

Perfidia by Jimmy Murphy**Venue:** Central Hall, Waterford**Company:** Red Kettle Theatre Company**Cast:** Jenny Clooney and Sharon Clancy**Director:** Frieda Ryan**Review date:** 1.15pm Thursday 12th September 2013**Reviewer:** Úna Kealy

Perfidia dramatizes how the reckless economic and social policies of recent decades in Ireland have equated to a treacherous betrayal of Irish citizens leaving them vulnerable and forsaken. In the play's title Jimmy Murphy has renamed Ireland and created a play that is bleak and uncompromising in its portrayal of modern Irish society.

Set in the shadow of the Camac Valley Apartments the play dramatizes an encounter between 38 year old Niamh (Sharon Clancy) and 24 year-old Ciara (Jenny Clooney). Niamh, unable to meet her mortgage repayments, is leaving her flat before the bailiffs arrive to evict her as Ciara, a single mother of three, arrives on the scene delighted at having been granted an apartment by Dublin County Council for weekly rent of €36. They meet at the door of the apartment block and their ensuing conversation reveals that in addition to abandoning her flat, Niamh has lost her business, been rejected by her partner and is broken, embittered and hopeless. Ciara, meanwhile, has never had a job; she has no contact with the three different fathers of her children and she and her family are entirely dependent on the State. Her enthusiasm for her new home quickly wanes, however, as she discovers that there are no shops in easy walking distance of the apartment block, the architects failed to create any play areas for children, and that she and her young family must climb nine floors of stairs as the lift to her apartment no longer works. As the play progresses we witness the disturbing extent of their isolation and despair.

Red Kettle Theatre Company's production is itself a victim of the recession: the publicity material lists only a director and performers and the lack of a design team is evident. The set consists of a pile of furniture taken from Niamh's penthouse flat but what appears onstage is a tatty collection of junk rather than the portable treasures of a woman who had splurged on house and home at the height of the boom. The text gives clues as to the important props – a painted Venetian scene for example - but in Red Kettle's production this is reduced to postcard size and an opportunity to highlight the extent of Niamh's loss disappears. The lighting and sound design is minimal and the production standards are atypical of Red Kettle's work but despite this the cast and director, Frieda Ryan, embrace the strength of Murphy's writing. This strength is found in Murphy's creation of characters that, although they admit to being architects of their own difficulties, are difficult to condemn. Clooney plays Ciara with a lightness of touch that sensitively navigates the humour and emotion of the drama and provides a necessary contrast to Clancey's tortured Niamh. They work well together and although Ryan does not always draw out and explore the tensions in the relationship between the characters the production leaves one feeling that despite their poor decisions the women are, in different ways, betrayed by a government and a society that should offer a more compassionate

response to their shared plight of isolation and despair. The final moments are played by Clooney and Clancy with real emotional depth and Clooney's plea for help from anyone - reminiscent of Shen Tai's supplication to the uncaring Gods at the close of *The Good Person of Szechwan* - echo pitifully as the play ends.