



**Arts
Centre
Melbourne**

The Bleeding Tree



The Bleeding Tree

Teachers' Resources

Written and prepared by Katy Warner

The Arts Centre Melbourne's Schools Program is dedicated to fostering the arts by giving schools the opportunity to see a diverse range of excellent theatre in fully produced form.

These education resources have been created for students in Years 10 – 12 and can be adapted for students at VCE level. The content is designed so teachers can adapt and develop the discussion and activities according to their students' learning needs and individual school contexts.

The resources have been developed with a view to addressing the following:

- VCE Drama Unit 1
- VCE Drama Unit 2
- VCE Theatre Studies Unit 2

Learning Area	General Capabilities
The Arts - Drama	Critical and Creative Thinking
English	Personal and Social

Content Warning

The Bleeding Tree contains strong language, adult themes, and violent imagery. These warnings also extend to the content of the resources – as strong language, adult themes and violent imagery may appear in script excerpts and interviews included in these resources.

Trigger Warning: violence, violence against women, domestic violence. Students and teachers alike are reminded of the support offered by the following organisations:

[Lifeline](#) – 13 11 14

[Kids Helpline](#) – 1800 55 1800

Table of Contents

Meet the Playwright Angus Cerini	2
Meet the Director Lee Lewis	5
The Performance	8
The Design	11
Focus on Set and Costume.....	13
Themes and Issue	17
Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women	17
The Furies	18
Stage Craft.....	19
Links and Resources	21

Meet the Playwright | Angus Cerini



Angus Cerini wrote the following blog post for the Griffin Theatre website before the premiere of his award-winning play *The Bleeding Tree*.

Angus Cerini's brutal, and brutally funny, *The Bleeding Tree* won the 2014 Griffin Award. Here he talks to us about the role of government and reveling in the downfall of those who prey on others.

It has been enormously enjoyable writing *The Bleeding Tree*. To revel in the downfall of someone who preys on others and to envisage a community joining in on that destruction.

I wonder though at our continual failure to protect those most vulnerable. I wonder at the celebration of our war dead, while the numbers of women and children destroyed by another less glorious version of masculinity lie forgotten by the wayside. I wonder whether things like the tax on tampons or those without a uterus opining about reproductive rights represent the very thin edge of the wedge when it comes to violence against women. Or maybe these things are just a distraction?

Being equal before the law is a central tenet of our democracy. Having access to justice is the one necessary aspect of our society we must fix before anything else can be achieved. The rates of incarceration in this country have far less to do with guilt or innocence, and more to do with the power of your dollar. If there is one thing a government should do it is to increase the ability of any individual to seek redress under the law.

The primary role of government is not to manage the economy it is to allow for a healthy society to flourish. And to be clear, the relatively tiny sums of money needed to make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable are dwarfed by what is spent on the wars on drugs and terror and the remembering of wars past. Sucking the resources out of basic human services displays an impoverished grasp of what true political leadership involves.

Perhaps the enjoyment I've had writing *The Bleeding Tree* comes back to the fact that despite the improbability of things changing in the real world, perhaps simply expressing this impossible desire might bring the fantasy to life somehow. And the festering corpse of all those violent men swinging in the air – alongside the corrupted system that allows him to exist at all – is I think, one we all want to stand around celebrating.

Angus Cerini

June 2015

www.griffintheatre.com.au/blog/the-bleeding-tree-angus-cerini/



LISTEN to the Sydney Theatre Company's Podcast in which Angus Cerini chats about writing *The Bleeding Tree*.

www.sydneystheatre.com.au/magazine/posts/2017/march/podcast-angus-cerini

DISCUSS

- During the interview, Cerini mentions that “*you’ve gotta start with something big.*” What were his reasons, as a playwright, for starting the play like he did? Do you agree with his ideas? Why? Why not? Where would you have started this story?
- Cerini said the play took him 2 hours to write but then another year and a half to craft. What do you think he means by this?
- Consider Cerini’s response about making theatre -

I did ballet for a decade as a boy, so I guess I approach making theatre from a dance perspective or the movement – you’re conveying a story with your body in space. And I think TV drama can tell a really naturalistic story beautifully. And you can do special effects in film. And so, in the theatre – I’ve been trying to create a language for the theatre that’s particular to the theatre. If you tried to do that language on TV it just wouldn’t work. Likewise, I don’t want to do TV language on stage because I think the TV can do it better. So, I’ve been trying to create poetry of the voice ... It’s your body speaking it.

