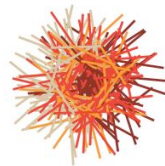




EDUCATION RESOURCES

Belloo.

C R E A T I V E



queensland
theatre
company



The following Education Resources have been compiled by Belloo creative in collaboration with Annette Box (BA/BED and Head of Drama, Somerville House) to provide teachers with resources to support their students' experience of the 2016 production of *Motherland* by Katherine Lyall-Watson.

SUITABILITY: This production contains loud noises, infrequent mid-level coarse language and adult themes. It is recommended for audiences over the age of 15 (Year 11 and 12). For any further information about Belloo creative, please do not hesitate to contact us at www.belloocreative.com

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1. PRODUCTION CREDITS

PLAYWRIGHT	Katherine Lyall-Watson
DIRECTOR	Caroline Dunphy
DESIGNER	Penny Challen
LIGHTING DESIGNER	David Walters
ASSOCIATE DESIGNER	Annie Robertson
SOUND DESIGNER	Dane Alexander
CAST	Kerith Atkinson, Peter Cossar, Barbara Lowing, Daniel Murphy and Rebecca Riggs.
DRAMATURG	Kathryn Kelly
PRODUCERS	Chris Bendall (Critical Stages) and Danielle Shankey (Belloo creative)
INITIAL PRODUCER	Ellen Belloo and Metro Arts
DURATION	90 minutes – no interval
AWARDS	Best Independent Production – Matilda Awards 2013 Best Production - Groundling Awards 2013 Gold Matilda—Barbara Lowing, Matilda Awards 2013 Outstanding Performance by an Actor—Barbara Lowing, Groundling Awards 2013 Outstanding Sound Composition – Dane Alexander, Groundling Awards 2013 Finalist—Patrick White Playwrights Award 2013

To access full biographies of cast and creatives, download the Queensland Theatre Company program on their website: <http://www.queenslandtheatre.com.au/Whats-On/Mainstage-2016/Motherland>

2. BELLOO CREATIVE

An award-winning independent theatre company that produces original works for stage and screen.

Founded in 2013, Belloo explores new ways of firing the imagination and connecting stories with the human body. Our philosophy is to bring people, stories and talent out of the shadows. Belloo is four women with decades of experience in theatre, film, and writing; *clockwise from top*: Katherine Lyall-Watson (writer); Danielle Shankey (producer); Caroline Dunphy (director) and Kathryn Kelly (dramaturg). We work across theatre, performance, community cultural development and the visual arts and all of us are individually involved in teaching, mentoring and advocacy.



www.belloocreative.com

3. CRITICAL STAGES

Critical Stages is the only dedicated national professional platform for touring independent theatre productions.

Since its formation in 2005, Critical Stages has grown to become one of Australia's leading producers of touring theatre from the independent sector. Critical Stages brief is to make outstanding theatre accessible to audiences around the country. To achieve this, we have been successfully touring independent theatre to regional, remote, urban and rural audiences in every state and territory around the country for the past ten years. We champion independent theatre artists and companies around the country and assist them in extending the life of their work, and we support regional communities giving them access to high quality theatre that they would otherwise not be able to access. The company's goal is to make exceptional theatre accessible to audiences everywhere, extending the life of outstanding productions. Scores of artists are engaged on Critical Stages touring productions every year, traveling to perform in hundreds of towns from Darwin to Launceston, and Karratha to Lightning Ridge to tens of thousands of audience members every year. Recent productions include: Dead Puppet Society's *The Harbinger*, Yve Blake & Co's *Then*, The Shift Theatre's *Girls in Grey*, Hayloft Theatre's *Delectable Shelter*, *Stones in his Pockets*, Sheridan Harbridge's *Songs for the Fallen* and many more. For upcoming tour information head to: www.criticalstages.com.au and sign up to our e-newsletter.

4. ABOUT MOTHERLAND

The epic and intimate *Motherland* intertwines the sweeping true stories of three very different women from different times, united in the heartache of exile from their homelands.

