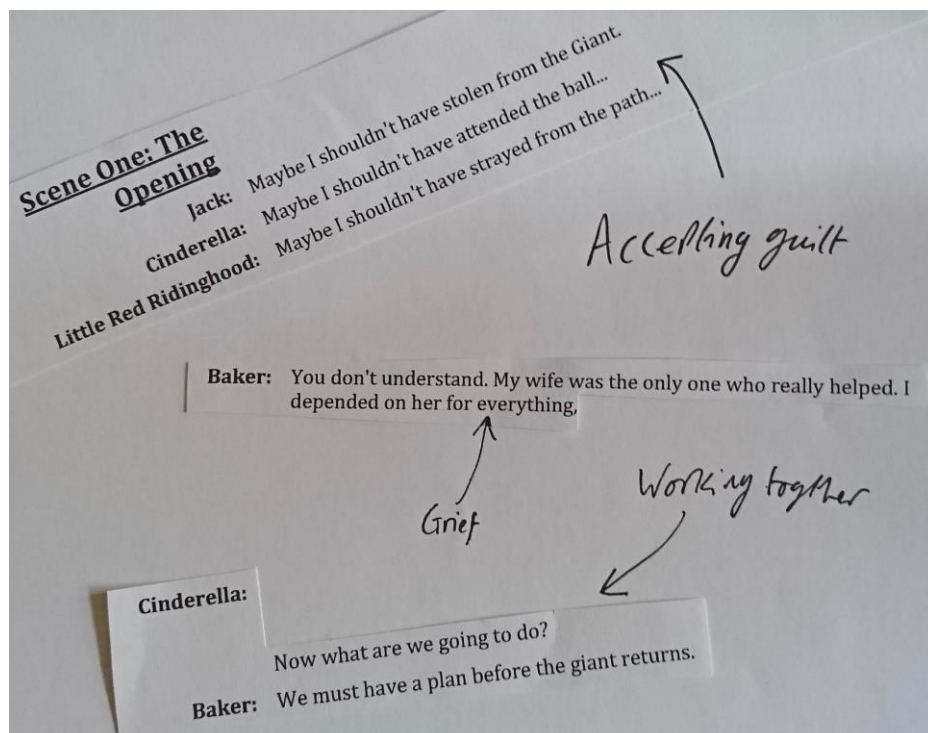


Katie Mitchell – INTO THE WOODS

Into the Woods is a musical of many themes. It explores these themes within the context of the world of fairy tales and features many intertwining and complex characters. It was written by Steven Sondheim, a renowned lyricist and writer of musicals. The extract of 'Into the Woods' we chose was from the end of the play. When analysing the events in the lead up to our extract, we observed that the main characters (The Baker, Cinderella, Jack and Red Ridinghood) have all had their original wishes realised but they still want more. The Giant has terrorised them all leaving many loved ones and friends connected to the main character's dead. In our extract, the characters are grieving, the main four all begin to accept their guilt for the part they played. They realise that they now have to band together to fight the giant.

