



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company,
La Boite Theatre Company and
The Sydney Morning Herald present

Edward Gant's Amazing Feats Of Loneliness!

By Anthony Neilson



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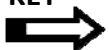
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Education Resource written by Kerreen

Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

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AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



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Drama Exercises



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Play online

EDWARD GANT'S AMAZING FEATS OF LONELINESS!

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Sarah Goodes

Designer – Renee Mulder and Romance Was Born

CAST

Edward Gant – Paul Bishop

Madame Poulet – Emily Tomlins

Jack Dearlove – Bryan Probets

Nicholas Ludd – Lindsay Farris



THEMES

Loneliness

Melodrama

Magic Realism

It is 1881, and the showman Edward Gant is giving his final performance. Tonight he and his troupe will bring you the most wonderful and bizarre stories of love and loneliness that the world has to offer.

Introducing his performers: the egg laying Madame Poulet, the poet reciting “Little” Nicky Ludd, and the loyal Sgt Jack Dearlove; he promises to touch our hearts and minds with their astonishing tales - terrible, extraordinary, and amazing.

We meet Sanzonetta, the pimple faced girl whose acne delivers pearls instead of pus. We learn of her exploitation at the hands of a greedy sister and of a husband who cruelly abandoned her for an Oyster.

Edgar, another lonely heart is brought before us. His fiancé died in his arms after a wasp sting and whose memory he cannot erase. Consumed with grief he travels to Nepal. There he meets Ranjeev the Uncomplicated who offers brain surgery to alleviate his suffering by removing the memory of his beloved Louisa.

Then things take an unexpected turn and Gant’s own story of lost love and feat of loneliness is revealed. Gant reassures his performers they will go on but he cannot. The show ends as he does - spectacularly.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

Anthony Neilson's Theatre

Anthony Neilson is a Scottish born writer/director. In the 1990's he along with writers such as Sarah Kane became a member of the British 'in-yer-face theatre' movement. They used the shock tactics of extreme – language obscenities, simulated violence and aggression - and took on controversial subject matter challenging audiences sensibilities with what were described as 'vulgar' and 'in yer face' provocations.

Although Neilson no longer formerly associates with the group his work continues to be controversial and boldly theatrical. He is an advocate of the spontaneous and that theatre should maintain a strong connection to real life. Magic Realism and Black Comedy are key stylistic features of his work. Neilson challenges the notion that the influences of popular culture don't belong in the theatre. 'Life is absurd, full of superstitions and flights of the imagination'. Why can't theatre reflect that, he asks.

Neilson describes writing as a 'pain in the ass' most of the time but the 'ability to turn a bad situation into something creative is very, very useful'. His character Edward Gant is also in a bad situation. Tonight is his last show and he wants to make the best of it. Tonight he promises his audience the experience of a lifetime.

Edward Gant derives its inspiration from the Victorian theatre with its passion for heightened displays of emotion, love of illusion and pantomime, the amusement hall, travelling circus and the freak show.

The Freak Show

The freak show became popular phenomena from the mid 1800s with its head Showman and 'human curiosities' ('freaks' or 'exhibits') touring the cities and towns of Europe and the United States. The popularity of the freak shows was consummate with industrialization, and a growing interest by the general public in science, adventure and the exotic. Freak shows continued up until the 1970's before they were recognized to be exploitative and inhumane through the efforts of disability advocacy and human rights groups.

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In the typical nineteenth century freak show the Showman would stand outside the entrance of the exhibition hall (tent, caravan, or theatre) 'spieling to the crowd'. The job of the Showman was to get people to "step right up" and buy a ticket. The Showman was an expert orator who had mastered the art of persuasion. Using exaggeration and making false claims they told passersby of the wonders that awaited within for a small price.

The 'human curiosities' were presented as unique, or the best of their kind-the tallest, or the shortest, the only one, or one of a category never seen before. The Showman told about the great popularity of the exhibits and of the need to act quickly so as not to miss the chance of a lifetime.

