

‘The Director is Dead’

Reflection Statement

Preface: It is ironic that this document exists, as the very purpose of my major work is to demonstrate that my personal influences and creative process as an author should not impact a responder’s understanding or appreciation of the text and its meaning. However, I understand that the Extension 2 course demands a thorough explanation of authorial intent. Perhaps because its syllabus was constructed before anyone had the chance to be impacted by my work.

The Director is Dead is an Absurdist assassination of inherent meaning. Its inception occurred when I observed a connection between the oft quoted phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, "God is dead," and Roland Barthes' assertion in his essay *The Death of the Author*, often summarised as "the author is dead". Upon further investigation, I discovered that these two Post-Modern ideas have far more in common than what has been previously realised, with their combined rejection of inherent meaning being an essential concept that must be considered in a society that is plagued by ideological divisions. By aligning an author's influence on a text with God's influence on the universe, my Major Work serves to effectively combine these two ideas in order to convey one synthesised message, "God is dead, the author is dead, so stop looking for them and go your own way. You'll be much better off."

The play's development began as an attempt to compose a text that criticised the ideologies that lie at the core of the world's Abrahamic religions, primarily the belief that their individual doctrines are the soul truth in the universe, and that those who disagree or follow a different creed shall be met with damnation. This subject was a matter of personal interest, as I am a passionate secularist and strongly believe that such attitudes play a significant role in conflicts the world over, and therefore must be challenged. In order to supplement my own personal criticisms, I consulted the essential writings of 'New-Atheism', specifically *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, and *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* by Christopher Hitchens. These readings served to provide me with further insight into the values of atheism, chiefly those concerning the value of reason and constructing one's understanding of the universe using tangible, empirical evidence. These values eventually became embodied by the character Torvald, who defends his lack of definite answers by stating, "What matters is I'll know that I have personally found my answers to be true, rather than relying on some mysterious director to give them to me."

However, as the work developed, I found myself moving away from specific criticism of religion, and towards the idea of the absence of inherent truth and meaning in all schools of thought, with particular emphasis on the intolerance that comes as an inevitable result of devout belief in a singular truth. This led me to discover the Post-Modern literary theory of Perspectivism popularised by Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author*. The influence of this essay on my completed work extends far beyond its title, shifting the focus of the project to include contextual analysis and its role in literary criticism as the supposed sole method for determining the 'correct' meaning of a text. My work agrees with Barthes and his statement, "We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God).", and demonstrates the repercussions that occur when that "message" is allowed to dictate thought.

My decision to use the textual form of an Absurdist play to explore these concepts was influenced by a variety of factors. Primarily, I was captivated by the Theatre of the Absurd and saw it as a brilliant tool for engaging with controversial and existentialist ideas in a unique, engaging format. My first exposure to the form was *Life Without Me* by Daniel Keene. In addition to acquainting me with the basic conventions of Absurdism, the play introduced me to the idea of using a single, simplistic space to represent a much larger, more abstract concept. When designing my own Absurdist stage, I took inspiration from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, a text I studied through the Extension 1 English HSC course. It demonstrated the ability of a minimalist setting to convey an atmosphere of existential dread, something which I then made sure to incorporate into my own work. In addition, the dilapidated stage of my play was also designed to play a role in the debate between my characters, representing a broken world that is subject to the Epicurean paradox which questions whether an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent God can exist in such a world.

However, the Absurdist text from which I drew most inspiration was Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the play which, on a cosmetic level, is most like my own. This is the case because I fell in love with Stoppard's use of witty repartee between characters to discuss serious issues such as the nature of death. I knew that I wanted the issues of my play to be discussed through such debates and thus took notes on Stoppard's comic timing and word play before utilising such devices in my own work. I also consulted a number of Absurdist scripts from Young Writer's Showcase to ensure my work met the requirements of the Extension 2 Course. Of these texts, '*It's your funeral*' by Marcus Keanu Hoi was most useful, as it demonstrated that a one act play taking place in a single unchanging space without scene transitions is entirely possible provided the interactions between characters is engaging enough, thus reaffirming my decision to rely on the wit of my dialogue to further the action of the play.

Throughout the composition process, my play was not designed with a particular target audience in mind, as my primary focus was the issues being discussed, and ensuring they were discussed in a witty and sophisticated manner. However due to the sophisticated nature of the text's form and its divisive subject matter, it would likely appeal to well-read, progressive individuals with an interest in events that specialise in hosting small scale, experimental pieces such as the Antidote festival at the Sydney Opera House. The practical elements of the play are well suited for such events, as the stage is minimalist in design and the only other elements required are two actors and a book.

The major work also served as an effective extension of my studies in the Advanced English course. My study of the *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller in Module C provided me with further insight into the consequences of ideological divisions and how they can be represented in texts. This played a significant role in determining the conclusion of my play, as I was initially concerned as to whether the death of Roderigo was too serious and melodramatic. Miller

reminded me of the lengths people will go to in order to protect their beliefs, especially if those beliefs are self-serving. All of these elements were incorporated into the play's dramatic climax, adding authenticity to the motives and reactions of both characters.

My study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Module B demonstrated to me the specific issues that are intrinsic to the human experience and how they may be represented effectively in a text to ensure the textual integrity of said text. This lead me to re-evaluate and adjust my discussions of concepts in order to make sure they were not too contextually specific in their relevance. Thus, my play became an allegory, indirectly discussing issues of theology, philosophy and literature in a manner that dramatically reduced the impact of my own personal context on the work. Thereby also ensuring that my Major Work remained true to the principles it was aiming to convey, in that my personal experience as an author does not affect the text's ability to convey meaning.

Overall, I am immensely satisfied with my Major Work. *The Director is Dead* combines my love of theology, Absurdist theatre and literature into one package that serves to fulfil a purpose that I believe is sorely needed in contemporary society. It acts as an effective integration and representation of several different academic theories, whilst also remaining entertaining and witty throughout its duration. The independent research that went into the project not only taught me more about the subjects of religion and philosophy in which I was interested, but also lead me to discover a new understanding of literature and its role in conveying meaning to its responders.

Try your best to forget the contents of this document, won't you? Because whether you thought this play was about God, or Barthes, or something else entirely, it was really about proving that no matter what you thought, you were absolutely right.

There is no one right answer.