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Bloody Sunday: Scenes From The Saville Inquiry

(Grand Opera House; 1,061 Seats; \$41 Top)

A Tricycle Theater presentation of a play in two acts edited by Richard Norton-Taylor.
Directed by Nicolas Kent with Charlotte Westenra.

Christopher Clarke QC - Thomas Wheatley
Michael Mansfield QC - Terrence Hardiman
Edwin Glasgow QC - James Wooley
Cathryn McGahey - Hilary MacLean
Alan Roxburgh - Phillip Battley
Peter Clarke QC, Col. Derek Wilford - William Hoyland
Eilish McDermott QC - Rita Hamill
Barry MacDonald QC - Gerard O'Hare
Bishop Daly - Michael O'Hagan
Michael Bridge, Soldier F - Michael Wilson [Michael Wilson](#)
Bernadette McAliskey - SORCHA CUSACK
William Patrick McDonagh, Soldier S - David Beames
Alice Doherty - Frances Quinn
Geraldine McBride - Heather Tobias
General Sir Robert Ford, Reg Tester - Michael Cochrane
Major General Andrew MacClellan - John Castle

By [KAREN FRICKER](#)

In theory, it seems only fitting for this provocative verbatim theater production to play Northern Ireland, site of the infamous incidents that are its subject matter. Production (which continues on tour to Derry, Dublin and London) is a meticulously observed re-creation of select testimony from the British government tribunal about the events of Jan. 30, 1972, when British troops shot and killed 13 civil rights protesters in Derry and wounded 14 more. "Bloody Sunday" remains one of the deepest wounds left by the Troubles and has been the subject of several screen representations and U2's famous rock anthem.

Yet there was an inescapable sense on its Belfast opening night that locals are this production's least necessary viewers: The events of that day and the tortured official response are tragically overfamiliar here. The true target aud is those not already outraged by what show's creators clearly represent as a three-decade-long abnegation of justice.

This is the sixth verbatim production created by director Nicolas Kent for London's Tricycle Theater; another of these works, "Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom," played Off Broadway last year. "Guantanamo" differed from the previous in that it dramatized various locations; the others, including "Bloody Sunday," take place exclusively in simulated courtrooms, with actors playing lawyers, witnesses and court officials sitting and standing in front of microphones and acting out interrogations. The form is therefore profoundly anti-dramatic, and part of the challenge faced by editor Richard Norton-Taylor was to boil down

an enormous amount of material (in this case, the tribunal sat for 434 days) into an engaging and digestible evening's viewing.

This, in turn, raises serious ethical concerns: Eiting is always subjective, but especially so in this type of theater, where it is the primary creative tool. Previous familiarity with the material as well as the case made by the production make it hard not to agree that British troops were deeply in the wrong on Bloody Sunday.

The first testimonies we hear are those of local witnesses and people caught up in the action; they come off as ordinary folk who are out of their element and sometimes badgered or cornered by the slick government lawyers. No evidence emerges that any were armed or aggressive on the day in question. Several of the generals and soldiers who take the stand are contrite. But most stolidly claim not to remember what happened on Bloody Sunday, in statements that reek of face-saving, even coverup.

It all adds up to a damning case against the British forces that seems to want to incite the indignation of its audience: This is theater with a clear political point to make. But the production's form and mode of presentation give it a surface sheen of objectivity that, in retrospect, feels a bit disingenuous.

The physical production is highly successful in its attempt to simulate a functioning courtroom. All of the performances are, in essence, cameos, and several in the large ensemble never speak at all, but merely open and shut folders and move around the stage. The technology is sophisticated, with photos and documents projected onto terminals on a dozen onstage desks and several large video screens. The stage light is strong and even, and the house lights never totally dim.

Participants in a post-show discussion agreed this looks exactly like the real-life premises of the Saville Inquiry, down to small details on witnesses' clothing. But again, what is the purpose of this appearance of objective truth?

Director Kent times his verbatim productions to appear before the findings of the tribunals he stages have been announced, and indeed Lord Saville will not release his response to the Bloody Sunday tribunal until later this year. It is hard not to be appalled that it has taken this long for the British government to finally reopen the Bloody Sunday case (a previous tribunal in 1972 is now widely dismissed as biased and incomplete). But the Tricycle needs to be more forthcoming about its evident political agenda.

Sets, Claire Spooner; lighting, Jon Driscoll; sound, Mike Thacker; dialect coach, Majella Hurley; production stage manager, Shaz McGee. Opened, reviewed Sept. 11, 2005. Running time: 2 HOURS, 30 MIN.

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