

A LEVEL
Teacher Guide

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459
For first teaching in 2016

Stockholm – Bryony Lavery

Version 1





Stockholm

by *Bryony Lavery*

Summary

Kali and Todd plan to travel to Stockholm tomorrow, but tonight - a celebratory birthday dinner full of champagne, reminiscing... and fighting. On the outside their lives seem perfect, but behind closed doors their passion for each other overflows into cruelty and spite. Their increasing devotion to each other pushes out all others from their lives, until they desire only to be together - their 'us' time.

Stockholm gives us an insight to a unique relationship between Kali and Todd, inspired by Lavery and Frantic Assembly's research into Stockholm Syndrome which names the intriguing bond between perceived victim and aggressor. The narrative takes us through an evening in their world, Todd's birthday, where calls from friends and loved ones are purposefully ignored, jealousy fuels bitter arguments about past relationships and the climax of the evening isn't a fancy meal but an aggressive bout between the two lovers.

Bryony Lavery

Lavery trained as a teacher and worked in arts administration before moving on to become an actress. However, she became increasingly frustrated with playing poor roles and began to write as she formed the company Les Oeufs Malades with Jessica Higgs and Gerard Bell in the 1970s. Lavery went on to set up the feminist cabaret group Female Trouble and later also founded More Female Trouble and served as artistic director of Gay Sweatshop. Much of her work has feminist undertones, but her most famous work, 'Frozen' not only found acclaim for being a Tony Award nominee, but also created controversy amid accusations of plagiarism.

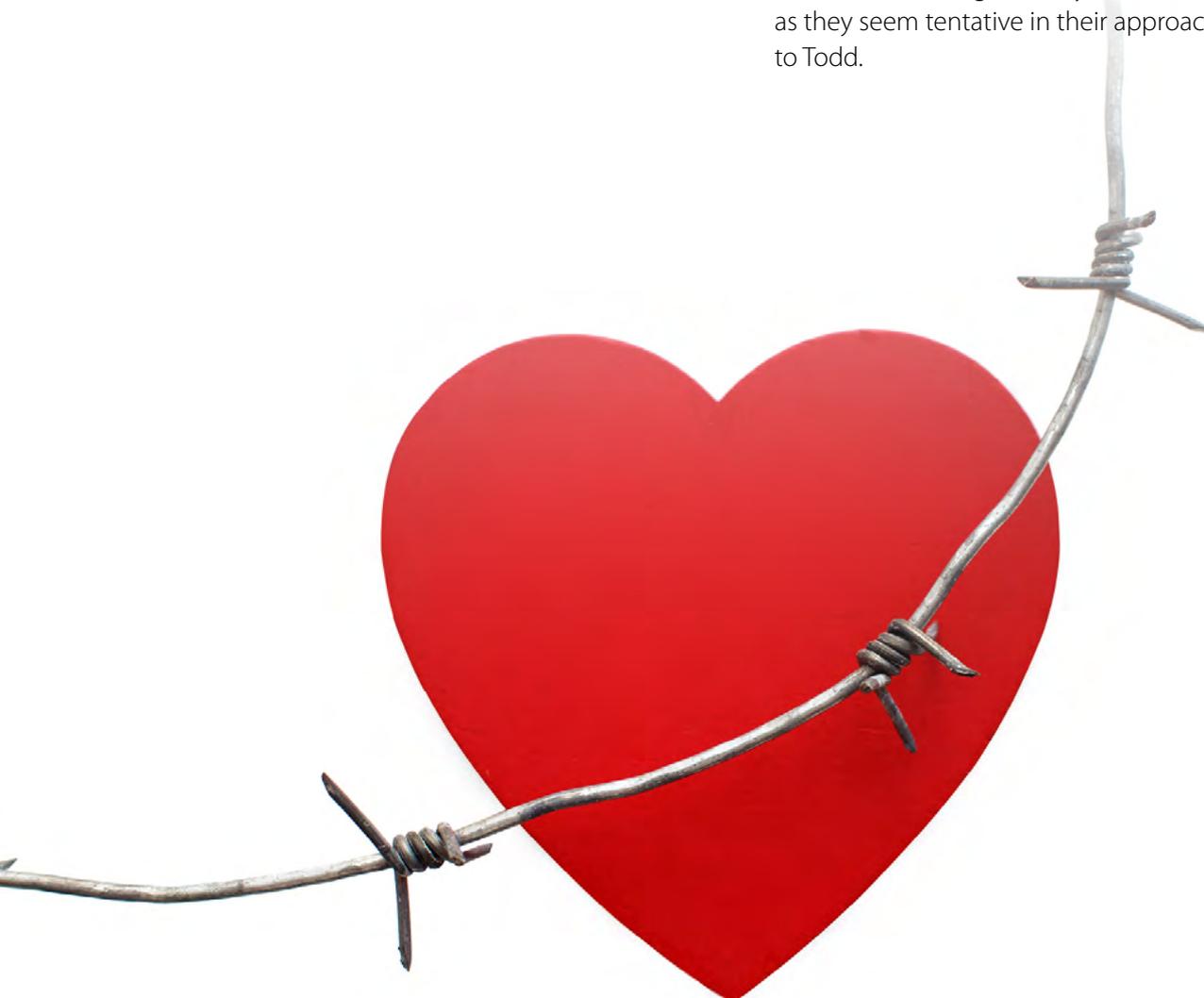
Lavery has been writing since 1976 and since then has had multiple plays in the National Theatre's Connections anthologies as well as several collaborations with the physical theatre company Frantic Assembly, including It Snows (2008); Beautiful Burnout (2010) and of course, Stockholm (2007). Most recently Lavery adapted Treasure Island, the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, into a play which was performed on the Olivier Stage of the National Theatre (2014).

