

11 Drama

Exam

Revision

Topic 1:

Australian
Theatre

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

You MUST know what the elements of drama are and be able to explain, in essays, how you and playwrights use these. These are the basic structures of all that we do in drama, we use the elements of drama to communicate dramatic meaning.

The Elements of Drama are:

- Role/Character
- Mood
- Symbol
- Tension
- Time and Place
- Space
- Relationship
- Focus

You need to be able to explain how, as a director and performer, you use a combination of these to communicate dramatic meaning in your experiential work. It's not enough to say that focus was placed on the falling petal. You might instead say:

“Focus was drawn to the falling petal by the characters all staring at it as it fell to the ground. This built tension in the performance because the audience came to understand, when the visual image was combined with dialogue “three. Three more dead”, that the falling petal was actually a symbol for the dying children. More broadly, the falling petal came to represent yet another student falling victim to the pressures placed on them by the current schooling system.”

Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma
University of Oklahoma

Developments in Recent Australian Drama

Author(s): Peter Fitzpatrick and Helen Thomson

Source: *World Literature Today*, Vol. 67, No. 3, Contemporary Australian Literature (Summer, 1993), pp. 489-493

Published by: [Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40149341>

Accessed: 26/07/2014 22:29

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma and University of Oklahoma are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *World Literature Today*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Developments in Recent Australian Drama

By PETER FITZPATRICK
& HELEN THOMSON

It took a depressingly long time before the Australian theatre could lay claim to a tradition in local drama that was lively, distinctive, and lasting. The last two-and-a-half decades, in which that development has at last occurred, provide a concentrated and very suggestive instance of that process in an urban postcolonial society: there is the quest for cultural definition, characterised by a strong reaction against the received values of the "parent" culture; there is the creation, through a complex set of factors, of a theatrical mainstream confirmed by the repertoire of the establishment theatre and by publication; and there is the reaction, once that mainstream has been identified, of those antiestablishment interests which would subvert it as it once subverted the colonial power. Observers still occasionally wonder whether the strength and momentum that marked Australian theatre in the early 1970s has petered out, as so many promising movements did before; but what has been evident in the last fifteen years has been a series of quiet but significant little revolutions, small by comparison with the transformations of that period, but involving the kinds of challenges to the audience that make a living theatre.

Two important elements coincided in the late 1960s to create the revolution that began at the alternative seasons at the Jane Street Theatre in Sydney and, especially, at the La Mama Theatre and the Pram Factory in Melbourne, which was quickly dubbed the "New Wave" of Australian theatre. One was the opportunity for writers to work closely with a performance company, which the playwrights of previous decades had mostly lacked; in the case of Melbourne's Australian Performing Group, the collaborative model was underpinned by the radical political commitment which has been characteristic of innovative companies throughout the world and which might have sustained earlier swimmers against the

tide like the Pioneer Players. The other new factor was the very noisy arrival of the *ocker*.

The *ocker* rode in on the back of the breakthroughs in censorship which occurred in Australia and elsewhere in the late sixties; those new freedoms coincided happily with a period of relative generosity in funding for the arts. The *ocker* was brash, crude, and a violator of all decorums, big in his talk and his drinking, and (by his own graphic but questionable account) an accomplished sexual performer as well. He was mostly young and middle-class, and he was always self-advertisingly male. For the first time the theatre had found a stereotype which represented cultural distinctiveness in a form that urban audiences could recognize as corresponding to aspects of their own experience.

The mythology of the wide brown land, in which so many playwrights had in earlier decades sought to locate their sense of Australianness, had proved fairly remote to that audience. It had also been hostile to the conventions and assumptions of naturalism, the mode which dominated the theatre of the time. The stridently local theatre of the early 1970s fitted the social-realist frame quite snugly, though its manner was mostly satiric caricature. And while the new audiences might not always want to be identified with the figure of the *ocker*, he came from the suburbs as they did, and everyone knew somebody a bit like him.

The *ocker's* particular attraction for the "New Wave" theatre lay not only in his uncouthness and comic vigour, but also in his complexity as a speaker. For the first time Australian theatre presented a style of talk which reflected the shifts in conversational register so striking in a culture where idiom has very little to do with regional variations and a great deal to do with the class to which one belongs or aspires. Kenny Carter, the motor mechanic in David Williamson's play *The Removalists* (1971), who defines himself as "just a beer-swilling slob," makes it clear that he is crude by choice and not by necessity. His first scene in the play, in which he rationalises his violence toward his wife on the previous evening as a "love pat" which she had earned because of her sloppy housekeeping, shows him moving through a number of conversational roles ranging from quite complex and polysyllabic ironies to deliberately shocking crudity. When he stuffs bread into his mouth and swigs beer from the bottle in a calculated affront to his pretentious sister-in-law, his challenge, "Don't you like my manners?" might stand as a motto for all the *ockers* who followed him onto the stage. The challenge was directed against the decorums of a

HELEN THOMSON is Senior Lecturer in English at Monash University in Melbourne and is Melbourne theatre critic for the *Australian*. Soon to appear is her book *The Madwoman in the Bush: The Madwoman in Australian Literature*.

PETER FITZPATRICK is Associate Professor of English at Monash University. He is the author of *After "The Doll": Australian Drama Since 1955*, *Williamson*, and *Stephen Sewell: The Playwright as Revolutionary*. Forthcoming is his dual biography of Louis and Hilde Esson.

parent culture defined as not only stuffy but no longer relevant. Even for those in the theatre who didn't like his manners much at all, there was a sense of liberation and of nationalist assertion which was exhilarating.

The affluent graduates of Williamson's drama *Don's Party* (1971) are even more sophisticated players of the game of verbal affront and represent the beginnings of a journey in which the ocker moved very rapidly up-market. It was not long before he resembled quite closely the educated elite which patronised Australia's subsidised theatres. Williamson set the pace in the development of the ocker figure, as he did in the not unrelated progress of Australian theatre satire from the antiestablishment alternatives into the theatrical mainstream. But there were other distinguished variants on the theme: Barry Oakley and Alex Buzo took the ocker to new heights of self-protective irony, and John Romeril in *The Floating World* (1974) dramatised Les Harding's almost successful suppression of the atrocities of war and imprisonment beneath his mask of comic assertiveness; even the octogenarian Monk O'Neill in Jack Hibberd's play *A Stretch of the Imagination* (1972) can be seen in the vulgarity and virtuosity of his talk as a very senior affiliate of the ocker tribe.

Like many a source of theatrical liberation, the ocker stereotype had its own capacity for oppression. The ocker was a triumphant product of the quest for cultural definition, but in his loquacious way he recapitulated a number of the theatrical problems raised by the inarticulate heroes of those early attempts to put the outback on the stage. His value system and verbal style dominated the plays he was in, leaving no room for the experience of women or of men who happened not to share his habits or his Anglo-Celtic heritage; and the strategic effectiveness of his bid for conversational power meant that there could be very little analysis of what, if anything, lay beneath his very practised surfaces.

David Williamson and Stephen Sewell, in very different ways, are the dominant playwrights in contemporary Australian theatre. Williamson has enjoyed an astonishing popularity, but although he remains concerned with satiric observation and with manipulative strategies in familiar social situations, he is certainly not a playwright who is standing still. The increasing readiness to experiment with episodic structures is one sign of a more obtrusive interest in dramatic form which has also, in plays like *Top Silk* (1989) and *Siren* (1990), produced particularly shapely plots. More interesting, though, are Williamson's use of music to broaden the emotional range of his fine and compassionate comedy about death and decay, *Travelling North* (1979), and his reference to the wonderful world of Oz to tighten the mythic framework of *Emerald City* (1986). Like Michael Gow, whose *Away* (1986) similarly achieves a mov-

ing reconciliation with the grimmer facts of life with the help of Shakespearean parallels and Mendelssohn's music, Williamson finds ways in these plays to engage in a different kind of mythologising. Rather than discovering the materials for distinctive cultural emblems wholly within the culture itself, this tactic locates Australianness within a larger story and a wider humanity.

Sewell's Marxism has always insisted on that broader context, and in early plays set outside Australia like *Traitors* (1979) and *Welcome the Bright World* (1982) there is a historical framework as well to channel the lives of the participants. *The Blind Giant Is Dancing* (1983) and *Dreams in an Empty City* (1986), his panoramic plays about the terrible power of despair and the necessary possibility of some form of belief, do more than place their Australian actions within an international network of influence. Both works draw on received mythologies (Faust and Christ) to shape and substantiate their passionate moral concerns. Even in the more intimate world of *Hate* (1989), the archetypal symbolism of the land as maternal principle and the invocation of familiar tragedies from Sophocles to Shakespeare give deeper resonance to the plot.

However, it does seem that becoming part of the mainstream involves a loss of political focus. Williamson has always found his material primarily in the moral dilemmas of the middle class. Usually the treatment is compassionate, even indulgent; there are still traces of the tension between satiric exposure and celebration which marked a lot of his earlier work and in *Don's Party* produced an interesting ambivalence of tone. When the moral analysis is largely preempted by the rush to general forgiveness, though, as it is to some extent in *Top Silk* and even in the painfully recognizable complications of his marriage play *The Perfectionist* (1980), the result can be a less productive kind of ambivalence. *Money and Friends* (1992), though its people are mostly as likably hollow and sophisticated as the other self-deceivers who mostly crowd his recent plays, has a tougher edge; in a world where people have become too smart or jaded to pursue matters spiritual or political, failing a friend is about the ultimate sin, and the vision of the play is correspondingly clearer. That has implications for the shape of the plot too. There is less need to turn to literary archetype, like the journey to Oz in *Emerald City*, to confer a structure on ideas which are all negotiable.

Even Sewell's recent work shows signs of this turn to the values constructed in private relationships. His two-woman play *Sisters* (1991) is hardly a cosy affirmation of the joys of family, but its recurrent rhythms of wounding and healing point to a kind of emotional fusion between the sisters which is finally a source of comfort in an otherwise dark and lonely world. *The Garden of Granddaughters* (1993) takes this develop-

ment further; the reunion of the expatriate parents with their three daughters in Australia takes great risks, not this time in confronting or challenging its audience, but in reinforcing and sentimentalizing ideas of meaning which can be fairly glib. Not everyone has come so painfully to hope against the powerful reasons for despair as Stephen Sewell.

Sewell's *King Golgrutha* (1991), a grotesque and surreal comedy which thereby escapes the dangers of dealing in sage observations that may have become slightly shopsoiled in soap opera, is a most unusual piece to have been borne along in the mainstream. Perhaps in its reliance on visual images for the communication of some of its central intuitions it suggests a way to write plays with happy endings without rubber-stamping the attitudes of establishment audiences. It generates its own myth for our times in the capitalistic monster Golgrutha, and finds in it an equivalent for the mythic and historical framework which informed and appraised private relationships in his earlier plays.

The major plays of the establishment theatre in the last few years have tended to affirm modest certainties and to rely heavily on explicit discussion of issues which are dangerously big and perhaps even more dangerously old; the questions range from the value of a life and the meaning of Life at one end of the spectrum, to the nature or possibility of Australian identity at the other. One play which offers a superior instance of this line of concern is Hannie Rayson's *Hotel Sorrento* (1991), in which the very Chekhovian three sisters find, like their counterparts in *The Garden of Granddaughters*, that the things which unite them are far greater than the superficial differences which drive them apart. Rayson's play is strong enough emotionally to avoid simply reinforcing some domestic complacencies, but this remains a potential problem for the largely depoliticised repertoire of the mainstream.

In one area the mainstream has continued to dramatise significant sociopolitical change in Australian society. The developing consciousness of Australia's Asian context has been reflected in the subjects and structures of a number of plays. Mostly it remains a strategy of defamiliarisation, a way of redefining Australian attitudes from another perspective; but even when the understanding of an alien culture is not in itself a priority, there is an implicit analysis of the forces which have shaped or obstructed the imagining of Asia in the Australian consciousness. Alex Buzo's *Norm and Ahmed* (1969) and Romeril's *Floating World*, with its entry into Les Harding's paranoia about the Japanese, his old enemies and former captors, were distinguished early instances. These attempts to put old Australian attitudes into a new and revealing context, however, were not concerned to draw on the resources of Asian theatre forms; neither were Buzo's *Marginal*

Farm (1983) and Tony Strachan's play *The Eyes of the Whites* (1983), which examined Australia's role as postcolonial culture in the role of virtual colonial power in Fiji and New Guinea respectively. More recently, plays like *Sex Diary of an Infidel* (1992) by Michael Gurr and *The Emperor Regrets* (1992) by Therese Radic have appropriated versions of those "alien" forms as an intrinsic part of their treatment of cultural otherness.

Still, the establishment theatre in any complex society is probably not the place to look for the things that characterise a lively national drama. The fact that for a considerable period in recent Australian theatre history it has been a reasonable place to seek such a thing has been a consequence of a number of factors. Partly it is a product of the ambiguous concept of the mainstream theatre in Australia; the 1970s muddied the waters by bringing the suddenly commercial iconoclasm of the "New Wave" into the essentially conservative structures of the large subsidised theatres. Partly, too, it is a reflection of a relatively small marketplace; the processes of publication are very closely linked to the repertoires of those theatres, and the ephemerality of initiatives outside them is compounded by distances, real and metaphorical, between the major Australian cities.

The process by which audiences have come to hear the voices which were not heard, or hardly heard, in the theatre of the first wave still involves the establishment theatre to a degree. Writers like Alma de Groen, and occasionally Hewett and White, have found a place in its repertoire. But the energies of developments in women's theatre and black theatre have largely been encountered outside it, and a strong, distinctive grass-roots movement in community theatre has happened elsewhere altogether.

OTHER INITIATIVES. Almost as soon as the "New Wave" became a cliché, it began to be fashionable to speak of Australian theatre as though it were drowning, not waving. But there has been much to wave about. The preoccupation with language as culturally self-defining at once shaped our drama and placed constraints on it; it was, for a while, a rich if narrow vein, and it was almost certainly, in retrospect, a necessary line of interest in a culture preoccupied with establishing its difference. The recent move to a dramatic mythology on a larger scale and of a more analytic kind provided some ways in which that difference can be questioned, measured, and redefined. That too is probably a necessary stage on the path of postcolonialism, and it might well reflect the passage from nationalist assertiveness or defensiveness to a proud if skeptical maturity.

Much of the most recent Australian writing for the stage has attempted to redress this imbalance and retrieve areas of feeling and forms of expression that were largely excluded by the dominant mode of satiric observation and the models of social realism to

which it referred. It is almost axiomatic that the articulation of previously marginalised experience requires the abandonment, or at least the adaptation, of those artistic structures which have expressed the perceptions that marginalised them. Certainly in contemporary feminist theatre in Australia, and even more strikingly in the dramatization of black experience, the audience is consistently made aware of a radical revision of form. Jack Davis, the most widely performed of Australia's Aboriginal playwrights, handles naturalistic domestic interplay very comfortably but challenges it continually with the perceptions that can only be communicated in verse, music, and dance. His plays formally enact the intersection of different cultures and different ways of knowing.

Patrick White and Dorothy Hewett never had much time for the mainstream conventions anyway, and both writers have focused primarily on female experience and on cultural myths that reflect the dark and irrational underside of social experience; their plays are characterised by an exuberant theatricalism that makes an awareness of the play as poetic construct always an aspect of the piece. Louis Nowra shows a similar disdain for the exploration of surfaces, and his charting of the human capacity to inflict and suffer cruelty has been very distinctively organised in terms of a series of indelible visual images. Ron Elisha has also pursued some of those larger, presocial subjects, though his frankly philosophical interests place a larger emphasis on talk as the means of analysis; like Nowra's, though, Elisha's kind of conversation is never centred on locally recognisable sliding registers.

The postcolonial problems of marginality and national identity have proved fruitful areas of dramatic conflict for many contemporary playwrights. First-generation Australians with parental, linguistic, and cultural loyalties to Europe have articulated the grief of dislocated lives not always fully compensated by material prosperity. Janis Balodis's first two plays of a planned trilogy, *Too Young for Ghosts* (1985) and *No Going Back* (1992), move away from Latvian/Australian contrasts toward the mysterious intersection between physical place and personal identity. The second play's introduction of an Aboriginal character signals its postcolonial awareness of the complications of serial imperialisms.

The migrant woman's extreme marginalisation, her falling victim to the sexism of both Greek and Australian masculinist cultures as well as her displacement from preindustrial domesticity to Australian country town or suburban alienation, preoccupies Tess Lyssiotis. The Greek/Australian dialogues she creates in *A White Sports Coat* (1989), *The Forty Lounge Café* (1990), and *The Journey* (1985) convey to English-speaking audiences something of the strain and anxiety of language-isolated newcomers. The fully assimilated Australian-migrant writer

increasingly records the isolation of that position, islanded between cultures and languages, heir to a romanticised past and a reality-modified future, without valid claim to either Anglo-Saxon or Aboriginal constructions of identity. Writers such as Lyssiotis and Balodis are newcomers to the dramatic arena of alienation previously occupied by writers such as the Jewish Ron Elisha, yet their voices have a particular pertinence and urgency in the postcolonial project of subverting the "New Wave" Australian voice, particularly that of the stereotypical ocker.

Nothing has proved more difficult than articulating a female voice, the feminist imperative of recognizing multiplicity only adding to the complications. Dorothy Hewett's plays, particularly *The Chapel Perilous* (1971), *The Tatty Hollow Story* (1974), *Joan* (1975), and *Bon Bons and Roses for Dolly* (1972), depict a disruptive female sexuality and subvert female sexual stereotypes with a corrosive irony. Hewett's plays gender the Dionysian/Apollonian conflict, heroicising not only female desire but also its near-anarchic expression. Shocked audience reaction to the explicitness of her writing of the female body in previously censored or silenced forms, such as the sexually active menopausal woman, attests to the effectiveness of her iconoclasm. Her appropriating of episodic cinematic techniques as well as musical disruptions to naturalistic dramatic forms puts her in company with Louis Nowra and Patrick White.

Nowra has persistently explored the area of language acquisition and the ways in which a human subject is inserted into a culture through language. *Inner Voices* (1977) dramatised the psychological mutilations brought about by language deprivation, *The Golden Age* (1985) the primitivism uncovered by language erosion, and *Visions* (1979) the collapse of sanity when a tongue is traumatised into silence. These plays were also metaphorical satires on Australia's history. More recently in *Summer of the Aliens* (1992) Melbourne audiences were intrigued to see the author playing himself, commenting on the fictional, early adolescent self who is the play's protagonist. The autobiographical story was enlarged by the tragically alienated Aboriginal girl whose irrepressible vitality is her only defence against a threateningly hostile world of prejudice. *Cosi* (1992), the second part of Nowra's still incomplete autobiographical trilogy, mirrored the moratorium days of the 1960s but centred its action on a group of insane drama-therapy clients, consistent with Nowra's repeated employment of madness to satirise the dangerous, irrational underside of Australian society.

These latest plays continue the satiric bent of Nowra's writing, but the autobiographical direction has lessened the intensity of the metaphysical searchings. Instead of using symbolic settings such as Paraguay and Russia to embody the bizarre in Australian life, a far less intellectually and artistically

challenging naturalistic reflection of recent history seems to have lowered the emotional temperature of his drama, a direction Sewell's drama also seems to be taking. Even the psychology of language acquisition, put to such effective use in Nowra's *Visions* and *Inner Voices*, with its symbolic potential for a post-colonial reading of the painful process of the development of a national voice speaking for an authentic Australian self, seems, for the time anyway, to have been left behind.

Australian history emerges as a very different story from Aboriginal dramatists. Jack Davis's trilogy of plays, *No Sugar* (1985), *The Dreamers* (1982), and *Barungin* (1988), and his earlier *Kullark* (1979), have disturbed audiences, black and white, right across Australia. Covering nearly 200 years of disastrous white-contact black history, from poisoned flour bags to deaths in custody, Davis's plays work in two dimensions. Song and dance evoke dreamtime culture while the messy, often alcohol-confused present lives of suburban black Australians mirror a reality no one is proud of. Only a black writer could depict with such credibility and honesty the feckless self-destructiveness of male Aboriginals and the malaise of alcoholic excess which marks their despair. It is Davis's women who represent his plays' source of optimism, their moral and physical strength promising a future of more than mere survival on the demoralised fringes of white society.

Younger Aboriginals (Jack Davis is now seventy-five) have a different vision. Jimmy Chi's musical *Bran Nue Day* (1988) joyfully celebrates difference and a hybrid national character. No longer mongrels or bastards, as defined by racial and legal prejudice, mixed-race Australians are happily prepared to appropriate the future on their own terms. Chi, himself a northwestern Australian of mixed descent like so many people in that area, product of a multiracial culture of several generations where Chinese, Timorese, Indonesians, Indians, and Malays have merged with both indigenous and white Australians, gives *Aboriginal* a new and complex meaning. His play mixes music and spiritual beliefs in a liberating non-hierarchical manner where country-and-western joins didgeridoo and rock 'n' roll, and Lutheran and Catholic beliefs adapt themselves to dreamtime myth. The comic sophistication of a shifting series of ironic self-representations on the part of indigenous Australians represents a profound rejection of both Otherness and victim status. National identity becomes a simple matter of self-election: the barriers are down, most hilariously and succinctly demonstrated in the line "Ich bin ein Aborigine," spoken by a tourist whose journey comes to replicate the wanderings of all the Australians whose walkabout feet make maps in the red dust of northern Australia.

