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Examining the harmful effects of the demonisation of women in historical fiction and how these biases persist into the twenty first century.

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Introduction

Historically, women who have held knowledge or power over others have been scrutinised and 'hunted' by the masses. The aim of this independent project is to explore the impact of these 'witch hunts' and how they have evolved into modern day ideologies. Through musical production, this independent project will aim to discover whether there are double standards between men and women in positions of power, whether men are intimidated by women in a position of power and to understand where the concept that powerful women are inherently evil comes from.

Through exploring these themes through the lens of women in historical fiction, it reworks famous stories to make these concepts easier to digest as the audience can recognise the original story and point out how it has been reimagined.

Devised Piece

Witch Hunts & Women's Voices is a bold and contemporary musical which reimagines the lives of three iconic fictional women- Lady Macbeth, Lysistrata and Rhiannon-who have been long labelled as evil, manipulative and destructive figures in history, mythology and literature.

Each of the characters portrayed carries a heavy burden of being perceived as villainous and dangerous. Lady Macbeth as the scheming wife, Lysistrata is the war-mongering peacekeeper, and Rhiannon is the "witch" with magical powers. But through the exploration

of these figures, they discover the depth of their strength and the reasons behind their actions and motivations which were shaped by societal expectations, personal struggles, and the systems that have sought to silence them. As the three actresses dive deeper into their roles, they navigate their own personal battles with self-doubt, power and identity, realising that the story of these “wicked” women is, in many ways, their own.
The show weaves together powerful performances, modern music, and sharp dialogue as the three women’s journeys intertwine-ultimately leading them to reclaim their stories and embrace the true power of their narratives, no longer defined by society's judgements, but by their own strength.

There are three main themes that will be analysed within this study to create a devised piece. In order to understand the context of this independent project, an examination into these themes is necessary. The first theme is empowerment. The show highlights the journey of reclaiming one’s power, especially for women who have been misrepresented throughout history. The second theme is the complexity of female narratives. It challenges the simplistic narratives about women in power, demonstrating that their actions and motivations are much more complicated than appears. The final main theme is solidarity. The bond between the three women, as they learn to support each other, mirrors the strength found in collective action and standing together in the face of adversity.

In the study, the aim is to explore and evaluate how misinformation and propaganda spreads hate speech amongst women has evolved in history and how the writers of these characters were influenced by the world and societal expectations were enforced upon

them. This will be achieved through a literature review exploring complex themes to provide further reasoning for the directorial and academic choices. A segment on Musical influences and how impactful storytelling through music can be, explaining the reasoning for specific music choices. A creative development analysis to reflect on the intricate processes of writing and directing a devised piece. Finally, a final conclusion of my findings and how the devised piece has addressed the question at hand.

Literary Review

This literary review aims to understand the negative impact of the demonisation of women in historical fiction and how these prejudices carry themselves into the twenty-first century. The objectives are to explore recurrent themes of misogyny through time and the stereotyping around powerful women. This alongside a growing conversation topic surrounding violence against women and the demonisation and misunderstanding of men.

Social Conditioning from Gendered Perspective

Preconceived stereotypes of gender ideologies which have evolved through history have led to a toxic dynamic between men and women in society, and how they are told to react and interact with each other. ‘From birth, people are expected to behave in line with the gender group to which they are assigned… These categorial assignments shape how they

perceive themselves, act towards others, and navigate their daily lives' (Stanaland.A, et al, 2023). By conditioning children from an early age about the fundamentals of what it means to be *masculine* or *feminine* we are subconsciously laying the foundations for sexism and prejudice to coexist in a generally accepting society in the modern world. 'Many boys learn and internalise masculinity norms as early as three years old…with many reporting pressures to engage in stereotypically masculine, heterosexual activity as early as middle school." (Stanaland.A, et al, 2023). It is often speculated that men and boys are raised to be harsher critics of women who are doing the same things as their male counterparts, holding them to a double standard. The social exclusion of women in developmental settings, such as school environments and playgrounds, lay foundations for blatant sexism and misogynistic ideals. This exclusion and segregation from a young age has been proven to lead women to furtherly shut out other women in the future, due to feeling as if they are un-belonging themselves. This leads to a phenomenon in which women turn to bullying each other instead of looking at the root cause; making women distrust each other and ultimately betraying other women with little to no explanation. 'Women may be more sensitive than men to social exclusion, and when they feel threatened by the prospect of being left out, a woman's first response may be to socially exclude a third party' (Gordon. E, 2015).

Female Hostility & Comparison

The power dynamic between women who are in the economic and cultural circumstances has been vastly explored in varying social experiments, examining children as young as 12 years old and exploring how their feelings towards women who are more popular or

conventionally attractive by their cultural standards.'The majority of female criticism actually stems from feeling inadequate in an area of life they value highly' (Myers.S, 2020). Of course, conventionally beauty is not the only and sole purpose for women feeling inherently intimidated or inferior than other women; factors such as promiscuity, relationship status and social class should be considered when addressing this reoccurring issue. A woman's exterior appearance impacts her likeability amongst other women, while subsequently enhancing the advantages received by men. In a professional setting, this power imbalance is heightened. 'This comparison and competition among females encourages women to succeed by elevating themselves above other women in the workplace and perpetuating gender inequalities among their inferiors." (Henshaw. S et al, 2018). Women have been put up against each other for centuries and these harmful prejudices and comparisons often lead to women allowing their internal frustration to manifest to their colleagues, friends, family or other female acquaintances. The competitiveness and bitterness which is curated in female dominated professions and environments is explained through a psychological phenomenon called, *female hostility*. 'Female hostility is a destructive comparison mentality women sometimes exhibit when they feel inferior to another woman in some way.(Henshaw. S, 2018).

Women in Leadership

In the workforce, women often receive significantly less promotions or pay rises compared to male counterparts. "A survey in 2010 reveals that the men have received 15% more promotions compared to women." (Ibarra. H et al, 2010) **.** This imbalance in women

receiving promotions is a direct result of women still being perceived as inadequate for leadership positions in the corporate eye, this is referred to as the 'glass ceiling effect'. "Glass ceiling… refers to the invisible barrier that many women face as they advance through the ranks of their chosen profession…It prohibits both women and organisations from reaching their full potential." (Chrisholm-Burns. M.A, et al. 2017). This inescapable wall limits what a woman can achieve in their career, in financial terms. Resultant of this limitation, there are drastically less women in higher up management positions. "Worldwide, women only hold 4-5% of CEO's and hold less than 25% of executives and senior-level positions" (Chrisholm-Burns. M.A. et al, 2017). Through asserting dominance in the workplace as a woman, your likelihood of receiving a positive or supportive reception from your colleagues is low. This boils down to outdated stereotypes and traditional gender roles. By displaying more masculine characteristics, it has a negative impact on a woman's career, paving the road further for an oppressive society against women in power. "Women tend to be penalised for displaying either too little or too much assertiveness, competitiveness and independence" (Chrisholm-Burns. M.A, et al. 2017).

Medieval Witch Hunts

'Witch Hunts' are not a recent phenomenon and are traced back thousands of years to medieval times. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding witchcraft and black magic stems back even further. A vast majority of whom people believed to be 'witches' were women. This plays down to female figures in the community being misunderstood and commonly

associated with the misfortunes of their society. These ranged from natural disasters such as flooding, to theft, unexpected deaths and illnesses and miscarriages or infertility. It was believed that witches were to blame for these incomprehensible events. “To seek a rational answer to why things happened the way they did…witchcraft offered a logically consistent manner of its explanation, and made sense in people’s lives” (Menjec.M). People often turned to women in the community who withheld knowledge that others did not possess, such as creating natural medicines, or those simply didn’t confine to societal norms of femininity. These medieval communities were frightened by women who knew ‘too much’. A lot of women who faced persecutions on charge of witchcraft were initially fuelled by rumours by others in the community, rather than concrete, primary evidence by the persecutors. “Acting on the basis of accusations, denunciations or sometimes mere rumours, these men arrested persons whose names came to their attention, interrogated them, and did everything in their power to extract confessions from them” (Levack.B.P, 2013) .These suspected witches were fought to be a part of an isolated cult who were following orders by an evil underworld figure, such as Satan. This boils down to the divide between Christianity and Paganism which prevailed in medieval Europe. This evoked the question of whether the witch hunt epidemic in medieval Europe was fuelled by society’s hatred towards women, or fear ignited through religion. “All Pagans as well as sorcerers, could be viewed as part of the monstrous plan of Satan to frustrate the salvation of the world” (Russell. J, 2024). Most of the people who placed forward witchcraft accusations against others were in the same community, social circle or even family. This could potentially be down to having ulterior motives, such as personal disagreements or financial

differences. “Their accusers were neighbours, relatives and in many cases, people with financial and personal reasons to make accusations” (Dunning. M.E, 2024).

