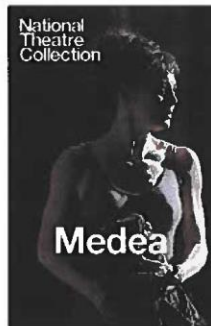


Candidate 5 evidence

Advanced Higher Drama Dissertation

Is Female Rage and Domestic Abuse overdramatised in theatre ?

Written by



Introduction.

This dissertation will explore the two combined issues of female rage and domestic abuse within theatre and how strong female practitioners such as the late Helen McRory, take these issues and bring them across in such a powerful way to their audiences, however, are they too overdone and exaggerated? I have chosen this topic because there is a lot of speculation that female rage is a cry for attention and not for help, or even that it is too much and needs to be dialled down. The same could be said for domestic abuse, should it be hidden from people to shield them from it, or should they be shown it to teach them about the effects it has on one's mental and physical state and the toll it takes on oneself. The two plays I have chosen to write about are Medea written by Euripides, which was directed by Carrie Cracknell in 2014, and Streetcar Named Desire written by Tennessee Williams and directed by Benedict Andrews and Nick Wickham in 2014. Medea is played by Helen McRory, Jason is played by Danny Sapani, Blanche is played by Gillian Anderson and Stanley is played by Ben Foster. Powerful female leads like Helen McRory and Gillian Anderson really execute playing such strong characters like Medea and Blanche brilliantly, they are very similar in the sense that they would do anything for their family even under such terrible circumstances. There are certain scenes I'm going to go into more detail about when discussing my themes that both these plays exhibit. The hatred these women have for these men in their lives is astonishing and even though they are similar, they are much different than meets the eye. Throughout this dissertation I will analyse both practitioners' approaches and acting styles and how they have such an effect on their audience and how they push the question I have stated above.

Streetcar named Desire's Female Rage and Domestic Abuse.

In 'streetcar named desire' we meet Blanche and Stanley who is her brother in law, and we are very quickly introduced to a very hostile interaction between them. They are arguing about the situation of the Dubois family house and that they no longer own it. Stanley finds Blanche extremely sneaky and we found out very quickly that they brought out the worst in each other. There is an obvious power struggle between the two, along with a clash of what they consider to be correct values. Stanley finds Blanche to also be insufferable due to her higher class of status, he is insulted by her commenting on his and Stella's house and day to day life. One night Stanley and his friends are drinking and playing poker. Through the curtain Stella and Blanche are playing music after being out all night, Stanley loses his patience and temper and comes through and breaks the radio by smashing it to pieces. Stella pushes him to the floor which she soon regrets as he pushes her back and smashes something against her face. Blanche is horrified at what she has witnessed and takes Stella to safety in the apartment upstairs. This is when the audience are properly introduced to the abuse Stanley is more than capable of. This is also key as it somewhat prepares the audience for what is still to come of Stanley's abuse. Later, Blanche has a total breakdown after discovering her boyfriend Mitch has discovered the ugly truth of what type of relationship that was had between Blanche and her seventeen year old student. Stanley comes home from taking Stella to the hospital, who at the time is pregnant, to find Blanche totally out of it after consuming a dangerous amount of alcohol. Stanley proceeds to take advantage of Blanche and ends up raping her. The director's successfully achieved this by having Anderson take up a shifty stance when Foster was coming round the table to take her to bed, they also directed Foster when he took Blanche to bed to lift up each layer of her dress slowly to very fast to show off his predatory animalistic nature, like a lion would to his prey. Blanche opens up to being raped by Stanley but he manipulates it to be that Blanche has gone insane due to everything in her life going wrong. A nurse and doctor from a mental institution come to the house to take her away and Stanley stands there smiling like he would if an exterminator was there to remove a pest in which it would be Blanche.

