

The Stone Background Pack



1. **About The Production**
2. **About The Writer**
3. **Synopsis of The Stone**
4. **Historical Background**
5. **About the Ideas in the Play**
6. **In Discussion with Director Ramin Gray**
7. **Classroom Activities**
8. **About Royal Court Education**

About the Production

The Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs presents

The Stone

By Marius von Mayenburg

Translated by Maja Zade

Cast in order of appearance

Hannah Loo Brealey

Heidrun Helen Schlesinger

Witha Linda Bassett

Mieze Justine Mtichell

Stephanie Amanda Drew

Wolfgang Jonathan Cullen

Director Ramin Gray

Designer Johannes Schutz

Lighting Designer Matt Drury

Sound Designer David McSeveney

Assistant Director Lydia Ziemke

Casting Director Amy Ball

Production Manager Paul Handley

Stage Manager Bryan Paterson

Deputy Stage Manager Sarah Tryfan

Asst. Stage Manager Samantha Tooby

Costume Supervisor Iona Kendrick

Set built by Miraculous Engineering

The Stone was first produced at the Salzburger Festspiele, in a co-production with Schaubunhne am Lehniner Platz Berlin, directed by Ingo Berk, 31 July 2008.

About the Writer

Marius von Mayenburg was born in Munich in 1972. He studied Old German at university in Munich, before moving to Berlin in 1992, where he did a course in playwriting at the Hochschule der Künste from 1994 to 1998. In 1995 he completed a placement at the Münchner Kammerspiele. In 1998 he became a member of the artistic direction team at the Baracke, the studio theatre of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. In 1999 he went with Thomas Ostermeier to work as artistic director and playwright-in-residence at the "Berliner Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz". His play Fireface premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2000 directed by Dominic Cooke and The Ugly One was produced in 2007 by the Royal Court and directed by Ramin Gray. He has won two prestigious awards in Germany: the Kleist-Förderpreis für junge Dramatik for "Feuergesicht" 1997 and Preis der Autorenstiftung during the "Heidelberger Stückemarkt" (1998).

-New German Dramatic Art, Goethe-Institut



“All my work is somehow related to dramaturgy. I react to the traditions we are working with in the theatre, I react to the actors. And in my work, I am reading all the time. I’m always looking for what’s ‘missing’, for what isn’t being addressed in the plays around me, and then I try to write those plays myself.”

-Marius von Mayenburg

From an interview in Theatre Notes, 28 Feb 2008

About The Play

As a house in Dresden passes from owner to owner and from generation to generation, a stone buried in the garden reveals the hidden secrets of one German family. The Stone examines the reverberations and legacy of sixty years of German history from World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The story begins in 1935 when Witha and her husband Wolfgang buy a house from a Jewish couple who are being forced to flee Germany. After they have moved in, the house is attacked by the Hitler Youth who throw stones through the windows, believing that Jews still live there. The story then jumps to 1945 at the time of the Dresden bombing. Witha survives the destruction by hiding in the cellar with her daughter Heidrun, but in the face of the Russian invasion of the city, Wolfgang commits suicide.

The next part of the family's history takes place in 1953 when Witha decides to move to West Germany with Heidrun for a better life. As they sift through the things they will take with them, Heidrun discovers one of the stones that had been used in the attack on the house. She quizzes her mother about her father's role in the war and his death. Witha tells her that Wolfgang saved a Jewish family by arranging for their escape and that he was shot by the Russians. Before they leave, Heidrun buries the stone in the garden.

The story then moves on to 1978. Heidrun is pregnant and has arranged to visit her childhood home with Witha. As East Germany is now a Communist state, the house is communal property and inhabited by three families. When they visit, there is only one family at home and they ask to have a look around. The grandfather refuses their entry, but Heidrun bribes the granddaughter with the promise of sending a chocolate bar from the West every year for the child's birthday. Heidrun digs up the stone in the garden and takes it with her.

