

Fear and misery of the third reich essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. Dramatic Aims " Show, don't be."

Our aims for this production from the historical point of view are to present the lives of people in Nazi Germany as they were and to show that because the past has changed, the present is changeable. However our main purpose is to make the audience realize how the play is related to their lives today and that if they want to change the world they have to start from themselves.

" Proper plays can only be understood when performed. (...) The production has got to bring out the material incidents in a perfectly sober and matter-of- fact way. Nowadays the play's meaning is usually blurred by the fact that the actor plays to the audience's hearts. The figures portrayed are foisted on the audience and are falsified in the process. Contrary to present custom they ought to be presented quite coldly, classically and objectively. For they are not matter for empathy; they are there to be understood. Feelings are private and limited." (" Brecht on theatre" Conversation with Bert Brecht)

" Fear and Misery of the III Reich" is an episodic play consisting of 24 scenes related through the political message (life in Nazi Germany 1933- 1938) but able to exist separately. This is one of the aspects of Brecht's idea of Epic Theatre which shows the world as it is- full of contradictions and forces members of audience to analyse and judge it. Epic Theatre puts a social or political message before the exploration of character and this is what we want to use in our production. Our aim is to keep the message clear so that our spectators retain a critical awareness that allows them to focus and reflect on this message.

My personal aim is to present a truthful picture of the world and make the audience face it. Through my roles I would like to encourage the audience to think rather than becoming over concerned with the plot, invite them to identify with the issues faced by my characters and not the characters themselves, to make a play a form of debate rather than an illusion.

I aim to take emotions out of the production, disengage myself from my roles, so that I cannot be identified with my characters, in order to make the political and social truth easier to comprehend. I want to show a clear, realistic situation which is unfamiliar for the audience, to make them use their 'reason' to judge and change their lives at the end. This requires an audience who is not drawn into empathising with any of the characters so that they can make judgements about society and human nature based on what they see.

In order to create distance between the character and myself I have decided to use Brecht's rehearsal techniques of 'making strange'. The play is set in the past which helped me to disengage from my characters and I believe will make today's sense of the play more significant for the audience.

To prevent the spectators from becoming too involved with the characters we have agreed on multi-roles. Actors playing more than one role should make the spectators accept them as actors playing roles, not as characters. It eliminates any emotional attachments.

My first role is the woman in "Jewish Wife". My aim for this role is to show that Judith is an ordinary woman who loves her husband and does not want much more than a normal life with him. It is really hard for her to leave,
<https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

however she knows this is the only solution for them both. She leaves not because she is scared and wants to protect herself. Before everything she wants what is the best for her husband, a good life for him with his beloved job, even if it means it will be without her. She realized a long time ago that the time she has to go away was going to come, but it seems like the man does not want to accept this.

Remembering the effect of changing accents in rehearsals I have decided to perform my part in two languages. Using English and Polish while making calls to Judith's friends will show how different she is and that her husband is not able to understand her fully. It will disengage these two characters.

In "The Spy" my role is the wife. She has just finished Sunday lunch with her husband and their son. They are quarrelling about politics; meanwhile, their son reads a newspaper report about Hitler's attack on the church. Suddenly they realise that he has gone to the Hitler Youth. She is worried about how much he heard them say and her husband accuses her of having borne him a 'Judas'.

The door opens and the boy enters, saying he went out to buy chocolates. His mother does not know whether to believe him. The scene is full of fear, the atmosphere is tense. One child has terrorized two adults. They do not know what to do and what to talk about, they live under the constant control. The stressed husband keeps pushing his wife away. She does not want to argue and worries about him.

In "Release" I take the role of wife awaiting with her husband the return of their old comrade, Max, from a concentration camp. The man does not know
<https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

whether he will be able to trust him now. In this role I would like to show the wife who is worried about the friend knowing how people do not trust him and tries to convince her husband how dreadful the situation must be for Max.