This is passionate, gripping, contemporary theatre, weaving multiple stories of home, belonging, love and loss that span decades, continents and revolutions.

Motherland is a play about three remarkable women...

Nell...a Brisbane socialite, who married the Russian Prime Minister and helped him escape from the Nazis during World War II.

Nina...a feisty writer and academic who quit her native Russia for Paris, but returned in her twilight years.

Alyona...a single mother who is a Russian museum curator whisked away to Brisbane by an Australian businessman, in search of a brighter future that may just collapse before her eyes.

From the chaos of a Russian military coup, through the hell of Nazi-occupied France to a turbulent Brisbane in the throes of the Fitzgerald Inquiry, Brisbane playwright Katherine Lyall-Watson has penned an intricately researched historical drama about how world-changing events can ripple out and take a toll on everyday lives.

5. REVIEWS

"...a most intelligent, and beautifully shared story...Motherland is the most elegant, most sophisticated theatrical work we've seen in Brisbane in years...Dunphy's inspired direction is faultless" Xanthe Coward, XS Entertainment

"Very, very well-written...wonderful acting, the women who are so strong, passionate and fiery...A terrific play" Doug Kennedy, 612abc

"...deserves its accolades" James Harper, The Courier Mail

"The best plays sweep you up, visually and emotionally, and drop you down amongst the action. They're so engaging you can't escape. They're so spectacular you don't want to. The newest production of my Best Plays list is the phenomenal Motherland" Zuzanna Kamusinski, Weekend Notes

“...a new and daring way of constructing a play” Alison Cotes, Crikey

“Beautifully written and expertly crafted, a gem of a play that weaves the epic and the personal and creates the kinds of roles actors long to play” Kate Foy, Greenroom

6. DIRECTOR’S NOTE

In 2013 *Motherland* was a newly written script, which Katherine Lyall-Watson was in the process of redrafting when she first asked me to read it. The lives of three real women (one Australian and two Russians) and their search to find a place for themselves in a tumultuous world sparked my initial interest in this monumental piece. The play’s events, which span the twentieth century, three continents, World War II, the Russian Revolution and Queensland’s Fitzgerald Inquiry, were brilliantly overwhelming and posed a great staging challenge that fuelled me as a director. I came up for air and was immediately immersed in our collaborative world with a fine team of local actors to work into the depths of Motherland’s core. It’s a rare and special experience to hear the voices of five mature actors on stage. Bringing Motherland’s extraordinary women out of the shadows of history and interweaving their stories needed great care and precision. Working closely together with a sensitive design team allowed us to explore the nuances of movement, sound, light and contemporary design to build the epic world and allow the rich and muscular writing to transport the audience. I’m thrilled that *Motherland* continues to resonate on many levels and that these women’s intimate stories stand the test of time with courage and integrity.

Caroline Dunphy, p.11, Queensland Theatre Company 2016 Season Program.

7. CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

The curriculum connections provided are based on the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) Drama Senior Syllabus (2013) for Queensland Year 11 and 12 students (see here for more information - <https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/subjects/arts/drama-2013>) and the Australian Curriculum: The Arts / Drama (see here for more information - <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/the-arts/drama>). Where possible, definitions have been provided for state specific terminology to assist with application across senior courses of study in other Australian states. The Australian Curriculum refers to ‘Making’ Drama which includes Forming and Presenting (QCAA dramatic dimensions), along with creating, devising, directing, designing, scripting, improvising and performing. ‘Responding’ (terminology used in both the Australian Curriculum and QCAA syllabus) includes analysing, reflecting, critiquing, researching.

DRAMATIC STYLES AND CONVENTIONS

The script and the live production primarily focuses on the dramatic styles of Contemporary Realism (including Heightened Realism), however it can also be used in the study of Verbatim Theatre, Physical Theatre, Story Drama, Ensemble Theatre, Contemporary Political Theatre and in an exploration of conventions such as poetic text, multiple roles, flashbacks, audience address, mirrored scenes across parallel time frames and multiple narratives across time and place.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

Role / Character: Three female protagonists, use of multiple roles.