The issues of female rage and domestic abuse come through heavily within this play between Blanche and Stanley. The directors, Andrew and Wickham, successfully cover both issues as they instruct Anderson and Foster to create this almost predator-prey relationship in terms of the abuse between Blanche and Stanley. They are instructed to be a few feet apart whenever together, this shows off the cold uncaring side they have for each other. However, when the lead up to the assault is taking place we have them in close proximity to each other, this could be to show how Stanley has completed a step in his plan to get to Blanche and starts pushing her off this ledge he has her on. This made the audience and I feel very uncomfortable and uneasy as we saw this very manipulative character take total power over this once strong and fiery character and turn her into a very insecure weak person in such a short amount of time. When the nurse and doctor arrive at the house we see that Blanche is in utter mental pain as she is no longer in control of her life as Stanley has manipulated everyone around her to be against her. The directors have Foster in a dominant hands crossed stance when watching Blanche being taken away to appear as if he won the battle he fought so long for. The directors instruct Anderson to raise her voice in

protest to being taken away and have a flighty stance and hunched posture, I believe this was to show that she is now the shell of who she once was. I believe that it can be said that the whole reason Blanche went 'insane' was that no one listened to her, which has brought about this whole issue of female rage and abuse as Stanley has abused the power that he has within his social group and life. The audience and I have a feeling of sorrow for Blanche as she is made out to be out of control and that she has been stripped of her voice and dignity that Stanley has so very inexcusably taken from her.

The Set Design also plays a part in the issue of abuse. The house that StreetCar is based within is merely just a frame of a house. It proposed to me the idea that no one knows what goes on behind closed doors and that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. What I mean by this is that Stanley did a lot of investigating into Blanche and everything that is going on with Belle Reve, the family estate, and when she was making digs about his life, home and lifestyle she shouldn't have as it is very easy to throw it back at her. The frames also show that only the people who were in the house at that point in time know what happened, for example; when Stanley hit Stella, all his buddies and Blanche are the only ones who knew about it, outsiders don't know the truth. When Stanley raped Blanche, the only people that knew the truth were them, hence why it was so easy for Stanley to lie and manipulate the story to Stella and their friends, especially as he was the only sober one of the two. There are also no walls within the house, the only thing that slightly resembles one is a sheer white curtain to provide the little privacy that Stella, Stanley and Blanche have when living together.

Research has shown from a crime survey for England and Wales, that at the end of last March (2023) about 2.1 million people aged 16 and over have been victims of domestic abuse. 1.4 million were female and 751,000 were men. This goes to show that domestic abuse, although focussed on female victims in Streetcar, are both genders. It also shows that we still don't know how many people are actually being abused as there are not enough people speaking up about it as they are possibly terrified of the outcome. Reviews have stated that "Anderson is utterly compelling" (The Guardian, 2014), "Gillian Anderson is electrifying as Blanche DuBois while director Benedict Andrews's modern-day setting allows Tennessee Williams's play to feel bracingly fresh" (The Standard, 2014). Gillian Anderson was an incredibly captivating Blanche to many including myself. "Ben Foster is explosive as Stanley, tattooed and menacing" (The Standard, 2014), "Foster's Stanley is a terrific tattooed bruiser who roars like a goaded bull." (The Guardian, 2014). Ben Foster was terrifyingly brilliant as Stanley, I almost forgot he was playing an egotistical maniac as he was that seamless.

Medea's Female Rage and Domestic Abuse.

Medea is a Greek tragedy that follows the story of a woman called Medea, her ex-husband Jason, their two boys, the boy's nurse, Jason's princess bride Creusa and her father the king Creon. Medea has been placed into exile along with her children by Creon because Jason left them and as there is suspicion of a revenge plot against him and his bride. She is then given a day to plan a way out safely to elsewhere, she has been offered a place of refuge by her good friend Aegeus the king of Athens. We immediately get a sense of lunacy from Medea as she starts discussing her plans of killing her boys, her plan is to get people on her

side of the story and fight for her then when they least expect it she will murder them herself instead of at the hands of some monster she claims several times through the play. However, her plan starts with killing the princess. She sends for Jason through a servant to take her boy's to the princess to beg for their freedom, with them she sends a lavishly wrapped box, enclosed is a poisoned robe and if anyone were to merely touch it they would be dead within seconds as it would burn the skin and leave nothing but bones. A servant returned with the boys explaining how the princess granted the boys to be free of exile and fell for this gift. Later we see the servant that brought her sons back and tell Medea of her wickedness, how the princess died unnaturally and cruelly and how Creon ran to her side and died alongside her. This suggests that Medea will let her rage and anguish run wild just so she can save herself and her boys from the cruelty of others. This also prepares the audience for what is still to happen with the murders of Medea's Children and also shows us that even when we think that she has turned into this monster she fears, she is much worse. Later, we see Medea outside with her sons and how she watches them walk away far enough to then strike a dagger to them both resulting in their deaths. The boy's nanny comes running in finding them both murdered and she staggers away looking numb and in shock from what she has just witnessed. This is the epitome of an appalling revenge and just shows us how far she is willing to go to destroy all that's near and dear to her so that no one else can hurt them. The director Carrie Cracknell successfully shows the horrific side to female rage and domestic abuse to the audience. The director instructs McRory to have a numb facial expression and almost robotic stance as she approaches her sons to kill them, this is to show how she can't show any feeling of remorse or regret as she goes to commit this horrific deed. She also directed her to have a look of joy when McRory gets news of Creusa's death as she has completed part of her plan of taking all causes of happiness that Jason has as she feels betrayed by him.

