



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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CUT BY DUNCAN GRAHAM

Hannah Norris

Holden Street Theatres – The Manse
Until 14 March 2015

Review by John Wells

The cut is the slice of a scalpel or the bloody tear of a chainsaw. The cut is the wink of death in every living moment. The cut is the chance of catastrophe in every bland heart-beat. The cut is the dark danger hovering in the shadow.

The Woman (Hannah Norris) greets us with a wide smile and a friendly affect. The smile is the painted-on grin of an air hostess. We are invited to sit, as she locks us in and seals the room. It is dark. It is silent. It is unnerving. We wait, and the waiting extends into discomfort.

Out of the dark she comes, in shadow. Her days are dreary routine ("Chicken or beef? Chicken or beef?"), but the humdrum is pierced by a waking nightmare: she is being followed by a relentless stranger. Wherever she turns, he is there. The narrative is wonderfully disjointed and obtuse. It gives us glimpses, clues and dream-thoughts.

Russell Goldsmith has created an emotionally tactile soundscape, which washes through and punctuates the action. Sam Hopkins' lighting design is extraordinarily detailed and inventive. Elizabeth Gadsby's design is simple but reveals sensitivity and innovative brilliance. Together, these technical achievements are powerful and give great depth to the acting and writing.

Norris is impressive. It is a beguiling, engaging and precise performance. She is unhinged, casual, frightening and sexy. She masters the exhausting technical demands, moving silently during the many black-outs so as the lights snap up it feels like she has been transported to a different place. Acting in such a small room (the Manse Theatre at Holden Street) is challenging but Norris is always committed.

Adelaide writer Duncan Graham, directing the South Australian premiere of his own play, creates a playfully claustrophobic atmosphere, full of danger and uncertainty. At times, the play is genuinely disorienting and unsettling. The staging is intricately plotted and highly effective within the small space, although there are a few lapses into cumbersome stage-craft towards the end of the play. Graham's text delights in its opacity and is so much the stronger for not being easily explicable. The writing is fresh, intense and adventurous. There are times when the action seems more in the head than the heart; this intellectualising saps a bit of the emotional punch of the play.

This unsettling and disconcerting short play is a complete success. All the strands of theatre-making cohere brilliantly and combine in a deeply satisfying production.

4.5 stars (out of 5)