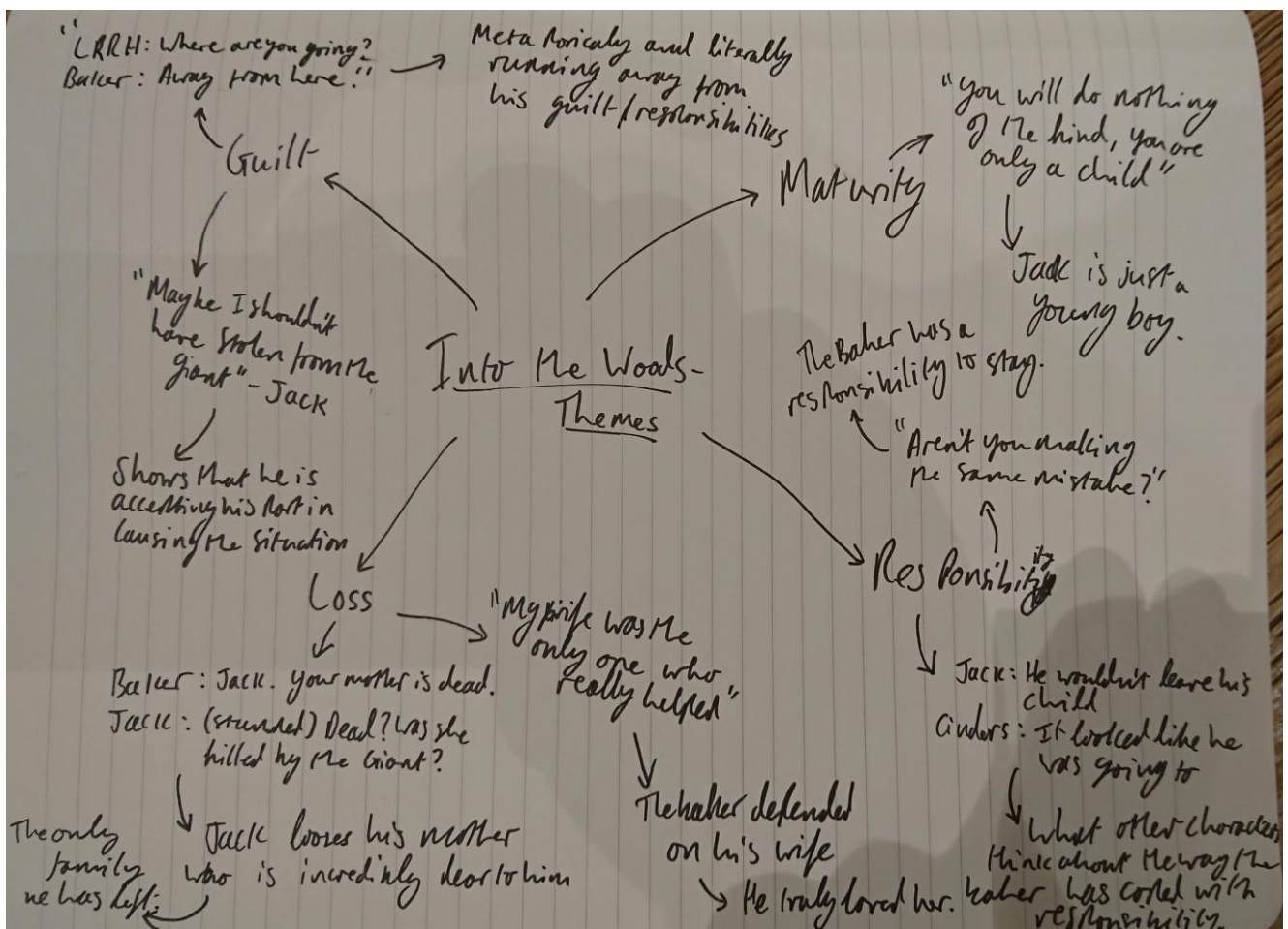


The characters I played were supporting characters to the main four, but were equally important to the plot development of the play. The Baker's Father (or mysterious man) appears with the purpose of helping the Baker accept both his guilt and his responsibilities. We added the narrator in at the beginning and end to frame the piece and help keep the sense of fairy tale folk fiction, made famous by the Grimm brothers in the 1800s. I was hooked by the relevance of the themes in 'Into the Woods', despite the fictional context of the interweaving tales. In the original production of 'Into the Woods', the role of the mysterious man and the narrator were always played by the same person. This created intentional links between characters who were both observers of the story, never properly getting dragged in to the narrative. What this creates is a unified, external force that is there to both guide and judge the main characters. It is significant as it then helps to guide them through the themes of the piece showing clearly the difference between right and wrong. With this in mind, we decided that it would also make sense for me to play Cinderella's Prince, who is in our reinterpretation never seen, but is heard in the form of a letter. He again is only observing from the outside and not getting fully involved with the events of the story.

In 1697 in France Charles Perrault had published what would become classic fairy tales for children, including 'Cinderella', 'Puss in Boots' and 'Little Red Riding Hood', but his versions of the stories were meant for sophisticated aristocratic families. The Grimms' attitude was entirely different. They believed that folk stories, handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another over centuries untold, enshrined the fundamental ideas, beliefs and reactions to human experience of 'the folk'. Expressing their hopes and joys, fears and sorrows, the tales were profoundly significant for children and grown-ups alike. The brothers took stories from Perrault and many others, but their versions were frequently different.

<https://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/publication-grimm%E2%80%99s-fairy-tales>

We chose Katie Mitchell as our practitioner as we were excited about the possibilities that came with the use of multimedia whilst still using some techniques of Stanislavski. For Mitchell the entire process must be done in a certain way. Through my research I found her process can be broken down into two key sections: exploration and then creation. Exploration is all about deciding on the key themes of the piece, creating a historical context and setting and then really investigating the characters so that they knit together and are both convincing and realistic (IM_1 VIDEO). When we started to piece together our reinterpretation, it was important we used Mitchell's features in the process. Therefore, I began by looking at the script. Before we even looked at context I decided to isolate four main ideas that we would focus on in the piece. These were: Maturity, Loss, Responsibility...



