

How does brighthouse  
portray the character  
of willie mossop



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Willie Mossop is a principle character in the play Hobson's choice, written in 1916. Brighthouse, the playwright, uses language during stage directions and speech to portray the character, this also conveys, to the audience, and relates to what society was like in 1880's Salford.

Before the audience even sees Willie they get a firm idea about how the other characters act towards him.

"...I'm capable of making the man suffer for it."

This shows the audience that Hobson believes Willie has done something wrong when Mrs Hepworth asks to see the man who made her boots. It shows how, because Willie is of a Lower class than Hobson, Hobson believes he can beat (hurt) him both physically and mentally. This also conveys to the audience what society was like in Salford and how people believed they could punish someone by hurting them since this form of punishment was widely accepted at this time.

It is not only Hobson who treats Willie in a bad way.

" You'll go back when I've done with you."

This quote from Act One shows the audience how Maggie treats Willie. It shows how Maggie bosses him around and how Willie could be described as being a ' follower', someone who does as he is told. The section of the quote:

"...when I've done with you."

shows the audience how Maggie won't let Willie go back down to the cellar before she has finished with him. The quote also shows the audience how  
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Willie does not wish to spend time alone with Maggie since he is eager to go down the trap.

When Maggie announces to Alice and Vicky that she is going to marry Willie, Alice exclaims:

“ You’re going to marry Willie Mossop! Willie Mossop!”

Here, in Act One, Alice does not believe Willie to be a very good husband for her elder sister. The audience can see this from the repetition of Willie’s name, which people do when they cannot believe what somebody has said or done. Alice believes that Willie will not make a very good husband because she knows he can’t read or write and because he is of a Lower class (people tended not to marry out of their class boundary as they would have been looked upon as a traitor to the class).

In Act One you first meet Willie when he is called ‘ up the trap’ by Tubby to speak to Mrs Hepworth.

“ His clothes are an even poorer edition of Tubby’s”

This quote taken from the stage directions portrays to the audience that Willie is of the Lower class, poor and unable to buy decent, new clothes. This relates to how society was split into three different sections, Lower, Middle and Upper class, with the upper being very wealthy, the Middle reasonably wealthy and the Lower, who would have been under paid and very poor.

However, in Act Four Willie has changed in way of his class. Now after marrying Maggie, the eldest daughter of Hobson, he is a reasonably wealthy Middle class man.

“...he is prosperous...”

This quote, taken from the stage directions shows how Willie has changed, since the word ‘ prosperous’ states how he is making a lot of money. This also shows the audience how Willie has done something never expected in the 1880’s - move class.

In Act One the audience also sees how timid and shy Willie is.

“ He comes half-way up the trap.”

This stage direction portrays to the audience that Willie knows his place is downstairs, in the cellar, making the boots and clogs and not upstairs. It also portrays to the audience he is timid and nervous since he will not come above the trap to speak to Mrs Hepworth ‘ at her level’. The fact that he knows his place is below the shop shows, again, the social classes and how the Lower class workers were not allowed in the shop.

In Act One Willie is afraid of his employers.

“ He dives down the trap.”

This quote, taken from the stage directions, portrays to the audience how Willie is afraid of his employers. The verb ‘ dive’ shows how he is uncomfortable and does not want to be above his cellar with his employer

Hobson or spend any more time than necessary with him and with the rest of society. The extract also portrays how Willie has no confidence since he goes quickly down the trap, shown here by the word 'dives'. The quote also portrays to the audience how Willie does everything he is told and so could be described as a 'follower'. The audience can tell this because they would see it happening after Willie is sent away by Hobson and told to go down to the cellar.

This is backed up when Willie claims he is already tokened (engaged) to Ada Figgins, when Maggie asks him to marry her.

" Oh, so it's her mother who made this match?"

This quote conveys to the audience how Willie does as he is told whether he is at work or at home (since he lives at Ada Figgins' mother's house.) He does as he is told because of his

"...brutalized childhood..."

And so as he no longer wants to be beaten he does as he is told. This quote also shows how he has no education since his parents could not send him to school since they were too poor and they were too busy beating him to try to educate him.

Another quote to back up the fact that Willie has no education is that he cannot read. The adjective 'brutalized' shows how bad his beating was during his childhood.

" Can't you read?"

Here, in Act One, Willie is trying to read a visiting card given to him by Mrs Hepworth. The quote portrays to the audience how Willie is uneducated.

These quotes also relate to how Lower class people could not afford to go to school (since you had to pay) and so many people could not read or write.

This also leads to the quote:

“ I do a bit. Only it’s such a funny print.”

This quote conveys to the audience how proud Willie is, as he tries to hide the fact that he cannot read. The words ‘ a bit’ show how Willie is unsophisticated since a wealthy, educated and sophisticated man in the 1880’s would say ‘ slightly’ rather than ‘ a bit’.