The final part of the story happens in 1993 in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Heidrun has reclaimed the house and she has moved back in with Witha and her daughter Hannah. A woman appears at the door, stating that she has come to disturb them. We discover that she is the granddaughter they met in 1978 and she has come to demand the chocolate bars she was promised but never received from Heidrun. She has also come to inform them of the distress and anger they have caused by forcing her family to move out of the house.

In the course of the conversation with the woman, Witha reveals the true story of what happened to the Jewish family in 1935. Heidrun and Hannah refuse to believe her and content themselves with thinking that old age has confused and muddled Witha's memory.

It's important to mention that, although this is what happens chronologically in the story, the writer, Marius von Mayenburg, does not present the story in a linear way in the play. Instead, the time periods are interspersed and a scene in 1935 can appear just before or just after a scene in 1993 or another in 1978. By mixing up the chronology, the family's secrets and past history can be revealed in a much more dramatic and complex manner.

Historical Background

The production's Assistant Director, Lydia Ziemke, researched the historical background for The Stone in order to help the cast understand how the family history in the play reflected the larger political events in Germany from 1935 to 1993. The table below was useful in placing the action of the play within its historical context.

The Play	History
<p data-bbox="232 520 305 548">1935</p> <p data-bbox="232 590 792 814">Mr. and Mrs. Heising (Wolfgang&Witha) buy the house from Mr. and Mrs. Schwarzmann, a Jewish couple who are preparing to leave Nazi Germany, after Mr. Schwarzmann had to yield his position to Mr. Heising and life gets increasingly restricted for Jews.</p> <p data-bbox="232 856 792 982">When Witha (25) and Wolfgang (30) spent their first days at the new house it is attacked by members of the Hitler Youth or SA who believe that Jews live there.</p>	<p data-bbox="816 520 889 548">1934</p> <p data-bbox="816 583 1360 642">Jan 24, 1934 - Jews are banned from the German Labor Front.</p> <p data-bbox="816 674 1360 732">May 17, 1934 - Jews not allowed national health insurance.</p> <p data-bbox="816 764 1360 890">June 30, 1934 - The Night of Long Knives occurs as Hitler, Göring and Himmler conduct a purge of the SA (storm trooper) leadership.</p> <p data-bbox="816 921 1360 1016">July 20, 1934 - The SS (Schutzstaffel) is made an independent organization from the SA.</p> <p data-bbox="816 1047 1360 1106">July 22, 1934 - Jews are prohibited from getting legal qualifications.</p> <p data-bbox="816 1138 1360 1197">Aug 2, 1934 - German President von Hindenburg dies. Hitler becomes Führer.</p> <p data-bbox="816 1228 1360 1323">Aug 19, 1934 - Hitler receives a 90 percent 'Yes' vote from German voters approving his new powers.</p> <p data-bbox="816 1354 1360 1413">Sept 15, 1935 - Nuremberg Race Laws against Jews decreed.</p> <p data-bbox="816 1444 889 1472">1935</p> <p data-bbox="816 1503 1360 1745">By this time Hitler had asserted his power, also with the help of the SS and SA who were allowed to run wild, killing socialists, communists and Jews. As a result, 1935 saw the first emigration wave of Jews, before society became more civilized again in preparation for the Olympic Games 1936.</p>
<p data-bbox="232 1764 305 1791">1945</p> <p data-bbox="232 1833 792 1892">Wolfgang (40) and Witha (35) consider their possibilities in the face of the Dresden</p>	<p data-bbox="816 1764 889 1791">1945</p> <p data-bbox="816 1833 1360 1892">England decides to attack the German civilian population in order to subdue the</p>