The tragic other side of what used to be called

miscegenation preoccupies Richard Whalley in *Munjong* (1990), which tackles the seemingly intractable force of racial prejudice, particularly among white police officers. The play's technique of presenting white characters in terms of stereotypes and black ones as complex individuals quietly signals its awareness of one pattern of implied inferiority as it reverses it. Jimmy Chi's intoxicating, optimistic version of interracial and intercultural richness is much harder to imagine in the country towns and suburbs of eastern Australia, where kooris suffer more profoundly the double alienation from an indigenous culture now often only a memory and a modern economy where social justice barely impinges either in theory or practice.

Meantime, the feminist agenda continues in the hands of women who have followed Dorothy Hewett. Alma de Groen's recent *Rivers of China* (1988) and *The Girl Who Saw Everything* (1991) brought an intellectually challenging dimension to the debates about sexual identity. *Rivers of China's* sex-reversed dystopia revealed the need to break out of sterile binary oppositions, whereas *The Girl Who Saw Everything* continued the earlier play's analysis of the importance of art as a transformative tool, both socially and personally. Both de Groen and Hannie Rayson, in her *Hotel Sorrento*, have put the New Man on the Australian stage, suggesting at least a softening in the national sexual divide. Unlike David Williamson's similarly well-educated middle-class men, the women writers' male characters are feminist practitioners, not just theorists.

A younger generation of women writers is well represented in Tobsha Learner, whose *Wolf* (1992) probes the psychosexual drives of the obsessively priapic male in terms of both the sexual revolutionary sixties, seventies, and eighties and the archetypes of the fairy tale. Unfortunately, its central male character, circled by a group of women, antihero though he is, does little to help bring women in from the margins of dramatic action. De Groen and Hewett have made more strenuous and complex challenges to that persistently male heroicising which has characterized so many efforts at a culturally distinct Australian character.

The Outsiders club has members other than women, migrants, and Aborigines. Sam Sejavka in *In Angel Gear* (1990) gives dramatic form to the alienated subculture of drug addicts in a play that might be set in any large city in the world at present. The efforts of those on the margins to claim ground in the centre represents the most lively source of dramatic action in Australia at the moment, just as it does in all national literatures in process of postcolonial self-definition.

Monash University

Developing a Concept Statement

Interpreting essay questions in Drama



What is a Concept Statement

- Your argument!
- Responds to, **and engages with**, the question!
- Don't just tell me what I've already told you - give your opinion backed up with evidence from:
 - lesson notes
 - the plays
 - your experiences

Approaching the Question

What ways can you approach
the question?

How successful has Australian
theatre been in portraying **both
individual and national journeys?**

National Affects the Individual Journey

Ruby Moon, Matt Cameron

NATIONAL	INDIVIDUAL	STAGING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National missing child crisis/epidemic - read interview with Matt Cameron and he's introduction to the play Independent research into the large number of missing children cases in recent history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidently this national issue affected Cameron enough to write the play The vast number of cases affected the nation, but research lets us know how individuals are affected and the connection this has with the theme of grief in the play and how each stakeholder in the situation expresses this grief differently (like the various characters in the play) 	<p><i>You need to decide how you would best utilise theatrical and staging techniques to manipulate the elements of drama in order to express these messages on stage in a meaningful way that is clear to the audience.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National distrust of international neighbours (terror threats, war, nuclear threats, asylum seeker and refugee policies) spurred on by the media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This national distrust and social paranoia results in an individual distrusting almost all of their own society We live in a world where it is common to not know your neighbour - how can you trust them? If you do know them, do you really know what goes on behind closed doors? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A digital life - existing in cyberspace more than we are in reality, our friends are "virtual" just like Ray and Sylvie become their own neighbours through transformation acting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The individual effects of living in a digital world can result in social anxiety issues and stop people functioning in reality. 	

National Affects the Individual Journey

Falling Petals, Ben Ellis

NATIONAL	INDIVIDUAL	STAGING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments on the national approach to schooling and how school is perceived to treat young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people suffer in different ways due to the schooling system they are in, the either feel the pressure to succeed or they feel that school is not meeting their needs 	<p><i>You need to decide how you would best utilise theatrical and staging techniques to manipulate the elements of drama in order to express these messages on stage in a meaningful way that is clear to the audience.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calls into question the perceived purpose of schooling and the debate between students as humans and students as numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a nation seemingly addicted to standardised testing, are we forgetting that students are indeed individuals in need of care and nurturing? The national concept of schooling is stressing kids out and causing all sorts of psychological harm... 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions the way Australia tends to define success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The symbolic mystery illness and the falling petals call into question why we determine success as being fully and properly educated - either you perform well in your final exams or you die...why? 	

Approaching the Question

What ways can you approach
the question?

How successful has Australian
theatre been in portraying **both
individual and national journeys?**

- *Use your essay to prove a point you feel passionate about!*
- *What do you feel needs to change in society? Do these plays express that? USE IT!*
- *Make the essay about something you want to say and use the plays to back you up.*

Examples of Concept Statements

How successful has Australian theatre been in portraying **both individual and national journeys**?

- As a nation, Australia is currently setting individuals of the younger generation up for failure, Australian playwrights call our attention to important issue that must be addressed to allow the youth to strive.
- Matt Cameron and Ben Ellis have successfully highlighted several points in Australian society that need correction in order to allow individuality to remain a basic right.
- To live in a world without individuality would be absurd and dystopic, Ruby Moon and Falling Petals protest against the national undoing of individuality by highlighting specific political and social areas in need of drastic change.

Preliminary Drama 2016 – Assessment Task 1

General Feedback – Essay

It is important to remember that senior Drama is a vigorous course, and the theory component accounts for 40% of your marks. With this in mind, it would be wise for all students to practice writing Drama essays and to re-work their most recent essay when they receive it back.

It was pleasing to see that most students were able to accurately identify and discuss theatrical styles and techniques, however, a deeper level of analysis is required in order to clearly explain to the marker how these are utilised on stage to communicate dramatic meaning to a contemporary Australian audience. The key word here is **'contemporary'** – how are issues relevant today?

General Feedback:

- You must engage in deep analysis – how and why must be the focus of every paragraph – do not recount the story to me
- Less commentary on society; more analysis of how this is communicated
- Much more analysis needs to stem from the use of the elements of drama – revise and know these!
- You have to include supporting evidence – quotes, plays you have seen, your own staging of the plays, etc. You must use this in an analytical way, it's not enough to say "I staged this using props" HOW did you create meaning for the contemporary audience?
- Argue your own case based on your concept/thesis – don't tell me what I already know. E.g. I know what transformation acting is, you don't need to tell me. Instead, tell me why transformation acting is used and how it makes meaning connected to your unique concept
- You can study with your friends, but if your essays start to read the same then you will run into issues. Remember what you were told about plagiarism in All My Own Work – this is important and can result in you receiving a ZERO mark
- Nominalisation is important and should be used to improve the quality and standard of your writing – (<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/3b.html>)
- Noun packing – improves the level of evaluation and quality content in your writing (<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/3cii.html>)
- Make sure the main point of your paragraphs are clear and AT THE START! Don't wait until the end of the paragraph to make an insightful point
- Avoid using colloquialisms unless it is a quote or for a clear effect
- Make sure you use theatrical language and avoid irrelevant English terms, for example:
 - The playwright (not composer)
 - Dramatic meaning
 - Audience is engaged in...
 - The plays (not texts)
 - The director...or performer...or designer...
 - Audience (not viewer or responder)
- Band 6 results will need to include INDEPENDENT RESEARCH – you can include and cite other sources in your essays, you just need to reference these. Relying on memory and class notes will not cut it – you need to engage in wide reading of appropriate resources in order to truly understand the topic and have your own well-informed opinion

Essay Writing in Drama

Organising thoughts and paragraphs



What You Need to Know

- The theory component of Drama is worth 40% of your overall mark
- You need to know the style and structure of a Drama essay
- You must be able to write about:
 - Perspectives and issues explored in a play and how they are communicate on stage
 - How the conventions of theatrical styles are used to communicate dramatic meaning
 - How theatrical techniques are used to manipulate the elements of drama as a means of engaging the audience with a central message
 - How your own experience staging and seeing plays has influenced your understanding

Perspectives in the Plays

This topic explores the following issues/perspectives in plays:

- pCAPS
 - **Political**
 - **Cultural**
 - Artistic
 - Personal
 - **Social**

You need to be able to write about how these issues are explored in the plays and made relevant to Australian audiences through effective use of the Elements of Drama and theatrical styles and techniques.

ALARM in Drama

ALARM IN DRAMA				
Play: _____		Playwright: _____		Year Written: _____
PERSPECTIVE/ISSUE (Political, Cultural, Artistic, Personal, Social)	EXAMPLE (Textual references, experiential workshops, audience experience)	TECHNIQUE (Staging, elements of drama, production elements)	STYLE (Conventions of particular style – realism, absurdist, commedia)	SO WHAT? (How is dramatic meaning communicated?)

Use the ALARM template as a guide to making your study notes. It will make sure that you're covering all the essential information.

It is your job to use the information to create an original and unique concept statement (see earlier notes on writing a concept statement). Regurgitating what you have in your ALARM table will get you some marks, but the highest marks will come from you manipulating this information to sustain a strong argument about theatre and drama using example from the plays to support your view.

Forming Strong Paragraphs in Drama

ALARM IN DRAMA			
Play:	Playwright:	Year Written:	SO WHAT?
PERSPECTIVE/ISSUE (Political, Cultural, Artistic, Personal, Social)	EXAMPLE (Textual references, experiential workshops, audience experience)	TECHNIQUE (Staging, elements of drama, production elements)	STYLE (Conventions of particular style—realism, absurdity, commedia)

P → Perspective (what issue are you responding to?)

E → Example (how has this issue been explored in the plays, in your experience, or from you have seen?)

T → Theatrical Technique (from this example, what evidence is there of effective use of theatrical techniques being used? Discuss elements of drama, staging, production elements, writing, etc.)

S → Style (this technique is used to effectively adhere to the conventions of which theatrical style? Why is this style so effective in communicating the dramatic meaning?)

S → So What? Why should the marker care? Link back to your concept statement and prove why all of this information proves your point. Argue your case!

PETSS as a Guide

PETSS should be used more as a checklist rather than a procedure. You can start by using it as a scaffold for your paragraph, but as you become more competent you should start being more creative and innovating with the way you structure your paragraphs in order to sustain reader interest.

Ultimately, you will be marked on how you demonstrate “flair” in your writing. This means you need to be interesting. A procedural paragraph is not going to be enough.

ESSAY Support Material

How are dramatic forms and techniques of the play you have studied used to portray elements of Australian society?

Start by introducing the play, Ruby Moon, and how it is a mirror reflecting Australian society. Explain the dramatic forms that Matt Cameron has used (e.g. Absurdism, fractured fairytale, who dunnit, etc.) and how these impact the understanding the audience gains about Australian Society.

Write about Cameron and what impacted him and led him to write the play. This is mentioning the playwright's context and you will show your understanding of how Australian society led to the creation of the play in the first place. You might like to reference something out of the interview with Cameron that we looked at in class and is also on Moodle.

Write in detail about at least two forms in the play – a paragraph each. Write about how Absurdism and the fractured fairytale both allow the audience to be alienated enough from the story of the play to see how it reflects the society in which they live. Whilst detailing how the dramatic forms do this you will need to write about the techniques (alienation, episodic structure, disjointed dialogue, eerie music, transformation acting, transitions, etc.) which compliment these dramatic forms and help communicate a message about Australian society (distrust, social paranoia, suburban isolation, etc.). Use quotes in each paragraph to back up your point of view.

Remember to write about how the audience is made to feel anxious and tense about society (they are not at the theatre to relax during this play). You should also write about the forms and techniques impact how the actor works and you can do this by referring to class workshops throughout the essay to further support your points.

Make sure that you look on Moodle to get as many resources and as much information as you can. Also use your logbooks and class activities to support your assessment work.

ALARM IN DRAMA

Play: Ruby Moon / Falling Petals

Playwright: Matt Cameron / Ben Ellis

Year Written: 2003 / 2002

Concept Statement: To live in a world without individuality would be absurd and dystopic, Ruby Moon and Falling Petals protest against the national undoing of individuality by highlighting specific political and social areas in need of drastic change.

PERSPECTIVE/ISSUE (Political, Cultural, Artistic, Personal, Social)	EXAMPLE (Textual references, experiential workshops, audience experience)	TECHNIQUE (Staging, elements of drama, production elements)	STYLE (Conventions of particular style – realism, absurdist, commedia)	SO WHAT? (How is dramatic meaning communicated?)
<p>Social issue – a dystopic nation valuing conformity and complacency by building a corrupt idea of success based on fear and distrust.</p>	<p>Phil and Tania’s view on needing to succeed “We need the marks to get to Melbourne [...] we can’t just chase the ‘interesting’ bits around like butterflies.” And the fact that they cannot the complete their exams because of roadblocks trying to keep the mystery illness out.</p> <p>Cameron suggests that as a nation we have become increasingly distrusting of our own society. This is highlighted in the Prologue of <u>RM</u> as Ray and Sylvie become increasingly suspicious of their neighbours in regards to the disappearance of Ruby, in turn becoming suspicious of each other which we demonstrated in our staging of this scene. “Haven’t you seen them looking sideways at us [...] what if it was one of them?”</p>	<p>Phil and Tania = conforming students. Staging (FP) – always drawn towards each other, especially when discussing the need to do well in exams; visually separated from Sally who has opposing views. (RM) – similarly blocking shows the growing separation between Ray and Sylvie, with Sylvie inching towards the window to “look out” and suspect the neighbourhood, with Ray watching her from behind also showing his distrust of her and the other residents of Flaming Tree Grove. Transformation Acting = emphasis on distrusting others, more so each other. Hints at the fear of the outside world so R and S form their own world, playing all roles. Yet this world is corrupt to – as a result of the real corrupt world. Costuming – Phil and Tania in correct uniform “all shades of one colour”. Sally also in uniform but with a different coloured hair-band to communicate her desire to maintain some form of individuality. Her demise in the play’s end clearly contrasted her objective, showing the national rule of conformity is undoing any notion of individuality.</p>	<p>Realism – characters have clear objectives which are representative of the national ideology. Using the Magic If, it’s not too much of a stretch to understand what these characters are thinking because it is the schooling system we are in too!</p> <p>Absurdist – the conversation goes around in circles which is effective in communicating the corrupt nature of the outside world and distrust we have of those around us. Cameron really does pose the question about how well we can really know another person and what goes on behind closed doors.</p>	<p>Dystopic nation is one of uniformity whose citizens adhere to the national norms without pausing to consult their purpose. Both plays achieve this reorientation of Australian society.</p> <p>FP = institutions (school) converting members to mere numbers who should behave in the same way and achieve the best results, where success is pre-defined and has little individual meaning. Success benefits the institution more so than the person.</p> <p>RM = we are trained through media and news reports to distrust other people. We are quick to jump to conclusions because we fear the actions of others. We worry that others are going to cause us harm and so we distrust them without evidence. Like R and S, we build a world of trouble that is more dystopic than it perhaps really is.</p>

<p>Social issue – the effects of the above on individuals within society who are trained to live their life based on societal definitions of success.</p>				
<p>Political issue – the devaluing of individuality in society in order to achieve national interests.</p>				
<p>Political issue – a country of washed out and diluted citizens unable to initiate positive changes due to the undoing of individuality in Australian society.</p>				

WRITING A DRAMA ESSAY

Writing an essay based on a play needs to be done **from the perspective of the audience**. This is crucial and will truly transform your analysis if you keep it in mind. You should analyse the language and the stage action **as if you were sitting in the theatre watching the action unfold before your eyes**. Of course, unlike the audience, you will know what is to come at any point (once you have read the play through, that is!).

When you select appropriate **quotations** and **descriptions of stage action** from your play to support the points you are making to build up your essay, you should make sure you explain and comment on the **effects on the audience** both of the language used and on aspects of **stagecraft and dramatic devices**. (When a dramatist writes a play, it is important to remember that it is written for the **stage** - not the **page**. So... when you analyse the **effects** and comment on the **purposes** of a play for your coursework or exam essay, you will need to take extra care that you consider what is happening **on the stage** and **how the setting, props, characters and action on the stage contribute to the audience's interpretation and enjoyment of events**.)

The action on the stage has the following main purposes a) **characterisation**, b) **plot development**, c) creating **mood** or **atmosphere** d) creating **dramatic irony**, e) foregrounding (sowing the seeds of...) future events f) the development and exploration of a **theme**.

You need to look for and explain the **dramatic methods** used in the play, such as **dramatic irony**. **Irony** is an important way of writing in literature being one of very many 'literary devices' available to writers whose wish is to deepen our engagement with a text. It is especially common in poetry but finds its way into all forms of writing. Irony allows a writer to suggest more than the surface meaning of their words - it shapes meaning in subtle ways and helps create 'layers of meaning'. When using irony a writer creates a kind of 'shared understanding' between the speaker/writer and listener/reader who both recognise that what is said or written is not quite what is meant; it's as if a 'gap' exists between the surface meaning of the words used and the deeper meaning intended. Why do writers use irony so subtly? Well - they know that readers do not like to be lectured: irony allows meanings to surface unobtrusively, leaving the reader to ponder on what is meant thus increasing the level of engagement with the text. Irony creates a great closeness to a text and a feeling of satisfaction when the irony is recognised and understood.

Dramatic irony is a particular kind of irony used on the stage or screen. It occurs when the audience knows more about a character than the character on stage does. Hence, in a childhood pantomime, you want to call to 'Jack' that 'the giant' is behind him - and you do! But in a play (or on TV), you simply cannot call out - yet the involvement you feel with the play is intense at that moment: you almost become a conspirator to the action.

- These methods - some linked to the language of the play, some linked to the action on stage will be creating effects in the audience's mind and each will have a **purpose** attached to it, perhaps to develop a character, create a **mood** or **atmosphere**, develop the **plot** or explore a **theme**.

Remember, too, that audiences change over time so aim to consider the effects of the play and its relevance to different audiences at different times - especially with a Shakespearian play.

KEY IDEAS, EFFECTS, METHODS AND PURPOSES

Whatever your essay question, you will be expected to look for and explain the **effects** the play is having on its audience, the **methods** being used to create these effects and the possible **purposes** behind them.

- Remember - there will always be **two levels of purpose to discuss**: first, the 'local' purpose at the point you are discussing or quoting; this will be linked to some local aspect such as development of a **character**, creation of **mood** or **tension**, development of the **plot**, helping the audience **relate to** or **engage with** the action and so on.
- As no part of a play is there for no reason, there will very likely be a potential **second overall purpose** you can discuss - this will be linked to the **themes** of the play.

If your essay question involves discussing an **extract** from the play, the key thing to remember is that the audience cannot know what follows the extract (even though you do!) - so part of your answer needs to discuss just **this point** and explain what effect the extract will have on **changing what the audience knows up to this point**: has it created dramatic irony, has it changed the mood, is it developing characters, tension, etc. Why is this done? How does it prepare the audience for what is to follow?

- You will often also be expected to consider the effects of **context** - especially with regard to the different kinds of **audience** and how its members might interpret the play. Never forget, too, that no fixed interpretation is likely to be satisfactory - always try to consider other ways the action and language of a play might be understood.

In a drama essay, your purpose is always to explore, explain and discuss the various significant ways by which the tools of drama have been used to entertain and engage the audience, persuading them to think about the world in a certain way - the dramatist's! The ideas explored by are called the play's **themes** and themes are always made clear through the play's characters and action. All essay questions will concern some aspect of theme and character.

Telling 'what happens' in the first paragraph in the form of an overview suggests to your teacher or examiner that you have absorbed and understood the text; it also suggests confidence and, most importantly, allows you to move on from telling 'what' to what gains the marks - your **interpretation** and commentary of...

- the **effects** text creates
- the **methods** the writer uses to create them
- the **purposes** for such effects

At all costs avoid 'retelling' or 'translating' the text's surface story: this wastes time and space and gains no marks. Only **interpretation** gains marks.

CHARACTERS AND ACTION

A vital aspect of a play is its characters and what they do. Most essay questions concern either the **themes** of a play, or the **characters** of a play. But a question concerning a character is often just a hidden question about themes – so it is probably true to say that all questions about plays involve themes in one way or another. Who a character is, what they say, how they say it, what other characters say about them, how other characters act around them and so forth all help to build up a character in the audience's mind.

Do you like a particular character? Why? Do you empathise with him or her or even sympathise with their plight? If so – think about what it is that makes you feel this way perhaps some aspect of the way they are being treated by their society? This is a theme of the play. Your sympathy and engagement with this character is persuading you to accepting the playwright's ideas or themes. And just because their society is, for example, Italy in the olden days, does not mean that the ideas are old hat. Society may have evolved technologically, but not always in other ways. Shakespeare's views on human relationships, and Arthur Miller's views on society are, in many ways, still very valid today.

