

The Pitmen Painters

The Play Text, its Context and the Ideas Presented

The play "The Pitmen Painters" was written in 2006 and premiered at the Live Theatre in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in 2007. It is set in 1934 in Ashington, a small mining village located in the far north-east of England. (Robinson, Maren). As the play itself premiered in Newcastle, both the dialect that it was written in, and the sentiment behind the piece proved to be popular with the local audience. Lee Hall's play is a response to the mine closings that began in the 1980s during the Thatcher administration, a topic which is still considered a sensitive topic in the north-east and produces quite legitimate anger. Because it is a play which deals with a local issue, in the local dialect, it was very well received, as can be seen from Katherine Montgomery's review of the piece, saying that "My own great grandfathers were both miners and I am sure many people will share a similar mining connection, making this play perhaps more poignant and giving a crucial insight into what life was like for our relatives in this area. The true story of these pitmen is inspiring, poignant and also extremely affecting."

Lee Hall is the playwright of "The Pitmen Painters", he was born in 1966, in Newcastle. He was inspired immediately by the book of the same name by William Feaver, but he was also living in the ship-building heart of Tyneside at the time of both the miners strike and the mine closures. Hall has quite an interesting take on art, as he discovered once he left the North-East for Cambridge, as he realised that "Theatre was a place of resistance and criticism in the north-east as well as celebration." (Hattenstone, Simon). When asked what made him write "The Pitmen Painters" he replied that "When he returned to Newcastle a few years later [after the mass closure of mines], his father drove him through the old pit villages. He knew that the mines had closed, but what shocked him was that nearly every sign of the old way of life had disappeared. "The slag heaps were grassed over, the winding gears were nowhere to be seen, and when we spoke to people they said, 'Oh, that was the first thing they did.' There was a cultural cleansing of the entire area. They made it impossible for the industry to be brought back." The quote that really captured the sentiment behind this play, and what essentially really drew me to it was: "The lie we've been told is that our history is individual and you scabble up the greasy pole pushing everybody down. But actually, value is created between people collectively. That's why culture is important – and representing communities that aren't represented as much as they were seems an important thing to me." (Hattenstone, Simon)

The play "The Pitmen Painters" can fit into four different categories of theatre. By the nature of the piece, it is both community theatre and political theatre. Community Theatre means that it is a theatrical performance made in relation to a particular community, in this case, the north-eastern audience. It is used as a tool for social development, although as this play reflects on events that have already past, there is an odd sense of nostalgia attached to the play, and instead of urging for society to develop and forget its roots, it suggests a rather cyclical nature to the life of a community (Gooch, Steve). As the play deals with the closure of the mines, brought about by the Thatcher administration, something which is rightly abhorred by most of the working-class members of the north east, it is political in nature. The play can be considered to be political theatre as it satirises and comments on both the current political scene (especially the labour party) and how it came to be that way (Chambers, Colin). It is not however Marxist Theatre, but an argument could be made for Socialist Theatre. "The Pitmen Painters" on a more metaphysical level questions what art is, and perhaps more importantly, **who** defines art. The play could be called socialist theatre as it challenges the archaic idea of the class structure, but it is postmodern theatre as it highlights the fallibility of definite truth and encourages the audience to reach their own understanding of what art is, and what makes someone an artist (Auslander, Phillip). Theatrical Realism refers to the focus on everyday drama, ordinary speech, and ordinary settings (Trumbull, Eric). Set in the mining town of Ashington in the north east, immediately the ordinary setting is established, as it is not glamorous, and most importantly, the life of the pitmen is not romanticised. In fact, the community, although dramatised is incredibly true to life. The Geordie dialect provides the "ordinary speech" element of

theatrical realism, as “The Pitmen Painters” dialect coach, Tanera Marshall explains: “*Geordie* is a regional nickname for a person from Tyneside, near Newcastle, in northeastern United Kingdom, and is also the name given to the regional dialect. The source of the moniker is thought to be “George,” a common name among the coal-mining communities, and the name of the designer of the safety lamps typically used by pitmen, George Stephenson. Because the region supported coal mining for so long, the dialect came to be thought of as a miners’ dialect. The inhabitants of the region today still refer to themselves as Geordies, despite the closing of the mines in the ‘70s and ‘80s.” (Robinson, Maren) As it is still a dialect which is spoken strongly today, there is a sense that Hall is not trying to glamourise their situation, or their roots, which immediately makes the audience more receptive to the piece. The performance aspect of the play meant that in subscribing to the ideals of theatrical realism, in order to achieve the correct accents, Geordie actors were hired for this piece. Ultimately, having a play which represented the north east realistically, which did not gloss over any of its political or social problems, and certainly did not describe the past in a rose-tinted nostalgic way, meant that it was, and still is, incredibly well received.

The main themes of the play in terms of political conflict would be the idea of class inequality. But in terms of an almost meta-narrative overarching theme, the play deals with the nature of art, and who it is that decides what counts as art. There is a line in the play that combines both of these ideas which is “... If you can overcome whatever you need to overcome, no matter who you are, where you come from. That is what is important about art; you take one thing and make it into another, and transform... who you are.” What is truly realistic about the play, what makes it theatrical realism, but also serves as the resolution of pipe dreams, is the fact that at the end of *the Pitmen Painters*, we learn that all the dreams of these miners, to have a socialist approach to class accessibility to education and the arts, are dashed by the Conservative agenda in Britain. The meta-artistic theme of art within this piece is present all throughout it, due primarily through the main plot of the play, but also through continuous dialogue such as; the discussion about Freudian symbols (“JIMMY. What the hell is a Freudian symbol? YOUNG LAD. It’s about all this stuff that’s gannin’ on in yer heed that you divvin’t realize is gannin’ on – and they all come oot – as a Freudian symbol. HARRY. Now look here, I’m the one who did this and I’m telling ye – right now - it’s got nowt to do with Freudian symbols – this is about politics and that’s that. YOUNG LAD. That’s the point of Freudian symbols – you divvin’t realise yer deing them. If ye tried to de a Freudian symbol then it wouldn’t be a Freudian symbol at aal.”) (Hall, Lee) The specific moment which represent the met-artistic theme of art can be seen at the end of the play, where the pitmen are discussing the role art plays in their lives, and how art affects the working classes.

