

British Theatre Guide

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Sary

Sam Chittenden

Different Theatre / Sweet Productions

Sweet Novotel

1–25 August 2019



As two women—one older, one younger, both in old-style clothes—sit and work with herbs and wicker, their story begins to unfold. *Sary* is the tale of a woman who keeps to herself, knows the herbs and plants and helps heal others, so, naturally, she's thought to be a witch and viewed with suspicion by some and with lusty interest by others. But her story is one that spans a lifetime as both women are Sary and, in this whimsical and dreamlike experience, she talks to herself, berating, teasing and commiserating on the events of her life, coming to love and understand herself and every decision she has made.

Sary is based in part on the old Sussex folk story of *Ol' Sary Weaver*, a wise woman of Upwalham who was considered a witch and, legend says, could turn herself into a hare. Sam Chittenden's take on this myth is to weave her story into a narrative, told in period patois and borrowing from sources such as the poem *The Names of the Hare*. Understandably, the leporine imagery features heavily at points, as she compares aspects of herself at times to one and goes into a description of hares mating that itself bleeds into a feverish dream of a real sexual encounter that leaves her with child. It's a story that tells a distinctly feminine experience that despite the 19th century setting has echoes that are recognisable today.

Sharon Drain and Rebecca Jones perform the parts of the two ages of Sary depicted, each showing a clear difference in the physicality of their performance, but with a marked similarity that each evokes the work of the other. It's a captivating performance that shocks and touches by turns. Intriguingly, there is distinct blurring between who is telling this tale and when. It changes mercurially, much as the legend would dictate, quite at odds with the grit and reality of the person portrayed through the story. It's also telling that this somewhat ironic treatise on witchcraft features two women rather than three, as would befit the traditional triumvirate of maid, mother and crone, is hardly accidental, going even so far as to explicitly mention this, along with other allusions to the traditional persecution of lone women and healers.

Sary is a captivating performance and an introspective look into the nature of loneliness and the strength of self-sufficiency, at odds with a world that doesn't care to understand.

Reviewer: [Graeme Strachan](#)