In " Servants of the People" I am a prisoner. An SS man is exhausted by flogging a prisoner and tells him to flog the ground instead. When an officer appears, he is ordered to flog the prisoner on his stomach. My role is a male character, however to make it stronger we have decided to swap genders. Women are considered to be weaker than the men, therefore a scene with battered woman will " make it even more strange" and will have stronger effect on the audience who should again use their reason to objectively judge the event happening on the stage.

" The Motto" is set in a meeting room of the Hitler Youth. One of the boys does not have a gas mask. An overweight Sharfuhrer enters and asks the boy to recite the Motto. Eventually he manages it but he is really scared and other boys are making fun of him. My role is one of the ' bad' boys.

To emphasize the social message of the play we have agreed on using montage. Before each scene we want to show a series of images turning the audiences' attention into the present problems as "(...) the incidents portrayed by the epic actor need to be familiar ones, in which case historical incidents would be the most immediately suitable."

I think that images have a great influence on people, especially because they create a record, a proof that the issue is still present. This proofs we would like to use in our production to awake the audiences' awarness of problems.

<https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

“ Jewish Wife” is mostly concentrated on Women Rights. Woman rights as a wife, mother, friend, as a human being. In our production we want to bring to light that these rights have been continuously broken by showing montage with Muslim women, victims of rapes and violence.

“ Spy” shows how children are affected by war. We do not have to look somewhere away to see Children of War destroyed by world’s conflicts, forced to fight, kill and grow up too fast.

“ Released” shows the situation of everyman released from prison, how people around them will always be suspicious, how they will always be Behind the Bar, different and separated from the society even when they are not any more in the prison. This situation will repeat as long as there are prisons and prisoners.

In “ The Motto” we want to show Disorders (including anorexic, disabled, and homeless people).

In “ Two Bakers” and “ Servants of the people” we want to show ‘ concentration camps’, with slightly different purpose and under different names, still exist: Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib.

2. Research “ Fear and Misery of today.”

Sources:

* “ Brecht on theatre- the development of an aesthetic” edited and translated by John Willett

* “ Changing Stages” by Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright

<https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

* " Słownik wiedzy o teatrze" (Theatre knowledge dictionary) by Dariusz Kosinski, Wypycha-Gawronska Anna, Agnieszka Marszalek, Malgorzata Sugiera, Joanna Lesnierowska

The first part of my research was dedicated to the period in which Brecht is formulating his aesthetic. In order to fully understand the historical aspect of the play I decided to find out about the culture of Weimar Germany.

(...)

Chinese theatre made use of symbols which allowed spectators to quickly recognize characters ideas. Recognized gestures were used too so that props could be minimal. Spectators were surprised by the actions and thought seriously about them rather than empathizing with the character. Chinese actors ' demonstrated' or ' quoted' a character rather than becoming them, which enabled the spectators to think about the social message behind the performance.

" Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. (...) The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work. As a result everything put forward by him has a touch of the amazing. Everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and automatic." (Brecht on theatre, Alienation effects in Chinese acting)

<https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

Chinese theatre is connected with Brecht's idea of Gestic Acting, where no words should be needed to understand the social position of the characters in relation to each other. I have decided to research some of the Chinese gestus and use them in our performance. I found it difficult especially because most of the hands movements have got a few different meanings, but also because it is hard to relate most of them to our play.

What I found really useful however is that this gestus can easily show relations between two characters onstage as well as their status. For instance if we want to say that one actor is a child we will use the ' utsanga' move, if we want to show marriage we will use the ' katakavardhana' gestus.

I found it the most helpful while rehearsing " The spy". The scene was quite long, so we have decided to cut it in order to make it tenses. However we still had problems with expressing our characters. We did not know how to show the clear situation without being to engaged with the characters. We used seven gestus to show characters' emotions and this worked well for us as actors and will not let the spectators forget that they are in the theatre. In the beginning of the scene we would like to show that Sam is a small boy, so he will use the ' utsanga' gestus which means ' a child'. Another one was to show that Ollie and I are married, we used the ' katakavardhana' gestus.

