

**National
Theatre**

Phaedra

Learning Guide

Index

About This Guide.....	2
Background Information	3
Teaching Information.....	4
Production Notes.....	5
Contextual Information.....	5
Key Design Elements.....	6
Performance Style.....	12
Key Moments.....	14
Plot Synopsis with Timecodes	15
Find Out More.....	29

About

This learning guide supports the National Theatre's production of ***Phaedra***, directed by **Simon Stone**, which opened on **1 Feb, 2023**, at the **National Theatre**.

Our packs are designed to support viewing the recording on the **National Theatre Collection**. This pack provides links to the UK school curriculum and other productions in the Collection. It also has a plot synopsis with timecodes to allow you to jump to specific sections of the play.

Here you'll find all the information you need to enable you to study the production and write about it in detail. This includes notes about all the key elements from performance style to design. You'll also find pointers for further research.

Background Information

Recording Date – 1 March, 2023

Location – Lyttelton Theatre, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 15+

Cast:

Helen Janet McTeer
Declan Archie Barnes
Isolde..... Mackenzie Davis
Hugo Paul Chahidi
Sofiane Asaad Bouab
Omolara Akiya Henry
Reda..... Sirine Saba
Aïcha Nadia Nadif
Daoud..... Nicholas Gauci
Achraf's Voice Younès Bouab

Creative Team:

Director Simon Stone
Set Designer Chloe Lamford
Costume Designer and Associate Set Designer..... Mel Page
Lighting Designer..... James Farncombe
Composers and Sound Designer Stefan Gregory
Intimacy Coordinator Ingrid Mackinnon

Teaching Information

This production is particularly suitable for:

- English Literature students who are studying the play.
- Drama and theatre students who are studying the play.
- Anyone with an interest in the work of playwright.
- Drama and theatre students studying Ivo van Hove as a contemporary theatre practitioner.

In particular you might like to explore:

- The contemporary setting of the play, and how this adaptation compares to Seneca's original tragedy.
- This production in comparison to Simon Stone's other work (you can also watch his production of *Yerma* on the NT Collection)

Production Notes

The following notes have been compiled to help guide you through the significant design and performance aspects as you watch the production, or to remind you of them after you have watched it. You may also want to make your own notes and form your own opinions on the effectiveness of these aspects as you explore the production.

Contextual Information:

- This play contains several very challenging themes, including suicide and self-harm, offensive language and sexual references.
- This is a multi-lingual production. It has subtitles when the characters speak in languages other than English.
- You will notice that the structure of the play includes some very long, intense scenes, followed by other very short scenes. The structure allows the emotional intensity to build steadily until the play's climax and denouement.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Set

- The design concept is centred on a glass cube in which all of the scenes take place. The cube revolves at various points in the performance, revealing different parts of the set and allowing the audience to see scenes from slightly different perspectives.
- The speed at which the cube revolves varies at different points. Because everything takes place within that shape and space, the feeling of claustrophobia and the inescapable overlapping of relationships is heightened. The audience cannot see any exit or entrance points. Actors exit or enter during blackouts.
- Most of the locations within the set are represented with a sense of realism. Helen's family home has a kitchen island and counter in white marble, dining table with chairs, an L-shaped sofa and two standard lamps. The tiles and finishes on the sofa and standard lamp suggest affluence. There is a well-stocked wine cabinet on the wall, stage left.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Set