- What makes theatre distinct and different from film and television? Why theatre?
- What do you think Cerini means by “*poetry of the voice*”? Could you find evidence of this in *The Bleeding Tree*?
- Why wouldn’t *The Bleeding Tree* work as a film or television drama? What changes would be made, and what would be lost, if this story was adapted for the screen?



WATCH Tom Healy interview Angus Cerini about his play *Scowl* for the 2013 National Playwriting Festival (Playwriting Australia) **NOTE:** *Coarse Language Warning*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgYwkXnXZ54>

- In the interview, Cerini observed: “*White men run the world so if the world is crap, well it’s white men we have to look at.*”

RESPOND –

- Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?
- Can you see evidence of how Cerini is looking at this issue in his play *The Bleeding Tree*?

- Cerini states, “*Writing a play isn’t just about the structure or the words. It’s also about the imagination of the space.*”

RESPOND –

- Look at a copy of the playscript and consider the way which Cerini has written the play. How does the writing / format of this play differ from other plays you have read? Does the playscript offer any clues about how Cerini uses the ‘imagination of space’? (You can purchase *The Bleeding Tree* and view an extract of the text through AustralianPlays.org - <https://australianplays.org/script/CP-3054>)

Lee Lewis wants *The Bleeding Tree* to spark legislation rewrite on domestic violence

By Elissa Blake
August 5 2015 | Sydney Morning Herald

Theatre director Lee Lewis believes the time has come to rewrite the legislation around punishment for domestic violence victims who kill their abuser in self-defence.

Lewis, the artistic director of Griffin Theatre, is speaking out as Griffin stages a new Australian play, *The Bleeding Tree*, about three female victims of violence who kill the perpetrator.

"The play makes a strong argument for a reconfiguring of our justice system," Lewis says. "It argues that as a society we don't actually believe a woman who responds in self-defence should be punished at all. But we have a justice system that has to punish. I would like to see a reconfiguring of that system but how do you rewrite that legislation? The creative community is pushing that conversation along, urging people to think about it."

Angus Cerini's play, which won the 2014 Griffin Award for New Australian Playwriting, follows a mother and her two daughters through the aftermath of the violent death of the man of the house.

"The play asks, if you defend yourself to that extreme, how guilty should you feel about it?" Lewis says. "The women in the play find the voice to defend themselves. A woman is asking, 'If it was none of your business before, given what he was doing to me, it's none of your business now'."

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homicide in Australia, with 39 per cent of all homicide incidents between 2010-11 and 2011-12 occurring in domestic relationships, according to a 2015 NSW Domestic and Family Violence briefing paper. Of domestic homicides during this period, 58 per cent were committed by an intimate partner.

Victims of domestic violence can raise self-defence in a homicide case in NSW if they believe their conduct was necessary. However, the prosecution can argue that the accused's actions were not a reasonable response to a perceived danger.

"I want our politicians and our lawyers to be sitting in the audience to see this conversation around domestic violence," Lewis says. "We can write laws and rewrite laws. But how long does it take to galvanise people to actually bring about change?"

Reading dry reports on domestic violence does not always help in the understanding of it,



Lewis says. "I believe playwrights and writers can pull apart the humanity of both the perpetrators and the victims to help us understand how people get caught in situations – both men and women. The more we understand, the more we will be able to change the situation."

So far, Lewis says, the audience response to the previews has been overwhelming. "I'm still reeling from the first preview. It was very vocally supportive. It's an incredibly tense story, you're hanging on the edge of your seat, and the relief at the end is huge."

Lewis has spoken to victims of domestic violence who have seen the show. "I asked them if it was hard to watch and they said no, because he was dead. So often the story is about getting to that point where the person dies and the tension is in wanting that person to die. In this play, the worst thing in the world is gone. I said what about the women getting caught? They said, oh no that's fine. The fact he was already taken care of, that was great. They were very happy to have the perpetrator of the violence dead."

