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***Medea* by Euripides. A new version by Tom Paulin**

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Medea is a play that exemplifies passion, betrayal and revenge. In my view, it is the most accessible ancient production for a contemporary audience, as it deals with themes that transcend times and cultures. Only two factors fluctuate; the portrayal of the protagonist and how we, as a contemporary audience, respond.

The character of Medea has been subject to change throughout performance history. Her reception is incredibly varied (which was cleverly and intelligently showcased in the accompanying exhibition by the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama in the upper room of the theatre). Tom Paulin, the adapter, clearly opted for a feminist version of Medea to run alongside a heightened sense of 'otherness' that the protagonist possesses.

The director, Barrie Rutter chose to establish Medea as a barbaric foreigner visually by choosing a young black actress to play the lead, in stark contrast to the rest of the ensemble who spoke in strong Yorkshire accents. The set was reminiscent of a primitive lair with a mixture of furs and animal pelts on the floor. At the back of the stage was a large formation of sticks that resembled the open ribcage of an animal or a cave of branches.

Rutter furthered this concept through the creation of the cast's costumes, all of which were Edwardian in style and muted in colour, apart from Medea's non-period specific, distinctive green dress (I am led to believe that Medea's nurse also wore a distinctive colour, however the actress was unable to perform on the night reviewed and her lines were taken on by another actor). The combination of these effects contributed in providing the production with a postcolonial atmosphere.

The lead actress, Nina Kristofferson was convincing, playing the abandoned partner, traded in for a younger, richer model. She navigated through the dramatic ups and downs of the protagonist, insofar as nowadays Medea would have been diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. Gone were the Victorian connotations of Medea as an evil witch and replaced with a strong minded, yet vulnerable woman trying to contend with rejection.

The production stayed true in some respects to the original Euripidean. Live music was performed on stage, the infanticide took place off stage and there was a chorus which was made up of three very talented women. The music that accompanied their odes had a rhythmic blues feel and they played melodies on harmonicas, which interspersed the vocal line. A simple drum beat helped evoke a primitive feel. This uncivilised ambience was carried through a passionate warrior dance and cries by Medea, however was ruined by the introduction of other instruments later on in the production. An electric guitar screeched at pivotal instances, perhaps in a vain attempt to signify the intensity of the moment.

The climax of the production was a little underwhelming with the back part of the set manipulated into Medea's *deus ex machina*, however, rather than evoking a sense of power and eventual freedom, it appeared cage like, as if she will be haunted by her actions; imprisoned by her past. This prompted much discussion post production, whether it was a conscious choice made by the director. The positioning of the object left the feeling that whilst Medea was not in the right, one could see why she performed these atrocities and that she would carry this burden as her punishment.

The production as a whole was what would be expected of a professional company, with the majority of the cast providing fair performances. The new adaptation uses an interesting mix of colloquial and straightforward language whilst resisting a 'dumbing down' approach. Unfortunately, the impact and intensity of the plot was lost through the lack of coherency between the directorial choices. This production neglects to focus on the integral themes from the classical text and thus does not achieve the success that it has the potential for.

Medea toured from 2nd February to 17th April 2010.