

Carran and Mary Waterfield

Looking for the Tallyman

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Triangle's latest production: *Looking for the Tallyman* is a play about identity inspired by a personal exploration of family history. It draws upon the personal history of my mother and grandmother. Central to the work is the tension between the public and the private - the bureaucracy of the institution, family pride, and national pride. Over-riding themes are notions of embarrassment and guilt and how these are used to keep you out of the system if you, by choice or circumstance, find yourself rejected as was the case for many "illegitimate" children from the 1930s.

The journey of the play has been as much about the state of illegitimacy as the difficulties of making illegitimate theatre. It seems we have not travelled far in a hundred years.

*I want to come in.
Are you on the inside or the outside?
I'm on the outside... I want to come in.
You want to come in do you?*

*Am I on the outside or the inside,
am I going out or are you coming in?
I want to come in!
What's the password?
BB - number 25*

*Mistake!
Again!
...*

*We don't fit.
We don't fit anymore.
We're too old.
We're all grown up now.*

The extract above is from *Looking for the Tallyman*.

AUGUST 1999

I never knew my maternal grandfather, but they said he was a tallyman - a kind of debt collector. My Nana-in-hospital (my maternal grandmother) did not talk about the man with whom she had secretly conceived my mum. The social constrictions of the 1930s meant that Nana-in-hospital was sent to a workhouse where my mum was born. My mum was separated from Nana at the age of three. She spent her early life in a children's home terrified of a scissor-waving bogeywoman whose particular artistic activity included making my mum and the other children perform like circus animals in shows for the American soldiers during the Second World War. The children were rewarded with gifts of chocolate which were promptly taken away from them as soon as the soldiers were out of sight.

Nana-in-hospital is a phrase, I have come to learn, that was a euphemism for her being in an institution all her life, initially for the sin of bearing a child out of wedlock and eventually because everyone thought she was mentally unbalanced. So Nana stayed "in hospital" all her life. "Hospital" meaning a series of institutions which changed according to the social legislation over a period of about forty years. The only odd thing I think she ever did was that in her seventies she started putting Green Shield stamps on envelopes instead of the ones they issued at the post office. The letters still got to us.

When I presented this show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, I also took my Mum - not only because I learned from her at an early age how to manage the minimal weekly house-keeping, but also because she had a unique selling point: the show was derived from her life, it was her story.

My mum is not a theatre maker but she has done her fair share of performing for adults as a child with a huge pair of scissors threatening to come down on her if she didn't get it right. In my case, it's just the funding agencies

and networks who have the power to snip - a less threatening punishment for not being commercial.

This is what my Mum wrote while she was with me in Edinburgh:

Friday 27th August

Been here two days in the Assembly Rooms. It's like a battlefield for the performers! Actors versus critics (where do I fit in?). I do not feel the Tallyman will be found here. It's get in, do it, battle through it and then get out. I saw a lovely play yesterday: Last Train to Nibroc - a love story by Arlene Hutton, beautifully acted out by Benim Foster and Alexandra Geis. I came out feeling truly uplifted and at peace. I am ready now for the battle tomorrow when we present Looking for the Tallyman - or maybe it won't be like that. Does it have to be? By your Spirit oh Lord help us to carry one another's burdens! Winning big has only earthly rewards and the moment of ecstasy lasts for only two minutes and then the next battle begins (see 2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

My Mum reads the bible a lot.

Sunday 29th August

In the "world of theatre" there appear to be so many "lost" people. This is the Edinburgh Fringe where, if a show runs late it causes havoc because one show follows another and the lost time can never be gained back. I sit and watch and ponder at the speed of it all: technicians, stage managers, front of house manager with his or her team of poorly paid staff. Then there are the artists themselves: "Only two to go, I'm sure my voice won't hold out, any press in tonight?"

"We may just be able to pay the Assembly Rooms for the privilege of being here", Carran says as she continues to warm up with the others in the confined space of the toilets.

I went to the Botanical Gardens today. It was beautiful and peaceful and as I looked down

Theatre Women Generation - Carran and Mary Waterfield

on the City of Edinburgh where it all happens - the Festival and all the droves of people coming here for it - I wondered to myself: what are they really here for? What do they really expect?

Why offer a man a stone when he asks for bread?

Why offer up a poem when he wants a well-made play?

Why make him frightened when he wants a laugh?

Why do you want to come in on the inside when you're better off outside. It's good for your work and your soul. When you sell your work, make sure you write on the label of the can the exact ingredients and cover it with the rider: this may contain nuts!

CARRAN WATERFIELD (Britain) is artistic director and founder of Triangle based in Coventry. Her work includes: *Omega and the Golden Water* (1989), *Married Blitz* (1990), *The Dig* (1992), *Tributaries* (1994), *Godiva* (1995), *My Sister, My Angel* (1996), *Nina and Frederick* (1997) and *Looking for the Tallyman* (1998).