

UNDERSTANDING

DRAMA

NOTES

1. At risk of upsetting probably the largest percentage of drama students - the girls - I have usually used 'he' and 'him' throughout, taking my precedent from the word 'actor' which is now applied to both genders. Any of the exercises can of course be sex-changed to suit your students' requirements!

2. This resource allows you to photocopy whatever you need to for your students. Please note, however, that the material is copyrighted. None of the contents may be reproduced to pass on to other teachers or educational establishments.

3. Basic drama resource tools, which I often refer to and which you would find useful to have for some of the practical work, are the following:

a multitude of lengths of cloth of different colours. Swirly light stuff is good, such as lining material. Different lengths and different widths, so that the cloths can represent clothing perhaps, such as a veil or a wedding garment, or the change from rich to poor, but also large pieces to represent rivers, seas, clouds, the wind, a river of blood, etc. I regularly visit my local department stores and see what off-cuts and end of roll lengths they have. Fantastic bargains can be found!

a range of instruments: percussion and simple wind instruments. I always have wind-chimes too, very useful for creating an atmosphere of magical mystery.

bamboo canes of different lengths including at least a whole class's worth of long canes: nine foot [unless you have a very low studio ceiling!]. These are useful to become swords, walking sticks, staffs of authority, to create the outlines of settings, e.g. suggestions of doors, pillars, forests, etc. To suggest seats, swings, vehicles, and a multitude of other things, even large animals.

lengths of white flexible rope: for obvious purposes and also to create suggestions of the outlines of things.

a set of cheap half-masks and a set of cheap full white masks - blank expressions.

With just the above items, any drama studio is ready for action. All of these things will enhance the imagination of a group and lead them away from the naturalistic and mundane to the realm of mystery and make-believe.

4. For any further information about this or any of the other publications or workshops developed by Dramaworks write to:

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permission has been sought for all relevant material

Richard Leacroft's Illustrations for: Greek Theatre; Roman Theatre; A Medieval Pageant; the Cornish Round; the Valenciennes setting; the 2nd Globe Theatre; the theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields; Wren's Theatre Royal - all in 'Theatre and Playhouse' by Helen and Richard Leacroft, publ. Methuen
Agamemnon by Aeschylus, in 'The Oresteian Trilogy', Penguin Classics, transl. E.F.Watling
The Pot of Gold by Plautus, in 'The Pot of Gold and Other Plays', Penguin Classics, transl. E.F.Watling

The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Play of the Nativity, from 'Thieves and Angels', an edition of it edited by David Holbrook for the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich.

The Moral Play of Everyman in 'Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays, ed. A.C.Cawley, publ. Dent
John Ross - Artist's impressions of Elizabethan Public Playhouse and Private Blackfriars Theatre - in 'Theatres and Audiences' by C.J. Williams, publ. Longman

Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

Main Shakespeare extracts used: Macbeth, A Winter's Tale, The Tempest.

Inigo Jones: design for A Masque of Queens, reproduced from the Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth
Design for Florimene by Inigo Jones, Italian perspective scene design by Peruzzi & Italian Court
Masque performed for a Medici wedding in 1616, all pictures found in 'All The World's A Stage' by Ronald Harwood, publ. Methuen

The Revenger's Tragedy - Tourneur

The Duchess of Malfi - Webster

The Country Wife - Wycherley

The Way of the World - Congreve

The London Merchant - Lillo

Picture: Edward Dayes - Drury Lane 1794 - held by Agnew and Huntingdon Art Galleries

Maria Marten and the Red Barn from a touring version thought to be by John Latimer

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde

Ghosts by Henrik Ibsen, in 'Ghosts and Other Plays', Penguin Classics, transl. Peter Watts

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 6 designs by Craig, all in 'The Theatre of Edward Gordon Craig' by Denis Bablet, publ. Heineman
 design by Appia in 'Adolphe Appia: Actor - Space - Light', publ. Pro-Helvetia, Zurich and John Calder, Ltd.
 The Lesson by Eugene Ionesco, publ. Penguin in collection, 1971, © John Calder publishers Ltd. 1958
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 Woyzeck by Georg Buechner, transl. Gregory Motton, publ. Nick Hern Books
 The Three Lives of Lucie Chabrol by Complicité, from Plays:1 publ. methuen 2003, © Theatre de Complicite 1995
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 Metamorphosis & Fall of the House of Usher by Steven Berkoff, publ. Amber Lane Press, © Steven Berkoff 1981

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DEFINING DRAMA AND THEATRE

What is drama? And what is theatre? What are the differences between the two? This seems to be the most important starting point for someone beginning a drama course.

To get to grips with the differences and so as not to confuse, I am leaving out the other ways the word 'drama' is used, as in 'Stop making such a drama about things' or 'She's a real drama queen' or 'A very dramatic series of events led up to the sinking of the ferryboat.' All of these are watered-down, non-specific ways of using the word in a non-theatre context, just as people use the word 'love' in a watered-down context: 'I love chocolate,' etc.

The clearest difference I can think of is:

Drama is the process, something that is ongoing and theatre is a] a place and b] the finished product, a performance in front of an audience. Thus 'drama' can cover rehearsals and work up to a performance and also the process of

learning. You might hear of a written play-text called a 'drama' too. If you think of this playtext as something that is still in embryo - something that has to have a lot of input before it becomes a finished piece performed before an audience, then you will see that the play text - the 'drama' - is also something that is ongoing, unfinished. This is something to bear in mind if you are studying a play as part of an English course; a play is always meant for performance. Playwrights will differ in the amount of information they give about characters and staging; all playwrights recognise that the writing of the play is only the first part of what will then be a process of creation involving large numbers of people - actors, designers, director - before it becomes a finished entity and consequently a piece of theatre.

So, too, a student studying the subject is a 'drama' student. The student is in process, not a finished product, and studying what leads up to and makes theatre via exploring and understanding the process, performance spaces and the finished product which takes place in such a space.

I thought of calling this book 'Understanding Drama and Theatre' but it's a bit of a mouthful even though it is more properly accurate. The first half of the book talks about the development of drama and of the theatre spaces in which plays were performed. Every effort is made to help students understand through practical work the kind of conditions of the time and what it might have been like to be a part of them.

By the time we get to the end of the nineteenth century things become ever more complicated. How to help a student to experience all the rich variety of what develops into the Modern Age? It is too vast a canvas to fill adequately. So I have had to pick and choose and the most sensible way of doing this appeared to be by following 'strands': the strand of Naturalism, which includes Stanislavski, who formulated the acting style; the strand of political and epic theatre, which includes Brecht and his acting style; the strand from *Woyzeck* through Surrealism, which includes Artaud, and which leads into numerous other off-shoots of what is loosely called Physical Theatre. This is what the second part of the book is about. It aims to help the student encounter as much of the range of theatre still prevalent as is feasible in a limited study-period.

The final section of the book shows 'time-lines.' It aims to follow clearly such things as the development of lighting; how the stage changed from one shape to another; how the Greek Phylax plays developed over the centuries into pantomime. And so on.

I have tried to be as accurate as possible, though there are differences of opinion about a large number of things mentioned. I apologise if the research I have done doesn't concur always with yours. I apologise too for leaving out your favourite playwright or if I have dismissed with a mere wave of the hand something you are passionate about. This is the trouble with a book which tries to cover so much in such a short span. There will be gaps; there will be shortfalls. Uppermost in my mind has always been what is within reach of a student doing what will probably be no more than a short block of time within a two-year course.

In the end, this is a resource book. You can of course pick and choose what in it you use. You do not need to follow it slavishly. But it might be wise, in the history section, to at least give students something of what comes before and after whatever section you decide to use, in the photocopyable form in which I offer it. A perspective

is hard for students, many of whom will have no idea of the order of events or which king reigned when. [Historical periods are also given in the time-line section.]

