Introduction

*Love and Information* was written in 2012 and premiered at the Royal Court in a production directed by James McDonald and designed by Miriam Buether.

The play compromises of over fifty scenes in seven sections, with a number of optional scenes available in the printed text. The scenes can be played in any order within their respective sections, with only the final scene of the play specified. The script itself is without stage directions and lines are not allocated to specific characters. This provides much scope for directorial interpretation and staging possibilities.

Caryl Churchill is one of Britain’s most respected playwrights, whose experiments with form are at their most radical here. The play does not have a traditional narrative arc nor a through line of action. With characters not appearing more than once in the play, there is not a central character’s journey for an audience to engage with. Instead, it is the cumulative effect of the scenes that vary from a few seconds to five minutes in length, which has a powerful effect on the audience.

The play is an astute observation of contemporary society. Across the individual vignettes, it depicts the difficulty of forming connections in a society overloaded with information. What impact does this have on our relationships? The snapshot nature of the play mimics channel-hopping or flicking through social media. Perhaps it is a comment on a contemporary need for instant gratification or our lack of attention span.
The original production received glowing reviews from the critics, with Michael Billington, from The Guardian, writing, ‘One of the many points made by this exhilarating theatrical kaleidoscope is that we live in a world where information bombardment is in danger of leading to atrophy of memory, erosion of privacy and decay of feeling.’

The Main Characters

The script does not specify characters or locations, so it is up to the director to decide both the context and the number of actors required for each scene. In the original production, there was a cast of 16 actors, with a mixture of gender, ages and ethnic backgrounds. Other professional productions have had a variety of cast sizes, with the smallest being eight actors.

Describing the rehearsal process for the Royal Court production, assistant director Caitlin McLeod said:

‘First of all, we just read through a scene and we would talk about what came out most strongly and what might it be about, what might these people be saying? Then next probably came the relationship – who could they be, could it be mother and daughter, could it be best friends? And that kind of moved and melded with where could they be and what the situation was….We would sense pretty early if it wasn’t working, either the energy of the place they were in wasn’t right or the actors didn’t feel it was completely truthful in terms of what the scene was saying.’

Some scenes give more clues than others about who the characters are. For example, in ‘The Child Who Didn’t Know How To Say Sorry’ a discussion is taking place between a parent and a child:

•    You have to say you’re sorry.

•    I’m not sorry.

•    But you have hurt him. You have to say you’re sorry.

•    I don’t feel sorry.

•    You have to say it. [p. 54]
Even with only five lines, there are many ways this scene could be played. What are the ages, genders and social backgrounds of these characters? In the rehearsal room, it would be important to experiment with different permeations to work out which creates the most effective dynamic. Decisions will also need to be made about the locale of the scene, as this will impact the delivery of the lines. In the classroom, learners should experiment with different variations of playing each scene to work out which is the most effective.

In other scenes, such as ‘Linguist’ [p. 48] and ‘Irrational’ [p. 16], the characters are less obvious. It is important to look at such scenes within the construct of the whole play. There should be variety in the characterisation to ensure that the kaleidoscopic nature of the text is apparent. It is up to the audience to try to make sense of proceedings and attempt to draw connections, if any at all, between the scenes. If the characterisation between scenes became too similar, it would impact on the distinct, stand-alone nature of each vignette.

**Issues**

Caryl Churchill is famous for not giving interviews about her plays. Instead, it is up to the audience to draw their own conclusions about the meanings of the text.

Ben Brantley, writing in The New York Times said:

> ‘Ms. Churchill matches style and content so closely that they become inseparable. Each of this work’s self-contained segments, some of which are only seconds long, deals with the ways we lust for, process and reject knowledge. At the same time, it teases, thwarts and gluts its audience’s capacity to assimilate the forms of information it considers.’

The title indicates the two central ideas that are explored in the play:

**Love**

The play explores many permeations of love, from romantic entanglements to the connections between a parent and a child.

There are juvenile infatuations in ‘Fan’. In this scene there is a build-up of intensity as the characters talk about the extremities they would go to prove their love:
Love him so much
Love him more than you
I’d jump out of the car
Eat fire
Cut off my hand [p. 6]

‘Ex’ presents love in a reflective mode, with two lovers reminiscing about their past:

I’ve got a really clear picture of you running ahead of me down a street. We were running for a bus I think.
Do you remember that hotel, we took a room for a couple of hours in a hotel, there was green wallpaper and we stood there kissing.
I remember the first time.
No, that’s got overlaid by so many others, I can’t, I remember once by a river, we were practically on a public footpath.
The kitchen, the kitchen at your friend’s house.

