The Woman In Black: Critical Analysis

How did the play make you feel?

I had quite an uneasy feeling during the majority of the play, it’s safe to say that they secured their goal of keeping me watching in bated breath as i watched the events of the play unfold.

They did this in many ways throughout the play using certain techniques such as how throughout the play they used the character of the women in black as an offstage character who only random appeared to frighten audience and build dramatic tension to the play, this singular technique was very effective at creating the unnerving feel of the play and managed to radiate a sinister feel of this mysterious character.

What did you really like about the play?

The main thing I really enjoy about the play was the atmosphere created by director Robin Herford. I believe his main intention was to scare us and the way he does this is fascinating.

He used theatrical techniques such as how he continuously used the dramatic and creepy sound of a rocking chair creaking and the deafening scream that is so loud we could essentially feel it, this excites and frightens our imagination, therefore leading us to imagining and creating in our minds something far worse than it actually was which is a concept that I certainly enjoyed.

What stood out in your mind as memorable?

I would say that the main thing that stood out to me as memorable would be the surprise element of the play, (mainly created by the appearance of the woman in black).

Many of the times when we saw the woman in black herself ‘it’s usually a blink and you’ll miss it’ moment, this manages to stand out as memorable for us as it feels like a big majority of the play is only the suspense of the audience waiting to see her and having their heart sink and with only the memory of her deformed, pale face.

Were there any elements you would have liked done differently?

One element I may of liked done differently would be within the theme itself and how it had some cliché and overused tropes.

One good example of this would likely be the scenery of the nursery , although this was quite scary and created some tension in the play by utilising a rocking chair it wasn’t unexpected and personally left me feeling wanting something unique and not something i have seen many time before in typical horror pieces. There are so many ways to convey fear into your audience in other more intriguing ways.

Would you recommend the play?

There are multiple reasons i would recommend this play to others with the main one being that it was one of the greatest horror plays I've seen. This is due to a multitude of things which all contribute to keeping me on the edge of my seat all the way through.

Things such as the use of sound how the very sudden loud noises such as the screaming greatly enhance the experience for both the audience and the characters. Slamming doors is also a repeated sound, along with the sound of the rocking chair. The director uses both sound effects like these to build up tension throughout a scene slowly leading to a climax which superbly erupts a feeling of fright and horror in the audience.

Also the set theme of how it was a play inside a play was a unique trope used that i had not seen in many other plays. This kept me intrigued into his story as in a sense we got to see the story of The Woman In Black in two perspectives, as the storyteller and as the actor. Many typical plays only show the inside of one fiction story which can only tell as so much about the perspectives and feelings, which is why I believe The Woman In Black is unique and a recommendable classic.

What was the purpose of the props?

The props during the play were used quite minimalistically yet effective as most of the time they were simple everyday objects but were used in different combinations and positions to show other object.

One great example of this would be how the chest hamper prop was also used as a bed, desk and as carriage. This helped towards the play having a versatile selt meaning the story can become many locations with small set changes and little effort which helped the pacing of the story as there was little time during each scene making it feel more authentic.

What did you notice about the costume?

The costumes successfully differentiated each character and generally had the aesthetic of late victorian dress which contributed to setting the theme of this play.

When the actors would transition into telling their story on stage their costume would be changed for example they would wear a different hat or coat to convey to the audience when they would be acting out the story within a story. Sometimes the costume would even be used to show identity of the character or the setting they're in, for example to become a different character he wore a dark green coat, an old scarf and brown hat. All the items looked well used, inexpensive and were darkly coloured, suitably making the character looked dressed for a cold night or day, showing he is working-class as well as indicating to the audience that the characters were outside.

How was the staging changed and manipulated?

They used light to manipulate the audience to what they see.

One example would be how the use of Gobos project different locations onto the stage, such as

when having the set of Eel Marsh House which moves the action effortlessly from one location to the next. The stage is always kept at a minimum level of darkness, I believe they did this so the whole playing space is usually not fully visible to the audience,as doing this controls what the audience can and cannot see, so vanishes and very quick reveals could be used for The Woman in Black throughout the action.

Another way it was manipulated would be how a light reflective backdrop was used to transition from one scene to the creepy nursery room. This was an effective procedure of quickly going from one scene to another with only a faint backdrop as both sets were simultaneously on stage.

How was staging used to communicate the story to audience?

They used staging fairly simple, and certain techniques are used to easily communicate the story to the audience.

The room was quite compact and small which almost in a sense made the audience feel trapped therefore intensifying the experience of the story as the theatre had hidden wings and steps at the front of the stage to make it seem like the woman in black can appear at will. Also the actors would also sometimes break the fourth wall which also changed the general staging of the show as their would now in a sense the whole theatre was the stage which made us more immersed into the story as we felt we were part of the moment.

How was the lighting communicated to the audience?

The lighting during this play was a key element and also used in a multitude of way to communicate certain things to the audience for example it is used to differentiate between real life and the story that the two characters are acting in. The lights dim when going into the story mode but lights turn on and light up the stage to represent real life so the audience can identify this and determine what perspective we are seeing. As well as this strobe lights are used to represent lightning which makes the weather change more realistic and makes the more audience more involved.

Lighting is also used on characters, a great example of this would be how the lighting on the woman in black was frequently only used to light her face, this is a great technique as it creates mystery about her as we only see her frightening, deformed face.

The purpose of the music and sound?

They used little to no music during the play but sound was a big contribution to the horror and setting the theme of the play in general.

The director uses sound to build up throughout a scene, slowly getting louder towards a climax. For example the iconic scene where the character is behind the door of the haunting sound coming inside a locked room. This is also an example of how in most cases, the audience are aware that the sound has something to do with the Woman, and as the character begins to follow it the source of the sound is slowly revealed. Echoes and reverb are also used therefore making the sound louder than natural, echoing around the theatre to create the real time audio

effect. Sound is used to both scare and create atmosphere (for instance how raven sounds are used in the graveyard), and also within adding to the overall theme of the play.