

Anna Wostenberg  
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*Thérèse Raquin*

I had very high expectations coming into *Thérèse Raquin* because I love Keira Knightley. I'm always excited to see famous actors make the change to stage acting because it is so different from screen acting. But I had no concept of what this play was going to be about other than it was a drama. As I've mentioned before, unless I've studied the play extensively, I rather enjoy not knowing about the shows I'm seeing because it leaves no room for biases. But this show was so engaging and dramatic that I was literally on the edge of my seat the whole time, and not because I'm short and have to lean forward to see everything. Everything from the staging to the acting was so well done and believable. I bought into it from beginning to end!

Something interesting about the theatre itself was the decoration in the hallway while we waited for the doors to open. There was a big poster with a map of Paris and interesting tidbits of information for the audience to absorb. I fear this an aspect mostly overlooked by the patrons of the theatre but it was very helpful for the understanding of the play. It put into context, among other things, why Laurent's character spent so much time visiting the morgue to look for Camille's body; the morgue became a place comparable to a museum: people would go there to look at the dead, unclaimed bodies as a sort of spectacle, as strange and voyeuristic as it is. I appreciated this because it helped me to comprehend that much more of this dated period piece.

The way in which the stage was utilized was so interesting. At first, I didn't notice that the water was actually real water. I love when stages use real water because it helps me to really see the scene, especially when water is so imperative to the content of the play. The way that the sets were raised and lowered was fascinating as well. I especially loved that Laurent's tiny attic apartment literally hung suspended in the air. It was beautifully well done and the set matched the era well. The props used were perfect as well. I'm not sure if it's written into the play to be this way, but the painting of Camille is so ghost-like that it's no wonder he haunts Thérèse. I just wanted to yell at her to take the portrait down and then he would probably leave her alone.

Keira Knightley could not have been more perfectly cast for this role. She's not one to play characters with happily-ever-afters and this tragedy suited her so well. She's meant to play these troubled female characters and Thérèse brought out her best acting skills. She didn't have the zoom of the camera to rely on to express her emotions and even from the balcony I could just feel her uncomfortable stares penetrating Laurent's back from the very first time he sets foot on stage. She is a character of very few words and she delivers those lines with such emotion and impact. It was excellent. Her subtlety was stellar and I was impressed the entire time.

I was also excited to see Matt Ryan on stage. I'd seen him on TV in *Criminal Minds*, but I hadn't seen him perform live. After watching an interview on Broadway.com, I learned that he's actually a very well seasoned stage actor and has even spent several years with a Shakespeare company and starred in *Les Misérables*

when he was a child. I thought his performance was so well done as Laurent. He perfectly portrayed the male animalistic desire to eliminate anything coming between him and the woman he desires and his inability to control his anger when she later refuses him felt so real. I actually thought he was going to beat Keira Knightley! He's the perfect Laurent: handsome, masculine, and strong, with really nice facial hair.

Judith Light, however, stole the show in my opinion. Especially in the second half when she was forced to use only her eyes to convey emotion. I sat up in the balcony and I felt her fear and seething stares penetrating both Thérèse and Laurent, racking them with even more guilt. She was completely helpless yet reliant on these murderous people to take care of her. I cannot even imagine being in the same position. It was stunning. But her transformation from a middle aged woman into an old, weak woman who needed the aid of her adopted daughter in order to survive was so convincing as well. I found myself constantly watching what she was doing anytime she was on the stage.

*Thérèse Raquin* is so unlike anything I've ever seen on Broadway before and I believe that is exactly what the cast and director were going for when producing this play. It was a whole different kind of dark, a very animalistic kind of dark with a touch of humanity and humor to it. I absolutely loved it and I'd love to watch it again and again. There's so much to learn from it and I'm certain seeing it one more time would help me to take away considerably more from each actor's performance. As frustrating as tragedies can be and as much as I just wanted to shout at Thérèse to just take down the ghostly portrait of Camille, it was a beautiful play about the

consequences people face when they give into their most carnal desires. It is funny, dark, hopeful, and ultimately tragic but it is such a real representation of how guilt undermines us all and it is beautifully done.