

AS LEVEL

Exemplar Candidate Work

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H059

For first teaching in 2016

Exemplar 1

Process to performance research reports

Version 1



Introduction

This work has been produced by Drama students as part of their school curriculum time, studying practitioners and performing from a text. It offers teachers an insight into how the process can be recorded by students in their research report and portfolio for Process to performance (Component 01/02/03/04).

As these responses have not been through moderation, an indication of the level of each response has not been included. A version of this resource which provides an indication of the level of the response will be made available in addition to this version in due course.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of an endorsed approach to creating a research report or portfolio.

EXEMPLAR RESEARCH REPORT 1

SAMPLE ANSWER

The practical exercises and working methods of Joan Littlewood and how these can be applied to studying Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht

Joan Littlewood, an English theatre director and practitioner, was born on 6th October 1914 and died 20th September 2002. She was born illegitimately to her mother of 16 and so was raised, largely, by her grandparents. This is possibly a leading factor which influenced her drive to creating controversial theatre. Throughout her career, she was well-known for dressing in male clothing and for displaying features of masculinity, this is possibly a reaction to the people she was working with and competing against. During her life time, she witnessed much of women's fight for equality, it is highly likely that she received negativity for trying to compete within the field of directing as a female and so she probably believed that in order to succeed she must look and act more like her male counterpart in order to be seen as more of an equal. As a practitioner, Littlewood wanted to create a style of theatre that was more accessible to working class people, like those of her own background, rather than just rich upper class citizens. Therefore, she wanted her theatre to be less obscure and for her actors to play roles in a more realistic manner rather than her actors 'walking like actors' she wanted them to walk like people. She drew many of her actors from non-theatrical backgrounds in order to experiment with more physical methods of characterisation and allow her characters to be more realistic and lifelike. Littlewood also liked to explore extremely controversial issues through her theatre, linking to her highly left wing political beliefs and involvement with the Communist Party, which led to her being banned from broadcasting on the BBC in 1941.

Mother Courage and Her Children is a play by the German practitioner Bertolt Brecht in 1939. Although the play is set during the 1600s in the Thirty Years War it is based on Nazi Germany during the rise to World War II. Brecht made the setting of the play blurred in order to disguise its political message because whilst he intended the play to warn people about what would become of Nazi Germany, if he had made these intentions too clear then the Nazis would have killed him and his work been destroyed. The play follows the life of Mother Courage as she trails the war back and forth across Europe, following the armies and selling provisions to the soldiers from the back of her wagon. She gradually loses each of her children to the war as she battles between her duties as a mother and her instincts as a business woman. One particularly strong theme within the play is Mother Courage's attachment to the wagon, it becomes clear that she considers it one of her children and possibly the most valuable of them because she keeps its stability in her best interests. For example, at one point within the play when her son, Swiss Cheese is in trouble, Mother Courage is given the option of paying a ransom for his release, however, this would mean selling her wagon. In the end, her hesitation towards selling the wagon lead to the death of her son. Although she cares and loves each of her children, Mother Courage understands that whilst their safety is important to her, none of her children nor her can survive without the wagon because it is their only means of allowance. One main theme throughout the play is the sadness and misery that is brought about by war, this is a key message that Brecht wanted to deliver to people as Nazi Germany prepared to go to war, he wanted to warn them of the devastating consequences it would bring.

As seen with her production of 'Oh! What a Lovely War', Littlewood like to explore the theme of war through the use of comedy. For example, she might like to dress her soldiers in bright and comedic costumes that mock their role in order to demonstrate the concept of soldiers just being puppets to the government. However, this strategy might often receive criticism because people felt that she was mocking the role of the armed forces and their brave work. Within Mother Courage and Her Children there is quite a lot of content involving soldiers. For example, in a workshop we explored the first scene of the play where the Recruiter and the Sergeant stop and question Mother Courage as she travels along a country road near a town. Brecht already paints the two characters in a fairly mocking way because during the scene Mother Courage makes them pick paper out of a hat, both of them pick a note that indicates their death is approaching. However, in order to emphasise this mocking of the military, we chose to dress the two soldiers as clowns. We found this worked quite effectively as our audience could not take the soldiers seriously and found the characters as a bit of a joke. However, they were not able to understand why we had chosen to depict the two soldiers like this and so did feel a little confused. I feel that this confusion might have been something quite evident within much of Littlewood's theatre in a sense because I don't feel that the audiences would understand why she made certain decisions, however I do believe that it would have been effective because although our audience couldn't understand the reasoning behind the decisions, they were brought to feel a certain way towards the soldiers which is the effect Littlewood would have wanted to create.