SAMPLE ONE: FROM THE GREEK THEATRE SECTION. ALREADY DISCUSSED HAS BEEN THE THEATRES THEMSELVES, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

The Plays

The main thing to remember about the Greek theatre is that everything about it was practical and tried and tested through the years, altering as the plays became more demanding.

The first plays were chanted songs in praise of Dionysus. This required only a Chorus - a large one of fifty, who sang and danced, requiring a flat large space - the orchestra.

Gradually the plays became a kind of question and answer format, requiring a single actor and chorus response.

Then Aeschylus came along and brought in more dialogue, requiring a second actor. More roles also came in, because this playwright decided to dramatise many more of the stories of the gods and heroes. The need for masks so that the two actors could take more than one role became essential.

Sophocles made his plays more naturalistic in style and required a third actor, also occasionally 'extras'.

Euripides made plays that were more complex still. Many of his would have required use of an upper level and some, a crane.

As the plays became more complicated, relying more on the actors to carry the story and less on the Chorus, we can see this reflected in a reduction in the size of the orchestra and in the growth and embellishment of the stage and the scene-buildings. In the plays, the balance between words given to the Chorus and to the actors reflects the same changes.

The Chorus still, however, right to the end of the Greek period, is an essential part of the play. The Chorus members play the important role of setting the scene, telling parts of the story that are not shown, building tension and atmosphere. They are also physically closer to the audience and unmasked, so they act as kind of intermediaries between the actors and audience, telling the audience by their gestures and tone what they should be thinking and feeling at every moment of the play, acting, in a way, as the 'pulse' of the play itself.

In the practical section there is a detailed look at plays, the Chorus, and a practical exploration of the 'rules' and conventions imposed on the playwrights of the time.

Masks and Costumes

The places for performance were chosen carefully, in natural valleys where the acoustics were good. Huge numbers could sit up these hillsides - as you can see from the photograph - and still hear every word. The fact that the audience was so large accounted for some of the other developments in the theatre of the period.

Masks worn had clear character details shown on the faces. An audience would have known instantly that the character was a hero, a woman, an old man, a young one, a slave or a god. These were visible from anywhere in the auditorium. The masks had mouths opened and shaped like a funnel which carried the sound of the actors' voices admirably.

We cannot be precisely sure of other details of actor's costuming. Vase decorations are the main source of our visual knowledge and may be inaccurate. They show a long robe, called the *chiton* for the tragic actors and a short tunic - with an additional strapped on phallus - for comic actors. Some people think that towards the end of the period, tragic actors were being made larger than life through the use of raised platforms on their footwear and much larger masks. If this is so, it had to be to enhance visibility for the huge audience.

Practical Exploration

Having carefully read through the information I have given on Greek theatre, in groups look through the details given and see how many things were organic - i.e. were developed to answer a particular theatrical need.

Make a list of all the Greek words used and what they mean.

Then try the following practical exercises. These are to help you experience, as far as possible, some of the conditions of the Greek theatre.

Here, in brief, is the story of the god Dionysus. I have simplified the many stories of the god, trying to cut a route through the contradictions and confusions that abound.

In the most usual version Dionysus was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, Semele, daughter of Cadmus, the King of Thebes. [Semele through this union became elevated to the status of an earth goddess.] Dionysus is the only one of the gods who was part human. Zeus, the King of the Gods, had a jealous wife, Hera. Suspecting her husband of infidelity, Hera disguised herself and became a maidservant to Semele, by now pregnant with Dionysus. Semele, who had never seen her divine lover as he really was, was encouraged by the treacherous Hera to ask Zeus to reveal himself in all his glory. This he did but she was unable to bear the sight and was consumed by the flames that emanated from his person. [This is a metaphor for the earth needing the burning sun to produce the wine-grape.] The baby she was carrying would have been destroyed too but, magically, a wall of ivy grew up and shielded him from the flames. Zeus then picked up the infant and, because he was not yet ready to be born, placed him inside his own thigh. From this place, Dionysus was eventually born a second time and placed under the care of some nymphs on Mount Nysa on one of the Greek islands, far away from the jealous eye of Hera who would still have killed the child if she could have. This double birth gave Dionysus the title 'twice-born', *dithyrambos* in Greek. The psalms in praise of the God sung at the early drama festivals were called *dithyrambs* or 'hymns to the twice-born.'

In his island home the child Dionysus was guarded and educated by the spirits of the earth and nature: dryads - spirits of trees; centaurs with torsos of men

and the bodies of horses; the satyrs - wood-deities who were part monkey and part-goat; the Sileni - water-spirits, who were also part horse, though old Silenus is usually depicted as a drunk old man; and the Maenads or Bacchae - men and women who became his trusty followers, made drunk with madness by his presence. These followers, who brought him up, become his constant retinue from now on. Their unruly behaviour [the Maenads for instance were liable to tear apart animals who crossed their path, for instance] made it unwise to upset Dionysus in any way.

As god of wine, a sacred drink in Greece, Dionysus wielded great power. He brought the gift of wine from island to island and eventually to the Greek mainland. Everywhere he went he was surrounded by his followers. With such an unruly following, it was unwise to deny Dionysus. There are many stories of his arrival in a new city, proclaiming his own divinity and his gift of wine, and having the king or royal family of that place refusing him entry. All of these people ended badly, either driven mad or destroyed. In the case of King Pentheus of Thebes, he was torn apart by his own mother, who was driven into a mad frenzy by the god and mistook her son for a deer. This story is the subject of Euripides' play *The Bacchae*.

In Thebes, Dionysus escaped prison by cracking open the walls. Another time, the god was captured by pirates. The ship became entwined with ivy, the sea around turned to wine and Dionysus transformed himself to a lion. Terrified, the pirates leaped into the sea and were changed into dolphins. In yet another story, Dionysus found Ariadne, the young woman who had helped Theseus kill the Minotaur. She had given the hero a magic ball of thread that helped him find his way to the centre of the Minotaur's labyrinth and back out to safety again. Theseus had not really loved Ariadne and had abandoned her on the island, Naxos. Here Dionysus found her and, with much celebration, married her.

After bringing the gift of wine to the whole of Greece, Dionysus travelled further afield, carrying his gift to India and further east. When he returned from this trip he appears changed. Pictures and statues of him show him young and unshaven, rather effeminate in appearance and wearing long robes. Previously, he had appeared as an older man, bearded, and rather more grandiose in appearance. Often, the playwrights commented on his changed appearance after his travels in the east.

Pictures of Dionysus show him wreathed in ivy, sometimes festooned with grapes. He and his followers carried staffs topped with a device shaped like a pine-cone. This staff was called a *thyrsus*. His followers are dressed in the skins of fawns or other animals.

Read the above carefully and then, as a whole group, decide on some key phrases. What you are aiming to do is to compile a kind of hymn or chanted psalm in praise of the god. Your phrases might go something like this:

We honour you, the twice-born.

We honour you, great son of Zeus, etc.

For each phrase you choose, come up with an action to enhance or emphasise it. Keep these actions simple and clear.

For instance, 'We honour you, twice-born' might be accompanied by two low sweeps of the hands downwards over your stomachs.

'We honour you, great son of Zeus' might be accompanied by raising arms and faces up to the sky - and so on.

Piece together your whole psalm with a series of such actions.

If you like, add an entrance procession, with suitable dancing steps, and an exit. Try to establish a strong rhythm for these, using your feet and hands.

Doing this exercise will remind you of the earliest form of Greek theatre - the choric song in honour of the god, performed on the orchestra.

The dithyramb in praise of Dionysus is not really drama yet. The moment when the Leader of the Chorus stepped away from the rest and was given separate lines to say, is perhaps the moment when true drama was born. With this action, we have dialogue and, through dialogue, the potential for conflict.

Try to explore this moment with further pieces of practical work, based still on the story of Dionysus. First:

divide up your previous hymn into a question and answer format, using a single person as the questioner and the choric assertions as the answer.

This kind of idea was probably the earliest step towards drama.