We used these ideas and we were clearly focused and understood the important themes to get across. Next we looked at context. We knew we still wanted to keep it in a fairly similar time, but wanted to change the setting. One factor that informed our decision was whether the various 'magical' aspects (such as the birds that Cinderella talks to) would actually be magic, or whether we would seek a more logical explanation. It was at that point that the idea of setting it in an asylum came to us. We could put any 'magic' down to the mental instability of the characters and it gave us some interesting prospects for the use multimedia and the staging of the production. I did some research into the history of Asylums in the UK, and found out that in the 1800s, women were often put in there by their husbands for being disobedient. This worked to provide context as to why the baker's wife was in there. We also found out that it was not uncommon for orphans to be put in asylums thus explaining why we find Little Red Riding hood in the establishment.

Victorian women and asylum reform

A woman who rebelled against Victorian domesticity risked being declared insane and committed to an [asylum](#). This was usually at her husband's or father's request, and she generally had no right to contest or appeal. Women were further disempowered by [moral treatment](#) once locked away. This cornerstone of Victorian psychiatry claimed male dominance was therapeutic. The doctor ruled the asylum like a father ruled his family.



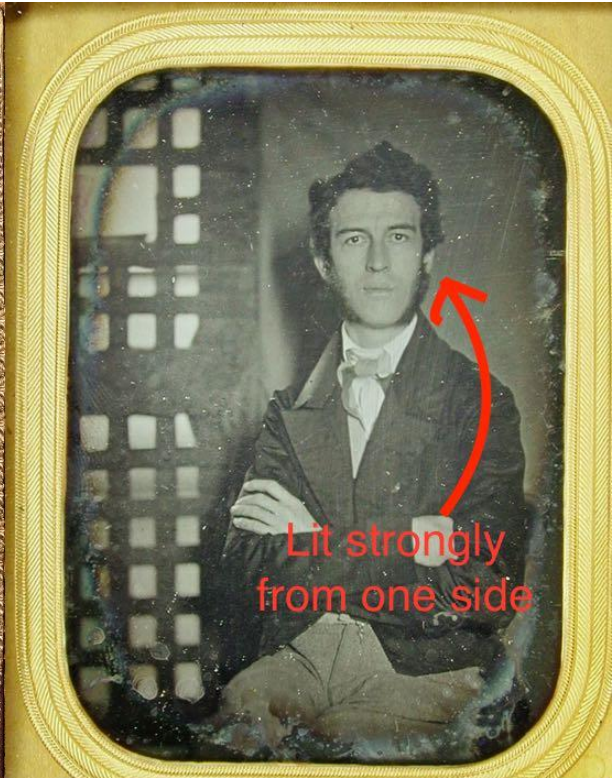
The spread of asylums between 1800 and 1900 surprisingly enabled a few women to be heard in politics. [Elizabeth Packard](#) won freedom after being confined to an asylum by her husband. She wrote a bestselling exposé, and advocated asylum reform and women's rights. [Dorothea Dix](#) lobbied successfully for public asylums throughout the US and UK. Some scholars argue Victorian readers became more outraged by the mistreatment of 'madwomen' than the mistreatment of 'madmen'. This may have been a response to the stereotyped 'madwoman in the attic' in novels of the time.

