

ODYSSEY

Teacher's Guide

Students viewing *Odyssey* in 2009 will be able to select it to write on for Unit 3 Outcome 3, as well as the examination. The following information is designed to assist you with analysing the production, and is a non-exhaustive performance analysis. It is outlined under the areas of study, as listed in the V.C.A.A. Study Design Unit 3 Outcome 3 for the subject of Drama.

This is what the VCE Assessment Handbook for Drama says about the task:

Outcome 3: Analyse and evaluate a non-naturalistic performance selected from the prescribed playlist. The analysis may be presented in one of the following formats:

- *A written report*
- *Responses to structured questions*

Teachers should develop an assessment task that allows the student to:

- *Analyse ways in which performance styles that are not dependent on the lifelike representation of real life and theatrical conventions are used in a performance of a play selected from the Unit 3 Drama play list*
- *Analyse ways in which characters in the play are represented in performance through the actor's use of expressive skills including voice, movement, facial expression and gesture*
- *Analyse and evaluate ways in which dramatic elements, theatrical conventions and stagecraft are manipulated to enhance the professional performance of the play*

- Use the language of drama associated with the performance styles, traditions and practitioners from a range of contemporary and/or cultural traditions to analyse and evaluate the play
- Have the opportunity to demonstrate the highest level of performance

-- From the VCE DRAMA Assessment Handbook 2007-2011, p9-10

A couple of important points:

Analyse: to analyse is to look at the parts that make up the whole. An analysis is a discussion about the 'what/how' the drama happened. If you are a visual person, you might like to think of it as a microscope – looking at the detail.

Evaluate: to evaluate is to make a judgement or a measurement. You know you are doing this if you say 'to what extent, or how effective' something is in the drama. You still need to have a sense of analysis in an evaluation too. Again, if you are a visual person you might like to think of a ruler or another measuring device. When you get asked to evaluate in your response, make sure you include the measurement or judgement. Usually, in an academic piece of writing, you wouldn't use the first person either – you might say that:

Litras' use of voice throughout the performance was effective: he utilised it to transform character and place. An example of this...

Rather than:

I think Litras was able to use his voice to transform character and place.

Following are the main areas of knowledge that you need to know for the Outcome. You also need to be able to demonstrate the knowledge through your skill:

- ***‘Ways in which performance styles that are not dependent on life-like representations of everyday life and theatrical conventions are used in performance’***

The ways in which the solo is performed are communicated through the styles and conventions. Here is a table for discussion that outlines some of the conventions that are used in the production:

| List of Styles and Conventions | Use and Effect |
|--|--|
| Use of Narrator/Narration (styles of Greek Theatre, Melodrama, Epic) | Like a Greek chorus, the character of Karagiosi establishes the multiple narratives of the performance and is able to shift between direct address to the audience and the worlds of the performance. He also reveals the plot to the audience in his very first speech, setting up the narratives as he sets the stage, literally and metaphorically. As well as revealing the plot, Karagiosi actively comments and offers his opinion on the narratives, at times satirizing and at other times undercutting the narratives; “that’s not a propa Greek story” |
| | The notion of direct address and the removal of the ‘fourth wall’ are vital aspects of the performance style. Karagiosi’s entrance and first lines are directed at the audience immediately establishing the non-naturalistic nature of the performance. The use of multiple intertwining narratives/narration is a fundamental aspect of the performance style requiring transformations of character, place, object and time to move between the narratives. |

Use of Comedy

(styles of Elizabethan, Physical, Stand-up Comedy, Vaudeville, Slapstick, Clown, Cartoon)

The performance utilizes a number of comic styles. Bawdy, physical, and word play vary the tempo of the performance, providing direct and rhythmical contrasts to the moments of pathos and dramatic tension. The physical humour of Karagiosi and his retelling to the Trojan War borrows from the world of Cartoon and Slapstick. This contrasts to Andreas' stories of his return to Greece which echo the direct address style employed in a stand up comedy routine and are far more lyrical.

Transformation of Character

(Eclectic Non-naturalism, Poor Theatre)

Litras' choice to transform character on stage maintains and changes the tempo and rhythm of the performance. The character transformations are minimalist (primarily voice and physicality) and therefore encourage the audience to enter into the world of the play.

The overwhelming majority of the transformations take place on stage in front of the audience with no attempt to disguise the transformations. The subtlety of the

transformations invites an imaginative investment on the part of the audience to fully realise the characters. Characters are created in a range of styles from the highly theatrical Karagiosi through to realistic representations of ordinary people and the surreal impressions of animals- for example the sheep that is slaughtered in the underworld.

Characters also range in detail from the fully fleshed out characters of Angelo and Paraskevi to the 'sketches' of characters such as the customers in the shop in Paraskevi's story.