<p>Bombing. (Wolfgang commits suicide when the Russians march in, Witha survives with Heidrun, 5). The house survives the bombing.</p>	<p>German spirit and thus cut short the war. After cities such as Kassel and Cologne they chose Dresden (Bomber Harris) which was considered the most beautiful of German cities, contained most refugees and had come to be believed to be save from bombs.</p>
<p>1953</p> <p>Witha (43) decides to leave the house behind to escape with Heidrun (13) from the Russian sector, East Germany, to West Germany.</p>	<p>1953</p> <p>In 1949 Germany was officially split in two parts, one controlled by the Western Allies, one by the Russians. Fear of the Russians and the dire economic situation drove many people out of the Eastern part towards the West. The Wall was built in 1961 to prevent more people from leaving and to seal the socialist territory.</p>
<p>1978</p> <p>The house is communal property, populated by three families. Witha (68) and Heidrun (38), who is pregnant, visit Dresden and the house, they meet Stefanie (15).</p>	<p>1978</p> <p>East Germans could not freely travel but West Germans could travel to the East...</p>
<p>1993</p> <p>Witha (83), Heidrun (53) and Hannah (15) have reclaimed their house, and have moved in. Stefanie (30) appears to challenge their right to the house.</p>	<p>1993</p> <p>1989 the Berlin Wall fell. A great wave of property restitution followed. Jews who had fled Germany could reclaim their property (except if they had sold it before 1939). Jewish property that was bought between 1939 and 1945 was not restituted to the buyers but the original Jewish owners. People who left the East for West Germany between 1945 and 1960 could generally reclaim the property they left behind.</p>

To help understand the significance of some of the events described in the table above, the historical background is explained here in more detail:

Racial Policy of Nazi Germany

The racial policy of Nazi Germany is the set of policies and laws implemented by Nazi Germany, asserting the superiority of the so-called 'Aryan Race' and based on a specific racist doctrine which claimed scientific legitimacy. It was combined with a eugenics programme that aimed to achieve 'racial purity' of the 'Aryan race by using compulsory sterilizations and extermination of specific minorities, which eventually culminated in the Holocaust and policies targeted, first of all Jews, who were considered as the most 'inferior races' of all on a hierarchy that included Jews at the bottom and the 'Herrenvolk' (or 'master race') of the 'Volksgemeinschaft' (or 'national community') at the top.

Exclusion of Jews

By 1 January 1938, German Jews were prohibited from operating businesses and trades, and from offering goods and services. In the autumn of 1938, only 40,000 of the formerly 100,000 Jewish businesses were still in the hands of their original owners. On 12 November 1938, a law was enacted enforcing the full transfer of the remaining businesses to non-Jewish owners and the proceeds taken by the state. Jewelry, stocks, real estate and other valuables had to be sold below market value. Jewish employees were fired, and self-employed people were prohibited from working in their respective professions.

In 1934, the year selected by Von Mayenburg to set the first section of the story, a number of laws were put in place to begin the process of systematically excluding Jews from German society. By this time, Jews had been prohibited from owning land, joining the German Labor Front and were denied national health insurance. The previous year saw the opening of Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps and the establishment of the Gestapo. On 30 June 1934, the Night of the Long Knives occurred in which the SA was purged and the SS set up as an independent organization.

Post-War Germany Timeline

8 May 1945	World War II is over and Berlin is divided into 4 sectors: the American, British, French in the West and the Soviet in the East
30 June 1946	At the instigation of the Soviet military administration, the demarcation line between East and West Germany is safeguarded
29 October 1946	A 30 day valid Interzonenpass is required to travel between the sectors in Germany
24 June 1948	Berlin blockade begins
25 June 1948	Berlin airlift begins

12 May 1949	End of Berlin blockade
24 May 1949	Federal Republic of Germany is founded (West Germany)
7 Oct 1949	German Democratic Republic is founded (East Germany)
26 May 1952	Border between East and West Germany is closed
11 Dec 1957	Leaving East Germany without permission is forbidden
14 Aug 1961	Berlin Wall is built and Brandenburg Gate between East and West Berlin is closed
3 Sept 1971	Four Powers' Agreement making it easier for West Berliners to visit East Berlin
9 Nov 1989	Berlin Wall comes down
22 Dec 1989	Brandenburg Gate is opened
3 Oct 1990	Germany is reunited



About the Ideas in the Play

To prepare for rehearsals, the director Ramin Gray and the creative team investigated the ideas they felt were driving the action of *The Stone*. The assistant director explains what they discovered through their research and the rehearsal process.