Modern day ‘Witch Hunts’

The scrutinisation and oppression of women in the public eye is something which has persisted into the 21st century, with hundreds of female public figures, from royalty, politicians to social media influencers being chased down and interrogated by press and the media for allegations and speculation around them. “The term, ‘witch hunt’, has reappeared with great fervor in the political arena, used by the powerful to generate fear that serves a distinct political narrative.” (Sherwin. B.D, 2021**).** Social media has quickly escalated in popularity and convenience for diffusing information, marketing yourself and creating social movements or trends. With the influx of social media platforms, the engagement with the general public has increased significantly. Scrolling on any social media platform nowadays will lead you to an article or post regarding the ‘cancelling’ of a certain public figure, celebrity, brand or influencers. Through the power of social media and herd mentality, ‘cancel culture’ has grown into a complex phenomenon which could even be considered to be our closest form of a modern day witch hunt. “Cancel culture is a form of public shaming initiated on social media to deprive someone of their usual clout or attention with the aim of making public discourse.” (Velasco. J.C, 2020). This sporadic movement of finding an anecdote to “cancel” a public figure on can become viscous and obsessive very quickly, with little to no realisation of the consequences or impact this would have on said persons lives and career. “Parasocial relationships are non-reciprocated

socio-emotional connections with media figures" (Hoffner. C.A et al, 2022). This one sided relationship creates an unhealthy and unnatural dynamic between public figures and everyday folk as the barriers between their realms of reality and privacy are blurred; proving us with the consensus that we know these figures on a personal level and are entitled to explicit information about. "The frequency and perceived authenticity of media figures' self-disclosures on social media accelerate people's socio-emotional connections" (Hoffner. C.A et al, 2022). These attempts to sabotage celebrities' career's, particularly those of female celebrities, is vaguely comparable to historic witch hunts where masses would go out of their way to seek out women who they believed to have been witches and perform immoral acts without concrete evidence and based primarily on speculation.

Symbolism of Animals and Gender Stereotypes

For centuries, animals have been used as powerful symbols in religious, cultural and literary narratives to reflect human behaviour, morality and identity. Often, these symbolic representations carry deeply gendered connotations. "The different ways in which humans interpret certain aspects of the biology or behaviour of animals is at the root of many symbolic meanings" (Almarcha.F, et al, 2022). In Christianity, lambs have been used as symbols of innocence, sacrifice and purity due to their clean white colour and submissiveness in nature, known as the 'lamb of God'. These associations often link lambs with femininity due to their connotations of docility and gentleness. "When a lamb is seen in architecture, it is almost always the 'Lamb of God', who was sacrificed for our salvation" (Collins.A.H, 1913). Many religious and historical texts perpetuate this archetype of lambs being used as sacrifices for wrongdoing in society. This is a possible reflection of how

women are expected to sacrifice their personal ambitions for familial roles in a society. This recurring imagery may mirror societal expectations of women to sacrifice personal ambition for family or community obligations. Likewise, in Biblical and cultural texts from around the world, wolves have been depicted as dominant figures who are predatory, deceiving and threatening to the submissive. The infamous idiom of 'A wolf in sheep's clothing'(Cambridge Dictionary), reinstates the notion that wolves are not to be trusted and are malicious creatures. It also highlights the helplessness and innocence of the sheep as no one would suspect any evil or wrongdoing from them; they are nurturing figures in the wild. Wolves could be used as a metaphor for masculine aggression and unchecked desire as ruthless predators in the wild, with no mercy or sympathy for other animals. Birds hold lots of weight in metaphorical analogies and symbolism throughout history, with birds often being the symbol of soul, freedom and spirit. "One of the most widely known symbolisms of birds is the representation of the soul" (Roque.M.A, 2018). Throughout literature, music and religious texts, birds have offered a sign of hope in times of despair. Doves in particular are denoted as being a representation of female virtue as they are gentle and nurturing. Culturally, white doves have evolved to become the symbol for peace and have been said to withhold and deliver messages from God in the Heavens. "For thousands of years, doves have connected societies and people both physically through their ability to navigate, and symbolically in their prominent role in religion and history representing common themes such as peace, kindness and fidelity" (Smith.A, 2024). Felines in nature and domestication have a deep rooted cultural connection with women and femininity. Cats of all species have been admired by women throughout history. "The fact that women, have been for such a long time, associated with cats show a long lasting

gendered attitude toward cats" (Frasin.I et al, 2022). Lionesses are prime examples of female power in nature as they harness their maternal protection, fierce loyalty and hidden power to lead within the Pride. They challenge passive depictions of women in nature as they are the key providers for their families and often lead their community without getting the recognition for it. "Lionesses are much more than hunters; they are nurturers, leaders, defenders, and key players in the Savannah ecosystem" (Africa-safaris, 2025). These misrepresentations of powerful women throughout history mirrors that of lionesses being overlooked while their male companions take credit and are represented through media.

Character Specific Research

Welsh folklore held a nuanced view of witchcraft in comparison to other European nations. The Welsh showed less reverence or scepticism of the supernatural, possessing an ambivalent attitude towards women believed to be *Witches* as they were either seen as wise healers or dangerous outcasts. "Only 5 people were hanged for witchcraft in Wales…Distinct elements of Welsh culture, including superstitions and religion, halted the witch trials seen across Britain and Europe." (Dunning.M.E, 2024).

Rhiannon was the Welsh Goddess of hope and forgiveness, whose story can be found in the Mabinogi (Matthew Francis, 1974). Rhiannon was an ethereal being, who held a close connection to the otherworld and mythical beings. "The enchantments, magical creatures and strange occurrences serve as reminders of her connections to this otherworldly place." (Forsyth.S, 2022). Unconventional to her time, Rhiannon was an independent, self-sufficient woman who led from her heart's desires instead of conforming to societal expectations of

her to go ahead with an arranged marriage. Rhiannon subverted the notion that women had to be chosen as a partner, so she decided to choose her own lover rather than the famous Welsh prince, *Pwyll*. Rhiannon was ridiculed for running off with another man and disregarding society's plan for her. She was quickly ostracised by the citizens of Wales for her free-thinking and strength. "The medieval woman was portrayed as beautiful…the virginal maiden…she was prized, fought after…the stereotypical 'damsel in distress'." (Shipock.K,2017). After the story of Rhiannon running off with another man out of love died out, she was falsely accused of killing her own son in a framed murder, as her community already believed her to be 'crazy' or unstable. This was soon proven wrong. Rhiannon's determination and carefree attitude became testimonial to women of this era as they saw her as an example of how women could choose their own fate in the eyes of oppression. "Rhiannon's resilience and ability to overcome adversity are central themes in her stories." (Forsyth. S, 2022).

Lysistrata is a fictional war hero from Aristophanes's play (Aristophane, 411 BC) of the same name, written in 411 BC .

Her story critiques gender roles and sexual politics in ancient Greece, where women were valued solely for reproduction and sexual advances for men. "Men controlled the lives of women by degrading their status until they were seemingly worthless, except for their wombs…They deemed women as insatiable beings, unable to control any physical cravings at all, be it food, alcohol or sex." (Tobias.M, 2019). Lysistrata instigated a sex strike and encouraged all of the women from her village to participate in hopes that from withdrawing

men from their main purpose as a woman, that they would get them to stop the Peloponnesian war (Aristophane, 411 BC). The women of Greece were re-claiming their bodies as a form of power and protest, in contrast to how the men treated their bodies as transactional. During this patriarchal society, women were treated as property, being passed down from their fathers to their soon to be husbands in arranged marriages. This legacy translates itself through modern ideologies that perceive women's bodies as a commodity for male pleasure and control. During ancient Greece and to this day, women's sexual pleasure has been vastly misunderstood or undermined, creating what is known as the 'orgasm gap' between men and women. "Women's sexual pleasure is viewed as more complicated and an "extra"...part of heterosexual sexual interactions…while men "need" orgasms for their sexual fulfillment and accordingly are "entitled" to them." (Coy. M, 2023). This perpetuates the idea that a woman's value to a man relies on sexual performance or physical attraction, pushing the narrative that women are seen as sexual autonomy rather than people. The stigmatisation of being a *whore* or *virgin* has historically paved the perceptions to men's access and judgements. In a modern society, pornography and the mainstream media portrays women as being submissive or *easy* to gain sexual advances from. Due to the over consumption of pornographic content, this creates a complex in women that in order to attract a partner, they must alter their appearance to match those of modern day pornstars, supermodels and other female figures in the media scape. "Throughout history, women's physical appearance has been constantly criticised…It has been continuously changed..for the benefit of the patriarchal society to fit into the 'male gaze'." (Sidani.K, 2023). Furtherly, despite men seeking out submissive women who fit into this sexually alluring women, the stigmatisation of a woman being described as a *whore* is

still consistent in modern world contexts. The term *whore* derives from being a juxtaposition to the term, *Madonna*, used to describe the Virgin Mary, who is the epitome of innocence and devotion; everything a whore is not. There also appears to be a distinct falsity between sexually promiscuous men compared to women, as men are expected to "explore" their sexuality, meanwhile women suppress it until they are in a long-term relationship."The Madonna-Whore dichotomy was also positively associated with the endorsement of sexual double standards…seem to devalue sexually permissive women, whereas sexually permissive behaviours are valued in men." (Klein. V, et al, 2022).