Relationships: Family, intimate and with our self.

Tension: Tension of the task (immigrating, escaping political and legal danger and completion of a life’s work of writing) and tension of relationships (romantic, friendship, familial and forbidden).

Symbol: Writing (political, poetry, novels, letters).

Place: The play is set in many cities, including Brisbane, Paris and Moscow, with relevant settings to each location.

Language: Use of minimal Russian language, poetic text.

Time: Time frames jump and overlap to transition the story in and out of the past and present, ranging from 1922 to 1992.

Mood: Against the backdrop of political turmoil, love and betrayal, an array of moods are created through choices in music, lighting as well as the actor's manipulation of voice and movement techniques.

Contrast: These exist in the choices of place, the age of the characters, depiction of what it means to be female, time periods and the various relationships we hold dear.

THEMES:

Identity, exile, sexuality, history, redemption, gender equity, diversity and maturity.

Gender equity and cultural diversity are currently very important in Australian theatre. The Australia Council identified a range of key changes needed to create a more diverse and robust Australian theatre including developing more strong female protagonists, culturally diverse characters and supporting female creative teams. *Motherland* provides a platform for students to discuss what it is to make theatre that 'shines a light' on the stories of real and powerful women, or other communities of people that they consider to be 'in the shadows'.

In a recent interview with *She Brisbane*, Editor Helen Goltz spoke to playwright Katherine Lyall-Watson about this very issue...

Q: Do you feel that the MAJORITY of women today especially in Australia, will never really face this sort of adversity and our challenges will be more social-based (career/family/finances)?

A: To be honest, I think there are incredible stories all around us. There are people fighting battles we aren't even aware of. Some of us are fortunate and never have to really struggle, but if we open our eyes we will see there are people who've fled wars and revolutions living around us now. There are people who've fought inner demons and those who've escaped violent relationships. There are those who are surviving diseases and those who are mourning their loved ones who didn't make it. I'm constantly astounded at the bravery and courage of other people.

CONTEMPORARY AND HEIGHTENED REALISM AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

The play uses a series of highly contemporary theatrical devices to tell this sweeping story including mirrored scenes, doubled casting and a taut and highly physical directorial style. This is a distinctive combination of traditional storytelling and theatrical innovation that arises from the collaboration between playwright Katherine Lyall-Watson and director Caroline Dunphy who has spent decades training in physical theatre forms such as the Suzuki method.

TRUE STORIES: STORY DRAMA AND VERBATIM THEATRE

Motherland is a new performance work that demonstrates the power of theatre to tell true stories. Although *Motherland* is not a verbatim play, the story is based on real people and portrays real historical events – some of the most turbulent of the last 100 years including the Russian revolution, WWII and Queensland's Fitzgerald Inquiry. This means that the play development process includes detailed research, ethical consideration about the impact on the work and themes that consciously link personal story with major historical events, important traits common with verbatim theatre or performance which draws from 'real' stories or people, with many liberties taken to make an engaging theatrical experience. Most of the characters are or were real people with the exception of Sasha and Chris (who were invented and very loosely based on a story told by Elena Volkova, the inspiration for the character of Alyona).

Motherland follows three extraordinary women as they battle for their lives and to survive their respective exiles:



Nell Tritton (1899 - 1946) was a Brisbane socialite, journalist and aspiring poetess. Her father owned the famous Tritton Furniture Emporium in the Valley and Nell left for Europe in 1925, where she met and married Alexander Kerensky.

Nina Berberova (1901 - 1993) was a Russian writer and poet. She left Russia in 1922 with her partner Vladislav Khodasevich and lived in several European cities before settling in Paris where she became friends with Nell Tritton and Alexander Kerensky. She immigrated to the United States in 1950 and only returned to Russia for the first time in 1989.



