

The Loss of Correlation in Debbie Tucker Green's "Stoning Mary"

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Abstract

Unlike ordinary plays with dramatic unity and chronological order, *Stoning Mary* juxtaposes three stories without any arrangement or explanation. One prescription causes an argument between an AIDS-stricken husband and wife; parents argue about the memories of their son who is no longer with them; a woman visits her young sister in jail. At the end of the play, the connection between these stories and the larger narrative emerges; the couple is the parents of the two sisters; the young sister was imprisoned for vengeance against her brother, a child soldier who murdered her parents. The play's connected sequences focus on family relationships and the significant issues that often arise in African and developing countries.

Keywords: Debbie Tucker Green, Stoning Mary, family's relationship, AIDS, child recruitment

Introduction

Attachment behavior is defined by English psychotherapist John Bowlby (1907–1990) as "any sort of behavior that leads to a person's maturity or maintaining proximity to some other distinguished and valued individual" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 39). According to Bowlby, attachment behavior occurs between parents and children in childhood and continues throughout adulthood as a bond between adults. With healthy, Bowlby goes on to say that this behavior is standard in many species, including animals and humans, and causes people to form affectionate relationships and attachments. It brings people closer to their corresponding figures or carers, which helps them survive because the risk of injury is reduced by the presence of a companion. In addition, humans establish innate attachments to particular people to cope with the world better through caregiving for the related figure (Bowlby, 1973, pp. 39–40).

In the opinion of Neria and Litz, the loss of one member of the family, a kid, or a close friend can cause more distress than the loss of a stranger, which means the loss of a significant relation may exacerbate the pain and despair felt by the bereaved person (Neria & Litz, 2004, p. 82). According to Bonnie Green, this circumstance can cause trauma in people's lives. Then, If a significant person dies unexpectedly, it might be even more painful. Unexpectedly, or accidentally. For instance, if the death is violent or painful, like murder, suicide, or the death of children (Green, 2000, p. 8).

The inaugural performance of "stoning Mary" was on April 1, 2005, at London's Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs under the direction of Marianne Elliot. Debbie Tucker Green is the first black British playwright to have

a play show for the first time on the main stage of the Royal Court Theatre (Pearce, 2013, p. 192). Since it premiered, the play has been seen in several foreign countries, including Australia, Spain, Canada, and Germany, and it has become Tucker Green's most famous play (Fragkou & Goddard, 2013, p. 149).

The play is divided into sixteen scenes and tells three stories that seem unrelated to each other about important topics like AIDS, stoning, and child soldiers, as suggested by the storylines' titles (The Genocide of AIDS, Stoning Mary, The Prescription, and The Child Soldier). Lynette Goddard and Deirdre Osborne, for example, identify the themes mentioned earlier addressed in the play with African countries. Even though the play has no cultural markers peculiar to African civilizations, it is reasonable to conclude that these concerns are primarily observed in Africa (Bilgin, 2020, pp. 36–37).

Stoning Mary depicts some of these violent dying types. In the play, a father and mother lose their kid, and the sisters lose their parents. Firstly, the father and mother lose their kid to the military; the boy is kidnapped. Although the father's assertion that the mother was lost the child. Then Mary kills the Child Soldier after his brief visit home; it is unclear why the Child Soldier kills his parent. Finally, even though the cause is unclear, It is requested that the Child Soldier kills his parents for military service.

These are severe losses that the characters go through because of killing Mary, and her sister has lost both of their parents. Although how the Child Soldier murder the Husband and the Wife (his parents) is not seen, they are said to die violently; he is described as wielding a machete. The parents offer the Child Soldier all they have, including money, food, and even their medicine which they fight about. However, they cannot avoid death. Their deaths are not explicitly

stated, but the moment in which the Child Soldier smashes the prescription and tells them to beg implies it (Bilgin, 2020, p. 54).