Do you dislike a particular character? Again, why? What are they doing to be disliked? How are they being presented? Are they created as a **stereotype** - a kind of **stock character**? What ideas occur to you when you watch them? Again, these ideas are linked to the **themes** of the play.

STAGECRAFT

The **effects** and **purposes** behind the playwright's use of stagecraft are as important in your analysis and essay as the choices and uses of language. Always consider how what is said in a play fits in with the following aspects of stagecraft: Staging, Setting, Costume, Props, Action etc.

QUESTION: Stanislavski developed a system for actor training that focuses on an actor's ability to relate to their character and portray the truth in a role. Discuss how you have used tools from the system in your own performances and why they are useful.

Stanislavski has been coined the "father of modern theatre" by many theatre and performance practitioners. The overarching reason for this is that he developed what became known as the Stanislavski 'system'. This was the forerunner to what has become known as Method Acting, however, his 'system' was much less strict in terms of demanding the actor to use particular strategies. What Stanislavski did was supply a vast array of tools for actors, and potential actors, to use in order to connect to a character in a very real and personal way. This personal connection is required in order to perform the truth of a role. In order to be faithful to a character's emotions and be 'in the moment', rather than leading to a predetermined point is necessary for a true and believable performance. I have used a number of Stanislavski's tools in my own acting which have included emotion memory and imagination, the magic if and objectives and units of action. I have found that these tools have been extremely useful, as a performer, because they have allowed me to focus on myself in order to create the real humanity required in a character.

Comment [TA1]: Introduce the area of study.

Comment [TA2]: Introduce your main points in relation to the question.

Comment [TA3]: Make your thesis statement that will be reiterated throughout your essay.

Before studying the 'system' I was performing very one-dimensional characters. For example, a happy character had a smile and was light on their feet; a sad character was the opposite. These were very stock characterisations and led to stereotypical performances. Stanislavski encouraged his actors to move away from the generic and focus on the specific. A character that is standing still with little facial expression may still be ecstatically happy. Working with the 'system' has allowed me to empathise more with my characters through the use of emotion memory. This involves linking a character's thoughts, feelings and actions to something similar from your own experience. For the happy character I mentioned, I might consider a time when I was very happy but wasn't necessarily displaying it physically. This leads an actor to then think about the given circumstances of the situation and discover why the emotion is not being shown physically. Perhaps my character is very happy that he has won the lottery, but it would be inappropriate to announce such a thing while sitting next to your terminally ill friend in the hospital. I have not experienced this but I can relate, through the use of emotion memory, by remembering when I was given a top grade in an assessment task but could not announce so because my best friend had failed that same task. In both cases, my character and I are aware of the feelings of others in the scene and enables a more honest, true and believable performance. This can lead to a particular objective and unit of action.

Comment [TA4]: Insight into why the practitioner is beneficial in improving an actor's performance. Written in first person.

Comment [TA5]: Introduce first point.

Comment [TA6]: Explain the point/technique.

Comment [TA7]: Use as much correct terminology as possible.

Comment [TA8]: Provide personal examples.

Comment [TA9]: Emphasise your thesis statement.

Making use of objectives and units of action is very important when aiming for a true performance. Although a character may have a super objective that remains their ultimate goal throughout the play, and maybe after, an actor can break down a script into smaller objectives and units of action. A unit of action refers to a part of a script where a character had a particular objective. For the aforementioned given circumstances, my character's objective might be, and thus that unit of action would be labelled, "avoid upsetting Person B more by telling them about my win". This helps me discover the character's body language and develop both the inner and outer tempo-rhythm in more detail so as to represent a real person rather than present a mere casing of an emotion. A play may consist of many, many different units of action as the nature of the plot changes and results in a change in immediate objective for the character. Together, these units of action combine to create

Comment [TA10]: Introduce second point.

Comment [TA11]: Correct terminology.

Comment [TA12]: Explain the tool being discussed.

Comment [TA13]: Personal experience.

Comment [TA14]: Correct terminology.

the 'score' of the character or role. When I am performing, I find it extremely useful to perform unit-to-unit, or beat-to-beat, as it allows me to be thinking the same as the character. I am not worried about the next scene; I am concerned with achieving the current objective. This creates an honest performance that really is 'in the moment'.

Comment [TA15]: Personal experience.

Comment [TA16]: Reiterate thesis statement.

As useful and as vital as I find these tools, I am of the firm opinion that one of the most important tools or concepts presented by Stanislavski in his 'system' is imagination. This is the key to unlocking the potential of all the other tools! Refining further, I would say that I find the Magic 'If' a particularly useful and important element to imagination. This is a deceptively simple tool where an actor asks themselves "what if...?" 'What if I had won the lottery but was by my friend's side at their death bed?' This helps bring a human quality to the scene and allows me to unlock my own feelings about the given circumstances as well as help me understand them more. Imagination is the actor's most essential skill and tool and allows for a blank canvas to become coated with true human qualities as they develop, build and create their role. It is imagination that also allows the character to live outside the realms of the actor's personal experiences. I have never killed a person, but when I was playing Macbeth then I thought about what I would do 'if a close friend or family member was pushing me to do the wrong thing in order to gain power for myself?' What would it take for them to convince me to kill? This also informed the other actors as it helped them develop the intensity of their own characters as they had to convince me. This conviction needed to be believable in order for us to create true characters and honest reactions.

Comment [TA17]: Introduce third point/tool.

Comment [TA18]: Explain.

Comment [TA19]: Personal experience.

Comment [TA20]: Personal experience.

Comment [TA21]: Link to thesis statement.

The true value and usefulness of these tools were made clear to me in a particular workshop that I participated in which highlighted the importance of approaching moments in a performance and reacting in a true way instead of thinking about what happens next in the script. My teacher presented me with a newspaper article about a tragic accident where a person had been killed. It was from that day's news and I had no knowledge of the incident. I was asked to read it to the group. I then was given Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy to read. After reading both, we came to the realisation that I gave a much truer delivery of the newspaper article as opposed to the fake Shakespearean accent and booming voice that came automatically when I delivered the soliloquy. This really made me aware, as an actor, of how vital it is to know the objective within a particular unit of action at any given point and perform that. My internal monologue must be the thoughts of the character, not what will be coming next. When I am thinking about the story and what happens in the next scene, my performance loses its honesty and becomes fake and stifled like my Hamlet delivery.

Comment [TA22]: Larger discussion related to personal workshop experience.

Comment [TA23]: Personal connection to the thesis statement.

I have come to deeply value and appreciate the tools that Stanislavski has provided as part of his 'system' because they really do allow me to portray true characters on stage. Using tools like the Magic 'If', emotion memory and units and objectives fosters a personal connection to a character that allows me to perform a play from moment to moment. This means my reactions are raw and honest and believed by the audience. Believability cannot be achieved when I am busy thinking about what happens in three scenes time. In this way, using the 'system' helps me to create a real and true character.

Comment [TA24]: Personal conclusive statement.

Comment [TA25]: Summarise the main subjects you have discussed.

Comment [TA26]: Personal.

Comment [TA27]: End with a final salute to your thesis statement.

How successful has Australian theatre been in portraying both individual and national journeys? Prove your point with reference to your knowledge of Australian theatre and two plays you have studied.

To live in a world without the ability to have individuality would be absurd and dystopic. Ruby Moon (2003) and Falling Petals (2002) protest against the national undoing of individuality by communicating specific social and political areas in need of drastic change. Theatre has the power to showcase national issues and the impacts they can have on individuals. In so doing, audiences are privy to more than a national case of political correctness and come to learn about the experiences of people suffering from such ideologies. In my experience researching, producing and seeing Matt Cameron's Ruby Moon and Ben Ellis' Falling Petals, I have come to an understanding about how blind conformity and adhering to unjustified social protocols can lead to a dystopic society. In my interpretation of the plays I worked hard to focus on this issue and communicate to the audience the need for change through effective use of staging and production elements. In my exploration of the plays, I discovered the importance of adhering to and manipulating the conventions of the absurd and realistic theatrical styles and how each has the power to communicate dramatic meaning. Both plays present the idea of distrust and social paranoia as well as the systematic removal of individuality amongst citizens and forces the audience to question the validity of such governance of their nation.

The concept of success in a contemporary society is predetermined as a milestone all must reach. Society values this conformity and complacency as citizens make attempts to fit this mould of success. Although the definition varies in each play, the overarching objective to be what society wishes you to be is maintained. In Falling Petals, the central figures are viewed under the umbrella of schooling and have been taught that in order to succeed, they must gain excellent marks in their final exams. Phil and Tania are fully on board with this notion, evidenced by their repeated dialogue that refers to the need to perform well in order to get into university in Melbourne, "Economics gets me out of Hollow" (Phil, Scene 1). What Ellis has successfully achieved in this exploration of conforming to societal views of success is communicating the outcast perception of those who prefer to lead an individual life with their own definition of success and self-fulfilment. Sally represents this type of 'unique' philosophy. She finds the subjects in school "interesting" and views this as success, Tania and Phil cannot fathom such individuality, "We need the marks to get to Melbourne [...] we can't just chase the interesting bits around like butterflies" (Phil, Scene 1). This was communicated clearly in Hunter School of the Performing Arts' (HSPA) direction of this production where the blocking sustained a visual communication of the separation between Sally and Phil and Tania. Sally was often isolated from the others which communicated her metaphorical exiling from society. Phil and Tania also maintained higher status through the use of levels which was embedded into the blocking too. This also allowed for a visual communication of the rising tension and conflict between the two views on success. Ultimately leaving Sally alone on stage as she dies at the conclusion of the play from the mystery illness. Her death, I interpreted from this production, is symbolic of the ultimate undoing of individuality in society.

- Society values conformity and complacency by building a predefined idea of success for all to adhere to
- In an attempt to be who society tells us to be, we come to distrust each other and the society around us – becoming ultimately distrusting of ourselves and our ability to function as individuals

- Based on the distrust we have of the world, we tend to build our own worlds which are, ironically, more dysfunctional than the reality we already live in.

DRAMA ESSAY PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Write a full introduction to your essay.

Point No. 1 – dot point plan of what you will discuss.

Practical experience

Point No. 2 – dot point plan of what you will discuss.

Practical experience

Point No. 3 – dot point plan of what you will discuss.

Practical experience

CONCLUSION

Write a full conclusion to your essay.

RUBY MOON – Matt Cameron

SYNOPSIS:

It begins like a fairytale...

Descend into a suburban dystopia of loss and fear with this haunting production of Matt Cameron's acclaimed Australian play for young adults, Ruby Moon.

In the suburban quiet of Flaming Tree Grove, life appears to be picture perfect; until the day little Ruby sets off to visit her grandmother at the end of the cul-de-sac and is never seen again. Her parents fracture. Grief stricken, they search for answers behind their neighbours' doors. Then a mysterious parcel arrives and Ruby's ghostly presence is felt again ... and again.

A cyclical story of loss and fear, Ruby Moon explores the relentlessness of grief as two parents continue to return to the same place with more questions than they have answers.

Matt Cameron's cleverly crafted play blends Theatre of the Absurd, Australian Gothic and Brechtian techniques, challenging the classic 'whodunnit' narrative it employs by employing the use of the fractured-fairytale.

Filled with tension and unpredictability, this stirring contemporary production will challenge senior drama students as they attempt to solve the mystery of Ruby Moon.

RUBY MOON – Matt Cameron

SYNOPSIS:

It begins like a fairytale...

Descend into a suburban dystopia of loss and fear with this haunting production of Matt Cameron's acclaimed Australian play for young adults, Ruby Moon.

In the suburban quiet of Flaming Tree Grove, life appears to be picture perfect; until the day little Ruby sets off to visit her grandmother at the end of the cul-de-sac and is never seen again. Her parents fracture. Grief stricken, they search for answers behind their neighbours' doors. Then a mysterious parcel arrives and Ruby's ghostly presence is felt again ... and again.

A cyclical story of loss and fear, Ruby Moon explores the relentlessness of grief as two parents continue to return to the same place with more questions than they have answers.

Matt Cameron's cleverly crafted play blends Theatre of the Absurd, Australian Gothic and Brechtian techniques, challenging the classic 'whodunnit' narrative it employs by employing the use of the fractured-fairytale.

Filled with tension and unpredictability, this stirring contemporary production will challenge senior drama students as they attempt to solve the mystery of Ruby Moon.

MALHOUSE THEATRE

EDUCATION RESOURCE NOTES FOR **RUBY MOON** by MATT CAMERON



©Malthouse Theatre Education Program 2008
© Playbox Theatre Company 2003
© Neonhart Theatre 2003

INTERVIEW WITH MATT CAMERON, PLAYWRIGHT OF *RUBY MOON*

What was your initial inspiration in writing the play 'Ruby Moon'?

To some degree I was inspired by headlines in the newspapers. Sadly those sorts of headlines are a constant, but for some reason there may have been a number of them at the time which sparked me. A missing child is such a universal tragedy with a primal impact. It arouses such potent emotions in the people that it immediately affects, and then beyond that, to communities. I can read a story from the other side of the world concerning a missing child and it still has a powerful emotional effect so empathy is not just about proximity. The challenge with *Ruby Moon* has been finding a way of writing a play that told a fictional story about a missing child that was distinctive because in some ways it is familiar territory.

Did you write 'Ruby Moon' with actors Peter Houghton and Christen O'Leary in mind?

I knew from the outset that I wanted to write a two-hander and an intense performance piece. Also, in Australian theatre the smaller your cast, the more chance you have of your play being produced which is a kind of dreadful practical consideration. Peter and Christen are actors who I've worked with a great deal and I have enormous faith in their range.

At the same time I tried not to let their involvement limit me in terms of what I would write. I didn't want to write entirely to what I perceived their strengths as actors to be. In a way I wanted to write for areas of their acting abilities that hadn't been explored because they hadn't had that opportunity. So I tried to just write what I felt the story needed and in the back of my mind I knew that, because they are both incredibly gifted actors, they would be able to find all of the characters that were required of them in the play.

To what extent did your knowledge of them as actors impact on the writing of the various characters?

They definitely impacted on the writing process in so far as we had discussions and workshop readings of the play at its various stages of development where their contributions were definitely noted by me. Whether it was just listening to a rhythm in their speech or, more directly, with them offering an idea or an improvised line that I would pounce on. In the end it is hard to imagine the piece without either of them.

If Sydney Theatre Company rang you and offered to produce the play for next season can you see other actors playing these roles?

Firstly, that would be a miracle. But when you write a play you can't be precious to the point of wanting to hold onto every production that might ever be staged. I think it's really important that a play gets to go out on that journey and be produced in other contexts without the playwright grasping onto it too tightly. New productions can also be great in terms of learning about the play

by seeing other actors, other directors, designers. I think that ultimately plays have to be re-interpreted. It's always interesting for me when I see another production of a play beyond the first one because I learn more from seeing how people approached it without my direct involvement.

(Note: Heather Bolton will replace Christen O'Leary in the 2004 tour of Ruby Moon)

Did you have any dramaturgical input for 'Ruby Moon' and would you talk about that process?

I definitely had dramaturgical input. I feel relatively self-sufficient as a playwright, but at the same time I crave collaboration and, for me, the best dramaturg is the director of the play – assuming I approve of the choice of director. In this case that's Aidan Fennessy and I've been working with him for many years now. Aidan's contribution has been enormous. He is a wonderful writer and, to my mind, a great director. What he provides can seem so simple but it's a revelation to me. He helps to focus and distill the ideas. It can come from him talking about how he might stage a scene and just hearing that helps to clarify for me how I should rewrite it in order to make it more effective. He has also provided direct suggestions of edits and ideas that I have brazenly adopted and claimed as my own.

Would you talk about the choice of the various characters in the play. They are quite archetypal. Was this deliberate?

It was almost instinctive. Once I was dealing with fairytale motifs, and with archetypes so much a part of fairytale story telling, the characters just emerged and evolved naturally. When we started to examine and deconstruct them, it became evident that these archetypes are actually almost covering key forces in our society: religion, science, art, magic, the military etcetera. I don't remember the selection of the characters as being conscious but it was probably about trying to make them universal. And so, like in all my plays, they're generic characters but specifically generic. Part of it might have happened through trying to make this street, Flaming Tree Grove, almost like a street of the world or a street of an entire city. Of course obviously it can't capture the complexity of every realm, but it was an attempt to address a wide spectrum within the context of a very small little cul-de-sac in an unknown suburb.

One of the striking things about the play is how it touches on the notion of 'community' and the affects of Ruby's disappearance on that community. Do you have a sense that a community exists in this street?

I think so, although it seems a decimated community at its heart. It feels like there were always secrets in this street and part of the journey for the parents is realising that there were secrets and that they, perhaps in their innocence and naivety, weren't aware of them. It seems their daughter, Ruby, had these hidden little pockets of experiences involving the other inhabitants of the street and the parents lived in ignorant bliss.

In writing this play I ended up drawing a little map [see end of notes] of the street so that I knew who lived next to whom and where the church was and where the school was and where the little laneway at the back of the church between the houses was and all those intricacies. I didn't envisage my own childhood neighbourhood. It was a more classic and iconic picture in my mind.

What the drawing gave me was a layout, a geography, and that helped me to realise how close these people all were together in terms of distance, but with realms of space between them on other levels. That's the paradox of the suburbs really. In the suburbs people live in incredibly close proximity but often have no idea about each other. Growing up, I didn't really know that many neighbours in the street. I thought I knew them. I knew their names, some practical details of their lives but who really knows what's going on behind our neighbours' curtains.

Were there any particular themes or concepts you wished to highlight in the play 'Ruby Moon'?

On some level, although it's probably obscure, I felt like the play was about the prevailing fear of our times. I was trying to get beyond the fear of losing a child and actually look at the nature of that unease, that *dis*-ease, that lurks and hovers in the world that we live in at the moment. In this country at present there is a climate of fear that we are being sold by our government. They claim their actions are about easing and removing that fear but I think they're nurturing it, feeding it. It's the classic ploy of corrupt power, to convince us that we are in peril and then offer themselves as our only protection. So I was quite interested in trying to explore notions of anxiety, doubt, loss and barely suppressed terror. To me anyway, it feels like the pervasive fear and mistrust that exists in Flaming Tree Grove is something of a microcosm of where Australia is at the moment. Like an ache in our collective soul that we haven't yet worked out how to heal.

How would you describe the style of your play?

Gothic, absurd, nightmarish, surreal. I make a conscious effort in writing a plays to make it theatrical and abstract. I think there are playwrights who do naturalism brilliantly, so I leave that territory to them. However, I think that playwrights who don't do naturalism well are responsible for boring theatre. So if I can't write great naturalism then I would rather not write it at all. *Ruby Moon* is written, therefore, in the style that I favour which is a type of heightened naturalism. It is still very much predicated on universal human emotions but isn't directly about topical events or specific places, but hopefully evokes them.

The way I write plays all comes back to when I was first taught at school about the metaphor and the simile. I remember the teacher saying that a simile is where one thing is said to be 'like' another whereas a metaphor is where one thing is said to 'be' another. My imagination was instantly drawn to the metaphor.

The idea is that hopefully there is room in the play for an audience to associate what they see on stage – however strange – with their own lives. To give them room to imagine and make connections and find a truth from it that is specific to them.

Did you envisage a particular space or set for 'Ruby Moon'?

This is not specifically the set that I envisaged but I love the set for this production. I certainly can't take credit for it. When I was writing *Ruby Moon*, I imagined the literal landscape, knowing that we would be *representing* that on stage, and that we'd be trying to trigger that image. So I was trying to imagine a street in my head which had these old, dark trees and street lamps, with pockets of

light and vast shadows. I was imagining a street at night even though the story of Ruby's disappearance begins on a screamingly hot summer's day.

Overwhelmingly the street felt to me like a street that probably looks picture-perfect during the day but at night suddenly becomes frightening and portentous. I grew up in the sad, bare, outer suburbs. This particular image, though, was probably more inner suburban with old deciduous trees, a really established suburb. So I imagined that real, natural world and then imagined the context for it on stage. I started to imagine a room, a room that was arrested in time because, for these parents, the loss of their child has caused everything to stop and has allowed the dust to accumulate. I imagined that everything was locked in a time warp.

The woods tend to give the play a fairy tale aspect – Little Red Riding Hood goes into the woods but, in this case, doesn't return. Is this what you were thinking?

It's strange with the 'woods' because the play takes place in a street called Flaming Tree Grove, one that is lined with flame trees and, I have a confession to make, I'm sure I have seen flame trees but I really can't picture specifically what they are. Typical of my lack of research and wilful ignorance, I preferred not to know. I just like the name of them. In a way I'm not even literally imagining a street with flame trees, it's more the idea of them – that when the sun sets on this street the trees look as if they've caught on fire. I was trying to imagine a pastiche rather than a specific landscape, one that was poetically evocative.

Were you involved in the design process at all?