The scene that really highlights the main theme of the piece, using art almost as an extended metaphor for the gap between the classes, is where Oliver Kilbourn turns down Helen Sutherland for a job as an artist. The play deals with the idea of class inequality, something which is exemplified in the second TEAM moment, in the dialogue between the two characters onstage.

This is one of the TEAM moments that I have chosen from the piece, mainly because it shows the political theatre aspect of the piece, but it also informs of the overarching theme of the play. The idea that the upper-class are the “saviours” of the workers, just because, as Oliver Kilbourn puts it, they “throw money at them”. The use of Helen’s quasi-understanding tone allows for reader/audience interpretation, lending itself quite heavily to the inference that the class gap is bigger than ever, and that it is that sort of condescending attitude that creates it. The political aspect of this scene is reflected, once again through Helen’s tone. The socio-political context of this play refers to the closing of the mines by the conservative government, and the creation of “new labour”, something which led to the death of many mining communities. Helen’s misunderstanding of the working class, with the ingrained upper-class assumption that everybody wants to get out of their community, and that it is essentially okay to abandon your roots which lead to many false understandings. For one, the upper-classes did not understand the sense of community that was rife in mining villages, something which was seen throughout the miners strikes on the picket line. (Robinson, Maren)

This play, perhaps because it is written in the vernacular Geordie dialect, does not contain the same amount of metaphors and imagery that a play written with elaborate diction, such as Shakespeare or Wilde would. As a result, the play feels more tangible for the everyday, specifically working-class audience members, and allows for a genuine connection to be forged between the play and the audience members. The character of “Young Lad” himself acts as an extended metaphor throughout the piece. Firstly, the fact that he is not given a name, as all the other characters have, represent the fact that he is a conglomeration of many young painters in the Ashington group. Secondly, Young Lad represents the younger generation of men born into mining communities. Due to the closing of the mines and general economic slump, there were simply not the jobs for young men. Young Lad signs up for the war and moves away in the mid to end part of the play, citing the fact that “they [the army] divvin’t look down on uz.” Young lad represents the general migration away from pit villages with the promise of a better life elsewhere. (Lavery, Ian)

A large amount of the symbolism within the play is created through characterisation. While Young lad represents the disillusioned younger generation, George represents the bureaucracy, the miners who were very set in their ways and who didn’t like change, as can be seen with George’s multiple protestations that they had to follow the political channels of the Workers’ Educational Association. (Lavery, Ian) Meanwhile, Harry represents the members of the political scene, particularly the socialist party, as can be seen by his numerous statements about things which are “tantamount to bourgeois formalism”. All of these characters do however, serve a deeper, more meaningful overall purpose. The characters all show that despite their opposing views on art, mining in fact the world in general, they are all part of the same community, and above all else, they would stand united and fight tooth and nail for each other.

Artistic Responses and Live Theatre Experiences

The main artistic intention that I, as a director, will focus on, is the class conflict. While I feel that the meta-artistic quality of the piece is incredible, I feel that it is also something which is communicated effectively without too much pushing. In fact, if that side of the piece is too overtly displayed, the piece loses some of its subtlety. Therefore, the class conflict is something which I am deeply interested in, and would like to see on stage. On a much lesser level, but still one which I relate with the playwright Lee Hall, is the representation of the Northeast in art. As my family still resides in the village in which my grandfather was a miner, I feel that representing, as Hall says, “communities that aren’t represented as much” is an important thing to me.

Initially when I read through the text, I was very taken with the idea of a form of meta-narrative within the piece. While the play does not address the fact that it is a play, it does question the role of art, what is determined to be art, and who decides what art is. I feel that by emphasising this facet of the piece, a distance is created between the audience and the play which allows them to examine their own relationship with art and how they fit into the formation of this piece. The use of projections is inspired by a production of “Die Zofen”, and the influence of the director Frank Castorf, as his projections are said “to mirror and emphasise what is on stage” (Arts Alive Canada). I would apply them to this piece by projecting the pictures by the Ashington Group that are being discussed on stage. The idea of quite a simplistic set is inspired again by the National Theatre production of Coriolanus, in which all the actors sat on wooden chairs which were stacked at back of the stage, and they were used as a variety of things. The idea of emphasising regional accents is particularly key for this piece, not to the extent that it would impede understanding, but certainly approaching that point.

The target audience for the piece would be natives and residents of the North East. The age range of the target audience would be people from ages 45 and up, so that they would hopefully remember at least part of the miners strike. This particular age group has the ability of remembering what life was like in mining communities both before and after the closure of mines and therefore will understand the context of the play without it being explicitly expressed. A large amount of humour in the play stems from life inside a mining-based community and therefore although younger audiences and audiences from elsewhere would be welcome, some of the subtleties of the play could well be lost. Having audiences that are comfortably middle-aged would mean that there would be the possibility of linking the play to current events.

I saw the production of Coriolanus at the Donmar Warehouse in 2014, the national theatre production of Hamlet in 2014 and the national theatre of Othello in 2013, what immediately struck me about all of these plays was the way in which they brought ancient plays into the modern world, and subsequently how relatable they were.



(Above) Rory Kinnear as a modern-day Hamlet, in Hamlet (2010) at the National Theatre.

<https://static.secure.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2010/10/8/1286527418481/Rory-Kinnear-in-Hamlet-at-006.jpg>



(Left) The National Theatre brings Othello, a play set on a military base, into the 21st century, making it more relevant to the modern audience.

<http://andrewmillar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/OthelloNationalTheatre1.jpg>

(Below) the bare, but extremely adaptable set of Coriolanus, giving the play a crude element.

http://www.theaterjones.com/images/large/1_130502001638.jpg

Ultimately, the influence that I am most drawing from are my own personal experiences from living in an ex-mining community. Similarly, my Grandfather himself was a miner since the age of 16 until the closing of the mine, and so he will act as a primary source for what life was like down the pit. Hopefully, this will bring out some of the traditions and experiences that are so well ingrained into Hall's piece, and will complement the story. This should bring out the theme of solidarity in the piece, and the implications of the play is that perhaps you can leave a community, but your experiences and where you came from will follow you.