Traumatic grieving is defined by Holly G. Prigerson as a psychological response to the traumatic loss of an important attachment figure. Although each person expresses sadness differently, this suffering can step out in a particular manner. Prigerson notes that (disbelief, avoidance, shock, apathy, wrath, and a sense of futility) are signs of grief caused by traumatic bereavement (Prigerson et al., 1999, p. 67). The characters in *Stoning Mary* who suffer a loss frequently avenge with physical or verbal violence against those they believe are to blame for their loss. When their child is lost, Mum and Dad pine for him. In addition, there is a risk of loss in the Older Sister's life; her younger sister Mary is represented as being on the verge of being executed. Moreover, she lost her parents, yet Older Sister seems unconcerned about everything. Unlike her sister, Mary's reaction to the death of her parents is violence directed toward the Child Soldier who was responsible for their death (Bilgin, 2020, p. 56).

Despite the characters' usual reaction to the loss being violence, the play does not portray physically violent actions to the audience/reader. However, specific photos can give an idea of what to expect; the husband and Wife's death, for instance, is inferred by the Child Soldier ripping the prescription. The soldier initially appears in scene five with Husband and Wife carrying a bloodied machete, implying that he killed someone else before arriving at the couple's home, who will be his next victims. His parents are shocked and terrified. These scenes give the impression that the Child Soldier is about to kill them, even though the act of killing is not shown. Mary's impending execution not only confirms the death of her parents but also proves the death of the Child Soldier (Bilgin, 2020, p. 57). As stated in the following dialogue:

“OLDER SISTER: You killed a man who was a boy.

YOUNGER SISTER: That boy was a soldier.

OLDER SISTER: That soldier was a child –

YOUNGER SISTER: That child killed my parents. Our parents”

(Tucker Green, 2005, p. 63).

Analysis and Discussion

In his London Commonwealth Lecture in 2000, Kofi Annan claimed that AIDS killed significantly more people in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the region's conflicts combined. He also points out that HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus) affects 36million individuals worldwide, with 23 million living in Sub-Saharan Africa (Annan, 2000). Another issue that Africa faces is the use of minors in militias; UNICEF defines child soldiers as:

"any individual under the age of eighteen who serves in any capacity in any form of military force including chefs, porters, couriers, and those who accompany such units. This concept includes girls who are recruited for sexual motives as well as forced marriages, as a result, it does not just relate to a child who is or has been in possession of weapons"(Zisler, 2009, p. 254).

Most children in nations where children are used as soldiers are abducted and forced to serve in the military without their parent's approval or knowledge. Following their capture, these child soldiers are severely trained and frequently asked to murder a member of their society or family to desensitize them to violence and modify their morality so that they can conduct terrible crimes without hesitation. Furthermore, child soldiers are assigned diverse responsibilities based

on their gender and age, such as guards, spies, sex slaves, porters, and combatants (Zisler, 2009, pp. 254– 255). For example, according to Michael G. Wessells, youngsters who act as combatants fight on the front lines in conflict while children who serve as spies gather information; they are also occasionally involved in kidnapping and guarding captives. Moreover, they are used for dangerous operations like planting traps and mines and clearing minefields; girls are abused, raped, and used as sex slaves, in addition to cooking and carrying supplies (Bilgin, 2020, p. 38).

According to the title of the play's third plotline, Mary will be stoned to death for murdering a child soldier (Anyanwu, 2006, 316). If someone commits murder or adultery, they are usually put to death by stoning; nevertheless, it might be argued that married women who commit adultery are more commonly sentenced to death by stoning. This terrible punishment consists of repeatedly throwing stones at the victim till he or she dies (Ogbu, 2005, p. 180).

Even though the character in the play has no outside relationships, she is sentenced to death by stoning for homicide. The matters addressed in the play are significant issues that African people face. Although these topics are tied to Africa, Debbie tucker green states at the start of the play that "the play is situated in the country it is performed in" and "all the characters are white" (tucker green, 2005, p. 2). As a result, the playwright appears to be attempting to elicit empathy by bringing African problems to the countries in which the play is presented and relaying her story through white performers. Tucker green claims in an interview with Emily McLaughlin, a former artistic associate of the Royal Court Theatre, that the play is not a documentary about Africa. She said that:

"There are certain things going on in the world that excite me, such as what is not being discussed, what is not in the news, and what is

not being reported on [...] there appears to be an unspoken news agenda [...] I'm not going to tell the audience what should think, but the play is inverted for the purpose the characters are white for a reason, and it's set in this location for a reason. What I'm asking is, "what if ?" (Rebellato, 2013, p. 201).

