

Flann O'Brien's

At Swim Two Birds



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FOREWORD

At Swim Two Birds is Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's fifth production for 2009. This is a new stage adaptation of Flann O'Brien's meta-fictional masterpiece commissioned by us from Jocelyn Clarke. Jocelyn's previous adaptations for our company include *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1999) and *Thorough The Looking Glass* (2000). Jocelyn also adapted our critically acclaimed production of *The Third Policeman* in 2007. This production of *At Swim Two Birds* will tour throughout Ireland in February 2010, followed immediately by performances of *The Third Policeman* at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh and the Tron Theatre in Glasgow. The tour to Scotland is being undertaken with the support of Culture Ireland.

At Swim Two Birds has been preceded this year by our performances of *The Third Policeman* at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, by the premiere production of *The Last Mile* by Malcolm Hamilton; by our international tour of *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* (premiered in 2002) at theatre festivals in Istanbul and Adana in Turkey in April; and by our production of *The Cat and the Moon* by W.B. Yeats during the Yeats Festival season in August.

Our company and our venue, The Factory Performance Space, continued to play a pivotal role in 2009 in supporting and developing Sligo's Cairde Festival. Now an independent event in its own right, Blue Raincoat Theatre Company established this summer festival in 2003 as a showcase event for the year-round arts participation programme we continue to undertake with diverse community groups and regional support agencies. Meanwhile The Factory Performance Space itself remains one of the key year-round arts programming venues operating in Sligo.

At Swim Two Birds will be followed in December by a northwest community venue tour of *A Brief Taste of Lightning* (premiered in 2001), marking the launch of the Mobile Theatre element of our five year Theatre Resource Project announced in 2006.



FOREWORD

Under the Theatre Resource Project, we will deliver five new theatre initiatives between 2007 and 2011. This year sees the continuation of our Lecture Workshop programme commenced in 2007, the first full operational year of our Theatre Library opened in 2008 and finally the launch of our Mobile Theatre initiative already mentioned above. The two remaining Theatre Resource Project initiatives for 2010/2011 are the launch of a theatre publishing initiative and the establishment of a theatre school respectively.

2009 also sees us complete the third year of our performance & mentoring programme with community-based theatre concerns in south Sligo. This initiative is part of an arts partnership arrangement under *Space For Art*, the current five year arts development plan being delivered by Sligo local authorities. Finally in 2009 we have launched our ScRIPT project, (Scheme for Regional Interaction with Professional Theatre). ScRIPT will see Blue Raincoat pioneer a new developmental and mentoring model between professional arts organisations and local arts related community concerns. The project is being supported by County Sligo Leader Partnership Company, under the aegis of Peace III, through the Community and Capability Training element of the current Regional Development Programme.

We hope you enjoy our production of *At Swim Two Birds* and that we will see you at some of our other productions and events in 2009 and 2010.

Malcolm Hamilton

Niall Henry

November 3rd 2009

CAST & ARTISTIC TEAM

Cast

John Carty
Kellie Hughes
Ciaran McCauley
Fiona McGeown
Sandra O Malley

Artistic Team

Director:

Author

Production Manager:

Designer:

Lighting Design:

Sound Design:

Set Construction:

Niall Henry

Jocelyn Clarke

Peter Davey

Jamie Vartan

Michael Cummins

Joe Hunt

Gus Henry, Graham Reid
Peter Davey &
Michael Cummins

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company thank the following people for their valuable input: Gus Henry, Roman Szytura and Maddie Smith. Jo & Frank Conway, Avril Lahiff & Paul Mc Donnell and the second year design students of the Performing Arts Degree Course, Sligo I.T., Carolin Devaney, Oisín Horler & Puma Design, Gerry Mannion & the Five Oak Ranch, Patricia McCarrick, Diarmuid O'Flaherty, Kathryn Reynolds & Yeats Country Antiques, Ann Clinton & Cahenys Bar, Joana Markiewicz and John Langton.