The next one was used to show differences between us and it was the ' katarimukha'. While quarrelling we used the " mrigashirsha" gestus. Then to show Ollie's character's aggressive mood he used the ' shukatunda' and for my character I have chosen the ' alapadma' gestus which means sadness because of being apart, since the woman is worried about her husband and

misses being close to him, but he keeps pushing her away. At the end to show the growing fear we used the ' sandamsha' gestus.

3. Inspiration and Influences " Silent film"

One of our main influences was Charlie Chaplin and silent film. I watched some of the moves with Charlie Chaplin and it made me point out the need for clarity of facial expression and almost stereotypical demonstration of emotions in this movies. It helped me a lot with understanding and using gestus in our production. We explored this idea as our rehearsal technique. We decided to exaggerate some of the characters' behaviour and movements, which for us then was rather funny, but we realized how it helped us understand our reasons better.

In case of productions we have seen, the helpful one was ' Casanova'. The production was executed in brechtian conventions. It included Gestic acting, alienation effect and the breaking down of the 4th wall. We have decided however that the direct usage of rehearsal techniques onstage was too much of an exaggeration and did not work for us as the spectators. We felt far too much disengaged from the action. Because of the usage of different languages we could not understand the action and Gestic acting was not good enough to make us not need words. However it gave us some good tips for the production of " Fear and Misery...". Rehearsal techniques can be used only during the rehearsal time and while using different language onstage we need to make sure the action stays logical.

Brecht was influenced by Erwin Piscator- a Marxist playwright and director, originator of political theatre. Erwin Piscator initiated the idea of using

<https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

theatre as an instrument of social change. His methods included using projection of images, which we have decided to use in order to emphasize the social message of the play.

4. Development

The part of our rehearsals which worked best for me was Brecht's rehearsal techniques. The first technique used during our rehearsals was acting in the third person. It helped me to treat characters more equally and act without creating sympathy onstage. It also taught me how to show the situation clearly and let the members of audience independently decide on their point of view.

Swapping genders during rehearsals time highlighted changes of status and emphasised the importance of gender. I saw how women are usually lower status and more emotional while men are high status and much more emotionally stable.

While changing accents I realized how it brings stereotypes and helps the audience criticize the scene. Switching register has shown that upper class creates more reserved and distanced atmosphere, while lower class is more involved in the action.

In my opinion Brecht's rehearsals techniques worked well for us. We distanced ourselves well from our characters, however we are still able to create a truthful performance. I achieved my aim in case of alienation, but I did not lose important aspects of my characters. I must not forget my reasons as a character in order to create the performance which is clear for

the audience. Hot-seating helped me with this a lot. We used this rehearsal technique once (one session for each character) to make sure we understood our roles well. It made me point out characteristics, thoughts and reasons in my parts.

We have decided that everyone will be a director. This was the easiest solution as there were only four of us and usually we needed all four to act. We often agreed as our aims and objectives were the same. Each one of us however had different image of what we wanted to do which brought a few arguments. We came with a solution of giving the director's role every time to a person, who was not acting in this particular scene. This gave us all a small part where, with an agreement of all, but our decision was final. We were not sure about the gestic (Chinese) acting as we did not have enough time to develop it fully.

We could not use it only in some scenes and not in the others. At the end we achieved consensus stating that using Chinese theatre moves during rehearsal time gave us strong background of understanding our characters and especially the message they carry with them. In order to actually use this technique onstage we would have to make sure the audience understand them. It would take a lot of time however to learn all the moves we could use and we objectively decided we were not able to achieve what we wanted in that short period of time. We took as much as we could from this during rehearsal time and we hope this will be noticeable during the performance.

The play is set outside our time period. The audience will see a strange, unfamiliar society, which should help them focus on the message of the play. It was crucial for us to create a historical identity. We paid attention to it especially while putting the gasmasks on in 'The Motto'.

