

Script, Rehearsal and Performance Process Workbook

A Study of The Texts

Starting out in Script, Rehearsal and Performance, we had two table reads of the two scripts we would be focusing on for the module. Those scripts being *Oh What A Lovely War* by Joan Littlewood and *Rage* by Simon Stephens.

After reading, I can say that *Oh What A Lovely War* is a very unnaturalistic piece. It has an incredibly farcical, almost circus-like, feel to the characters and scenes but also often hits the audience with harsh real First World War facts and statistics which creates quite the major contrast for the audience. Mark Lloyd describes that the play “**Should be quite bleak but this is a very funny show**”. An example of this would be at the very beginning of Act 2, on page 39: The Newspanel opens with various statistics about British casualties from different battles which is then jarringly followed with a jolly musical number: ‘Oh it’s a Lovely War’, a satirical song about the joys of being a soldier. This tone and contrast are clearly intended to be a representation of the war as a whole; a clownish mess with horrific consequences. To understand this has better helped me to improve the characterisation and stylisation of my performance, as I am constantly reminding myself to emphasise the importance of the ridiculousness Littlewood clearly pushes to convey to the audience.

My first impression of *Rage* by Simon Stephens was very different to *Oh What a Lovely War*; immediately starting with two underaged siblings having a sexually charged conversation with following themes of drug use, police brutality and discrimination. A particular talking point that seemed to sweep our discussion of *Rage* was about the play’s heavy themes and, specifically, how Stephens chose to portray them. This play is filled with harsh language and slurs as well as the brutal depictions of police brutality. The script does not shy away from showing outwardly racist characters listing slurs to insult others or giving harrowing imagery in stage directions. An example of this can be seen midway through page 29, where the stage directions describe the police holding the “**Readhead boy tightly with his arms behind his back**” and that throughout the scene “**the boy screams and screams and screams.**” Stephens wants the audience to feel uncomfortable. This was imperative to understand as performers because it meant we had an idea of what the scenes of police brutality were intended for; not just to shock an audience, but to evoke disgust.

As a personal fan of writers’ such as Sarah Kane’s work, I have an attachment and intrigue toward any script willing to portray the issue it is criticizing with unfiltered and uncensored honesty. However, I can also appreciate the sensitivity around these topics

and I am aware, and encourage, that they should be approached with maturity. Nowhere is this more the case as with the use of slurs in a script. During our group discussion, I said that the reason having sensitive topics such as racism or police brutality should be appropriate themes to explore in performance is because it is only a reenactment of harmful behavior. The difference with slurs is that *they* are the problem within themselves and that not everybody is comfortable hearing them. Despite this, I believe you can only show the audience the true extent of an issue by being as honest with them as possible. This can be disturbing for an audience, but Stephens wants to confront the audience of a harsh reality. I think this is an important thing for us as performers and creatives to grasp because these issues need to be discussed maturely in order to be portrayed effectively, thus allowing the audience to understand their severity.

To help us better understand the current issues surrounding the police, as a group we were pointed to a recently released BBC documentary, about an undercover investigation by *Panorama*. The documentary revolves around the organization's seven month secret investigation into Charing Cross Police Station in London, about the way members of Metropolitan Police Service behave behind closed doors. In the footage shown, the extent of which racism, misogyny and abuse of authority is still prevalent within the police is made painfully clear to the viewer. I think it was important for me to watch because whilst I was watching the footage and listening to some of the comments made, it imbued within me a sort of passion and frustration towards the issue that I believe would help me understand what Stephens wanted to convey in his script. Even ex Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police, Sue Fish, describes viewing the footage as **"It feels like watching a TV drama about bad cops, but this is real."** This point, although brief, made me realise something: despite the footage being real, it truly did feel as if it were a parody. This helped me to find a crucial link in tone back to Joan Littlewood's portrayal of the First World War in *Oh What a Lovely War*, an element of absurdism binding the two texts together and so providing a foundation for our showing.

My Personal Monologue

When asked to find a personal monologue to perform, there were three plays I wanted to look into. *Journey's End* was my first idea because it also takes place during the First World War, the main difference being in the play's style and tone: it is very sallow and very naturalistic. Surrey County Council describes the play as capturing the **"tension, claustrophobia and barely concealed terror"** of the conflict, which can be attributed to the fact that Sherriff himself served as a 2nd Lieutenant during the First World War. He saw it all first hand, unlike Littlewood. I thought this juxtaposition in presentation of

the same subject matter would have made for an interesting contrast of performance for the audience. I also believe it still would have been in keeping with Littlewood's original work; serving as a more grounding moment in an otherwise farcical performance.