Lady Macbeth's mental unravelling in Shakespeare's tragedy, *Macbeth* has been theorised as being misunderstood and rather than a supernaturally induced hysteria, it is the direct result of unresolved grief and emotional neglect. The finger is typically pointed towards Lady Macbeth while looking at who is the real *antagonist* of the story. "Commonly disregarded for her actions within the play, has a jarred reputation..She is infamously known as the "fourth witch".. And is often linked with pessimistic and unfavourable opinions for her courage and resilience." (Shahiwala.S, 2022). There is a widely renowned theory as to what led to her breakdown, which is that Lady Macbeth suffered with postpartum depression from the loss of a child, either during pregnancy (miscarriage) or during early infancy. Postpartum depression is a mood disorder which affects women after a pregnancy, this often interferes with the mother's ability to care for herself or the baby. "Postpartum depression occurs within the first twelve months following childbirth and can include feelings of low mood..1-6% of women experience symptoms of post traumatic stress within the first six months postpartum." (Iles.J, et al, 2011). The line from Act One,

Scene Seven of Macbeth, “I have given suck, and know/how tender ‘tis to love the Babe”(Shakespeare.W ,1623) , alludes to the death of an infant. This infers that Lady Macbeth was suffering from some form of postpartum depression or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) before there was any comprehension of either condition. “During the late sixteenth century...the English people became more concerned about the prevalence of madness..Conventional beliefs about the nature and causes of mental disorders...reflect the traditional fusion of magic, science and religion.” (Banerjee.R, 2024). Society at the time were fearful of these unexplainable phenomena, hence why Lady Macbeth was judged so harshly for her mental state. Throughout the course of the play, there is an evident shift in dynamic within Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s marriage as Macbeth grows more ambitious for the throne while leaving his wife isolated. For example, in earlier scenes, Macbeth proclaims that Lady Macbeth is, ‘My dearest partner of greatness’ (Shakespeare.W, 1623), however by later acts, he starts to leave her behind entirely in his plan of power, as denoted through the line, “Be innocent of the knowledge, my dearest chuck”(Shakespeare.W, 1623). Due to Lady Macbeth’s deteriorating sanity caused by postpartum depression and trauma induced mental illness, the additional emotional neglect from Macbeth merely fuelled her feeling of isolation and madness. Recent studies emphasise the importance that emotional support plays in recovery from postpartum and post traumatic experiences. “Women who perceived higher levels of postpartum emotional support from their partner were less likely to develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress and depression.” (Iles.J, et al, 2011). As emphasised through the infamous sleep walking scene and compulsive hand washing scene in Act five, these provide symbols of suppressed trauma resurfacing. The complex

psychology of Lady Macbeth, caused by Macbeth's unacknowledged grief of their child ultimately leads to her breakdown.

Conclusion

Through this literature review, it becomes apparent that the villainization of women in historical fiction is not an isolated issue of the past, but instead a deeply ingrained societal pattern. From the value men place on a woman being determined by how physically attracted they are to her, to the glass ceiling effect, these misogynistic phenomenons are merely re-renderings of pre-existing chains of oppression.

Evidence of Development: Creative Processes

Musical Influences

When deciding on how to approach this research question through self-examination, the creation of a musical was an idea that was intriguing. Due to a personal love of musical theatre, it was decided to use the character research to develop a musical using pre-existing songs to create a jukebox show. It was decided to not create original songs due to pre-existing songs that already have great context and meanings for this independent project.

After first hearing Fleetwood Mac's song, 'Rhiannon' (Fleetwood Mac, 1975) It was instantly intriguing to learn more about this mystic woman that Stevie Nicks was inspired by. Nicks felt compelled to write the song after reading 'Triad', by Mary Leader (Leader.M,1973).The story follows a woman who gets possessed by the spirit of a mystical figure, Rhiannon, and inherits her powers. The spirit of Rhiannon is the same Rhiannon that features in the Mabinogi. The lyrics focus heavily on the imagery and symbolism of birds to act as a metaphor for her freedom from the confinements of medieval Wales. The lyric, "Takes through the sky like a bird of flight, and who will be her lover?" directly makes the comparison. As discussed in my literary review, historically birds are believed to be messengers from Heaven and are the symbol of peace, freedom and love. These are all qualities and values that Rhiannon herself represents as she showed society that women

can choose their own fate and bring peace to themselves and their community. “When something bad was happening in war...She’d come and the danger would be gone, and you’d see birds flying off.” (Nicks.S, 1977). The lyric, “All my life, you’ve never seen a woman taken by the reins.”, highlights how determined and independent Rhiannon was, how she could never be tied down by the reins of society and settling for an unhappy life. The song was therefore selected due to the connotations and metaphorical meanings represented throughout the song.

Edge of Seventeen (Nicks.S, 1981) is a 1981 solo hit by Stevie Nicks released after separating from Fleetwood Mac. The song's title refers to being on the brink of adulthood and embracing a new chapter of your life, even when it comes with hard challenges.Nick's inspiration from the song came from a very upsetting period of her life, following the infamous assasination of Beatles member, John Lennon, and the more personal death of her uncle. “Written in the throes of grief, she infused it with a gritty spirit and inspiring defiance that makes it even more compelling.” (Howe.Z, 2022). Through once again utilising the symbolism of birds, more specifically doves, in the chorus: “Just like a white winged dove/sings a song/sounds like she’s singing” Nicks was able to convey feelings of grief through a metaphor for a person's soul soaring up to Heaven when they die. The significance of the bird being a white wing dove is important symbolism as doves are the universal symbol of peace, meaning that by Nick’s logic, when a person dies, they do so peacefully. Because of these connotations of freedom, peace and possible rebirth, this song was another great fit for Rhiannon’s character and it was decided to include both songs, in a cut down version, into the final script.

Burn Alive (Ford.J, 2024) is a 2024 song from British girl group, *The Last Dinner Party* from their debut album, 'Prelude to Ecstacy'. The band merge musical genres such as orchestral pop with indie rock to create a unique fusion of sound with haunting vocals. The song, 'Burn Alive', has been described by critics as, "Masochistic, in which lead vocalist, (Abigail) Morris belts her way through parental grief." (Darshini. P, 2024). The lyric, "Let me make my grief a commodity" alludes to how Morris wont let her parents death's define her character and prove that she is strong enough to process her loss while not letting it take over her being. Another lyric, "Do what I can to survive" , iterates how society can be ruthless and lack empathy over those who have experienced traumatic events, such as familial loss. It also implies that in order to survive in a modern world, you need to close off your emotions from others. In itself, the title, 'Burn Alive', seems like an indirect metaphor for how witches were burnt alive at the stake out of fear of the unfamiliar or unknown. I believed this song would be a compatible fit for Lysistrata's character as she too dealt with lots of loss during the Polyn war, yet did not let it define her and in fact, it fuelled her to make a change. The reference to survival and being burnt alive is in reference to how men tried to smoke women out of their houses out of sexual frustration and the vigorous treatment towards women during ancient Greece. This song felt very impactful to the storyline within the musical.

You Don't Own Me (Gore.L, 1963) is a feminist hit song, performed by 17 year old, Lesley Gore, in 1963 which still holds the same political underscoring as it did sixty years prior. Th1e writers of the song admitted that they were frustrated with all women's music centering around the idea of falling in love with prince charming, so they decided to flip the

narrative to show that a woman isn't something to possess. "It was about being a person… it got picked up as an anthem for women, which makes me very proud." (Gore.L, 1991). Powerful lyrics such as: "Don't put me on display" and "I'm not one of your many toys" perpetuates the concept of a woman being treated as a transactional product, while also highlighting the double standards of men and women in the 1960's. Partial inspiration for the song came from response to black protests, this invited the song to be the undefined anthem of many feminist protests, such as the Me Too movement. "That is literally the haunting of YDOM- all the ways in which systems of patriarchy continue to reveal themselves." (Prof. Redmond.S, 2019). Due to its dominant themes of ownership and reclaiming your voice, I believed this song would be a great suit for Lysistrata's character, as she and the women of Greece faced oppression from the men in their country and managed to successfully gain control over their sexuality and bodies.