The Sydney Morning Herald

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/lee-lewis-wants-the-bleeding-tree-to-spark-legislation-rewrite-on-domestic-violence-20150804-gir0yz.html>



READ the Out the Front interview with Lee Lewis for insight into her career, Griffin Theatre and new Australian plays.

<http://outthefront.com.au/2016/lee-lewis/>

RESPOND

- What does a director do?
- What sort of skills or attributes do you think Lee Lewis has which has helped her become a director?
- Lewis talks about the type of plays she is drawn to. What sort of plays would you be interested in directing? What themes or stories excite or interest you? Have you ever seen or do you know of any plays / theatrical productions that explore these themes / stories?



WATCH this March 2014 Tom Healy interview with Lee Lewis about directing (AustralianPlays.org)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5F4kg6SjICs>

DISCUSS

- Lewis talks about the need for director's to have a 'lack of ego'. What do you think she means by this? Why is that important?
- What is different or unique about the rehearsal process for a new work? Is there anything Lewis mentions that you think could be beneficial to consider in the development of your own, devised work?
- Consider Lewis' response about working with new writing –

My question always comes back to you, the writer; what do you want to say to people now about this? What do you want me to walk out thinking and being willing to do? The audience is going to give you two hours of time. You. The writer. What difference do you want to make in that time and how do you do that to this audience?

- How do you imagine a director helps a playwright develop new work? What is their role? How do directors and playwright work together?
- After seeing *The Bleeding Tree*, do you think Cerini and Lewis had considered those questions? How?



LISTEN to the Stage Milk Director's Chair interview with Lee Lewis. This interview is focused on advice for actors but there are some good insights into the craft of directing.

www.stagemilk.com/lee-lewis-interview/

REFLECT

- In the interview, Lewis says: *"500 years from now ... the plays are the artefacts that will exist to tell people who we were and what we thought on a deep level."* What plays (and maybe they have not been written yet) would you want to leave behind?
- Lewis discusses some of the attributes she is looking for in actors; courage, curiosity, observational skills and the ability to adapt to change. Why do you think these words are at the top of her list? Can you think of any other important attributes for actors?
- When asked, *"What is the goal of the theatre?"* Lewis doesn't even hesitate in her response: *"To make the world a better place."* What would your answer to this question be? Do you think that Lewis' production of *The Bleeding Tree* meets this goal? How?

The Performance



Paula Arundell, Airlie Dodds and Shari Sebbens were the original cast members of the premiere 2015 Griffin season and subsequent 2017 Sydney Theatre Company co-production of *The Bleeding Tree*. In the 2018 return season at Arts Centre Melbourne, Paula Arundell once again plays the Mother however this time she is joined by Brenna Harding and Sophie Ross.

Paula Arundell won the 2016 Helpmann Award for Best Female Actor for her work in *The Bleeding Tree* as well as the Sydney Theatre Award. Her performance garnered high praise from critics and audiences alike.



CONSIDER the following quotes from reviews.

(If you'd like to read the full review online, links to all these reviews can be found in **RESOURCES**.)

"Paula Arundell is astonishing as the mother desperately trying to protect her children and wife finally free of years of unbelievable torment. Her vulnerable performance captivates from start to finish, entwining us in the unfolding of her anxieties, and memories, along with her renewed hope for a brighter future. We feel the ramifications with her as she both rejoices and recoils from what she has done."

(Aussie Theatre, March 23 2017)

“The performances are all astonishing and forceful, led by Paula Arundell as the mother working to hold it together for herself and her daughters, and understand exactly what her role is in the new family set up. It’s a character which comes to life vividly in the raspy warmth of Arundell’s distinctive voice.”

(The Daily Review, 15 August 2015)

“Paula Arundell as the matriarch is self-assured, as her character instructs her daughters with a calm authority that belies her most certain rising panic. The two daughters (Airlie Dodds and Shari Sebbens) are the perfect contrast to their mother, exclaiming frequently at the scene and cursing their father as an old prick. Not even a fast-paced script can slow down any of the performances, Arundell, Dodds and Sebbens are all in absolute and compelling command of the material.”

