

***‘Present Past’ Pitch Presentation on
Breathing Corpse by Laura Wade, and my
role within the presentation, and its
Evaluation.***

For our group presentation on Laura Wade's '**Breathing Corpses**' we explored the play's themes, meaning, and how our theatre company, '*The Coroners*', would stage a production at the Royal Court Theatre in London. As part of the Present Past play production idea, we focused on the elements of production, performance, design and genre that would shape a compelling Present Past Pitch Presentation.

Throughout this module, we read a range of plays from different playwrights and presented them at the end of each lesson. Doing these mini presentations helped me understand how to research all the different elements that make up a production, such as costume, lighting, sound, set, and props. With this, I understood what needed to be done for each presentation, which helped me follow a structure. I made sure to follow the CAST AND CREW GO guideline to the best of my ability to make sure I covered everything that needed to be covered when presenting the play.

When I first read '**Breathing Corpses**', what stood out to me the most was how quiet and still the play felt. The first scene introduces Amy, a hotel chambermaid, who discovers a body that has committed suicide. The presence of the corpse in the hotel room stood out to me immediately. The play doesn't treat the corpse as a shocking moment like in real life – it treats it as something that has simply become part of everyday life – which makes the scene very unsettling and disturbing.

The play's episodic, non-linear structure confused me at first. But I later realized that this was done on purpose to demonstrate how overwhelmed the characters feel after encountering multiple deaths. My first impression of the play was about being stuck in a time of grief and not being able to move on.

For our presentation, my role was to explore Scene 1 and Scene 5, looking at sets, costumes, lighting, props, and the meaning behind each scene. After reading the script and watching a performance online, I researched how other productions portrayed each character and their responses to grief. I also researched the designer, lighting designer and sound designer from the first production of '**Breathing Corpses**' performed on 24 February 2005 at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. (*Mark Jonathan (2023)*) (*Paulwillsdesign.com (2025)*) (*Team BWW (2025)*)

Scene 1 Design Choices

The play opens in a '*mid-price hotel room*' (page 115), which I imagined as cold but bright, with the atmosphere setting up the unsettling nature of the play. Through researching Laura Wade, the playwright, I found that she focuses more on themes of families, relationships, and hidden emotions. I researched some other plays from Wade which linked with '**Breathing Corpses**' in terms of themes and meaning. One that I found was '**Colder Than Here**', (*Londonpubtheatres.com (2023)*) which explores a

woman dying of bone cancer and her family coming to terms with her impending death. I wanted to understand why Wade wrote '**Breathing Corpses**' as it was such an unexpected storyline, and found that she often writes about grief and death.

I decided to go for essential but meaningful props for this presentation. For Scene 1, I used a variety of cleaning supplies such as spray, gloves, and towels. Then, I mentioned the envelope and pill bottle, an important aspect of the play, as it shows how one of the deaths happened. Lastly, I included a telephone to depict the scene where Amy picks up the phone to report the death, but reluctantly puts it back down to show how maybe people might believe that she has something to do with the deaths inside the hotel room, as that was not the first corpse she discovered. Luckily, I had some of the props on hand and was able to contribute to the performance of our presentation, the white sheet for the corpse, the cleaning spray, and the blue light to demonstrate the coldness of the scene.

Amy's costume stayed true to her work uniform, with her white shirt, black skirt, with a burgundy tabard. (See Appendix 1) I chose to keep it close to the original script because it highlights the key themes and symbolism of the play. With black representing death, white – the shift between life and death and burgundy- blood and violent death.

For the set, I chose a simple hotel room layout that felt cold and distant. I found a drawing on Canva that matched what I had envisioned. Coincidentally, the artwork above the headboard resembled the Angel of Death - which is a symbol that is used to represent Amy. (See Appendix 2)

For lighting, I used blue light to create a cold, distant, and clinical feeling. Because the play begins (Scene 1) and ends (Scene 5) in the same hotel room, the blue lighting helped the production feel like a full circle moment. (See Appendix 3 & 4)

Lastly, I looked at the different sounds both scenes had, and instead of using simple, everyday sounds like footsteps or knocking for a hotel room setting. I chose a long, eerie sound to heighten the tension in the scene. This helped create an uncomfortable atmosphere for the audience.

Scene 5 Design Choices

For Scene 5, Amy walks into a hotel room and sees a body under a white sheet, but instead of being a corpse, it turns out to be a living man named Charlie. This scene takes place in the same setting as the first scene, using the same set, lighting, and sound design. Amy keeps the same costume, whereas Charlie's costume, trousers, button-up shirt and dress shoes show that he is dressing smartly for his meeting. However, the props have changed, introducing Charlie's Japanese carving knife, which he shows to Amy. The object suggests it's not simply an innocent knife but rather something violent, leaving the ending intentionally unresolved.

EVALUATION

Throughout the process, I developed a clearer understanding of '**Breathing Corpses**' themes of death, grief and how the play is not just about finding dead bodies, but about how a person manages with that grief and what they then do with it.

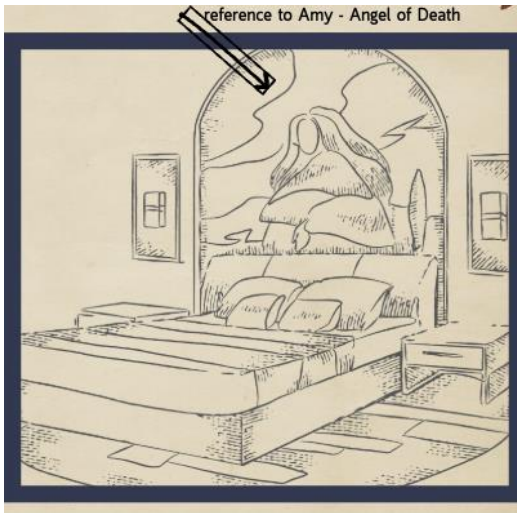
Upon reflection, I would expand on how the designs could be adapted for different stages and include more sketches to help visualise the ideas better. Overall, the process helped me think about how design choices communicate ideas, mood and different characters.

I believe this play is especially important today and for years to come because loss is something people constantly experience. '**Breathing Corpses**' shows that grief is complicated but happens to everyone, and seeing it being performed onstage can help audiences feel less alone in their own head. The play's use of everyday settings, such as hotel rooms, a storage facility, and people's homes, helps keep the play more relatable. In the play, death isn't seen as a shock but a quiet and lingering presence throughout the scenes. Through blue lighting, simple but meaningful props and sound which matches the atmosphere, the play guides the audience through a dreamlike journey where the boundary between the living and the dead feels blurred. This is what I liked the most about the play; it's a relatable storyline for myself included.

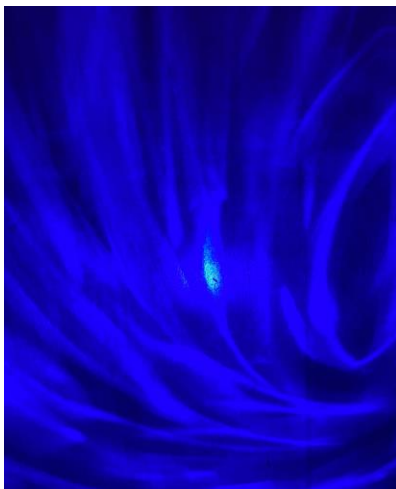
Appendix 1



Appendix 2 – Drawing from Canva



Appendix 3



Appendix 4



Reference list

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