

Production, Performance and Genre - Gavin Witt

My introduction to this module began with a relatively detailed history of theatre. As someone with a passion for both theatre and history I naively expected to already know the majority of what we were about to learn. One of the very first tasks set was to create a timeline of theatres covering styles and key moments in theatre. We plotted greek theatre at the very beginning, Shakespeare roughly a third along the line and crammed the furthest third to the right full of all the styles most theatre fans would know, Brecht, Chekhov, Realism, The Well Made Play, Musical Theatre etc. I remember feeling pleased that we'd covered the majority, subsequently feeling foolish, particularly for assuming there were no changes in theatre from the Greek's up until Shakespeare.

We looked into several plays over the following weeks following a format of CAST AND CREW GO. This format gave us a structured way to analyse plays and while I found some of the research using this method rather repetitive in the answers given, I cannot deny it made analysing the pieces much simpler. *Characters* and *Action* are fairly obvious parts of a play to analyse and I personally would place *Themes* into that category also. As a student on a design course, where the format became particularly useful where the following categories;

- "A – Aesthetic; how does it look and feel? Set, costumes, lighting, sound, props"

I have a little experience in looking for these aspects in scripts, however I have always approached this in a messier fashion. That is to say I wouldn't group these elements and read through the script looking for exclusively these. Allocating the aesthetic and what that entails its own read / research time completely changed how I view a piece of work and gave me ideas about scripts I am sure I would not have otherwise had, especially when combined with the other points of research found in, and structured with, CAST AND CREW GO.

- "E – Environment; setting, staging – when and where is it set, and how is it staged?"

Grouping *when & where* and *how is it staged* seemed strange and often unhelpful to me. For this reason I usually split this part of the structure into 2 separate points of research. I can however understand that with the right kind of script it can be very useful to combine them. To use *Lovesong* as an example, analysing the when (in this case 2 separate decades half a century apart) was an important influence on the how. The whole point behind how *Lovesong* is performed is to witness the long term journey simultaneously with two short term journeys. Understanding how this is portrayed to the audience requires definitive understanding on which era, and therefore which life, the characters are living.

Of course every point of research within CAST AND CREW GO proved incredibly useful in understanding plays to an extent I simply wouldn't have achieved without it. The most valuable aspect of this task however wasn't the research itself but rather sharing my findings with my peers the following week. Similarities are always reassuring but it was the different, sometimes opposite, findings that proved most interesting. It was surprising to see how the same piece of writing could produce such opposing views and made me realise the potential a production has to be different from another production of the same script.

I particularly enjoyed *Doll's House*, (although I am biased in this regard as I have seen this performed previously) *Bedroom Farce*, and *Lovesong*. The two plays I found myself naturally giving more time to were *Dolls House* and *Lovesong* which I think is interesting given that these

are almost entirely opposite forms of storytelling. Although both Realist pieces, which focus on very real and believable storylines, where one is portrayed in a naturalistic form (Dolls House) the other tells the story of a very real relationship through a bizarre and artistic if not absurd manner. It is therefore no surprise that I was very keen for our group during the group project to focus on Realism as our main subject, delving into Henrik Ibsen more specifically.

We allocated points of research to each member of the group. I focussed mine on the childhood and feminist influences of Henrik Ibsen as I had previously looked into the latter while compiling a mood board for another module.

Having compiled my research I decided to take a different approach to present it. Whereas the majority of the group opted to simply read out their research in a typical presentation form with slides behind them to reinforce their content, I decided it would add a dramatic element to put my research into an interview format. Working with actors was conducive to this form of presenting particularly as we had already agreed that one of the actors would portray Henrik Ibsen in their performance element. I decided to write the script as though Ibsen was a guest on a chat show as I felt this gave a modern yet realistic way to get the information across and hopefully kept those watching more engaged with the content.

I found this module has given me the ability to analyse pieces of writing in a far more structured way and will benefit me greatly when working on productions in the future. My biggest obstacle across this module was my own absences from class. As I stated earlier the greatest benefit from researching each piece was sharing and discussing our findings in class with my peers, I unfortunately missed out on many of these sessions so was unable to discuss not only my own findings but more importantly the opportunity to see how these differed from other peoples.

References

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