



A Level

Drama and Theatre

The Book of Dust – La Belle Sauvage by Phillip Pullman, adapted by Bryony Lavery



About the play

The play is the first of an 'equal' trilogy set in the same universe as the *His Dark Materials* series. It follows the story of a boy named Malcolm Polstead, who takes on the responsibility of protecting a baby named Lyra, the subject of a prophecy. He must keep her safe from the authoritarian Magisterium and sinister Gerard Bonneville. Along his journey, he forms an unlikely friendship with Alice, and both the characters transform through their experiences.

Context

Similar to Philip Pullman's other works, the play explores his views on organised religion and the use of power within society. The play's world premiere was at the Bridge Theatre in London on December 7, 2012. Directed by Nicholas Hytner, the production used a range of theatrical devices to create a visceral experience for the audience.

Themes and motifs

The play explores several key themes, including the oppressive control of organised institutions, morality (and when it's right to break the rules), innocence, companionship and self-discovery. Dæmons, which are animalistic representations of their human's inner selves, help to convey themes of identity and transformation throughout the story.

Directing

Directors must consider how their use of the performance space, movement and positioning can communicate the context of a performance. The choice of stage type significantly impacts these decisions. The four main staging styles are: proscenium arch, in the round, traverse and thrust.

Characters

Malcolm: A twelve-year-old boy from Oxford who embarks on a physical and literal journey while protecting Lyra from the Magisterium.

Alice: A fifteen-year-old girl who works at Malcolm's mother's inn. She initially loathes Malcolm but learns to trust him throughout the journey.

Lyra: A six-month-old baby who is the subject of a witches' prophecy, which foretells her role in reshaping the world. Her parents are Mrs Coulter and Lord Asriel.

Mrs Coulter: A high-status member of the Magisterium, searching for her daughter to hand her to the authorities.

Lord Asriel: An Arctic explorer who rejects the ideals of the Magisterium, which has ruled that he is not allowed within 50 miles of Lyra.

Gerard Bonneville: A disgraced scholar who is obsessed with his theories about Dust, a mysterious matter. He is violent and sinister.

Dr Hannah Relf: A scholar of St Sophia's college. She can read the truth-telling alethiometer. She is a member of the secret resistance.

George Boatwright: A patron of The Trout Inn who is vocally opposed to the Magisterium. He flees and leads a group of political fugitives.

Members of the resistance: Scholars who join Dr Hannah Relf in working against the Magisterium, including former Lord Chancellor, Lord Nugent.

Live theatre

How have your acting, directing and design ideas been influenced by examples of live theatre you have seen? How can you adapt effective ideas for this play? You may refer to the National Theatre at Home recording of the play.

Design

Consider the following when approaching the text as a designer:

What are your aims and intentions? What are the key themes you want to communicate? What is your production style and chosen time period? All of these decisions will impact the rest of your design.

Performance space: Each of the four main staging styles have their own advantages and things to think about when creating ideas for set, such as sight lines. Think about the role of the audience; should they feel immersed, or as though they are observing from a distance?

Set and props: How will you create locations? What large pieces of set and furniture do you need? Think about the scale, style and colour.

Puppetry: This was used in the original performance to bring dæmons to life.

Lighting: For example, types of lanterns, position of lights, colour, intensity.

Sound: For example, live or recorded, diegetic or non-diegetic, use of music including period and style, SFX, soundscape, intensity.

Costume: For example, period, style, colour, material, fit, state.

Hair and makeup: For example, style, colour, impact of makeup.