Alyona (1954 - present) is a Russian historian and museum curator living first in Moscow and then in Brisbane in Nell's old house. The inspiration for the character of Alyona is Elena Volkova, who brought the story of Nell and Kerensky to our attention and was so generous in sharing her own journey.

EXTRACT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHERINE LYALL-WATSON
(p.12, Queensland Theatre Company 2016 Season Program)

Q: Did you find it hard to draw the line on the research and story?

A: Absolutely! I kept finding out new things that I wanted to include, but there's a point where you have to stop and use what you have rather than keeping on researching. There's a lot of information that I found out after I'd drawn that line which would have *Motherland* a very different play. It's why I now call it a work of historical fiction based on fact.

→ **CLASSROOM CONSIDERATION:** Try to have a general framework, vision or lens in mind prior to interviewing or researching to help guide you in the initial phase of preparation...do some preliminary research and equip yourself with a basic idea of the background of the issue, event or people prior to seeking interview subjects.

Q: How did you decide what leads in your research to follow in order to create the story?

A: That was really tricky! Basically, I followed the leads that excited me. There were so many directions I could have taken (and so many early drafts following various threads that turned into dead ends) - for instance, Nell had another marriage before Kerensky. She was married to a Russian opera singer who was apparently a womaniser and alcoholic. I loved writing him and had a lot of fun in their scenes, but in the end I had to make the hard choice to cut him from the play as his scenes with Nell didn't advance the story (they were a fascinating detour but if I'd kept going with all the fascinating detours I'd have ended up with a seven hour play! - or a mini-series!)

→ *CLASSROOM CONSIDERATION: Once you have a vague idea of the direction for your scenes or script, it is always worth questioning in great detail and probing further during the interview as well as exploring a broad range of avenues to research to allow you to have an excess of content to draw from if you are devising a script based on true stories. The more you have, the more you are able to craft the shape of your script to create an engaging narrative.*

Q: Are there any other interesting facts that you discovered while doing the research for *Motherland*?

A: Nell went to Somerville House. Her name was Lydia Ellen Tritton and she changed it to Nellé because I think she wanted to be more exotic. She later dropped the last e and changed it to Nell but also went by the name Therese while she was overseas. It was hard tracking her as she used so many different names. She also published a terrible book of poems when she was still young - but I imagine if any of us looked at the sorts of poems we wrote in our teens, we'd cringe at their sentimentality. Her family owned the Tritton Furniture Emporium and were very wealthy. She danced with the Prince of Wales at Cloudland but was smitten with all things Russian. I think she found herself when she travelled overseas and was free of the constraints that were naturally present in Brisbane in the 1920s.

→ *CLASSROOM CONSIDERATION: As you research and collate stories, be open to the discovery of potential symbols, places or contexts which may serve the drama. Note places (such as a furniture shop, Cloudland, a school), people mentioned (such as the royals and politicians) and the specific era from which the story comes. This will assist with creating an aesthetic that suits your scenes or script. The five senses are often a great way to open an interview and make for some wonderful potential dramatic exploration in a script and on stage.*

8. PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

POP-UP FOYER EXHIBITION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MUSEUM OF BRISBANE

Belloo creative has partnered to develop a Pop-Up Exhibition with the Museum of Brisbane that offers a small historical exhibition about the people in *Motherland* as well as an opportunity to record and share your stories about place, identity and exile.

The Pop-up will sit in the foyer of the Queensland Theatre Company and will be activated by Belloo creative dramaturg, Kathryn Kelly, an hour prior to each show.

School groups are warmly encouraged to make the most of this opportunity to engage with the real and historical dimensions of the show.

Kathryn Kelly is an experienced educator, currently teaching at QUT and can facilitate student-led discussion, or answer any questions in relation to activities or assessments suggested to scaffold student experiences of the show in these educational resources.