Freak shows were advertised as morally uplifting and educational, not for mere amusement. The show was made up of the "true life stories and facts regarding". The person received an identity that appealed to people's interest in the culturally strange, the primitive, the bestial, and the exotic. Promoters of the shows told the audience the person on exhibit came from a mysterious part of the world 'darkest Africa, the wilds of Borneo, a Turkish harem, an ancient Aztec kingdom'.

People were dressed to fit their story and instructed to behave accordingly. Prestigious titles such as "Captain," "Major," "General," "Prince," "King," "Princess," and "Queen" were given. Changing the birthplace was another technique of elevating status. Showmen sometimes told the public that the 'freak' was highly educated, spoke many languages, and had aristocratic hobbies such as writing poetry or painting. Having had an audience with royalty or person of high social ranking was also a common fabrication. The 'human curiosity' was in the same social circle as celebrities, not merely a scientific specimen. This elevated status also required dressing the part. People would be dressed in expensive jewelry, stylish clothes, top hats and tails, evening gowns, and furs.

Sometimes the Showman might work on the sympathies and compassion of the audience. They might tell the crowds how unhappy the person was, how the admission charge would help pay their expenses and relieve their suffering. But pity did not often coincide with the world of

amusement where people used their leisure time and spent their money to be entertained, not to confront human suffering.

References:

The Social Construction of Freaks Robert Bogdan 1996

Interview with Anthony Neilson

National Theatre of Scotland MP3 download embedded in website

<http://www.nationaltheatrescotland.com/content/default.asp?page=s272>

Consider

The freak show exploited human misery for profit.

All audiences are voyeuristic.

Magic realism offers new perspectives on reality.

Additional Resources



Review of first production at the Drum Theatre, Plymouth 2002

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2002/may/16/theatre.artsfeatures1>

Headlong Production video excerpts



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2R2v6IgTNC>



Reviews of the London Production 2009

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/edward-gants-amazing-feats-of-loneliness-soho-theatre-london-1659830.html>



Interview with Anthony Neilson *The Guardian*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/mar/03/anthony-neilson>

In-Yer-Face Theatre Company

<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/az.html>

In-Yer-Face-Theatre 2001 Aleks Siez

Victorian Freak Show historical overview

<http://www.nfa.dept.shef.ac.uk/history/shows/freaks.html>

The Elephant Man 1980 directed by David Lynch

Tells the story of Joseph Merrick who was rescued from a freak show.

The Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture

Nadja Durbach 2010 Recent study on the continuing popularity of freak shows in contemporary culture

Photographs by Diane Arbus – who photographed marginalised groups in US the 1950-60's

Melodramatic Gestures – overview of typical conventions of melodrama acting

<http://thecrushedtragedian.blogspot.com/2007/07/basic-melodramatic-stage-conventions.html>



AIM: To introduce and understand how the Victorian freak show is employed as a narrative device in *Edward Gant* to explore the theme of loneliness.

Loneliness



When do you feel lonely?

Describe the feeling of loneliness.

Find an image that represents loneliness.

Share & Discuss the collected images with others. What are the common elements?

Brainstorm the causes of loneliness.



Make a body sculpture tableau on theme of loneliness.

Freak Show



Research the history of freak shows.

Discuss why they were popular.

What is the contemporary equivalent of the Victorian freak show?

Consider Reality TV shows like *The Biggest Loser*, *Conviction Kitchen*, *Big Brother* and infotainment/documentaries like *Bodyshock*, *Extraordinary People*, *Embarassing Bodies*.

Discuss the ethics of these shows.

Reflection

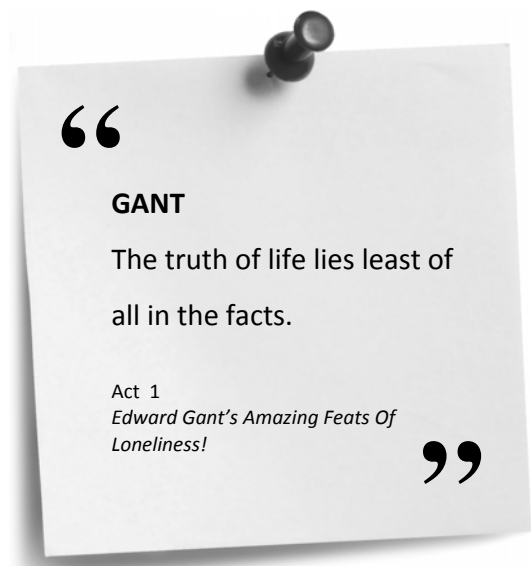
How much of these television program's agenda is based on humiliation?