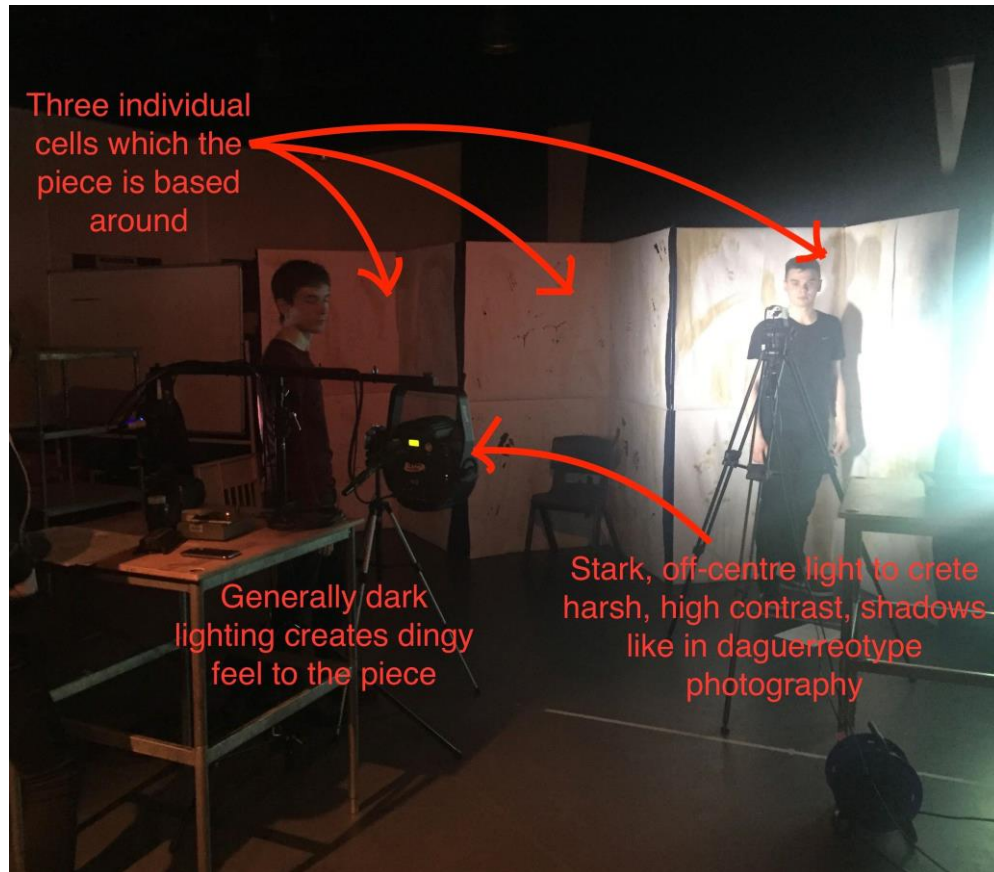
Hysteria and psychoanalysis

Nearly all Victorian physicians considered women more fragile and sensitive than men. They believed women were more susceptible to [nervous breakdown](#) and [neurasthenia](#). The classic 'female malady' was [hysteria](#). This diagnosis covered strange behaviours and nerve symptoms found most often in women, but also sometimes in 'feminine' men. The most commonly prescribed treatment for an unmarried woman showing signs of hysteria was to find a husband.

<http://broughttolife.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/themes/menalthandillness/womanandpsychiatry>

From this we decided to set our piece in 1860. With the context decided, we could then start to make technical decisions. In an interview with Mitchell about her production of 'Some Trace of Her', she describes how research into the photographer of the time has influenced her technical design choices (IM_2 VIDEO). Therefore, I conducted my own research, looking at daguerreotype photography from the time, we picked out that the key features were lighting and pose. We then tried to emulate this. We used what we learnt from doing this to inform how we lit the actual performance. It was also at this point that we had the idea of having the stage based around 3 'cells' and all the action happening in and around them. We thought that this would work really well to get the setting across and give the dingy feeling we were after.





It was important for us to rewrite parts of the script to fit with this context and to reword the singing to sound more like natural speech. After this, we went through it bit by bit breaking it down into individual moments, or 'events' which indicated where the characters intentions changed in our performance.

Events

An event is the moment in the action when a change occurs and this change affects everyone present. 'Event' is really just a simple word for something that happens regularly in life. We regularly find ourselves trying to achieve one thing when something happens which changes what we want to achieve. It can happen when we are alone or it can happen when we are with other people. For example, a couple are on the sofa happily discussing a film they have just seen. Suddenly the man puts his head in the woman's lap, and says 'I can't go on like this'. The woman freezes for a second and takes a sip of her wine. She then sits up and pushes the man's head off her lap. 'I think you should go,' she says. 'I'm so sorry,' says the man. The event is the moment when the man puts his head in the woman's lap and says 'I can't go on with this' and it radically alters what they both want. Initially they both want to have a nice evening. After the event the woman wants the man to leave and the man wants the woman to forgive him.

Events have a whole variety of different forms: they can be sudden (such as if someone threw a stone through a window during a family meal) or gradual (as when a group of people in a remote building slowly realise there is a stalker outside). This 'gradual' event might start with the barely audible crunch of footsteps on the gravel outside and end with the definite sound of someone trying to unpick the lock of the front door. The responses that people have to these events can be slow or sudden, strong or weak.

'A Director's Craft' by Katie Mitchell

Here we brought in a Katie Mitchell technique and worked out the intentions of the characters in each of the 'events'. I made an example for the character of the Baker which made clear to the entire group what the purpose of each moment was and created a clear structure to this scene.

'Intention' is the word that describes what a character wants and whom they want it from. In this process, the characters' intentions only change at events and the analysis of intentions will therefore evolve naturally from your study of events. Before rehearsals begin, try to work out exactly what each character wants in between every event in the play – and from whom.

'A Director's Craft' by Katie Mitchell

Scene 1 1

in straight line g4.

collected a mirror from the giant's lair.

JUST AWAY FROM THIS BUNCH
AND THE GLOOM
AND THE DOOM
AND THE BOOM
CRUNNNCHI

*Mirror frame
Portrait at the begging
becomes frame of mirror for
mirror hit.*

(she disappears)

*He accept
guilt
but Baker
doesn't*

Jack: Maybe I shouldn't have stolen from the Giant.

