

Dramatic aims and objectives and choice of play essay



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The dramatic aim of our piece was to create a diverse and entertaining piece of theatre, which would not only inform the audience of the context, purpose and techniques of the performance, but also help them understand the political message behind it and make them leave in a thought provoking way, having learned something about human nature and it's effects on war and conflict. We decided to adopt Brechtian techniques as this was the practitioner we studied at A Level, and this would aid our knowledge and understanding of naturalistic theatrical techniques, making the performance interesting for both performer and audience member. The choice of play was " Oh! What a Lovely War! " by Joan Littlewood, and the section we chose was the second half of the first act; starting from the musical number " I'll make a man of you" through to the closing musical number of that act, " Goodbye- ee".

While we do follow the structure of the script on the whole, we did have to adapt certain lines and cut down roles as there were many characters and not enough actors. However this proved an advantage to showcase our acting abilities and diverse multi-role play and abstract interpretation. As a group, we wanted the audience to relate to the message of war and its consequences, and as such, decided to make the piece abstract and adopt various dramatic techniques and methods such as image projection, song, soundscapes, dance, physical representation, various lighting and sound effects, and various acting skills such as posture, gesture, accents, facial expressions, levels, as well as adopting appropriate use of set, props and costume. We did not want to insult the audience by having to spell out the purpose and idea behind each scene- we wanted them to question and think

about the themes and issues presented. This was a highly Brechtian technique. He wanted his plays to alienate the audience and be a bit strange.

The audience know it is not real life, and Brecht wanted them to about why the scenes were happening rather than what was happening; he wanted them to look further than the aesthetic value of it all. As a result of this, we decided to use various Brechtian techniques such as Gestus, song and dance, Verfremdungseffekt, breaking down the fourth wall, direct audience address, thematic representation instead of character representation and so on, so that the audience would question the scenes rather than just appreciate the aesthetic. The fact that the piece was abstract lent itself to our aims of informing and entertaining the audience about the farce of war and its political conflicts, as this meant we could put forward our own themes and ideas for representation and interpretation, as well as being able to relate it to modern day conflict, because as students experiencing the current news about the war in Iraq, we felt quite strongly about the effects on a personal level and not just as a political, financial and consequential level. Inspiration, practitioner and research Preparation and the shaping of ideas In the initial process and selection of play there were many factors we had to take into consideration. These were the fact that there were two girls and three boys as actors in the group, the play had to be suitable for our budget and not too complex in terms of props, set, costume and technicalities.

However this lack of budget did allow us to be more creative and experimental for our performance. We needed to play to have a section that would stand alone as a performed piece and this is why we chose “ Oh! What
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a Lovely War! as it is an episodic play anyway, and the section we chose started and ended off quite nicely, without the audience having to understand the previous scenes, or be left still questioning the plot. Moreover the play had to have scenes and characters in which we could use Brechtian methodical techniques such as *gestus*, *verfremdungseffekt*, breaking down the fourth wall, direct audience address and so on. This also lent itself well as our final choice of play because the piece was to be performed in a studio space that meant it was to be abstract and more creative than say a proscenium arch theatre of traditional theatre performances. One of our first choices of play was "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare.

What attracted us to this was the fact that it had already been abridged to half an hour and so we felt this was beneficial in creating a piece of drama that wasn't context dependant on the rest of the play, and that the audience would understand a rounded play and not a disjointed section with no real links or structure on its own. However, it proved a fruitless idea as there were far too many characters in the play and not enough ways to multi-role play. Also, the fact that there would be too many male roles played by women and vice versa made the play incomprehensible to an audience and we agreed that we did not want to confuse them; we wanted our message to be clear and to the point, just like Brecht's aims. Another fully rounded half an hour play we considered was Tim Supple's adaptation of the Grimm fairytale, "Hansel and Gretel". This appealed to us because there were five parts and there were five actors in our group. We also liked the dark, gothic undertone of the piece which we felt would be interesting to create onstage

and as actors and dramatist we felt it would bring about a remarkable performance using innovative and original portrayals of the characters and the set of the woods and the sweet house.

However as a group we struggled to find a political message that could be expressed via Brechtian methods, as there wasn't really a message other than good always prevails. We wanted something with a bit more substance and relevance. In addition, although there were five parts for acting, it transpired that the lead protagonists of the play, Hansel and Gretel, undoubtedly were the bigger parts and the other roles were merely supporting parts. This was something we did not want as it would have been unfair on those without the lead roles and so we wanted an ensemble piece that would showcase each of our acting talent equally, and was also something that could present to skills of the technician in our group, Eoin.