Our first idea of staging included the usage of a squash court. The driving force of this decision was the brechtian lighting- white, very bright, almost clinical. It would make the spectators become observers as well as alienate the actors and the audience from the play. However we faced the problem of sight lines and even more important- specific sound on the squash court. The number of audience would also have to be reduced as there is not much space around the squash court and we need to remember about the fire hazard.

At the end we have decided to use main hall. We will use sport-mats to highlight the side-lines. The audience will sit around the 'stage'. If we place them upstairs it should also help them to feel like observers.

5. Individual Skill

One of my biggest problems was the whipping scene in 'Servants of the people'. Even the fact that I was wearing the fencing jacket and did not feel the actual pain did not help. I feel uncomfortable when it comes to the topic of beating women.

During rehearsing 'Two Bakers' one of the actors was struggling with showing the fear and hunching shoulders after the sound of the whip. To solve that problem we used Marxism idea of sharing experience. The actor's

role was the SS man in ' Servants of the people' where he whips a detainee (played by me). During one of the rehearsals we changed the roles and the detainee whipped the SS man. It helped the actor a lot with his reaction onstage, but it helped me as well in case of my fear. I realised we can trust each other in a group and that it is even harder to hit someone (even just pretending) than to being beaten.

' Jewish wife' was my longest role, also the one which changes the most during the scene. She has to show different faces to each one of the people she is calling. She has to consider each word, even when she speaks to her husband who is supposed to be the closest person for her. The first part of the play is a long scene with a telephone, then it comes to a bit when Judith prepares for the conversation with her husband and again she changes her moods, tones and the way she talks.

I was afraid that because of the size of my speech it was going to be boring for the audience. I have decided to add bits in polish, which should make it more entertaining. Another purpose was to show that Judith is different from people she knows and disengage her as a character from her husband's character. Other actors watching me performing this piece of the ' F&M' agreed that it helped a lot with achieving our aims and made the long monologue much more engaging.

6. Health and Safety

Every time when we were rehearsing or preparing the set a teacher was with us or knew where we were. As it was possible we were rehearsing at bare rooms to minimise the risk, and in groups of three or more as even when <https://assignbuster.com/fear-and-misery-of-the-third-reich-essay-sample/>

someone would have to get help, another person could stay with injured one. There were always telephones close in case of emergency. During setting-up decorations we were always making sure that everyone knows exactly what to do and has his own job, to prevent crowding (dangerous when moving heavy objects).

In case of the fire we minimise the audience number (to prevent overcrowding) and made sure that fire exits were clearly marked and easily accessed.

When using gasmasks we were aware some people can find it difficult. We spent some time practising to make sure we know exactly how to do it. We never rushed with gasmasks.

While using the whip I always made sure my fencing jacket was properly tied. We took special care during whipping scene, we rehearsed it a lot and always with a teacher in the same room with us. We didn't forget about warming-up before each rehearsal to keep ourselves away from any injury.

7. Evaluation

The final production proved that we achieved most of our aims. We all were well alienated which I believe highlighted the context of the play. We made that clear that we were retelling events which were not actually happening onstage and therefore we unable the spectators to judge a situation objectively. After the series of rehearsals with Chinese Theatre Gests, we were able to unintentionally incorporate Brechtian Gestus into the play. The montage in the beginning of each scene was I believe significant in better

understanding of our aim, the audience were reminded that they are in a theatre watching a play for a reason- to learn and judge.

It was a good idea to start slowly and increase the tension throughout the play. It prepared all of us but especially spectators, for the hard and touching end of our production. We left the audience thoughtful and concerned about the topics we have shown.

In ' what to improve' part, whipping scenes should be mentioned. In ' Servants of the People, as well as in ' Two Bakers' actors' reactions could have been improved. A good way is to try to overreact hard scenes during rehearsal period, and then it becomes easier to show onstage. Overall, I think that our production was a success and most of epic theatre aims were achieved.