Little Red Ridinghood: Maybe I shouldn't have strayed from the path...

all look at him

Cinderella: Maybe I shouldn't have attended the ball...

Baker: Yes, maybe you shouldn't have.

(BAKER begins to exit)

Jack: Where are you going?

giving up

Baker: Away from here.

24mm

Little Red Ridinghood: But you said we had to find our way out of this together.

Baker: It doesn't matter whether we're together or apart. *give baby*

Jack: We need your help.

Baker: You don't understand. My life was the only one who really helped. I depended on her for everything. (moves further)

Baker-Kel

Cinderella: You would leave your child?

15

Baker: (sad) My child will be happier in the arms of a princess. *light just on eye*

(BAKER exits)

Cinderella: But wait...

(CINDERELLA, JACK, LITTLE RED RIDINGHOOD exit)

(SET CHANGE MYSTERIOUS MAN appears and startles the BAKER)

Baker: I thought you were dead. *Mirror*

Mysterious Man: Not completely. Are we ever?

Baker: As far as I'm concerned you are.

Scene 2

*Baby not
Baker's*

Individual Events

Baker's Intention: To make Jack, Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood feel guilty for their actions.

Jack: Maybe I shouldn't have stolen from the Giant.

Cinderella: Maybe I shouldn't have attended the ball... *(Repeated)*

Little Red Ridinghood: Maybe I shouldn't have strayed from the path...

Baker: Yes, maybe you shouldn't have.

Baker's intention: To disown Little Red Riding Hood

Little Red Riding Hood : Where are you going?

Baker: Away from here.

Little Red Ridinghood: But you said we had to find a way out of this together.

Baker: It doesn't matter whether we're together or apart.

Baker's intention: To confide in Little Red Riding Hood.

Little Red Riding Hood: We need your help.

Baker: You don't understand. My wife was the only one who really helped. I depended on her for everything.

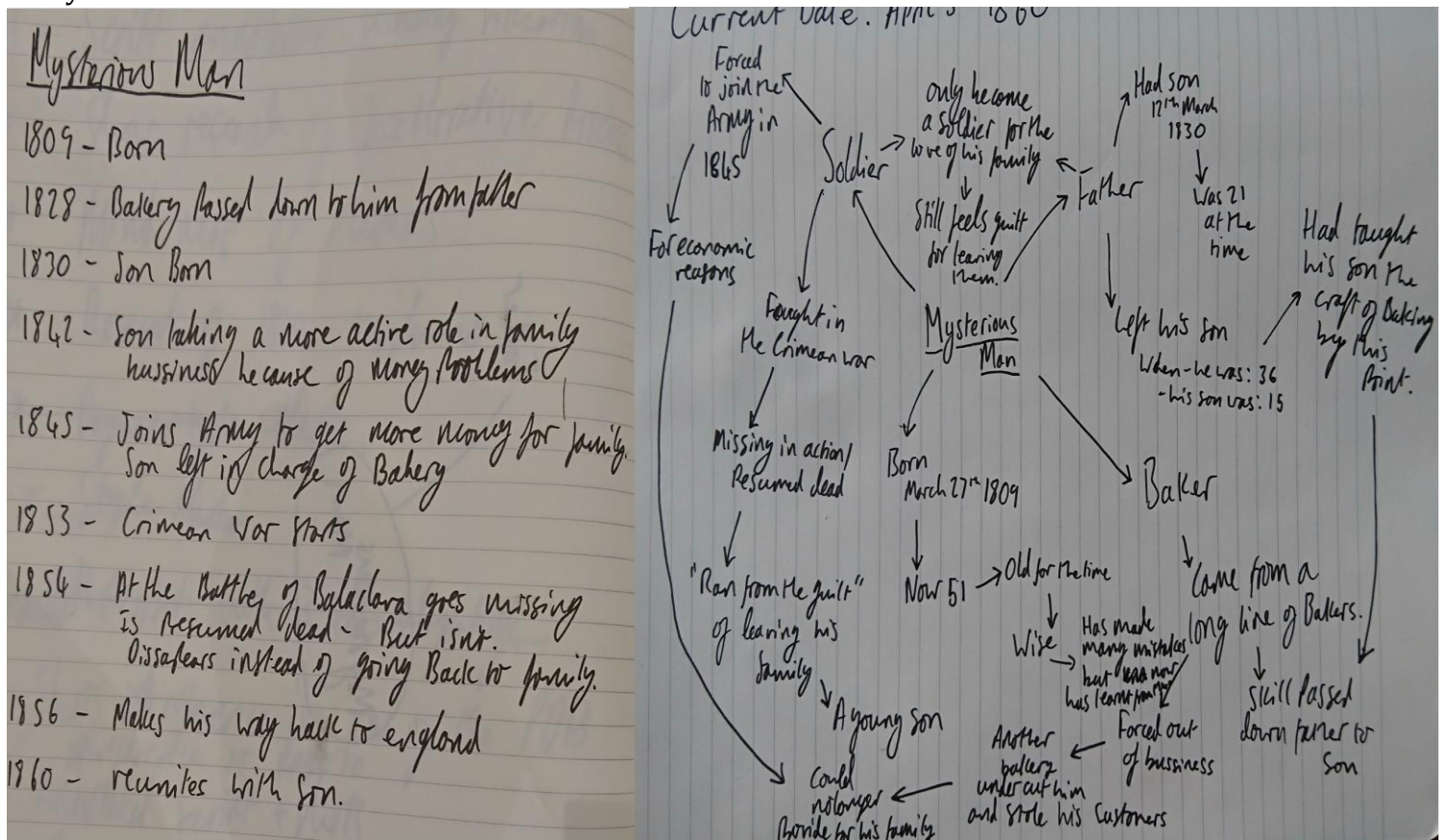
Baker's intention: To threaten Little Red Riding Hood.