Eventually we came across " Oh! What a Lovely War! " after having watched the play and feeling inspired and moved by it. We wanted to create a piece of drama that would be both visually, aurally, and thought-provokingly interesting for both audience and performer. For the opening scene of our piece, it is the musical number, " I'll make a man of you". This was sung by me and as such I had to deliver it with gestus as well as the other actors responding to my actions with their own gestus. It begins with Kerry, Ben, Rob, and Chris playing various potential army recruits, placed in different positions on different levels acting out various typical " army" actions such as Chris was polishing his boots.

I was stood in the audience on the third step, facing away from the audience looking at the potential recruits. As I walk down the steps towards the stage this is in essence me breaking the fourth wall by using the audience as part of the show. There were fairy lights making a strip of little lights through which I walk down to again create an image of glamour and sophistication. This scene is essentially about how men during 1914 were lured by propaganda to join the war, with my character representing propaganda through a sexually provocative song. I decided to speak the opening verse on pitch a capella to create immediate effect of drama and focus on me and the words i was saying, then progress into song and dance with the background music to create a musical spectacular to make a glamorous tone.

This was to show the irony and the fact that the war was nothing like what my character portrays it to be. For the chorus, I flirt seductively and suggestively with each potential recruit such as smiling coyly or fluttering my eyelashes at each of them in turn, however just as soon as each of them manages to get my attention i move on to the next recruit. This was to make them wanting more so they would essentially have to join the army to get the full benefit. Throughout the second verse it is all about how joining the army makes you manly and so I refer to making " a strapping soldier of a kid" and instead of singing the line " you put me through it and I didn't want to do it, but you went and made me love you so I did" , we decided that it would make more sense and irony if the recruits sang it as though the line was a direct reference to them as individuals, even though it represents the

feeling of pressure on all soldiers. We then all form a line upstage and act out various actions that refer to the line being sung.

So for example, on the line “ On Monday a rifleman in green” the recruits pretend they are shooting a rifle and various levels to make it look visually interesting. For the closing line “ but on Saturday I’m willing if you’ll only take the shilling, to make a man of any one of you” this would again be direct audience address, in keeping with Brechtian techniques, whilst marching as though to war, and point to the audience on the word “ you” to make it seem more personal and relatable. We wanted this scene to be really upbeat with lots of action and movement to contrast with the more sober, solemn scenes that follow. To link this scene with the next, my character boldly strolls up the audience side steps shouting requests at them as though they are potential recruits themselves, and then continues down the middle until the scene is set for the next scene. For the next scene, “ the French scene”, we wanted an atmosphere of embarrassment and farce between the characters of Sir John French and General Lanrezac, as the humour comes as a result of neither person knowing the language of the other, even though French thinks he does.

The hilarity arises as my representational character, Belgium aka General de Moranneville, gets dismissed by both characters for being “ le petit Belgique”. Gestus was used to great effect here by each character over emphasising their country’s stereotype as far as accent and mannerisms were concerned. For example Ben, who plays Sir John French, fiddles with his monocle and preens his moustache, while his accent is very similar to that of “ Queen’s English” to get an immediate sense of character. Likewise, Chris,
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who plays General Lanrezac, is very physical in his hand gestures and very expressive on his face. Moreover, the Brechtian technique of *verfremdungseffekt* is used to great effect in this scene.

In particular the opening dialogue between Kerry and Ben's characters, French and Wilson, by vocally creating the sound of a car engine and physically bouncing about in time to the car's movement Development as an actor and the pursuit of excellence and personal contribution to the dramatic intentions Personal strengths and weaknesses as well as of the group, the appropriateness of the piece One particular strength of mine is that I am naturally creative and enthusiastic, so this showed through during the rehearsal and development progress, when fresh and original ideas were needed. Also, having a keen interest in history and having previously studied World War One in great depth for my GCSEs, so this gave me great insight into the themes and issues of the play, and the way it portrayed conflict on both an international and personal level for the soldiers, generals, women in the war, political action and military strategies, and trench warfare, which proved a big part in the piece itself, as my character has an ongoing association with Kerry's character throughout. Another strength is that I am very able to do physical acting and dance, as my small built body is easy to manoeuvre into shapes and bend and be carried more easily, than say a taller, bigger built person. This proved helpful during the opening musical scene of "I'll make a man of you" when my character begins in the audience, and gets lifted by Rob and Chris' characters in a smooth, slick movement and then is transported and lowered back onto the ground. After that proceeds a complicated and energetic choreographed dance routine to

compliment the lyrics of the piece and Brechtian techniques of song and direct audience address. Also I helped to keep momentum during the rehearsals and try to help others feel focused when at times they lacked drive and motivation.