Information

In contemporary society, with information readily available to anyone with access to the internet, what do we need to know? How do we make sense of the information we have?

Sometimes, like in ‘Terminal’, the information required isn't initially forthcoming. The question raised here is, is it always important to be knowledgeable or is it better to be kept in the dark occasionally?

Doctor, one thing before I go. Can you tell me how long I’ve got?
There’s not an exact answer to that.
I’d be grateful for anything you can give me an idea.
Well let me say ten percent of people with this condition are still alive after three years.
That’s helpful, thank you. [p. 22]
In ‘Affair’, Churchill addresses the power play between those who have information and those they choose to reveal it to:

I don’t know if I should tell you.
What?
But you’re my friend more than she is.
What is it?
What do you think yourself? Is it better to know things or not to know things? Is it better just to let things be the way you think they are, the way they are really because if someone tells you something that might change everything and do you want that? Do you think that’s interfering or is what a friend ought to do?
You’re going to have to tell me now, you know that. [p. 17]

Churchill then undercuts the build-up, with the confidant stating ‘I’ve known that quite a while’ [p. 17], perhaps implying that there are times when it is not necessary to share everything one knows.

Science and technology

Like in Churchill’s A Number (2002) and Far Away (2000), numerous scenes deal with changes in science and technology and the impact they have on our lives.

In ‘Climate’, two characters discuss climate change, one of whom is clearly less concerned about its impact. Faced with the facts, the character here just chooses to ignore it:

There were those emails those scientists, I can’t remember the detail
No it didn’t make any difference in the end
No I think you’re right, most scientists agree it’s a catastrophe. The question is how bad a catastrophe. [p. 54]

And later in the same scene:

Are you really not going to take it seriously?
I don’t know how to. [p. 54]
Then in ‘Virtual’, a character reveals their love for a ‘virtual’ woman; one the audience assumes is an avatar on the internet. Clearly, the confidant is not accepting of this relationship, and questions its validity:

I don’t care what you say
No but listen
I’ve never felt like this
That’s not the point what you feel
It’s the only
Because she doesn’t exist [p. 67]

To find a similar use of form and style, look at Swedish director Roy Andersson’s films You, The Living (2007) and Songs from the Second Floor (2000).

### Critical response / Productions

The original production was staged at the Royal Court and according to one review, ‘James MacDonald’s dazzling, playful production makes the piece a human experiment in which an outstanding cast bring each situation to vivid life inside a clinical white cube that is suggestive of a lab.’

The production was equally well received in new productions in Australia, ‘Director Kip Williams and a strong ensemble cast have wrested a stylish, vibrant and detailed humanist tapestry from this challenging text, augmented by clever modular set design (Dave Fleischer), lurid lighting (Paul Jackson) and pace-making electronic sound (The Sweats). It’s intellectually and emotionally probing theatre that feels utterly fresh.’

It was also well-received in the United States of America: ‘Churchill has been not only one of the most radically inventive dramatists of the modern era but also one of the most trenchantly observant.’

As David Riposte writing in Variety says, ‘Love and Information is a vastly entertaining riposte. Churchill depicts a world increasingly fractured by information overload, with people struggling with the possibility of love and hope. Her dramatic representation of it could not be more intoxicating.’
First steps into the text...

Below are some ideas related to key scenes in the play Love and Information. These are intended to inspire exploration and are in no way prescriptive. Detailed practical approaches to the text can be found in the ‘Eduqas Drama and Theatre A Level Guide’.

Each element – i.e. acting, directing and designing – can be covered simultaneously in the study and practical exploration of scenes from the play. This will enable learners to have prepared ideas for all the elements which will appear in Section A or B of the examination.

Context

The knowledge of the genre, practitioners to apply, as well as social, economic and historical context will apply to all answers in some degree in the examination. If learners relate them closely to the text, their relevance is heightened.

Perhaps the main themes are a good starting point for learners to make decisions regarding their overall concept. They might consider the time frame they wish to place their action, e.g. in the present day which talks directly to the audience about their current experience. They might choose a non-specific period, making the play's ideas and themes universal. Each scene might have a specific time which might then comment on attitudes in that period of history.

*Love and Information* has much scope for reinterpretation and flexibility. What may at first seem imposing for learners will, in fact, be an excellent starting point for many practical exercises. Getting students to try out different approaches to the play will enable them to see the many possibilities this play provides.