Directors Vision and Intended Impact

There is one particular lullaby which I would really like to include in the play, which is called "Miners Lullaby" (or "Coorie Doon"), which is something that was sung to me in my childhood and I feel would fit very well into the play. The script states that in the final scene of the play, there should be a rendition of the "Miners Hymn", and that will bring out the theme of the sense of community in mining societies. As mentioned previously, highlighting the especially "northern" and "Geordie" aspects of this play is very important to me, and as such, I would like to link it to events both current and historical that have had a large impact to the ex-mining communities of the north-east. These would include the mine closings that began in the 1980s during the Thatcher administration. Historically, the events that I would draw attention to would be the 1984 Miner's Strike that began when the Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire that went on strike to protest the proposed mine closure. The denationalisation of mines in the north east meant that that by 1997, all coal mines that had not been closed were privatised, and in 1988 the Ashington Colliery was closed. While all this is common knowledge, the more human elements of the strike, such as the extreme hardship faced by mining communities, and the divisions the scabs caused within families are not as well documented particularly in art, and this play provides a perfect opportunity to do that. On a more topical note, one aspect of politics which is talked about frequently in the north-east at the moment, is the shifting of the Labour party, back from the centre mark, after the distancing of the Labour Party from its roots by Tony Blair.

My main directorial intention for this play is to highlight two key features. These are the socio-political implications of the piece, and the meta-artistic style. The play is, I feel now especially relevant in its political repercussions and I would like to draw comparisons with the current shift of the political climate, especially the idea of the Labour party going "back to its roots". I will try through the staging of the play to communicate the meta-artistic style of Lee Hall, primarily through projecting the paintings of the Ashington group onto big blank white screens. My artistic intention will be actualised through this by selecting the paintings from the Ashington group that represent the typical everyday life of the miners, in hope of communicating the "northern soul". These particular paintings, although they will clearly be excerpts from miners lives, they will not only be centred around life in the pit, but will focus more on recreational activities such as life in the club, and home scenes.



Propping the Mat - Oliver Kilbourn (1938)

<http://www.northumberlandlife.org/woodhorn/images/1989.17.12,%20Propping%20the%20Mat.jpg>



Untitled - Norman Cornish

<https://wealeicesterbranch.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/6d5c2a5be14c58dc366b625f71687963.jpg>

◀ These particular paintings, although they will clearly be excerpts from miners lives, they will not only be centred around life in the pit, but will focus more on recreational activities such as life in the club, and home scenes. ▶

My Life as a Pitman
Oliver Kilbourn

http://cdn2.b.examiner.com/sites/default/files/styles/image_content_width/hash/2a/91/2a91a7669ba7d511ba3b2b84c382f656.jpg?itok=i2VppVen



(Above) Saturday Night at the Club - Oliver Kilbourn (1940)

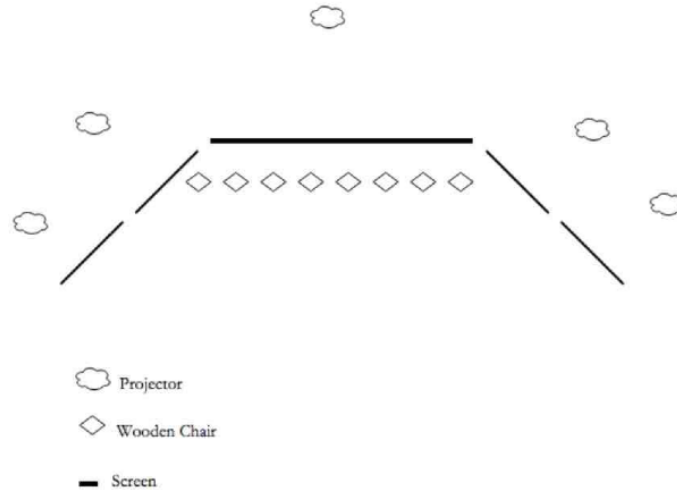
<http://www.in-between.org.uk/performance/the-pitmen-painters/image.jpeg>

A subtle way of staging the play in order to communicate my directorial intention is that I would have small props denoting the political situation at the time, for example the Miner's union banners and newspapers with headlines about strikes and the shutting down of the collieries. Specifically as it is the Ashington group's works that this play is about, I would use the union banner from the Woodhorn colliery.



http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_wkakTeCqaLU/VQFxxz1vQzI/AAAAAAAAAdwk/9Rz0vcSGPfQ0/s1600/BurradonBannerObverse0005.jpg

In order to achieve my intended audience impact, I would stick to quite a bare, plain set. Harry Wilson's painting "Committee meeting", from 1937 details the inside of the hut. In staging this play, I would try to keep the set as true to that as possible, as the overarching theme of maintaining your roots. I'm also not trying to sell "the pitmen painters" as anything that they're not. In changing the set, and changing the hut, it's exactly as Oliver Kilbourn said, it's trying to make them into something that they're not. As a play, as characters, and as a group, they don't need to try and be "classed up", and staying true to their, and my roots, is my way at trying to express that. Therefore the set would consist of A blank stage, with strategically placed screens to project paintings on, with 8 wooden chairs, and one easel, as denoted below.



◀ In trying to communicate an atmosphere and mood for this play, the technical aspects of the piece would be fairly simple. In terms of audio, an amplifier would be required, as scene changes throughout the play are denoted through siren sounds. Since a lot of shifting between scenes is denoted in the script through blackouts, each time this would occur, the projector would have to be switched on, and the date, place, and any other information would be projected in white writing on a black background. The lighting would be kept fairly clearly artificial, with shadows on specific areas of the set allowing the stage to look as though it is lit by one bulb suspended from the ceiling. ▶



The Staging of Two Moments of the Play

The first moment of theatre I would stage, is the confrontation between Helen and Oliver, after Helen's offer of a job for Oliver as a professional painter. I chose this first moment of theatre for a variety of reasons. As mentioned above, one of the key elements of this play that I particularly wanted to highlight, is the confrontation between classes. I feel that the class difference is something that you notice immediately if you're from the working classes, but from above, there is merely a general air of condescension. This is the moment of theatre that I feel particularly encapsulates that sentiment. Particularly throughout the 20th century, but still carrying on today, there was a complete lack of compassion and understanding shown towards the mining communities, that stemmed from the fact that the upper-classes didn't understand the loyalty and the sense of community that permeated every aspect of mining villages. This moment is not the first confrontation between the classes in the play, but it is, I feel the most realistic, and the most confrontational in terms of text. Overall, this moment contributes to my artistic intention, and my intended audience impact as it highlights the main conflict of the play, and certainly the most socially relevant aspect.