Next:

have the chorus leader taking on the character of Dionysus himself. He is trying to persuade a group of people who know nothing about him of his godhead. Use the 'facts' you know about him from reading the story of his birth and his deeds. This last exercise takes vast steps towards real drama. There is the potential for conflict, for disagreement. Did you find you wanted to personalise members of the Chorus? Was it a strain keeping the choric feel and using only one actor? If you found it so, then you have discovered the reasons for Aeschylus's addition of another actor and Sophocles's addition of a third. Remember that, through the use of masks, these actors could take on a number of roles.

Festivals to Dionysus happened at several times of the year: in December, when the new wine was tasted; in February, when last year's wine was used and the celebrants were wreathed with flowers - both of these were country festivals - and then there was March when the more solemn festivals took place in the cities. It is the city festivals that are particularly important to drama, because this is when the week-long play competitions in honour of the god took place. The country village festivals were far more raucous in type: more orgiastic, more drunken. These took as their model the rumbustious followers of the god and were usually a procession leading through a village and up a mountain. From these drunken gatherings emerged an early form of comedy.

Now we have looked at the dithyramb, which is the earliest form of tragedy and you have done your own version. [Tragedy by the way means 'goat song' from the Greek *tragos* = goat, *ode* = song. Goats were sacred to the god, perhaps because of his goat-like, often goat-footed, followers. So a goat was always sacrificed at the start of the festival on the altar you saw pictured on the orchestra.]

Let's also try having a go at the style of early comedy. [This word comes from the Greek *komos* = procession and *ode* = song]. These raucous processions wound their way through the little villages. Those taking the part of the followers of Dionysus would be dressed in animal skins and have attached long phalluses, in

remembrance of the sexual nature of these followers. As they processed through the streets, they would call out questions about the god to the audience crowds lining the path. The audience would call out often ribald or comical responses. This kind of back-chat two-way idea became in the end formalised by using a double Chorus.

Aristophanes, who is the most famous comedy writer, moved away, as did the tragedy writers, from stories about Dionysus himself. Like earlier comedy writers he used a double Chorus and his characters still wore long phalluses attached to their costumes. Tragic actors wore long robes for costume but comedy actors wore short ones. Both sorts of actors wore masks, but as one would expect, the comic masks were comically grotesque and exaggerated.

One of Aristophanes' most famous plays is called *Lysistrata*. In it the women of Athens go on strike so as to force their men to give up going to war. All the women decide to withhold sex. They contact women of the opposite side too, who are also fed up with the war, so that both armies are finally forced to submit. No one can go without sex for too long! There are many comical scenes between individual husbands and wives and also a chorus of men and a chorus of women trading comments, pleas and insults.

Divide the group up into two halves: 'men' and 'women.' Allocate a partner to everyone from the opposite group. Start by the pairs devising a short scene in which the women refuse to do anything at all for the men: no cooking, no cleaning, no mending, no minding the baby - and of course no physical contact at all. If you have an odd number, there could be a child or a female servant too, also refusing to co-operate.

Having got warmed up to the idea with these scenes, follow up by the two groups trading complaints and insults. Start with being reasonable and gradually work up to a slanging match.

Once you have done this, try to organise what is said more formally, so that everything can be heard by an audience.

Then present one or two of the pair scenes followed by the big confrontation between the two choruses.

You have devised something similar to a classical Greek comedy!

At the festivals a day of tragedies would be followed by comedies or short bawdy romps called 'satyr-plays.' Tragedy was defined as dealing with the gods, heroes and history of the nation. This is a somewhat different meaning to what we normally associate with tragedy. Since the early Greeks believed in those gods and heroes that we would now call mythical, tragedy dealt with 'truth' - the great truths of their religious beliefs and pride in their own background.

Comedy had as its realm invented plots. That was its main difference. But already we have seen that there are two distinctly different strands to comedy. On the one hand is the comedy of such as Aristophanes which, despite the brief outline of the plot I have given, dealt with serious matters, close to the Athenian hearts. Often issues of the day would be debated in a satirical manner by the characters and two Choruses. It was perfectly acceptable to satirize even their own gods and heroes without offence. Many comedy shows on television have the same approach. Often

the Royal family, religion and political figures are made fun of; this is similar in tone to the comedy of such as Aristophanes.

On the other hand there was the comedy of the satyr plays. These would be farcical slapstick - knockabout comedy, involving clowning, sexual innuendo and so on. No one quite knows how old some of these early farces, known as Megarean comedies [because based in the area of Greece called Megara] are. It is likely that even before the festivals and records of formal drama, there were travelling players, using stock characters and situations. The actors were called 'mimes', which didn't mean what it has come to mean today. A mime actor did not perform silently; 'mime' meant stories based on improvisational skills. Actors would play around with stock plots and characters, improvising around the rough outline of a familiar plot. These stories seem as old as time itself: the mean old father, the lecherous old man, the young lovers, the boastful coward, the rascally servant, and so on. These early farces were the basis for a long line of drama carried through Europe by travelling players and leading eventually to such as the Commedia dell'Arte troupes and, in this country, to pantomime and other allied forms of popular drama. When we deal with Commedia dell'Arte, we will explore some exercises in this style.

To finish off our exploration of classical Greek theatre and drama, here are a number of practical exercises to try, based on what we know of the time. Before you start work on them, you may want to hand out the Appendices A & B to your class, which give two important stories of the time, whether you call them myth or history: those of Oedipus and of Agamemnon. The relevant Appendices are at the end of this section on Greek drama. These stories were ransacked by the tragic playwrights, who saw them as truth, time and time again. I have not included the many stories surrounding the sacking of Troy, the Wooden Horse, and the adventures of Odysseus as he returned from Troy to his tiny kingdom of Ithaca, wonderful though they are. It would take just too long!

Here, now, is the suggested practical work:

a] Costume and masks.

In books on the history of the theatre what you often see is the very exaggerated costume and masks of a later period. The early period of drama, which is what we have been studying here, used simple masks made of linen usually, though sometimes cork or light wood. The masks would go over the whole head, the linen having hair attached to it. Obviously, there were holes cut in the cloth for mouth and eyes. The main characteristics were clearly delineated on the mask, but there was little subtlety, which would have been lost in such a large amphitheatre. However, the audience would, by the actor's wearing of the relevant mask accompanied by appropriate costume additions, have been able instantly to recognise an old man, a young man, a king, or a woman. Costume additions might be such as a sceptre for a king, a sword for a warrior, and so on.

Costume was everyday dress: a long robe, called a chiton, for such as kings, short robes for slaves. Women, who would have been played by men - it is many centuries until we find women performing in public - had long robes with long sleeves to cover up the masculine arms of the actors! Footwear was flat sandals laced up the calf. Such costume allowed easy movement, especially necessary for the dances

done by the Chorus and we know from the superior acoustics of the early Greek theatres that projection of the voice did not need any help, so long as the mouth was free.

Using card or material, make your own Greek mask. Choose from the following:

a king, a woman, a god, an old man, a young man. Keep any features clear. Make sure the mask covers the whole head, using wool or string for hair.

Wearing your masks, invent a short play based on a story such as those researched earlier for the section on ritual. Or you can use another myth already known to you.

Masks are more than just a useful device so that one actor can take many roles. Theatres throughout the world that employ them do so because it allows the actor to lose himself completely. He is literally transformed; the actor's whole self is obliterated and in its place is the character.

Try a simple experiment using either your own masks or cheap blank white ones such as you can buy from any joke or party shop. Have half the class, with their backs to the audience comprised of the rest of the group, put on a mask. At a signal, all turn round and face their audience. Call out different moods and characteristics - happy, sad, angry, arrogant, kind, etc. - and ask them to adjust their body language accordingly. Then leave them in the last state that you call out... and leave them ... and leave them. Ask the participants afterwards what they felt. Guaranteed, some will have started to feel 'taken over' or certainly 'not themselves'!

Make sure the other half of the group have the same experience.