(The Buzz from Sydney, 11 August 2015)

WRITE

- Imagine you are a reviewer. How would you describe Paula Arundell’s performance? What moments or images stayed with you? What did she do? What effect or impression did her performance make on you? How can you communicate this to your readers?



LISTEN to the ABC Radio National Books and Arts segment in which Michael Cathcart talks with Angus Cerini and the actors.

You can listen [here](#) (language warning)

DISCUSS

- During the segment, Michael Cathcart describes the production as a chorus piece. What is meant by that? What performance and expressive skills do you feel an actor would need to work effectively as part of a chorus?
- Cathcart asks the actors how they built the performance. Shari Sebbens responds that there is a *“strong internal life in all the characters.”* What are some techniques

that actors use to build the internal life of the characters they play? Why do you feel this is important?

- Cathcart asks Airlie Dodds about the “*flicker of doubt*” in her character. Did you notice this in the performance? How did the actor use their expressive skills to convey this mood?
- Sebbens comments how it “*feels like Angus has written a play which takes Time and really plays around with it.*” What do you think she means by this? How does the structure and form of the play inform the performance?
- Listen to the actors performing an excerpt of *The Bleeding Tree* and consider how the actors use voice (timing, pace, breath, pitch, silence, tone) to:
 - Drive the action and narrative
 - Create character
 - Transform character (into Mr. Jones)
 - Create mood / atmosphere and tension

After the performance, take some time to discuss and reflect upon the performance.



- Analyse and evaluate how the three actors use voice, gesture and facial expression.
- Consider the actor-audience relationship
- How did the actors address and engage the audience?
- What was your response to the mother’s situation? Her daughters? The other characters from the town?
- Where and how were the performers placed on the stage? How did the placement of the performer in relation to

the audience effect the audience’s response to their situation?

- Explain how the actors used performance skills to convey character. Consider focus, timing, presence and energy. What do you think could be the challenges for an actor in the performance of *The Bleeding Tree*?
- What is the role of transformation in this production? Where was transformation evident and how? Consider how the actors became a different character often within a sentence or less. How did they use gesture, voice, action / reaction to transform?
- In his review of the return season of *The Bleeding Tree* (Griffin Theatre and STC, 2017) Ben Neutze for the Daily Review writes:

“Paula Arundell’s performance is every bit as astonishing and powerful as I remember, but Shari Sebbens and Airlie Dodds have both gone even deeper into their characters, finding richer resonances and an even more profound sisterly bond. While I remember Arundell as the absolute stand out of the first season, it feels much more like an ensemble piece now.”

In what ways do you think *The Bleeding Tree* is an ensemble piece? How is this reflected in the performance style?

The Design



“Director Lee Lewis, designer Renee Mulder, composer Steve Toulmin and lighting designer Verity Hampson fashion a visually striking and aurally rich production around Cerini’s words. Arundell, Sebbens and Dodds, working on a steeply raked and pleated stage that keeps them off-balance or pitched forward most of the time, are spellbinding as his outback Furies.”

(Jason Blake, [Sydney Morning Herald](#), 7 August 2015)



CONSIDER the following insights into the design of *The Bleeding Tree* from reviews, articles and interviews.

(Links to full article can be found in **RESOURCES**.)

“Renée’s set and costumes placed the actors (Paula Arundell, Airlie Dodds and Shari Sebbens) in an abstracted, timeless version of the play’s Australian rural setting.”
(Sydney Theatre Company Magazine)

“Played out in a cloaking of darkness and pools of light (Verity Hampson, lighting) on an awkward, angular construction painted as pink floral swirls on which they tentatively move, barefoot, (design Renee Mulder)”
(Stage Noise, 13 August 2015)

“Renée Mulder’s set design created a sense of immediacy in the small theatre, as the stage was enveloped by a canopy like structure that the characters perched on, where they were at easy eye level with the higher banks of seats in the audience. The drama had much more

urgency as a result, as mother and daughters kept a watchful eye on the horizon as they paced the set.”