In terms of the specific artistic intention for this moment of theatre, I would particularly like to highlight the idea of class differences. The two characters involved in that moment are polar opposites, with "Helen" being an upper-class art collector, not used to having to work for anything, and "Oliver" being a born and bred pitman, and it does, as the play later states, feel as though the two are from different countries. All facets of staging of this moment, should serve to highlight the differences between the two characters.

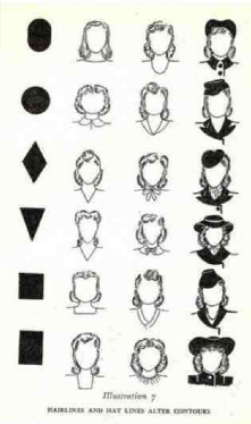
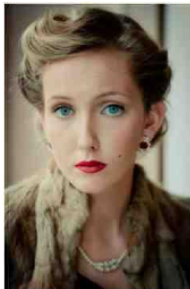
This moment is specifically appealing to the idea of “TEAM”, (a moment of Tension, Emotion, Atmosphere or Meaning.) As the passage progresses, the tension and the nature of the extract shifts considerably. Tension is heightened through Helen’s suggestion that Oliver turn his back and cut ties with the mining community in order to pursue a career in art, and her complete lack of understanding for the sense of solidarity that permeates the mining community. As for emotion, this is the first moment of the play where there has been a direct confrontation between the classes, and Lee Hall, the playwright, does an admirable job of conveying the emotions that are tied to the suggestion for leaving a close-knit community. The moment is not atmospheric as such, with the focus being more on the characters and how they relate to each other as opposed to their interactions with their environment. For me, “Atmosphere” indicates that there is a relationship between the characters onstage and their physical surroundings, and this is something that perhaps this moment lacks. The concept of attaching “meaning” to this extract is a little bit redundant, as I feel that any meaning is created through the dialogue between the two characters, as it deals with such an emotional topic, borne from a fundamental misunderstanding of how other classes live, and therefore meaning naturally comes through in this passage as it exemplifies the message of the entire play.

As previously mentioned, in staging this moment of theatre, all design aspects should serve to highlight the difference between the two characters on stage. The distinct gap between social classes will be primarily created through aesthetic aspects, such as characters’ costumes.

Character Name	Character Description	Images
Oliver Kilbourn	<p>Oliver is a pitman, he is not “well-off” by any means. He does however, have his dignity and his clothing should make it clear that, given the chosen scene takes place in a museum, that he is wearing his “good clothes”, but even so, they are noticeably shabby, and belong to a proud working-class man. His fashion would be very similar to his contemporaries, and the flat cap would allow for more versatile blocking while staging this particular moment. Care should be taken with Oliver’s outfit that he does not look almost like a caricature of a “poor person”, as there is a fine line between a character who accurately represents the working classes, and hardship, and one who looks like an extra from Oliver Twist. What is meant by this, is that Oliver’s character is written as proud, particularly unashamed of his roots. The pictures to the right indicate the type of clothes that a worker would have worn in the early twentieth century. In this first TEAM moment, Oliver has, preceding this point, not earned any money from his paintings, and therefore is still on a miners wage. Something which should be evident in his clothes.</p>	 

Helen Sutherland

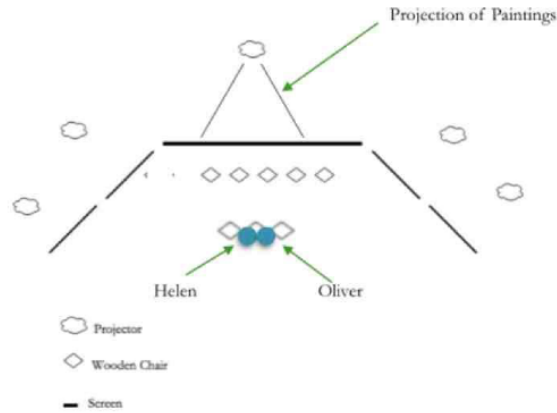
Helen is the polar opposite of Oliver. Stereotypically feminine and upper-class, she represents everything that Oliver isn't. The naivety of Helen presented through her world views, and her dialogue with Oliver should be able to be seen through a physical manifestation of this, namely her clothes. Always used to getting the best materials and the latest fashion, she should appear to be well put together, with not even a hair out of place. Helen is not an overtly flashy woman, it is not as though she is flaunting her wealth in front of other characters, especially Oliver, however, as a member of the upper-classes, it is so ingrained in her, that it seems to permeate every cell of the character. For example, her hair should be done in a fashion-conscious but not ground-breaking way, something which (as depicted on the right) is of the moment, and demonstrates her status as a kept woman. Similarly, her makeup is minimal but elegant, simply the fact that she is wearing any displays her status. Due to the era, a hat would be considered extremely fashionable, and with the addition of a hair pin, the extravagance would be a subtle juxtaposition to Oliver's plain suit. Helen's dress in and of itself should not be overtly detailed, simply a well-made dress from expensive material speaks of elegant taste but is demonstrative of the difference between what is clearly a new dress, and Oliver's patchy suit. The coat again should not be too extravagant, but should look warm and clearly fashionable.



<https://de.pinterest.com/pin/286682332503189227/>
<http://vintagedancer.com/1920s/1920s-mens-shirts-and-collars-history/>
<http://vintagedancer.com/1930s/1930s-day-afternoon-dresses/>
<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/images/discus-files/125171.jpg>

The blocking for this set is relatively simple, as the entire dialogue exchange takes place sitting down, on chairs that have been pushed together to form a sofa. The character of Oliver would have taken off his hat before the beginning of this moment, and would be holding it in his hand as was proper etiquette. Therefore the only movement, in the pauses between dialogue would be a sort of nervous fidgeting with his flat cap. Similarly, the character of Helen would be holding a bag, however as she is more at home in the environment of a posh museum, she would not be nearly as on edge as Oliver is.