In preliminary discussions on the design I was there with Christina Smith (designer) and Aidan Fennessy (director). It's very important that the design process happens between the director and the designer. As a writer I can suggest or drop hints as to the kind of world I imagine the play takes place in but it's crucial that they own the set design. If it's written into the play in an overly prescriptive manner then I think that gives a designer no room to create. I love Christina's set design and, apart from whatever is in the script that triggered her mind into creating it, I can't – unfortunately – take any credit.

What do you see as being the role of playwrights in our society?

I think it's about demanding our own relevance. I have no belief that playwrights are intrinsically important and that they should be listened to. That privilege needs to be earned and demanded by the quality of the work. To me, playwriting is about telling stories in a way that is distinctive from other story telling forms. It's about making the theatre a place people feel compelled to go to in order to hear a story told in a way that they could not find in a book or on television or in film. So I see the role of the playwright as being one of trying to tell stories distinctively and using all the virtues of the theatre to do it. Beyond that I think the role of the playwright is to challenge the homogenisation of thought. I write for television as well and in writing for television there are so many more people putting their fingers into the pie. Often the result is diluted and diminished. So, the theatre to me is still this pure world where you can actually tell the story as you would like to tell it.

Does the playwright's role create a potentially powerful opportunity?

Absolutely. Sometimes the most dangerous aspects of ourselves are revealed in the theatre. Beyond that, in a more general sense, I strongly feel the role of the playwright is to move audiences, to deeply move them. Because in the theatre the audience is sharing the same space as the storytellers there is such potential for connection. It's a waste if you're not trying to work at the most extreme and powerful ends of the spectrum. There's no point being timid in the theatre because it's just a wasted opportunity.

What would you like the audience to be thinking as they leave the theatre?

It's not that I don't think of the audience, but I never presume to dictate what they might think at the end of the performance. All I can do is take responsibility for what I want to convey. How they interpret that and how much it impacts upon them is out of my hands. I would, however, love the audience to feel like they've made a deep emotional connection and the fact that they might leave the theatre even thinking about the play is enough for me.

**INTERVIEW WITH AIDAN FENNESSY, DIRECTOR OF
'RUBY MOON'**

As a director, what were your first impressions on reading the text of 'Ruby Moon'?

Well it has had a few incarnations and it has changed considerably. I suppose my first impressions of the script we're working with now were about the physicality of the language, the challenge involved within the script and I think, more pertinently there was a particular pitch in this story. It reads very differently to how it flows.

I think, as well, I was fairly excited about working with this type of language. Matt Cameron writes purely from a kind of poetic aesthetic, one which he places into his work and this then has to be ingested and played out by characters. He writes very specific sorts of characters as well but the text itself is like an overwriting character, the invisible character in the whole plot. So many Australian and overseas plays are naturalistic. The playwrights try and create a natural 'ear' for the piece but Matt works completely against that so it is always a big challenge as a director.

You have collaborated frequently with Matt in the past. How does this affect your working process as director?

It means we have a pretty good shorthand but that doesn't mean that we're in cahoots or in agreement with every decision. In having a history with a particular writer it means that you've seen their tricks before and you want to push them a little bit. So it doesn't mean that the working relationship is any smoother I don't think. I think the collaborative process means that at the end of the day you walk away, you put it down, and you're still friends. I suppose having a history of working together gives me some sort of advantage in terms of getting the inside track on what

Matt's doing because he can be quite an obscure writer I think, more so than what he'd like to admit. But he writes very eclectic work and I suppose knowing him helps me understand where that comes from.

Were you involved in any dramaturgical process in regard to 'Ruby Moon'?

Yes I was. Matt and I do work on the script a lot together before we hit the rehearsal room floor and that process is basically about reading it and kicking around ideas. Matt is probably the most workable writer I've ever worked with. He's very open to ideas, he's very open to taking them on board and putting them within the text.

In the case of *Ruby Moon* it's been a slightly different process. The text is very dense and quite difficult in terms of achieving a logic for the actors. Matt and I came into this production with an agreement that we'd try and render what was already written, and then go through a process of editing because we decided that the script that was there was pretty much right. If anything, what we'd need to do was a type of surgical editing process. As director of this production I wasn't prepared to edit before we'd seen what we had, mainly out of respect for the writer.

How have you worked with the actors in rehearsal to help them develop all their different characters? Have you used any particular acting techniques or approaches?

Not particularly. I'm not a director who has a particular method or a process, at least not a formal one. In this production, however, I'm pretty hands on, and I've been directing probably more than I would normally do. As a director I often take a lot of offers from the actors and run with them but because of the density of this particular text I've found that it does need someone directing with a pretty heavy hand so that the actors see the logic within it. I am lucky in that I have worked with Peter and Christen before so I have a type of shorthand with them. I've been throwing cultural film references at them, for example, and saying, 'What about that?' They then try it out and we'll extract bits and pieces from what we find and then move on.

In a four week rehearsal process it's very hard to impose a methodology on it. You've got a deadline and you've got to have a show at the end of it so it's whatever works best. As a director you are going to work with many different actors and you've got to learn how to get something out of each one of them. Walking into the room with one process isn't good - you've got to walk into the room with about twenty.

How would you describe the style of 'Ruby Moon'?

That's a difficult question. I think it's more ambitious in its style than anything I've ever done. It crosses genre all over the place which can be a complete disaster or it can be a real revelation. All the best sort of plays and films and books – you know, the ground breaking ones - have always been ones that have melded genre. *Ruby Moon* has got musical elements in there, it's got song, it's got almost Busby Berkeley type routines. It has straight out horror in it and a lot of comedy. So, I would call it a gothic-comic-tragic-psycho-drama. And it's a pastoral as well – a pastoral gothic play.

Are there any particular themes that you are wanting to highlight in your production of 'Ruby Moon'?

I think the play is principally about how two people cope with loss and that's what it's chasing in a very eclectic sort of way. The play is about feelings. It's about what we do with these terrible feelings that we often have, that we can't digest. Do we reinvent them as stories? It's all about people writing their pain and giving it a shape and making it a story. So I suppose those aspects are thematic. The other thematic element within it is about people not seeing the world for what it is; people putting faith in the community, being accepting or trusting of people, believing they are fundamentally good and not being able to see that perhaps they're not.

Could you describe your collaboration with the designer Christina Smith. What particular choices have you made with regard to the use of the space?

I've worked with Christina before. She is fantastic and she's a great antidote to me because I'm a messy sort of person in terms of ideas. I tend to throw everything up against the wall and then she sort of has to peel off, take it away and she comes back with a design that is beautifully rendered and wrought, one with very crisp, clean ideas. So as a designer she's very good at being able to instinctively say what can work. Christina really works in a collaborative sense. She's not someone who comes to the first meeting with all of her ideas. She'll come to the first meeting with virtually nothing and we know that the first meeting is always going to be just talking about the design and throwing up cultural references and other ideas.

The set design for *Ruby Moon*, though it's got a few craggy elements, principally it's very neat which is great because the play is so cluttered. In terms of the design we did initially start off talking a lot about curtains. There is quite an undercurrent in the play about curtains - people looking through curtains and opening curtains - and we did discuss how we could use them but we decided that it was probably a bit too tricky so we had to let that go. In terms of space, we've gone for a very tight acting space. It's a two hander so we didn't want to put the actors in a void. We've included a few tricks as well, and have taken a few fairy tale ideas and placed them within the set and spatial design.

The play is a single setting and it becomes evident towards the end of the play as to why we've selected that. As a result of the single setting, some of the staging choices have then involved other design elements. When a character moves from their house to the neighbour's house there are little transition elements such as a bit of walking accompanied by sound effects like dogs barking and wind blowing to indicate that they're moving. But then, when they arrive at the next house it's still the same generic lounge room, the one that everyone lives in.

So has there been a fairly strong collaboration with the lighting designer, Philip Lethlean, as well?

Yes. Phillip has worked for a vast range of companies including Handspan and he really knows how to light in order to isolate people and places on the stage. His work is just beautiful and I think he is the best lighting designer in Australia.

So it sounds like you are all having a good time!

I think so. It's a very tricky play but I also think it will be good.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER HOUGHTON & CHRISTEN O'LEARY
RUBY MOON: An actor's process

As an actor how have each of you worked on developing all the distinct characters that you're playing in Ruby Moon?

CHRISTEN

That's always really hard for me to put into words, but when I had a think about this question, the easiest way for me to answer it is to say that I've tried to push things to extremes very early on. I've tried to grab a kernel of an idea for each character and to really push that to be as big and as bold as I can get it. I've tried to make each character as different as possible and then over the weeks of rehearsals, I've slowly tried to fine tune each one so that they may get a little bit closer in subtleties but the big colour of them is very different. I think at first you have to get out there and be bold; to go – she's red, she's blue, she's yellow, and then you start fine tuning. That's how I'm doing it.

When you talk about the kernel of the character, could you give an example of what that might be for one of the characters?

CHRISTEN

Well, one of my characters is a woman called Dulcie Doily who owns a parrot and she is very religious. I grabbed the idea of the parrot and I thought, because Dulcie owns one, I might try and make her parrot like. At first I thought Aidan Fennessy, the director, might say no to that idea. But I just tried it for a bit so that

Dulcie's physicality became a bit clawed, and we started developing a parrot-like way of rocking - things like that. That was an idea that I just ran with for a while. Dulcie's also old, so that gave me a big colour to work with; she's sixty plus, she's not twenty plus and that immediately put her into a particular field. I also tried to develop a "parrot" kind of voice. Now admittedly over rehearsals that is being ironed out a little bit, but in the beginning that's what I tried to grab on to, just to get an idea of her.

PETE

Like Christen I suppose, I've been looking for the biggest thing that I can do with each character, something obvious I can get a handle on. We've got these base characters as well - Sylvie and Ray - who are almost "normal", except they also have these modes of theatricality that are a little bit bigger than normal as well. They were originally the hardest things to find because those base characters have got to be feasible but they're also telling lies, as people who've read the play will know. So we had some trouble with them in the beginning. Then going into the broader characters,

it's all about trying to find something strong and also trying to make them all different from each other too, which is the hardest thing.

You sometimes find yourself going "Oh my other character does that, I can't do that with this character." The differentiation of things is very important, so you're often thinking quite practically about making sure that people can recognise the differences, and that you're not doubling up anywhere.

Do you have the benefit of costume change to assist you?

PETE

Yes we do have a minor costume change with one or two elements between each character. The hardest thing to differentiate I'm finding is age, to shift between young and old characters. I'm always going to have dark hair and be a slender kind of youth, so to try and be an old man is difficult! But changing the shape of your body and moving your voice around a bit and using props and costumes - all those things are useful. It's not so much about "method", it's more about the externals I think, so it's a bit clownish in that way.

Do you use any acting techniques or strategies that you might have learned at acting school or elsewhere, such as Stanislavsky etc?

CHRISTEN

I've always found this really difficult to pinpoint, my process as an actor. I can say that Stanislavsky has been quite absent in this rehearsal room! It's a very particular type of style; we are going right out on a limb with things. Matt's work is always like that. But I have found that because it's a particular kind of style you can really get into trouble. For instance with Ray and Sylvie, I've always believed that if we get to a point where we don't care about them, well, what's the point? Months ago when I was looking into the play I tended to do a lot of reading and research on the subject matter on a very naturalistic level. Ray and Sylvie are dealing with the loss of a child so I did a lot of reading about people who've lost children. I find that stuff really helps me, informs the head space that I'm in, even though ultimately when it comes to performance I'm never concentrating on that. But for me, that stuff tends to really fuel things.

The other thing I do is to try and just listen to anyone else's ideas really. One of the greatest things I learnt early on in my career was to try and balance a healthy confidence with the thought that there's always somebody who's going to be able to teach me something and that might be another actor in the room or the director. I think the more you can keep your ears open and take people's ideas on – to me that will always feel like it's helping me grow and form my process.

PETE

The challenge of Matt's work is putting truth underneath a cartoon and that can be a bit tricky. I'm often in plays where you can be reasonably subjective as an actor; you can carry a kind of strong reality with you. In Matt's work you've got to have this almost directorial sense all the time about how you're actually presenting the story, because it's such a confusing sort of narrative. You've always got to be a hundred percent sure about exactly what you're telling at any one point. The base characters of Ray and Sylvie flip between a particular 'mode' when they are supposed to be

acting, and then another 'mode' when they are being truthful. Then there is a third 'mode' when they are halfway in between. The characters then drop out of these characters to become the base characters again. So there are these very particular modes and I think if the play is going to work, we need to be quite certain when the moments are when those modes change from one to another. I've often skidded through plays as an actor where I've thought, "If I sit here and look serious then I'll last for four or five pages and I'll be fine". Or, "If I'm roughly engaged here or emotionally truthful or reasonably relaxed, then this will carry me through for a couple of scenes". But in this play you have to keep changing every few lines and that's very taxing, but also challenging.

Do you think it is important that the audience empathises with Ray and Sylvie?

PETE

Yes, I think it's vital.

CHRISTEN

So do I, because you are taking the audience on a roller coaster and if they don't care, you're going to lose them. It's going to be a big struggle just to keep the story alive and to keep it mad and interesting and funny, but also to keep the audience interested and concerned, thinking "What's going on?" You don't want them to think, "I don't get it and I don't care." An element of mystery and confusion is okay if you're still holding the audience.

PETE

Ray and Sylvie are the sort of people who don't feel sorry for themselves, which is probably good in a way. Sometimes they do express some more meaningful stuff, but they're actually quite prosaic about the game that they're playing to try to bring back their child, which is quite a useful device for them. If they feel sorry for themselves, the audience may get sick of them, but they are actively chasing something and I think the audience will identify with their attempt. There are a few moments when they both crack and you do get to see inside them a bit and to understand what they're trying to cover.

CHRISTEN

At the other extreme if you keep the characters of Ray and Sylvie too strong, too cartoon-like and too alive in their game, the audience could get to a point where they think, "Why should I care because these people aren't real. There's nothing really fueling them; there's no real emotion or real loss". But the minute you start getting indulgent with them, it starts to turn into "Days of our Lives" and you don't care then either. So as actors, it's a real knife edge to walk.

How do you work on achieving the transformations between the characters?

PETE

I'm still working that out actually! At the moment I feel like I'm oozing into character...

CHRISTEN

Yes, bleeding in rather than diving in.

PETE

As we rehearse I'm finding that what I can see visually is helpful. For example, there is a moment when I walk up to the back of the stage to a filing cabinet and I have to grab a prop and turn around and come back down stage and I know that about 12 lines after that I have quite an emotional speech. If I'm not ready for that speech when I get to the box on the filing cabinet, then I won't find the emotional pitch. So I need to program in my mind: that speech is coming up. There's a sort of photograph in my mind so that when I see my hands on the box I know what I have to do otherwise I might simply forget.

So a visual image can become a trigger to change to a new emotional state?

PETE

Yes. Little triggers like picking up the walking stick of a particular character and then knowing that I have to make a particular physical shift, making cues for myself so that I know what is coming up.

You talked about the idea of 'bleeding' from one character to the other - do you think that is okay sometimes or do the transitions always need to be sharp?

PETE

They need to be sharp.

CHRISTEN

Especially because we've got those base characters of Ray and Sylvie and then the other characters that they become. You often see those other characters once and once only, so if you spend the first 30 seconds of a scene 'bleeding' into them, the audience is going to think, "What's going on?" You've got ten minutes with that person so you have to go 'bang' - this is who we are dealing with. With Dulcie, for instance, I am finding in rehearsals that if I just stoop into her physicality that helps me to take a step into that character.

I have a problem where I can end up thinking about everything still to come. I can be in a moment and then suddenly think, "I've still got all this to go. I've still got that moment and that scene and that character" and I can end up seeing the whole lake flooding out. I have to force myself to think, "Just be here, in this moment and listen to that line and then eventually you'll get to the other side of the lake".

'Ruby Moon' is written in quite a poetic style. How do you approach Matt Cameron's particular style of language in your work?

CHRISTEN

It's difficult because it is very poetic, and yet you have to play against it. I feel like I have to treat it as if it's not poetry, as if it's the way that people really speak to one another. I try to find what is driving the character and what she is trying to do to the other character in a moment, in a line, underneath the poetry. Matt often writes his subtext as dialogue and sometimes you think, "How do I play that?" It is interesting working with Aidan Fennessy who is directing the play, because whenever I get bogged down he always finds a way to flick it on its ear. He finds ways to keep the characters active, to keep them enacting upon one another, rather than spinning into a personal

reverie which you can tend to do. So I think I'm finding that you have to find the character's intention: she's intending to do something to him and she just happens to be saying it like this. It has to be based in something real.

PETE

Yes, I agree. There is a useful collaboration between Matt and Aidan where you can always tap into the 'authorly voice'. I presume Matt likes working with people like Aidan, Christen and myself because we fight against the 'authorly voice' a lot. Matt's material can be emotionally didactic in a way so he likes to work with people who have an allergy to that and can find ways of chipping away at it. It's like working in a more classical style which is quite stiff and has its own rules but you have to make it as truthful as you can. I think Matt's work is revealed at its best when people have not been strict about obeying the subtext. The characters are always being active in what they are *doing* to each other.

CHRISTEN

The interesting thing is that as much as it's difficult, that heightened sense of language and performance actually can release you into a state where all bets are off. You're not restricted by the naturalistic or, for want of a better phrase "Blue Heelers" style of acting. You can actually put your hand on the door of a huge statement and if you open that door it means you can pitch your performance to a more heightened state, to a more emotionally vulnerable or more dangerous place.

PETE

It's a bit like Beckett in that way in terms of what people are aware of and what they're not aware of. Beckett-like characters can say the world has ended with no emotion or they can become highly emotional about the loss of a hairpin. It's all about what the character's attitude is towards what they are saying, and that is not entirely prescriptive. The exciting thing about Matt's writing is that you can have a monologue which ostensibly looks on the page like a 'me' type of monologue and it will actually end up being almost completely emotionally unaware from the character's point of view. The audience sees somebody talking about their emotions as though they are talking about a shopping list which creates the conflict in the monologue. That becomes interesting to the audience. As an actor you are always looking for ways of counter-pointing the obvious or making something that's not obvious, clear. Very tricky but satisfying in a similar way to cracking a classical text. There's no prescription really. Matt doesn't write many stage directions. He establishes the scene in detail at the beginning of the play through initial stage directions but there are very few throughout the rest of the play.

Would you say that the play has a particular style?

PETE

It can probably be described as 'expressionistic'. It's definitely a style that is designed to be played out to the audience rather than for an audience to peer in on. It's about the audience *hearing* it rather than *listening* to it if you know what I mean; a kind of 'surround sound'. Physically it's all about getting it right. It's not a subtle or a quiet, reflective style; it has the muscularity of classical texts. It reminds me of writers like Beckett and some of the pre-war German playwrights.

Also, there is a real cruelty in the play. There is something quite nasty at the heart of Matt's plays. A lot of the characters are quite persecuted and tortured. There was a review that said Matt's work was like 'Bill and Ben the Flower Pot Men' meets 'David Lynch' (creator of Twin Peaks). There is this 'cute' thrust to his work with these inoffensive clowns who suddenly stab somebody to death or bite their tongue out or something.

How does the set and the shape of the space affect your work in the play?

CHRISTEN

Well it absolutely is going to affect it because you can only move within the space you have been given, but I'm finding in this work in particular that the space is a real help. There was a time the other day in rehearsal where Pete and I were both at a point where we had no idea what we were doing anymore. Aidan, the director, turned around and said, "Whenever you get bogged down and confused as to what world you're in, go and look at the set model because Christina Smith's design is so extraordinary that it's absolutely going to *place* you". It was a very wise thing for him to say to us because when you're working in a rehearsal room where you can hear traffic and people working in other rooms it can be quite distracting. Then you look at this extraordinary set and it absolutely can place you in the non-naturalistic world that the play functions in. It is wonderful because sometimes sets can be quite restrictive. Sometimes you get into a theatre and you feel like the set is fighting your work and that you are just a little puppet in a grand vision. But this is a situation where everybody's disciplines have come together to work cohesively with one another so you don't feel that the set is working against the direction or the direction is working against the music - everything's just helping you to establish the world of the play and I'm finding it a great help. Every time I hear some of the music or look at the set or listen to the sound I feel that it really helps me. All these elements are like cushions beneath me.

PETE

At the side of the set there are these big trees that overhang the space that represent the flame trees that run down Flaming Tree Grove. They also create the sense of a dark fairy tale forest. Then there is one arm chair and that's about it really. Up the back there is all this refuse like bits of furniture and chairs and things; it's a very actor friendly acting area that we run around and go crazy in.

Is there anything else you would like to say about your work in 'Ruby Moon'?

CHRISTEN

It's great, it's incredibly challenging. Some days I get up and I start to come to work and I think, "I just can't do it today, it's too hard." It's one of those terrible things where, as an actor, you're always searching for a challenge; so often you are typecast and placed in safe little boxes. Then every so often when a challenge comes along, you start moaning and thinking, "What if I can't do it?" This is an opportunity for us to excel.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINA SMITH, DESIGNER OF 'RUBY MOON'

Christina how did you initially respond to the script of 'Ruby Moon'?

