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# 'Through A Glass Darkly' into a whole other place

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Colin Campbell and Beth Cooke in *Through A Glass Darkly*  
*Fiona Morgan*

## **Through A Glass Darkly by Jenny Worton directed by Annie Ryan**

Rating: ★★★★★

A small island off the coast of Sweden where dysfunctional families spend summer holidays. A disturbed, interior landscape. A liminal, grey purgatory between heaven and hell. In Jenny Worton's adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's, Oscar winning, 1961 movie, "Through A Glass Darkly" suggestion is more compelling than certainty. The sense of what might be, or of who we might be, the urge towards the infinite trapped within the finite, the blurring between the real and the unreal crafts a reality all of its own. In the hands of a lesser director "Through A Glass Darkly" could well flounder in its own impenetrability. But director Annie Ryan ensures "Through A Glass Darkly" is a mesmerizing, thought provoking and deeply evocative production.

Set over the course of a single day, "Through A Glass Darkly" sees Karin, a young woman recently released from a mental institution, her doctor husband, Martin, her sixteen year old brother, Minus, and her writer father David, strive to play happy families on holidays on an island off the Swedish coast. Each attempts to fulfill their assigned roles, always struggling to restrain deeper, often forbidden impulses. Martin, determined to do the right thing, wrestles with his lust for his sickly wife. David, wanting to be a devoted father almost as much he hates it, struggles with his responsibility towards his family and the dark wish for Karin he secretly harbours. The sexually frustrated Minus also entertains dark desires, but Karin's desires are perhaps darkest of all. As four competing realities fight for dominance, acceptance or release, Karin's world unravels as she seeks him who resides in the room beyond the wall and all are changed utterly when the final moment arrives.

Jenny Worton's adaptation remains faithful to Bergman's original screenplay, at least in narrative terms. In sacrificing some of Bergman's original dialogue and adopting a spider-less ending however, something gets lost in translation. Yet what remains is strikingly powerful and resonates with emotional honesty. A minimalist set design by costume and set designer, Sarah Bacon, opts for the evocative rather than the literal, with her grey, shadowy backdrop, with sliding panels, perfectly evoking a timeless and placeless, other worldly liminality, ably supported by Sinéad Wallace's lighting design and Denis Clohessy's sound design. Director Annie Ryan appears to conduct almost as much as she directs, marshaling the talents, forces and energies at play in "Through A Glass Darkly" into something almost palpable. Ryan's often expressionistic take combines the theatrical, poetic and visual into an almost musical evocation of mood and atmosphere, as well as eliciting strong performances from her four strong cast. Peter Gowen as David, Peter Gaynor as Martin and Colin Campbell as Minus are wonderfully compelling as men struggling to restrain their dark, interior pulls. Beth Cooke, in what could possibly be a career defining performance as the schizophrenic, or visionary, Karin is utterly riveting in a performance of raw vulnerability.

"Through A Glass Darkly" is not for the faint of heart, nor for those wishing for light entertainment. It's Bergman after all, so it's light on laughs, though there are a few. Rather "Through A Glass Darkly" disturbs, disconcerts and unsettles, making uncomfortable by its refusal to offer easy answers. Thought provoking, yes, and a gender reading of a woman trapped in a man's world yields rich dividends, as does a reading of the human spirit caught between living the limited joys of this world and yearning for the possible joys of another. But neither nor both are enough to plumb the rich depths "Through A Glass Darkly" has to offer. Greater than the sum of its parts, "Through A Glass Darkly" is a production less to be understood than experienced, and it is a profoundly rewarding, deeply moving experience that will linger long in the memory.

"Through A Glass Darkly" by Jenny Worton, directed by Annie Ryan and produced by The Corn Exchange runs at The Project Arts Centre until December 5th

For information on times and tickets visit [The Project Arts Centre](#)



**Chris O'Rourke**

Theatre Examiner

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