

Edinburgh International Film Festival – Picks For Next Weekend (part 1)



Shadow Dancer

Some very good Belfast accents.

Belfast, 1973. Young Collette McVeigh sees her younger brother shot to death during a skirmish between the British Army and the IRA. Twenty years later, Collette is a member of the IRA herself. Picked up by MI5 while on an unsuccessful mission to place a bomb in the Underground, she is convinced to spy on her republican brethren in order to protect her own son's wellbeing. As Collette finds herself deeper in trouble, can she trust her handler to help?

Academy Award-winning director James Marsh (Man On Wire) turns his attention to my old home town during a time of considerable upheaval – December 1993. This was the official beginning of the end of the Troubles, as the Downing Street Declaration of December 15th led directly to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the eventual setting-up of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Also in 1998, ITV's Ireland Correspondent Tom Bradby released his first novel, Shadow Dancer. Fourteen years later, he has adapted it into a screenplay.

Although set in Belfast, Shadow Dancer is not a "Troubles movie". The political situation is merely a backdrop for this intelligent and tense thriller based on the themes of family, betrayal and the lengths we will go to to protect the ones we love. Geordie actress Andrea Riseborough plays Collette and this deserves to be a breakout film for her. Even in scenes without dialogue, such as the extended opening sequence as she

tries to evade her MI5 tail through the Underground, she is a captivating presence at the head of an exceptional cast. Clive Owen as Mac, her MI5 handler, brings his usual calm gravitas and a certain ambiguity to a role that could have been fairly one-note. Collette's brothers and fellow IRA members are played by Domhnall Gleeson and Aiden Gillen. The two roles are relatively small and unshowy, but Gleeson (son of Brendan) manages to show that the talent has not skipped a generation, and we get reserved and pensive Aiden Gillen as opposed to wacky, out there Aiden Gillen. More *The Wire* than *Blitz*, shall we say.

Marsh and his art department done a fantastic job in recreating Belfast of the early nineties, with the wardrobe, the cars, even the set dressing. My parents had the same bedroom furniture as Collette, that's how accurate it is. All of this would just be empty window dressing without a good script though, and this is a very good script. Where it excels most is in its restraint. Bradby isn't afraid of silences, trusting that his director and actors will be able to get across the point of a scene without words. I mentioned it before, but that opening sequence is a bravura piece of filmmaking; I didn't have my stopwatch, but it must have been maybe six or seven minutes with no dialogue, only background noise, and not for one second are we in any doubt about what is happening. The film starts off tense and never eases off; it just keeps ratcheting it up until the shocking ending.

Shadow Dancer will be screening this Friday and Saturday, with a full nationwide release scheduled for 24 August 2012. As always, tickets for this and any other film showing here can be picked up at the festival box office at The Filmhouse, Lothian Road, or via the festival's website, [here](#).