Create a character based on your study of loneliness.

Write a life story for your character.

Give yourself a name with a title.



Consider

Physical Appearance

Body Language

Posture

Attitude

Mood

Internal thoughts & feelings

Special Skills/Talents



Devise & Present a freak show on the theme of Loneliness.

Consider

The Showman's opening address to the audience.



AIM: To create and present a character based on the Victorian theatre style of melodrama.



Research Victorian Theatre – acting style, theatres, plays and playwrights, audience, costume and make-up, set and production design, advertising, and performance reviews.

Define the term melodrama.

List key stylistic elements of a melodramatic performance.



Silent Movie

Brainstorm the words conflict and attraction.

Discuss conflict and attraction in relationships – mother and daughter, trapeze instructor and student, customer and salesperson, sister and sister, father and son, husband and wife, actor and director...

Devise 3 physical gestures for conflict.

Devise 3 physical gestures for attraction.



Devise a silent scene in the style of melodrama between two characters based on the theme of conflict and attraction.

Incorporate the devised physical gestures into the scene.

Present/Film the scene.

Reflection

How do the gestures communicate the intentions of the characters?

Why is gesture significant in the performing of melodrama?



Extensions:

Design/Make a costume for your silent movie character.

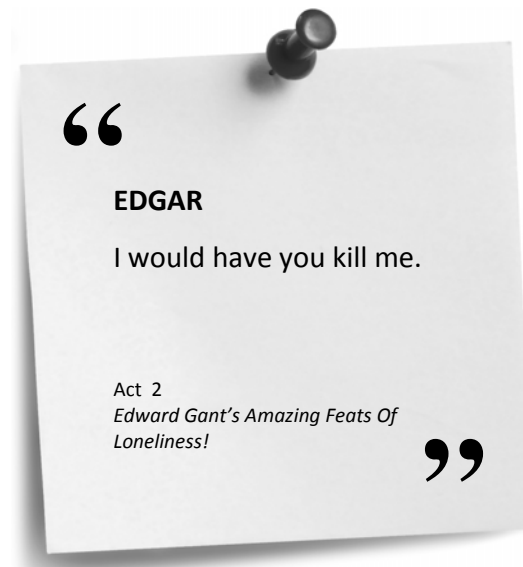
Design the face make-up.

Display the designs as part of a 'Victorian Theatre Exhibition'

When viewing the STC performance

How do the actors use gesture to communicate feelings and intentions?

How do the costume and make-up designs contribute to the actor's performance of character?





AIM: To understand and apply the conventions of magic realism in narrative fiction.

Magic Realism is a juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic. It is a hybrid genre drawing upon elements of expressionism and surrealism. Key features of Magic Realism are living dreams, sudden time shifts, and convoluted (often illogical) plotting. An element of surprise and shock is necessary in fracturing the division of reality from the non-real 'as if by magic' principle.



Research Magic Realism – in literature, films, art works



Pass the Story

Write on a large piece of paper the first line of your story.

Pass it onto the person next to you and write the next line.

Fold the paper over so the next person can only see the line written before them.

Continue writing one line per person and folding over the previous line.

Unfold and read the stories out aloud.

Discuss the stories – what was surprising, pleasing, confusing?



Extension

Nominate a theme – love, loneliness, cruelty

OR

Begin with an opening phrase – 'Once Upon a Time', 'Little by little', 'Step right up', 'Ladies and Gentlemen'

Unexpected Turn



Choose a story based on real life – a newspaper article, a memory of something you saw or heard, something that happened to you or to someone you know.

Write a story based on this real life incident and add an unexpected turn that leads the characters to a new perspective, a new understanding of the world or themselves.