During my introduction to Joan Littlewood, I mentioned how she would often dress and behave in a more masculine way in order to make herself more authoritative, this was also a theme that she continued through her theatre. Women's battle for equality would have been something evident in the media throughout her lifetime and so became a key issue for her to explore, particularly with her love for controversy. One way that we explore the theme of authority within Mother Courage in our exploration sessions was by making all of the highest ranking soldiers within the play female characters and have them to be seen giving orders to lower ranking male soldiers. Although this was received quite well by our audience because many member likes the concept of

'woman power', I doubt that the reaction received during Littlewood's time would have been as positive as many men would have seen this as an attempt to mock them which would not have been at all acceptable. We also played around with different accents during this exploration, we used very prestigious accents to portray rich people and quite common accents for poorer characters in order to demonstrate social class in quite a stereotypical way.

Joan Littlewood came from quite a working class background, as such she was quite left wing in her political views and often demonstrated this through her theatre, one way being through her portrayal of rich and poor families. In workshops we depicted the rich as having a lot of excess food for example within the scene where Mother Courage is at the Officer's tent, we depicted there being an excess amount of food within the tent, but then in contrast to this there is a point within the play when Mother Courage, the Chaplin and Katterin have very little food and they are struggling to share it amongst them. This concept of depicting those with a richer status as being quite greedy would have likely been quite popular with Littlewood's audiences because she directed her theatre more at working class people, who were generally more poor and, at this time particularly, would have likely felt certain negativity towards those with a richer status.

As a director preparing for a performance of Mother Courage and Her Children in the style of Joan Littlewood, I would want to highlight the concept of the soldiers being victims to the war and puppets to the government because to a certain extent, they were indispensable during these times. In order to accommodate the target audience of working class people, I would make the performance of the play more naturalistic in order to reduce the element of alienation that Brecht intended for the script because Littlewood wanted to make her theatre more accessible to a working class audience and less obscure because she wanted it to entertain them, whilst also exploring some quite controversial issues. In order to successfully reach this target audience, the performance would need to be quite lifelike and possibly even be more reflective of a kitchen sink drama, any obscurities or non-naturalistic elements would likely impede the level of communication to the audience and take away from their enjoyment of the production.

I would also want to explore the theme of authority which was something quite important to Joan Littlewood because of her battle to be powerful in a world dominated by men. I would appoint many of the powerful male-lead roles to women, particularly the roles of high ranking officers in order to push the concept of female power, quite in contrast with how this would have actually been during the war. Alternatively, if I was to decide to keep the authoritative high ranking officers as males, I would direct my actors to depict these characters in quite an incompetent way in order to mock male power and demonstrate lesser female roles as being more powerful and competent.

As an actor playing Mother Courage, I would try to particularly push my portrayal of her power and authority so that it obviously overshadowed that of her male counterparts. However, I believe that this concentration on female power may be less effective on a modern-day audience because it is more common for women to have authoritative roles, whereas during Joan Littlewood's time this would have been more shocking as this kind of behaviour from a woman would have been far more uncommon and perhaps even unheard of. In contrast to this, a male soldier role should be played as less authoritative and powerful so that it is possible for the audience to see an immediate contrast between the power of the two sexes. Although they might not understand why this decision has been made, it would leave them questioning it and thinking about the difference between male and female power which might leave them to consider why, throughout history, males have been more powerful which is what Littlewood would have wanted to achieve through her theatre.

As a designer, I would dress all soldiers in quite bright and possibly even jokey costumes in order to mock their authority by leading the audience to laugh at them, reflecting the goal of highlighting the concept of them just being puppets to the government and incorporating the element of the war as a comedic topic, quite in contrast to how it would normally be depicted which is quite serious. I would set the stage up in quite a naturalistic way, so it would likely be quite detailed rather than the minimalistic stage intended by Brecht. During Brechtian productions of the play, it is common for the wagon to be prevalent in all scenes in order to show it as a constant and at the centre of life and the centre of the play, however, in order to accommodate the more naturalist style of the play I would use a wagon that the character of Mother Courage would be able to bring onto stage when it was required within the scene.



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