- Sofiane's improvised accommodation in an office block features a mattress on the floor stage left and a red suitcase centre stage, suggesting a temporary stay. There is a tray with a kettle and mugs down stage right and an angle poise lamp downstage left. When Isolde visits the same location, the cube revolves so that we see a slightly different perspective as Sofiane is confronted by a second woman. It prevents the similarities of the previous scene with Helen becoming a barrier to audience engagement.
- The bedroom in Helen's house has a double bed with white bedclothes. There is also a white freestanding bath, a standard lamp with a beige round lampshade, and a low-slung chair. There is 3D textured wooden panelling on the wall: it suggests high end interior design, befitting an MP's house.
- In the second act of the play, the location shifts to a field. This external location is suggested by waist height tall grass which occupies most of the cube. The various short scenes reveal different groupings of characters, suggesting different progress through the area.
- The restaurant where Helen's birthday party is held is highly detailed. It has an exposed brick wall, on which a set of pink vertical lights are displayed. A range of tables, laid for full dinner service with white tablecloths, are scattered across the set, with a longer table at right angles to the stage where Helen and her family are set to have dinner. There is also a circular marble-appearance bar. When the cube revolves, we see the other side of the bar, and the serving hatch and door that leads to the kitchen.
- The mountain side where Achraf's car accident happened is created by the glass of the cube appearing frosted, and a white material is used on the floor to create the idea of settled snow. There is a ramp within the cube which suggests a steep incline, up which Helen walks during the final scenes of the play. In this section of the play the slow revolve of the cube allows Helen to be revealed speaking to Aicha and Daoud after we hear her begin talking (she overlaps the end of the previous scene).

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Costume

- Helen's first costume includes a black jacket, a white blouse and black trousers. When Sofiane arrives, she is wearing a gold-coloured blouse of silky fabric, and brown trousers. In the external scenes in Act 2, Helen wears a Barbour jacket with a white t-shirt and cardigan underneath it. In her final scenes Helen wears a beige jacket, and a white top with green trousers and a brown scarf. The white top emphasises the redness of blood after she takes her own life.
- Sofiane enters wearing a black leather jacket, a white t-shirt and a blue-grey shirt over the t-shirt. He wears dark shoes. He later wears a faded black hoodie and a blue denim jacket and black trousers. In his scene with Reda, Sofiane wears a blue checked shirt, jeans and boots.



-
- Declan wears a hooded Adidas grey zip-up top, with dark trousers and trainers. In the field, Declan wears a green puffer gilet, dark trousers and a light purple jumper underneath the gilet.
 - Isolde begins the play in a tan wool coat, light knitted jumper and dark blue jeans with black, thick soled boots. During her visit to Sofiane's accommodation Isolde wears a green jumper and black trousers, with dark Vans-style pumps. Isolde wears a black fitted, long-sleeved dress to Helen's birthday meal, worn with flat black leather shoes.
 - Hugo's first costume includes a dark open-neck shirt, dark trousers and black jacket. The following morning, he wears tight black athletic leggings and a Nike exercise jacket in black, white and yellow. His costume for Helen's birthday party is beige jeans with a grey and white vertically striped shirt worn with an open collar over the t-shirt. He wears dark shoes. He later wears a faded black hoodie and a blue denim jacket and black trousers. In his scene with Reda, Sofiane wears a blue checked shirt, jeans and boots.
 - Eric arrives at Helen's house wearing a red beanie hat, yellow puffer jacket, white t-shirt with the image of a globe being held by two gloved hands, and dark trousers. He has an orange and beige cardigan. Later he wears a blue and green zip up fleece over a t-shirt, and dark trousers. For Helen's birthday party Eric wears a lilac jumper with grey trousers and sturdy hiking trainers.
 - Omolara is another politician. After the birthday party she wears a bright blue tailored jacket with a long-sleeved cream blouse – the cuffs of which can be seen under her jacket – and black trousers. At the party she wears a blue, chartreuse and white dress with a blue hair wrap.
 - Reda wears pale blue jeans and a pale blue jumper, with white trainers. She borrows Sofiane's dark bomber jacket as protection from the cold and the snow.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Lighting