In Act One the audience sees how Willie is not confident.

“ He comes reluctantly.”

When the audience sees this stage direction (being acted out) they can see how Willie lacks the confidence to come above the trap door. This could be because he is afraid of being beaten by Hobson, or that he is just uncomfortable speaking and being around his employer and his employer’s daughters.

However, in Act Four Willie has gained in confidence, power and no-longer feels afraid of Hobson.

“...and all you think to offer me is my old job back at eighteen shillings a week.”

This portrays to the audience how Willie has gained confidence as in Act One he would never have dared stand up to Hobson. It shows the audience how he is no longer afraid of Hobson since, again, he would never have stood up to Hobson. The quote also conveys to the audience how Willie has gained in power and class and the audience can see this when he hears of the offer for eighteen shillings a week. A quote to back up the fact that he has gained in power is:

“...people call me Mr Mossop now.”

This quote, taken from Willie’s speech, shows the audience how Willie has grown in status, so he gets respect from his customers, so now demands the respect of Hobson, Vicky and Alice. This shows the audience the change in society at the time the play was being written, 1916. It shows how the Lower and Middle classes are joining together since they were the people fighting for King and country in World War One.

In Act Four the other characters treat Willie with respect.

“ I don’t know yet. I haven’t asked my husband.”

This quote portrays to the audience how Maggie now respects Willie since she is telling Hobson that she will not go back home to live and help him without the consent of her husband, Willie. It also shows how Maggie trusts Willie to make the right decision.

“ Now you can kiss me Will.”

This quote from Act One shows the audience how society is changing. It conveys how the suffragettes are getting stronger and so how women are getting more rights. The audience sees this through Maggie telling Will to kiss her and it was Maggie who asked and forced Will to marry her and not the other way round. These quotes portray to the audience that Willie has done something that was never expected of somebody in the 1880's - move class. It shows how education can help somebody achieve their potential in life and that women should have more rights than they had. The audience can see this because before Willie married Maggie he was not respected by anyone and was uneducated, whereas after he had married Maggie, and Maggie had educated him, people respected him more. It shows that women should have more rights because it was Maggie who forced Will to marry her and who set up their boot making business.

When Maggie forces Will to marry her and tells him to kiss her Willie won't.

“ Now? With them here?”

This quote portrays to the audience how Willie doesn't love Maggie even though he is marrying her. It is also conveying to the audience that Willie is ashamed of being forced to marry Maggie. The audience sees this because Willie will not kiss Maggie in front of Alice and Vicky, whereas if he loved Maggie he would kiss her no matter who was there to witness it.

However, at the end of the play, Act Four, Willie shows signs that he has fallen in love with Maggie.

“ I was for getting you a proper one, Maggie.”



This conveys to the audience how Willie has fallen in love with Maggie since he wants to buy her a proper, gold wedding ring, as they had been married with a brass ring. This also symbolises how Willie cares for Maggie more than he did when he married her and that he is now rich enough to afford a gold ring. The adjective 'proper' shows the audience how Willie does not believe anyone should be married with any kind of ring, but instead should be married with a gold one only.

In Act Four the audience see how Willie is no-longer timid or shy and he now does as he sees best - not what other people tell him to do.

" I'll do the arranging, Alice"

This quote shows the audience that Willie has changed, from a shy, nervous man who did everything he was told, to a man who is no-longer timid, shy or nervous and who does what he thinks best. The audience sees, during the play, how Willie becomes more and more confident with the encouragement from Maggie.

In Act One, Willie has no education and no authority to demand a pay rise from Hobson.

"...and I expect you underpay him."

This quote conveys to the audience how Willie is underpaid whilst working at Hobson's shop. It shows how Willie does not have the authority to demand a pay rise from Hobson, else he would have already done so. It shows the audience how he is not educated and so is weak and lacks confidence, since he would then be powerful and confident and would have the authority to  
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demand a pay rise. The verb ' expect' shows that Mrs Hepworth reckons he is underpaid, this is because he is of Lower class (which she can tell by his clothes) and so he is uneducated.

The audience see how the power of education has helped Willie's success.

"...to be strong and use the power that's come to me through you..."

This quote, from Act Four, portrays to the audience how Willie has gained power. He claims the power has come to him through Maggie, who educated him. The fact that Maggie educated him, and then he became powerful and successful in his boot making business, suggests to the audience how education helps people, like Willie, to become successful in their life. The adjective ' strong' tells the audience that Willie was planning on being forcible and powerful when he was speaking to Hobson.

In this essay, I have shown how Brighthouse portrayed how Willie as a shy, timid, weak Lower class man, who does everything he's told to do (in Act One), who changes under the influences of society, education (which gives him confidence), and Maggie, who educated him, to become a powerful, confident and bold Middle class man. I have showed how the audience would see these changes in Willie and how they would interpret the stage directions (viewed during the play) and the speech that they would hear.