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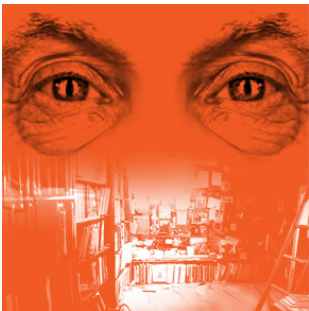
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## [Review: The Death of Norman Tortilla and A Lady of Substance](#)

Posted on 26 March 2012 Written by [Emma Mottram](#)



*The Death of Norman Tortilla* is a modern, black comedy and the first play written by Charlotte Coates. It centres on Norman Tortilla, an elderly sufferer of Parkinson's disease who desperately wants his memories to be recorded before he dies. Robert Gill created moments of surrealism and comedy through his body posture, gestures and his delivery of Norman's muddled thoughts to the audience. He played an aging individual who is mentally falling apart very effectively. The strange Polish care worker, played by Nicholas Ruben, was obsessed with personal hygiene and brought an almost dehumanising aspect to the play, chilling the audience with his views on the human condition and his treatment of Norman. The woman attempting to flog gas insurance was stereotypical, yet being brought to life by Morag Sims and her interesting story stopped the character from being predictable.

The setting was mostly minimal with the exception of hundreds of pictures cut from celebrity magazines plastered over a coffee table and cabinets. These pictures created an eerie atmosphere and also highlighted Norman's mental deterioration.

However, as a piece of writing the play did not flow well and at many points it felt disjointed. The transitions between comedy and drama were too brief, which often made the audience feel uncomfortable. This was particularly noticeable at the climax of the play where a blood effect was quite gratuitous and did not aid drama or comedy. The play contained a lot of bad language that I do not believe was at all necessary as it did nothing to aid the plot or the development of characters. There were certain props which could have had more thought put into them, such as an obviously blunted kitchen knife. Despite these aspects which spoiled the piece it was a good first play by the writer and well presented by Sheer Drop Theatre.