

THE WOMEN IN 'EXTINCTION' ARE PORTRAYED AS BEING WEAKER THAN THE MEN. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE?

Hannie Rayson's 'Extinction' is a complex play which delves into a discussion of the relationship between man and the environment and human interaction with one another. Rayson fully constructs female characters within the play to be much more vulnerable and weaker than the male characters to a full extent. This is achieved through the idealistic persona of Piper, which contrast with her partner Andy, despite his terminal illness, a strong-willed character. Both Dixon-Brown and Harry Jewell are dominant and successful business leaders, but they use their power and money in very differing ways, further depicting the weakness of female characters and the strength of male characters in 'Extinction'.

From the commencement of the play, Piper is established as an emotional and weak female character who tends to seem determined, but her saviour complex disallows her to become the person she wants to be. Piper's slight masculinity appears when she offers Harry a whiskey and "*collects her motorcycle helmet and pack*". As a naïve, young girl who falls for Andy, she lets him lead their relationship on an unsteady path, "So I should know there's no future in this relationship." Although seemingly a strong-willed character, Piper lets her saviour complex disrupt her ability to think logically about the environment and her relationships. She wants to be "the person who faces up to things." but believes that "all animals are worth saving" and is unable to functionally deal with her dog's illness nevertheless Andy's terminal illness. Rayson utilises Piper to state that women with a saviour attitude like her, who appear to be self-sufficient are ultimately weaker than men such as Andy who will always dominate in their relationship, thus portraying females as the weaker gender to a full extent.

Furthermore, Andy, Piper's partner, is constructed as a character who, despite his terminal illness, is resilient and determined to protect the environment, thus depicting his continuous and admirable strength. Andy portrays his overarching power over Piper in their relationship as "[he] looks unimpressed" when Piper tries to care for the injured quoll in the first scene of the play, whereas Andy euthanizes it because "It's not fair to try and resuscitate an animal in this condition". Despite his clashes with Piper and his hot-and-cold attitude with his sister, Dixon-Brown, whom he will fight "until the day [he] can no longer stand up or form words that make sense", both female characters ultimately reach out to him and "Won't be pushed away", as Dixon-Brown tries to be his carer whereas Piper stays with Andy at the end of the play, portraying the power that Andy has over them. Perhaps the most exemplified sign of strength is when Andy finally opens up about his terminal illness with Piper and his fear of "not wanting to live [his] life as a dying man.", depicting his vulnerability yet remaining powerful and resilient. Rayson depicts that despite his illness and personal struggle of burdening those around him, men like Andy are still the dominant people in their romantic and family relationships, thus will be stronger than women in the play.

Moreover, Dixon-Brown is the most complex character of the play yet, whose weakness stems from her inability to form functional human relationships, leading her to acts of manipulation and gas-lighting of other women to consolidate her reputation. Dixon-Brown's vulnerability is visible when she is turned down by Harry, also a successful businessman like herself. She blames it on his inability to "stomach a woman who stands up to [him]" and believes he is "intimated by [her]", where in fact Dixon-Brown is "sick of being single" and becomes defensive when she finds out that Harry has been also sleeping with Piper, a younger and more attractive woman. Her leading position at CAPE Institute and PhD in Statistics allows her to have a feeling of control over certain aspects and people in her life, yet that is all compromised when an email exposing her inappropriate sexual encounter with Harry is sent around.

Dixon-Brown turns to Piper, manipulating her to admit that she was the one who had sex with Harry and “will need to step aside from the project” in order for Dixon-Brown to feel powerful again and in control. Rayson comments that women, even in powerful positions, will still betray one another if it means their reputation is upheld, displaying their weakness, which contrasts greatly to Harry Jewell’s use of power.

On the contrary, Harry, a mining magnate who enters Piper and Dixon-Brown’s lives as a charming, powerful business man creates tension between all three characters and provides “dirty money” for their projects. Harry’s outlook on life is that he can get “everything [he wants]”, even if “life isn’t like that”. His company, Powerhouse Mining allows him to be wealthy and build “Highways, bridges and roads” and not live a “myopic” life. He uses this to his advantage by finding a sentimental cause and funding the tiger quoll research project. Despite his broken relationship with his wife and daughter, he is still confident in his charm and has sex with both Piper and Dixon-Brown “twice, maybe ten times”. Rayson depicts that men like Harry in powerful, dominating positions will always overpower females like Dixon-Brown and be more influential, as his tiger quoll project is a success. Harry is also a well-liked character whose promiscuous actions are ultimately overlooked due to his position as a strong man in a successful industry, as he loses his job due to “misrepresentation” of the company, and not due to his multiple sexual advances, ultimately portraying females as weaker than men.

Overall, Rayson’s play ‘Extinction’ demonstrates the imbalance of power between female characters such as Dixon-Brown and Piper, and male characters such as Andy and Harry to a full extent. Rayson constructs this parallel through Andy and Piper’s toxic relationship and Andy’s hold on both his sister and Piper, in addition to the manipulation Dixon-Brown commits in order to appear strong against Piper, which is the outcome of Harry’s sexual encounters with both female characters, thus depicting his and Andy’s strength over them.