Dispossession & Emigration

Jews were dispossessed in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1935, and between 1938 and 1945, and many emigrated. After the war ended in 1945 some of the surviving Jews reclaimed their property and were compensated for any loss.

After Germany was split up officially in 1949 many people emigrated from the East to the West to flee from the Russian rule and a dire economical situation. This is why the Wall was built in 1961. Many of them left property behind which they could then reclaim after the Wall had come down and reunification began. If the property had been acquired (bought or taken over) from Jews between 1939 and 1945 they did not get it back. If they had bought the property from a Jewish family before 1939, however, they did have the right to restitution.

In the play the Schwarzmans decide to emigrate and sell their house in 1935 because the situation for Jews had become unbearable. It seems that Wolfgang and Witha treat them unfairly in the deal because they can.

Family Memory & Dynamics between Generations

The play has a family at its heart – three generations of women, Witha, Heidrun and Hannah. The aim is to show how the women are left behind after the war to tell the stories, and how the family history is handed down and modified over time to fulfil the need to glorify one's ancestors.

The grandmother, Witha, seeks to create a plausible and bearable story for her daughter who takes hold of it and smoothes out the unclear moments in favour of her grandfather before passing it on to her daughter. The granddaughter then simplifies the story again and virtually creates a hero of her grandfather.

'Family memory is not a collection of accurate and complete facts but an on-going incidental discussion in the light of the relationships between the family members.

Usually it occurs in non-intentional, "conversational remembering" which often is not instigated by the person who made the past experiences. The ritual repetition supports the continuity of the stories' right to exist in the family memory

In the family two things need to be married – a generalized image of the moral identity of the ancestors with a public story of evil, the Holocaust. All family members are automatically enlisted to hold up the good family history on the basis of coherence,

identity and loyalty. The ancestors are established as “good” people in the hearts of the following generations and this feeling is extended to any time period in the past. In the strongest possible social structure, the family, it is almost impossible to comprehend that the parents/grandparents have acted in a morally questionable or wrong way.’

From ‘Grandpa Wasn’t a Nazi:
Nationalsozialism and Holocaust in Family
Memory’

-Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, Karoline
Tschuggnall

East and West Germany, Fall of the Wall

In communist East Germany after the war people were assigned property. Very few people owned their living space, as the aim was to operate with communal property. As a result many people had to leave what they had considered their home for their whole life, when Germany was reunified.

In the play this happens to Stefanie. She has lived in the house for 30 years after Witha and Heidrun have left it with her grandfather, who dies shortly after they are evicted from the house in 1992.

While the separation was in place people could travel from West Germany to the East but vice versa only with special permission, which was very rare.

In the play Heidrun and Witha visit Dresden and the house in 1978 and meet Stefanie. It has changed a lot, as three families live there now. At that point they do not expect ever to come back.

After the Wall came down Heidrun goes through the legal process of reclaiming the house and succeeds. They move back in 1993.

In Discussion with the Director, Ramin Gray

Below is an extract from an interview with Ramin Gray in which he discusses the challenges of staging of *The Stone* and Von Mayenburg's previous play *The Ugly One*.

*There is an impossible, formal problem at the heart of *The Stone* because it spans 60 years of history in 57 minutes and Linda Basset, whose playing *Witha*, has to appear in six different time periods. There's no possibility, I think, of having costume changes or scene changes. So, we're trying to work out ways of making that clear to an audience through the acting process. *The Ugly One* had a similar problem about characters: how you could do the character shift without bringing on different people.*

I think that Marius works as a dramaturg - that's not something we have here - but what he does every day is work with different people's plays. He cuts them and he translates them and he is a real expert craftsman. And I think when he comes to write his own plays he enjoys throwing up theatrical challenges and that's what I love about his work. It forces us to really re-assess, re-evaluate and reconsider all the techniques we have as theatre people.