Consider

Sudden time shift

Sudden location change

Moment of revelation – when a new truth is discovered.





AIM: To examine the play's use of rhetoric and Gant's role as orator.

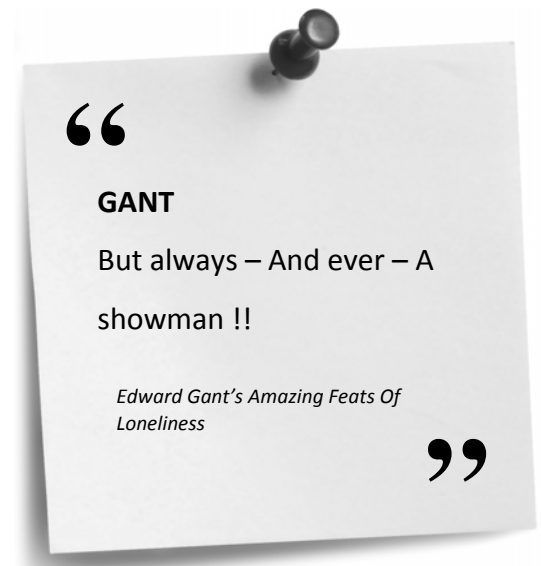
Rhetoric (Greek rhetor 'speaker in the assembly')

Rhetoric is the practice of persuasive speech.

In *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness* the 'speaker', has been replaced by the actor, and 'the assembly' has been transformed into the Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf 1.

Edward Gant as the showman speaks to you now!

Behold
the firmament's most precious jewel
around which does revolve
all the bodies of the Heavens
Edward Gant



What does the phrase 'gift of the gab' mean?

Which characters in the play might be said to have the 'gift of the gab'?

The Orator

- Orator: 1. One who delivers an oration.
2. An eloquent and skilled public speaker

Since all the activity and ability of an orator falls into five divisions ...he must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument; next go on to array them in the adornments of style; after that keep them guarded in his memory; and in the end deliver them with effect and charm.

Cicero *De oratore* 1.xxxi

Cicero's five divisions for good oratory:

Invention – relevant and appropriate choice of words and ideas

Arrangement – organization of the material into sound form

Style – appropriate manner for the occasion

Memory – ability to memorize the speech

Delivery – voice and articulation techniques for making the speech



List famous orators from history.

Examine a speech by a famous orator. For example, Barack Obama's Election Victory speech "Yes, we can", on winning the 2008 Presidential election.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfHbw3nOEIM&feature=relmfu>

Consider

Use of Language

Emotion

Structure of speech & arrangement of ideas

Body Language

Tone

Eye Contact

Pace & Rhythm

Relationship to the Audience

Volume

Delivery Style

Articulation & Diction



List the qualities of a good orator.

What is Gant's role and function as the orator in *Amazing Feats of Loneliness*?

Describe Gant's oratory style with reference to Cicero's 'five divisions' checklist.

Imagine the play without Gant as the head showman.

Voice & the Actor

'in drama the actors now count for more than the poets,
so it is in the contests of public life, owing to the defects
of our political institutions'

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*

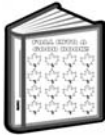
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Discuss this quote with reference to your understanding of the function and role of the actor in society.

In Greek theatre a good actor and a good voice were synonymous. The voice of the actor should encapsulate the range of human emotions and reflect the human condition. Acting and music were practiced as integrated art forms of sound.



Define your understanding of a 'good voice'.

Debate the merits of a politician having a good voice for public office.

Post – Performance Reflection



How do the actors use their voices to create character and to distinguish between different characters when playing multiple roles?

Describe Gant's voice.



Examine Gant's opening address to the audience below.

Read the speech for sense and meaning.

What is the story he is telling?

What devices is Gant using to persuade his audience to stay and listen?

GANT Ladies and Gentleman,
 as some of you may know,
 my name – is Edward Gant;
 Prodigy, Soldier, Traveller, Poet
 but always and ever
 a Showman.
 As such, it has been my mission
 to bring you the most wonderful and
 bizarre that the world has to offer.

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But what I bring you now is no mere Freak
Show.