Such a magical transformation is at the heart of Greek acting and other ancient traditions, many of which still survive today. The Japanese Noh theatre and the Kabuki theatre are examples. Most important, because most unchanged from ancient times, is the Balinese theatre, an ancient form of theatre rooted in ritual and the island's religious beliefs and employing masks, dance and action to tell the story of the banishment of evil by good. This theatre tradition is the closest we can get now to the feeling and fervour of the early Greek festivals. Modern day practitioners, from Antonin Artaud onwards, have been profoundly influenced by it.

Many modern practitioners have expressed a wish to return to a purer form of drama, rooted in magic and ritual, where masks are one way for an actor to lose his identity. This loss of the actor's own persona is accompanied by the magical idea that the actor can literally be transformed, taken over, by the character he is undertaking. This is why Dionysus is the logical Greek god of drama, the god of magical transformations. It is also why many modern practitioners have returned either to maskwork or have taken a step beyond to working on the actor until he becomes, like the masked performer, an empty vessel waiting to be filled by his role.

b] The rule not to allow acts of violence to be shown on stage.

As stated earlier, this rule did not mean that the *results* of violence could not be shown. The Greek stories are full of bloodshed so, without showing it as it happens, the playwrights devised various means of getting around the problem.

Here is a particularly bloody scene, popular with many playwrights of the time but most famously treated by Sophocles. In the scene, Oedipus, King of Thebes, has just learned that his wife has hung herself in their bedchamber. Distressed, he has run into her room, cut her body down and in his grief has taken a brooch from her dress and with the pin has put out his own eyes.

Using the main body of the class as Chorus, explore reacting to the violence of the scene by the following methods:

A Messenger enters and tells the Chorus what has happened in the palace. Though the Messenger is distraught, he himself did not witness the events. He is merely reporting.

The Chorus are waiting in the great hall of the palace. They have already witnessed Oedipus's distress at hearing of his wife's suicide and his running out to investigate. They are talking amongst themselves about this. Suddenly a Messenger arrives and stands in the doorway. With glances down the 'passageway' off stage, he relates how he witnessed Oedipus's grief and the putting out of his eyes. Then he sees - and describes - Oedipus stumbling down the passageway towards the hall, blinded. The scene ends with the arrival of the blind king himself.

The final version presents a tableau - a still picture - of the scene. In classical Greek times, violence was often presented by the pushing out of a wheeled platform [the *ekkyklema*] through the central double doors. On this platform would be a still picture showing the results of some violent action. Such a picture in this case might show Oedipus, blood pouring out of his eyes, grieving over the body of his dead wife. Since no holds are barred, you might want to show the belt or strip of material that bound the queen's dress, by which she hung herself, still around her neck. Make the whole image as gruesome as possible.

Now discuss the different versions you have done. Which did you find most effective? You might decide, in this particular case, that the staggering Oedipus appearing with blood running down his face in the second version is as good as the third.

Finish work on the use of the *ekkyklema* by making still images of the following:

**Both sons of a king and queen have died in battle
a mother, deluded by Dionysus, tears her own son to pieces, thinking he is a wild beast. She has been helped by a number of other female attendants, similarly driven mad by the god.**

Clytemnestra stands triumphantly over Agamemnon, her husband, who she has murdered in his bath by throwing a net over him so that he cannot defend himself, and then piercing him through the net with a trident. Also in the tableau is the murdered prophetess Cassandra, killed by the vengeful Clytemnestra for being Agamemnon's mistress.

c.] The Chorus.

The use of the Chorus is something that many students find hard to understand. But even at the end of the classical period, the Chorus was an integral part of the action. The following exercises are to help you to understand why that is.

Their main function is as a link between actors and audience. This was particularly important because of the distance between the audience's seating and the stage at the back of the orchestra. It was the Chorus that occupied the middle ground between.

For the following exercises, the class should simulate as closely as possible the numbers of the Chorus [i.e. 15]. If your group is much bigger, divide the class in half. Otherwise, you'll have to work with the numbers you have. Each of the following indicates one of the functions of the Chorus in those days. Your task is to explore these functions as closely as possible, so as to understand them for yourselves.

1. Setting the mood.

Imagine that the scene straight after yours is one of mystery, of wonder. Try as a whole group to prepare the way for this mood, using your voices and bodies to make sound and rhythm. You might want to use percussion instruments too perhaps. Add movements and gestures that are appropriate.

Try preparing for other moods too. Imagine the scene that follows will contain:

a murder

a meeting between two lovers

a battle

and prepare the way by setting the appropriate mood.

2. Preparing for a climax.

Allied to setting a mood is preparing for the climax of the play. Here are the endings of some famous plays. See if, as a Chorus, you can find a suitable way of preparing the audience for these endings. Consider sound, voice, movement, gesture and facial expression. Look at how much grouping can help influence the audience, e.g. a huddled group of Chorus members might indicate unease, fear; a Chorus standing in strict formation might be young men going to follow a leader to war.

a] Clytemnestra defies the elders of the City [the Chorus]. She says that she and her lover can very well rule in Agamemnon's stead, now that she has killed him. She will rule with an iron fist.

b] The mother Agave has torn her own son to pieces, thinking he is a wild animal. In the last scene, she shows the head of her son, thinking it is the head of a lion. As she does this, the madness leaves her and she realises the horror of what she has done.

c] The women of Troy have lost all their menfolk and many loved ones. They prepare to go into captivity with the enemy, as slaves.

3. Causing a moment of reflection, to allow the audience to see the universal significance of what they are seeing.

Taking any of the ideas already attempted in this section, find a way of showing the audience that such things can and have happened to them, in their world. Or show how common such events are, by drawing inferences from history, from current affairs or from other stories. You might, for example, if you were preparing the audience for a love scene that is about to come, want to mention famous lovers like Romeo and Juliet. Preparing the ground for the rule of Clytemnestra and her lover, you might want to make links with other tyrants of today or in recent history. The plight of the women of Troy might gain understanding from an audience if they think of what is happening in Kenya, in Iraq, or what happened in Rwanda, or in Yugoslavia.

To do this exercise, choose one idea and discuss it with your group. The idea is to make links with the audience, so experiment with ways of combining narration with other methods of choral expression. For this, it might prove better for the Chorus to face the audience.

4. Guiding the reactions of the audience.

Of course, all of this work has overlaps. Look at any of the ideas you have been working on so far and see what additions to the chorus work you might want to make. The idea is to make absolutely clear what the audience should feel about a character or situation. For instance, Clytemnestra's murder of her husband ought to be received with superstitious terror [because of the dire revenge the gods will send on her in due course] and human fear as she declares how harshly she will rule the people now, because they have dared to disapprove. As representatives of these people, the Chorus will react - but also it is their job to communicate the greater horror that the gods, and therefore the audience too, should feel.

For this exercise I am sticking strictly to how events would be perceived in their period. As a modern woman I might, if directing the play today, want to encourage more sympathy for Clytemnestra! But that would be against the spirit of the age, and I think it is important to hold to those bygone views for the purpose of this study.

In your work, consider the grouping of the audience, their body language, their facial expressions to each other and the audience, appropriate ritualised movements, their voices. For instance, they might be whispering fearfully amongst themselves; or shouting with joy. Adjust your work as necessary.

5. The Chorus is the human link: ordinary people communicating to ordinary people in the audience.

6. The Chorus is both inside and outside the action. That is they move easily from commentary or narration to direct speech with main characters. They can be used as 'real' people or as storytellers, particularly important with an illiterate population who, though brought up with the stories and traditions of their history and religion, might still need reminding of the details of a story.

These last two points have probably been covered adequately by the work on the Chorus you have already done.

Finish the work on the Chorus by working on a section from a real Greek play. First, read the following extracts, which show the Chorus being used in a variety of ways. Use the six-point checklist given above to decide which role the Chorus is fulfilling in each one.

All of the following are from the play *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus.