Stockholm Syndrome

When writing Stockholm both Lavery and artistic directors Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham (Frantic Assembly) were intrigued by the Stockholm Syndrome. In the resource pack from the company they outline the origins of the syndrome and make connections between this event and the relationship between Kali and Todd in the play. (http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Stockholm_Resource_Pack.pdf)

This makes for extremely interesting reading and demonstrates how the extreme behaviour found between captors and hostages transcends the heist in Stockholm in 1973 and can potentially be applied to abusive relationships and kidnap situations.

In the play Todd is viewed as the 'victim' or 'hostage' with Kali as the 'captor'. Todd demonstrates key traits that link with Stockholm Syndrome, including identifying with his captor as a defence mechanism, especially against his 'rescuers' - seen as his friends and family in the narrative. Todd has alienated anyone who might see the relationship for what it is and potentially intervene; the tone of the messages left by others confirms this further as they seem tentative in their approach in reaching out to Todd.



Although Lavery, Hoggett and Graham wanted to explore Stockholm Syndrome in a domestic setting, they wanted also for the audience to be able identify with the couple as lovers and as 'in love'.

Key themes

Love and unconventional relationships

In the play the protagonists narrate much of the exposition to the audience. From the outset we learn of the couple's trip to Stockholm, which has been planned with "Mission Impossible One' close-attention-to-detail brilliance" (Lavery, 2008, p21), their romantic love of foreign films, and Todd's love of Kali's laughter. This picture-perfect relationship continues with the information that they worked tirelessly to renovate their home into "exactly how they wanted it" (Lavery, 2008, p27).

Although this perfect façade doesn't last, there are moments when the 'Todd and Kali love story' reignites in words, giving the audience hope that it could conquer all: all arguments; all fights; all jealousy. After digging up a past lover they agree to not have 'retro-jealousy' and Kali tells us:

*"That we trust one another
that our love is strong impenetrable
can
Move mountains
Ford rivers
Survive three months of Serbian builders."*

This is quickly backed up by a lust fuelled speech from Todd:

*"Dearest darling beautiful wonderful thing
Do you know how much I love adore lust love fantasise want
need have to have must have love passionately eternally
perpetually love you desire you want you?"* (Lavery, 2008, p41)

It appears that these words aren't enough however, and together they tell us this might not be enough, "If this is the best you can do... Just not good enough" (Lavery, 2008, p42) - leaving the audience confused. Is this their game? Do they recognise their own indecision about the relationship? Or it is simply different to the fairytale romances we're used to?