-Ramin Gray

If you would like to hear the entire interview with Ramin Gray and the cast members of *The Stone*, please visit www.royalcourttheatre.com and click on the podcast for *The Stone*.



Classroom Activities

Movement Exercise

Resonance

The set for *The Stone* was a very simple box. There were no exits or entrances from this acting space, so the actors remained on stage throughout the entire show. The director felt strongly that this was necessary to enhance the play's examination of how Nazi Germany's legacy impacted successive generations.

The challenge was to find a subtle way to allow each generation's story to resonate theatrically with the other generations on stage. The following exercise was used to create relationships between all the characters despite their existing in different time periods. For students, this exercise is an excellent way to discover how characters can relate to each other in the acting space as well as creating interesting stage images.

Ask students to get into pairs. One person is A the other is B.

A begins the exercise by making one movement, ie walking, sitting, lying down, in the space, while B remains still and watches the movement.

B then makes a movement in response to A's movement while A stays still and watches.

Repeat this sequence with A and B alternating with three movements each. It is important that they do not layer the movements with any pre-meditated intentions. Each movement is a simple response to the last movement they watched.

Ask one pair to demonstrate their sequence while the rest of the group watches. Discuss with the group if they saw any sort of story or clear relationship emerging.

Next, ask one pair to move into the centre of the room and ask half the group to take up positions against the walls of the space. The other half remain as audience.

A and B repeat their sequence, but this time those at the sides watch and shift their position slightly in response to each movement made by the pair in the centre.

Again, discuss the stage pictures or stories the audience saw.

For the final part of the exercise, ask all the students to go back into their pairs and discuss typical phrases their parents use all the time, ie *I'm not angry – I'm disappointed, I told you that would happen, Be careful, Better safe than sorry, etc.* Each pair should then select one of these phrases.

Next they plan a short scene using the same ABABAB movement sequence as before, but the sequence begins with A's movement, then A says the chosen parental phrase. B moves, then vocalises a response, A moves, then responds verbally and so on. Each partner should have three movements and three verbal responses, making 6 movements and responses in total to complete the scene.

The pairs show their short scenes. Once all have been seen, ask for one pair to volunteer again. The rest of the group take up positions against the walls of the room and repeat the exercise in which they shift their position slightly in response to each movement made by the pair in the centre and the groups finishes the exercise by discussing how the work helps to develop believable character relationships.

Writing Exercise

Family Mythology

- Brainstorm five stories your parents or family members have told you about your grandparents. Jot down a basic outline of each.
- Select one which contains an argument, conflict or a lie.
- Write a monologue in which you imagine you are telling this story to a friend.
- Write a second version in which you imagine one of your parents telling you the the same story.
- Write a third version in which one of your grandparents is telling the story to a close friend their own age.
- Once you've written all three versions, swap your monologues with a partner and read through the other person's work.
- Note down the major differences in the three versions. Which one strikes you as the most truthful?
- Discuss each other monologues, exploring why each generation would tell the story in a different way.
- Share your ideas with the group as a whole.

Education at The Royal Court

As the Royal Court is a centre for excellence and innovation in theatre-making, the Education Department aims to stimulate and inspire students of all ages, encouraging learning and participation in every aspect of the theatre's work, from the process of writing plays to pioneering rehearsal room techniques.

We offer a wide-ranging programme of work designed to open up and de-mystify the craft of making theatre. Royal Court Education activities include:

Workshops for productions

INSET workshops for teachers

Education Matinees

Post-show talks

Royal Court in a Day Study Day

Drama School in a Day Study Day

Performing Arts Business Study Day

On-line Students Forums

A full description of all education events can be found on the education pages of the Royal Court web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com. If you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Education Associate, at lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com or phone 020 7565 5174.

For more information about Royal Court productions and the Young Writers Programme, please visit our web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com.

*The Stone Background pack compiled and written by Lydia Ziemke and Lynne Gagliano,
© February 2009.*