

British Theatre Guide

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Purgatorio

Ariel Dorfman
Arcola Theatre
(2008)

Ariel Dorfman has one of the most distinctive and recognisable voices of any contemporary playwright. He is best known for that modern classic railing against totalitarian oppression, *Death and the Maiden*, but has written a stream of other work on similar themes.

His latest play, *Purgatorio*, has been given its British premiere thanks to the efforts of Anglo-Italian director Daniele Guerra, who tellingly graduated in Psychology, the perfect training for a Dorfman interpreter.

He is well served throughout this three act, 90 minute psychological drama by Neil from *The Office* (Patrick Baladi playing Man) and the exceptional Adjoa Andoh as the self-absorbed Woman.

It takes some time to tune in to what appears to be a realistic view into the world of secure mental institutions.

The Pinteresque first act sees the Woman rampaging furiously like a caged animal before her bespectacled therapist. He ever so slowly uncovers her marital problems and the reason why she is incarcerated.

To those with a mythological bent, the story might seem familiar, as she shares her issues and history, the murders of her two children and the woman who usurped her, with Medea.

This impression is consolidated in the second act with the tables turned, white coat and spectacles swapped, so that now we are in the next identical, brightly-lit, clinical cell with Man under analysis.

He is more stable but has similar problems, unsurprisingly as he can be identified with unfaithful Jason, now embarking on "the greatest quest of all", to achieve catharsis through understanding and possibly even forgiveness.

He is initially unbending but by this stage, with the title to assist, we realise that the couple are in Purgatory with their release dependent on mutual co-operation.

We also discover in the third act who the male doctor is, giving this poetic, psychological drama extra depth.

Guerra's production could do with a little peppering up early on and might prove hard work for those who do not know their myths. However, with a really fine, feeling performance from Adjoa Andoh to enjoy and clever construction around the Greek myth now given a modern slant, *Purgatorio* rewards those willing to stick with it.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)