SAMPLE PAGES FROM PART TWO, THE MODERN AGE:

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

For this second half I am going to change direction somewhat. The field of modern drama is a vast one. It is fair to say that by the latter part of the twentieth century every kind of stage shape: Greek arenas, trestle platform stages, Elizabethan thrust stages, Georgian apron stages, indoor and outdoor theatres, proscenium arches, intimate studio theatres, theatres in the round, traverse stages, promenade performances - and many more styles and forms of presentation existed. I will detail as many of these as is possible and follow the main strands of drama through the practitioners.

Because the field is vast, I have found it best to follow various strands or trends rather than the linear approach which has been possible so far. This means that I have kept going back, when dealing with each separate strand, to the beginning of the modern period and then followed through to the present-day, covering the plays and the practitioners associated with that style so far as is feasible. Throughout, practical work is built in, as it has been in the history section.

SAMPLE PAGES FROM THE POLITICAL THEATRE SECTION

Quick overview of other forms of drama to the end of the Second World War.

We saw in the various forms of early Naturalism that one of them was social realism. You looked at an extract of Galsworthy's *Strife*. There were many plays like this one

that aimed to show an audience that things weren't right in the world, that they needed to change. And in a world where theatre-going was one of the few activities available for a night out, such canvassing of the audience was amazingly successful.

The audiences in England up to the First World War were rather different. Theatre, with new serious dramatists to feed it, was attracting a more intellectual clientele. Most of these came from the middle or upper classes of society.

What happened to the working classes? Well, they had their own forms of entertainment: the pantomime and the incredibly popular music-hall. Theatres specialising in music-hall had sprung up over the whole country, drawing in crowds of people eager for a night out, light entertainment, a good laugh, an ogle at pretty women dancing or singing daringly saucy songs. Not just the working classes attended these venues either. Music-hall was immensely popular particularly with the men - business men, even royal princes attended for the light entertainment that was on offer. Typical music-hall fare would be songs, often full of double meanings, short dramatic sketches, dancing, animal acts, ventriloquists, jugglers, stage magicians, comedians - in fact the whole range of entertainers who in previous centuries would have had to eke out a living as travelling players. The age of the music-hall lasted until after the Second World War, when it began to peter out. In the 1950s, with the advent of television, many of those same entertainers turned their skills to what this new medium had to offer - and do so to this day.

So - back to the serious audiences of such as Galsworthy, Priestley and George Bernard Shaw. To show how successfully a good playwright could change the world in which he lived, Galsworthy's play *Justice* showed such a moving scene of what it is like for a prisoner to be held in solitary confinement, that Winston Churchill, then the Home Secretary, went straight home and began work on changing the law concerned with the treatment of prisoners.

Political theatre, plays about injustice, became less popular as the country was led through two terrible World Wars. People at those times wanted uplifting escapism, not to be reminded of how awful the world is. Between the wars was the heyday of such writers as Noel Coward with their frothy Comedies of Manners set, as is usual for this style, amongst the rich aristocratic set of the 1920s, 30s and the post-war 40s. Naturalistic plays, by such as *Rattigan*, already mentioned, were also available, to counter-act Coward. And of course, there were always the music halls.

There were also some serious attempts at Verse Drama from poets like T.S. Eliot. *Murder in the Cathedral*, the story of Thomas a Becket and his betrayal by King Henry II is still a powerful piece. Less successful were his attempts at verse settings of domestic scenes as in *The Family Reunion* or *The Cocktail Party*. The most popular of these verse dramatists was Christopher Fry, who aimed to show that poetic drama, like Shakespeare had produced, was still possible in the twentieth century. His *A Phoenix Too Frequent* and *The Boy and the Applecart* are examples. It is perhaps indicative that language has moved on from verse of the Shakespearian kind when we note that all the successful plays have a historical setting. The past appears to lend itself better and is more acceptable as a vehicle for people speaking in verse, perhaps. At least if the playwright is attempting to convince us that the scenes and situations are 'real.'

Nowadays there is a resurgence of

plays written in verse, or partly so, but there is no attempt at realism. These plays are mainly in the Physical Theatre spectrum.

Joan Littlewood

Mainstream political theatre may have died a temporary death, but in a different form it was still going on. Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop was active in the 1930s and 40s, performing in factories, dockyards, touring round the industrial north - wherever there were workers and a cause. And they performed in a way that appears to us today surprisingly modern, combining folk music, dance, information and action scenes to illustrate points. They dealt with subjects like unemployment and warned people against the dangers of nuclear waste. Working with Joan Littlewood was folksinger/ playwright Ewan MacColl. Here is a tiny section of Uranium235, written in 1948 by MacColl. The excerpt comes from near the end of the play and, as you can see, it pulls no punches:

The 'characters' are talking about plutonium, nuclear bombs and nuclear power stations.

PUPPET MASTER ... You'd better recognise the fact that a man or woman can be a brilliant nuclear physicist and yet be a third-rate human being.

SCIENTIST In which case, they're no different from the rest of us.

WOMAN They *are* different. They're worse than the rest of us.

SCIENTIST How do you make that out?

WOMAN They *know* what they're doing. They're not like someone who goes out and murders a child - some old man, sick in the head. Oh, no! We're talking about rational people: brilliant minds! People who're supposed to be more far-seeing than the rest of us. And what do these rational, brilliant, far-seeing people do with all that know-how? ... They turn to us, the stupid, gullible, easily-impressed public and say: 'Here is a present for you - the wherewithal to destroy yourself and the world you live in. Our greatest achievement!'

SOLDIER Use a little of it to make a bomb... you could wipe out Liverpool or Edinburgh.

SECOND MAN And with four or five such bombs you could eradicate London from the face of the earth. No more traffic problems, no housing problems...

SECRETARY And no people problems. Period!

From now on, all the dialogue is directed straight at the audience.

PUPPET MASTER ... then there's the nuclear reactors dotted all over Britain ... at Windscale and Hunterston ... Dungeness...

WOMAN Each of these reactors is a weapon pointed at the heart of this nation.

SCIENTIST They produce power.

WOMAN ... They produce radioactive substances which poison everything they touch - the land, the rivers, the seas, the air ... they breed cancers in the bones... Man's greatest achievement! A device, a series of devices with which we can kill ourselves, our children, our families, our friends....

SCIENTIST *taking off his white coat* It isn't so much a question of why they do it, it's why do we let them do it?

2ND WOMAN Yes, why? Are we too lazy ...? Don't we care?...

SOLDIER ... it isn't only human life that is threatened - it's all life. And it's forever.

ALL *quietly* Forever!

After more direct pleas to the audience *'The stage is left in darkness and the theatre is filled with whispers ... Forever ... forever ... forever.'*

Mainstream political theatre in England didn't really resurface until the 1950s and 1960s, with such as John Arden, writer of such plays as *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* [1960]. In 1963 Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop Company was still very active. Now it hit the big time with *Oh What a Lovely War*, still very popular. It is a

successfully biting satire against war in general, though it uses the facts and mistakes of the First World War for its material.

Post-War Political Theatre

Arguably the restlessness and discontent shown by the younger dramatists, like Osborne and Wesker, in the 1950s was the real birthplace of political theatre in this country. The world had been cleansed of a great evil - Hitler - and yet it was not shifting its values fast enough for the new angry young men and women. There was still injustice; still poverty.

Jim Cartwright's *Road* in 1988 continued the trend of the angry disillusioned playwright. In fact, the Thatcher years spawned a whole lot of left-wing political drama designed to open people's minds to rebel against Thatcher's style of Conservatism. And Political Theatre is still very active today with such playwrights as David Hare at the forefront of the intellectual left and Sarah Kane plus a whole blossoming movement of black playwrights voicing the street-wise concerns of a present-day angry generation.

Look at this section of David Hare's *The Permanent Way*, written in the angry aftermath of the Paddington rail crash disaster.

Lord Cullen enters. Everyone becomes the Cullen inquiry.