The minimalist nature of the transformations allows very quick transformations of character. In Scene Eight: Paraskevi's Stories over eight characters and characters sketches are presented in only a few minutes of stage time. In many instances throughout the performance it is the volume and frequency of transformations of character which emphasise the non-naturalistic nature of the performance more so than the representations themselves.

Use of Heightened Language

(Elizabethan, Greek)

Spoken language includes the use of both Greek and English languages. The effect of speaking Greek can be to place the audience as the outsider (in a position of misunderstanding), and it can also be used to evoke emotion and mood as well as tension. The choice not to translate Angelo's departure forces the audience to decode the language through the components of emotion, gesture, physical expression. At times, the language is heightened and poetic e.g. 'When dawn rose with her ruby red fingers' drawing of the verse of Homer. At other times the language is deliberately sparse allowing space for the audience's imagination- such as the description of the Sheep's brains as 'thick and pasty'.

Transformation of Object

(Eclectic Non-naturalism, Vaudeville, Clown, Poor Theatre)

Objects on stage have multiple uses throughout the performance. For example, the suitcase becomes the prop-carrier, becomes the Trojan Horse, becomes a suitcase, and becomes a table. This affects the actor-audience relationship as it gives rise to the possibility that objects may have more than one meaning and that each object is not only to be interpreted as it appears but also as it is 'endowed' by the performer. Each object on stage has significance and the audience is invited to create meaning.

Use of Mime: Implied Person and Place

(Mime, Eclectic Non-Naturalism)

Mime is utilised within the performance as a narrative device, as parts of the story are told through mime; most notably the Cyclops episode. It changes the rhythm and tempo of the performance and a highly structure physical language it exists outside the boundaries of representations of everyday life.

Focus Questions:

- As a class group, work through the script and list all of the theatrical conventions that you observed in the performance. How did these enhance the meaning?
- Once you have a long list, you can fill in the following chart, listing the conventions on the left and then the effects on the right:

Convention

How it affected the dramatic elements

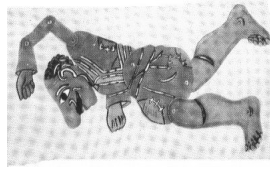
1. Use of song (During Angelo's journey from Greece to Australia)
1. The use of song in the performance changed the mood and rhythm. As Angelo sings and moves the boat, the rhythmical melody creates a mood of foreboding with the approaching new land – Australia.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

- ‘Ways in which characters are represented in non-naturalistic performance through the actor’s use of expressive skills including voice, movement, facial expression and gesture’:



Andreas is able to represent the characters in *Odyssey* through non-naturalistic performance techniques. Here are some examples for class discussion:

| Characters | Ways | Performers comments |
|------------|--|--|
| Karagiosi | A very physical character, he is represented through gesture, voice and facial expression. Karagiosi moves seamlessly between the different worlds and realities on stage. Many of his character traits are exaggerated; he is a character larger than life. | <i>Karagiosi for me came alive when he became a human based on the shadow puppet figure of the same name. Coming from that theatrical genre he didn't seem bound by any rules- he can do anything and is bigger and bolder than any of the other characters. I really anchored the character in a strong voice and physicality. Accent and his rhythm of speech are vital.</i> |



| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Angelo | Singing is one way of representing Angelo to the audience. His internal life is represented by the card game and dance sequences, which begin with a celebration and end in a drunken despair. The quality of song he sings on the boat gives an indication of his internal emotional state. | <i>My dad had very bow legs and that's where I started with him – bending my knees outwards, dropping my hips and centre and walking on the outside of my feet. This gave me a different body rhythm and walking gait. I then used his love of song and sociability to enhance his physicality.</i> |
| Paraskevi | Represented through a shift in vocal quality; Paraskevi speaks with a different vocal tone to the other characters. Simple gestures are used and repetition of vocal patterns. | <i>My mother was the hardest character in many ways. One of the hardest things to overcome was the notion of a male actor representing a female character and how to do that. In the end we went for simplicity- I worked on a softer vocal style and a distinct vocal rhythm. This was then allowed to sit in contrast with the bigger characters of Angelo and Karagiosi.</i> |
| Cyclops | Represented through movement (mime) , the creation of vocal sounds and some language. Heightened and precise physicality combined with voice and vocalized sound is used to represent this character. | <i>For me the Cyclops scene is more about presenting a series of images than playing a character; telling a story through a series of pictures. My focus is more on what is it I want the audience to see than anything else.</i> |
| Underworld Characters: Tiresias, Agamemnon, Odysseus' Mother | Represented through the use of makeup, the toy crown and mop (elements of costume), exaggerated facial expressions, gesture and voice. Use of shared space is employed to create the underworld (behind the suitcase) and so each character is only seen from the head up. This focuses audience attention of facial expression, voice and gesture. | <i>These characters were just fun- absolutely over the top and highly theatrical. The fact that I was only really acting from the head up combined with the comical/surreal nature of the scene led to me using highly exaggerated facial gestures and using the maximum range of vocal expression</i> |