Tolerate It (Swift.T, 2021) is a poignant emotional ballad from Taylor Swift's 2021 album, *Evermore*. The song focuses on a story of unreciprocated love and provides a compelling perspective on the intricacies of romantic relationships. Swift took inspiration from Daphne Du Mauries 1938 novel, 'Rebecca' (Du Mauries.D, 1938), a tale about a lady who marries a wealthy widow to discover that both he and his house are haunted by the spirit of his deceased wife, Rebecca. This representation of unacknowledged and under appreciated love is something that many listeners can seek solace in. "There was a part of her that could relate to the unnamed woman because she had felt herself trying to love someone who was ambivalent towards her in the past." (Malik.A, 2024). Strong imagery is seen throughout the lyrics, for instance, the lyric, "I made you my temple, my mural, my sky" emphasises how

she once felt secured and protected in the relationship. Whereas, the bridge of the song talks about the idea of reclaiming your freedom. The lyric, “Break free and leave us in ruins” implies that she has the potential to escape and jeopardize their relationship. Trailing off of this, the next lyric, “Took this dagger in me and removed it” uses the dagger as a metaphor for self sabotaging, and possibly self harm, as the woman is aware of her compliance yet does nothing to change their dynamic. Immediately, I thought this song would be a perfect fit for Lady Macbeth as her story in my piece delves into the complexities of the treatment she receives from her husband.

The 1995 hit, *Just a Girl* (Stefani.G, 1995), from the group, No Doubt, remains a catchy feminist anthem which has resonated for over thirty years. Written by lead singer, Gwen Stefani, in retaliation to negative media portrayals of her at the time, such as her relationship status and fashion choices. The lyrics poke fun at the stereotypes of femininity while still holding truthful and poignant undertones. “Stefani takes a satirical approach and exaggerates stereotypes often associated with women..The song points out..how being a girl in a male-dominated society can feel like a burden.” (Del.A,2024). During the 90’s, society was still dealing with the repercussions of the 60s and 70s, in reference to contraception and equal pay. These inconsistencies in the treatment of women still prevail today, as seen through the Roe V Wade ruling in the USA and the UK parliament denying the outlaw misogyny as a hate crime. Lyrics such as, “That’s all that you’ll let me be”, emphasize the confinement that women face and their supposed incapabilities to subvert these. The lyrics, “Guess I’m some kind of freak” and “They all sit and stare” perpetuates the notion of women being constantly monitored and criticised for their physical appearances

or positions in society, implying that a woman's value relies on her looks. 'Just a Girl' is the first song I knew I wanted to include in my piece, particularly as a finale number as a group. This is because no matter the historical context of the three 'witches', the themes discussed are still applicable and relevant to not only these historical, fictional characters, but to the audience also.

Script and Plot Development

I believe as though comedic writing is my strong point when it comes to storytelling, therefore I leant towards a comedic script when first writing 'Witch Hunts and Women's Voices". My writing style was inspired by TV female driven shows, such as 'Fleabag' by Phoebe Waller-Bridge (Waller-Bridge.P,2016) , and 'Miranda' by Miranda Hart (Hart.M, 2009). Both shows have a distinctive lens while addressing the audience, using them to offload their inner monologues while the other characters on screen are unaware. The language which they use makes the audience feel as though they are genuinely watching the lives of middle aged, middle class English women, rather than watching actresses portray these characters. This is down to the language they use, such as swearing, and notoriously British and middle class phrases. This helps to humanise the characters and in return, the audience has more empathy for them as they can see themselves through these traits. The dialogue the witches use when addressing the audience in their monologues and

interacting with each other. My aim was to replicate how teenage girls talk nowadays in order to make them feel more cohesive and make their stories easier to understand by using modern day language. To feed this illusion that these women exist in the present day, not only in the past, I incorporated swear words, derogatory terms used against girls and pop culture references to add comedic value and give the audience elements of them to relate to.

Subsequently, I wanted to incorporate lots of direct address into the piece in order for the witches to connect with the audience as much as possible, to create a lasting impact on them as they retell their harrowing stories. I have always been a big fan of direct address in theatre and TV, especially those moments that focus on misunderstood female characters. This is due to the characters holding more power on stage and screen when they break the fourth wall, it makes the audience feel involved in their narratives. My biggest inspirations from theatre were 'Six: the Musical' (Moss.L et al, 2017) and 'Fantastically great women who changed the world' (Moss.L et al, 2017), both written by Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow. Both shows focus on misrepresented women throughout history, Six: the Musical focusing on the former wives of Henry VIII, and 'Fantastically Great Women Who Changed The World' focusing on the lives of Frida Kahlo, Rosa Parks and Amelia Earhart to name a few. I found their direct address to the audience and concert style intriguing from a storytelling point of view. Through having the six former wives and six influential historical women use direct the audience by breaking the fourth wall, rather than them reliving their story, I found that they held more power over their narratives and as the show progresses, their comradery makes them stronger as a unity. This is something which I utilised in my own script as I

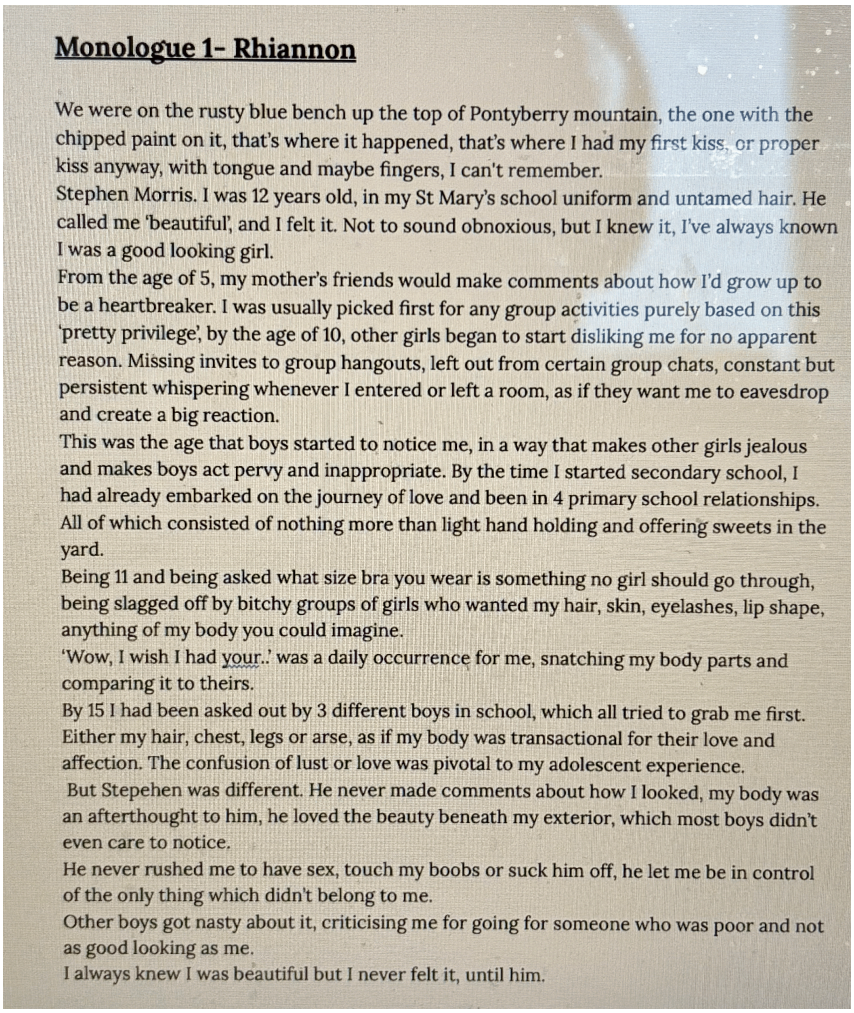
wanted the witches to feel as though they have a genuine friendship and realistic chemistry.