The issues of female rage and domestic abuse are brought consistently throughout Medea. The director Carrie Cracknell successfully carries out both these issues by instructing McRory to have a very defensive attitude and angry facial expression whilst sat down when discussing her plan of revenge to the voices in her head, this demonstrates how she is truly losing her correct sense of judgement and is being incredibly irrational. Cracknell also directs the voices, who are a group of women who all stand at the edges of the room, to be in all different levels to demonstrate that Medea has voices everywhere around her telling her what is and isn't right, like an angel and devil would sit on one's shoulder judging her every move. To me, the issue of female rage is heavily demonstrated here as she has no one to talk to about her plans which is driving her insane, but even more so when she starts arguing and shouting at the voices which show she has truly gone insane. Even more so when she believes the only way she can save herself or her sons is to kill them, I also think it's to bring more destruction to Jason's life as she can't stand that he has managed to move on and she has not. Cracknell also instructed Sapani to have a look of despair and pain and to fall to his knees as he watches a robotic version of his ex wife dragging his children into their old family living space, I believe this is to show how he has already gone through the pain of losing his bride, father in law, two sons but also Medea as she is now just a void of who she used to be. This makes the audience and myself feel very sorry for Jason as he in one day has lost all that is near and dear to him all due to Medea not wanting others to hurt who she loves the most. This also makes us feel absolutely appalled at this transformation of Medea as she is now this monster she expressed to dearly she didn't want to hurt her loved ones. I believe this shows female rage as this dark horse that can really sneak up on a woman and

make her do astonishing things. It also proves how a woman can really be and do anything that she so desires, especially in such a cruel nature. It also shows how domestic abuse really does come in all formats, the worst is death. It doesn't matter who it is, I believe it started well before she killed the boys as she kept saying to them in riddles how they must be kept from her as bad things will happen. It also shows that she knew she was going to kill them and how she grieved them before they died so she wouldn't have to afterwards.

The Design of this play also exhibits these issues previously stated. When Medea is talking to herself and the voices, she is dressed in a clean white jumpsuit, I believe this can show how her actions have not had an effect on anyone yet and that she is still classed as pure of intention. However when she kills her boys, she emerges with her hair incredibly messy and her clothes bloodstained. This shows how there was evidence of a struggle between them all. I believe it suggests that her rage has completely overtaken her as the colour that is mainly attached to rage is red and that's now the majority colour of her jumpsuit. It also clearly shows the issue of domestic abuse as she has killed her own children and that it is their blood that now stains her hands and clothes.

According to the BBC (2022), Gallup World Poll has collected 10 years worth of data saying 120,000 people in more than 150 countries asked what emotions they felt for a lot of the previous day. Most conveyed that it was a negative feeling. I believe that it's because we as women have been told to sit still and look pretty for such a long time, that the second we can start voicing our opinion it all comes out. Female rage is an important issue as people believe that it's a bunch of nonsense but judging from this Greek tragedy, it's always been a part of history. It's just no one wants to talk or listen about it. "McCrory delivers a majestic performance as the vengeful protagonist" (The Guardian, 2014), " a powerhouse central performance from Helen McCrory " (LondonTheatre, 2014). I found McCrory's performance to be compelling and astonishing, the way she played Medea was so different from anything I have ever watched before, unlike Sophie Okonedo's Medea.

In Conclusion with regards to the question, Is Female Rage and Domestic Abuse overdramatised in theatre? I have found that in this case, the issues previously discussed are not overdramatised in theatre. I believe it is a very good way to highlight these incredibly serious issues and shows that no matter what circumstance you are in, these issues shouldn't be 'normal' for one to experience. Then again another thing that would need to be brought into consideration for future research is how you interpret the play and issues. I find them as stated, not overdramatised.

Word Count: 2987.

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