(The Buzz from Sydney, 11 August 2015)

“Part of the danger in/of the performance, we absorb, might be because of our unconscious sense of the knife-edge danger these actors maybe experiencing performing on this monstrously precipitous Set Design by Renee Mulder. This design may be decorated, strewn with a period pattern of wall-paper/lino flowers but it looks anything but safe, and we hold our breath for the actors, even unconsciously, as they negotiate its constant scariness of possible injury. The design, then, does work as an inter-active visceral embodiment of danger for the audience, and the dramatic schemata of Verity Hampson's Lighting must be acknowledged as another creative power of this production to that end, along with the haunting, moving Composition, Sound Design of Steve Toulmin.”

(Kevin Jackson's Theatre Diary, 8 August 2015)

“Renee Mulder's design for director Lee Lewis' premiere of Angus Cerini's The Bleeding Tree yields one of those sets which is sculpturally interesting in itself, even before it's animated by actors. From upstage in The Stables a series of slanted wedges fans out, dipping sharply to the floor in an evocation of the vertiginous ridges of an abstracted, unaccommodating landscape. But the harsh impression is softened by the surface with its floral patterning of a kind found on the frocks and wallpaper of bygone generations, now faded and inexpressive. The same backward glance is 'heard' pre-show in Doris Day singing, “Everybody loves a lover” until interrupted by a shattering blast, its long reverberation felt throughout a sustained total blackout plunging us into a traumatised present.”

(Real Time, Issue 129)

REFLECT

- What did the set bring to your mind? How about the costumes and colour palette? Did it remind you of anything?
- Some commentary (above) talks about the 'dangerous' set. What is your opinion on this? How did the set effect the tension?
- How did the three main design elements (set/costume, lighting and sound) work together? Do you think all the designs complemented each other? Did they work cohesively?
- How did the production design elements create mood and atmosphere, focus, character?

Focus on Set and Costume



“The design by Renée Mulder began concept as a women’s space, an interior environment and a place where appearances and upkeep seem vital. “Abstracted, the set is both the form of mother’s floral skirt yet also an unforgiving and dangerous terrain” says Mulder. “The costumes suggest the 1950s the characters clothes have been inspired by references of Country Women’s Association (CWA) ladies and sewing patterns of the period.”” (Arts Review, 29 July 2015)

Design sketches by Renee Mulder (photo by Brett Boardman)

COSTUME



According to [Time Out Magazine Sydney](#):

“ Lewis ... pushed Cerini’s text back into the 1950s, a time when the Country Women’s Association held the community together with scones, sponge cake and a cast-iron sense of organisation. ‘I wanted the audience to focus on the physical and emotional experience of isolation, rather than the practicalities of how we deal with domestic violence in a contemporary context.’ ”

Image: Costume Sketch by Renee Mulder

DISCUSS

- How were the actors dressed?
- How did the costumes add meaning or context to the play?
- Did the costumes help develop character? Mood? How?
- Do you agree with the director’s decision to set the piece in a less contemporary context?

DESIGN YOUR OWN COSTUMES FOR *THE BLEEDING TREE*

- **Step One: Analysis.**

Consider the character's age, family history, status, and geographical location. What time period is the play set? What style is the play performed in (naturalism vs. non-naturalism)? Gather as much evidence from the text as you can to generate initial ideas.

- **Step Two: Five Words or Less**

Describe how you envision the production looking in five words or less. Consider the mood and atmosphere of the piece. What effect are you trying to create with the costumes? Consider the genre and style of the play.

- **Step Three: The Vision Board.**

Look at the photograph of Renee Mulder's sketches. In this photograph you can see the reference material she put together as she researched and prepared for the design of *The Bleeding Tree*.

Gather images, articles and make sketches as you work through ideas for your own design of *The Bleeding Tree*. You may like to do this the 'old fashioned' analogue way and cut and paste your research / ideas to a

board. Digital versions could be presented via online platforms such as Pinterest.

- **Step Four: Draw your Design**

How would you like to present your final design? Some costume designers use a very straight-forward, realistic representation of their costumes. Others opt for a more impressionistic style – evoking the movement of the costumes, the way it would be worn and the mood / atmosphere it might create.

