



Hugh O'Connor and Charlie Murphy in *Arlington*

PATRICK REDMOND

Walsh visualises a world and then tilts it on its axis



SARA KEATING

Arlington
Abbey Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★
Until February 25th

from a Beckett play.

He facilitates her freedom, but it turns out she is dispensable: her story is just one of thousands of others unfolding in towers across the city. As she leaves, the stage is occupied by an unnamed woman (Oona Doherty) who is trapped in a similar purgatory.

Without recourse to language, Doherty uses the savage, grounded, emotional choreography of Emma Martin to enact a similar struggle against darkness

Indeed, it would be impossible to conceive of the piece without the sense of symbolic physicality that Martin brings to it, both in Doherty's expressive dance and Murphy's stylised, animatronic movement.

Similarly, Adam Silverman's lighting design which, by turns, tilts the world upon its axis and shakes it to its core, is key to realising the threatening atmosphere, just as Teho Teardo's cinematic score creates the piece's key suspense

sphere, just as Teho Teardo's cinematic score creates the piece's key suspense (though it also, crucially, helps to puncture the tension with moments of comic absurdity).

This is theatre as Total Theatre. Theatre as true collaboration. If *Arlington* is not Walsh's greatest work – there are other, less complex plays vying for that accolade – you cannot help but admire the ambition and execution of this warped reflection of our contemporary times. *Arlington* runs at the Abbey Theatre until February 25.

● If *Arlington* isn't enough to satiate your appetite for Walsh's weird and wonderful imagination, a new play by Walsh, **The Same**, has just opened in the atmospheric setting of The Old Cork Prison.

It reunites Walsh with director Pat Kiernan of *Corcadorca*, who directed his first play *Disco Pigs* in 1996, as well as actress Eileen Walsh, who played one half of the unforgettable duo *Pig and Runt*, opposite Cillian Murphy.

Eileen Walsh is joined for *The Same* by her sister, actress Catherine Walsh, in a story where two women realise they are actually one and the same.

Designed by visual artist Owen Boss, whose site-specific work has transformed various sites of dereliction into atmospheric stage spaces, it runs at the Old Cork Prison until February 25. ■

Arlington by Enda Walsh premiered at the Galway Arts Festival last year in a redesigned space in the Leisureland complex in Salthill, a site of suburban dereliction that evoked the desolate, dystopian atmosphere of Walsh's theatrical vision.

In this revival, Landmark Theatre's production transfers easily to the main stage of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. However, the experience, which is closer to a conceptual, multimedia installation than a play, undoubtedly loses some of its power.

Framed by an acid yellow curtain and observed from the traditional fourth-wall theatrical perspective, our engagement is guided by ideas rather than the trademark visceral experience that Walsh is so good at creating.

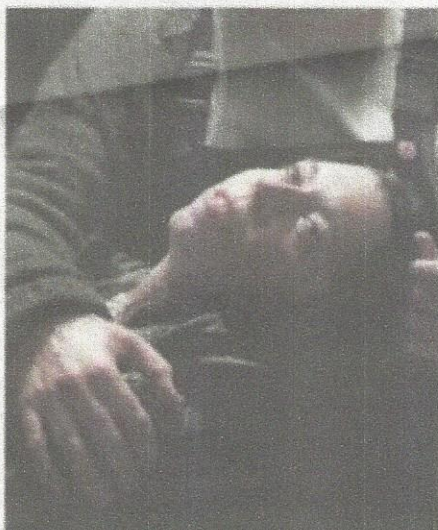
Jamie Vartan's set offers us immediate entry into Walsh's clinical and sterile world. In an anonymous locked room, Isla (Charlie Murphy) is waiting for her number to be called. Isla has been waiting for longer than she can remember, and she does not know for what.

When a young man (Hugh O'Connor) enters the control room next door, we begin to get an explanation of the rituals that structure the long days that she fills with talking like a deranged character

choreography of Emma Martin to enact a similar struggle against darkness and despair. It is this wordless sequence which provides the emotional anchor to the show.

Many of the themes woven through the fragmented monologues speak to Walsh's previous work, in particular the use of storytelling as an armour against the world.

The idea of self-imposed and forced exile, and hermetic worlds impenetrable by rationale or reason, also bring to mind some of his best-known plays. What is new and fresh about *Arlington*, however, is the way in which Walsh harnesses a variety of different tools to create his world.



Eileen Walsh in *The Same*