On the main screen behind the “sofa” made up of three wooden chairs, a painting is projected. The sofa with Helen and Oliver sitting on it faces out towards the audience, and they, for all intents and purposes look as though they are examining the painting projected behind them.



The paintings projected onto the rear screen are classical, but clearly depict wealthy scenes, that are objectively very aesthetically beautiful for a character such as Oliver, but due to their rich opulence, are so unfamiliar and removed from everyday reality, that it is clear Oliver will not understand the message behind them.

<http://image.made-in-china.com/2f0j00oCjtZzgUOEhi/Classical-Royal-People-Portrait-Oil-Painting-10-.jpg>



There should be something ironic about Helen telling Oliver to “paint what he knows” while still claiming that he can fit in with the upper classes. The irony lies in the fact that Oliver simply cannot be like all the other painters, because he’s not rich, he’s not accustomed to such mindless spending and extravagance as is depicted in these paintings. Helen is telling Oliver to abandon his roots to sell his “refreshing” art, but what makes his, and in fact all of the Ashington groups’ art so refreshing is the fact that they painted everyday life, and it was something that spoke to everyday people.



<https://nuwarthistory.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/hogarth2-784243.jpg>



<http://roldan-art.yolasite.com/resources/Classical%20oil%20painting088.jpg>

While these paintings are being projected on the rear screens, the other screens should have paintings from the Ashington group projected up, to maximise the juxtaposition between the artistic canon, namely what they are expected to paint, and the reality of their lives, and how that was communicated through art. For example, while the paintings projected in the rear show elegant

gatherings, and people “working” by reading, the projections on the other screens are pictures which are starkly contrasted from them, both in terms of style, and subject.

George Blessed - *Whippets*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/BlessedG_Whippets_thumb.jpg



Leslie Brownrigg - *The Miner*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/BrownriggL_Miner_thumb.jpg



Jimmy Floyd - *Pigeon Cries*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/FloydJ_PidgeonCrees_thumb.jpg



Arthur Whinnom - *Pit Incident*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/WhinnomA_PitIncident_thumb.jpg



Andrew Foreman - *The Bar - Playing Dominoes*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/ForemanA_TheBar_thumb.jpg



Harry Wilson - *Ashington Colliery*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/WilsonH_Colliery_thumb.jpg



George McLean - *Bedside*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/McLeanG_Bedside_thumb2.jpg



Andrew Rankin - *In The Canteen*

http://www.ashingtongroup.co.uk/images/thumbs/RankinA_Canteen_thumb2.jpg



The intended audience impact of projecting these two types of art side-by-side is mainly to provide a juxtaposition. Still today, the artistic world seems to be reserved for the elite, and their appears to be a common thought that certain types of art, particularly more classical pieces, are too sophisticated for the lower classes, and certainly it is harder for the lower classes to access artistic critique. This play, as many post-modern pieces tend to do, questions the role of art in the modern world. Lee Hall as a playwright, specifically questions who decides what “art” is, and how that affects future artists. This TEAM moment is particularly good for that overarching theme, as it ties in the personal approach to art, with Helen’s comment that Oliver can paint “whatever he wants”, and the political elements to it, with the conflict between classes, and its impact on art. These particular paintings from the Ashington Group depict the familial spirit of mining communities, something which in this moment, Helen completely fails to understand. George McLeans’ painting “Bedside” (Bottom Left, Above), demonstrates this particularly well, as the shift board in the upper right-hand corner suggests that either this miner has just come off shift, or is about to go on shift, with a strong implication that someone else will come to sit beside the bedside. During Oliver’s line “I’ve known these blokes all me life, Miss, as far back as I can remember. I knaa their fathers, I knaa their kids, they’ve pulled iz oot of the pit, they’ve helped me sister, I mean these people are like a family to me. Well they are my family – they are everything I’ve got.” this picture would be projected, to provide emphasis to the fact that through thick and thin, the mining communities were there for each other, which made the closing of mines so devastating, because they were not just closing pits, but destroying and breaking up entire communities.

A large part of the impact on an audience of specific moments is due to the intonation and emphasis placed on certain things. With the annotated version of the script for this first TEAM moment, the tone for specific lines is noted, with the idea in mind that different tones for different lines is key to an entertaining and captivating play. Similarly, the pauses are documented, for the fact that frequently the most poignant moments can be caught in the silence between lines.

■ = tone (Oliver) ? = stage directions/cues
■ = tone (Helen) ■ = emphasis
| = pause (long)
▲ = pause (short)

HELEN: Look, nobody said this would be easy. *Carefully*
 OLIVER: How could I just cut myself off from everybody? I've known these blokes all me life, Miss, as far back as I can remember. I knaa their fathers, I knaa their kids, they've pulled iz oot of the pit, they've helped me sister. I mean these people are like a family to me. *Emphatic* Well they are my family — they are everything I've got. I'm not me on me own. *Patronisingly* Why ye can gan and meet any number of people, just like you. Well I can't er. It's not that easy for me. *Emphatic* This is who I am. *Imitated*