→ *CLASSROOM CONSIDERATION: If you are unable to participate in the 'Pop-up Foyer' concept presented at QTC, why not consider presenting a similar model back in the classroom? Students can work in small groups to research the various places and time periods and create a focus for each 'exhibit' based on the themes presented in the play or personal connections to the places and times. The content that students create for this can then be used later for Forming activities.*

MAPPING THE NARRATIVE

Research the three countries and relevant cities in the time periods explored throughout the play. Create a digital 'mood board', a Prezi or use a basic web page format such as Weebly or Wix (or whatever your school may have licenses for) to create a visual depiction of the landscapes and era. Include sound bites or files to further situate the action in a time or place.

THE PROTAGONISTS

In the *She Brisbane* interview, Goltz spoke further with playwright Katherine Lyall-Watson...

Q: *Motherland* is a powerful story and the three women depicted had hard lives, frightening lives, compared to some of our contemporary challenges. Why did you choose to depict these particular stories/moments in history? Have you personally got a connection or fascination with these events?

A: I was originally approached by an independent company called Three Sisters, who'd heard the incredible story of Nell Tritton from a Russian researcher. I was fascinated by the fact that an adventurous Brisbane woman had married an exiled Russian Prime Minister and saved him from the Nazis in World War II. It seemed utterly implausible. I started researching and the more I researched the more fascinated I became. Not just by Nell but by the other women who became such important parts of the story.

→ **CLASSROOM CONSIDERATION:** *If you were to choose one or more women across history and the world to interview for the purpose of writing a stage play, who would you choose and why? Consider jumping across the globe and time frames for your choice. What is it about their 'story' that appeals to you and that you believe would make good 'drama'? What do you think makes a story worth telling? Consider what design choices might help bring that woman's story to life on stage.*

9. POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

- Using the model of a 'tweet', ask students to summarise the narrative in 140 characters. Have them record this and share with their peers.
- Create a visual representation (such as a tree or a mind map, something digital or even use classroom items) to track all of the characters and places encountered in the play.
- Create a triumvirate Venn diagram to explore the three main female protagonists and chart their similarities and differences.
- The form of poetry is important throughout the text. Using a basic rhyme scheme or even a Haiku, create a series of short (no more than 4 lines) poems that represent each of the key characters and each of the key places throughout the play. These can be used in Forming class work later as stimulus for devising movement pieces and physical theatre.
- Create a list of all of the key themes that emerge throughout the play. Using the play script, find a line of dialogue that most accurately reflects this theme and the moment.
- Use the program to map the various creative members involved in the team and track their choices. For example, there is a Sound Designer/Composer. Which CHOICES might he be responsible for? Use provocative and descriptive language to describe these choices. Refer to specific examples and try to determine the impact or intention for these choices.
- Discuss the various dramatic styles evident throughout the play and the associated conventions. Explore which forms and styles overlap and the effectiveness of these conventions onstage.
- Imagine that you are writing the marketing content for *Motherland*. In 100 words, write a summary of what you perceive to be the dramatic intention and meaning of the play.

10. LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

FORMING AND PRESENTING

The philosophy of the theatre company that created *Motherland* is to bring people and stories 'out of the shadows.'

Phase One: Forming

Students are to work in small groups to identify stories, people or issues that they believe need to be brought 'out of the shadows'. These might include historical or true events or issues that have been neglected by the mainstream media. Each group then shares these key ideas with the whole class, facilitated by the educator / teaching artist.

The facilitation involves careful consideration of:

- ethics and respectful engagement
- discussion of appropriate content and preventing triggering if sensitive issues raised

Some of the research processes used by Katherine Lyall-Watson include:

- reading the works written by her subjects
- tracking down interviews, letters, correspondence and media reports from the people she was writing about
- using her wordpress blog to ask for community and family information

A short list of appropriate 'leads' are developed and students decide which group will pursue a particular idea and what research processes might be possible for their piece. Students might like to work in collaboration sharing the various roles, or to mirror the roles of the Belloo creative team, which includes playwright, dramaturg, director and producer.

