

## DRAMA

### Contemporary Australian – Stolen/ Ruby Moon:

**(2011 Past Paper) Discuss how the ideas and images of the plays might be presented in this theatre space?**

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While the key ideas and images of a play are embedded within the script, a play's true strength in communicating these ideas and images (and that which makes it theatre) lie in an actor's ability, aided by the tools of production, to have a real and engaging connection with the audience. The ideas and images of both Matt Cameron's *Ruby Moon* and Jane Harrison's *Stolen* would be ideal in this theatre space because of the intimacy it provides, enabling each theatre company and its production team to intensify both *Ruby Moon*'s ideas and images of grief and loss and *Stolen*'s engagement with the stories of the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal Australians in this three-sided stage.

In the intimacy of this theatre space, presenting *Ruby Moon* would encourage greater audience connection to the mysterious microcosmic world of Flaming Tree Grove, and to the ideas and images of grief and loss embodied within Ray and Sylvie Moon's search their lost daughter. The audience connection from any of the three sides of the stage would be aided through the sensory mediums of light and audio technique. Mirroring the technique of the Sydney Theatre Company in their use of light and shadows, with a single spotlight on the Ruby Mannequin, increases the haunting, mystical and foreboding tone that is embedded within Cameron's text. Equally the audio of heavy rain and 'flashes' of lightning as Ray and Sylvie sit alone in their home heightens an audience's sympathy for the couple in their disillusionment, as they fuss over "past-tense" and particularly in the epilogue as Sylvie asks Ray quietly "Was there ever a child at all Ray?"

In the naturally intimate nature of the theatre and Cameron's ascribed living room set, audience from physical proximity in being able to notice details of facial expression and subtleties in vocal tone can directly engage with the ideas behind each of the archetypal characters. This proximity, equally gives prevalence to the symbolic images, of the mannequin and the dismembered ruby doll, that stand as haunting reminders of the lost child, aided in the echoing effect of the Ruby voiceovers that open and close the play. The direct engagement that this smaller theatre space allows also feeds into the over-arching suspicion, with Cameron's script and plot playing upon audience prejudices in shifting from character to character the hope of finding a scapegoat to blame for this tragedy that has befallen the Moon couple. In essence, the theatre space in its intimacy, close proximity with audience and the significance of visual and audio production effects would intensify the mystical and haunting ideas and supporting images for these parents and their child who may or may not have ever existed.

This theatre space would be equally effective in present the contrasting ideas and images of Jane Harrison's *Stolen*. In capturing the ideas and images of the Stolen Generation in Australia, the intimacy of this space is ideal particularly for the individual accounts given throughout the fragmentary and episodic structure. This would be most effective in such scenes as "A Can of Peas" when Sandy talks of the traumatic experience of being taken by government authorities from his family as a young child. Lit by a single spotlight (as seen in the STC workshop) Sandy has full audience attention and can ultimately fulfil, in his monologue, Harrison's key idea and purpose, in being able to educate through physical representation and emotional connection the experiences of Aboriginal Australians to contemporary Australian audiences.

Equally the flat, uninclined space aids the movement of Harrison's suggested set design, being 5 moveable iron-frame institution beds and a large filing cabinet. The moveability of these props (that also serve as key images of the play) is vital in the flow of the production in its seamless transitions

between childhood recollections and adult experiences. These props serve symbolically on stage as images, relating to audience notions of poverty, institutions and particularly in regards to the filing cabinet, government authority and the legitimacy of the atrocities of the stolen generation.

Practically, this set could be moved to accommodate the many perspectives that a three-sided stage allows, which could be best utilised in a scene like “Shirley never gives up searching” with each actor calling out from their bed to a different audience direction, to “Lionel”, who represents not only a single son, but the whole of the Stolen Generation. This moveable set onstage would also reaffirm the ideas present in numerous key scenes, with the iron frame serving to represent the jail bars before Jimmy’s suicide, or the shifting beds around Sandy as he runs on the spot in his effort to escape inevitable capture in the scene “Hiding Sandy”. In essence, the theatre space would heighten Stolen’s ideas surrounding the Stolen Generation through its intimacy, amplification of images imbedded within the set design and in being conducive to the speed of transition and the fragmentary nature of the play.

In conclusion, it is the theatre space and how it is used that enables the ideas and images within a written text to have a strong connection with audiences. As such, the intimacy, multiple perspectives and the space’s ability to incorporate the elements of production in a holistic and complimentary manner would intensify and heighten the powerful ideas and images within both the contemporary Australian pieces of Ruby Moon and Stolen.