

Metamorphosis by steven berkoff essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

During the first course of the year in As Drama and Theatre Studies, we have been exploring Metamorphosis by Steven Berkoff, and My Mother Said I Never Should by Charlotte Kesteven. Both of these plays allowed us to explore critical factors which make up the course, these headings are: practitioner, vocal awareness, non-verbal communication, visual, aural and spatial dynamics, language, plus social, historical cultural and political contexts. Finally the plays uncover interpretation and characterization along the way too.

When looking at the deeper meanings behind the plays, they do have similar themes for example change and family interactions. In the sense where My Mother Said deals with time change between family members; how the era they were born in has an effect on their opinions and the approach they take, in order to deal with a situation they faced with. Similarly Metamorphosis deals with a change on one family member and how this ricochets on to the rest of the family, but it also exposes how affection increases or decreases amongst the relatives.

The plays are different when it comes to style/ genre, as My Mother Said is mostly a naturalistic play as it focuses around more of a real life situation, which could more likely happen to any family. On the other hand Metamorphosis is much more non-naturalistic, as the techniques used at some points in the play are to deliberately create a non-natural environment (choral speech). Practitioners Before reading the text Metamorphosis we as a group did some background research on the play and I had found out that the original play was created by Franz Kafka a German writer.

Originally Kafka wrote this play so that it could reflect how he was feeling at the time as he felt that society looked down on him as an inferior being not even a human which is why in the play the family representing society at the time abandon Gregor who turns in to a beetle. Gregor symbolizes Kafka. Later on in time Steven Berkoff develops the play Metamorphosis by adding his own style of acting to it (total theatre). The definition of Total Theatre is that all elements of the production are all equally important.

In the first stage production of Metamorphosis the acting would be described as 'mellow drama' as the actions are very over the top and not realistic. The audience at the time complained as it was like nothing they had seen before but most importantly the original writer was disappointed as the over the top acting created a decoy from the main factor of the play which was to share the emotional strain and torment Kafka was experiencing in his life. A Constantinian Statistician's idea about acting was to become the character rather than to pretend to be the character.

He developed his system with a simple phrase; inside out and outside in, this helps his actors to become the character so first they would look at the 'inside' things which create their character, for example morals, the way they think, likes and dislikes etc. Then they would go on to the 'outside' aspects like the way the character is dressed, their walk and how they would talk too. These are tasks the actors would have to undergo in order to master Statistician's acting technique. Practically we explored this system as a group when we were asked to be explorers that are fascinated by the room and are looking for facts.

At the end of the time limit we were then asked if we were actually collecting facts about the room or are we acting (pretending) as if we are, by then end the majority of the class were found to be pretending. Vocal Awareness To get us started with this topic we did some off-text improvisation which allowed us to explore how the characters surrounding, time of day and who they may be talking to can have an affect on how they sound and how the lines are delivered. To explore this in more depth we did a group practical where we each had to create a scenario.

For example where the character is, who they are talking to, time of day, temperature (so if it's July it may be hot/ warm), what is their objective and how do they use their voice in order to get what they want. During this practical all groups had the same set of lines but had different scenarios. My personal findings at the end of this were that an individual's speech should be able to tell you how they are feeling without any actions added. Also to add to our vocal awareness we looked at a section of the text where Greeter was having a convocation with her mother.

We had to work in pairs and decide when Greeter was in control with what she was saying and when she was not so powerful in her delivery. This task allowed us not only to uncover Greeter's status through unpicking the way she talks and delivers her thoughts. When looking at vocal awareness around the play *My Mother Said* we experimented with the four monologues from each character. We were split into groups and told to change aspects of that section for example the tone, pitch, pace, volume and diction the text is been said in.

When carrying out this task I realized how important it is to know 1) why your character is speaking 2) How they are feeling 3) Who they are talking to because those factors affect the deliverance. I in my pair found that Margarita's monologue right at the end of the play if because she has died however hen said as if Margaret is drunk and is talking to her best friend the whole meaning of the monologues is lost and it becomes a drunken ramble from a middle aged woman.