Andreas The performer himself, no less a character than any of the others in the play. Functioning as a subdued and naturalistic storyteller and repressed using natural vocal tones and facial expression. Gesture is used to emphasize and illustrate text; think of the widening hand gestures as the character describes his Aunt as a “very, big, woman”.

It's strange to think of yourself as a character but really by putting 'yourself' on stage that's what you become. The hardest thing in the world to do was to not do anything- that was John's note to me when playing me- not to add anything or try to present a version of me but just to be me.

- ***‘Ways in which Dramatic Elements, Theatrical Conventions and Stagecraft are manipulated to enhance non-naturalistic performance’***

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

The performance is layered with dramatic elements. A close analysis of the performance needs to consider not only the quality and effect of the dramatic elements, but how they work in combination, contrast and concert with each other.

Climax - The non-linear and complex narrative structure of *Odyssey* provides no singular climatic event but rather a number of climatic moments. These include the arrival home of Odysseus, Andreas changing his name and Karagiosi's retelling of the end of the Trojan War. The effect of these multiple climatic moments is to provide a momentum and resolution for the various narrative threads.

Conflict - Is one of the central platforms on which the performance is structured. The character Karagiosi establishes the conflict in the opening sequence of the performance as he works to hijack the plot.

Contrast - is manipulated through the performance to demonstrate different characters and their reactions to similar situations. Consider the ways in which Andreas uses contrast to better convey the different responses Angelo and Paraskevi had when leaving Greece.

Disjointed time – A hallmark of Non-naturalistic theatre which is used through the performance. Karagiosi draws attention to the real world time in his opening address; “What’s the time?” From there the play moves backwards and forwards though time, changing with the Narratives.

Focus - in *Odyssey* is specifically used, and often in relation to shifts of scale. An example is the Cyclops, which changes focus from Odysseus on the Cyclops, to the fingers that represent him to the Cyclops. There is also filmic focus as evidenced in the close-up on Angelo and then the ‘wide’ shot of the boat crossing the ocean and back to the close-up Angelo as he arrives.

Mood - The use of music and song contribute to the mood of the performance. Consider the ways in which Karagiosi’s use of comedy, both physical and through direct address of the audience, contributes to providing variety in the mood.

Rhythm - The rhythm changes from the high energy of Karagiosi to the more quiet and reflective story telling moments in the performance. This also occurs through the varied use of different performance styles such as puppetry, mime and monologue. The manipulation of the rhythm of the performance serves to create and maintain dramatic tension. Another example of the manipulation of rhythm in the performance in Angelo’s ‘cards and chips’ sequence which transforms both time and space whilst also establishing a sense of the ongoing rhythm of life.

Silence - Is used to great effect at a number of important points. Think of the response to the first funeral slide – after having set up a pattern of commenting on each slide this pattern is broken as the first funeral slide is met with silence. This silence is enhanced when the second funeral slide is met with a more intense silence. The song of the Gramophone stops as Angelo sits on his suitcase after his tearful farewell – his silence emphasises the emotion of the moment and contrasts the noise of his departure.

Sound - Sound helps to create context, as well as deliver aspects of the story. Songs create mood and texture and offer the audience a different way of understanding the plot. An example of this is the sound of water at the end of the play when Andreas is washing off the make-up. The sound underscores the story of the family life after Angelo's death.

Space - There are a number of key spaces in the performance. Karagiosi is established on the side of the stage. The effect of placing Karagiosi down stage left is that he is in a position of evoking confidence from the audience. He is both inside the play but commenting on it. He says, "the space is not ready yet", yet goes on to perform. The central space is fluid, while upstage contains the projection and the underworld characters. There is also an inferred other space where the character of Andreas is going to supposedly enter from.

Stillness – Stillness is used at important points throughout the performance and often as a counter point to moments of Karagiosi's high energy. The madness of the underworld is followed soon after by the stories of Andreas' return to Greece which are told from one spot of the stage using no movement of the body and only minimal hand gestures.

Symbol - exists in many levels within the performance. The pot plant is used a number of times with the addition of the soil and the seed, representing home and growth respectively. Paraskevi places a cloth underneath it to create a sense of the domestic. The symbolic gesture of wrapping the chips evokes a sense of time and place. The paper boat and hand shows scale and distance.