Little Red Riding Hood: You would leave your child?

Baker: (sad) My child, that is not my child, that child will be happier in the arms of the matron.

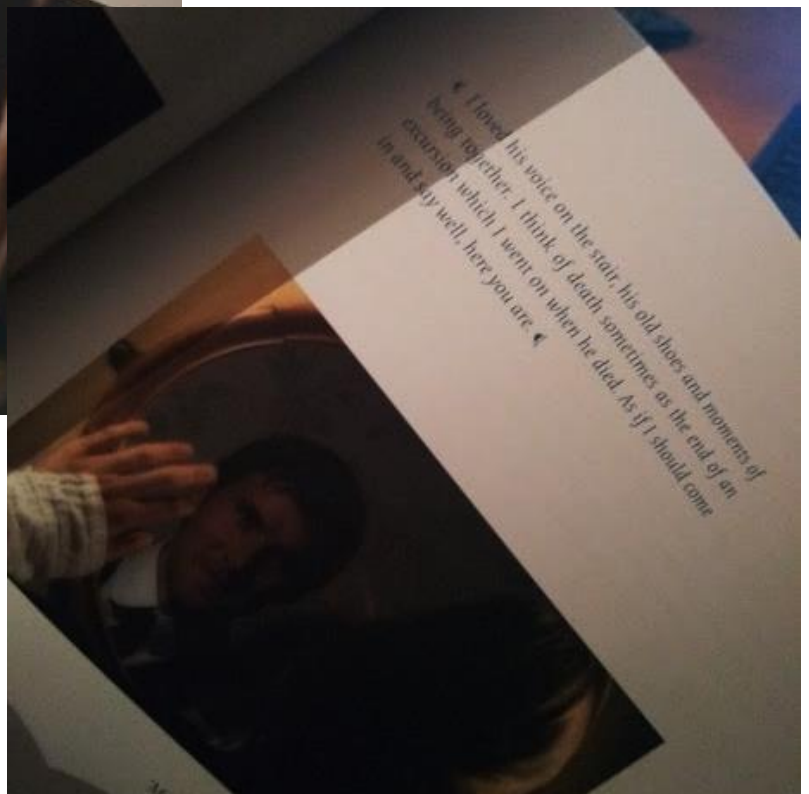
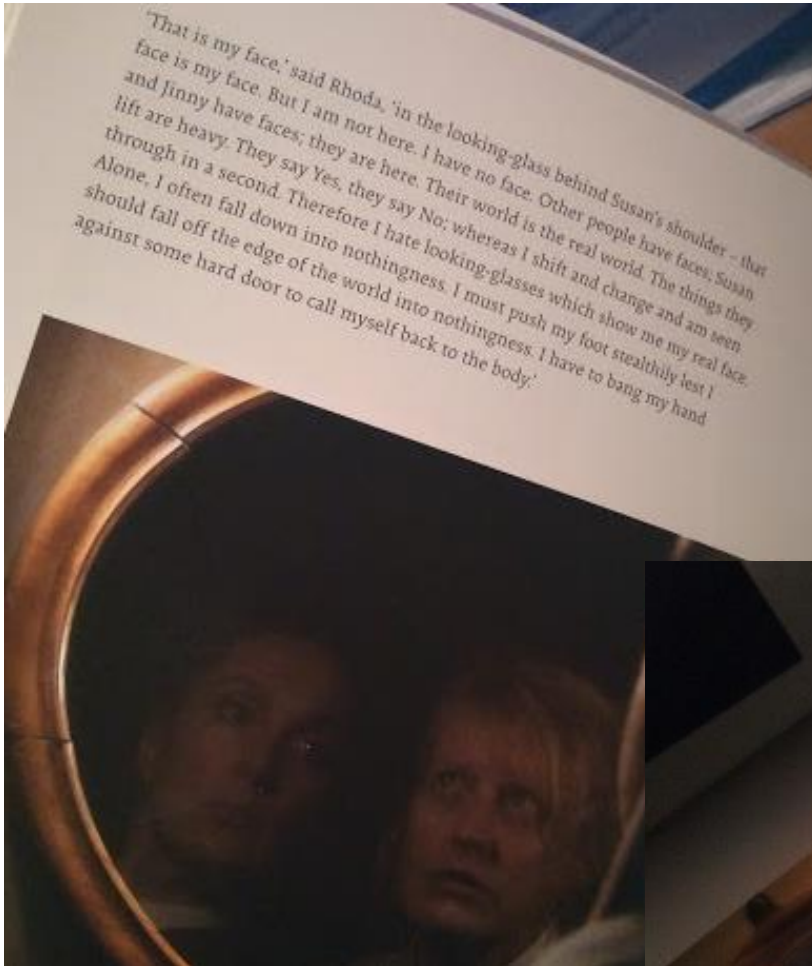
Little Red Riding Hood: But wait...

