






Rape in Contemporary Theatre

1. History

Rape and sexual violence against women have been recurring themes in theatre since the ancient Greeks. However, depictions of rape have often been insensitive and used:

- for comical effect in ancient Greece. 
- to entertain the Romans. 
- to show war and power shifts between characters. 
- to shock and grab the audience by 'the scruff of the neck' (Sierz 2001: 4) in in-yer-face-theatre. 
- to sexually excite the audience during the Restoration period. 

2. The Fourth Wave

Fourth wave feminism began in 2013 and has been enabled by social media. "Facebook" and "Instagram" have generated a "call-out" culture, which allows society to challenge sexism and misogyny.



Despite this movement 'Rape offences have increased dramatically in the United Kingdom since 2012/13' (England, Wales: rape statistics 2019 | Statista, 2021).

#FreeTheNipple

#YesAllWomen

#Reclaim the Night

4. My Aims

I will explore the ways in which the social contexts of fourth wave feminism have influenced the writing and performance of gender violence in theatre.



I will analyse practical theatrical work and existing play texts pre and post the fourth wave.

I will develop a practical project grounded in these debates with reference to the theatrical representation of male-on-female violence.



3. Theatre's Response

Since fourth-wave feminism began there has been an increase in plays depicting male-on-female rape. Often these plays focus on the rape victim and try to debunk rape myths and expose rape stereotypes. This shift in representation of rape has been fore fronted by female playwrights.

Slut Shaming

Joey: So, Slut Squad just means we're confident and, you know, sexy

Capriello 2014: 30

The crushing disappointment when I awake and find myself still alive

©Neill 2018: 88

Impact on the victim

Victim Blaming

'You weren't stupid'
'You weren't like other children'

Harrower 2005: 42, 44

