



Two by Jim Cartwright

Performed at [Royal Exchange](#) , directed by Greg Hersov, designed by Amanda Stoodley

Reviewed by [Emma Short](#) January 2012

With an emphasis on the tentative balance of self and other within a relationship, Jim Cartwright's **Two** takes us on a journey through the most intimate insights and fluctuations within couple dynamics. The secrets shared at the bar over a pint are captured in all their innocence, arrogance and transparency evoking a sublime pathos that grips the breath.

Justin Moorhouse and Victoria Elliott play all 14 of Cartwright's characters with tremendous versatility, flair and imagination. The range is astounding, from small boy, to bullying boyfriend, chipper landlord and wistful old man to mirror the portrayal of the scorned other woman, ground down elderly carer, brow beaten girlfriend to over excitable Maudie.

Greg Hersov's direction flows like golden ale from the pump; he orchestrates the changes of wardrobe and character with seamless subtlety. This manipulation of change is of course aided by the Royal Exchange's stupendous seven sided theatre module in the Great Hall which is an ideal performance space for *Two*. With its many exits and entrances branching from the central round bar it complements the show's Brechtian nature executed with sheer precision whilst maintaining the pub's naturalistic setting in the imagination of the audience with frequent interaction between actor and audience.

The focus gravitates naturally to the centre of the bar where the primary narrative played out between our Landlady and Landlord, with all other characters telling their merry tales around and against its wooden sculpted sides.

In many ways this could have been identified as a low cost production, considering the seeming simplicity of the set and props, and the fact only two actors played the parts of all 14 characters who each use mime in a performance sense. However, one should not be fooled by its modest appearance. The specially woven carpet interspersed with shiny black plastic **spill shaped puddles** evokes an authentic soiled pub feeling, this does not look cheap and when combined with the lighting effects during some of the monologues it is barely distinguishable as a designed floor, it really pulls the imagination together.