The next stage was all about character. We each focused on our own individual characters and got to know them as best we could. Using the context, we were able to explain things about our characters. For example, the Mysterious Man was absent for a large portion of his son's (the Baker) life. I decided to put that down to the Crimean War (1853-56). I created a full character biography, a technique used by Mitchell.

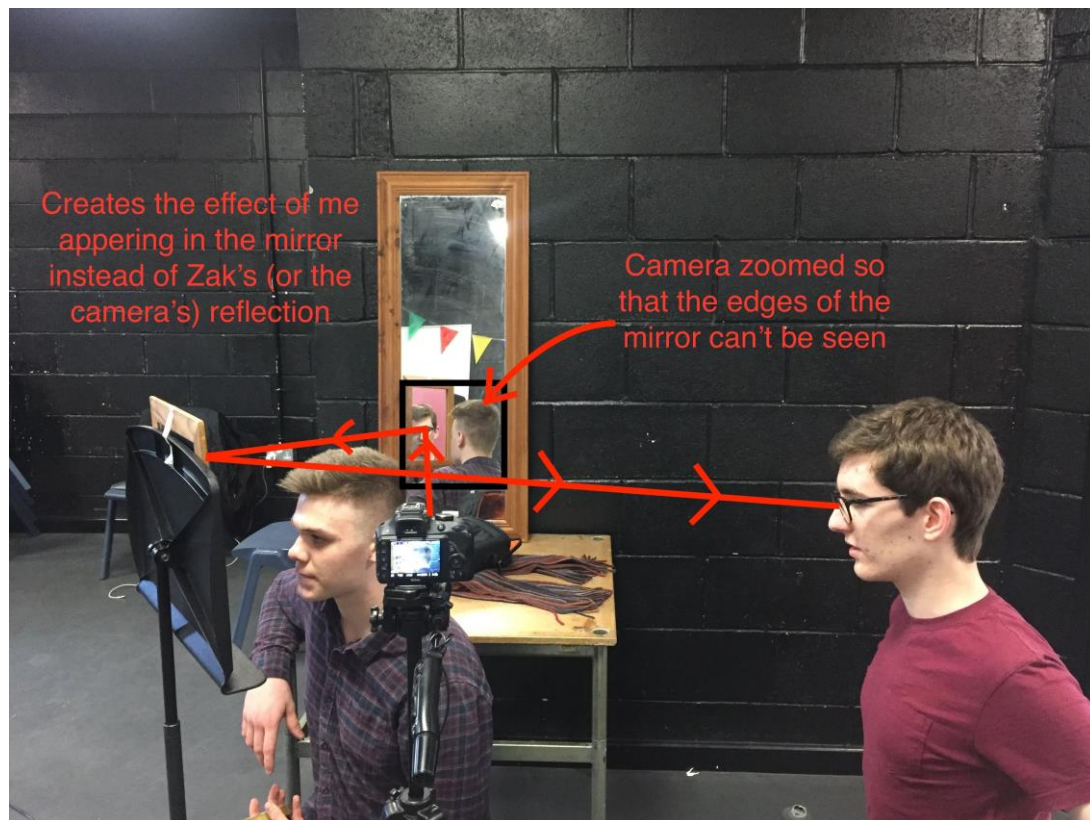


The process was then about creating the piece. We worked on a 'shot by shot' basis not always chronologically. My research into Mitchell's techniques meant I was aware that this was her normal way of working, the pieces of the performance would be fragmented until the later stage (IM_3 VIDEO). It was important in the process to have access to the cameras and projectors whilst we went as they were integral to the piece. We would often spend the start of each session sat talking and planning what it was that we wanted to do with the shot we were working on.