Learners might want to establish a coherent concept. Such concerns regarding the order of scenes and how they wish to structure the play need to be discussed. They may consider the reason why the play being restructured. Learners must also decide which, if any, of the optional ‘random’ scenes are included. The ‘depression’ moments are essential – but where should these be placed in the running order? The text also suggests that the depressed character can be the same throughout or played by different actors. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? The play clearly raises more questions
than it initially provides answers to.

Ultimately, the answer to these questions will be revealed when the learners decide what atmosphere they wish to create for an audience. How do they want the audience to respond? Is there a sense of ‘channel-hopping’ with scenes of different moods and style or, perhaps more effectively, an overall pervading sense of disconnect in contemporary society? Some scenes like ‘Fan’ and ‘Manic’ are humorous due to their subject matter and character dynamics but should the whole play be played broadly as a comedy? The American Conservatory Theater production in Los Angeles was somewhat criticized as it ‘accentuates the buoyancy of Churchill’s writing at the expense of some of its steely chill. It’s an audience-friendly version of the play that at times comes off as comically ingratiating.’

Learners might conclude that the play needs to be performed like a piece of music. The pace should be varied to keep an audience engaged otherwise the fifty short scenes might become somewhat repetitive.

**Acting**

- **Practical exploration of the text** will help learners to form their own opinions about the characters in the play. Each scene is very immediate and intense. There is no time to ease into the role. Some scenes even appear to be as if they are part way through a conversation. Learners might need to consider how actors could transition from scene to scene where they may be called upon to multi role.

- **The specific rehearsal techniques used by practitioners and theatre companies** the learners are familiar with can be used to explore acting style, subtext and motivation of the characters. As the scenes are vignettes, they are very self-contained and characters do not develop over the course of the play as in other texts. However, an actor has very little information to go on and must create a complete background and history for the character to establish a coherent *given circumstance* for the scene.

- **Physical and vocal experimentation in the building of a role and relationships** will help learners to develop opinions and personal responses to the performance demands of the text. For example, in the scene ‘Mother’, some analysis of the language in the scene might indicate the ages of the characters – here one character is a teenager and the other “mother” only twelve years
older. Learners might consider the vocal and physical skills appropriate for the character.

- **Close text work** from *Love and Information* to prepare monologue or duologue technique and performance skills will give learners the opportunity to use subject specific vocabulary about vocal and physical performance skills. Familiarity with and use of this vocabulary is expected in the written responses in the examination.

- **Live theatre productions**, seen as part of the course, will provide helpful examples of acting skills at work, which can be referred to by learners in Section B. These observations also help learners to make similar or different creative choices throughout their study of the text.

**Directing**

For the purposes of the examination, directing refers to the work done with actors in terms of movement and positioning in the space, in rehearsal and in performance.

- **Performance style**. This might refer to the original production style or one that learners have applied to the text in their own experimentation with it.

- **Movement and positioning in the performance space**. As well as the placement of actors in relation to one another, this might also cover where they enter and exit the stage and the characters’ relationship with the audience. In *Love and Information*, the transitions between the scenes are important. For example, in Section Four, Dinner, Piano, and Flashback are very short scenes, and learners might need to consider how characters exit or how the action of each scene is connected.

- **Interactions between characters through reaction and response in the space**. Learners might need to consider how the pace of each scene is established through the speed of response or when pauses in the action should take place. The pacing and rhythm of the scene might be considered in conveying this relationship, as well as the reaction to the arrival of new characters and how they change the dynamic of a scene. For example, Section Four, Memory House, might be a dialogue between two characters whose words overlap and interrupt at various speeds.
pace and rhythm of the scene is created entirely by this interaction.

- **Rehearsal techniques.** These should refer closely to the technique used, its reason and intention, and the success of its use in achieving the aim. For example, Section One, Secret, learners might explore the type of secret it could be and consider how this affects the response to its revelation and the impact upon the proxemics of the characters.

- **Live theatre productions**, seen as part of the course, will provide helpful examples of directing skills at work, which can be referred to by learners in Section B. These observations also help learners to make similar or different creative choices throughout their study of the text.

**Design**

The Design element covers set and props, hair and make-up, costume, lighting and sound. The questions in the examination will clearly state which skill area(s) are required in the response.