Drawings also include annotation or notes. This may be a close-up on a particular, special detail of the costume, colour or fabric swatches or an important note for the costume maker.



SET



Image: *The Bleeding Tree* Set Design Sketch, Renee Mulder

According to [ABC Radio National: Books and Arts](#)

–
“The set for *The Bleeding Tree* describes a mother’s protective floral skirt, but what is underneath?”

[Limelight Magazine](#) interprets the set in a differently-

“Designed by Renée Mulder, the set consists of a steeply raked, ribbed stage covered in a pattern of roses, which suggests wallpaper or dusty curtains in an old homestead but also relates to the longed-for rose garden the mother plans to grow using a broth from the old bastard’s bones. He too loved roses, but he mistreated them as he did everything and everyone else.”

DISCUSS

- *The Bleeding Tree* was performed on a non-naturalistic set. Why do you think Mulder opted for this style? Would the play have worked on a naturalistic or realistic style set design? What are the differences between these two styles?
- Different theatre spaces create different relationships between the actor and audience. Consider the theatre space and where the audience were seated. (For example, the audience in a show performed in-the-round has a very different experience to an audience watching a show performed on a proscenium arch stage.) How did the set / space effect the audience-actor relationship? What sort of experience did Mulder create?
- An audience will ‘read’ a set. This means, as an audience member, you take clues and ideas from the set. Consider:
 - Shape – what sort of shape/s did Mulder use in the set design? What was the effect of these shapes? (For example, a set with a lot of smooth curves will feel very different, and create a very different atmosphere, to a set with a lot of jagged lines.)

- Colour – what colours were used? What sort of atmosphere did the colour create?
- Texture – what materials were used to create the set? What was the texture of the surfaces? What are the effects of these textures? (For example, a cold, shiny surface gives a very different effect to the use soft, velvety textures.)
- Consider of different reviewers interpreted the set. What is your opinion?



Themes and Issue

Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women

The Bleeding Tree will start some vital, and maybe difficult, conversations for your classroom. Domestic Violence cannot be ignored as an important discussion topic and learning opportunity for your students.

In an interview with [The Daily Review's Ben Neutze](#), Lee Lewis talks about the significance of a return season of *The Bleeding Tree* (2017 at Sydney Theatre Company):

"Women are still dying at a rate of more than one a week," Lewis says. "That hasn't changed since we first staged it — not that you expect a theatre work to change things rapidly, but it's part of the artistic community's response to these horrifying stories that became very visible two years ago.

"I've been at a lot of functions in the last year, talking about this play. But I'm really conscious that I'm always talking in rooms where a large percentage of the people are actually living through the violence depicted in the play, and that's a weird thing to do."

Both hope that the play will go on to be picked up by other companies and become a part of Australia's theatrical canon.

"There's a hope sitting underneath the writing of awful stories now that 20 years from now we will look back and go: 'that came out of that time when that was happening, and things have changed'," Lewis says.

"The devastating thing with a revival is realising that society hasn't changed. There can be two functions — either a celebration of how far we've come, or a slap in the face to say we've done nothing. Both of those are reasons to revive, and I really hope it's the former."

DISCUSS

- Can theatre lead change? How? What can theatre do to encourage or spark change that other forms may not be able to do?
- What issues or ideas or conversations can *The Bleeding Tree* start?
- In other interviews, Lewis has referred to *The Bleeding Tree* as a 'hopeful' piece and often talks of how Cerini created a play in which 'the women don't die.' Why do you think this is important in a play that tackles these issues?
- Lewis talks of the 'two functions' of a revival – as a celebration or a slap in the face. When *The Bleeding Tree* has a season, 20 years from now, how will it function? Why do you think this?

Further Discussion and Investigation

OUR WATCH has excellent resources for a range of ages, and it is strongly advised that teachers explore their website - <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/> - and find suitable materials for their students' levels and needs.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTRE VICTORIA also offers very good resources and contacts for your classroom <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/teachers>

It is advised that you make details of the **Kids Helpline** - <https://kidshelpline.com.au> - and your school psychologist / counsellor / nurse available for students who may need some extra support after seeing *The Bleeding Tree* and / or the discussions that follow.