Tucker Green does not intend to lecture the audience or reader about the hardships that black people face in African countries in the play *Stoning Mary*. Instead, she uses white characters to raise attention to these problems and tell their untold experiences since she believes these problems are not enough highlighted in the media. Stoning Mary, as McLaughlin puts it, "encourages us to consider our sentiments and reactions if white people died of AIDS in the same numbers as black people" (Goddard, 2015, p. 127).

The interaction between characters in the play demonstrates human beings' lack of empathy for those who live in less fortunate countries. Tucker green highlights the implications of turning a blind eye to critical global issues in stoning Mary. Each storyline's participants refuse to help one another, and their responses to major issues are typically cruel. Their interactions can be a metaphor for how indifference to global crimes contributes to their continence (Goddard, 2015, p. 129).

In the first storyline, a husband and wife are fighting for the sole prescription for therapy that can be affordable. Although it is unknown how they became infected with AIDS, it is clear that they both require treatment. However, because the prescription can only save one of them, they turn on each other and try to persuade one another that their individual lives and survival of one of them are more vital than the other (Aston, 2010, p. 589).

“HUSBAND: But I am fitter' [...]

WIFE: I'm younger.' HUSBAND: But I'm stronger.' [...]

WIFE: but I'm smarter. I'm smarter. I am.' [...]

HUSBAND: I earn more.'

WIFE: not enough to cover two” (Tucker Green, 2005, p. 27).

Their refusal to give each other medicine and their attempts to undermine each other are not typical of a loving couple. However, each character is afraid of the possibility of the other surviving rather than attempting to find a solution for both of them. For example, the wife frequently asserts that she can care for her girls and Husband; therefore, she has a higher need for the medication. Similarly, the Husband asserts that his wife appears in good health even though he does not believe it. Their ego persona shows their true feelings and inner thoughts as they strive to persuade one other about the medication. They are unwilling to express their true feelings to one other, but the ego characters express what they truly believe and feel. Even though their inner thoughts indicate that they believe the other is ill. However, they attempt not to express it outwardly to obtain the prescription (Bilgin, 2020, p. 46). The relevant dialogue:

“HUSBAND: And y' look fine.'

HUSBAND EGO: Liar

WIFE EGO: he says.

HUSBAND: Y' look well.

' HUSBAND EGO: Liar” (Tucker Green, 2005, p. 27).

The character's body language, like their ego characters', is very expressive, expressing their concealed thoughts and sentiments; it detects their relationship's dynamics. The ego characters evaluate the characters' body language and actions, demonstrating that they try to avoid each other's difficulties and maintain dominance over one another (Goddard, 2015, p. 129). The dialogue below is an example:

“HUSBAND EGO: She eyes to the skies it – focus on the floors it.

[...] Hands in pocket.

WIFE EGO: hands in pockets doing defiant – doin defiant badly. [...]

WIFE EGO: Face off the floor– look him in the eye.

HUSBAND EGO: Looks me in the eye now, now she thinks she got

XXXomething to say” (Tucker Green, 2005, pp.4–5).

The language used by the characters expresses their true feelings, which they cannot express clearly and directly, such as the language used by the poet Maya Angelou. Her words are considered a means of liberty from silence, disregard, and oppression, as well as the ability to speak. When it comes to whites who openly display their anti-Black sentiment, she has no qualms about taking a severe stance in her poetry (Hamad & Alzubaidi, 2020, p. 6).

A similar battle for a single life-saving medication was continued in the next generation; the conflict also affected the Husband and Wife's eldest daughter, Older Sister, and her boyfriend. It is unclear how they contracted the disease, but they are both fighting for the prescription; they offer to look after each other if the medication is given. In the end, Older Sister persuades her friend to accept the medication. This cycle of arguing over a single prescription

indicates that the AIDS epidemic continues to hurt people's health, and infected people in underdeveloped countries such as Africa have difficulty finding medication because not enough is being done to address the problem (Bilgin, 2020, p. 47).