Timing - is manipulated within the performance to evoke emotion from the audience. This is due to the fact that it often involves the unexpected. An example of this is the slide of the coffin that is placed at the end of a sequence of humorous slides. The timing of the death slide surprises and shocks the audience, and fundamentally alters the mood.

Tension - is developed through a range of devices through the performance. The expectation of the arrival of the professional actor's arrival, the interaction between Karagiosi and the audience are examples. Tension is varied through the performance from comic to the dramatic.

STAGECRAFT ELEMENTS

Whilst being a touring show that is quite minimalist in approach, there are numerous examples of stagecraft elements that create non-naturalistic performance. Makeup, when used, is exaggerated and grotesque, costume is minimal with the only change being the adding or removal of a hat to delineate between Andreas and Karagiosi. Set demonstrates simple objects being used in multiple ways. Lighting is initially simple, with no real change until the lights go out for the slides. From there, the slide projector is used to both project images and then is a light source for the performance. Sound is multi-sourced and is varied to incorporate many different styles. Acting, resourced from a number of different traditions and styles, includes clown, realism, Elizabethan, puppetry, mime, slapstick, Ancient Greek Theatre and melodrama.

Direction helps to create non-naturalism, as it is non-linear (disjointed time sequences), it uses multiple character threads and is eclectic.

Dramaturgy is demonstrated through the uses of fact and the historical basis of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Props transform and operate on both a symbolic and functional level.

Some Sample S.A.C. questions:

- Choose one of the characters that Andreas Litras plays. Analyse how he realises that character referring to style and convention.
- Choose a different character and analyse how Litras used one expressive skill to represent the character.
- Choose one dramatic element, and one stagecraft element and explain how each was developed non-naturalistically.
- Evaluate the way that the theatrical conventions of use of song and use of narrator were used in the performance.
- Describe the overall style of the play, *Odyssey*.

CREATING NON-NATURALISTIC THEATRE - A WORKSHOP

The following is based some of the techniques that were used in the creation of *Odyssey*. Students can work individually but may gain more benefit from working in groups of 3 to 5. This workshop involves the creation of 5 components which can then be manipulated to create a non-naturalistic piece of theatre. The participants will need a piece of paper and pens to keep notes.

Stage One

- 1) A story - Ask the participants to share with their friends the story of the most embarrassing thing that their parents (or career) have ever done. Usually little prompting is required, but if it is ask them to think of incidents like; a time when their parents have divulged too much information to a friend, have acted inappropriately in front of others. Ask the participants to share the incident with their friends with as much detail as possible so rather than them just saying; "My dad did a bad dance at my party," they need to share how he danced, to what music, what he was wearing, how did others respond etc. If some people have more than one the group can pick the best. Once everyone in the group has a story they need to write a note on a piece of paper – just a word or two to remind them of the story.
- 2) A vocal rhythm – Ask the participants to share the phrase or saying that their parents say over and over again. It is like a signature, something that their parents repeat so often you can almost tell what they are going say before they open their mouth. It doesn't change. Things like; "Why doesn't anyone listen when I talk", or "What's the magic word". Write it down word for word.
- 3) A physical gesture – Ask the participants to think of a physical gesture that their parent's repeat- an action that they do – sometimes without thinking – if it has an accompanying sound that is great but the gesture is the main thing. They need to demonstrate it to their friends. It must be precise and repeatable. Once everyone has one they need to write down a brief description.
- 4) A childhood name – As participants to share what childhood name their parents had for them or a term of endearment their parents used.

5) A song – Now ask participants to recall the first lullaby or nursery rhyme they remember their parents singing to them. It doesn't need to be in English or have words but it must be distinct. Remind them this isn't a singing competition, just actors' research. The need to sing this to their group so the group all hears it.

Stage Two

The groups now need to manipulate these 5 elements to make a piece of theatre. It is important to establish some rules of creation. Here are some I use in workshop feel free to add you own.

- 1- Each piece must contain one of each of the 5 elements (but can contain more). Ideally one song and two or more of the each of the other elements works well.
- 2- Each piece must be non- naturalistic; encourage them to consider repetition, canon, disjointed time, narration and the other elements of non-naturalism; transformation of character, space and time.
- 3- No one is allowed just to be a Narrator – multiple Narrators are fine.

Often participants will try and blend everything together into a single Narrative but this is to be discouraged. What they are creating is an essay, a theatrical exploration of families. It needs to be theatrical minestrone in which each of the various components maintains its own integrity. Ask participants for work particularly on the transitions between elements. If they get stuck a song or Repeated Physical Rhythm is always a good place to start they just need to decide what would be the most interesting thing to follow with.

Have Fun!

Andreas