I believe the most interesting aspect of Mitchell's style is her use of live video projection and sound. Our next step was to take all the different 'events' and worked out how we could film and project them live. After that had been done, it is was about piecing them together to create the story. The projection is used to frame the action and enables the director to do things that would have otherwise been impossible on stage. An example of this in our process was the scene with the Mysterious man. We knew we wanted the mysterious man to almost appear as if he was hallucinated. I had observed that Mitchell's production of 'Waves' often made use of reflections to communicate moments of hallucination.



I suggested that the best way to stage the Mysterious Man and Baker exchange would be with mirrors. By angling the mirrors, we were able to create a shot that looked as though the Baker was looking in the mirror but not seeing his own reflection; instead seeing his father. This took accurate planning and measuring to ensure the distance and angles were correct to create the desired effect.



Whilst rehearsing this dialogue, I attempted various different intentions to explore different meanings behind the Mysterious Man's speech (IM_4 .VIDEO & IM_5 VIDEO). I believe the second version works best as it is more powerful and wise sounding.

In video 1:

Mysterious Man's intention: To humour the Baker

Baker: I thought you were dead.

Mysterious Man: Not completely. Are we ever?

Baker: As far as I'm concerned you are.

Mysterious Man: Is that true?

Mysterious Man's intention: To convince the Baker into not running away from his problems

Baker: It's because of you all this has happened.

Mysterious Man: I strayed into the town to give your mother a gift. And I thoughtlessly took some of those jewels for myself. How was I to know? How are we ever to know? And when she died, I ran away from my guilt. And now, aren't you making the same mistake?

Baker: No.

Mysterious Man: Aren't you running away?

In video 2:

Mysterious Man's intention: To question the Baker, to make him think carefully and wisely.

Baker: I thought you were dead.

Mysterious Man: Not completely. Are we ever?

Baker: As far as I'm concerned you are.

Mysterious Man: Is that true?

Mysterious Man's intention: To force the Baker into not running away from his problems.

Baker: It's because of you all this has happened.

Mysterious Man: I strayed into the town to give your mother a gift. And I thoughtlessly took some of those jewels for myself. How was I to know? How are we ever to know? And when she died, I ran away from my guilt. And now, aren't you making the same mistake?

Baker: No.

Mysterious Man: Aren't you running away?

Whilst researching Mitchell's work, I was impressed with how the cast cleverly held up a small "backdrop" to provide what was needed in the camera shot. I was also drawn to the shot of water on glass to create the effect of looking through a window. We experimented with this in class and it worked effectively to convey the pathetic fallacy of the situation at the moment where Cinderella is informed the Prince is leaving her. I had to chance and adjust camera lenses at this point to ensure the shot was focused (IM_6 VIDEO).



We then looked to further enhance our piece using sound. Katie Mitchell often uses techniques similar to those of Foley artists. One of the examples of how we implemented this in our piece is the scene where Cinderella looks through the window with rain pouring down it. We had sorted the visuals but were looking to enhance the atmosphere by creating the sounds of light rain. We experimented with random objects. We tried things like dropping rice into a bottle and tap to try and create the sound we settled on the sound of tapping on a empty milk carton (IM_7 SOUND CLIP). Another element of sound I thought created disturbing undertones was the music in 'Waves'. The low pitched, dissonant violin music was something that stood out to me. I researched composers of a similar style and found Béla Bartók, a Hungarian composer who had written some dramatic violin concertos with clashing harmonies at time, adding to the psychologically disturbed feel.

All the sounds in the performance were created live by the actors and then directed into microphones. These were processed and amplified in the soundboard and the output through speakers suspended near the projection screen.

Foley definition

During our process, lots changed. Originally, we had planned to just launch straight into the story but this meant that for the audience, things weren't very well explained. So towards the end of the process we decided that we would create a prologue to set the scene and clarify the context. We had seen Katie Mitchell use shadow puppetry for the Beauty and the Beast prologue and thought that this would work well to provide something visual to accompany narration. I worked out a way of filming the shadow puppetry on an improvised light box. In the end, I feel as though this really worked for the piece. It allowed us to bring in the character of the Narrator who is prominent in into the woods and tied the piece back to its original setting of 'fairy tales'.