LORD CULLEN Good morning. I've been authorised by the Attorney-General to conduct a public inquiry into the cause of the death of thirty-one persons on October 5th 1999. I shall start by reading the terms of reference of my inquiry. 'To inquire into and draw lessons from the accident near Paddington Station...'

Lord Cullen goes on mouthing his terms of reference under:

SECOND BEREAVED MOTHER The Cullen inquiry was a catalogue of shame. It was a complete cover-up.

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF RAILTRACK The Cullen inquiry was a medieval witch-hunt...

There is a hiss.

I was hissed at whenever I got up to speak.

SECOND BEREAVED MOTHER From the start Cullen gave everyone immunity and so we thought, 'Oh, this is wonderful, they'll be free to tell the truth without fear of prosecution.' What actually happened was that they didn't need to disclose anything. I thought, this is the Mad Hatter's tea party. These people have been promised that whatever they say - whatever - say what they like and no harm will come to them. And *still* we don't have the truth.

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF RAILTRACK People in railtrack uniforms were spat at in newspaper shops. We needed a new chairman and 147 people turned the job down. The *Socialist Worker* put up six hundred pictures of me all over the Underground. The caption read: 'Wanted for Serial Killing.' My mother used to close her eyes, and only open them between stations.

Now look back at the Ewan MacColl section about nuclear power. The style is very similar, considering there is more than fifty years between the two plays. Obviously Political Theatre playwrights have found a style that works.

Bertolt Brecht [1898 - 1956]

So far I have kept to Political Theatre as it is in this country. But of course there has been a lot going on in other countries too. The style gained most of its impetus from a German playwright and director called Bertolt Brecht. By the 1950s in this country, his influence was being felt in mainstream theatre [Theatre Workshop had encountered his work long before] and many of his theories were absorbed. So what were these theories?

As with the section on Stanislavski, what follows is an extremely cut-down version of what I have detailed in other publications. But this is the kernel - the most important theories that can be used to form a Political Theatre 'style'.

Brecht was an idealistic Communist who was living and working in Germany at the time of the rise of Fascism and Hitler. For him and many other intellectuals, Communism [still quite a new concept at that time] appeared to be the only code that had the strength to ward off Fascism. Communism puts the plight of the many before that of the individual and, influenced by this, Brecht's plays are less concerned with individuals than exposing the ills of society and, more importantly, showing us that we can alter things. Brecht saw theatre as a tool for social change.

German theatre has a different history from our own. The nearest thing to music-hall for Brecht were the revue clubs [featured in films like *Cabaret*], noisy and smoky, where people gathered to drink beer, smoke and talk politics whilst being entertained by singers, saucy dancers and often biting satirical revue sketches. To the end of his days, Brecht carried his love of these venues into his theatre practice. He wanted his theatre to generate the same passionate political discussion and he wanted his audience to be participants intellectually in what was going on on the stage. He loved to say that no one who was smoking could watch a performance in any other than a detached way, squinting through the smoke. An audience that is lit, as would have been the case in these revue clubs, is also less likely to be too emotionally involved in what they are watching. They will be conscious of their surroundings, of other people in the audience.

So why was it so important to Brecht that his audience should not be emotionally caught up in the action of a stage play? The answer is largely a reaction to Stanislavski and Naturalism. Brecht saw Naturalism as 'pretence', a 'lie'. Audiences were being kidded into believing what was happening on stage. Lights suck the attention onto the stage and sitting in the dark aids the illusion that we are just observers of other people's passions and pain. Brecht didn't want people who just sat with mouths agape believing in what the playwright and director had chosen to show us as 'real life.' He wanted an audience that thought, that criticised. Even more, he wanted to lead an audience into seeing that life is alterable. Our destinies are in our own hands.

So Brecht saw that Naturalism simply showed people what *is*. It didn't change anything. He began to devise a style of production that would ensure that people were not sucked into being idle spectators.

The theatre shape that Brecht was working with was the proscenium arch. Bizarrely, it seems not to have occurred to him to have concentrated on changing the space [though he did start the trend for taking plays to people, as did Joan Littlewood in this country - to factories, community centres and so on] - instead he staged all his main plays on a normal picture-frame stage, but set about fighting the magical illusion to which the picture-frame lends itself by other means.

His actors often talk directly to the audience instead of pretending the audience is an invisible fourth wall. Lighting bars were kept visible, and scene changes and often costume changes occurred in front of the audience. This was to remind the audience they were in a theatre and that the actors were only actors and not the characters they were portraying. For this reason, actors will often change roles, sometimes playing many parts and often openly doing this in front of the audience, by putting on a different hat and coat for example.

Scenery and props were minimal - only what was required to tell an audience where they were. The interior of a house might have just a door-frame and a table

and chair, for example, whereas Naturalism would have filled the stage with convincingly real and complete settings.

Brecht realised that for an audience to remain detached enough to be clear as to the messages of the play, the actors also had to be detached. If an actor is too caught up in his character, he will convince an audience of its reality and suck them in too. Swapping roles is one way to keep an actor detached - he can not become totally immersed in his character if he keeps having to drop it.

He devised rehearsal techniques for actors to prevent them becoming too involved with their character. Here is one famous one to try. It tells you a lot about what it is to be a Brechtian actor, and therefore an actor of Political Theatre.

Look back at one of the extracts used in the last section. The one from *Roots* would be ideal, or from *Look Back In Anger*. Read through the scene, acting it out as far as you can, in groups of three or four - dependent on your choice of script. Every time there is a stage direction [all the bits in bold italics] the character whose stage directions are written there should read these aloud, whilst also acting them. You will find that this prevents the actor becoming caught up in the role.

The theory works even better if you apply it to some piece of drama that you devise. In pairs [with one threesome if you have an odd number] improvise one of the following emotional scenarios:

**seeing someone off to fight a war on the other side of the world
cradling a sick or hurt loved one whilst waiting for the ambulance to
arrive**

**greeting the late teenager back home, having waited for him/her for
hours**

**telling a parent you're pregnant or getting married or leaving school
instead of doing exams - or anything similar**

breaking bad news to someone

The idea is to act the scene out first as naturalistically as you like and with as much emotion as you are able [without hamming!]. Then repeat a part of the scene, saying the words as you did the first time - emotionally and so on. BUT you also have to describe every movement you make, aloud, and as if it were part of a story - a narrative. You use the third person [he, she, they] and the past tense. If you pace to and fro, that is what you tell us: 'He paced to and fro.' If you support the head of a loved one, then that is what you tell us: 'He held up his grandmother's head.' You could try repeating your extract too, changing the stage directions into the past tense: Alison turned her face away, etc.

Emotional scenes are best done for this exercise because the temptation to be thoroughly caught up in the action is enormous, but if you are always having to analyse what you are doing with your body, you cannot be caught up.

This exercise should help you understand what Brecht means by distancing the actor from emotional attachment to his part. Brecht calls it *Verfremdungseffekt* [which translates literally as the 'making strange effect'. Most people use the word 'distancing'.] The actor, by analysing everything, views his own role from the outside and is able to understand why people behave in certain ways. It is like looking at human nature through a scientist's microscope: the actors and the audience should

be in the position of scientists who are saying to themselves: 'How very interesting! Yes, that's quite right! A person who is saying goodbye to someone they fear they'll never see again [for instance] does look away, or finds himself unable to make eye contact, or whatever...'

The style of Political Theatre is good for story-telling too. Brecht's stories were always very complicated and often spanned many years. He used Narrators who sang or told us what to expect in a scene. Sometimes the Narrator was someone outside the action and sometimes it could be one of the characters themselves who would drop their character and speak to the audience, describing what is going on themselves or pointing out the message of a scene.

Act out any well-known story, such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* using an external narrator. Now repeat one of the scenes, but this time have the characters themselves narrating as well as acting their parts. An example might be:

GOLDILOCKS Oh, what a delightful little cottage. I wonder who lives there. Cautiously Goldilocks peered in at the window but couldn't see anyone. There's no one there. She tried the door. It opened. There doesn't seem to be anyone in.... etc.

