

THE NEIGHBOR'S GRIEF IS GREENER by Emanuella Amichai

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“Wallowing Variation on the Stepford Wife“

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 23 January 2018

Subversion seems to be the stock-in-trade of any performance seeking to dwell on social issues. In *The Neighbor's Grief is Greener*, Emanuella Amichai, creator and director, tries to subvert the stereotypes of the perfect 1950s American housewife by presenting them in a new light.

Within the first few minutes of the show, three perfectly elegant housewives (Ayala Bresler Nardi, Merav Dagan, Julie Neshar) are dead, and a pool of blood washes the stage. A man (Jeremie Elfassy) enters, turns on a radio which broadcasts a hardboiled radio play, and indulges in his fantasy of being an enigmatic detective, while being totally oblivious to the women.

With that, Amichai states her thesis: the women are going through a certain sort of death – an unfulfilled life.

From there, we get a constellation of scenes in which the women, occupying discrete spaces on the sparse stage, take turns to come alive and act out their frustrations of their situation or a fantasy of theirs, before dying again just before the man enters the scene.

A key component of these scenes is the re-enactment of American cultural references of the 1950s, which compels one to relook at them.

Julie Neshar uncannily lip-syncs to an interview of Marilyn Monroe before lying down to the overwhelming sound of cameras clicking, thereby giving the impression of Monroe being photographed to death.

Not to be outdone, Ayala Bresler Nardi and Jeremie Elfassy excellently re-enacts a sketch from the 1950s American television sitcom *I Love Lucy*, in which Lucy is giving her husband a hair treatment with an unlikely concoction consisting of kitchen ingredients. In the context of the overall performance, the wife is subtly getting back at her husband with a wink and a wide grin.

Throw in Merav Dagan striving to be herself through a quirky dance routine; and Meirav Elchadef entering with a pail on her head, standing on her head, and spreading her legs – and we get a show that strives to expose the underbelly of these stereotypes through the versatility and virtuosity of the performers.

Apart from subverting some stereotypes, which most of us already believe to be false, what else is undermined that would spark conversation and further the feminist cause?

There, the image of the dead women is an apt critique of the show itself. Rather than struggling for life, the women either simply dropped dead or committed suicide.

That is a far cry from the likes of the early suffragettes and many other admirable women who fought tooth and nail to live a life that they envisioned.

So what else does this show offer?

As evident from some glowing reviews by other critics, a platform for we-art-oppressed rhapsodies that accomplish nothing. People will still find resonance in this piece several years later because – like the elegant housewives – they choose to play dead and roll over.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

THE NEIGHBOR'S GRIEF IS GREENER by Emanuella Amichai

23 – 24 January 2018

Esplanade Theatre Studio

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Isaac started reviewing plays for the student publication, Kent Ridge Common, and later developed a serious interest in theatre criticism after taking a module at university. He is also an aspiring poet, and has a passion for acting and flamenco dancing.