Personally, I found it more difficult to intertwine comedic moments with gritty and uncomfortable themes, as I was not sure if they came across as insensitive or ill fitting, however, as I grew more confident in my writing abilities and got to understand my characters better, it came instinctively to me. To help tackle the heavy themes, I wrote the role of the 'Narrator', to provide explanations with historical and cultural contexts, while additionally acting as a voice of reason throughout the piece. The Narrator opens and closes the show with powerful statements about the perceptions of 'Witches' and the role that women face in positions of power. I always wanted the narrator to be an ominous presence, not seen on stage but consistently present, and more specifically, I wrote the part to be played by a man to provide a juxtaposition between the witches and the Narrator, my intention was for this casting to represent how men take the reigns in telling stories throughout history and have the potential to shift people's opinions on them. Through the Narrator's language, I wanted to create the illusion that the audience were listening to a wildlife documentary. Through using primital phrases such as 'females of our species', it strips humans down to their animalistic behaviours, comparing our behaviour and gender roles to different animal species. The Narrator at one point, compares Lysistrata to a lioness, to further highlight the bleak correlation between us and animals.

Attached below are the first drafts for each of the witches' monologues compared to what ended up making the final edit. In the first drafts, I was asked to retell the women's stories

as though they occurred in 2025, to make it seem more realistic and relatable. The final drafts are using the correct terminology and re-telling their stories as I intended to. After these drafts, I have included a copy of the entirety of the final script to gain a better understanding of the writing style I was inspired by and how these messages have translated onto the finished product.

Rhiannon (First and Final Draft)



Monologue 1- Rhiannon

We were on the rusty blue bench up the top of Pontyberry mountain, the one with the chipped paint on it, that's where it happened, that's where I had my first kiss, or proper kiss anyway, with tongue and maybe fingers, I can't remember.
Stephen Morris. I was 12 years old, in my St Mary's school uniform and untamed hair. He called me 'beautiful', and I felt it. Not to sound obnoxious, but I knew it, I've always known I was a good looking girl.
From the age of 5, my mother's friends would make comments about how I'd grow up to be a heartbreaker. I was usually picked first for any group activities purely based on this 'pretty privilege', by the age of 10, other girls began to start disliking me for no apparent reason. Missing invites to group hangouts, left out from certain group chats, constant but persistent whispering whenever I entered or left a room, as if they want me to eavesdrop and create a big reaction.
This was the age that boys started to notice me, in a way that makes other girls jealous and makes boys act pervy and inappropriate. By the time I started secondary school, I had already embarked on the journey of love and been in 4 primary school relationships. All of which consisted of nothing more than light hand holding and offering sweets in the yard.
Being 11 and being asked what size bra you wear is something no girl should go through, being slagged off by bitchy groups of girls who wanted my hair, skin, eyelashes, lip shape, anything of my body you could imagine.
'Wow, I wish I had your..' was a daily occurrence for me, snatching my body parts and comparing it to theirs.
By 15 I had been asked out by 3 different boys in school, which all tried to grab me first. Either my hair, chest, legs or arse, as if my body was transactional for their love and affection. The confusion of lust or love was pivotal to my adolescent experience.
But Stepehen was different. He never made comments about how I looked, my body was an afterthought to him, he loved the beauty beneath my exterior, which most boys didn't even care to notice.
He never rushed me to have sex, touch my boobs or suck him off, he let me be in control of the only thing which didn't belong to me.
Other boys got nasty about it, criticising me for going for someone who was poor and not as good looking as me.
I always knew I was beautiful but I never felt it, until him.

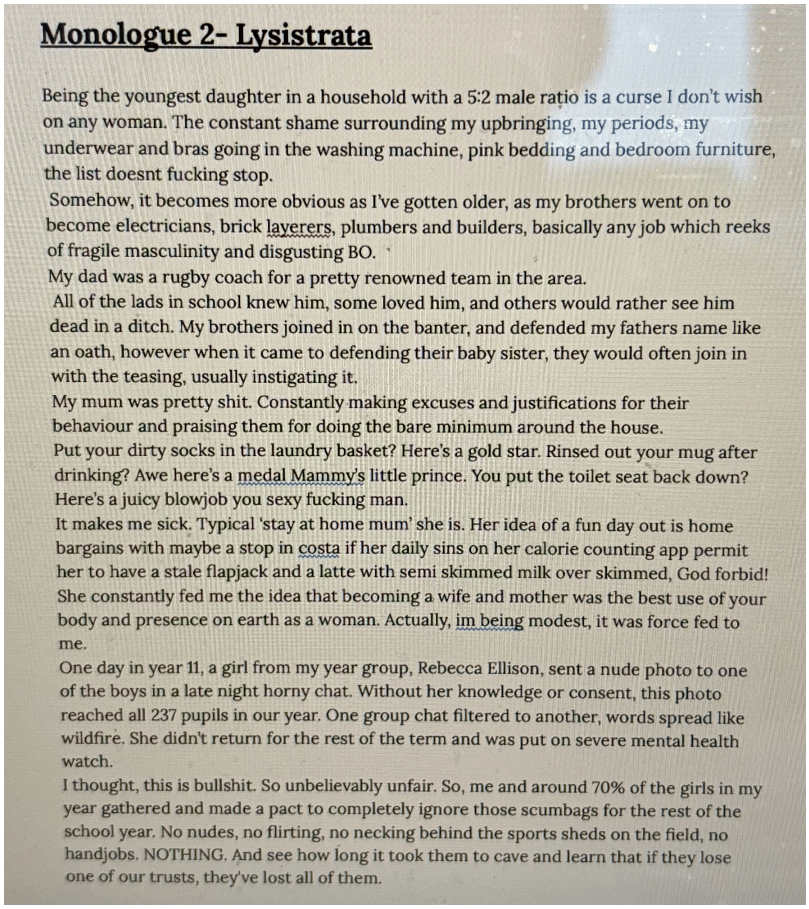
RHIANNON: I was born into a wealthy family with big dreams—royalty or nothing. And guess who they decided to marry off to secure all that? Me! At 17, how could I refuse a Welsh prince? Well, I would've—if he wasn't such a complete twat.

He's everything my parents want: royal, powerful, and as charming as a brick wall. He tells me what to wear, when to smile, and how to bow. It's like being in a *Royal Sim* game. I was some decoration, a little political move. His "love" is a choke chain. But, I smile, I nod, because that's what princesses do, right?

But there's a fire inside me, and guess who gets it? A stable boy. Yes, a poor, unkept *stable boy*. He doesn't care about titles or crowns—he just sees me as a person, not some royal doll. And my parents? They think he's beneath me. "What future could you have with him?" they ask, clueless. But they don't see how my heart races when I think of him.

I know what you're thinking: "Privileged girl rebels for love. How sweet."
But class matters. And choosing love over power comes with a price.
I gave it all up—and the world called me crazy for it.

Lysistrata (First and Final Draft)



Monologue 2- Lysistrata

Being the youngest daughter in a household with a 5:2 male ratio is a curse I don't wish on any woman. The constant shame surrounding my upbringing, my periods, my underwear and bras going in the washing machine, pink bedding and bedroom furniture, the list doesnt fucking stop.

Somehow, it becomes more obvious as I've gotten older, as my brothers went on to become electricians, brick layerers, plumbers and builders, basically any job which reeks of fragile masculinity and disgusting BO.

My dad was a rugby coach for a pretty renowned team in the area.

All of the lads in school knew him, some loved him, and others would rather see him dead in a ditch. My brothers joined in on the banter, and defended my fathers name like an oath, however when it came to defending their baby sister, they would often join in with the teasing, usually instigating it.

My mum was pretty shit. Constantly making excuses and justifications for their behaviour and praising them for doing the bare minimum around the house.

Put your dirty socks in the laundry basket? Here's a gold star. Rinsed out your mug after drinking? Awe here's a medal Mammy's little prince. You put the toilet seat back down? Here's a juicy blowjob you sexy fucking man.

It makes me sick. Typical 'stay at home mum' she is. Her idea of a fun day out is home bargains with maybe a stop in costa if her daily sins on her calorie counting app permit her to have a stale flapjack and a latte with semi skimmed milk over skimmed, God forbid! She constantly fed me the idea that becoming a wife and mother was the best use of your body and presence on earth as a woman. Actually, im being modest, it was force fed to me.

One day in year 11, a girl from my year group, Rebecca Ellison, sent a nude photo to one of the boys in a late night horny chat. Without her knowledge or consent, this photo reached all 237 pupils in our year. One group chat filtered to another, words spread like wildfire. She didn't return for the rest of the term and was put on severe mental health watch.

I thought, this is bullshit. So unbelievably unfair. So, me and around 70% of the girls in my year gathered and made a pact to completely ignore those scumbags for the rest of the school year. No nudes, no flirting, no necking behind the sports sheds on the field, no handjobs. NOTHING. And see how long it took them to cave and learn that if they lose one of our trusts, they've lost all of them.