Non-verbal Communication Non-verbal Communication can be anything from music to actors on stage saying nothing or Just their body language alone. Being that Metamorphosis is a non- naturalistic play it is more fun to play around with the verbal and non-verbal communication because it would add to the peculiar atmosphere. Soon after we had finished reading the play, we were faced with a selection of music which collectively e had to choose a sound that best summed up the play.

In the end we chose Fur Elise by Beethoven as I/ we thought that due to the song starts of slow with a mid range pitch it represents the beginning of the play but as it starts to pick up past and become more exotic when Gregg is changing into a beetle. One very helpful aspect to non-verbal communication was that we as a class created actions that go with phrases that come up through out the text for example I work, I eat, I command and I am beetle. These helped us to create a story from them alone and to rein act the play with no verbal communication.

In My Mother Said there are many scenes when it is possible to act with out a verbal communication between characters or even a character and the

audience. For example in act one scene six where Jackie gives her daughter Rosier to her mother Margaret. My self and another student was exploring the possible non-verbal communication and we thought we would take it completely to the non-verbal category; we decided to make the scene in to a contrary dramatic dance, where the audience are able to fully see the unnatural standoff between Jackie and Margaret, they were also able to see the defied Jackie was faced with, for he first time.

This was imperative because Jackie from the start is very charismatic and confident individual. When we were making this scene we had to think about our proteomics this involved us thinking about where we would be on stage at what time each other, height and our movement in sync too. For that interpretation my self and the other student were commended for our hard work as it was drastically different to others in the class.

We also had to think about what we had created and try and re introduce the verbal communication back in to the scene which was an extension task. Visual, Aural and Spatial Elements After reading the text we had a look at hoe some other productions of the plays were staged and had a class discussion on how we felt things would work or not go so well with those productions. However we then had to think about how we as individuals would stage our own production of the play if we had to.

The chose was to set out the stage over all or a specific scene. When I created my floor plan for Metamorphosis I thought that the stage should be segregated with different flooring so I would be clear which part of the house is the family are as this area will have nice new looking lour but the section

where I would be for Gregory room will be dirty, dark and dingy. This is because the family push Gorgor to the bottom and don't see him as a valuable member of the family but only to earn them money in the beginning.

With this production I feel that sound should be very important so I believe that extra sounds that is not the casts voices should be pre-recorded this I think will help bring along a more non-naturalistic environment. When it comes to spatial element I would like my audience to be sat in the traverse setting as then they will be able to get the full effect of the play too. This type of intimacy between the audience and the actors means that they can build relationships with each other and at curtail moments in the play the audience can relate with the feelings of the character.

With my Mother Said I planned that the audience should be seated in a Premium arch as this will help to engage them in the story for example this type of seating creates the effect of watching a story in another world and this is the effect I would like the audience to feel when they are watching the production. However I don't want them to be too far away as I still want them to know and feel that this is a real life example so they can relate to the themes and emotions. Visually I want the stage to appear very bare and decedent as this will reflect the relationship between the lady as empty because that is how I feel their relationship is.

Being that the play changes from era to era it would be difficult to change the soundings quick and easy so I would prefer if there was no fixed set. Charlotte Kettle clearly specifies that she does not want any set used to

create a homely feel. Again where sound is concerned I think I would like pre-recorded sounds as it would help with the intensity of the play ND it would help things to run smoothly for example in the opening act there is a voice over radio which I think in order to capture the war era that sound is imperative to have with the news it brings.

Language Metamorphosis is a play I feel is very easy to manipulate in order to get the effect you are looking for. So playing around with its language was one of the most fun things I was faced with in the course. When reading the play I did find a set of characters to me a bit odd. However their oddness made me very interested in them. I noticed that the stage directions for this character said that it could be played by one person or y three people with to me ultimately meant that they where the same person.

So I thought it would be more interesting to have the three actors play the one part but in order to accomplish this they would need some language devises to make this work completely. Firstly I had to think of devises that would show unity so I came up with: choral speech, repetition, ellipse, interjection and rhyme. After coming up with these we had to try and apply them to the section of the text where the loggers come in. Using language devises really helped to apply emphasis on the situation.