You will gasp, yes, gasp, and you will marvel
And you will see your share of grotesquerie.

But the deformities on show this evening
Are not the deformities of the frame,
But those of the heart and mind.

I have scoured every continent to find these
most astonishing testaments.
Alas, I cannot put before you the subjects themselves
but I will – with the help of my players – attempt
to represent their tales to you as truly as time
and talent will allow.

So without further ado, I present
For your astonishment,
the Extraordinary! The Terrible!
The AMAZING FEATS OF LONELINESS !!



Read the speech aloud for perfect articulation and diction.

Exaggerate the sounds.

Be precise.



Read the speech again to express various emotions.

Explore different emotions – joy, fear, anger, sorrow.



Read the speech as expressive of a dominant personality.

Explore different attitudes and personality traits – timidity, laziness, stupidity, and arrogance.

What effect does personality have upon articulation and the tone of voice?

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Read the speech for situation – as if a secret being communicated to a friend, a public statement for a huge crowd.

What other changes can you make besides volume in these contrasting situations?



Extension

Compare and contrast Gant's opening and closing addresses to the audience.

References:

Public and Performance In The Greek Theatre, Peter D Arnott

The Actor At Work, Robert Benedetti

Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, J. A. Cuddon



AIM: To examine *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness*' blending of melodrama, black comedy and magic realism.

Melodrama (Greek 'song drama')

The origins of melodrama coincide with the development of opera in the late sixteenth century. Opera began as an attempt to revive classical Greek and Roman tragedy. Combining music and drama became a distinguishing feature of 'melody-drama'.



Key features of melodrama:

Song & Music

Extravagant emotional displays

Spectacle

Extremes of character – evil V's good, hero

Sensationalism

V's villain

Violence

Elaborate dialogue



Discuss the use of music, song and poetry in the production.

How do the songs and poems contribute to eliciting an emotional response in the characters?
The audience?



Drawing upon your pre-production research notes on melodrama and magic realism

Select three moments in the play that reflect a use of melodrama.

Select three moments of magic realism that occur in the production.

Choose a moment in the play you would describe as black comedy.

'Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness deals with serious issues in a highly theatrical and entertaining manner'.



Discuss this statement with reference to the principles of 'In-yer-face' theatre to engage audiences through shock tactics.

Extreme Characters



Choose two contrasting characters from the play. For example, the sisters Campanetti and Sanzonetta Tutti, Edgar Thomas Dawn and Ranjeev the Uncomplicated, Nicholas Ludd and the Bear.

List the individual characters qualities – note similarities and differences between the two characters.

Consider

Physical Appearance

Behaviour & Attitude

Voice

Costume & Make-up

Emotional Display

Dialogue

Spectacle & Elaborate Dialogue

Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness revels in Victorian Theatre spectacle, and emotional excess accompanied by elaborate dialogue.



Read the scene excerpt below aloud in pairs.



What do you notice about the character's use of language and emotional tone?

Describe the writing style.

Consider

Stage Directions

Punctuation

Dramatic Irony

Word Usage – use of repetition and sound form

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THE SOUND OF THUNDER: SMOKE BILLOWS ONTO THE STAGE
A FIGURE IN A CLOAK DRIFTS ON. IT IS GANT

GANT : Nicholas Ludd !!

LUDD: Who are you?

GANT: I am the Phantom of the Dry! I appear to thespians whose lines
have escaped them ; I live a whole lifetime in those seconds of
helplessness and pass, like a butterfly, when they end!

LUDD: Have you come to me with my lines, Phantom?

GANT: Have I Dan; I bring instead a lesson.

LUDD: What good is a lesson to me now, when the audience is hanging on my
words?

GANT: The only thing this audience will be hanging is you, my friend, for your crimes
against poetry !!

PAUSE

LUDD: I think they would rather my poems than your whimsy.
Wouldn't you, Ladies and Gentlemen?



Rehearse the scene

Add extreme character traits

Pay attention to gesture, voice, emotion, and physical appearance

Perform the scene

Direct your audience to respond to Ludd's question – who do they prefer, Ludd or Gant?