LYSISTRATA: I was born into a world of war, where men fought for power, glory, and dramatic battle speeches. Families were torn apart, lives lost, and peace was apparently something people just talked about for fun. I've seen it all—destruction, chaos, and a lot of dirty uniforms.

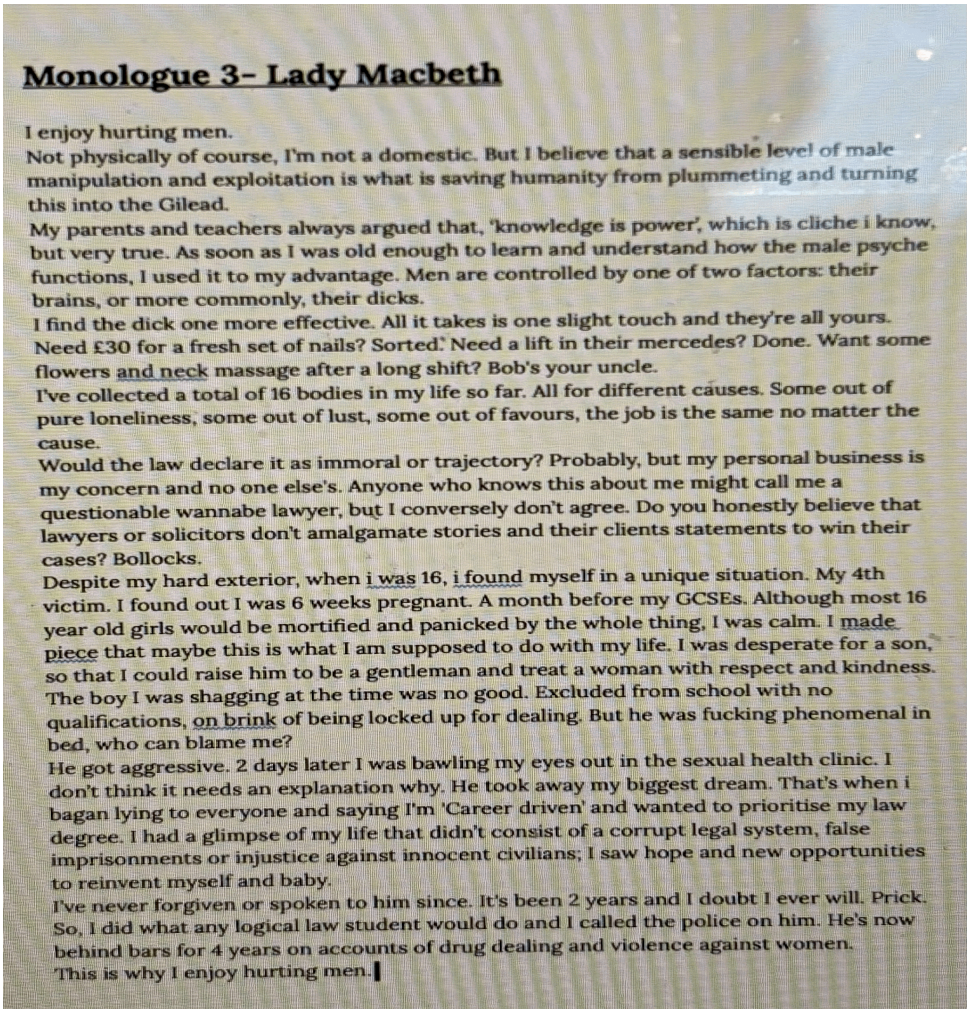
I decided to take matters into my own hands because, honestly, waiting around for someone else to fix things? Aint for me. I wanted to end the suffering, but not with swords and blood—no, I had something much more powerful: men's horniness. Boys will fight for power, control, and most passionately, for one thing- to get in our sheets!

So, I thought, if they're all obsessed with sex, why not use that against them? If we withhold what they crave and beg for, maybe, just maybe, they'll notice the mess they've made, as usual.

So, I stood up. I mean, sure, the men called us selfish, unnatural, and probably worse things I can't repeat here, but we didn't back down. And now, for the first time in forever, people are actually listening!

Look at us—trendsetters in world peace. If we can't stand for love and peace, then really, what's left? What kind of victory are they going to celebrate if they've lost their souls and their sex lives?

Lady Macbeth (First and Final Draft)



Monologue 3- Lady Macbeth

I enjoy hurting men.
Not physically of course, I'm not a domestic. But I believe that a sensible level of male manipulation and exploitation is what is saving humanity from plummeting and turning this into the Gilead.
My parents and teachers always argued that, 'knowledge is power', which is cliche i know, but very true. As soon as I was old enough to learn and understand how the male psyche functions, I used it to my advantage. Men are controlled by one of two factors: their brains, or more commonly, their dicks.
I find the dick one more effective. All it takes is one slight touch and they're all yours. Need £30 for a fresh set of nails? Sorted. Need a lift in their mercedes? Done. Want some flowers and neck massage after a long shift? Bob's your uncle.
I've collected a total of 16 bodies in my life so far. All for different causes. Some out of pure loneliness, some out of lust, some out of favours, the job is the same no matter the cause.
Would the law declare it as immoral or trajectory? Probably, but my personal business is my concern and no one else's. Anyone who knows this about me might call me a questionable wannabe lawyer, but I conversely don't agree. Do you honestly believe that lawyers or solicitors don't amalgamate stories and their clients statements to win their cases? Bollocks.
Despite my hard exterior, when i was 16, i found myself in a unique situation. My 4th victim. I found out I was 6 weeks pregnant. A month before my GCSEs. Although most 16 year old girls would be mortified and panicked by the whole thing, I was calm. I made piece that maybe this is what I am supposed to do with my life. I was desperate for a son, so that I could raise him to be a gentleman and treat a woman with respect and kindness. The boy I was shagging at the time was no good. Excluded from school with no qualifications, on brink of being locked up for dealing. But he was fucking phenomenal in bed, who can blame me?
He got aggressive. 2 days later I was bawling my eyes out in the sexual health clinic. I don't think it needs an explanation why. He took away my biggest dream. That's when i bagan lying to everyone and saying I'm 'Career driven' and wanted to prioritise my law degree. I had a glimpse of my life that didn't consist of a corrupt legal system, false imprisonments or injustice against innocent civilians; I saw hope and new opportunities to reinvent myself and baby.
I've never forgiven or spoken to him since. It's been 2 years and I doubt I ever will. Prick. So, I did what any logical law student would do and I called the police on him. He's now behind bars for 4 years on accounts of drug dealing and violence against women.
This is why I enjoy hurting men.

LADY MACBETH: Oh, they think I'm mad, don't they? A witch, some crazed woman who pushed her poor husband into murder! But let's cut the bullshit. Where was Macbeth when I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders—while he was off playing king and leaving me to clean up the mess?

I lost our child, and he couldn't even notice. My only ambition since I can recall was taken away from me.

NARRATOR: In the vast wilderness of life, the instinct to create and nurture new life is strong. For some, the journey to motherhood is smooth, but for others, it's filled with obstacles and uncertainty. Much like an abandoned nest, the loss of a pregnancy is often hidden in silence, a grief not easily shared. But just as creatures in the wild rely on their community for support, so too do mothers in mourning. Emotional support becomes crucial, providing the patience and comfort needed to heal.

I was up all night, bleeding out my hopes and dreams, and where was he? Not even a "how are you doing, love?" Just too busy plotting his *next big move* for the throne. Meanwhile, I'm over here doing all the work—getting him to the top, keeping up appearances, making sure his ego never deflates.

And now, I'm "psycho.' 'A scheming bitch' "Oh, she's lost her mind." Well, no shit! I was the one running the show, and *he* gets the crown, the glory, and the credit. Meanwhile, I'm left holding this bloody fucking knife—sorry wrong use of words—and now they call *me* the villain?

Let them think I'm mad. Honestly, it's the only explanation they'll ever understand. The real question is—who's the real crazy one here?

Finalised Script:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1W6S7KCZe1A8JrDCXldWv0Wt89iFU_E9ttaRaqSQNa70/edit?usp=sharing

Character Development

Whilst writing, I realised how vital the differentiation of the three witches are. In order to make them interesting, they had to have their own quirks and distinct personalities. Working alongside my actresses: Betsi Williams, Hollie Weaver and Emily Couper, we brought these characters to life.

