

An analysis of the effectiveness of the opening of the rise and fall of little vo...



The Rise and Fall of Little Voice is in many ways a 'la pièce bien faite' (translated as 'well-made play'), which consists of a four point structure: an exposition; a complication and a climax followed by a denouement.

Certainly, the exposition can be identified as the first scene, where the audience is introduced to the actors and the play's main themes. Indeed, Little Voice's inevitable tragic fall can be inferred from the title, but the exposition suggests that she does not possess Greek Hubris, since Mari mentions that she 'hardly ever speak[s]'. Moreover, Cartwright uses Realism, through use of colloquial diction, such as 'damn stinking' to highlight the ordinariness of Little Voice's life before her short-lived fame. The play opens in complete 'Darkness', which is generally used to symbolise the evasion of truth and reality. Perhaps Little Voice causes 'blackout[s]', since they enable her to escape her reality, where Mari considers her records 'bloody shit' and live in a world where music is paramount. Furthermore, the repetition of 'Darkness' suggests the regularity of the blackouts, which is corroborated by Little Voice's comment 'not again' when the loudness of her records cause the fuse to blow. However, the unstable fuse could simply represent the poor and 'lower-class life' setting of the play. Moreover, Cartwright belonged to the 'new writing' genre in British theatre, which experimented with dramatic structure in order to be confrontational and provocative about the social policies of Thatcherism. Therefore, opening in complete darkness would have kept his audience in suspense and contrasted to the standard opening of past British plays, where the curtain's rising was met with light and action. In *The Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad determines that darkness represents the evil within humans. Therefore, Cartwright opening the play in 'darkness' could suggest that the play is

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didactic and focuses on the idea of morality. In addition, the play is a melodrama, where morality is black and white, and so the 'darkness' could symbolise the immorality, and so irresponsibility of Mari's drunkenness, which seems habitual, as Little Voice can instantly identify that she is 'drunk'. Whilst Mari is drunk 'she screams' and commands Little Voice to do the same. Thus, the dominance she exerts proves her to be the mother, despite her immature demands. Furthermore, Cartwright uses violent verbs in reference to Mari's actions, such as 'smashing' to describe her drunken state, creating pathos towards Little Voice. The ambivalence presented of Mari and Little Voice towards screaming emphasises their contrasting personas, as well as Mari's habitual undermining of Little Voice's timid and repressed attitude. Mari's domination is best presented through 'Shut that up! Stop it! Get it off! Get it!' to which Little Voice 'runs upstairs fast', demonstrating her obedience. Furthermore, the circular structure of the scene, which begins with 'darkness' and ends with a 'blackout' symbolises the repetitive nature of Little Voice's life, and indeed its emptiness. Consequently, the intensive stage directions provided where Little Voice takes on the responsibility of caring for her mother, 'She rolls her over on settee and tucks Mari's coat around her, takes off Mari's shoes, places them carefully. Covers Mari's ears with pillows' advocates a routine. Throughout *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* music is a 'leitmotiv' and serves as Little Voice's escapism. Little Voice 'finds herself through the medium of song' by listening to the records of powerful music divas of the 1940s to 60s: Shirley Bassey, Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, Edith Piaf and Gracie Fields. Certainly, Shirley Bassey and Judy Garland records are played during the exposition, which acts as a foreshadow to the other singers in the latter parts of the

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play. Ironically, the medium through which Little Voice chooses to communicate, Mari despises, since the records make her 'want to be sick all over the house'. Therefore, music is not only a motif and Little Voice's device for escapism, but a symbol of their mother-daughter conflict. Perhaps Cartwright's specific choice of 'Come Rain or Come Shine' by Judy Garland confirms that Little Voice will always care and look after her mother, whether they are 'Happy together' or 'unhappy together'. Indeed, in the stage directions Little Voice and Mari 'stumble together' and 'fall together', which emphasises their unification and verifies the reference. Furthermore, the moment when 'Mari moans and mumbles. LV stops, turns back' certainly holds the potential to be a 'tableau vivant', which would emphasise Little Voice's love for her mother, despite their differences. In essence, Cartwright effectively establishes the volatile mother-daughter relationship between Little Voice and Mari, although the collective pronoun 'they' creates hope for a closer relationship in the future. Similarly, although Little Voice is presented as timid and reserved, she does have a rebellious nature, since when she 'takes' her Shirley Bassey record 'off', she 'begins putting another one on', which foreshadows her found confidence when performing on stage later in the play. Moreover, Cartwright introduces central themes, such as music and darkness in the exposition to emphasise their importance and foreshadow their constant appearance throughout the play.