- The main source of lighting is through the panels above the cube which are often a stark white colour. There are also vertical strips of light on the frame structure of the cube, which are often lit during scenes of great emotional intensity.
- Some colour is used, such a yellow tones, to suggest domestic and other interior settings.
- Full blackouts separate many of the scenes. The abrupt snaps to black make the play feel episodic and have a practical function in allowing the different locations to be created within the cube. It heightens the tension that builds during the play, rather than being disrupted by visible scene changes. The music and voiceover also heightens the effect of the blackouts, using the audience's aural sense rather than the visual one at these points.
- Standard and desk lamps that are seen in some of the scenes are lit, giving the impression of these functional light sources.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Sound

- Much of the vocal music is acapella, often with vocalized sounds rather than sung lyrics. Some songs appear to be in Latin.
- A synthesized organ sound is used for some of the scenes.
- Underscore is used to create dramatic tension, sometimes it is played at an almost imperceptible volume but then increases in volume at the climax of a scene.
- After we see Helen informing the Home Office of an address in Birmingham, the Arabic influence on some of the sung score becomes clear. It helps our transition to the scene between Reda and Sofiane in Morocco.
- The voiceover that you hear is Achraf, Sofiane's father, recording a message for his young son.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Performance Style

- The acting style used in the play is naturalistic. The difficult family dynamics are conveyed through the use of facial, vocal and physical expression.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Wigs, Hair and Makeup

- Eric's hair is dyed a light pinky purple. It suggests a liberal attitude to appearance.
- The female characters wear natural make up, including natural shades of lipstick.



Production Notes

Key design Elements: Key moments

- The family conversation with Sofiane, where Hugo begins to explain German phrases begins at 00.22.29 and ends 00.33.10. The family dynamic and rapid overlapping of lines creates an intensity and claustrophobia here. We also see the stage begin to revolve for the first time, revealing the bedroom into which Eric and Isolde briefly disappear. You can take note of the underscoring in this scene as well as noting how the actors begin to communicate the various relationships between different characters.
- Helen gives the account of what happened to Achraf in the car from 00.41.54, and the scene ends at 00.48.01. This is an excellent opportunity to explore how the actor conveys emotion in this scene, and how she works with the actor playing Sofiane to create pathos.
- Isolde confronts Sofiane about his relationship with Helen from 01.18.44 – 01.23.12.
- Helen's visit to Sofiane where she brings him gifts begins at 01.25.06 and ends at 01.27.00.
- Helen's birthday party begins with a conversation between Helen and Omolara at 01.27.05 and ends 01.50.35. This extended extract demonstrates how the claustrophobia is formed by the actors' rapid delivery of lines, and the use of a wide range of vocal skills. The music towards the end of this scene is also something to explore in this extract.
- *****trigger warning – blood, self harm and suicide***** Helen, Bahman (Hugo) and Reda speak in the final scene, before Helen takes her own life. This scene begins at 02.02.52 and ends at 02.16.05. . Note how the use of French does not impede our understanding: even without surtitles we would be able to follow the emotional intensity of what is being spoken by Reda, even if we cannot understand every word. The delay in hearing the story explained in English heightens the audience's emotional response to hearing the Sofiane and his son Sami have both died.

Plot Synopsis with Timecodes

Act 1, Prologue 00:01:30

A choral chamber choir sing. A recorded voice in Arabic talks of recording these capsule sound tapes for his son, Sofiane, to hear in ten years' time, from "a man you probably feel you never met." The voice speaks of time moving so fast.

Act 1, Scene 1 00:02:35

A wealthy, modern-designed kitchen and dining area. We are introduced to Declan, Isolde and matriarch, Helen. They are a close-knit family, all high achievers. Enter Hugo, a modern father, who is introduced as the "one who does the shopping". Declan mockingly suggests that Hugo is not Isolde's father. Helen asks where Isolde's husband, Eric, is. Helen suggests that perhaps Eric is having an affair. She hopes that her daughter aspires for more, and learns to take better care of herself.

Eric arrives, and perhaps innocently, Eric and Helen greet each other with a kiss on the lips. Helen and Eric flirt overtly. Declan jokes that Helen is in love with Eric. Eric is popular with the whole family. Hugo thanks Eric for coming this evening, for it is an important evening for Helen. Helen demands the whole family being on their best behaviour, for the visitor who is coming has unknown intentions.