It also help o contribute to the non-naturalistic vibe the play has as it is not natural for a group of people to constantly be talking in sync or to finish each others sentences. My class's exploration of language started with improvisation from the text where we tried acting out different scenes in different language styles like slang, formal, romantic etc his allowed us to

see how the language use to deliver the text could change its meaning or power it may have. We then thought about how the play could be categorized as naturalistic or non naturalistic, formal or informal, prose or verse, literal or figurative.

We then arranged them in level of importance for example we collectively thought that verse and figurative language was more used in the child scene in the play because the children talk in riddles and sing songs in the opening. Also in the child scene the children say loads of thing that they would not really do. For example ' Let's kill our mummies'. Social, Historical, Cultural and Political The first published play of Metamorphosis was realized in 1915 which was the start of the world war one, so you can imagine the terror and panic the country would be in.

Although we can get a sense of the traditional status hierarchy in the home. For example the need for men to earn a living which Gorgo originally fulfilled and for Greta to ' marry well'. During this time era there was not welfare system so the poor were really poor and the rich were extremely rich so you could understand the types of people Kafka was made to feel belittled by as we have to remember on a wider scale what was taking action when he was writing/ published this play.

Being that the play was written the the writer Charlotte Kettle is fairly accessible to the key facts and influences that were around the time eras the play was set it. Being hat the play has a tendency to keep traveling in time backwards and forwards we can see why it would be important to know complete what was going on in these time, this would reflect the characters

actions and speech. At the peak of the play its set in the sass which was the start of Margaret Theatres rule of Britain (first woman prime minister), this would have a big change in the dynamics of how women would have been passive as it was an era with loads of changes.

Also in 20th century the play goes through a big women's protest against nuclear weapons on British soil but actually belonging to the Americans. This protest went on for.... And was widely televised. During Margaret Theatres rule a very big situation occurred called the Miners Strike where she order all/ majority of the mines to close leaving thousands of people unemployed. These type of situations would obviously have an effect on the public inspiring them to change their behavior or act a assertion way.

So if this was the case, the characters in the play must also be affected. I believe Rosier was the most easiest to influences as she is the youngest that has grown up in the time when all of this was going on so therefore she would only see it as natural to say how she eels (freedom of speech) and to be in charge as a female (female prime minister). To explore this section we after reading the text had to look up the time periods specified in order to see what was going on in the social, cultural and political aspect of Britain.

We found that the Falkland Island was invaded by Argentina, the hippy movement was popular, and woman gained the power to vote and some more. Other than this we got the opportunity to unpick a scene in pairs to see the deep meaning behind specific words of phrases said to see whether they would link up with the events happening at the time or those that have previously happened. Interpretation and Characterization Interpretation is

something I feel comes naturally to us all because on a basic level it's just what you personally think something symbolizes.

However when you get to this stage in studying Drama you have to be able to take that definition a little further, for example it's not just what you think something in the play means but you also have to think about specific choices the director and team would have to make in order to give a meaning below the surface meaning. When exploring this section we looked at fragments of each text and we brought it back to life and played around with the character and the situation to see how it would complement or disrupt the audience's interpretation of what's going on.

When it comes to characterization it is a bit critical because if the actors are not in character or can't play the role effectively it just will have an effect on everything else even if the story line is amazing. Noting this in mind we discussed as a group what we thought the hardest roles in each play would be for us as individuals. Overall for *My Mother Said* we all thought it would be really hard to play a child or even an elderly person as being a child was too far to completely remember and an elderly life we haven't lived yet.

So our teacher helped us by playing a game where we run around the room in the age he calls out. At the end of this session we all identified that it worked as we as a class fed off each other's energy which is crucial that you are able to do so, when acting on stage with others as it allows a set text to look and sound natural and spontaneous. Mostly for *Metamorphosis* we did off-text improvisations where we were given a situation and had to act out the

scene in character. This help us to develop a better understanding of our characters and their legislations towards each other.

One lesson involved us looking and the logger's scene but we wanted to look at the reason why they may have been evicted from their last residence. This help us to gather thoughts and emotions on how they may be feeling knowing that they can not carry out the same behavior which got them evicted in the first place. We also looked at the logger's as having a significance in the play; considering that both Kafka and Before were looked upon as social inferiors (Gregg) the logger's may represent society coming in to the Samba's house and judging them.