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Extension

Drawing on the your character study of loneliness from pre-production notes

Write & Present a dialogue scene in the style of the scene excerpt.

Have your character of loneliness interact with a contrasting character – a villain, a hero, a long lost love.

References: *Dictionary Of Literary Terms And Literary Theory* J A Cuddon



AIM: To develop skills in performing and evaluating character performance in *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats Of Loneliness*.

Edward Gant's Amazing Feats Of Loneliness is a world of extremes where there are unequal divisions in society and the disadvantaged and vulnerable are open to being exploited and mistreated.



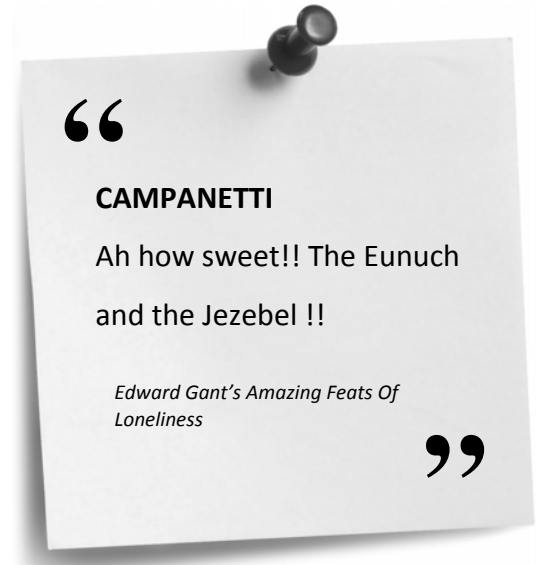
Who was your favourite character in the play?

Give three reasons why you liked this character.

Which character didn't you like? Why?

What was your selected characters' dramatic purpose?

Consider the play's intention to draw attention to human cruelty and suffering.



Style & Performance

You cannot act a style; true style results only from doing the specific job at hand in the manner demanded by the form of the play.

Robert Benedetti



Discuss this quote with reference to the acting styles employed in the production.

How does the style of performance complement the dramatic form of the play?

Believability & Character

Edward Gant's Amazing Feats Of Loneliness is not a realistic play, the expression of character is heightened and the story does not attempt to represent everyday real life.



How believable were the characters?

Does believability rely on the character being 'true to life'?

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How important is it for the actor to understand their character's dramatic purpose?



Explore believability & character in performance in this scene excerpt.

Edgar Thomas Dawn & Louisa von Kettelmeim-Kurstein Frond are in love but their relationship is abruptly ended with Louisa's untimely death.

Read the scene in pairs.

EDGAR: I'm asking for your hand –

PAUSE

LOUISA: In marriage?

EDGAR: In marriage , yes; my sweetheart, my darling, my sunshine and showers.

PAUSE

LOUISA: I have no words.

EDGAR: You need only one.

LOUISA: And you don't mind about my?

SHE LOOKS DOWN AT HERSELF

EDGAR: I wouldn't have them any other way.

SHE SUDDENLY EMBRACES HIM

LOUISA: Edgar, my love! I do, I will. Yes!

My love.

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EDGAR: I think I have never been happier than now.

And it seems all nature does agree!

LOUISA: Ow!

SHE TOUCHES HER NECK.

Discuss



Why is Louisa's death significant in Edgar's character journey?

What is Louisa's dramatic purpose? Edgar's?

What is the dramatic purpose of the scene in the context of the whole play?

How does this scene contribute to the theme of loneliness in the play?



How will you approach this scene as an actor?

How will you achieve believability without compromising the play's heightened and extreme performance style?

Note the stage directions - how will you play these?



Rehearse the scene in style of

- silent movie

- opera

- television soap opera

- realistic drama



Decide & Perform the scene in the style you feel is most appropriate to the play's form and the believability of your character.



Discuss & Evaluate the different versions and stylistic choices made by the performers.

Reference: *The Actor At Work*, Robert Benedetti

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AIM: To understand and appreciate how the costume and production design elements contribute to the creation of the imaginary world of the play.