You should be able to see how the actor moves from direct speech to telling the story in the narrative voice. This style occurs often in many modern plays. Sometimes it helps simply by telling the story; you are able to cover a number of years or details that would be otherwise boring, or difficult to put over using Naturalism.

Here is an example:

NARRATOR Mary, married to Henry, is forty-five. She has two children and a steady job but now something is happening inside her. She is bored. She wants excitement in her life. So she decides to.....

Carry on this story in your groups, using a Narrator to stand outside the action and comment or, if you prefer, have Mary herself [and any other character] introducing herself and then dropping into direct speech. e.g

MARY Mary married to Henry, is forty-five. She has two children and a steady job but now something is happening.... I am bored. I want excitement in my life. I've decided to...

shave all my hair off, steal a car, shoplift, have an affair... are just some suggestions.

Apart from the things I have already mentioned, there were other stylistic features common to Brecht's productions which need mention:

Songs, often delivered in a harsh satirical style broke up the scenes, particularly at potentially emotional moments.

Placards, or headings projected on a screen, told an audience what to expect of a scene. This took away the element of surprise - surprise being dangerous, since it keeps audiences emotionally involved rather than using their brains. Knowing that, say, a murder is going to occur in a scene makes the audience look for the *reasons* for it; they analyse the situation rather than being horrified emotionally by the deed itself.

The development of character is not important for its own sake. Instead the story, or the message is important. Characters, therefore, are often just there for their part in furthering the story.

To give an example: Stanislavski would be interested in the *nature* of a policeman and an actor would need to find a background for the man, a name, an age, a family life, a childhood, his reasons for becoming a policeman, and so on. Brecht might have an unnamed character simply called Policeman - who is simply necessary for a part of the story. The policeman might be stereotyped or, more Brechtian, presented in a way to give a particular impression about the Policeman - for instance, that he is corrupt, or a bully. Showing an 'attitude' like this towards the Policeman is called, in Brechtian terminology *gest* or *gestus*. [The two words are interchangeable.] Gest is a more skilful technique than just general stereotyping.

To try this out for yourselves, here is a list of potential characters in a Brechtian style play:

Mother, Teacher, Headteacher, Kid.

The storyline is that Kid has been accused of bullying. Teacher has seen this in the playground. Mother has been called in by Headmaster. Teacher relates what she has seen in front of Mother and Kid and Headmaster.

On the basis of your decisions about the four characters will rest the outcome of this short scene. Mother could be neglectful and useless, or caring, for instance. Kid could be bullying or bullied. Teacher might have misunderstood what she saw. Teacher could be kind or a bully himself. And so on. Of course, there are more than two choices.

First - decide on the storyline and what you want each of your characters to represent. Then find a pose that shows through exaggerated, clear face and body language the gest for each character, i.e. neglectful mother or caring mother. Next find a line for the character that is typical and find the right tone of voice to say it. Finally, remembering all your decisions and keeping them firmly in mind throughout, attempt the whole scene. Make sure that the gest - the attitude - towards each character remains constant.

Look back at the two extracts quoted earlier in this section. Neither have made any attempt at characterising people. Playing such roles as Scientist, Woman, Second Bereaved Woman or Managing Director of RailTrack will be a matter of finding the correct attitude to the character - his or her gest.

Here are some mainstream British plays that have been influenced by the Brechtian style. Read them first and see if you can spot some of the Brechtian things we have been talking about.

SAMPLE PAGES FROM SECTION THREE:TIME LINES

THEATRE PERIODS

- 1] THE GREEKS: FIFTH > FOURTH CENTURY BEFORE CHRIST [388 B.C.]
- 2] THE ROMANS: 250 B.C. > 65 A.D.[Anno Domini - A.D. = 'the year of our Lord' so after Christ's birth. 0000 = Christ's birth.] [Roman Republic nearly up to birth of Christ - then the Emperors]
- 3]THE DARK AGES: SIXTH CENTURY A.D.> TENTH CENTURY A.D.
- 4] THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD: TENTH CENTURY>SIXTEENTH CENTURY A.D.
- 5] THE ELIZABETHANS: SIXTEENTH CENTURY: [Elizabeth I =1538-1603 the last Tudor]
- 6] THE JACOBEANS: EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: [JAMES I = 1603-1625]. The first Stuart. Theatre-wise, includes his son CHARLES I [1625-1649] executed in the Civil War
- 7] THE COMMONWEALTH - Oliver Cromwell. 1649-1660
- 8] THE RESTORATION of Charles's son. CHARLES II 1660-1685
- 9] EIGHTEENTH CENTURY starts with the last of the Stuarts, Queen Anne 1702-1714. Then the first of the Hanovers: GEORGE I, II & III
- 10] NINETEENTH CENTURY: George IV, William IV, VICTORIA: 1837-1901
- 11] THE MODERN AGE, theatre-wise, begins in the middle of Victoria's reign, in the 19th century and goes through the 20th century to the present day.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

background to the drama

Rulers: Victoria - died 1901; Edward VII 1901-1910; George V 1910-1936; Edward VIII 1936 [abdicated to marry Mrs Simpson]; George VI 1936- 1952; Elizabeth I 1952-

FIRST WORLD WAR 1914-1918

RUSSIA embraces Communism 1921

beginning of Stalin's 'rule' 1929. [Died 1953]

HITLER appointed Chancellor 1933

THE GREAT DEPRESSION the 1930s

SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936-1939

SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-19

STAGE SHAPES THROUGH HISTORY

GREEK: circular 'arena'

ROMAN: half and full circle arena, various

MEDIEVAL: inside church > west door of church > platform rectangular stages on

1] pageant wagons

2] simultaneous settings [many platforms

a] in a line e.g.Valenciennes

b] in a circle e.g. Cornwall].

3] platform 'trestle' stage in rich man's hall, market square, inn yard

ELIZABETHAN & JACOBEAN: platform 'trestle' stages > public theatres: thrust stage > also private theatres: rectangular stage

RESTORATION: thrust stage in front of proscenium arch

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: thrust reduced to apron in front of proscenium arch

NINETEENTH CENTURY: proscenium arch 'picture frame' stages; other theatres, e.g. Astley's - circus-ring type amphitheatre. Some experiments., e.g. Craig

see next page

THE MODERN AGE: Up to Second World War = proscenium arch stages are the rule.

Post- Second World War: the whole range of stage shape possible:

arena - amphitheatre;

thrust;

apron;

trestle platform stages;

open stages [no proscenium - open to the audience];

traverse stages - where the audience is on two opposite sides and the playing area is like a corridor in between;

theatre-in-the-round, where the audience surrounds the performance space, leaving only gangways for the actors. [Can be square or octagonal, etc. not necessarily round!]

promenade performance. A style which involves the audience moving from place to place with the actors. This can be as in some community theatre experiments around different sites in a town, for instance, or in different rooms in a house, or where the theatre has been turned into an empty space where actors and audience mingle; actors and perhaps, light define different playing locations in this space for different scenes. This style comes from the Medieval idea of simultaneous settings, where similarly the audience followed the action from place to place. plus many individual experiments by numerous practitioners.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCENERY

GREEK = no scenery, indications of place on three-sides revolving structures called periaktoi. A symbol on each side told the audience where the setting was: a pillar=city; a tree = country, the 3rd side adaptable to a play's needs. The front of the scene-building was in itself a setting, the doors leading to a palace interior.

ROMAN = no scenery, highly decorated front of the scene-building indicating grandeur of palaces, etc.

MEDIEVAL = highly decorated platforms, use of machinery, Hell's mouth, heaven, suspended clouds and so on.

ELIZABETHAN & JACOBEAN = no scenery, helpful props to indicate interiors, e.g. throne, or night, e.g. a lantern

Court Masques = lavish scenery. machines. perspective backgrounds, brought in by Inigo Jones

RESTORATION & EIGHTEENTH CENTURY = grooved flats, painted scenery, perspective backgrounds

NINETEENTH CENTURY = bigger and better, huge sets, historical accuracy begins and leads to meticulously researched Greek or Roman buildings on stage, for instance; trains, horse races, working machines of all kinds

THE MODERN AGE - Naturalism = box sets, 'real' rooms built on stage, ornaments, furniture, clutter etc.