I then looked at *Breeding* by Barry McStay, which I believed would be complimentary to our showing because both Littlewood and Stephens' texts feature a criticism of an aspect of society, those being the concept of war and the issue of police brutality. *Breeding* instead critiques the additional difficulties and scrutiny that homosexual couples face when trying to create a family, when in comparison to heterosexual couples. One of my favourite lines from the script, on page 56, highlights this intent perfectly: **"We've had to prove to you that we DESERVE a baby, while f*cking straight people can get drunk, have terrible sex, get pregnant by ACCIDENT.... While we take an exam?"** Even McStay himself has stated that his first idea for the play was about **"satirising the adoption process"** and that we **"live in a world where queer families are increasingly prevalent, but the path to making those families is less straightforward and more invasive than that taken by most heterosexuals"**. It was because of McStay's passion that I considered an extract from this play for my monologue. I believed it would have been thematically cohesive with the rest of our showing and had good potential for me to explore more dramatic performance without delving into clowning.

Eventually, I decided on a monologue from *An Inspector Calls* by J.B. Priestley, from the character of Arthur Birling. In Birling's monologue, he is addressing his family at a dinner party, basking in the pride of human accomplishment. Keeping in mind that the play is set in 1912, Birling also addresses that there is no chance of war and that the state of humanity is only ever improving. I thought these arguments Birling makes could make a perfect setup for the rest of our showing, that of course involving the very war Birling insists won't happen as well as societal issues that continue to present themselves throughout history that Birling is simply ignorant of. I also saw Birling as a sort of embodiment of the societal issues present in our showing: Birling had the arrogance and authority over those around him of the Police from *Rage* as well as the 'profits over people' mindset of the World Leaders from *Oh! What a Lovely War*. I know this because it is clear from the play that Birling is less upset about his contributions to a woman's suicide and **"more upset that his family's implication in the scandal would become public"** (Sparknotes, 2025), showing he cares more about his reputation than another human's life. I also especially like the line from Birling that there would be **"nothing to gain by war"**, which is directly contradicted by the fact stated on page 41 of *Oh! What a Lovely War* that **"21,000 Americans became millionaires during the war"**.

I found it a challenge to find Birling's journey through his monologue, as my initial interpretation was based solely on his arrogance, I struggled to see much else. However, after some discussion, I have since been able to event Birling's monologue into units and my performance has room for much more varied emotions. My rendition now involves a more sharp dismissal of Birling's son, Eric, with condescending mocking of the notion of war. As well as more excitement towards humanity's achievements such as the Titanic. I then finish the monologue, arrogant, confident in my belief that there **"isn't a chance of war"**; all played naturalistically. This is all then quickly flipped on its head with a gunshot, transitioning into our first *Oh! What a Lovely War scene*, full of clownish caricatures; straight away creating that contrast found in Littlewood's writing.

Rehearsal and Reflection

In rehearsals, There were some changes made to our chosen scenes. One specific scene I was involved in had me deliver a mini monologue from Police 4. I decided to change the way I delivered this speech and interpreted it as more of a drug induced rant from an intoxicated partygoer rather than a police officer. I chose to make this change because I thought it would give me an opportunity to perform a different character to those of Birling, Police 1 and First Officer, who all seem to fall into a more authoritative position. This way I would have the opportunity to play a character with lower societal status as well as be able to show a more heightened character without delving into clowning, both of which would show more variation in my performance.

To reflect on the module, I was very pleased with our final showing but I think I let the eventing for my monologue sway a little too much and so lost a little bit of the intended emotions within it. However, I think I have greatly improved in being able to event a script and find more subtle moments of changes in energy in text. I am also pleased with the contributions I made during rehearsals and the changes to our scenes and I think we were able to keep our underlying intention clear as a group. Going forward in future modules I would like to continue the more positive outlook I have developed on our work during this module and look forward to what is to come for us as a company.

Bibliography:

Beck, R. (2024) Barry McStay: My Story of Breeding. Available from:
<https://broadwaybaby.com/features/barry-mcstay-my-story-of-breeding/2501>

Dougall, M. (2021) STUDENT THEATER REVIEW: Rage - 53Two, Manchester.
Available from:
<https://number9reviews.blogspot.com/2021/12/student-theatre-review-rage-53two.html>

Littlewood, J. (1963) *Oh what a lovely war*. Published by: Methuen

Lloyd, M. (2023) REVIEW: Oh What a lovely War! Available from:
<https://ayoungishperspective.co.uk/2023/11/25/review-oh-what-a-lovely-war/>

McStay, B. (2023) *Breeding*. Published by: Samuel French

Priestley, J.B. (1945) *An Inspector Calls*. Published by: Heinemann

Sherriff, R.C. (1928) *Journey's End*. Published by: Heinemann

Sparknotes. (2025) Arthur Birling Character Analysis in An Inspector Calls. Available from:
<https://www.sparknotes.com/drama/an-inspector-calls/character/arthur-birling/>

Stephens, S. (2018) *Rage*. Published by: Methuen

Surrey County Council. (2024) RC Sherriff - the man behind the play. Available from:
<https://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/people/writers/sherriff/play/>

Undercover In The Police (2025) [Documentary] Emma Vardy, Rory Bibb. BBC