HELEN: Look nobody's asking you to cut yourself off. Anyway, they would take my hand off if it were them. You know that.
 OLIVER: What if it doesn't work? *Awfully, sincere* Excitedly
 HELEN: But what if it does? You'd be an artist like everybody else?
 OLIVER: "Like everybody else"? I'm a pitman, what do you think I paint? *Vaguely Sarcastic*
 HELEN: Like whomever you wanted to be. You can paint whatever you want. That's the point. You make it up. You decide who you are. You've got no ties, Oliver. *Emphatic*
 OLIVER: Look, you don't understand, do you? *Humourously, vaguely annoyed*
 HELEN: Yes, of course I understand. But take your life into your own hands for once. *Condescending*
 Look, it's not your fault that you're working-class, that you were born here. It's not your fault your father died. It's not your fault you had a mother who abandoned you. But you can't let that define you. Look, you're scared. It's perfectly natural. *Indignant, laughing*
 OLIVER: Scared, you gotta be joking, man. Look, I get scared down the pit. I'm not scared of painting. Look its not that. It's just that I haven't got the language. *Sadness and pity* Don't you see? You can't be working-class and be an artist. They're two different things. It doesn't exist. I'd have to be someone else. *dejected*
 HELEN: And what the hell's wrong with that. Listen to yourself, Oliver, for gods sake. Don't be pathetic. I am throwing you a lifeline here. *Compassion* *Humility, tentative*
 OLIVER: So I just give everything up. Because you graciously decide to pluck me out. *Sardonic*
BITTER Well no — It doesn't work like that. You can't just change who people are by throwing money at them. It's not about the money, it's about everything else. *Resentful*
 It's about who people are. I'm never gonna be like you. Your "them." You grew up knowing about art, sitting on your posh sofa, knowing how to gan on. We're from a different country, man! Do you know who I am? Do you know what I do every day? I'm a pitman pet, and I'm a bloody good pitman. *Decisively*
Whole message behind TEAM moment
Vehemently

A large part of the impact on an audience of specific moments is due to the intonation and emphasis placed on certain things. With the annotated version of the script for this first TEAM moment, the tone for specific lines is noted, with the idea in mind that different tones for different lines is key to an entertaining and captivating play. Similarly, the pauses are documented, for the fact that frequently the most poignant moments can be caught in the silence between lines.

■ = tone (Oliver) ? = stage directions/cues
■ = tone (Helen) ■ = emphasis
| = pause (long)
▲ = pause (short)

HELEN: Look, nobody said this would be easy. *Carefully*
 OLIVER: ▲How could I just cut myself off from everybody? *Incredulously* I've known these blokes all me life, Miss, as far back as I can remember. I knaa their fathers, I knaa their kids, they've pulled iz oot of the pit, they've helped me sister. I mean these people are like a family to me. *Enphatic* ■Well they are my family — they are everything I've got. I'm not me on me own. *Patronisingly* Why ye can gan and meet any number of people, just like you. Well I can't er. It's not that easy for me. *Emphatic* ■This is who I am. *Imitated*

HELEN: Look nobody's asking you to cut yourself off. Anyway, they would take my hand off if it were them. You know that.

OLIVER: ■What if it doesn't work? *Awfully, sincere* *Excitedly*
 HELEN: But what if it does? You'd be an artist like everybody else?

▲ OLIVER: "Like everybody else"? I'm a pitman, what do you think I paint? *Incredulously* *Vaguely Sarcastic*
 HELEN: Like whomever you wanted to be. ■You can paint whatever you want. That's the point. You make it up. ■You decide who you are. You've got no ties, Oliver. *Emphatic* *Humourously, vaguely annoyed*

OLIVER: Look, you don't understand, do you? *Laughingly*
 HELEN: Yes, of course I understand. But take your life into your own hands for once. *Condescending*
■ Look, it's not your fault that you're working-class, that you were born here. It's not your fault your father died. It's not your fault you had a mother who abandoned you. But you can't let that define you. Look, you're scared. It's perfectly natural. *Disdainful* *Indignant, laughing* *Sincerely* *Condescending*

OLIVER: Scared, you gotta be joking, man. Look, I get scared down the pit. I'm not scared of painting. Look its not that. It's just that I haven't got the language. *Sadness and pity* ■Don't you see ■You can't be working-class and be an artist. They're two different things. It doesn't exist. I'd have to be someone else. *Dejected* *Vaguely condescending*

HELEN: And what the hell's wrong with that. Listen to yourself, Oliver, for gods sake. Don't be pathetic. ■I am throwing you a lifeline here. *Temporarily* *Humility* *Intelligent*
 OLIVER: So I just give everything up. Because you graciously decide to pluck me out. *Sardonic* *Resentful*
BITTER ▲ Well ■no — It doesn't work like that. You can't just change who people are by throwing money at them. It's not about the money, it's about everything else. *Emphatic* *Resentful*
▲ It's about who people are. ■I'm never gonna be like you. Your "them." You grew up knowing about art, sitting on your posh sofa, knowing how to gan on. *Resentful* ■We're from a different country, man! Do you know who I am? Do you know what I do every day? I'm a pitman pet, and I'm a bloody good pitman. *Vehemently* *Decisively*

→ whole message behind TEAM moment

My second moment of theatre is taken from the final scene of “The Pitmen Painters”. I chose this moment of theatre specifically because it is the conclusion of the piece. I have long been taught that the most important two parts of a play, regardless of the genre or the climax, are the exposition and the conclusion of a piece. This passage especially has just so much hidden depth that it would feel almost immoral to not discuss how I would stage it. In this extract alone, the entire socio-political, historical, and cultural message of the piece is explored. The political element would be very easy to amplify in this moment, in highlighting the fact that “In 1995, the call for the “common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange” was excised from the Labour Party Constitution.” and the toast to socialism. What is stronger however is the sense of misplaced hope. There is something quite stereotypically postmodern in the ending of this piece, in the fact that it seems that it will end on some sort of hopeful note, with the idea of “Pitmen poets, pitmen painters, and pitmen professors”, however this is all scrapped with the final projection stating that “No University of Ashington was founded, Woodhorn Colliery was closed in 1981.” Over the course of this play, as the characters evolve and genuine compassion is formed towards them by the audience, and the realities of living in a pit community are exposed, and with the final statement about how the colliery was closed, there is a genuine sense of both compassion and empathy generated by the sense of loss from that final statement. What is perhaps the most effective element of this final passage, is the sense of community evident in every single line. Perhaps because I was raised hearing about mining disasters, and what life was like before mine closures, and I am intimately familiar with the Gresford disaster, and “The Miners Hymn”, the finale to this play is one of the most impactful that I have ever heard of, and certainly one which has stayed with me for a long time. The sense of community in this passage, and the interactions between the characters are the most impactful of the entire play, for me, and therefore it is this aspect of the moment that I would try to draw attention to.