Helen: "I HAVE no idea what his agenda is. And who he's been sent by. So watch the fuck out."

Act 1, Scene 2 00:13:15

We are introduced to the whole family meeting Sofiane. Helen and Sofiane have met before, though when he was much younger.

Helen: It's me. You remember me?

Sofiane: Of course I do. I think almost one of my first memories is of you.

It is established that Helen is a politician, Hugo is an ambassador, and Sofiane is a journalist from Rabat, Morocco. Helen is visually and verbally flustered by meeting Sofiane again. Sofiane is now 40, so a lot of time has gone by. It is suggested that Sofiane's father was very important to Helen. Helen and Sofiane's father, Achraf, met in Rabat 1979, where she appeared "like a Viking goddess, Freya". We learn that Ashraf left Morocco in 1986, when Sofiane was 6-7, for Marrakech, for a life with Helen. Sofiane remarks that Isolde looks remarkably like "Freya" that he remembers from his childhood.

Sofiane: Like the woman I remember from my childhood. The woman I couldn't understand.

Isolde: Freya.

Sofiane: Exactly.

Isolde: I don't feel like Freya, to be honest.

Helen: Neither did I.

Sofiane: Funny. I'm older than you. But I look at you and feel like a child.

Sofiane reveals that he has now moved to the UK from Rabat, as he has gotten into some trouble with some articles that he wrote, about worker strikes, protests. A friend from the ministry suggested that he leave. He is in the UK on his own, staying with some relatives outside of London in Birmingham. Helen asks if he needs help, assuming this is why he has come to visit. Sofiane replies that he does not need help, but that he just wanted to see Helen again, as this was very important to him.

Act 1, Scene 3 (00:23:21)

Cut to the end of dinner, when a lot of alcohol has been consumed. Helen and Hugo are

drunk and making a lot of lewd jokes and comments. Isolde is upset, and walks to the bedroom, followed by Eric. Isolde is upset that Sofiane has made a brave step to meet Helen, who is disregarding it. Eric defends Helen and Hugo, which upsets Isolde further.

Isolde asks Eric to kiss her, which he does, reluctantly, as he does not feel this is the time and place at her parent's dinner party. Meanwhile, Sofiane has excused himself from the dinner table to the bathroom and has been watching this action all unfurl. Sofiane interrupts the argument, asking where the bathroom is.

All re-seat at the dining table. Sofiane apologises for interrupting the argument. He asks Isolde and Eric if they are planning on having children. They reveal that they are currently in the process of adoption, as they have been struggling to have children of their own, and have made a pact to find out which of them is the person having issues.

Hugo asks Sofiane about his father's past with trouble with the secret police, for being a politically active artist, that was until he met Helen, when he started to become less politically engaged, stating that his brothers in Nass El Ghiwane felt betrayed by him, though Helen does not agree.

Hugo drunkenly asks Sofiane about the car-crash that killed his father, and the breaks being cut on his car by the secret police. Sofiane recounts a very different story; that his father was high on drugs and alcohol when he crashed his car into a rock. It is revealed that Helen used to organise large glitterati parties, and that his father had not touched drugs and alcohol until he had met Helen. Sofiane accuses Helen of destroying his father, a musician fuelled by Helen's alcohol and drugs.

Sofiane: He was leading a great life. And then... then he was seduced and... he led your life. The easy life. The pleasurable life of self-destruction. But it's only easy for people born in that life. He didn't have the, how do you say? L'endurance?

Isolde: Stamina.

Sofiane: He didn't have it. He was never going to survive. But it made you feel exotic. To have a Moroccan lover. And it's a story you can tell. The dissident musician stolen from you. Your terrible heartbreak. It's very fashionable, I imagine –

Sofiane leaves, arguing with Helen as he leaves. On his way out, Sofiane speaks directly to Isolde:

Sofiane: You are beautiful, Freya. Please become everything you should be.