My initial response to the play was in many ways quite similar to what we have now, but also very different. My first scribbles were directly from the play only at that stage I hadn't yet had the chance to talk to Aidan Fennessy (the director). Matt Cameron's (the playwright) writing is very 'illustrative' – there are many visual clues and symbols that are hard to ignore. My first response centred heavily on the notes from the initial draft of the play, in which Matt was quite prescriptive. I've never asked him, but I'm sure he visualises his plays strongly as he writes them - his notes are so detailed.

It was only when I started talking to Aidan that the idea emerged, and it came from Aidan's vision on how the play could be done, which was different to Matt's idea on the initial draft. The great thing about working with Matt and Aidan is that their differences complement each other so well – it's a little ying and yang!

What was your design brief in regard to the play?

I'm not really given a brief as such. The discussions I have with Matt and Aidan during the design process are not really briefs, but do give me boundaries. For example, Aidan may tell me he sees the world of Sylvie and Ray as colourless, or that the house needs to 'lived in'. From here this gives me a good framework from which to start – it ensures we're both on the same page fairly early on.

What concepts and themes are you hoping to highlight in your design?

I don't know if I can outline the design concept or it may give the story away if readers haven't seen the play yet ! (Matt did swear us to secrecy). In a broader sense, the design hopefully incorporates themes of grief and memory – that's certainly what I was thinking about when designing it.

How would you describe the style of your designs?

Problematic (that's a joke...) I'm not sure if I have a style yet. I'm still fairly young. I'm also not too sure I want to be 'put in a box' so to speak ie. "She only does *this* type of play or *that* type of set". I'd like to keep my options fairly open, as I enjoy doing a wide variety of shows.

The style of design is also often dependent on the rest of the team you are working with - the director, the writer and lighting designer to name a few - and also primarily related to the requirements of the text. Therefore, if I feel a show requires a minimalist approach, and it's something the director will embrace, then that's the style. It has to be something that serves the text and the team, nothing that is 'imposed' onto the work.

Would you talk about the design of 'Ruby Moon' in relation to:

(a) How you feel it assists the actors to tell the story

This design fundamentally creates a world for Sylvie and Ray to exist in - in fact they exist ONLY in this world - whilst also becoming a 'heightened' place in which the various characters appear. It's very much an environment with many textures – it can be 'spooky' when we need it to be, but also bland like the living room or filmic for the transition states. In terms of assisting the actors to tell the story, I actually think the lighting and sound lend more support in this sense - the set is the container, not the spice so to speak! The concept of the design does, of course, relate completely to the major plot 'spike' in the story, but again, I don't think I can go into that for fear of death via Matt!

(b) How you believe it establishes a particular time and place for the audience

The design for Ruby is actually deliberately timeless – it does have an air of 1940's/post war about it, but we didn't want to tie these people to modern day or contemporary occurrences. I guess one of the questions we wanted the audience to ask was, 'How long have they been there for?' and to produce a feeling that is a little like time standing still. For instance, the use of natural materials could be now, but could also be fifty years ago. The style of Sylvie's dress is faintly 1940's, but still seen today.

Questions for Analysis and Discussion

Content and Themes

1. The 'missing child' has long held a place in the Australian psyche.
 - can you think of any examples of stories of missing children, both historical and contemporary?
 - how do you respond to these stories?
2. Playwright, Matt Cameron, says that he wanted to make Flaming Tree Grove 'like a street of the world':
 - what do you think he means by this?
 - how does the community of Flaming Tree Grove represent a wider community?
3. Matt Cameron says that archetypes are 'so much a part of fairy tale story telling':
 - what is an archetype?
 - what are some of the classic archetypes in fairy tales?
 - what are some of the archetypes in *Ruby Moon*?
4. Director, Aidan Fennessy, suggests that thematically *Ruby Moon* is about 'people writing their pain and giving it a shape and making it a story'.
He also suggests that the play is about 'people not seeing the world for what it is':
 - how do Sylvie and Ray 'write their pain'?
 - what are some of the things that the characters in the play are 'not seeing'?
5. The playwright talks about one of the themes that he wants to explore as being 'the unease...that lurks in the world we live in at the moment'
 - how is this 'unease' evident in *Ruby Moon*?
 - how is it evident in the world we live in at the moment?

Style and Language

1. Matt Cameron believes that the role of the playwright is 'one of trying to tell stories distinctively and using all of the virtues of the theatre to do it':
 - what do you think Matt means by telling stories 'distinctively'?
 - what do you believe are the 'virtues of the theatre' as distinct from film, television or literature?
2. The playwright says in his writing his imagination is 'drawn to the metaphor':
 - what are some of the metaphors at work in *Ruby Moon*?
3. Director, Aidan Fennessy, suggests that 'the text itself is like an invisible character in the whole plot':
 - what do you think he means by this?
4. Aidan Fennessy describes the style of *Ruby Moon* as 'gothic-comic-tragic-psycho-drama':
 - can you think of examples of each of these elements in the production of *Ruby Moon*?

Dramaturgy and Direction

1. Playwright, Matt Cameron and Director, Aidan Fennessy both talk about the dramaturgical process for the text of *Ruby Moon* in their interviews:

- what do you understand by the term 'dramaturgy'?
 - in what sorts of ways did Aidan Fennessy provide Matt Cameron with dramaturgical assistance with the text of *Ruby Moon*?
2. Aidan Fennessy says that with *Ruby Moon*, he has had to direct with a 'heavy hand, so the actors can see the logic' in the play:
- why do you think *Ruby Moon* specifically has required a 'heavy hand' from the director?
 - what are some of the clear directorial choices that Aidan has made?

Acting and Actor/Audience Relationship

1. Matt Cameron says he wrote *Ruby Moon* with Peter Houghton and Christen O'Leary in mind:
 - can you think of any other actors who you believe have the versatility to play the characters in *Ruby Moon*?
 - as a student of theatre and performance, can you imagine playing the diversity of roles in *Ruby Moon* in one play?
 - what do you think would be the particular difficulties and challenges?
2. Christen O'Leary talks about trying to find the 'kernel' of each character:
 - what do you think are the most distinctive characteristics of each character?
 - could you try to identify a 'kernel' for any of them?
3. The two actors describe Ray and Sylvie as their 'base characters':
 - why are Ray and Sylvie the 'base characters' in the play?
 - how are they different from the other characters both in terms of their function in the plot and their character portrayal?
4. Peter Houghton says that Sylvie and Ray 'have got to be feasible, even though they are telling lies':
 - what do you think he means by this?
 - what would this mean for Peter and Christen as actors in their portrayals of Sylvie and Ray?
 - did you find these characters to be 'feasible'?
 - did you empathise with them?
5. Actor, Peter Houghton talks about working with 'the externals' in terms of his acting approach to this play.
Christen O'Leary says that 'Stanislavsky has been quite absent from this rehearsal room!'
 - what do the actors mean here?
 - what is similar about what they are both saying?
6. What does Peter Houghton mean when he says 'the challenge of Matt Cameron's work is putting truth underneath a cartoon'?
7. The two actors believe it is very important that the transitions between their characters are sharp:
 - do you think they achieve sharp transitions in the play?
 - what techniques do they use to make those transitions?
8. Christen O'Leary says that director, Aidan Fennessy, helped the actors when they became bogged down in their work, to find ways 'to keep the characters active, to keep them enacting upon one another':

- what do you think she means by this?
 - how might this approach differ from trying to analyse the characters' feelings or motivations?
9. Peter Houghton describes the style of *Ruby Moon* as one that is 'designed to played out to the audience rather than for an audience to peer in on':
- what do you think he means by this?
 - what form do you think the actor/audience relationship takes in *Ruby Moon*?

Monologues - Sid and Sylvie

1. Describe in detail the world that the character of Sid inhabits.
Describe in detail the world that the character of Sylvie inhabits.
 - Are they same world?
2. List three props/set items that you feel would help create the world of each character and justify your choice.
3. What is each character's relationship to the missing child, Ruby?
 - In what ways could this impact on interpretation?
4. Each of these characters appears with another character in their monologue.
 - What is their relationship with the other character?
 - Do Sid and Sylvie directly address the other character they are with?
 - As an actor, how will you *imply* the other character?
5. If you were to re-contextualise the play, what choices could you make in this regard? Where would you set it? Why?
6. If you have seen a production of 'Ruby Moon' what influence has this had on your interpretation of the characters of Sid and Ruby?

Stagecraft

1. The Director, Aidan Fennessy, and the Designer, Christina Smith, have decided to set *Ruby Moon* in the same generic lounge room, 'the one that everyone lives in':
 - how does this work to convey the worlds of all the different characters?
 - how does it work to convey meaning to the text as a whole?
2. Aidan Fennessy talks about adding 'a few fairy tale ideas' to the set:
 - what are some of the fairy tale aspects of the set?
 - how do they contribute to the mood and atmosphere of the play?
3. Actor, Christen O'Leary, describes the stagecraft elements in the play as 'like cushions beneath me':
 - what does this comment suggest to you?
 - can you think of examples where the stagecraft elements support the actors in their work?
4. Designer, Christina Smith, says that her design incorporates themes of 'grief and memory': in what ways does the set suggest 'grief' and 'memory' to you?

RESOURCES

The following websites may provide some useful background information to the play.

MYTHS AND FAIRY TALES

'The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever present peril; both joy and sorrow sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of the traveler who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gate should be shut and the keys be lost'

- J.R.R. Tolkien 'On Fairy Stories' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*.

1. <http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimtmp/>
A complete list of Grimms Tales - all 209 of them - that you can dip into in order to immerse yourself in the genre.
2. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folklinks.html>
A site of Folk and Fairy Tale links including stories, history, and folklore surrounding a range of fairy tales from many countries.
3. <http://www.legends.dm.net/fairy/>
Lists classic fairy tales on the net and some wonderfully insightful quotes about what it means to take the fairy tale journey.

WHO'S WATCHING THE CHILDREN ?

'For it could be argued that the further people retreat away from community and into isolated families and behind picket fences and locked doors, the less safe, on average, children become...In our desire to keep children 'innocent'. We disrupt their freedoms, warn them against strangers and incite adults to watch them more carefully... But who's watching the watchers?

- C. Beth Spencer, 1997

1. <http://lin.cbl.com.au/~beth/beamonts.html>
A history of the Beaumont children all three of whom disappeared on Australia Day 1966 in Adelaide
2. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/07/04/1057179154768.html>
Article outlining the investigation of the disappearance of Eloise Worledge from Beaumaris in 1976.
3. http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/60/stories/2000_08_27/story_224.asp
The infamous disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru in August 1980.

RUBY MOON
by Matt Cameron

Teacher

Resource Kit



Introduction

SYNOPSIS:

It begins like a fairytale...

Descend into a suburban dystopia of loss and fear with this haunting production of Matt Cameron's acclaimed Australian play for young adults, Ruby Moon.

In the suburban quiet of Flaming Tree Grove, life appears to be picture perfect; until the day little Ruby sets off to visit her grandmother at the end of the cul-de-sac and is never seen again. Her parents fracture. Grief-stricken, they search for answers behind their neighbours' doors. Then a mysterious parcel arrives and Ruby's ghostly presence is felt again ... and again.

A cyclical story of loss and fear, Ruby Moon explores the relentlessness of grief as two parents continue to return to the same place with more questions than they have answers.

Matt Cameron's cleverly crafted play blends Theatre of the Absurd, Australian Gothic and Brechtian techniques, challenging the classic 'whodunnit' narrative it employs.

Filled with tension and unpredictability, this stirring contemporary production will challenge senior drama students as they attempt to solve the mystery of Ruby Moon.

TARGET YEAR LEVELS:

Years 10-12

STYLE / FORM / THEMES / CONTEXTS:

Drama

Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking

A blend of Theatre of the Absurd, Australian Gothic and Brechtian techniques

A cyclical story of suburban isolation, dystopia and ghostly presence.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Producer:	Artslink Queensland & The Arts Centre Gold Coast
Writer:	Matt Cameron
Director:	Helen Howard
Production Design and Construction:	Josh McIntosh
Sound Design:	Phil Slade
Original Songs:	Andrew McNaughton

For THE ARTS CENTRE GOLD COAST:

Lighting Designer / Technician:	Alex Fox
Performing Arts Manager:	Brad Rush
Associate Producer:	Vicki Buenen
Production Coordinator:	Scott McCaig
Marketing Coordinator:	Michelle Macwhirter
Education Officer:	Kaitlin Bell
Graphic Designers:	Nathan Herbertson and Chris Bouffler

This production is a co-production between Artslink Queensland and The Arts Centre Gold Coast. A Theatre Season opened on 17 July 2014 before the tour traveled to schools throughout Queensland for 6 weeks.



Australian Gothic Theatre and Ruby Moon

This style of theatre explores a vision of Australia that is the familiar made strange and foreboding. It warns us of the dangers that under the façade of the ordinary and mundane images of the Australian landscape. This style of theatre is built on the post-colonial notions of Australia as a topsy-turvy landscape where swans are black instead of white, the seasons are reversed, the trees lose their bark rather than their leaves and the water spins in a different direction. The familiar European view of the world was somehow jarred by the Australian landscape, conjuring notions of the supernatural and other worldly. Ruby Moon similarly takes the familiar landscape of a suburban streetscape and distorts it into a place of mystery and secrets.

Playwright Matt Cameron further plays on audience's perceptions of the familiar as he makes strong inter-textual links to the fairytale; Little Red Riding Hood. Ruby ventures from her home to visit her Grandmother's house and never arrives. The tale is familiar, yet twisted as we explore the mystery of Ruby Moon's disappearance. Fairytales and other children's narratives dealing with lost children are familiar to audiences; Hansel and Gretel, The Pied Piper, Snow White, Wizard of Oz and Alice in Wonderland. Yet the familiar made unfamiliar is key to making audiences feel unease as this production unfolds.

The lost child is not only found in fairytales, but figures as a much feared and recurrent theme in Australian literature. Ruby Moon strikes upon this fear of the missing child. Cameron reveals that, "the challenge with Ruby Moon [was] finding a way of writing a play that told a fictional story about a missing child that was distinctive because in some ways it is familiar territory." (Malthouse Theatre 2008) The fear of the child lost in the woods is embedded deep into the Australian psyche and is evident in literature such as; Picnic at Hanging Rock, Babes in the bush and Dot and the Kangaroo. The play transforms from location to location in the suburban street that is home to the Moon family, the familiar people and places reveal strange and unsettling characters. Through the descriptive street name, Flaming Tree Grove, and the dead end insinuations of the cul-de-sac the symbolism, Cameron has made reference to the Australian fears of the bush. Ruby Moon's distorted images of the familiar, compels audiences to question where reality lies and what sinister presence lies beyond the walls of the Moon family home.

"Ray: What were once neighbours' quirks of behaviour soon become the flaws of depraved minds when a child goes missing." (Original Script, Published 2003, Scene 12, p.51)

Malthouse Theatre (2008) [http://www.govo.wa.edu.au/courses-program/senior-school/Curric-Resources/Ruby%20Moon%20Background%20Notes\[1\].pdf](http://www.govo.wa.edu.au/courses-program/senior-school/Curric-Resources/Ruby%20Moon%20Background%20Notes[1].pdf)

CONVENTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC THEATRE FOUND IN RUBY MOON

- Fluid/ doubled characterisation
- Supernatural intrusions into the drama
- Fourth wall (realistic acting, where the supernatural is accepted into the fiction)
- Setting as a character (the urban streetscape; Flaming Tree Grove)
- Forboding mood
- Use of sound to underscore tension
- Episodic / Cyclic Plot
- Motif (visual, verbal and sound)
- Symbolic set and props rather than representational
- Fluid location / transforming settings
- Use of lighting to create atmosphere
- Intertextuality

Pre-Performance Activity #1

LOST CHILD

The lost child is a motif in Australian literature and is a tragedy that strikes at the heart of all Australians. Research some prominent stories of real life 'lost children'.

Examples:

- The Duff children
- The Beaumont children
- Azaria Chamberlain
- Clara Crosbie
- Madeleine McCann

Further Reading:

- <http://www.smh.com.au/national/a-country-of-lost-children-20090814-el8d.html>
- <http://jonesfamilyhistory.wordpress.com/2013/06/06/three-lost-children-daylesford/>

Pre-Performance Activity #2

BABES IN THE WOOD

Ruby Moon blends dark content with fairytale like qualities and intertextual references. Similarly, the traditional song/nursery rhyme Babes in the Wood takes the tragic tale of 2 children who are lost (and ultimately die) and presents the tale as a children's story.

Babes in the Wood

My dear, do you know,
How a long time ago,
Two poor little children,
Whose names I don't know,
Were stolen away
On a fine summer's day,
And left in a wood,
As I've heard people say.

Among the trees high
Beneath the blue sky
They plucked the bright flowers
And watched the birds fly;
Then on blackberries fed,
And strawberries red,
And when they were weary
'We'll go home,' they said.

And when it was night
So sad was their plight,
The sun it went down,
And the moon gave no light.
They sobbed and they sighed
And they bitterly cried,
And long before morning
They lay down and died.

And when they were dead
The robins so red
Brought strawberry leaves
And over them spread;
And all the day long,
The green branches among,
They'd prettily whistle
And this was their song-
'Poor babes in the wood!
Sweet babes in the wood!
Oh the sad fate of
The babes in the wood!'

Author - Anonymous

TASK:

- Divide students into groups of 5-7. Read through the text of Babes in the Wood.
- Ask students to create 4 freeze frames to accompany each stanza of the nursery rhyme. Every member of the group must be in the freeze frame, creating the setting of the narrative.
- After they have created the 4 freeze frames they will need to create movement transitions between each freeze frame.
- Next, students will select lines or phrases from the text to be incorporated into the freeze frames. It is crucial that only a small portion of the text is included.
- Present work. Discuss the clarity of the narrative.
- Now, they are to add a soundscape to each freeze frame. They should consider using rhythm, voice, body percussion, literal and non-literal sounds. Students can remove some of the text if they feel it is appropriate.
- Re-present work. Discuss the creation of mood and tension in the work.

Pre-Performance Activity #3

INTRUSIONS INTO REALITY

When working with an Australian Gothic text it is crucial that actors and directors realise that despite the supernatural themes and intrusions, the work is still presented in a naturalistic or realistic style, so the acting techniques employed will most closely align to Realism. The style is in fact known as; Magical Realism.

Magical Realism is a style of performance where fantastical or supernatural elements are a natural part of an otherwise mundane, realistic environment.

WARM UP:

- Ask students to move around the room naming everything they see out loud.
- Now ask them to repeat this activity naming the objects they see what they are not. E.g. A book may be called a dog, a table may be called a bell, etc.

EXERCISE: Storytelling

- In pairs, students will be telling a story. One student will be the storyteller and one will be the interrupter.
- Before beginning ask the interrupter to write down random 6 words (nouns; places, names, objects, etc.)
- The teacher will give the storytellers an opening line from which to build their story. E.g. There once was a house on the hill...
- As the storyteller progresses through the story, the interrupter must call out their 6 words. The storyteller must incorporate these words into their story as naturally and seamlessly as possible.
- Discuss how successful they were in incorporating the interruptions. What was the impact on the story? Was their initial instinct to make the inclusions realistic or ridiculous?

Pre-Performance Activity #4

MAGICAL REALISM ON STAGE

- Have students improvise a scene (max. 1 minute) depicting two siblings attempting to complete a difficult task. Prompt students that this scene must be realistic (Realism). Perform the scenes.
- Now ask students to add a supernatural intrusion into the scene. For example, a spirit may intervene and assist them, they may stumble on a location that reveal its history to them, they may see characters from the past, one character may actually be dead, they may morph into a character from history, etc. It is important that this supernatural intrusion is blended into the scene and the intrusion is accepted as natural rather than as a horror.
- Perform the scenes.
- Discuss the basis of Realism in their work and how it transformed into Magical Realism.

Post-Performance Activity #1

FAIRYTALE AND RUBY MOON

"Ruby: It begins like a fairytale.... But how does it end?" (Epilogue p.51)

Matt Cameron has relied heavily on intertextual references to fairytales, particularly Little Red Riding Hood. Have students brainstorm the intertextual references in the production.

Discuss the significance and dramatic meaning of these references.

Explore whether as an audience they had expectations that the narrative would end like a fairytale. Why/why not? How did the match/mismatch of their expectation make them feel or think about the production?

Post-Performance Activity #2

DISCOVERING MOTIFS AND THEMES

Below is a table outlining some the motifs and themes commonly seen in Australian Gothic texts. As a think-pair-share activity, ask students to identify which if any of these they saw in the Artslink production of Ruby Moon.

Commonly Used Motifs and Themes in Australian Gothic Plays Archetypes & Tropes (stylistic devices)

BINARY OPPOSITES	MOTIFS	CHARACTERS
Good vs Evil Pure vs. Violated/Injured Light vs. Dark Entrapment vs Abandonment	Mirrors Paintings/ Portraits Death Disfigurement Ghosts, Spirits, etc. History erupting into the present Forboding doom Inevitability of future/ destiny Castles Storms, rain Secrets Winter, Autumn Shadow Familiar rendered unfamiliar Vanishing/ Sudden Appearance	The pure and innocent heroine Demon lover The violated one The disfigured one The undead or unborn one The evil one The doubled or shadowed one

Post-Performance Activity #3

BLENDING FAIRYTALE AND MOTIFS OF AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

Revisit the table Commonly Used Motifs and Themes in Australian Gothic Plays Archetypes & Tropes (stylistic devices).

