



HAUNTED by Edna O'Brien

RESOURCE EXTRA

When a captivating young woman enters the life of the quixotic Mr Berry, his desperation to ensure her return causes him to start secretly giving away his wife's clothes in exchange for elocution lessons – but as the redoubtable Mrs Berry searches for an explanation to her fast-diminishing wardrobe, he soon finds that both his relationships are increasingly under threat...

Edna O'Brien is an Irish novelist and playwright who now lives in London. Born in 1930, O'Brien's work was banned in Ireland for a time. She has been described as a feminist writer and the language that she uses is rich and poetic.

HAUNTED is a new play that will premiere at the Royal Exchange Theatre in May 2009. There are three characters in the piece: Mr Berry, Mrs Berry and Hazel. These three characters' lives become entwined by chance and have consequences that nobody could have imagined.

HAUNTED is a memory play. Mr Berry is our narrator, he speaks to the audience and it is his memory of events that we see. Mr Berry is retired whilst his wife, Mrs Berry, is a supervisor in a factory – a job that she hates. During the play, we learn various pieces of information about the life Mr and Mrs Berry have lived together, including that Mr Berry had an affair some years ago. Hazel is an elocution tutor and she also has a clothes stall. Hazel is sent to the Berry house by a local thrift dealer, who Mrs Berry used to sell her old clothes to. Mr Berry instantly becomes besotted with Hazel and starts to secretly give his wife's clothes to her. The relationship is very much an affair of the mind – the relationship is never consummated or sexualised. Mrs Berry is unaware of all of this – even of Hazel's very existence, and Hazel thinks that Mrs Berry is dead. Mrs Berry's suspicions are aroused, eventually she catches Hazel dressed in her wedding gown and the deceit is unravelled...



Notes on staging HAUNTED

HAUNTED was written for a proscenium arch stage, not a theatre in the round. This meant that designing the production for the space proved challenging. In fact, Director Braham Murray says "it's the most difficult play we've ever had to design for this theatre... it's taken literally months to find a solution which was right for this space."

WHY NOT? There is one physical feature which is needed to tell the story, but which is problematic in the round. Braham Murray says that solving this one element of the set was the key to the whole design. As you watch the play, can you work out what the challenge – and solution – was?

Murray describes how when he read HAUNTED, he was: "swept away by the extraordinary language... by the intensity, by the passion, by the heart of it." The Creative Team had to find a way to capture the heightened, poetic style of the play. Murray explains: "it's a memory play and therefore vivid in a different kind of way to a play which just unfolds in front of you and you know you are present when everything is taking place." To create the visual and sound worlds of the play, Murray re-assembled the Creative Team of designers and composers who worked with him on THE GLASS MENAGERIE, which is also described as a 'memory play' – the design solution they have created, however, is very different.

The script of HAUNTED includes descriptive passages about a glass wall. Designer Simon Higlett explains, "that was really intriguing. In a proscenium, I could have designed it quickly, in that one would do a glass box with resonances



of a conservatory or a greenhouse. Mr Berry is a gardener, he's remembering things from his past, so he's looking through a glass wall, it's slightly faded, slightly dirty, mould growing on it – they're all memories and they're slightly fogged." In a theatre in the round, the glass wall would need to become a glass floor.

The floor is made of perspex and can be lit from underneath. The under lighting will be used to suggest that things aren't always real – even the characters, when lit from underneath take on a ghostly, otherworldly quality. The floor will also be used as a surface for images to be projected on to. These will be magical, moving images, used to suggest locations, and also to reinforce some of the imagery in the writing.