Sofiane bids goodbye to Helen, and exits.

Act 1, Scene 3 (00:34:25)

The next morning. Eric has left after the argument with Isolde. Helen has also left early in the morning for work. Isolde talks with an embarrassed, emasculated Hugo in his running gear, and expresses that she is worried about Sofiane, and wants to find where Sofiane lives. Hugo admits that he has been on the phone with Eric discussing Isolde's actions. Isolde accuses Helen of being a bad mother, for "escaping" in the night, and for never apologising for anything significant. Isolde also criticises Hugo for his parenting, emasculating him further.

Hugo: I am one half of the parenting team so please go ahead, list your grievances –

Isolde: One half? More like a quarter. At most a third.

Hugo: ...

Isolde: Now I've hurt your feelings and I'll be the one apologising. Of course.

Hugo: I have to get changed.

Isolde: Yup.

Hugo: Have a good day.

Isolde: You too boss.

Isolde returns to her search for Sofiane's address.

Act 1, Scene 4 00:40:15

We are back in the kitchen. Sat on the sofas are Isolde and Sofiane, still in jackets and coats from having just entered. Helen enters, on a work call.

Isolde insists that Helen speaks again with Sofiane, on the condition that Isolde leaves them to talk. Sofiane reveals that Isolde had found him, visited, and insisted he come back to London to talk with Helen. Helen admits the difficulty she feels in seeing Sofiane, for she never imagined that her two worlds would interchange. She also admits that when she was younger, often drunk in her first year with Hugo, she would pine for a life she knew she had lost, so she used to tell stories that would keep Achraf alive, sharing too much, stories that Hugo never forgets.

Sofiane confronts Helen, telling her he knows that she was in the car with his father when it crashed, and he died, as the police found her Viking coin necklace in the wreckage. With his last words, Achraf said “I’m sorry”, but not to Helen, to someone else.

Sofiane recounts his memory of the necklace, when he was young and he first saw Helen and his father having sex, the necklace being hung on the door as a signal for him not to come into his father’s room. Sofiane admits that when his father’s items were returned to his mother after the wreckage, he stole the necklace for himself, and wears it to this day. He admits that as a teenager he had sexual fantasies about Helen wearing the necklace. Sofiane suggests that he should go, but Helen asks him to stay. She remarks on the striking resemblance to his father. They come together, and they kiss passionately. The move to the bedroom, and begin to undress.

Act 2, Prelude (00:49:15)

Achraf’s voiceover. He explains to his son that Helen has bewitched him, and he is his real self when he is with her. He explains that he understands that he is the one who has made mistakes, not Sofiane. He is an absent father, he is drunk, and has left Sofiane. He hopes that when Sofiane is older, he will understand more what it means to fail, and that he may be able to forgive his father.

Act 2, Scene 1 (00:51:55)

We find Helen and Omolara standing in a field on a walk, Helen having just confessed all to Omolara, a colleague, friend and confidant. Helen has fallen head over heels for Sofiane, and has admitted to several sexual encounters to date with him, though has not

yet had full intercourse. She cannot think of anything but Sofiane, and feels alive again after so many years. Omolara reminds Helen that Sofiane is not Achraf.

Omolara suggests that Helen needs to make a choice for her family, to which Helen knows she must, but not yet. She wants to enjoy this for longer. She fears, once the pair have had full intercourse, there is no turning back.

Act 2, Scene 2 (00:56:55)

We meet Isolde and Sofiane in the same field, where Isolde spent many fond childhood years.

Sofiane impresses Isolde with his expansive knowledge of European culture. She admits that she feels very comfortable around him, as she does not make friends easily, except for Eric, though she is not sure that they would be friends if they met each other now. Sofiane admits that he has never been lucky in love. Isolde thanks him for coming back, and how much she enjoys having him as a part of the family, as he feels like a brother to her.