Political theatre = minimal scenery, just indications; placards to describe place

Total theatre = Surrealistic huge props, hanging masks, dream-like, or nightmare like settings

Symbolism, Expressionism [from Craig etc.] = harmonious suggestive settings which include the audience, brooding shapes, steps,

forms that move in space

Brook etc - a return to the empty space of Shakespeare.

DEVELOPMENT OF LIGHTING.

Greek, Roman, Medieval, Elizabethan = daylight - because open-air theatres
Elizabethan indoor theatres: candlelight > many candlebra in **Restoration and Eighteenth century**; audience lit > some attempt to control candles with shuttered lamps by **end of Eighteenth Century** > **1817** beginning of gaslight, more control possible; audience in dim light > **1880s** beginning of electric lighting; audience darkened; little subtlety or colour used. Potential not realised > **Stanislavski** = realistic lighting; sun slanting through windows, moonlight, etc; > **Appia & Craig** - painting with light - light symbolism, atmosphere and mood > **Brecht** - anti-realistic light - bright and white, including audience > **nowadays** - the whole range suggested here.

COSTUMES

GREEK/ROMAN: more decorated versions of everyday dress. tragedy - long robes; comedy - short tunics with leather phallus addition.

MEDIEVAL: the costume of the time

ELIZABETHAN/ JACOBAN - costume of the time, but rich because given by rich patrons

RESTORATION: as above, courtiers liked to donate clothes to the actors

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY - towards end, some attempts at realism and historical accuracy

NINETEENTH CENTURY: even more researched historical accuracy

TWENTIETH CENTURY: costume appropriate to play and style e.g. Brecht deliberate anachronisms, or used gestically; costume to expose theme, or to enhance set, etc.

USE OF MASKS

Greek drama > Roman drama > certain characters in Medieval drama [devils, etc.] > Elizabethan & Jacobean Court Masques, also Commedia dell'Arte > Brecht, Artaud, Brook, LeCoq and many more, influenced as much by Far Eastern theatre traditions [Japanese Noh, Balinese, etc. all involving masks] Belief in the negation of the actor through losing himself in the mask with all these practitioners.

STATUS OF ACTORS, AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL

GREEK: high status, priests at first, then professional actors thought to be 'chosen by the god' > **ROMAN:** at first high status professionals then gradually debased under the Empire, professional farce players and mimes, but also many amateurs in arena; **MEDIEVAL:** priests to start, then amateur actors; professional actors - travelling players, low status > **ELIZABETHAN & JACOBEAN** low status professional actors > mix of high and low, dependent on patronage; amateur Court Masquers; amateur Boy's Companies > **RESTORATION** professional players started low, especially women; gained favour and became admired and accorded star status; one or two, like Betterton, became actor-managers, highly respected > **EIGHTEENTH, NINETEENTH & BEGIN OF TWENTIETH CENTURY:** high status 'star' actors and actor-managers > **NOWADAYS:** a mixture of star status commercial actors and acting companies happy to pursue less fame and more ideals, personal satisfaction

THEATRE SIZE/ACTING STYLE

GREEK: large - acting style: stylised, big clear gestures, masks

ROMAN: large - acting style: far more stylised, help needed via masks and costumes to aid projection of character

MEDIEVAL: platforms in church setting - acting style - formalised clear gestures > small platform stages - intimate acting style

ELIZABETHAN/ JACOBEAN: quite large public theatres with thrust stages - acting style intimate though larger gestures than real life > private theatres:

smaller, still intimate acting; Great Halls, etc. - Court Masques - formal, attitudes and poses, dance

RESTORATION: small > larger than life acting because a] Comedy of Manners and b] rowdy audiences

NINETEENTH CENTURY: large - acting style over-the-top melodrama etc. > from mid-century, growth of realism - large = huge sets, machinery etc. > as realism progresses into naturalism, theatres adapt to smaller sizes as does acting.

The above concentrates on theatre buildings. Throughout - the travelling players with their simple trestle stages would have used a knockabout intimate style of acting and clowning with direct address of the audience. Here the largeness of the style is

because of the use of masks [Commedia] and the need to attract an audience in the open-air setting - as in any type of street theatre.

THE EMPTY SPACE.

In **Medieval** theatre, the *platea* is the space around a setting which can be anywhere > **Elizabethan** stages have no scenery and can stand for anywhere > after many years of addiction to scenery, **modern theatre** tries to reclaim the idea of the stage being 'empty', waiting to be filled by the imagination. **Peter Brook** gave us the phrase 'The empty space' with his influential book of that title.

INFLUENCE OF GREEK LOW FARCES - VARIOUS STRANDS

Ancient Greek folk slapstick comedies, using stock characters

- 1] Megarean comedies > Sicily - Phylax comedies > Southern Italy - Atellane farces > travelling players > Commedia dell'Arte > Harlequin & Colombine mimes & ballets > Punch & Judy > Pierrot shows > Pantomime + review shows and music-hall
- 2] Megarean comedies > Menander's written comedies > Plautus & Terence written comedies > Shakespeare et.al. via Renaissance translations of Roman playwrights > sentimental dramas > melodramas
- 3] Megarean comedies > Phylax comedy > Atellane farce > travelling players > Commedia dell'Arte > Moliere > Comedy of Manners > Oscar Wilde > Noel Coward > poss. Alan Ayckbourn & similar
- 4] Megarean comedies > Phylax comedies > Atellane farces > travelling players > Commedia > folk drama based on satires, political broadsheets etc. > Beggar's Opera > continuing fairground entertainment > pub entertainment > reviews, cabaret, music hall etc. > Joan Littlewood, Brecht, political theatre and 'rough theatre' as Brook calls it.

CHARACTERS WHO ARE PERSONIFICATIONS

[e.g. Vice, Virtue, Beauty etc.]

Morality Plays > Christopher Marlowe [Faustus], Ben Jonson, Tourneur > Comedy of Manners > Sentimental Drama

NON-LITERARY DRAMA

Greek Megarean farce > Phylax Farce > Roman Atellane farce > travelling players > Commedia dell'Arte > satirical drama > Colombine & Harlequin pantomime >

melodrama > musical etc. > emphasis on devised work with many twentieth century practitioners + return to Commedia skills and mime skills

CHANGES TO LITERARY COMEDY

GREEK, ROMAN: anything with an invented plot. Need not be funny, though it often was.

ELIZABETHAN: romantic, endings which ended happily

RESTORATION: Comedy of Manners, from Moliere - mildly satirical in intention

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY onwards: three strands = biting satire, political folk drama at fairgrounds etc; Comedy of Manners type; Romantic happy ending type

CHANGES TO TRAGEDY

GREEK/ ROMAN: 'historical' plots or tales of their religion. High status heroic figures. Some of what we might call myths, were history to them.

ELIZABETHAN/JACOBAN: mixture of Aristotle's ideas: tragic hero must be status figure and fatally flawed [e.g. Macbeth/ ambition] and English tradition, e.g. some comic characters

RESTORATION onwards: 'Purer' form of tragedy, from French Classical models - Corneille; 3 Unities, and so on. Rhetorical speech

LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY onwards: top-heavy grandeur and 'bombast'; over the top style; middle-class heroes rather than kings, generals, etc. melodrama = working-class heroes

TWENTIETH CENTURY: quieter, naturalistic tragedies - ordinary people. best examples Arthur Miller.

BRITISH THEATRE NATIONAL OR LONDON-BASED

medieval = national > Elizabethan & Jacobean = London > Restoration = London > Eighteenth century, towards end = national. National from then on.

This did not mean that when theatre was London based there was no performance elsewhere. Remember those travelling players!