Another outstanding illustration of the lack of concern for others and a selfish attitude is when the Older sister pays a visit to Mary in the Correction Office while she awaits her execution. Although she knows Mary will be stoned or brutally murdered shortly, she reproves her sister by focusing on trivial concerns. First, she reproves Mary for quitting smoking claiming that she began smoking because Mary pushed her to do so; therefore, she refuses to accept Mary's decision to stop smoking. Moreover, she resents Mary for wearing glasses, claiming that she also requires glasses, but no one seems to notice. Finally, she ignores her sister's words about shaving her head for the execution; instead, she focuses on her sister's glasses. In short, Older Sister's anxieties about trivial matters contrast with the gravity of Mary's impending execution, revealing the nature of the sisters' interpersonal bond (Goddard, 2007, p. 188).

Additionally, Mary has not received the assistance she expects from anyone other than her sister; Mary needs her sister's help to draft a petition and require signatures from anyone willing to help her avoid execution or even be saved. However, Older Sister informs them that only twelve individuals have signed their petition, even though they require 6000 signatures. When she discovers that nearly no one is ready to help her avoid the death penalty, she criticizes the women who refuse to defend her (Bilgin, 2020, p. 49).

“YOUNG SISTER: So what happened to the womanist bitches? [...] the feminist bitches?

[...] the professional bitches.

What happened to them?

What about the burn their bra bitches?

[...] the black [...] white [...] brown [...] underclass [...]

overclass [...] political [...] bitches that love to march [...] study [...]

debate [...] curse [...] educated [...] bitches that can read [...]

count [...] Pretty bitches.

**Not one of them would march for me? [...] Not a one a them would
sign**

for me?" (Tucker Green, 2005, pp. 61–63).

Mary claims that "feminist" women will only march and sign petitions for women who can read and count, which can be interpreted as a condemnation of the Western world's inability to care for people outside their community (Maya. 2018, p. 19). Mary emphasizes the lack of female solidarity and unity, she had hoped for their support, but she was disappointed. The repeated use of the word "bitches" is seen by Ken Urban as a scolding to those ladies who do not interact with Mary's penalty (Urban, 2006, p. 53).

The characters' inability to interact vocally reflects their lack of concern for one another. Unfinished and fragmented sentences, as well as repetitions, can be seen in the characters' speech. In addition, they frequently speak simultaneously and do not pay attention to one another. As a result, tucker green uses overlapping speech, denoted by a slash in the text, symbolizing the characters' incapacity to listen to one another's issues (Bilgin, 2020, pp. 50–51).

Conclusion

When it comes to humanism and the ideas of equity Tucker Green significantly contributes to the fight for human rights regardless of whether these rights are local or universal. In the play, Tucker Green sheds light on the Western's failure to deal with individuals who are not part of their society, wherefore she employs white actors in the play in order to heighten the effect and possibly elicit an ethical response from the white masses. AIDS, child recruitment, and the stoning penalty are some of the more prominent issues that the actors in the play are dealing with; despite this, the writer does not explain the causes of the problem, she shows nor does she give any answers.

Instead, she focuses on the effects; Tucker Green does not explain how the son of her parents ends up as a soldier, why he targets and murders his parents, or how Old Sister contracts AIDS. It is also unclear how Mary discovers which soldier is responsible for their parent's deaths. Moreover, the problems that are present in the play are only hinted at in the scene names; the actors themselves never perform them.

In addition to vagueness, stylistic elements heighten the effect of the problems being discussed; the characters do not assist or support one other in times of suffering in facing vehemence, bereavement, and illness. For example, the wife and husband disagree over their treatment of each other; the older sister does not help her younger sister while she is in jail, mother and father turn against one other after losing their son. These events are just a few examples of the many types of family dysfunction.

Like many plays by Debbie Tucker Green uses familiar names for the characters instead of culturally specialized names. Aside from Mary, whose name is prevalent throughout cultures and hence a common proper name, all their given names are derived from their familial roles. Aside from the fact that *Stoning Mary* deals with the black community issues, Tucker Green uses family terminology to emphasize that all races and ethnicities share these violent actions.

To conclude, Debbie Tucker Green succeeded in terms of raising moral consciousness among the Western masses. The play can call attention to the Western world's lack of responsibility and urge its viewers to rethink their viewpoints in the light of their encounters with the feeble Others on the stage. Ethical-political possibility of theater is highlighted in this play because it allows its masses to see the face of another and acknowledge their frailty.

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