She tells of how after an embarrassing childhood experience, she hid her womanhood from herself and everyone else for a long time.

Isolde I normalised it. All my life the kinds of people I wanted to be friends with, who let me be who I wanted to be, they didn't really like admitting to themselves that I was a woman. So I kind of cut that part of myself off.

Sofiane reaches out and intimately touches her face, and tells her that he is glad that she is a woman.

Act 2, Scene 3 (01:02:25)

We see Hugo, Eric and Declan in the same field. Eric expresses that he feels as though he has lost his mojo recently and begins to cry. The two others support him with a hug.

Act 2, Scene 4 (01:03:15)

A few moments later. Isolde and Sofiane discover the men hugging in the field with Eric in tears. Isolde harshly criticises Eric for apologising and for mis-understanding her needs. Eric tells all that they are on an intimacy break, though carrying on their family commitments.

Act 2, Scene 5 (01:04:12)

Helen and Omolara enter the scene on the field, where tensions are high and all are arguing.

Helen learns of the intimacy break, and that she has called Eric a “pathetic man”. Helen criticises Isolde for being selfish and entitled and scolds her that she is very lucky to have found a man like Eric. Isolde tells everyone to stay out of her life, and that she is done. She apologises publicly to Sofiane.

Act 2, Scene 6 (01:05:39)

Omolara and Sofiane stand alone in the field, after the fight. Omolara confronts Sofiane about taking advantage of Helen. Sofiane feels like he has many conflicting sides to himself, and he is very confused. They discuss the struggles of the paradoxes that exist inside themselves, they are the anomalies.

Omolara asks Sofiane if Helen knows how close he has come with her daughter. He tells her that he is not afraid, though admits that he used to be.

Omolara: You made a connection with Isolde?

Sofiane: She’s been a good friend.

Omolara: And now she's broken up with her husband?

Sofiane: I didn't know that until today.

Omolara: Does Helen know how close you've become with her daughter?

Sofiane: We have lunch sometimes. We go to galleries. The cinema.

Omolara: And with Helen you just fuck?

Sofiane: I haven't. We haven't –

Omolara: Everything but. I know. She told me.

Sofiane: I'm not scared.

Omolara: Why do you say that?

Sofiane: Because I used to be.

Omolara: You're an enigma Sofiane.

Act 3, Prelude (01:09:16)

Choral singing. Achraf's voiceover. He speaks of seeing Sofiane grow up so fast, soon he will be old and strong enough to take his revenge on his father. He sees the rage building within his son, and how it eats away at him. "One day you will be better, my son."

Act 3, Scene 1 (01:11:40)

Sofiane's flat in Birmingham. It is minimal, with just a mattress on a floor and a suitcase.

Helen discusses how alive she feels, and how her life has felt so programmed, and how she feels as though this is her second chance, that she has returned to herself. He

reminds her that he may not be here tomorrow. She wants to spend every minute she can with him.

Act 3, Scene 2 (01:17:30)

Isolde enters Sofiane's flat, dripping wet from the rain. She immediately confronts him.

Isolde: Are you sleeping with my mother?"

He confirms. Isolde is incredibly conflicted about her relationship with Sofiane and his relationship with her mother.

Isolde: Why her? You're not stupid Sofiane. Don't pretend you're stupid to make this easier.

Sofiane: Okay. You had your fantasies. I had mine.

He confesses that he had unfinished, complicated feelings, relating to his father. He lends Isolde some dry clothes, and she turns to leave. Before she does, she turns to ask him what he had imagined their life together as.

Isolde: What did you imagine?

Sofiane: Excuse me?

Isolde: You said that you also. What was it that you imagined?

Sofiane: Images. Of a garden. Family lunch.

Isolde: Family?

Sofiane: Somewhere safe. Springtime. The children play in the grass.

Isolde: Oh fuck.

She asks him if he is in love with Helen. He denies it. She kisses him, passionately. They fall into bed together.