Later, Kali's jealousy and suspicions over Todd's voicemail tread a thin line between betrayal from a loved one and an obsessive need to be the only one in his life. Her



accusations spill out viciously instead of the perhaps more expected response of hurt and a need to understand. She uses past relationships against him, encourages a violent response to her anger and declares their relationship over. Here's where the idea of love begins to fade and there is more of a suggestion of Kali's need for power and control and Todd's desire to keep a balance, as he pleads "Let's not do this" (Lavery, 2008, p61).

By the end of the play both characters are almost smug in their ability to get through the fight. They reminisce about the remainder of their night - the sex, the food and their happiness as they look forward to Stockholm. To an audience, or anyone looking in, their fight should have spelled out the numerous issues in their relationship but, by the conclusion of the play, we're left wondering if this is simply an average day in their own 'paradise'.

Violence/domestic abuse

Violence or abuse could be identified in many forms in the play and links intrinsically to the creators' influence of Stockholm Syndrome. There is verbal and emotion manipulation; an obvious avoidance to communicate with the outside world; mistrust between the couple and then, of course, the physical fight that breaks out at the height of their arguing.

When exploring this theme with students try to engage them in considering why Todd stays with Kali, why he rejects contact with others and why Kali needs to feel in control. It's important to not simplify the situation, or assume that the narrative is one of stereotypical domestic abuse. There is indeed love and a desire to be together between the couple, however strange this may appear if the abuse and violence is unpicked.



There are many ways to explore the power balance in this relationship and students should think about how both verbal and non-verbal communication can play a part.

Performance characteristics

Stockholm was originally directed and choreographed by Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham in their unique physical style. There are several clips of the show on the internet for reference. This approach creates an almost dance-like quality to the performance, enhancing both moments of romance as well as adding danger and risk in the choreographed violent sequences.

When exploring the text in class with your students consider how style may impact the process and outcome for the actors, as well as the way in which an audience would read the performance.

Realistic approach: Unpick the emotions, thoughts and motivations of the characters and consider how to naturally portray these on stage. Looking at the psychological side of the characters perhaps fuels a need to remove any direct address (suggested by Lavery's bold text, but not explicitly explained) and to allow the audience to do more of 'the work' towards understanding where the two characters are coming from. Whether this works on its own or not in your explorations, it's definitely worth using as a starting point.

Physical approach: Consider how motifs or sequences can be used to highlight key moments between Kali and Todd, or to symbolise their thoughts or mood.

Staging requirements

There are several named locations in the play, though the majority of the action takes place in the kitchen. These are all domestic, with one exterior location and the rest being the interior of their home: kitchen, attic, bedroom and cellar.

In terms of staging there are many ways in which this can be achieved: multi-functional set that perhaps draws on the use of lights and symbolic items; composite set with split levels depicting a realistic version of their house; a revolve to unveil different locations as they come into play. Allow students to explore the possibilities of staging, as well as weighing up the practical and artistic advantages and disadvantages.





Approaching the exam

One of the most important preparations for the exam is the students' understanding of the whole text - its themes, characters as well as plot. Working through the entire text practically will not only help to bring this to life for the students, but also help to engrain key moments, themes and directorial decisions into their memories for the exam.

As the exam asks the students to consider the play from the viewpoint of director, this approach would be useful within the classroom through a range of explorations. Some suggestions, or starting points are listed below:

- **Space and blocking**
How do Kali and Todd move around each other within the kitchen? Is there an intimacy or do they keep their distance?
Kali goes to the attic room and looks at Todd's phone - is there any way to physically show this as an invasion of privacy into areas or corners of the house that are their own? What could this reveal about their relationship?
- **Character**
Kali and Todd: What would each character say their own and their partner's flaws are? How would these be communicated in performance?

What makes each of the characters want to stay? How would you show moments of decision making, or doubt, in performance?

