, this production of "I, Daniel Blake" adapted by Mark Calvert forced us to consider the social context of our world, specifically, our government today and just how difficult it is to live for people who don't have a lot of money. This play did an amazing job at this through the directing and acting choices made and remained faithful to achieving a truthful portrayal of the reality of poverty and the welfare system in this country.