Act 3, Scene 3 (01:24:35)

Isolde and Sofiane have continued to sleep together in Sofiane's flat, with this latest stint lasting for three days. Isolde asks if he has seen Helen again, which he denies, and she tells him that he should soon talk to her mother to end it. Sofiane expresses that he needs to get away. Isolde notes Sofiane's destructive tendencies.

Act 3, Scene 4 (01:26:20)

Helen arrives in Sofiane's apartment with gifts to make the place feel a little more homely. Sofiane is visibly distressed and frustrated and begins to cry. Helen attempts to comfort him but he moves away from her. She mistakenly calls him Achraf, his father's name. He shouts at her to leave, and to let him go. Helen, confused, refuses to leave, as Sofiane gets increasingly and visibly more angry.

INTERVAL

Act 4, Scene 1 (01:29:30)

We find Helen and Omolara having a drink in a high-end restaurant, on the eve of her birthday party. Helen outlines her heartbreak and longing for Sofiane, who has stopped all contact. Omolara reminds Helen of how self-centred and self-pitying she is acting, and how her pain will subside.

Hugo, Eric and Declan arrive, and we see viscerally how the relationship between Helen and Hugo has broken down; they jab verbally at each other, and tensions are running high. Enter Isolde and Sofiane. Helen jumps up, startled to see Sofiane, though she is delighted to see him after 2 months of radio silence.

All sit down to dinner at the table. The tension between the group is palpable and manic. Isolde announces that she is two months pregnant. At first there are congratulations to Isolde and Eric. Isolde quickly dismisses these congratulations to Eric, as he is not the father, Sofiane is. The table erupts, Helen reprimands Isolde for stealing “her boyfriend”. Eric, being criticised for acting too calmly, smashes glasses, rips the tablecloth off the table, bringing the evening’s meal clattering to the floor, and pours a bottle of champagne over Isolde, to relieve her of her bad conscience, and leaves.

Isolde, Declan and Sofiane leave. Among the wreckage, Helen and Hugo are left. Hugo reminds Helen of the family she has destroyed with her love of Achraf; how she has slept with his son, destroyed her marriage and relationship with her daughter. She has used him over these years to build a family with the safety of Hugo, while she was still longing for the lost Achraf, and now that has all come crashing down. Hugo leaves, leaving Helen alone amongst the smashed remnants of her family meal, crying for the love lost with Achraf.

Act 4, Scene 2 (01:52:50)

The same restaurant, a few days later. Omolara and Helen meet for a coffee. The story of the family’s public fight has leaked to the press, and it has been discovered that Sofiane is an illegal immigrant as his visa has expired, which goes against Helen’s political party’s agenda. Omolara tells Helen to resign and step down from her position. Omolara has made all of the arrangements, she shall be replaced. She has also advised Sofiane and Isolde where to seek refuge while the visa paperwork issue is resolved. Helen cannot stand that while her career and reputation is ruined, her daughter and former lover receive all the support.

Helen: So, I lose my career and they live happily ever after? Huh? And what I just disappear into old-age and insignificance, and I watch my daughter have everything that I –

Omolara: That’s about the size of it.

Helen: No. No. I won't. I won't.

In one final act of desperation, Helen rings her colleague at the Home Office, and makes them aware of an address in Birmingham that they should review.

Act 5, Prelude (01:56:50)

Achraf's tapes. He speaks of losing the battle of fear, and because of this he has nothing to give to his son. He is a failed father, and he cannot stand that he has lost his son. He apologises and bids his son farewell.

Act 5, Scene 1 (01:59:40)

The road-side of a frosty, snow-covered Moroccan mountain. It has been 35 years since the death of Sofiane's father on that mountainside. Sofiane and Reda, Sofiane's partner, argue atop the mountain. Sofiane is looking to find meaning in his father's death. He tells of how his father had once tried to take his own life before, but was found and revived. Perhaps the crash that killed Achraf had been on purpose, and he had tried to take his lover, Helen, with him?