Divide students into groups of 4-5. Allocate a nursery rhyme to each group. Using the nursery rhyme as stimulus they are to create a scene depicting the nursery rhyme that includes at least 3 of the concepts listed in the table above. They must use some of the text of the nursery rhyme in the scene, but it does not need to constitute the entire script.

The following dramatic conventions may be layered into the scenes or provided as scaffolding for creation:

- Freeze frame
- Slow motion movement
- Vocal devices – call and response, echo and diminuendo
- Dream sequence
- Soundscape

Present scenes and discuss how the dramatic meaning was impacted by the added motifs and themes. Explore the audience reactions to the familiar nursery rhymes in the performances. Extend discussion into dramatic meaning and intertextuality.

A RING A RING A ROSY

Ring around the rosy
A pocketful of posies
"Ashes, Ashes"
We all fall down

Ring-a-Ring o'Rosies
A Pocket full of Posies
"A-tishoo! A-tishoo!"
We all fall Down!

A TISKET A TASKET

A-tisket a-tasket
A green and yellow basket
I wrote a letter to my love
And on the way I dropped it,
I dropped it,
I dropped it,
And on the way I dropped it.
A little boy he picked it up and put it in his pocket.

ROCK-A-BYE BABY

Rock -a-bye baby, on the tree top.
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock;
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall
And down will come baby, cradle and all.

BOYS AND GIRLS COME OUT TO PLAY

Boys and Girls come out to play
Boys and girls come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day.
Leave your supper and leave your sleep,
And join your playfellows in the street.

Boys and girls come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day.
Leave your supper and leave your sleep,
And join your playfellows in the street.

ORANGES AND LEMONS

Oranges and lemons,
Say the bells of St. Clement's.
You owe me five farthings,
Say the bells of St. Martin's.
When will you pay me?
Say the bells of Old Bailey.
When I grow rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.
I do not know,
Says the great bell of Bow.
Here comes a candle to light you to bed,
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!

Post-Performance Activity #4

2D vs 3D CHARACTERISATION

Playwrights and directors know that audiences feel empathy and engagement with characters when they are depicted with depth of character, that is 3 dimensional characterisation. In contrast, 2 dimensional characters can alienate an audience and appear to be stereotypes.

DISCUSSION:

- Within the production of Ruby Moon, can you see 2D and 3D characters?
- Which characters do you empathise with and want to learn more about?
- Why do you think this is?
- What is the impact of this characterisation?

EXERCISE:

To explore the convention of 2D vs. 3D characters. Ask students to create a scene between a criminal and a policeman. Present scenes in a realistic style first of all.

Repeat and this time select one character to be performed as a 2D stereotyped character. This character should lack emotional depth and be somewhat of a caricature.

Discuss the impact of the second performance. Did this change the who the audience were sympathetic to? Did it create dramatic meaning?

Post-Performance Activity #5

WHERE DID RUBY GO?

Divide students into groups of 3-4. In their groups ask them to share their theories about what they believe happened to Ruby Moon.

As a group they then need to decide on a theory they wish to explore and then dramatically re-create a scene that shows us what happened to Ruby Moon.

Present scenes to class. Discuss the possibilities presented in relation to the clues in the production.

Post-Performance Activity #6

MUSIC & SOUND

Brainstorm examples of where music or sound were used in the performance.

Place the examples into the table below and complete the remaining columns.

EXAMPLE OF SOUND OR MUSIC IN RUBY MOON	NAME OF CONVENTION	ELEMENT/S OF DRAMA IS CONTRIBUTED TO MOST	DRAMATIC IMPACT

Ask students to write sentences or paragraphs analyzing the use of sound or music.

Post-Performance Activity #7

SYMBOLISM OF LYRICS

During the production a song is used, the lyrics are....

'She's not in the room
She's not outside
Hide from the world
The curtain girl...'

DISCUSSION:

- What is the impact of these lyrics?
- Why have they been included in the production?

Sample Ruby Moon Responding Assessment Task

Note: This is a generic task applicable to multiple Year levels. Edit, adapt and omit parts of the task to cater for the varying abilities and ages of student cohorts.

DIMENSION: Responding

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT: Extended Response

The Artslink Queensland production of Ruby Moon by Matt Cameron can be described as an example of the Australian Gothic dramatic style. It explores the dark side of life and human nature, just as the Gothic artists of the middle ages did, yet it taps into a fear deep in the Australian psyche; losing a child. Ruby Moon under Helen Howard's direction depicts a uniquely Australian landscape, employing the conventions of the Australian Gothic theatrical style.

After viewing Artslinks' production of Ruby Moon, you are to write an essay evaluating the how successfully the production engaged audiences by employing the dramatic conventions of the Australian Gothic style. You should consider the following in your essay:

- What impact did the performance have on the audience?
- Was there a dramatic meaning or dramatic purpose evident in the production?
- What was the dramatic style? Which dramatic conventions used indicate that style?
- Did the choice of any dramatic conventions create meaning or dramatic impact?
- Can you identify any key moments in the performance when the elements of drama were manipulated to great effect? (particularly consider, mood, tension, symbol, place, role) How were those moments created? Why were they successful?
- How did the actor's performance skills (voice movement, characterisation), the production elements (lighting, music and sound) and design (set & costume) assist in creating the dramatic style and dramatic impact. (Link these ideas back to your discussion of the dramatic conventions and elements of drama)
- Overall, was this a successful piece of Australian Gothic performance?

Your discussion must use specific drama terminology and must refer to specific dramatic conventions, skills of drama and elements of drama employed in the production. Use examples from the production to support your statements.

Below is a list of dramatic languages commonly used in Australian Gothic Theatre. Draw on these as you reflect on the production. Some or all may have been used in the production.

CONVENTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC:

- Fluid/ doubled characterisation
- Supernatural intrusions into the drama
- Fourth wall (realistic acting, where the supernatural is accepted into the fiction)
- Setting as a character (the urban streetscape; Flaming Tree Grove)
- Forboding mood
- Use of sound to underscore tension
- Episodic / Cyclic Plot
- Motif (visual, verbal and sound)
- Symbolic set and props rather than representational
- Fluid location / transforming settings
- Use of lighting to create atmosphere
- Intertextuality

KEY ELEMENTS OF DRAMA IN AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC:

- Symbol
- Relationship
- Mood
- Tension
- Character
- Place
- Time
- Contrast

CONDITIONS:

Year 12

- Individual
- 2-3 weeks preparation
- Written: 1000-1200 words
- Spoken: 4-5 minutes
- Multimodal: 5-7 minutes

Year 11

- Individual
- 2-3 weeks preparation
- Written: 800-1000 words
- Spoken: 3-4 minutes
- Multimodal: 3-5 minutes

Year 10

- Individual, Analytical Essay
- 2-3 weeks preparation
- 600-800 words

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

DIRECTOR : HELEN HOWARD

Helen trained at Mountview Theatre School in London and is currently co-artistic director, with Michael Fitcher, of Matrix Theatre. She has performed lead roles for many companies, including Queensland Theatre Company and La Boite. As a writer, both solo and with Michael, she has published several plays, notably the renowned *A Beautiful Life*. Helen has been an acting coach for theatre and screen (*Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *Slide* [Fox 8], *Mental*). Her directing credits include her own adaptation of Zola's *Therese Raquin* (*Zen Zen Zo*), a remount of *Piano Lessons* (Queensland Music Festival), and a co-direction with Michael, of their own 2013 adaptation of *1001 Nights* (QMF/QTC/*Zen Zen Zo*). Helen has won a Best Director Matilda Award for *Therese Raquin* and a Gold Matilda for her body of work in 2012.

PLAYWRIGHT: MATT CAMERON

An award-winning playwright and screenwriter, his plays include *TEAR FROM A GLASS EYE*, winner of Wal Cherry Play of the Year Award with productions by Playbox, Black Swan and London's Gate Theatre, where he was nominated for Evening Standard Awards; *FOOTPRINTS ON WATER*, winner of British Council International New Playwriting Award with productions by Neonheart, Griffin and La Mama; *MR MELANCHOLY*, winner of ANPC/New Dramatists Award with productions by Griffin, La Boite, Chameleon as well as in New York, Paris and Poland; and *THE ESKIMO CALLING*, produced by Neonheart at Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir B Sharp. For the Melbourne Theatre Company: *POOR BOY*, featuring the songs of Tim Finn, nominated for Victorian Premier's Literary Award and co-produced by Sydney Theatre Company; *HINTERLAND*, nominated for NSW Premier's Literary Award; *MAN THE BALLOON*, nominated for Victorian Premier's Literary Award; and a short play *WHISPERING DEATH*. *RUBY MOON* nominated for Queensland Premier's Literary Award and produced by MTC, STC, QTC, State Theatre of SA, Playbox, Neonheart as well as in England, Japan and Switzerland. Screen credits include *JACK IRISH* telemovie for ABC, *SEACHANGE*, *CRASHBURN*, *NEWSTOPIA*, script editor for *KATH & KIM* and co-creator/co-writer/director of *AWGIE* award-winning *INTRODUCING GARY PETTY*.

RAY MOON: MATTHEW FILKINS

Matthew has trained in a diversity of theatrical disciplines including stage combat, Le Coq mask, improvisational theatre (Edge impro), clowning (De Base), practical aesthetics (Andrea Moor), physical theatre (*Zen Zen Zo*) and studied with Shakespeare and Company in the US. He is also currently completing a BA in Arts with a double major in Drama. His past theatrical credits include *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (4MBS Classic FM), *The Miracle Worker* (Crossbow Productions), *The Merchant of Venice* and *Half Hour Hamlet* (Qld Shakespeare Ensemble), *Angry Young Women in Low Rise Jeans with High Class Issues*, *Secret Bridesmaids Business* and *Moonlight and Magnolias* (Mixed Theatre Company), *Short+Sweet Festival 2009*, *The Reunion* (Metro Arts Independents Program), *Crave* (Blacklight collective), *Cigarettes and Chocolate* and *The Pillowman* (23rd Productions), *The Perfect 10* (Emerge Theatre Company) *Far Away* (Volunteer Extra – Q.T.C.), *Homme Fatale* (and return season) and *By the Short and Curlies* (Underdog productions), *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Nights Dream* (Harvest Rain Theatre Company), *The Merchant of Vengeance* (Dianne Gough Productions), *Blackrock*, *Wait Until Dark*, *Aftershocks* (Nash theatre), *A man for all seasons*, *MacBeth*, *Medea* and *Home* (Brisbane Arts theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (Groundlings), *The Bald – Prima Donna* and *Antigone* (Q.U.T) and *Sheila Shorts 2002* (Debase Productions). His directorial credits include *The Vitreous Burglar*, *Wombat Stew* (Own adaptation of the children's book), *Trainspotting* (as assistant director) and *The Devil's Aftershave* (2010 Short and Sweet festival – winner of best drama and actor) Matthew has toured schools with the Artslink Queensland in the 2003 primary school tour of *Fair Play*, 2005 primary school tour of *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*, 2007 primary school tour of *Hermes* and the *Naked Flame* and in 2002 toured secondary schools with *Boneless Chicken Brecht* for *Cracka* theatre Troupe. Recent short films include *Christmas is here*, *The Day of the Deadline* and *Abigail Lancaster: The truth begins*. His past film and television appearances include *Waste*, *Flipper*, *Killer Instinct*, *Terra Nova*, *Down Under Murder Mystery Tours*, *The Digger: A History*, *Gruen Planet* and the current Carlton TVC campaign.

SYLVIE MOON: MARY EGGLESTON

Mary Eggleston began her professional arts career as a founding member of *Commotion - TIE* (1998), whilst studying a BA Drama at University of Queensland and training in Tadashi Suzuki Actor Training and Viewpoints with *Zen Zen Zo* Physical Theatre Company in Brisbane. After studying mime and physical theatre at *dieEtage* in Berlin (2001–2005), Mary developed and facilitated her own workshops throughout Germany for small children learning English as a foreign language and for the hearing impaired. In September 2006 Mary was invited to facilitate workshops for the *Osijek Festival* in Croatia. In 2006 Mary returned to Australia to direct *Solarcoaster Children's Festival*, a multi-arts Festival designed for 3-12 years olds on the Sunshine Coast. In April 2008 Mary co-founded *Egg Festivals Inc.* of which She is now director. *Egg Festival Inc.* is committed to the cultural development of children on the Sunshine Coast. She is also a member of the management committee for *The Sunshine Coast Creative Alliance*. In 2010, Mary founded the *School Of Dramatic Arts (S.O.D.A)* on the Sunshine Coast. Recently, Mary and Dr Sue Davis have combined forces and expertise to help provide quality drama productions to be created for young people on the Sunshine Coast, establishing *2Muse Productions*. Mary's career has focused extensively on mime, physical theatre and the youth arts industries on a variety of levels; ranging from founding director of *S.O.D.A* (2010), *2Muse Productions* (2010) and *Commotion TIE* (1998) & artistic director of *Spielsprache* (2004) to facilitator, performer and teacher to administration, marketing and entrepreneurial roles.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR : HELEN HOWARD

Ruby Moon is a disarming play. It tackles the subject of a child inexplicably missing, and there is nothing more catastrophic which can happen to a parent, robbed of their responsibility, their duty of care, of unconditional love and indeed their main function in life – to preserve, protect and provide for the innocent they brought into the world. For society, a missing child is a disturbing, distressing, oft-repeated failure – and when there are no answers we, and the parents, are left with only our imaginations to fill in the blank left by the child's absence. In the play, as in life, there is a pervading sense of guilt, and blame; sometimes that blaming is directed even at the child, who is conveniently unable to speak for her/himself.

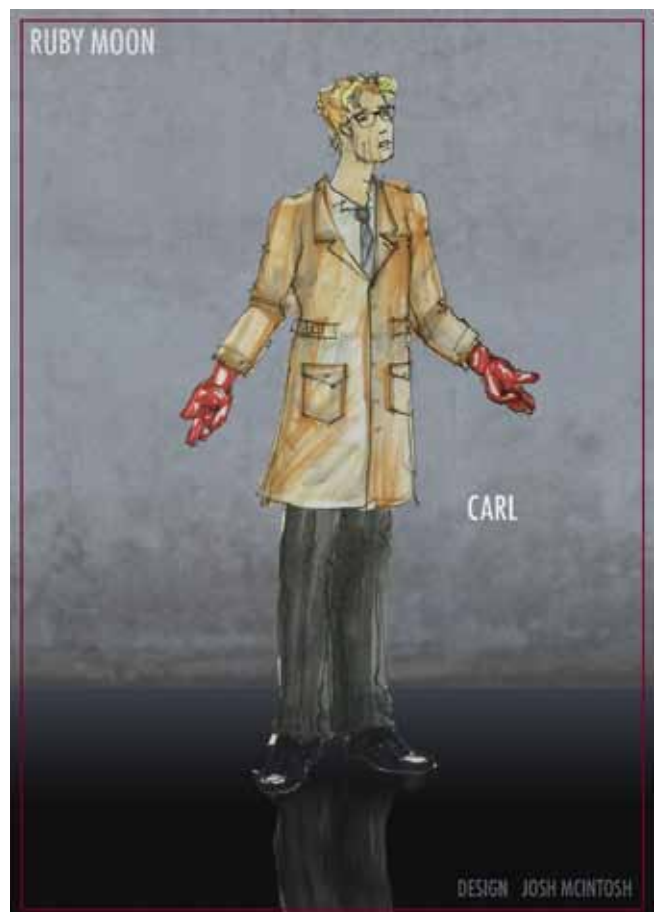
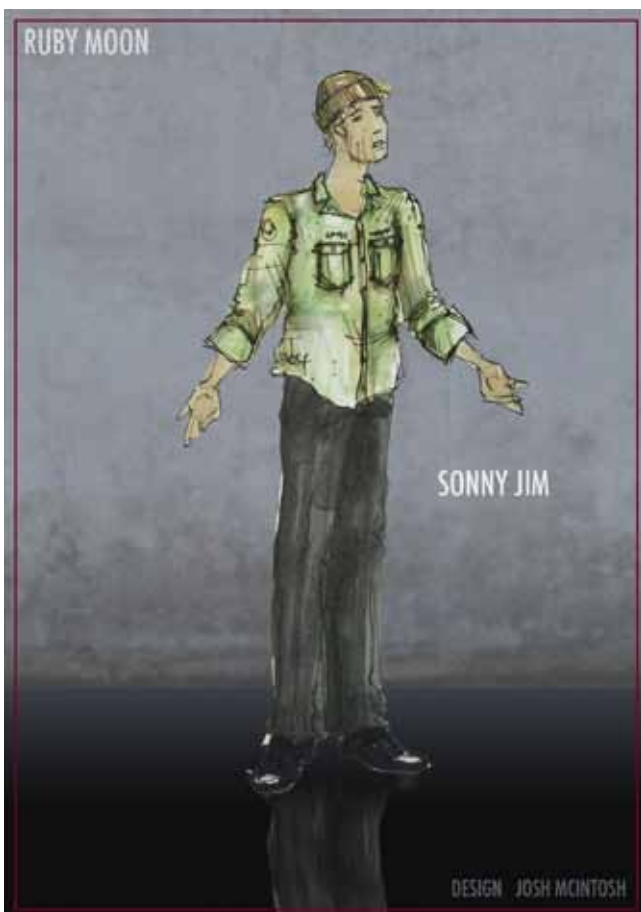
Matt Cameron places this much-visited theme – the stuff of fairy tales of ancient invention – under a high magnification. We by-pass the nuts and bolts of 'life after disaster' – we see them only in passing through to the deeper levels of their existence, things like work, eating, passing time – and look behind the scenes, inside the cut-loose minds of the major players. Cameron's 'parents', Ray and Sylvie, some years on from the loss of Ruby, are endlessly recycling their tragic experience, their moments 'on the day', the list of suspect abductor-murderers, looking first to their neighbours, then to their own doorstep, and at last to the safer choice of a stranger. They review what they know to set as ballast against the universe of what they don't know. This raises the stakes, enhances the size of their misery.

Cameron highlights the anchor-less tossing and turning of Ray and Sylvie in their own emotional detritus, underpinning the lack of equilibrium, by creating dialogue which seems at once banal and lyrical, sensible and lunatic. In Ray and Sylvie we see ourselves, every couple, and their reverse – a destroyed 'norm', an inch from where we now stand, but skewed, scuppered – with little or no hope of rescue.

He uses many techniques of absurdism.... characterised by Gothic features – to disturb us: the folkloric missing child, danger from outside, through a permeable barrier (a curtained window), perpetual night-time, wind, rain, bells, telephone calls from no-one – the sound of a distorted Ruby, knocks on doors, and insanity. For we find the inhabitants of Ray and Sylvie's world bizarre, unhelpful creatures, self-absorbed yet defensive towards the visiting afflicted parent, challenging their sense of perspective, of self – even their own knowledge of their missing child, questioning her innocence, at six years old. We are offered a complex glimpse into Ruby's life, by the neighbours, which seems at once disturbingly plausible and poignant and somehow misconstrued and distorted by their worn, clichéd reactions, as well as wilder constructions – like a black hole!

To direct this complex, deliberately inconsistent and unnerving play, primarily for a schools' tour, sans lighting, for a young audience of students, and also to provide The Arts Centre Gold Coast audiences with a satisfying, engrossing in-theatre experience, has been an exciting challenge. I've tried not to short change anyone, nor to explain the play in the playing of it! It's very clear episodic structure and its unashamed meta-theatrical, role-playing style assisted me greatly. It's a play of discoveries, both grim, surprising and ultimately, I feel, hopeful.