Rhiannon, played by Betsi, is a mythical Welsh Goddess, this meant that she was a whimsical character who moved with fluidity and bird-like movements, as though she had wings. This suits her songs also with metaphors of freedom and birds. I envisioned Rhiannon as soft and romantic, as insinuated by her story of finding true love and not accepting an unfulfilling relationship. To make her appear softer than the other witches, Rhiannon had less vulgar language and her movements were always gentle.

Lysistrata, played by Hollie, is a strong warrior, and hence should be treated as such. I wrote Lysistrata as a sarcastic and perceptive character with impeccable street smarts, as she was able to use the only tools available to her to put a stop to violence. It only felt fitting that Lysistrata made the most sexual references and used explicit language, portraying that she is not scared to assert dominance. Her movements and interactions felt calculated and assertive to reflect her defining gender norms.

Lady Macbeth, played by Emily, is a misunderstood, troubled woman, therefore addressing the complexities of her narrative is important. She must be dealt with empathy and respect. I wrote Lady Macbeth as a timid and demure character who appears reserved, however has moments of unpredictability, to reflect her declining mental health. As the show progresses, she becomes more comfortable opening up and showing her real feelings. This masking reflects that which she had to perform for society, in order not to cause speculation. Lady Macbeth's movement and interactions were often blunt and appeared cold because of this.

Design Elements

As the rehearsal process progressed, so did the design concepts I had for the show. The setting of the show was vital in the symbolic style of my script and music choices. My initial concept was for the three figures to be statues in an art gallery exhibition, which is what I stuck with for the final product.

I settled on the art gallery setting as I wanted to showcase how these women's stories have been preserved and untouched for centuries, mimicking how art in galleries and museums are preserved and untouchable. Through the use of varying artworks and blank canvas' surrounding them, it symbolises how the stories we have heard about these women are not finished or a full recollection of what happened. From a metaphorical perspective, art is subjective, therefore people will hold strong opinions, whether positive or negative, about different pieces of art; similar to how these famous characters are also victims of discourse and harsh societal opinions of them. Not everyone will agree with their actions and that is normal. I incorporated lots of blank canvas' and paint brushes around the stage, to symbolise how these women are now re-painting their public image and retelling their stories, claiming artistic integrity for their stories. This element of symbolic design is reiterated through the script, as the witches often refer to 'repainting' their stories.



Furthermore, at the end of the piece, during ‘Just A Girl’, I wanted the witches to go around the exhibition and completely destroy it, ripping it apart and graffiting the blank spaces. This powerful sequence was constructed to act as a retaliation of patriarchal stereotypes forced upon them and reclaiming power which society has stripped from them as they wreck the environment which imprisons them for financial gain. This angsty rebellion goes against these stereotypes as it is not viewed as conventionally feminine or polite to lash out. In order to achieve this destruction of the set, I used wrapping paper to cover studio mirrors which the actors tore down messily through the song, and had spray paint for each of them to illustrate their inner frustrations towards these negative representations. Graffiti art has negative connotations in media as being ‘disrespectful’ or ‘messy’, making it even more impactful that the actors use this instead of regular painting techniques. Attached are pictures of the dismantled gallery.



Centre stage, I included a blank canvas which the witches would step towards and mime painting actions as they told their stories. This acted as a metaphor to redesign their narratives and tell the audience what they want you to hear, instead of their authors. At the end of the piece, this canvas was turned around to reveal a painting of a lamb being attacked by ravenous wolves; symbolising how innocent women are preyed on by a misogynistic world. This is the painting in question:



Angus by Konstantin Korobov is an oil painting which holds a metaphorical depiction of Jesus' crucifixion. "The innocence and purity of Christ is depicted in the gentle lambs, soft white wool…The serenity of the lamb is contrasted by the frenzy of the wolves."(R.Lee,2025). The exact moment of the painting occurs moments before disaster before blood starts oozing out of the lamb. This idiom uses animals to reflect human characteristics, therefore I believed it fitting for my piece.

For costumes, I had a clear vision for each character for outfits which would suit their personalities, but also what their stories represent as a whole. Rhiannon's costume concept was very traditionally feminine, focusing on a white and pink palette to pay homage to her angelic and whimsical presence. I envisioned her wearing white flowy fabrics, such as lace, to add to this ethereal illusion.

My vision for Lysistrata's costume was for it to be formal office wear, however a man's formal office wear. By wearing a suit and oversized blazer, it represents her as a fierce leader. Additionally, it subverts traditional segregation of clothing. A black suit connotes dominance, reflecting how she wants to be taken seriously. For makeup, the main element I was adamant of was Lysistrata wearing red lipstick. Not only is red lipstick an iconography of womanhood throughout history, but red as a colour symbolises sex, but most importantly, danger. The lipstick acts as a bold statement against the use of her autonomy.

For Lady Macbeth's costume, I imagined her wearing something which reflected her femininity and maternal instincts, while adding an homage to her fantasies of rebellion. I envisioned a pretty, pristine dress with something dramatic and moody over it, for example an unruly leather jacket.

While choreographing the musical numbers of the show, the idea came to me to use physical chains to mimic puppetry in Lysistrata and Rhiannon's songs. This idea was inspired by traditional puppetry styles, where puppeteers control their puppets through using strings to contortion their limbs. The puppet trope in theatre and media serves as a metaphor to how certain people are controlled by others to push a specific narrative or stereotype. In this instance, the 'puppeteer' is the men in these women's stories, whereas themselves, as women, are the 'puppets'. For example, during 'You Don't Own Me', Lysistrata is being constrained by these chains and ultimately breaks free from them.

Meanwhile,during 'Edge of Seventeen', Rhiannon is in the middle of a battle of tug of war, where her two lovers are fighting over her.

Rehearsal Process

At my very first rehearsal with my cast, we concentrated on trying to better understand these witches in order to accurately portray their feelings on stage. **"Uta Hagen's nine questions help actors develop the granular details of their character's backstories." (Ates.A, 2019).** I asked my actors to fill out character profiles I created with Uta Hagen's questions. Once completed, I challenged my actors with Hagen's concept of 'substitution'. **'Hagen's technique (substitution) focuses on pinpointing moments where activities or sensations from an actor's lived experience intersect with the scene at hand." (Ates.A,2019).** We read the scenes and I asked the actors to recall a time in their own lives where their character's given circumstances could possibly relate to a real life situation they have faced. I believed this would help them empathise with these characters more and understand their decisions.

Attached below are the character profiles using Uta Hagen's questions that I filled out in collaboration with my actors.

To ensure I had a consistent and cohesive rehearsal process, I created a detailed rehearsal schedule to best utilise my time with my actors. Clear communication and structure go hand in hand when working creatively .

Early in the rehearsal process, blocking was the main aspect which I struggled with as a director, as I wanted all of the staging to feel authentic and motivated. Rather than 'pre-blocking' and having a definitive vision for how I wanted a scene/song to be staged, I took a more organic approach to work coincidently with my actors to develop blocking

which felt instinctive and natural as I wanted them to feel as though they had a voice in the creative choices of the show, as I believe this is valuable when enriching your dynamic working with different people. To accomplish this, we marked each monologue individually during 1-1 rehearsals and I asked them to move on an emotional 'beat', whenever it felt appropriate or drove the emotions. I found this very beneficial as it made the actors appear more grounded in their work as they had creative freedom to express their characters feelings.

Rehearsal Timetable

	Betsi	Hollie	Emily	Callum
23.04 4:00-6:00 PM	Full Company Read Through	Full Company Read Through	Full Company Read Through	Full Company Read Through
25.04 12:00-3:00 PM	Blocking (scenes) & Ensemble singing	Blocking (scenes) & Ensemble Singing	Blocking (scenes) & Ensemble Singing	N/A
28.04 3:00-5:30 PM	Blocking Edge of Seventeen & Rhiannon	Blocking Edge of Seventeen & Rhiannon	Blocking Edge of Seventeen & Rhiannon	N/A
29.04 11:00-12:30	N/A	Choreographing You Don't Own Me	Choreographing You Don't Own Me	Line work
31.05 1:00-3:00 PM	N/A	N/A	Blocking Tolerate It	Blocking Tolerate It
02.05 1:30-5:00 PM	Blocking Just A Girl & Full Run through	Blocking Just A Girl & Full Run through	Blocking Just A Girl & Full Run through	Blocking Just A Girl & Full Run through
03.05 2:00-4:00 PM	Music Call (all songs)	Music Call (all songs)	Music Call (all songs)	N/A
04.05 Individual Call Times	11:30-12:15 Monologue work	12:30-1:15 Monologue Work	1:30-2:15 Monologue Work	N/A
04.05 2:00-5:00 PM	Full Run	Full Run	Full Run	Full Run
06.05 4:00-6:00 PM	Full Costume Run	Full Costume Run	Full Costume Run	Full Costume Run
07.05 12:00-2:30 PM	Working notes and Polishing	Working Notes and Polishing	Working Notes and Polishing	Working Notes and Polishing
08.05 2:00-6:00 PM	Full Costume Run and Working Notes	Full Costume Run and Working Notes	Full Costume Run and Working Notes	Full Costume Run and Working Notes
09.05 1:15-2:30 PM	Tech Run	Tech Run	Tech Run	Tech Run
09.05 8:00-9:00 PM	Performance	Performance	Performance	Performance

Uta Hagen Questioning

RHIANNON

Uta Hagen Questioning technique

Who Am I?
I am Rhiannon, a noblewoman of the Otherworld, once considered a goddess, now queen of Dyfed. I am wise, patient, and strong-willed. They say I ride a magical horse and possess powers beyond the mortal realm.