Sofiane admits to Reda that he is in trouble with the police again, and they are following him. He has been hatching a plan for a few weeks to escape, as advised by lawyers, to come to the UK, and for Reda not to follow him. He cannot escape the turmoil and chaos of his mind. Before he leaves, he reveals to Reda that the name of the woman in the car, his father's lover, was Helen.

Act 5, Scene 2 (02:04:00)

Helen has arrived in Morocco, looking for Sofiane. She asks two local people where and how to find him, but Helen's understanding and speaking ability of French is limited. The two locals do not want to share much information with Helen, but they tell her that Sofiane is in prison, though they cannot tell her why. Helen asks if Sofiane has any family in the area, to which they reveal that his wife lives here.

Act 5, Scene 3 (02:04:50)

Hugo arrives to assist Helen, as one final favour, to find Sofiane, the father of their grandchild. Isolde has cut all contact with Helen, and with Sofiane gone, she is 8 months pregnant, and alone. Hugo calls in a favour with his contact at the embassy, to find information as to why Sofiane is in prison, as neither the police or any other authorities will give any details.

Act 5, Scene 4 (02:06:50)

Helen meets Reda, Sofiane's wife, at the site of Achraf's accident. Hugo acts as translator. Helen recounts her experience of the crash, and her worries at the time for being blamed for it.

Reda reveals that Sofiane has been killed, in a prison fight, three months ago. Helen weeps. Reda blames Helen for killing him, for making the call to the home office that got him deported back to Morocco, where he has arrested and imprisoned. She also reveals that she and Sofiane had a son who died when he was young, and Hugo reveals that their daughter is pregnant with Sofiane's child. Reda blames Helen, for robbing sons of their fathers. The scene spins.

Reda: *Tu as volé le père d'un petit garçon.*

Hugo: You stole the father of a little boy.

Reda: *Tu arrives comme la mort. Et tu tues.*

Hugo: You're arrive like Death himself. And you kill.

Helen: No.

Reda: *Oui. C'est ta nature.*

Hugo: It's your nature.

Reda: *Deux fois, tu as tuer un homme innocent et un petit garçon a été rendue orphelin.*

Hugo: Two times you killed an innocent man and a little boy was orphaned.

Act 5, Scene 5 (02:14:35)

Helen is driven mad by the accusations and the death of Sofiane. She runs away from Hugo. She believes that Reba has cursed her, and that she needs to remove the witch's poison. With a dramatic swift action, she slits her throat. Sofiane appears out of the mist and white light, as Helen bleeds out onto the snow. She believes him to be Achraf. He tells her that Sofiane is here too, with his son, Sami, playing together. She is his angel, and they were due to meet together again. As the blood leaves her body, Helen falls to the ground, and grows cold. Her vision begins to fade, and Helen passes away, bleeding into the snow.

End.

Find out More

Watch:

Simon Stone wrote the version of Yerma which is available to watch on the NT Collection. Watch that production and work with a partner to discuss the similarities and differences in the way that Stone has updated the original narratives, particularly looking at the themes of women and marriage.

Watch this video which explains the set design and practicalities of operating it within the performance:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0H_B3I71F4

You can watch Helen McCrory's performance of the titular character in Medea on the NT Collection.

Explore:

The NT's Archive has worked with Lucy Jackson from Durham University to explore Greek tragedies that have been staged at the National Theatre.

Explore these videos and consider whether you think modern day transpositions have to offer than traditional stagings of plays such as Medea:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TB77Wf8zD8I&list=PLJgBmjHpqgs5cGSRmLUZEseSougpELZ_0&index=2

Learning Hub

You can find more resources for schools and teachers on the National Theatre's Learning Hub. Search by key stage, subject, theatrical style or practitioner and discover an ever-growing library of short films, learning guides and digital exhibitions.

Find out more: <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/schools/teacher-resources/>

**National
Theatre**

Thank you