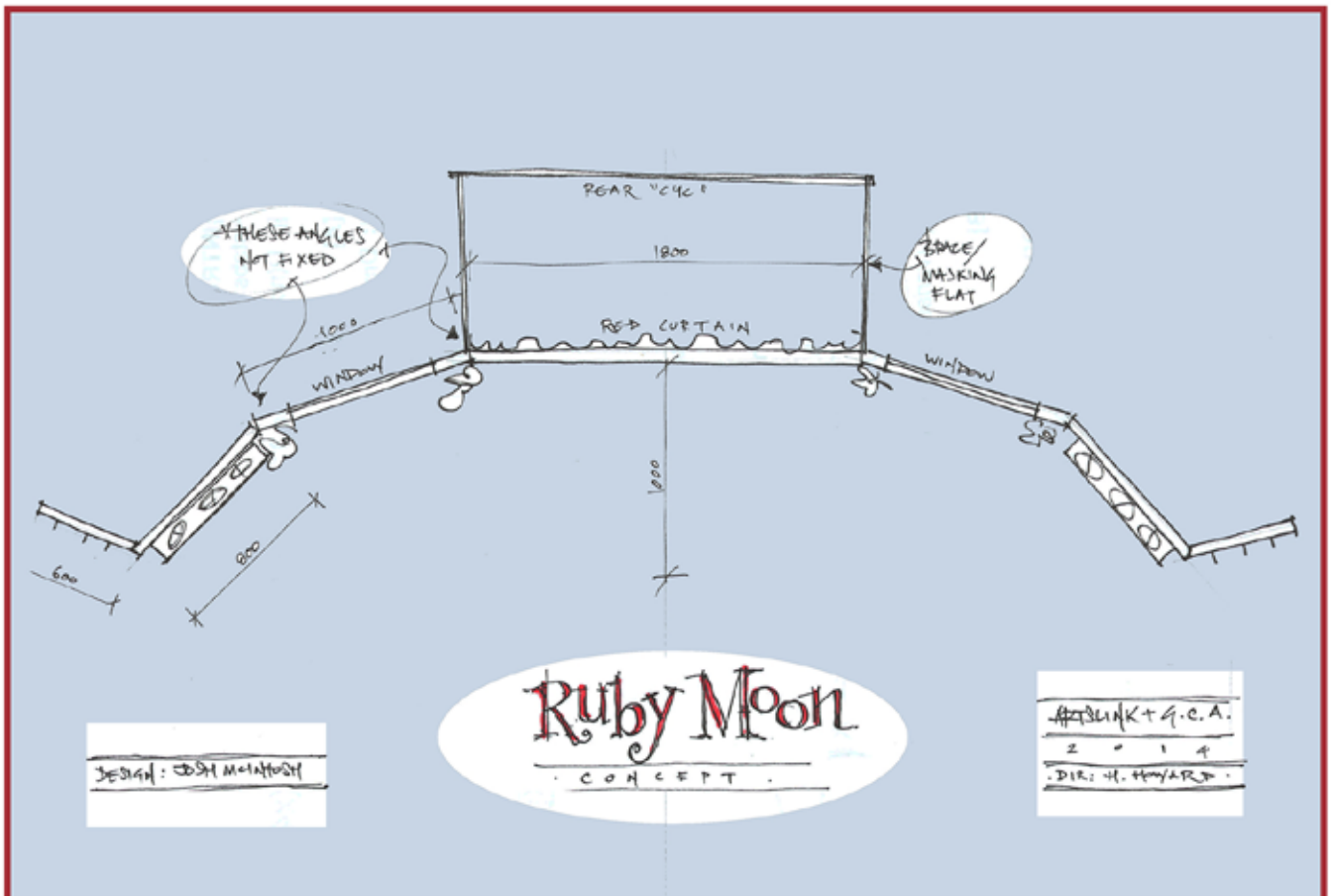
SET AND COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPT



SET AND COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPT



SET AND COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPT



GOVERNOR STIRLING SHS
Study Guide



Artistic/Social/Political/Cultural Context

Cameron presents a contemporary Australian landscape of a tiny neighbourhood cul-de-sac, where an ice-cream van plays *Greensleeves*, which becomes a vast wasteland of ambiguity.

Exercise: Introduction to Contemporary Australian Theatre

BRAINSTORM: What experiences of Australian theatre have you had? Define what makes all these examples "Australian". What would you define as Australian theatre?

Think about: images, characters, themes and issues, symbols and metaphors, language, setting and landscape, cultural and political context, comedy and irony, atmosphere, element of biography and Australian identity

(Hint: If it was performed overseas how would other audiences identify it as Australian AND when performed here what do Australian audiences identify with on a variety of levels?).

Ruby sets of down cul-de-sac and never returns ...

SYLVIE: We had a child, Ray. And we lost her.

SCENE 7 Pg 34

The notion of the missing child is part of the Australian psyche as eg. Beaumont children, Azaria Chamberlain, Picnic at Hanging Rock, and is presented as a recurring theme in the play. We are young nation, experiencing destruction and corruption of innocence. Cameron challenges the assumption that the street and the world we have created for ourselves is safe by cracking the ideal suburban image. We are led us to discover that the foundation of our existence - that our world is safe - seems no longer true. We are often described as fringe dwellers on edges of the island scared of what lies at the centre of the continent. Ray and Sylvie want the truth but don't want the truth....

Research and Discussion:

Conduct research/web search into Australia's missing children - newspaper articles / other texts / plays dealing with the issue e.g. Samantha Knight

Identify and discuss the fears, emotions and media hype that surrounds these stories and why "the missing child" has become such a fundamental part of Australian landscape and psyche.

What fairytales can you think of that explore the premise and concept of the missing or lost child? What ideas etc do these tales explore? What do they have in common? Why do you think this theme/premise is so popular and recurring? Why is it often a little girl?

- Alice in Wonderland
- Little Red Riding Hood
- Hansel and Gretel
- Wizard of Oz

Dramatic Structure and Form

Exercise:

Divide class into groups and give each group a length of rope or string. Under a time limit, to increase energy and sense of competition, ask students to replicate/model the following dramatic structures on the floor. Discuss the results/decisions between each one.

- Naturalistic/Realism dramatic structure
- Absurd dramatic structure
- Episodic dramatic structure, fractured narrative

Ruby Moon is a fractured fairytale. The dramatic structure is cyclical and episodic. The audience witness Ruby's parents experience grief and replay investigations like a routine in an effort to numb this grief. In what began as a series of monologues in rehearsal, the audience travel with the Moons through the cul-de-sac as they re-interview all the neighbours. Each neighbour implicates the next therein propelling the narrative; consequently the plot becomes a journey of tension. The play is episodic in that it is a series of short, somewhat self-contained scenes; each scene has its own narrative and complication. However, with each scene the tension builds and the action rises and thus; it is at the end of the play the audience see the deeper mystery and bigger idea of grief. Cameron uses the play's structure and narrative style to allow the character of Ruby to have a "voice" but she does not exist on stage. The dramatic technique of language is manipulated so that she is spoken about but never speaks.

RUBY: *[voice over] It begins like a fairytale ... suggests a journey, with recognisable characters, status relationships, fate and events but happy ending seems ambiguous.*

Whilst each scene can be experienced as a self-contained dramatic moment, it is when they are viewed within the context of the whole play that our knowledge and understanding of the characters and the neighbourhood becomes more intriguing and engaging in its mystery and atmosphere. The constant change in locations creates a distorted narrative; a world that is larger than life. Ray and Sylvie search different sides of the street and emotionally and intellectually they are disconnected and searching for different things and hear different things in what the characters say. When Ray and Sylvie return they do not share their discoveries with each other. They cannot resolve or reconcile, they are stuck but the audience can see they must move on in order to bury their grief.

DULCIE: *You have to let it go. There is evil in this world, Raymond. Do you really want to be the shattered couple in number one for the rest of your lives?*

The episodic structure enables time to jump between past and present, place to shift without changing set, rhythm to rise and fall without losing the underlying tension. It allows a wide range of characters as each episode can involve new characters without needing to introduce them thoroughly. Cameron's structure thus relies on audience to make connections between the scenes. Each scene ends on a lingering image or idea. For example: Scene 1 - *DULCIE: [As the parrot] Aark, where's the pretty girl...?*; Scene 2 - *They form a family portrait behind the mannequin as they stare out*; Scene 3 - *The Ruby mannequin stands under street light with the moon hovering*; Scene 5 (original text) - *Blackout. The sound of Ruby singing her scales.*

Discussion Questions:

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE: The play runs strictly without interval.

1. Why?

2. How does the dramatic structure allow the characters to be played by TWO actors? How is it like a traditional fairy tale narrative?

5. What dramatic choices does Cameron make to create this focus?

The Prologue

The play consists of a Prologue and Epilogue and 10 scenes. The Prologue's function is to introduce all the characters through the suspicious of Sylvie and Ray. The Prologue is a series of routines and rituals and sets up the repeated door knocking. Cameron manipulates the dramatic technique of learning about other characters through what characters say about them and then manufactures the position in which audience is placed. The audience is already positioned to judge the characters with suspicion based on the Moon's experiences and notions of their existence, as we move through the scenes.

RAY: (Sid) He was bathing the customers.

SYLVIE: (Sonny Jim) Walking that nasty dog of his...(Dawn's house) Bad things happen in houses like that.

RAY: They bring down the street.

SYLVIE: Such a pretty little street.

RAY: (The Wizard) I thought I saw him loitering in front of the school..

We don't know at this point, who is right or wrong, Ray or Sylvie. The paper package is the link from discussing past and memory and what they know, to present a new justification for re-run. The package becomes a dramatic device to propel the action and accusation. It allows audience to make connections between Sylvie's behaviour and Ray's question, "What happened today?"

Discussion Questions:

Why is it called Prologue and not Scene 1? What is its dramatic function? Where does it position the audience? From Ruby's opening statement how quickly do things begin to unravel in the Prologue? If appropriate, compare to the Prologue of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*.

Exercise:

Divide the prologue into beats to find shifts in mood and to map the breakdown of the Moons from sitcom perfect husband and wife to bitter, judgmental and righteous, dysfunctional couple. Look for rhythms in dialogue etc. Initially two students present the perfect couple in the arrival. Then students in pairs work on chosen sections to present the breakdown.

The Epilogue

The Epilogue begins with the uncomfortable image of Ray on the armchair, normally Sylvie's place, with a headless Ruby Doll and the disturbing soundscape of Ruby's creepy voice from opening of the play, "It begins as a fairytale but how does it end?" The image helps to suggest to audience that play is reaching its resolution, as the structure seems to have come full circle, with Absurdist-like qualities. Ray continues to appear to have taken Sylvie's place, telling the doorknocker to go away and repeating the routine of looking under the floor.

Sylvie appears dressed as Ruby, after a subtle prompt from Sylvie Ray seems to play along with the

game. The audience is alienated, repositioned, as we are unsure if Ray is engaged by Sylvie or pretending. We are watching another performance within the performance.

Discussion Question:

Is this an extension of the whole play, part of the repeated routine or has the search, questioning finally driven them to this for the first time? Read Upton's discussion on the existence of Ruby. What is your conclusion?

Exercise:

Divide class into pairs and provide a short extract from the Epilogue for each pair to direct and perform. Half of the pairs should rehearse and perform the extract as 'a return to life as it was in the Prologue'. The other half are to make choices about blocking, acting style and use of space to suggest Ray and Sylvie have slipped into a much darker, nightmare-like place.

Present performances and conduct class debrief: Which directorial choice do you think is the most engaging way to end the play? Justify your thoughts with reasons and examples from the performances presented in the workshop.

Exercise: Directorial Interpretation & Stage Directions

Resources: Provide pairs with a section of the Prologue and Epilogue with stage directions. Provide other pairs with same section of script with all stage directions deleted. Rehearse the scene you have been given, paying particular attention to decisions you have made about movement & stillness, gesture, focus & tension, pause & silence, use of props and acting style.

Reflection:

In your logbook, reflect on your workshop experience by answering the following question:
A director has a responsibility to obey the playwright's stage directions in order to bring the play to life and create dramatic meaning.
Evaluate the accuracy of this statement with reference to the performances of the Prologue and Epilogue you have seen in class.

Characters

Apart from the Moons, each character is given a name and a role, in Brechtian fashion. Cameron gives each a significant prop e.g. stones out of shoe, birdcage, gun, bottle of booze. These props become a theatrical and dramatic technique in forming part of the outer layer of the characters' identities. Each has their cross to bear e.g. Jimmy's limp isn't getting better.

Each character creates their own ending for Ruby, based on their experiences and understanding of the world and project this imagined ending onto the story. The audience then draws on their social and cultural context to answer what we believe has happened to Ruby.

Exercise:

Several of the characters have a routine that they "perform". Identify what these are. Choose one and discuss what the performance reveals about that character. What is the other character's reaction to the routine as the performance takes place? This is as important as the character itself in communicating to the audience what is real or not real as it can position us to view the character in a particular way.

Transformation and Transition

Exercise:

Resources: range of props (female characters) boas, medicine bottles, elastic bands, shawl, birdcage, dolls, wigs. (male characters) crutch, rifles, etc. Exploring the characters through transformation, each student needs 4 props.

Present the female characters through the chosen prop, a distinct voice and physicality, and way of moving. Teacher directs students to establish an "arena" and feeds various character key lines to the students who experiment with delivery and elements of drama to find ways of presenting the characters. Students should be encouraged to remove the prop in character, returning to neutral and then moving to the next character. Students should remain aware that an audience is watching at all times. Side-coach: For example, "You are the archetype – you are the "spinster", the femme fatale. Use your prop to help in your movement." Encourage the students to connect movement with breath and voice and the character's movement centre and stance.

Exercise: Character transformation

Imagine you have been cast by a director, as either Ray or Sylvie.

To assist with your character development, your director has instructed you to write a character biography for one of the neighbours into which you transform. As the actor required to present this character on stage, you must know and understand him/her intimately and be prepared to improvise various scenarios. For example:

- Sid and Veronica meet under the street lamp
- Dulcie stopping Carl outside the church
- Dawn meeting Sonny Jim on the way back from the post office with a package

Themes and Issues

- Knowledge
- Light vs dark
- Loss
- Guilt
- Fear of the unknown

- Innocence vs loss of innocence
- Grief
- Truth
- Powerlessness
- Suburban life and neighbourly behaviours
- Identity
- Parent/child relationships

Imagery

Exercise:

In pairs, list all the unsafe images referred to in one scene. Read these out to the class.

In groups, select 3 unsafe images to bring to life. Consider how you might use sound, movement, the performance space and/or interactions with the audience to create a particular environment or atmosphere.

The Night and the Nightmarish World

The Window

SYLVIE: [*looking out*] Did you see him hiding out there before? (pg 3)

Exercise:

On a piece of blank A4 paper or in your logbook, draw a picture of the perfect/fairytale cul-de-sac street. Photocopy or repeat the drawing distorting the fairytale features through shapes, colours, lines and/or textures to create a creepy, nightmarish landscape.

The Window

SYLVIE: [*looking out*] Did you see him hiding out there before? (pg 3)

Discussion Questions:

Each character "looks out" – we assume it's a literal window but where do they look? Do they look into the audience or is there a prop window? What is the significance of this both literally and metaphorically? For example, Sylvie looks for safety and routine inside and is threatened by the night and the Wizard outside under the streetlight.

What is in the dark? Is the outside safer than what is being revealed or faced on the inside? How much is this the same as the characters' own external and internal worlds?

Why are all the characters directed to "look out"? What does this communicate dramatically about the fears, desires and needs of each character? What feelings about the world outside, beyond the

window, are created for the audience to experience? Where are we positioned in relation to the action and our appreciation of what Cameron is trying to say about the Australian suburban landscape? What choices does Upton make to allow us to appreciate his interpretation of Cameron's text?

Exercise:

In pairs, find five moments in which different characters "look out." Stage each moment, making a choice of where "looking out" is staged and how the moment is blocked. What is the effect of this repeated image? What feelings were created for you as an audience? How successful were you in creating some of the messages Cameron is trying to say about the Australian suburban landscape?
The Mannequin

Exercise:

Block a scene using the mannequin making specific choices about how Ray and Sylvie touch the doll and/or interact with it to communicate any or all of the following feelings - a sense of tenderness, replacement, abuse or power play. What is Ray and Sylvie's different relationships to mannequin, and what does this communicate to us about the play?

How does Upton's production make dramatic use of the mannequin? Is it used to create tension/build distrust/disturb/haunt/evoke sympathy? How successfully is the mannequin used?

Sound

Discussion Questions:

Cameron uses different door knocks for each of his characters as part of his soundscape. How does this theatrical technique pre-empt the characters we are going to meet? What techniques does Upton use in his production to suggest we are entering into a new 'place'? What effect did these have on your experience and appreciation of his production?

Performance Style (Absurd, Expressionist)

Exercise:

Consider the situation of parent storyteller and child audience. Study the scene from the stage direction, *"He slowly hangs it up."* till *"SYLVIE: Can I have the book?"*. Rehearse this scene; clearly showing the moment Ray and Sylvie adopt the roles of storyteller and child audience. You should exaggerate your voice and body, heighten your energy and choreograph the movement. Aim to make clear for your audience, the transition in and out of role and to highlight that Ray and Sylvie use this role-play to medicate their grief. Be aware of elements of drama: tension, pace and timing to control and build atmosphere.

Exercise:

This exercise first uses the conventions of the fairytale world to present a suburban, familiar, idyllic world; then requires students to manipulate these conventions to create cracks in world of the Moons. Using a narrator retell the story of *Ruby Moon* in 8 to 10 lines. Present this to the class as a performance using techniques to make the world of *Ruby* picture-perfect. Heighten her innocence and the friendliness of those around her. One actor should be the narrator using direct address to communicate with the audience. One actor should be *Ruby*, two actors present all the other characters.

Repeat this scene using techniques that crack the idyllic surface to suggest a dark and ambiguous world. Position the audience to judge *Ruby*, her neighbours or her parents as suspicious. Consider how you could use character physicality, asides, stylised voice and movement and sound and space to achieve this.

Notes from an Interview with Andrew Upton, Director of *Ruby Moon*, STC 2007**What is it about *Ruby Moon* that appealed to you and made you want to direct it?**

Its theatricality first and foremost...it possesses an openness that is attractive and it's the opportunities it offers actors that I am interested in as a director. It's much more about Ray and Sylvie.... so charged, so sexy. It's an actor's piece, beautifully written. We're finding a lot more. I think it's going to be very different.

What can we expect from your interpretation of *Ruby Moon* for STC 2007? How different do you think it will be for those students who have explored it in the classroom?

A very different setting; the set is very different from what is described.... Many objects are not included. The designer and I thought, "Let's get rid of the props except those related to the characters". The imagery of the nursery, the dusty house is gone. The play is stripped bare; we've only kept the essentials. A Hills hoist is used to change scene... sound is huge.... drains [are important to the concept].

Do you see the play as uniquely Australian or does it have universal resonance?

It's a very Australian play with a strong suburban feel. I would imagine that it would play anywhere, as the central relationship between Ray and Sylvie at the core of the play is a true marriage. The characters are kind of Australian...Dulcie is a kind of Patrick White character. It would play out well in an American landscape. The "missing child" is a terrible basis for quite a funny play. There are some answers. There is a clear answer in our production that a child existed. They have got to have had that child in that relationship.

Coming to this production as the director, how has your other theatre role as playwright influenced your relationship with the text?

It's a really good bit of writing. Cameron creates an imaginative world that is justified which is very

difficult to sustain in writing.

I'm more Naturalistic than Cameron, particularly in dialogue. He's prepared to break theatrical form and integrate why he's drawn it into the meaning of the play. He provides the characters with a way of acting out their fantasies.

Every story has a moment where it can go to shit. Keeping the mystery alive that these neighbours could be truly neighbours rather than fantasies... working out how to jump over them - there are moments in nearly every script where you have to make a leap and the actors are required to justify certain actions without reason but they are not here. Cameron's writing made the play very attractive to direct.

What images and ideas in *Ruby Moon* have influenced your direction?

The melting ice cream cone...sound hugely...fairytale... this thing that's evolved. The kiss, the constant kiss, "Can I have a kiss?". The sexual relationship of marriage equals the spine of the play. We've pushed this through to characters they play. It's really sad. There is an interesting tension. There's great comedy, classical great comedy, double takes and slapstick, juxtaposed with realistic grief.

Cameron's play evokes the sense of an unknown threatening landscape. How have you used space and/or design to recreate this in the theatre?

They are playing this interior life at the end of a cul-de-sac. It's disconcerting, placing it in the cul-desac, placing it in a dangerous space; threatening in the shape of it, jagged and tooth-like with no way out. A strangely blank, threatening blackness in people, the world...like you're dreaming. It's claustrophobic; you can't get free of it...David Lynch-like. It's a hard-edged, *Godot*/Beckett aesthetic. There's a chest for the actors to play with.

There are specific production and design directions specified by Cameron in the script. Can you describe the design choices you have made and your relationship with your designer, Jo Briscoe?

We worked collaboratively. We started with dialogue, threw out props. We had meetings and discussion and decided to strip away everything. Wherever we want to put it, that's the core of where we started. The process goes in stages. Very early on we got fixated on a cone melting into the pavement. The cone led to bitumen. Things grow... The play needs a designer.

What performance style or styles have you been exploring or uncovering with your actors in rehearsals?

The play seems to say the style required by each moment but it is firmly based in reality. For example with Sonny Jim...this is what this guy believes. It's the reality of a life. These people do this because that's how they see themselves.

When actors play each moment straight the impact is much stronger, it carries more weight. We have used tones from the archetypes but not the clowning or the torch song as directed in the script. To keep the mystery alive, the neighbours must be played by the actors as if they are real people.

The character's natures are Naturalistic with a back-story and a history. Emotions, conversations, decisions must be played as if people really do these things and have these behaviours.

Two actors play all the roles, what rehearsal techniques or exercises have you used to help the actors find their characters?

We are milking it as a practical exercise. No one is saying "stand there do this". We are not aiming for a final image. We've got a very practical edge so it doesn't get lost in the madness or become too stylised. There is a very practical aesthetic – we work out the mechanics of how a scene needs to run which opens up a set of choices and then we start to colour in and get shapes, textures... then it shifts.

Cameron's writing style is quiet poetic, what techniques have you used to make this live on stage?