This moment is especially appealing to TEAM in the emotional, atmospheric and meaningful factors. This moment is not overflowing with tension, and perhaps it is that which makes it such an effectual ending, as it feels as though any lingering conflicts from the play have been put to rest. The only tension related moment comes at the very end of the play, with the realisation that all the hope that is built up throughout the passage was completely false, especially for things like the toast to “the national health service” and “nationalisation”, political statements which even today are highly controversial with the back-door privatisation of the NHS, and the movement of the labour party away from its socialist roots, and becoming what is essentially the new conservative party. The emotional and atmospheric factors of this passage are created through the interactions between the characters onstage, particularly when they are discussing their future, and the fact that the working classes won’t be as systematically exploited, but as an audience, with the (in this case) unfortunate hindsight, we know that this is nowhere near true, especially in relation to the arts. The meaning, especially in a cultural form, is key to this moment. I would make this passage very relatable to my target audience, as The Miners Hymn has sometimes been described as “the unofficial anthem of the north”. Therefore the meaning, in an almost ironically post-modern twist is prescribed, not by the playwright or actors, but by the audience themselves and their experience with “The Miners Hymn”.

The costumes for the four characters on the stage will all be incredibly similar. As they are all working-class men, in 1948. Due to the continuation of rationing, even if the characters, or any of their real-life counterparts, earned enough to buy new clothes, fabrics were rationed and as such, their outfits will not have progressed much from the beginning of the play. Although the costumes are quite similar to Oliver’s in the first moment of theatre, their circumstances are very different. In the first moment of theatre, Oliver is meeting Helen in a museum, somewhere which to begin with, he is not very comfortable, with someone who he feels he has to dress up for and look more sophisticated than his clothes would usually suggest. In this moment however, it is just the four pitmen who have either just come off work, or were simply going about their everyday lives in Ashington. This means that they are all in their “natural habit”, in their everyday clothes. Due to the nature of the mining communities, they will all be dressed similarly, clearly they will not be in “uniforms” or identical suits, however ultimately their clothes will be something which unifies them. Their clothes are relaxed and informal for the time period, however they are not sloppy and still look as though they are well-made, made to last, although patched up due to everyday wear and tear.



(Left) An informal Miner's football team, practicing in their normal clothes.

<https://dc.pinterest.com/pin/286682332503189227/>

(Right, Below) Photograph of two men, shown wearing average 1940s informal clothes.

<http://vintagedancer.com/wp-content/uploads/1940s-mens-shirts-223x300.jpg>



Ken White - *Leaving Work*

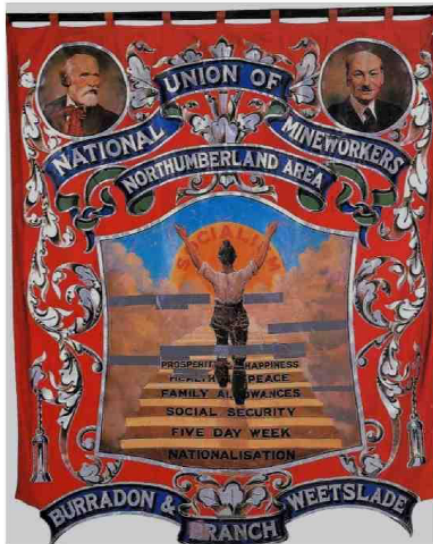
A primary source which demonstrates exactly the type of clothing that the Ashington group would have worn coming off their shifts.

<https://dc.pinterest.com/pin/164099980150622698/>

The blocking for this moment starts off very relaxed and informal. Jimmy, George, Harry and Oliver are looking up at the audience, there is a screen at the back upon which the Woodhorn Colliery Union Banner is projected. They stay standing discussing the banner up until Harry's line "We make wor life art." Then all four characters move to centre stage and look out at the audience, completely breaking the fourth wall, although still maintaining that air of dignity that comes from separation of performer and audience. They stay like this until the end of the scene, with the four main characters closing the show with a rendition of *The Miners' Hymn*, directed towards the audience.

On the main screen, at the back of the stage, the union banner (below) is projected, it stays that way until Harry's line "We make wor life art." After that, on all screens around the stage, newspaper headlines come up about the closing of mines, the privatisation of industries, and the privatisation of the NHS. As the scene continues, more recent headlines are projected alongside the papers from the time. Alongside headlines detailing Margaret Thatcher's policies, topical news such

as George Osborne's disability cuts, and the cutting of corporation tax, and the billions handed out in tax cuts to the very wealthy. These projections will be contrasting enough that the point will stand that unless something is done, history will repeat itself.



Projecting a banner of the “Nation Union of Mineworkers for the Northumberland Era” is something which I feel sums up the main thematic ideas of this play. The concept of the workers union is so central, not only to the understanding of this piece but to the understanding of political history, especially when dealing with the impact of the Thatcher administration. The fact that these banners still exist today, only corroborates the fact that although the mining communities may be gone due to the closing of the pits, the sense of community still permeates most aspects of life.

<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-wkakTeCqaLU/VQFxxz1vQzI/AAAAAAAAAdwk/9Rz0vSGPrq0/s1600/BurradonBannerObverse0005.jpg>



The Thatcher-era headlines would be interspersed with the pictures of the strikes and riots that were held due to her policies. Never before, and never again has a Prime Minister divided a nation like she did, and it is interesting to see the lasting effects that the defeat of the workers unions had on British politics, particularly on the labour party.

(Left) <http://i1.mirror.co.uk/incoming/article3005250.ece/ALTERNATES/s615/The-National-Miners-Strike.jpg>



<http://www.socialist.ca/sites/default/files/miners1984.jpg>



<https://workerspartynz.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/kids-at-miners-strike.jpg>

Morning Star

Free-market fanatic who sowed seeds of today's crisis
 Obituary: p8

I watched jobless steelworkers line the streets in Glasgow
 The true legacy: p10



Protests and headlines from the 1980's will be juxtaposed with protests and headlines from today, in order to emphasise the risk of history repeating itself, especially when a country is run by the privileged few.