Phase Two: Forming

Students will need at least one lesson to consolidate the research found and to consider what material will be incorporated into their performance. They may decide to allow the playwright and dramaturg to drive this process, or they may wish to work as an ensemble.

Phase Three: Forming

Students will prepare a short script or treatment of the material to be workshopped and devised. Students may decide to allow the director to drive this process or to work collaboratively as an ensemble. Further work may be undertaken on the piece by the playwright and dramaturg, if required.

Phase Four: Forming and Presenting

Once the script is at a final draft stage, students will collaborate as a directorial and creative team to block and rehearse the work, considering the space and set, movement, direction of focus, how to create tension and achieve mood and contrast. Symbols and other stagecraft elements such as music may be introduced here.

Phase Five: Presenting

Once lines are down and the scene work has been rehearsed and polished, it will be shared for an audience using basic and symbolic props and costume items, relevant sounds or music and theatrical conventions such as flashbacks, multiple roles, suspension of reality, narration.

Phase Six: Presenting

After the initial presentation for an audience, reflect on aspects that need some further consideration and seek feedback from audience members and peers. Reshape the work as required and prepare to perform it again, this time for the camera so that the work can be captured on film, viewed for reflection in class by the performers and potentially shared with the original subjects.

RESPONDING

- ❖ In the play, Nina makes many bold comments such as “*maybe in Australia you have ‘little’ readings but poetry is never little here. Friends of mine have been killed for their writing. If you think this is just a hobby, there’s no place for you here!*” (Scene Four).

Select TWO moments from the live action which demonstrate the difference in culture and attitude between Australia and Russia OR France. Refer to Dramatic Elements to help analyse HOW these differences were realised onstage (consider space, language, stagecraft elements such as sound and lighting and acting skills of voice and movement). Evaluate the impact of exposing and sharing these contrasts in relation to the overall dramatic meaning of the play.

- ❖ Nina further asserts that “*women with children are boring and silly. Women with professions are not boring. It’s as simple as that.*” (Scene Two).

Select TWO of the three main protagonists and identify a moment where they may share similarities or closely align in their pursuit of femininity and gender expectations as well as one where they are in opposition. Refer to Dramatic Elements to help analyse HOW these differences were realised onstage (consider language, relationships, situations, tension and acting skills of voice and movement). Evaluate the overall intended message about female gender identity that is conveyed in the play through your analysis and detailed examples from the live action.

- ❖ In her review of the 2013 production of *Motherland* Zuzanna Kamusinski stated that “*the best plays sweep you up, visually and emotionally, and drop you down amongst the action. They’re so engaging you can’t escape. They’re so spectacular you don’t want to.*” (Weekend Notes).

Select ONE or more moments in which you feel the audience engagement and connection was created through visual aspects, prompting an emotive response. Consider the set, lighting and costume design, the use of space and movement (making reference to conventions of physical theatre) and the actor’s execution of movement (including gait, body language, facial expressions) to analyse the relevance of this quote and the impact of this moment visually to engage the audience and convey an overall dramatic meaning with emotional impact.

11. RESOURCES

The script for *Motherland* is published by Playlab and is available for purchase at www.playlab.org.au

Playwright Katherine Lyall-Watson also discusses her unique processes for writing plays based on true stories in her introduction to the publication of *Motherland*.

Katherine describes how she found the real people that inspired *Motherland* and how she went about researching their stories and writing the script. This is available on the Belloo Creative website: <http://www.belloocreative.com/motherland/>

Katherine’s blog shows the response of Brisbane audiences, including Nell Tritton’s family in Brisbane to *Motherland* <https://katherinelyallwatson.wordpress.com/kerensky/>

12. PRODUCTION PARTNERS

JUDITH WRIGHT
CENTRE OF
CONTEMPORARY
ARTS

ELEN
BELOO



queensland
theatre
company

Metro Arts



Dedicated to a better Brisbane



Queensland
Government