Romance Was Born costume designers Alan Sales and Anna Plunket are inspired by stories. Developing themes and ideas from stories they feel a connection with, the dynamic design duo have created controversial and uncompromising works.

Their 2010 Fashion Week collection 'Renaissance Dinosaur' was inspired by Dinosaurs, Galileo and the Renaissance.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NM1nQXKqfXo>

And more recently at the Rosemount Australian Fashion week, 2011, *The Oracle* was based on the animation film *The Never Ending Story*.



<http://stcblog.posterous.com/busy-bees>

'The aim of the theatre costume designer is to breathe life into the characters'.



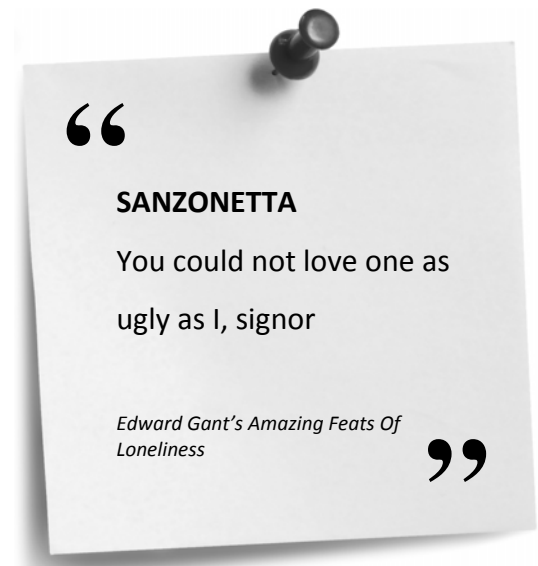
Discuss this statement with reference to Romance Was Born's approach to costume design for *Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness*.



List the key features of your favourite character costume from the production.

How well integrated are the costume designs with the production design? Do the costume design elements appear cohesive or random?

Select a favourite moment in the performance where you felt all the design and production elements were working together.



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Consider

Lighting

Staging

Sound & Music

Set

Design Brief

Edward Gant's Amazing Feats Of Loneliness is concerned with opposites and the injustices of life's imbalances between the loved and unloved, rich and poor, fortunate and the unfortunate. Take your inspiration from *Romance Was Born*. Be bold, brave and willing to give birth to new ideas!



Brainstorm the theme of love – write down, draw or collect images, words, objects associated with love.

Brainstorm the theme of loneliness.

Interplay between the contrary themes of love and loneliness.



Design costumes for two characters in the style of *Romance Was Born*, based on the theme of love and loneliness.



Choose a story you like – a film, image, song, book, poem, fairytale, real life news story.

Brainstorm for key themes, words, images, sounds, objects and textures associated with your story.



Storyboard the story in five frames.

Who are your characters – animate or inanimate?

Where is your story set?

When is your story taking place?

Explore opposites in the story.

Consider how you might represent conflict, opposition and differences between characters.



Select a key idea or image for your main character.

Create a collage to capture that key idea – use found objects, magazines, draw, cut out colours, shapes, textures, images.

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Design a stage costume for your character based on your key idea research.

Consider

Shapes

Line

Fabric

Symbols

Colour

Basics – functional and able to be worn by the actor in performance

Display your costume design.

Discuss & Compare designs.

For more information on Romance Is Born:

Alan Sales & Anna Plunkett



http://www.ahigherlearning.com.au/content_common/pg-luke-sales-romance-was-born.seo

http://publish.vogue.com.au/fashion_central/people/designers/anna_plunkett_and_luke_sales



ROMANCE WAS BORN.

A love of kitsch Australiana, crafty construction and fine tailoring help Australia's sentimental favourites Romance Was Born to turn the dreaded cultural cringe on its head. Design duo Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales have an unstoppable passion that permeates their designs and is vital to the garments construction, combining seamlessly with their technical pattern-making wizardry. Romance Was Born collections are irreverent and fun loving, fabric and colour combinations are what inspire their playful outfits where sparkle, texture and bold prints jostle together in a harmonious jamboree of style. The past three ranges have seen the design duo collaborate with celebrated Australian artist Del Kathryn Barton, giving Romance Was Born an exclusive treasure trove of digitally printed fabrics. Their lavish aesthetic often includes a pastiche of craft work like appliqué, tie-dying or crochet; these are the fabulous hand detailed features that set their label apart from the flippant trends of the fashion madding crowd.

