

"That Face": A Harrowing and Poignant Exploration of Family Dysfunction in Polly Stenham's Acclaimed Play

Polly Stenham's "That Face" is a groundbreaking play that has garnered critical acclaim for its unflinching portrayal of family dysfunction and the devastating consequences of trauma. Written by Stenham at the tender age of 19, the play premiered in 2007 at the Royal Court Theatre in London and has since been staged around the world, leaving audiences profoundly moved and challenged.

Themes and Motifs

At the heart of "That Face" lies a complex exploration of family dysfunction. The play delves into the corrosive effects of domestic violence, addiction, and mental illness, examining how these destructive forces can perpetually damage the bonds between loved ones. Stenham masterfully depicts the ways in which childhood trauma can cast a long shadow over adulthood, shaping relationships and perpetuating cycles of pain.



That Face by Polly Stenham

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 356 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Print length : 100 pages



Trauma is a central motif in the play, manifesting itself in the characters' fractured personalities, erratic behavior, and desperate attempts to escape their past. The play raises important questions about the lasting impact of trauma and the challenges faced by individuals and families in the aftermath of abuse and neglect.

Characters

"That Face" features a cast of unforgettable characters, each grappling with their own personal demons. Martha, the eldest daughter, is a troubled and self-destructive young woman haunted by the horrors of her childhood. Mia, the younger sister, is a fragile and introverted soul, struggling with severe mental illness. Henry, the father, is an alcoholic and abusive husband whose behavior has deeply scarred his family.

The play delves into the complex psychology of each character, exploring their motivations, fears, and coping mechanisms. Stenham creates a web of interdependency and fractured alliances, as the characters navigate their relationships with love, resentment, and a desperate yearning for redemption.

Dramatic Structure

"That Face" is a tightly constructed play with a non-linear narrative that shifts between the present and the past. This fragmented structure reflects the characters' fragmented memories and the way in which trauma can disrupt the continuity of time. The play's dramatic climax is both cathartic

and devastating, as the consequences of the characters' actions come crashing down upon them.

Stenham's use of language is both poetic and visceral, capturing the raw emotions and dark humor that permeate the play. The script is littered with moments of poetic intensity and heartbreaking honesty, adding depth and resonance to the characters' struggles.

Theatrical Impact

"That Face" has had a profound impact on contemporary theater, both in terms of its critical reception and its enduring popularity. The play has received numerous awards, including the Olivier Award for Best New Play and the Evening Standard Award for Best Play. It has been performed in countless productions around the world, captivating audiences with its unflinching honesty and emotional power.

The play's success lies in its ability to connect with audiences on a deeply personal level. It sheds light on the hidden realities of family dysfunction and mental illness, challenging societal stigmas and fostering a greater understanding of these complex issues. "That Face" serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit amidst adversity.

Polly Stenham's "That Face" is a remarkable theatrical achievement that continues to resonate with audiences today. Its unflinching portrayal of family dysfunction and the lasting impact of trauma offers a profound and

thought-provoking examination of the human condition. Through its complex characters, poetic language, and powerful dramatic structure, "That Face" invites us to confront the darkest corners of our lives and to seek hope amidst the wreckage.



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