How this works as dialogue, it's not realistic dialogue in a classic sense...there's a rhythm...it's connected. What we level of reality/fantasy are they connected to on each line? There are about seven realities and it starts to play as a piece of dramatic text.

What do you see is at the heart of *Ruby Moon*?

I would have said grief. Also I think it's a marriage, a relationship in stasis.

Do you have your own thoughts about / opinions on what happened to Ruby or do you simply surrender to the journey Ray and Sylvie are on?

We surrender because we are fascinated. This is terrible, something horrible has happened. They have no place in it...not knowing...if they could just find out if she is dead. She does exist. Everything that happens on stage has a reality.

Notes from Discussion with Designer, Jo Briscoe

I had already read the play before coming on board with this production and loved it. I was excited by design possibilities.

We started talking about images we thought we had...the imagery wasn't written. The image of abandonment is a tragic image. The design needs to have a demented edge. We were influenced by Cameron's introduction to living in the suburbs, you think you are safe, but they are not...that is inherent in suburbia.

We began with a list of all the images in the play on paper. It's a circular action...continually going through them. This equals the cul-de-sac. Once you get it it's very quick.

There are real props and they are part of the action. There is also the notion of dress up box...the concept of the neighbours as dolls. Cameron puts us into a place that is not part of our reality.

Having the idea of the dress up toys/dolls/box led us to the doll's clothes out of scale with big buttons. Velcro is like some kind of doll. It won't be immediately evident that the scale is out, but it's apparent and gets more noticeable. The giant press-stud sells it.

The props are toys. Things that are part of the adult world, those things used by characters to medicate themselves are real e.g. medicine, pill bottle, as they are connected to the reality of their life compared to what they are acting out in their grief spiral. There needs to be a contrast. We are playing with scale, relative to each other; to normal...all of the clothes, houses, Hills Hoist...an adjunct of how things meet each other leads to contrast.

The characterisation in the script, the theatrical conceit of the actors playing the neighbours gives us license to do things that are nutty. The neighbours are artificial, a little like the "Stepford Wives" and very disconcerting. A slick plastic world that is artificial.

Ruby Moon, Matt Cameron
Exploration of Theatrical Styles and Techniques

Pg.	Quote	Technique / Style	Link to Theme	Link to Australian Society	Staging Ideas
1	“The sound of distorted music-box version of ‘Greensleeves’ crackling from an ice-cream van speaker.	Australian gothic – use of sound to develop tension . Props (speaker) used to hint at the loss of childhood innocence.	This distorted music is played through an ice-cream van speaker. The audience is right away introduced to a play where ‘something is not right’ – the world is distorted and unclear. The childhood memories correlating to the ice-cream van speaker also hint at distorted and disrupted childhood innocence.	From Cameron’s introduction, it is clear that the ice-cream van hold pleasant memories for many Australians who associate this memory with the joys and small pleasures of childhood. Audience members will likely make a similar connection to their own past. The distorted music exuding from the speaker, however, sets a very foreboding mood that hints to a corrupt Australia, vastly different to the innocent place that might once have existed.	Place speaker close to Sylvie in the armchair, as though this is a radio where the characters focus their attention to receive news from the broader world. This highlights the corrupt world that exists outside of Flaming Tree Grove and how it is leaking in and having an immediate effect on these individuals. The audience considers how news broadcasting from corrupt parts of the world impacts on their close-knit social circle.
1	The sound of distant thunder rumbling [...] “It begins like a fairytale...”	Contrast – ominous mood created through sound effects opposed by dialogue referring to fairytales delivered, disembodied, in a ghostly tone. Australian Gothic and Magical Realism – supernatural ‘ghostly’ voice of Ruby.	The sound of a disembodied child’s voice with ghostly tones certainly alludes to the theme of disrupted childhood innocence. The phrase she speaks also hones in on this concern. Fairytales are children’s stories and should restore joyful memories, the contrast here being that we suspect that, whilst it ‘begins’ as such a story, it won’t end the same way. This is reinforced by the sound effects of thunder which superimposes an ominous mood to contradict the prologue’s opening.		
1	“Do I get a kiss?...Sounds like it’s coming down cats and dogs...yes, domestic pets are falling from the sky...How was the world today?”	Absurdist Theatre – somewhat pointless and meaningless; without reason. Repetition of questions Seemingly pointless banter-like dialogue between the couple which is disjointed .	This initial exchange between Ray and Sylvie introduces the themes of suburban isolation and grief. In the duologue, Sylvie asks Ray “how was the world today?” possibly because she’s been isolated from it for some time, hence why it “asks after [her].” The audience also has the sense that the couple attempting to avoid something through their stilted and disjointed conversation – an early indication of the grief we learn about later.	The audience recognises something familiar with the polite, borderline comedy of manners, disjointed and awkward conversation the couple has. Most people have experienced it at some point, usually with a stranger with whom conversation must be made...waiting in a line or at a doctor’s surgery. We recognise it also from awkward encounters with people we know following an argument or traumatic event. The characters are married so we tend to apply the latter to this scene. The audience must question why Ray and Sylvie are so disconnected and awkward with each other.	

From Matt Cameron's Introduction:

- Innocence is disrupted and our world is distorted
- Even the watching was an event (referring to watching the smug children eat their Mr Whippy ice-cream)
- A world where neighbours dutifully waved but had no idea who each other really was or what went on over the fence, behind the curtains
- In regards to Cameron growing up in suburban Melbourne "the neighbourhood would echo with the sounds of parents' voices calling tardy children in for dinner. We would hear those calls and never for a moment think that the child might not be coming home."
- The conception of Ruby Moon from the outset was for two actors to inhabit all of its eccentric characters [...] the essence of theatre magic.
- A solitary spotlight on an actor forces focus onto them and their story, but also makes us question what exists in the darkness surrounding them.
- Cameron says that this quote from Lord Bowen resonates with the mystery at the heart of Ruby Moon: "...a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat which isn't there."

“Looking Out” and Effective Set Design

In Ruby Moon, each character is directed to “look out” in each scene. Cameron has done this as a means of effectively communicating the main themes of the play:

- Suburban Isolation
- Social Paranoia
- Disconnectedness

This seems pointless, adhering to the Absurdist conventions, but it really shows the characters in a disconnected world, yearning to be out of the confines of Flaming Tree Grove, but never truly knowing what is beyond the window.

The choices made by the director and set designer are vital in order to clearly communicate dramatic meaning. For example, placing the window upstage, as opposed to downstage, would see characters turning their backs on the audience to “look out”. This would communicate the disconnection and isolation of characters. On the other hand, placing an imaginary window, or the window frame down stage would communicate a different idea of the audience “looking in” at the characters “looking out”.

Magic Realism & Disconnectedness

Interrupting Reality in Ruby Moon

Magic Realism

When working with Ruby Moon, directors and actors must understand that despite the supernatural themes and intrusions, the play is still presented in a realistic style. The acting techniques employed closely align with that of Realism. This is Magical Realism.

Magical Realism is a style of performance where fantastical or supernatural elements are part of an otherwise mundane, realistic environment.

- *List at least three moments of Magical Realism from Ruby Moon*
- *Why do you think this is an appropriate style to communicate the dramatic meaning in the play?*

Journeys Communicate Disconnectedness

The idea of being, and becoming, disconnected is communicated clearly in Ruby Moon. There are three levels of disconnection when we look at it under the umbrella of journeys:

1. Individual Journey: the disconnection from self is presented to the audience through the transformation acting which is key to the play being performed. There are 8 characters, but only 2 actors. We see the actors “transform” into different characters, highlighting the way that Ray and Sylvie are becoming disconnected from themselves. As grieving parents, the fact that they do not know themselves anymore is understandable to the audience.

Journeys Communicate Disconnectedness

2. Micro-Journey: the journey we see Ray and Sylvie experience in the play is one of a growing separation and distrust of a once loving couple. The parents of Ruby become more and more disconnected as the play goes on. Each time they return home from interviewing one of their neighbours, their relationship has suffered. This is evidenced by the disconnected dialogue, starting towards the end of the prologue and certainly by the time we get to scene 2.
3. Macro-Journey/National Journey: the growing disconnection between Ray and Sylvie represents the growing paranoid atmosphere present in reality. Social paranoia is a strong theme in the play and is linked to the distrust we have of one another in the larger community. Each suspect in the 'whodunnit' mystery blames the next, a never ending cycle of accusations!

The Structure

Ruby Moon is a fractured fairytale. The dramatic structure is cyclical and episodic. The audience witness Ruby's parents experience grief and replay investigations like a routine in an effort to numb this grief. In what began as a series of monologues in rehearsal, the audience travel with the Moons through the cul-de-sac as they re-interview all the neighbours. Each neighbour implicates the next therein propelling the narrative; consequently the plot becomes a journey of tension.

The play is episodic in that it is a series of short, somewhat self-contained scenes; each scene has its own narrative and complication. However, with each scene the tension builds and the action rises and thus; it is at the end of the play the audience see the deeper mystery and bigger idea of grief.

INTRUSIONS TO REALITY

List all the times in the play where reality is broken or interrupted.

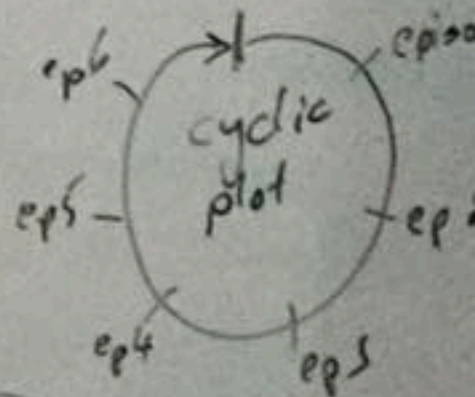
10 mins

- Ruby's ghostly prologue
"it begins like a fable"
- Dulcie speaks as parrot
"Arrh hal'elujah!"
- Sid (Ray) - re-enacts his theory of how Ruby disappeared
- "naive piano refrain" plays with no visible source
- Sylvie stares at ringing phone rather than answering right away

• gothic children's story - foreshadow / symbolise the whole play
↳ questions what society is teaching younger generation.

• "perhaps our grief has reached its use by date" - parents consider forgetting Ruby and present the case in a very factual way to determine "what we know"

• Prologue ends with Ray + Sylvie introducing other characters + decide to investigate + interview neighbours - not for the first time... "just like the first night."



Why is Magic realism and a cyclic plot so effective in communicating the main message of the play?

Scene One

Dulcie: "Let me tell you about your little angel, Mr. Moon"

* Dulcie has to tell Ray about Ruby, as if he never knew her.

* Scene ends, Dulcie as parrot: "Aark, where's the pretty girl...?", as contrasted to "who's a pretty girl"

Lingering image of loss and disconnection. Questioning where Ruby is, but Ray seems less knowledgeable of his daughter.

Dulcie appears somewhat insane - an image the audience takes this with them and applies it to the rest of the play.

predatory interpretation reflects more about the audience

Scene Two

* Ray breaks the mannequin - suggesting that he is perhaps responsible for the missing child...

* Sylvie asks for help to put the arm back on.

* Parents plan to investigate Sid next.

Lingering image of paranoid + blame parents starting to suspect each other (as does the audience). Social paranoia extended to blaming another neighbour.

Scene Three

* Repeated stage directions "solitary spotlight... walks on the spot..." → isolation + going nowhere...

* Sid's dialogue contradicts the action (e.g. "um... I'm not here...")

* Sid's childish mocking of Sylvie... representative of Ruby..

* Sid gave Ruby her Ruby Doll and says "she played with us"... implied predator, but perhaps innocent...

* Sid interacts the day, revealing the "boring parts" with "blah blah blah"

Lingering image of childhood innocence being lost + extended insanity, or at least perceived insanity

Theatrical Styles in Ruby Moon

ABSURDIST THEATRE

- theatre of the absurd is otherwise referred to as absurdism
- absurd originally means “out of harmony” (in a musical context) – its meaning in the theatre of the absurd is different to the everyday meaning of the word as “ridiculous”
- absurd in the context of absurdism can mean:
 - without purpose
 - illogical
 - out of harmony
 - useless
 - devoid of reason
 - meaningless
 - hopeless
 - chaotic
 - lacking order
 - uncertain
- lying in the background to absurdism is the notion of existentialism

AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

This style of theatre explores a vision of Australia that is the familiar made strange and foreboding. It warns us of the dangers that under the façade of the ordinary and mundane images of the Australian landscape. This style of theatre is built on the post-colonial notions of Australia as a topsy-turvy landscape where swans are black instead of white, the seasons are reversed, the trees lose their bark rather than their leaves and the water spins in a different direction. The familiar European view of the world was somehow jarred by the Australian landscape, conjuring notions of the supernatural and other worldly. *Ruby Moon* similarly takes the familiar landscape of a suburban streetscape and distorts it into a place of mystery and secrets.

Conventions of this style include:

- Fluid/ doubled characterisation
- Supernatural intrusions into the drama
- Fourth wall (realistic acting, where the supernatural is accepted into the fiction)
- Setting as a character (the urban streetscape; Flaming Tree Grove)
- Forboding mood
- Use of sound to underscore tension
- Episodic / Cyclic Plot
- Motif (visual, verbal and sound)
- Symbolic set and props rather than representational
- Fluid location / transforming settings
- Use of lighting to create atmosphere
- Intertextuality

MAGICAL REALISM

Magic realism or magical realism is a genre where magic elements are a natural part in an otherwise mundane, realistic environment. Although it is most commonly used as a literary genre, magic realism also applies to film and the visual arts.

Successful contemporary Australian play, Matt Cameron’s *Ruby Moon*²⁸ subverts the Little Red Riding Hood fairytale and employs black humour to critique the supposed safety of suburban Australia, undermining what is known and what is imagined.

TRANSFORMATION ACTING

A technique used by actors to change characters on stage in front of the audience. Ruby Moon uses transformation acting to effectively portray the isolation of Ray and Sylvie in Flaming Tree Grove. The isolation is clear because Ray + Sylvie transform into the characters in the street. They are not played by other actors. This also highlights the growing social paranoia in the play. The grieving parents suspect the neighbours of kidnapping Ruby, coming to actually distrust each other. This is emphasised by the fact that, through transformation acting, they have actually been suspecting each other all along.

Directors need to consider how to communicate the change in character:

- physicality
- costume pieces
- elements of production (lights, sound, set, etc).

TRANSFORMATION ACTING

RAY

SYLVIE

1) Character + how to show change

1) Character + how to show change,

2)

2)

3)

3)

BY: KARLEE



It Began like a fairytale.....

Reiser is the sketcher



KUM-BAH-YAH!

large phone holder, pen box, wood etc

DRAMATIC FORMS & TECHNIQUES IN RUBY MOON

by Matt Cameron

BY: AMY

Looking Out - 'get a kiss?'

Ruby Moon



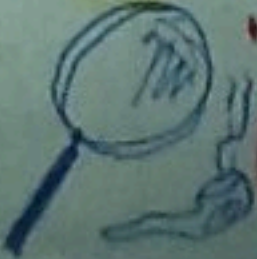
Social Paranoia

a Ray

Absurdism

who dunnit

MAHOOD BEN



Is she even there??
Shes not in the room
Does not clear the
pizza from the table
the tv rain gets

ALLIENATION
BY: HANNAH



Extremism

don't trust

BY: ANNE

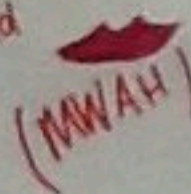
Dramatic forms + techniques

In RUBY moon

distance between characters
 fractured dialogue

TENSION

↓ "Do I get a kiss?"
 Repeated



(MWAH)

doublet

Social Drama

fractured

Based on small ^{novel} ^{compendium}

→ red riding hood

fractured dialogue

"tell me a story ray."



transformation acting ♥

By eliza tianne + maddy ♥

Absurism

"Whodunnit"



SUSPENSE

"Did we ever have a baby girl ray?"



alienation

constant looking out.

BY: KARLEE



Abstrusism
every single
page

"You don't need
make you just
need new shirt"
No longer

"Make a circle"
Taylor

ANNE
= B A O

Transformation using
Optimal
Point

DRAMATIC FORMS + TECHNIQUES

Social persona
"Did you allow
your child to
fly with
crash"
pg 12

Strained
frigate
"I began the
a frigate" pg 2

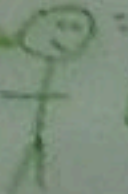
IN RUBY MOON by Matt Cameron

"and she says she has
my car, my car
and she comes with
the stars and she
want to know
"Bah Bah"
"Chit Keef"

By

Diverted
dialogue
perhaps -> epiphany

"In the dark
and a low
Ruby"
Looking
out



"I wish I was
a tiger, when
I'm - a Zoo
know they have a
pretty good life"
Neil Kham

Mahood

Mitchell

James

James

Socialism
"Remember that you don't
take a hand and hold all the
passages bridge - with
that hand"

"Be part of it"
You are so carrying
and there is. Don't
be be dressed"
Taylor

distance
between
solution?
PERSON
↓ "Do
get
Repeat

Cyclic Plot

Ruby Moon has cyclic plot; it ends much as it begins. Seemingly nothing is achieved throughout the plot, and this Cameron's point. The all-consuming power of grief and the endless distrust of their neighbours, and of each other, have Ray and Sylvie stuck in a rut. They go in search of Ruby throughout the neighbourhood "just like the first night" - it is clear from the prologue that this is not the first time they have done this.

The prologue and epilogue highlight the cyclic nature. At the start Sylvie requests Ray to "tell me the story". He does - a story of a girl gone missing. Is Ruby real, or just a story? The epilogue sees Sylvie asking about the story again - "don't let it end like that, Ray."

In order to not "let it end like that", the audience is left with the impression that the couple will go through this all again, in search for a different end.

Questions:

- ① What does the cyclic plot have to say about Australian society?
- ② Do you think Ray and Sylvie are really that different from real individuals in society? Why?
- ③ As a director, how would you ensure that meaning is communicated through your staging of the prologue/epilogue?
Consider:
 - costume
 - set
 - lighting
 - sound
 - blocking
 - props

FALLING PETALS

Ben Ellis

This play is written in a more realist style than Ruby Moon, we are introduced to Australian teenage characters in the first scene who we can relate to. As school students, we can relate to their circumstances because they are under pressure to perform well in senior school. We can also relate to their location and language. Phil, Sally and Tania meet around the cherry blossom tree and discuss their views on schooling and the strange illness that is shooting through their town, Hollow, and killing off kids one-by-one.

Two views on schooling are introduced in the first scene. Phil and Tania believe they must perform well in their final exams in order to get out of this town in order to become successful, Phil says "Economics gets me out of Hollow" (p.1). Sally on the other hand believes that school should nourish students and give them time to find what it is they are interested in and are passionate about ("It's interesting" – p.5). This is a concept Phil and Sally cannot understand: "We need the marks to get to Melbourne [...] we can't just chase the interesting bits and pieces around like butterflies" (p.7).

In this first scene, a strong political and social perspective of Australian society is introduced by Ellis through the characters' views on their schooling and what it takes to become successful. In a current climate of standardised testing throughout school and as a way of determining the intelligence of students, this play hones in on the effects this is having on young Australians. The stress and pressure placed on students, particularly in the final years of schooling, can have significant physical and psychologic impact. This is symbolised by Ellis through the setting of this play around the cherry blossom tree (sakura), whose petals fall to the ground to represent each child dying of the mysterious disease. This disease can be conceptualised as representing the tribulations experienced at school and the ultimate impact it can have. In a less physical sense, it's also representative of the perspective society instils into young people who are left with nothing but a sense of "life or death" when it comes to performing well in their standardised exams.

Questions

1. How did your group set the stage in order to focus on the falling petals?
2. What was the main message about Australian society that your group communicated?
3. How would you incorporate costumes to effectively enhance the way you communicate dramatic meaning?

REALISM – Theatrical Style in ‘Falling Petals’

Ben Ellis has written Falling Petals as a realist play. This means that, although the play engages with extended metaphors and multi-layered meanings, the characters, emotions and situations are believable by the audience.

When considering realism as a style, Stanislavski is the key practitioner for performers to study. Several of his approaches to acting and character development are essential in performing characters such as Phil, Tania and Sally. Prominent techniques include:

- Magic If – the actor imagines what it would be like to be in the situation their character is in and how they would react;
- Emotion Memory – recall a time when you had a similar mood or emotion and how you reacted, use this in your performance;
- Objectives and Units of Action – break the script down into workable chunks/bits where you work out what your character wants to achieve and how they go about doing this (all the different strategies they use to achieve their objective)

It becomes clear how well Falling Petals represents elements of Australian society when approaching these characters because their situations are not at all the dissimilar to our own. The ideas relating to the pressures placed on young people and the misguided priorities of the schooling system parallel elements of contemporary Australian society.

FALLING PETALS

Consider the symbolism of the falling petals throughout the play. Create a movement piece that communicates the message made by the falling petals.

1. What do the falling petals represent?
2. How can this be shown in a movement piece?
3. What does the movement piece need to focus on?
4. How can tension be developed throughout the performance?
5. How would costuming be used to heighten the message of the piece?
6. What theatrical techniques can be used to convey this message? Explain the use of at least three techniques (e.g. repetition, movement, music, etc).