The Furies

You may have noticed some reviewers referring to the women in *The Bleeding Tree* as Cerini's Furies.

It is even referenced in the judges' report for the 2016 NSW Premier's Prize for Literature, Playwriting –

This short but formidable work is as epic in its power as any great tragedy. By turns murder ballad, gothic horror story, outback myth and revenge thriller, Cerini's cautionary tale is grotesque and exquisite. His rural Furies hunt and haunt us. They insist, in language that is unforgettable for its cruel beauty and tender ugliness, that the cycle of domestic violence continues long after bruises have healed. While sharing qualities with the Greeks and Jacobean, Angus Cerini's wildly poetic text is a morality play for these days and this land.

Research and Discuss

- Who are the Furies?
- The Furies are associated with vengeance, retribution and punishment. Do you think it is a fair comparison to the women of *The Bleeding Tree*? Do you agree they are 'modern Furies'?

Creative Response

- The Furies are significant characters of Greek and Roman mythology. As such, their appearance, number and purpose often change depending on the story being told and the writer telling it. However, we usually think of three Furies (although there are many more in tales such as *The Iliad* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*) – commonly, Anger, Jealousy and Avenger of Murder. What would these Furies sound like today? What current issue would make the Furies angry or vengeful? Use this as a starting point for a short monologue.

Stage Craft



Lee Lewis in rehearsal with the cast

- What is the effect of the sound and lighting at the very opening of the play? How does silence and darkness work to create the mood? What is the effect?
- Consider the actors' use of gesture and facial expression in the opening moments of the play. Recall the mother's first action – she puts her hand to her face, nods. Small, considered gestures. What is the effect? How does this draw us, the audience, in? Where is her focus?
- What are the stakes for each character in these opening moments? How do we know this? How is this scene directed? Recall the actors' actions, interactions and reactions. How do they use the space?
- Recall the first time a new character appears – Mr Jones knocking at the door. How does lighting and sound indicate a transition? What is the effect?
- Recall the actors' use of expressive skills to transform from sister/mother to Mr Jones to narrator.
- Look at the scene in which we met Mrs Smith:
 - No sooner than you blink than fresh as a twig, out rings the trill of Mrs Smith.
 - Holding a something appearing like magic at the kitchen gate.
 - Too late to do anything as she barrels up and through.
 - Hello love, bought you a cake.
 - Heard you were missing your bloke.
 - Causing a ruckus so everyone says.
 - And now gone to his sister's they say?
 - Looks hard, close, shit.

- You sure he's not actually dead?
- Sweats and chills she's asking it straight.
- What do you do now, when the words they is said?

- Recall how this scene is directed. The three women standing together, like a sort of Chorus. What is the effect of this positioning?
 - Think about the use of gesture and posture in this scene. How did it create character?
 - Where were the actors looking? Where was the focus for this scene? Consider how the use of focus created tension.
-
- How does the direction create action? Recall the scene where the women are getting the body into the tree. The audience does not physically see this, and the actor do not mime the action and yet it is somehow visible. How does voice, movement, facial expression and the placement of the actor in relation to the audience make this action clear?
 - How does the direction build and sustain tension?
 - Consider the scene in which we meet Stevens, the postie-cop. What are the stakes for each of the characters in this scene? Who stands to lose? Who stand to gain? What is surprising about this moment?
 - Recall the final scene. In the play text there is a stage direction which reads: *Mum serves up three bowls of soup. They sup together.* How was this scene realised in performance? What was the effect?
 - Recall a moment from the play that has stayed with you. What happened in that moment? Consider how the design elements complemented the onstage action. What did the actors do with their voices and their bodies? How did the actors (and direction) use performance skills to portray character? What was the actor-audience relationship in that moment?

Links and Resources

Reviews

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/aug/13/the-bleeding-tree-review-a-domestic-violence-story-that-rings-all-too-true>

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About the Cast and Creatives

Angus Cerini – Real Time Mag – profile (Language Warning)

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Angus Cerini | Double Tap

<http://www.anguscerinidoubletap.com/about>

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Costume Design

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<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/designing-stage-costumes/>

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