I felt my firm attitude towards tardiness and tension in the group benefitted the group as I helped encourage positive behaviour and create a productive environment, conducive to creativity and Moreover, a strength of mine is my resourcefulness in gaining the majority of props and costumes, and the flags for the set design. This was through various resources such as the internet, costume shops and asking people about historical artefacts such as the medals in the French and British conference scene, and the hats appropriate for the soldiers in the German and British trench scene. What is more, my strength as a singer also proved beneficial to the show as I have been in previous school musical productions and have private singing lessons to develop my contralto/mezzo soprano voice, which aided the quality of the opening scene, " I'll make a man of you". However, one particular weakness of mine as was my lack of creativity at times as i procrastinated occasionally and relied upon the ideas and suggestions of the others. To combat this I took short breaks and allowed myself to think and reflect on the aims of the scene and what I could achieve through my character, and how i could portray this through facial expression, posture, gesture, levels, use of props and interaction with other characters.

All five of us who were actors in the performance were friends prior to the drama piece so we knew each other well, and we were very enthusiastic and creative. We all have seen the play performed, so had relevant knowledge of <https://assignbuster.com/dramatic-aims-and-objectives-and-choice-of-play-essay/>

play and characters represented, and could use it well as inspiration for our own piece. This was beneficial as we are very much an ensemble group who like to appreciate each other's talents and not try to "outshine" any other actor in the group. Our close friendship allowed us to communicate ideas much more effectively and take on board constructive criticism easier and with more justification, not taking each negative censure as a personal attack: we were all friendly and approached each disapproval of a particular idea as a challenge to be overcome- we decide that to be fair and encouraging, we would try all ideas out before totally discarding them, thus creating a more reasonable way of coming up with ideas.

This proved useful as many of the final staging came through as a result of trying out actions that did not work initially but we adapted them to create a more interesting and Brechtian piece. Furthermore, we are all good at physical theatre and are good at coming up with ideas for representational scenes, but lacked enough motivation and ingenuity when coming up with naturalistic scenes and dialogue, as they all turned out tedious and overlong and not concise enough, taking the focus away from the scene's objective. Also, a couple of group members lacked focus and drive at times and were very easily distracted. It was ultimately inevitable that procrastination would take place and valuable rehearsal time was wasted a few times as a result of this, causing minor tensions between the group members. However, we all decided that teamwork was vital if we wanted to succeed and actually achieve our dramatic aims, and we always overcame our trials and tribulations throughout. The piece we selected from "Oh! What a Lovely War!" was appropriate for us as an ensemble group not only because one of

our main strengths is our ability to work as a group and not overshadow the other actors, but also the fact that its episodic, representational portrayal lent itself well with our Brechtian techniques and dramatic devices.

Moreover, the piece was appropriate for us in terms of costume, set and props as it wasn't too complex and difficult to create, as we wanted to achieve themes and ideas, rather than individual characters. Health and safety Throughout the rehearsal process and dramatic development, we used warm-ups to gain focus and perspective on the tasks that lay ahead. These included concentration techniques activities, and teamwork building. To ensure all safety procedures were met, we all wore appropriate shoes (flat comfortable practical shoes) and appropriate dress (no baggy clothing vulnerable to get caught on equipment, set or by props. Also we taped down securely the lights that were where the stage met the audience, to ensure no one tripped over and injured him or herself.

Plus we tied safety wires to all the overhead lighting and projector, again to avoid them injuring anyone by becoming loose and unexpectedly falling on to a potential actor or audience member down below. We handled all technical equipment such as laptops, lighting rigs, electrical boxes and sound decks with care and made sure they were not misused so as to create potential electrical damage or be a safety hazard. In addition, we taped down all the lighting cable and the fairy light wires to the floor using secure duct tape to avoid unnecessary trips and falls, and made sure we alerted the audience and cast and crew to the use of these precautions and the use of the smoke machine in case there might have been a risk of harming anyone.

Furthermore, we did not use pyrotechnics to ensure that the surrounding
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stage curtains were not accidentally set alight, as none of our props, costume and set was fire proof. In addition, we always transported the boxes and seats during scene transition safely and carefully. We also skilfully choreographed each scene, particular those with a lot of physical movement and actor interaction, particularly the energetic musical numbers “ I’ll make a man of you” and “ Hitchy koo”, so that nobody came to any harm when performing, and by checking for any sharp edges on the stage (there were none) and on the boxes, we were able to work around it with ease and simplicity.

Conclusion and evaluation On the whole, I am very contented with our final piece of devised drama. I trust that other members feel the same and are proud of our individual and personal achievements, having tackled a controversial subject matter whilst conveying it with tact and respect, but also interest. We used a variety of thematic devices and techniques to add significance and curiosity to our scenes. I consider the piece to have achieved its dramatic aims and successfully affected the audience in a positive and thought-provoking way. Having had more time, I think we could have possibly developed the themes and the relationships between characters more, as most of the scenes were quite short and representational, rather than naturalistic. However, I am wholeheartedly satisfied with the final piece of theatre and thoroughly enjoyed the entire process, from conception all the way to performance.