

# British Theatre Guide

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## Woman and Scarecrow

Marina Carr

Prime Cut Productions

Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast, & touring  
(2009)

In Marina Carrs newest play, *Marble*, which has just premiered in Dublins Abbey Theatre, the most talked about situation is one in which a woman responds to the news that a man other than her husband dreams erotically about her by dreaming sensuously about the man in question.

Set in the now frayed cocktail land of the Celtic Tiger, *Marbles* position on the Richter scale of shock is more than an Irish mile away from Carrs early 1990s works *The Mai and Portia Coughlan* where mothers brutally destroy their own children, and from *On Raffertys Hill* of 2000 in which, on stage, and over the kitchen table, the patriarch rapes his youngest daughter.

But Belfast, the northern capital on this divided island, is unaccustomed to the operatic language of Carrs melding of feminocentric Celtic and Greek mythologies, having experienced only her *By the Bog of Cats*, a modern retelling of Medea, in an alfresco production in the Palm House of the citys Royal Botanic Gardens.

Thus expectations were heightened for Prime Cut Productions take on Carrs *Woman and Scarecrow*, directed by Emma Jordan, designed by Ciaran Bagnall, enhanced by music from the Martins, Neil and Meadhbh, and featuring the magnetically and malevolently corvine Kathy Kiera Clarke as the eponymous Scarecrow opposite Gemma Moxley's incongruously healthy dying Woman.

Prime Cut, titled Mad Cow till those words took on another association, have an enviable reputation as one of the two companies (the other having been Tinderbox) to release the Norths theatre aficionados from the Lyric Theatres once seeming endless retreads of self-satisfied wee cup of tea in your hand versions of either the classics or the memoirs of Belfast's suburban socialists.

Since premiering Fugards *A Place with the Pigs*, Dorfmans *Death and the Maiden*, and most notably Trevor Griffiths *Who Shall Be Happy* in the early 1990s they opened an enlightening slipway onto a raft of Canadian theatre including Daniel Daniss *Stones and Ashes*, George Walkers *Criminal Genius* and Michel Marc Bouchards *Coronation Voyage*, plus a fleet of stormers by local writer Owen McCafferty.

Though introduced by the programmes off-puttingly academically dense printed prologue written by Belfast Lyric Theatre board member Melissa Sihra, *Woman and Scarecrow*s real impact is conveyed immediately by Bagnalls black cage set inside a bedrooms blood-red walls.

The rather lovely Moxley, complete with distracting cleavage, lies, looking fresh as a daisy in her silk slip amidst her brass bed whilst having dismounted from her perch atop the black wardrobe, her alter ego, her Celtic soul if you like, Kathy Kiera Clarke, prowls ominously as if ready to peck out the soon to be corpses eyes.

Jordans direction is precise, and the two actresses bitchy bickering rivetingly disturbing. Yet, as the author herself previously agreed with the poet Patrick Kavanagh, as she treads the line from Beckett to Joyce, from Godots enigmatic absurdities to Molly Blooms lubricious murmurings, tragedy is just underdeveloped comedy. Yeats and Visa card bills are unwieldy bedfellows as are, indeed, our sympathies for the dying mother of eight stretched out alongside her lifes Colour Supplement highlights of champagne on the Champs Elysées, Demis Russos Greatest Hits and the Scarecrows talk of a necklance of infants ankle bones.

At odds too with talk of an asphodel for the grave are Helena Bereens old crone with her bitter Catholic pieties and Frank OSullivans portrayal of the philandering husband, delivered as if from another production. At the interval, an audience member, invoked the Belfast author C.S.Lewis, murmuring, *sotto voce*, that the piece should be retitled as 'The Dyin', the Witch and the Wardrobe',

However, while its concerns teeter at times on the edge of a television soaps, at its heart Carrs obsession with the conflicts of motherhoods not yet escaped from under the shrouds of Celtic Catholicism and of the same cultures older religion, still evokes many of the passions - and provokes many of the debates - at the core of her work.

Thus Prime Cuts *Woman and Scarecrow* will serve its author well as it tours Portlaoise, Bray, Strabane, Sligo, Armagh, Monaghan, Lisburn, Galway, Longford, Virginia, Castlebar, Omagh, Manorhamilton and Letterkenny over the month of March.

**Reviewer:** [Ian Hill](#)