- **Production Style.** Reference to the original production style and context will inform the learners’ ideas. In some cases, this will be a faithful rendition of the style, their own ideas or a different style completely. In both cases, justification of this concept in terms of their wider knowledge of the play, themes, relevance and intended impact upon a contemporary audience are required. In Love and Information, the production style might focus entirely on conveying the title of the play. It is usually performed in a minimalistic style; however, there is scope for it to be performed naturalistically or using epic theatre techniques. In Section B, the influence of live theatre must be referred to in justification of their ideas.

- **Hair and Make-up.** Ideas might include the use of colour and make-up and hair techniques to convey the period, age and status of the character(s). The use of techniques in the creation of prostheses and elaborate hair pieces and wigs, body make-up and light reacting colours might be
explored. Learners will need to give reasons for the choices of these ideas and connection to the given / chosen scene(s) is essential. Due to the many scenes and the pace of the action, hair and make-up for each scene might not be possible and learners might choose to use a design appropriate for all scenes with perhaps the addition of hair accessories, e.g. hair wraps. Performers might have an abstract “character throughout” that embodies the designer’s concept of the play, e.g. the use of a mask like make-up effect or a puppet like appearance. In Section B, the influence of live theatre must be referred to in justification of their ideas.

• **Costume.** Reference to the original performance and other productions might provide a starting point for costume ideas. The techniques a costume designer might use to create character, status, age and to convey meaning to an audience should be explored. This might be achieved by the choice of historical period, use of fabric texture, colour, silhouette of the design and the intended use by the actor in the given / chosen scene(s). Costuming is also another problem. Regardless of the size of cast, each actor will end up playing multiple roles. How does a costume designer get around this? Should the actors be dressed in blacks or neutral tones, with specific costume pieces added to indicate different characters? The play was written in 2012 but should future productions continue to set it in this time period or should it be contextualised so that it is always set in the present? In Section B, the influence of live theatre must be referred to in justification of their ideas.

• **Set and props.** This refers to the study and discussion of various performance spaces and their suitability for the text and how other productions have been designed for their chosen space. The production style, location, mood and atmosphere of the given / chosen scene(s) might be created through the use of levels, positioning of exits and entrances, the proximity of the set to the audience, and whether set pieces are fixed or able to be moved automatically or by the actors. Learners will consider the use of large props to dress the scene, and the colour, period
and significance of these in terms of the scene and in conveying a meaning to the audience. To accommodate the many scenes, learners might want to consider the use of a multi set. The original production, which was performed on a proscenium arch stage, included a white cube set, created by set designer Miriam Buether – the walls of which looked like giant graph paper, with a front shutter-like screen that dropped between each scene. Each scene then had minimal furniture, such as a bed or chairs, to suggest the locations of the events. In the Sydney Theatre Company production, set designer David Fleischer also created a bare white flexible set which consisted of equally sized blocks which were manipulated by the cast. These blocks were then used to indicate the different locations. Learners should consider the possibility of staging the play on different types of stages. The flexible nature of the text means that it is ripe for different interpretations. How different would the production feel if it was performed in-the-round or on a thrust stage? Could this play even work in a promenade performance? In terms of style, it is usually performed in a minimalistic style; however, there is scope for it to be performed naturalistically or using epic theatre techniques. In Section B the influence of live theatre must be referred to in justification of their ideas.

- **Lighting design.** The techniques used by a lighting designer to convey location, mood, atmosphere and meaning to an audience might include the use of colour, different types of lighting, positioning of lights and their intensity, use of effects lights, and length of the lighting cue. The use of technology through projection and animated visual effects are considered part of the creation of this visual element. In the American Conservatory Theater production, the production started (unknowingly to audience members) in the foyer of the theatre. The design here focused on multimedia elements, including film. Lights might also be used to highlight areas or action around the stage so that transitions are quick. Locations can be suggested by the use of gobos, e.g. One Torture; the characters are outside of the interrogation room but the light through the bars of the interrogation room may cast a shadow on the action. In Section B, the influence of live theatre must be referred to in justification of their ideas.

- **Sound design.** The techniques used by a sound designer to convey location, mood and atmosphere, change in dynamics and rhythm of a scene, and its impact upon an audience might
include the use of different types of sound, placement of speakers, intensity, length of the cue and changes between sound states, manipulation of sound through software, and the looping of sound in performance. Sound could also be used to enhance the themes of the play. In the original production, Christopher Shutt’s sound design used a variety of music, sound effects and ambient sound in the transitions between scenes. The sound here was often incongruous with the action of the scenes that it preceded. The overall effect was the bombardment of noise in a world in which it is difficult to be heard. In Section B, the influence of live theatre must be referred to in justification of their ideas.
Acknowledgements

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