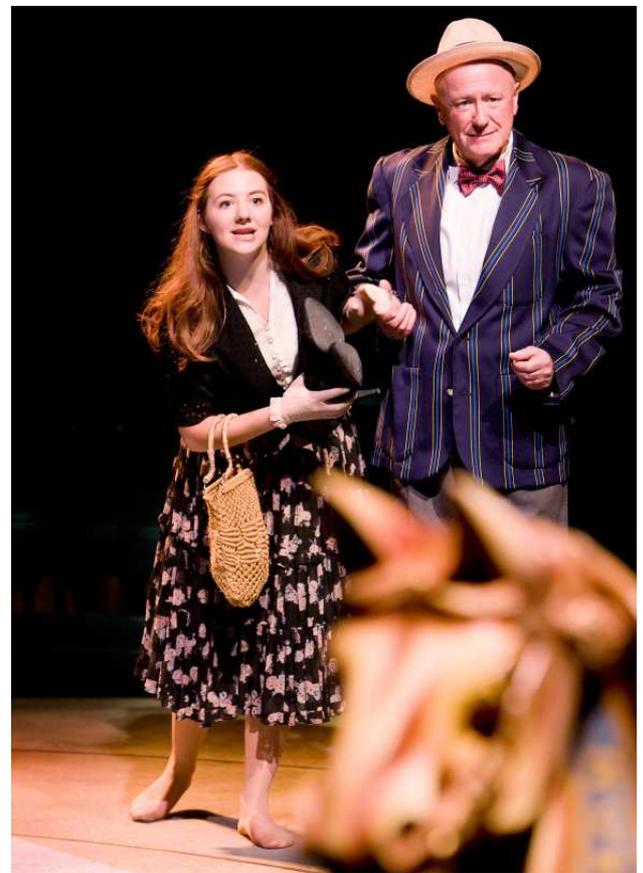
WHY NOT? Imagine you were designing a production of HAUNTED for a proscenium arch theatre, what would your set look like?

Original music is being composed for HAUNTED by Akintayo Akinbode. Although HAUNTED is a new play, Akinbode explains this does not change his process as a composer, "for me, each play is approached from a fresh point of view whether it's a world premiere or a play that has been done hundreds of times before. The music has to work with the production we're doing rather than be about an audience's preconceptions and expectations." The music in HAUNTED is mainly being used for the transitions between scenes. There are three main musical themes: "Mr Berry and Hazel", "Jack and Gladys" and the "Creepy" music.

WHY NOT? As you watch HAUNTED listen for the three themes in the music. Can you identify when and why they are used? What affect do they have?

WHY NOT? Compose the score for a well-known story, by giving each of the character's their own themes – music which is played whenever they appear. Explore how the same theme can sound different depending on the instrument it's played on. How can you use this to express the moods of your story?

Themes for further exploration



THE MADNESS OF LOVE

Director Braham Murray says that HAUNTED is “about – as a lot of plays are – the madness of love... Men have a little image in their mind of the perfect woman and they project this image onto various women in their lives. Sometimes they marry them, sometimes they have affairs with them and then, when the lust dies away, they project the same image onto someone else.” Mr. Berry seems aware that he is guilty of this, suggesting it is not in his control, “I fell... I always fell”.

WHY NOT? Write a ‘would like to meet’ advert on behalf of Mr Berry. What do you think his version of the perfect woman is?

WHY NOT? Write a scene between Hazel and a friend, where Hazel describes her relationship with Mr Berry – to what extent is she aware of his feelings?

A ‘VERY IRISH’ PLAY?

Braham Murray has described HAUNTED as “a very Irish play”, explaining that for him, “it’s in the intensity and the passion of the language which is very un-English... English writing, for example Pinter, is all repression and held in and pauses and silence... it’s not a criticism at all, there is just a difference which I think is to do with being English and not being able to show quite how you feel and saving it all inside.”

WHY NOT? Read a selection of extracts from plays by writers of Irish heritage and a selection of plays by English writers. Can you notice a difference in style, like that which Braham Murray suggests?

“WHO ARE WE THIS EVENING...?”

Mr Berry is constantly re-inventing himself and his life. He describes the importance of a hall to Hazel, saying you need a place to, “...spruce up... quaff the hair... make an entrance.” There is a sense that Mr Berry is always playing a role. As Mrs Berry says “he’s a dreamer... do you know what a dreamer is... a dreamer has scaled the Mattahorn, a dreamer has sat at the world’s top tables, a dreamer has played Shakespeare in his birthplace and comes from a noble Anglo-Irish family on the estuary”

WHY NOT? Write a history for Mr Berry based on what he tells Hazel, and then another – the history that you think is true. What was his childhood like? His family? What are the things he wanted to do but never did?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES

When Mr Berry asks his wife what would make her happy, her answer is: “to be Jack and Gladys again and not Mr and Mrs Berry”. Names are significant in the play. Mr Berry introduces himself to Hazel as “Berry – Quincy”. Mr Berry’s mother would call his wife Mabel – after a maid they had. There are other significant names in the play – as you watch listen for how and why they are used.

WHY NOT? Write down the names Jack, Quincy, and Mr Berry – for each name, draw the person you would expect to meet.

To hear a full interview with Director Braham Murray, WHY NOT listen to the latest Royal Exchange podcast at royalexchange.co.uk