What is in my way?
Patriarchy. Myth twisted into suspicion. The fear men feel when they encounter a woman they cannot control. My own sorrow sometimes threatens to consume me.

What time is it?
It is a time of old magic and kingship, before the world was written down in books — a time when myth and truth wove together in song.

What do I do to get what I want?
I endure. I speak the truth, calmly and boldly. I serve my penance with dignity, and I reclaim my place without vengeance. I let time, and truth, do their work.

Where am I?
I am in the court of Dyfed, though my heart still remembers the mists of the Otherworld. I walk the lands of mortals, yet I am not entirely of them.

What surrounds me?
I am surrounded by men who doubt me, subjects who fear me, and a world that is slow to understand women of power. I am also surrounded by the whispers of magic, and sometimes, silence.

What are the given circumstances?
I was falsely accused of murdering my son and endured seven years of penance. I wore a sack and carried visitors on my back. Now, I am restored — but scars remain.

What are my relationships?
I love Pwyll, my husband, though his doubt wounded me. I feel deeply connected to my son, Pryderi, whom I lost and regained. My loyalty runs deep — to kin, kingdom, and truth.

What do I want?
I want to be seen for who I truly am not feared, not idolised just understood. I want justice, and above all, I want peace.

LADY MACBETH

Uta Hagen Questioning technique

Who Am I?
I am Lady Macbeth, wife to the Thane of Glamis and later queen of Scotland. I am ambition wrapped in silk. I see greatness in my husband — and I will drag it into the light.

What is in my way?
Male pride. The inertia of war. Even some women hesitate to sacrifice comfort for change. And yet, I press on.

What time is it?
It is a cursed hour. A time of prophecy and blood. A time when the line between fate and action blurs. Night bleeds into day.

What do I do to get what I want?
I manipulate. I shame. I pray to darkness for strength. I steel myself to cruelty and then, when it returns to haunt me, I break.

Where am I?
I am in a cold, stone castle in Inverness. Shadows grow longer here, and spirits whisper in the halls.

What surrounds me?
Power. Fear. The scent of iron and death. My husband grows stranger by the day. The crown looms above us both.

What are the given circumstances?
A prophecy has ignited our hunger. Duncan sleeps under our roof unaware he won't leave alive. I have called upon darkness to unsex me and fill me with cruelty.

What are my relationships?
My bond with Macbeth is deep, though strained by guilt and consequence. I push him and he pulls away. Our love becomes a weapon, and then a wound.

What do I want?
I want power but more than that, I want to shape fate with my own hands. I want Macbeth to be king and myself, queen.

LYSISTRATA

Uta Hagen Questioning technique

Who Am I?
I am Lysistrata, a woman of Athens, clever and unyielding. I am neither a soldier nor a ruler — yet I lead a revolution. I'm tired of watching men wage war while we bear the cost.

What is in my way?
Male pride. The inertia of war. Even some women hesitate to sacrifice comfort for change. And yet, I press on.

What time is it?
It is the time of the Peloponnesian War. Men bleed and die for glory while cities burn. We are exhausted — and I will not wait any longer.

What do I do to get what I want?
I strategize. I rally. I withhold. I speak plainly and act boldly. I use the power men fear — my body, my mind, my refusal.

Where am I?
I am on the Acropolis, having seized it with women from across Greece. We have taken the treasury — the very heart of the war machine.

What surrounds me?
Women who once mocked each other now stand united. Men grow increasingly desperate. Patriarchs rage while their bodies betray them. Laughter and tension swirl like wine.

What are the given circumstances?
War has gone on for too long. I have united women.Spartan and Athenian alike, and led them in a sex strike. No peace? No love.

What are my relationships?
I lead the women. I challenge the men. I love my city and my people enough to risk everything. My relationships are political and deeply personal.

What do I want?
Peace. Sanity. A future for our children. I want men to stop proving their manhood through bloodshed.

I felt my most confident, from a directorial perspective, when directing acting through song, as I believe this is my strong suit as an actor. Purposefully, I chose songs with lyrics that resonated deeply with each character and their given circumstances, making it far more coherent for the actors to portray these emotions through song. Whilst working individually with my actors on their songs, to discover their character's stream of consciousness. **"Stream of Consciousness is a narrative style that tries to capture a character's thought process in a realistic way... It's mimicking the way our brains work." (Delf.L, 2019).** We did this by stopping the actors after every verse and evaluating what their character must be thinking in order to be singing these lyrics; it was all designed to unlock their motivations. Following Stanislavski's 'Units and Objectives', the actors gained a greater sense of what is happening in their character's worlds, allowing them to empathise more with them. When working on monologues, coincidingly, we used the stream of consciousness, using Stanislavski's units and objectives to identify shifts in motivations. **"A unit is a portion of a scene that contains one objective for an actor."(Sawoski.P, 2018).** I wanted to make sure the emotional journeys of these characters were not generalised.

Before starting rehearsals, I introduced specific warm up activities to engage my actors and open their imaginations to new methodologies. The first one I used was a Lecoq inspired one, focusing on the concept of 'neutral mask'. This state of being is a complete relaxed condition where you are aware of your physical and emotional reactions. I had my actors walk around the space where I called out different states of being, such as 'freezing' or 'summer', to see how these extreme conditions affect their physicality. These extreme given

circumstances promote a relaxed state when walking at their natural state. Another exercise we used was the Stanislavski technique of grasp, where the actors connect and form relationships with them. To achieve this, I had the actors recite their monologue while maintaining intense eye contact with each other, then breaking their monologues into smaller units and reciting them back to the original actors. This helped give a fresh perspective on scripture which they have already performed multiple times, seeing how it is received by other actors and how their motivations are being transferred.

Final Performance

The final performance of 'Witch Hunts & Women's Voices' was very successful as a whole, with only minor errors which the audience was oblivious to. My audience was very diverse, with different genders, ages and levels of understanding regarding feminism and history, however based on the positive feedback I received, everyone understood what messages were being conveyed and resonated with the characters. The dry and sarcastic humour went down very well, generating many big laughs from the audience, thanks to their convincing, and equally dry delivery from my actors. My actors and tech crew did a brilliant job in bringing my show to life and I could not be more thankful for their hard efforts and commitment.

From a practicality standpoint, the biggest flaw was the timing of the music, as the songs started later than I intended them to, leaving a sometimes awkward gap between dialogue and song which was not rehearsed. This was a fault on my behalf and perhaps not making my que lines obvious enough for my tech team to understand, and this is something I shall work on in future practices. Another element to the piece I would change if given the chance is to swap the spray paint for a safer alternative as the paint fumes were strong and caused many audience members, myself included, to end up coughing. I would lean towards using sharpies or permanent markers instead.

I am so proud that my snippet of theatre has had a lasting impression on my audience and has been able to broaden their horizons and change their perspectives on women's treatment throughout literature, history and nowadays through mainstream media. With the appropriate writing and acting choices, the stories of these misconstrued fictional women have been able to reclaim their narratives in impressive ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion surrounding societal discomfort with women in positions of power will undoubtedly remain a persistent one, with more evidence being compiled daily to solidify this modern translation of female fuelled hatred through outdated misogynistic values. Despite burning stakes and pitchfork riots may be stuck in our history, the spirit endures through online harassment, media vilification and systemic obstacles in political and professional settings. Modern day manifestations of 'witch hunts' provide the same function: to police and suppress women who challenge gender norms. Recognising these patterns is integral to progress past them to gain an equitable future. No woman ever made a difference by being complicit or well behaved.

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To my Mam and sister, thank you for showing me the beauty which female strength and power can hold and for teaching me not to be afraid of using my own voice. Your unwavering support and resilience has shaped me into the woman I am today. This dissertation is a reflection of the many lessons you have taught me and the love you have shown me. I am eternally grateful.

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