Friends and Family: How are these voices communicated on stage? Are they pre-recorded or imitated by the actors? Is there concern in their tone, or even a sense of panic? What do their messages reveal about the couple and their relationship with each other and the outside world?

- **Design**
What staging form, or stage space would suit the play and why?
How would you costume Kali and Todd and what would you want this to communicate about them?
How could lighting impact the mood and atmosphere created on stage at key moments in the play?
How could sound, or music, also add to the atmosphere?

As exam preparation it would be useful for students to document their explorations in some way. This might include character profiles and notes on the skills they have used to create these characters in rehearsal as well as notes on direction of others; sketches, photos or videos of blocking or staging ideas and observations of other students' successful work. The aim is to rehearse being



in the role of director, so wherever possible, encourage students to discuss how they directed rather than how they performed/rehearsed.

Lastly, consider opportunities beyond explorations and rehearsal such as a mini-showcase of sections of the text, or even an entire performance changing actors as the plot progresses. This might be a useful way to extend the students' understanding of character and potential ways in which a character(s) can be interpreted in performance. It may also offer insight to a range of stylistic approaches.

Exam questions

When writing strong responses, students will need to:

- Have a clear understanding of the narrative, characters and well as any significant social, historical or cultural contexts.
- Have a clear understanding of the playwright's intentions and the original performance context.
- Have a developed and accurate use of subject specific terminology in their responses.
- Understand the role of a director and demonstrate this through suitable directorial methods or techniques appropriate to the performance of the text.
- Create their own directorial vision for the text that is informed, creative and reflects a personal interpretation.
- Understand, through analysis, how meaning will be communicated to their audience through their directorial staging ideas.

Activities

Rehearsal activities to develop understanding

Hotseating

A staple of the classroom and a great way for students to discover more about the characters. Questions could focus on the characters own reflections on themselves and their own personality/desires/dreams/fears or similar questions relating to their partner's. Questions could also delve into their memories about their childhood or key moments from their relationship as well as explore their relationships with colleagues, friends and family.

A tip is to film these sessions and ask the students to analyse the 'performance' of the characters during questioning - what is revealed and what is deliberately hidden? This will deepen their understanding of the connection between knowledge of the characters and their own vision for direction.

Sticky notes and text messages

In the front of the play text there is reference to the original rehearsals of the text. One method that was used was that of Kali and Todd leaving sticky note messages for each other. This is a great idea to explore the highs and lows of their relationship as well as the mundane of the everyday versus the excitement of special occasions. A similar method could be explored through text messages; this develops the sticky note idea as it looks at responses and reactions.

Use of props - practical vs. pleasure vs. danger

In the original production there are various moments where the everyday object is used in unusual ways. The kitchen is a hub of activity when Todd is cooking; at this point, objects are practical in his tasks, but later they are used to tease or create a sense of danger.

Using plastic props in place of any potential hazardous objects students could explore how the everyday domestic item can take on different intentions when used between the couple. For example, can a tea towel be used to lure a partner closer if wrapped around an arm, or even to inflict pain if pulled tight...?

'Hymns Hands' and creating motifs

Frantic Assembly's devising technique called 'Hymns Hands' is a useful tool to explore the relationship between Kali and Todd. The structure is simple - a sequence of movement created where a hand is either placed on you



or on an opposite partner, normally from the waist up. As with Frantic's devising approach encourage students to create this sequence (8 moves is plenty) without any forethought into meaning. Once established students should loop the sequence and then explore variations of speed, intent, reaction to touch, mood and emotion.

Either record this exploration or ask a few at a time to drop out and watch the others in the class. What meaning have the sequences created? Can they find moments of love or passion or abuse? Perhaps even challenge the students to see if their sequence can be manipulated to move effortlessly between these predominant themes?

For further guidance or ideas, the Frantic Assembly resource pack for 'Stockholm' is brilliant, as is 'The Frantic Assembly Book Of Devising Theatre':

- http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Stockholm_Resource_Pack.pdf
- Graham, S. (2009) The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre. Routledge. London. ISBN: 978-0415467605





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