- http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02530/Thatcher_star_2530786f.jpg
- http://rabble.ca/sites/rabble/files/node-images/britain_miners_strike.jpg
- http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02218/disability_2218977b.jpg
- <https://workersparty.nz/files/wordpress.com/2013/04/kids-at-miners-strike.jpg>
- <http://i2.ednds.net/13/15/618x779/media-news/newspaper-front-pages-margaret-thatcher-17.jpg>
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- <http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/dynamic/141/590x/secondary/208338.jpg>

For this moment of theatre, one of the most important aspects is the way that the characters interact with each other, something which this annotated version should provide some insight into.

■ = tone (Oliver) ⚡ = directions
 ■ = tone (Harry) ⚡ = emphasis
 ■ = tone (Jimmy) ⚡ = emphasis
 ■ = tone (George)

OLIVER: Do you think it works? → *Questioningly*
 HARRY: As a banner? → *Confused* → turns to Oliver
 OLIVER: As art? → *Incredulously* → *grinning almost rooking*
 HARRY: To be quite honest, as art it works better as a banner.
 OLIVER: Well I thought *quite* like the message, Harry. → *comparative*
 HARRY: I do, I do, I'm just not sure I like the painting. → *Sarcastic aside*
 JIMMY: What's wrong with it? → *Confused*
 HARRY: There are no people in it, Oliver. What's the point of utopia with nobody in it? → *Comedic effect*
 OLIVER: I just thought it was a way forward. A way of using our art like. → *Vaguely defensive but proud*
 GEORGE: Making banners? → *Confused*
 OLIVER: Making something useful. → *Self-important*
 HARRY: Listen, plenty people can paint banners, Oliver. But nobody's doing what we're doing. → *Condescending*
 OLIVER: Oh aye and what do we do? → *Vaguely Sarcastic/Sardonic*
 HARRY: We make wor life art. It doesn't get better than that. Nobody telling us what to paint. No masters but ourselves. → *Cocky → as if to cover*
 OLIVER: But surely it matters what we paint. → *Proudly*
 HARRY: Yes. And what do we paint, Oliver? Moments. We paint those little, tiny moments of being alive. Of life passing by. Tiny things in the corner of an eye. That's what life really is. Very rarely do big things happen, life is all these little things which are lost in a moment if somebody doesn't get them down, the fall of light – the magic of being alive – and nobody else'll do it – if we divvin't get it down it's all gone. That's why we should be proud and that's why we will continue to do what we are doing: making our lives art because well because we are alive, here and now. (Belch.) End of lesson. → *Awed*
 OLIVER: Aye, look, if this is what we managed to achieve wi nowt just think of what we'll be able to do in the future. → *Proud*
 GEORGE: Nobody's gonna be satisfied with just coming off their shift and vegetating now they're all gonna want what we want. For centuries and centuries they kept aal the good stuff for themselves. But they're not gonna leave yer Shakespeare and Goethe just for the upper classes now – it's gonna belong to us. → *Stipitated but excited talker w/ the audience*
 HARRY: This is just the start. This place'll be an academy. In years to come it'll be teeming with artists in here: bakers, pitmen, housewives – → *Hopeful, Expectant*
 GEORGE: Steady on, Harry. → *Apprentice Comedic effect*
 HARRY: Everybody actually living a proper creative life. → *Optimistic*
 GEORGE: But not consuming the rubbish they flog you. The scraps off the table. → *Annoyed, Boring*
 OLIVER: Oh no, making something for worses.
 GEORGE: The University of Ashington. (There'll be pitmen poets, and pitmen painters.) → *Steady, optimistic*
 HARRY: With Ph.Ds., there'll be pitmen professors, the lot. → *Humorously*
 GEORGE: I knaa thousands have died and I knaa, it was hell, but it's gonna be worth it. All change. → *Solemn, strong belief*
 JIMMY: The working classes are coming to get us. → *Evaled, Cheeky → To Audience*
 OLIVER: To the future → *Hopeful*
 GEORGE: to Nationalisation. → *Steady*
 OLIVER: And absent friends. → *Sadly*
 HARRY: (To the National Health Service) → *Heartily*
 GEORGE: Dental care for all.
 JIMMY: To culture. → *Raising glass, the others join in*
 GEORGE: To the common man. → *Up towards the audience*

Softly
Steady
filled with awe at nature
Softly
turn to look at audience
staring sure of himself and proud
Raising glass of in a toast

HARRY: And ^{→ Emphatic} aspiration
 GEORGE: Yes aspiration → song (about Ashington Group)
 OLIVER: And socialism → Almost as an afterthought
 JIMMY: And socialism → following on as he is leading the toast
 HARRY: And ^{→ Emphatic} art
 JIMMY: And art
 GEORGE: Of the people
 JIMMY: To the people } said rapid-fire one after the other → as one sentence
 OLIVER: With plenty people in it
 HARRY: Here, here. → Finally
 JIMMY: Listen they've got it → Audience
 OLIVER: Gresford → Realisation → Realisation
 JIMMY: The miners' hymn (The music from next door wells up. They listen to it.)
 GEORGE: Beautiful (They listen to it, it is beautiful, stirring) One of them starts singing; after a few lines they all join in gradually, it rises to the end of a verse. → Jimmy

Emotional

ALL:

Loud singing, very proud and very emotional

LORD OF THE OCEANS AND THE SKY ABOVE,
 WHOSE WONDROUS GRACE HAS BLESSED US FROM OUR BIRTH,
 LOOK WITH COMPASSION, AND WITH LOVE
 ON ALL WHO TOIL BENEATH THE EARTH

THEY SPEND THEIR LIVES IN DARK, WITH DANGER FRAUGHT,
 REMOTE FROM NATURE'S BEAUTIES, FAR BELOW,
 WINNING THE COAL, OFT DEARLY BOUGHT
 TO DRIVE THE WHEEL, THE HEARTH MAKE GLOW.

LORD OF THE OCEANS AND THE SKY ABOVE,
 WHOSE WONDROUS GRACE HAS BLESSED US FROM OUR BIRTH,
 LOOK WITH COMPASSION, AND WITH LOVE
 ON ALL WHO TOIL BENEATH THE EARTH.

(The loud sound of a buzzer breaks them off. Blackout. Projection: "No University of Ashington was founded. Woodhorn Colliery was closed in 1981. In 1995, the call for the "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange" was excised from the Labour Party Constitution.")

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Images

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