Luke and Anna met studying fashion at East Sydney Technical College. A few fun-filled party nights later and the creative pair became the best of friends, so a dream of starting a label together was formed – Romance Was Born. Fresh after graduating Anna and Luke were selected to attend The Fourth International Support Awards in Italy. On the other side of the world, they famously turned down internships with Galliano; their fashion fairytale had another date with destiny.

The drama and individuality behind the effervescent design work of Romance Was Born has seen them able to attract and dress the music industry's finest show ponies. Anna and Luke approached Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs to dress her in a 'one off' creation for her 2003 Australian tour – a dazzling red tulle and lace halter-top bursting Jim Henson style with oodles of googy eyes. Since that brave approach Romance Was Born have gone on to dress an impressive A-list of performers – including Cyndi Lauper, Debbie Harry, Lilly Allen, M.I.A and Aussie superstars The Veronicas. They were also commissioned to make costumes for the Melbourne band Architecture in Helsinki. The costumes featured in the band's film clip, had elements of puppetry and glowed-in-the-dark.

A stellar hit at last year's Rosemount Australian Fashion Week, the Romance Was Born duo have always been stylist and editorial darlings; but their solo RAFW parade established the designers as supremely talented mavericks of style. The S/S Renaissance Dinosaur collection was a blend of fashion and fantasy, a melding of prehistoric creatures with Elizabethan shapes and styling. Set within an incense-filled hall at Hogwarts-like Sydney University, the show was as far removed from Harry and Hermione as could possibly be, opened by Amazonian uber model Alexandra Agoston O'Connor with her thigh-high gold boots and black mesh bodysuit embroidered with a spangly gold cross. The RWB signature fantastical creations emerged down the decorative runway, with wildly colourful prints and sequins, talon length nails and bejeweled faces and headpieces sparkling with elaborate jewels. It wasn't just hype and costumery; this collection was wearable art.

Romance Was Born's entirely Australian production adds another layer of integrity to their label. They insist on supporting the dwindling Australian manufacturing industry and in an industry renowned for compromise and cutting corners – they never do. Their love of Australia has helped them remain honest to their brand's distinctive style; our vibrant Australian characters and diverse landscape is a source of constant inspiration but there is nothing daggy or jingoistic about Romance Was Born. They are flamboyant couturiers whose avant-garde use of fabric and colour is restrained only by the limits of their own imagination, which is boundless. First stop Australia, next stop – The Universe. **C**



Age 4-years-old, the label that is!
City of origin Surry Hills.
Favourite piece from your current collection? Knitted kimonos, we have wanted to do one for ages.
Your humble beginnings in the business of fashion? Working from each other's lounge room.
Something we wouldn't have heard about Romance was Born? We both love Japan!
If a Romance garment could talk, what would it say? Love me.
Biggest event on the 2011 calendar? Fashion Week plus the opening of the Sydney Theatre Company's Edward Gants Amazing Feats of Loneliness. We're doing the costumes for it, very busy summer!!!!
Famous clients? Recently... M.I.A, Cate Blanchett, Sia, Karen O (Yeah Yeah Yeahs) and our favourite, Natasha Khan from the band 'Bat for Lashes'.
Greatest perk? Travel.
Toughest part of your job? Focus.
The best piece of advice you've been given? Focus.
No Romance garment is finished without... a good home.
Best praise from the media about Romance? Sartorialist and fashion journalist Godfrey Deeny said our Spring Summer show 2010 was the best he had ever seen outside the major four.
Dream model for your garments? Alexandra Agoston. We met her in Paris two years ago and nagged her to come to Australia, so the next year she opened our show for the Renaissance Dinosaur collection. As far as Aussie models go, we have loved her since fashion school. Amazing!
Why should there be a Romance was Born piece in every gal's wardrobe? Because there's something for everyone.