BIOGRAPHIES

John Carty

John Carty trained at the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, Dublin, graduating in 1988. He worked with Co-Motion Theatre Company and Graffitti Theatre Company before returning to Sligo to become a founder member of Blue Raincoat Theatre Company. He has since trained at The Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique, London, at the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, New York with Anne Bogart and at the Roy Hart Theatre in Malargues, France. John has appeared in most of the company's productions to date. In recent years, he has also directed a number of one-act plays at the Factory Performance Space.

Ciarán McCauley

Ciarán is from Sligo and has been a core member of Blue Raincoat Theatre since October 1991. He has trained at the Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique, London with Corrine Soum and Steve Wasson, at the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, New York with Anne Bogart and at the Roy Hart Theatre in Malargues, France. He has performed in the *Playboy of the Western World* at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin directed by Niall Henry and has worked with Crossroads Repertory Theatre, Indiana. Ciarán has directed productions of *At the Hawkswell*, *Purgatory* and *The Cat and The Moon* and has been a guest tutor at Queens University, Belfast, and NUI Galway.

Niall Henry

Niall is from Sligo and is Artistic Director of Blue Raincoat. He studied in Paris with Corrine Soum and Maximillion Decroux and returned to Sligo in 1991 to co-found Blue Raincoat with Malcolm Hamilton. He has directed six of Malcolm's plays, most recently *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* and *A Brief Taste of Lighting*. Other shows directed for Blue Raincoat include *Hamlet*, *A Mid Summer's Night Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, J Clarke's adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (co-production Peacock theatre) and Brendan Ellis' *Hollow in the Sand*. He has directed on two occasions for the National Theatre, *Playboy of the Western World* in 2002 and more recently, Colm Toibin's *Beauty in a Broken Place* for abbey one hundred.

BIOGRAPHIES

Kellie Hughes

Kellie first performed with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company in 2004. Initially trained in dance, she performed in the World Tour of Riverdance-The Show in 1996/97 before graduating from University of Ulster, Coleraine in 2000 with BA first class honours in Theatre and History. She then completed an MA in physical theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. She spent three years training with Corinne Soum and Steve Wasson, last assistants of Etienne Decroux and directors of the Theatre de L'Ange Fou and the Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique. After receiving her diploma Kellie returned to Ireland to perform in Blue Raincoat's international showcase of *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst*. Kellie is guest lecturer in University of Ulster, NUI Galway and IT Sligo. She is Training Coordinator for Blue Raincoat Theatre Company.

Fiona McGeown

Fiona began working with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company 14 years ago and has appeared in many productions including *'Alice in Wonderland'*, *'Still Life'*, and *'The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst'*. She recently took time out from professional theatre and spent three years working and studying in London with Theatre de L'ange Fou at L'ecole de Mime Corporel et Dramatique.

Sandra O Malley

Sandra is a graduate of the Ecole de Mime Corporel Dramatique. She studied under Corinne Soum and Steven Wasson, Etienne Decroux's last assistants. Having performed with their company, she returned to Ireland and has been working with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company since 1997. Sandra has provided workshops both nationally and internationally for University College Galway, the Drama League of Wales and Potsdan International Dance festival, Germany. She has also directed productions for the Sligo Youth Theatre.

BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Cummins

Michael is from Dublin and studied painting at N.C.A.D. He has designed sets and lighting, and acted as production designer for many of Blue Raincoat's productions including *Hamlet*, *Once Time*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking glass*, *Macbeth* and *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst*.

Peter Davey

Peter is from Tubbercurry in Sligo and has a lifetime involvement in amateur drama having worked extensively with Beeneeze Theatre Company and The Phoenix Players. He has been the recipient of national amateur drama awards for both acting and lighting design. He is currently Production Manager at The Factory Performance Space.

Joe Hunt

Joe is Technical Manager and Sound Designer with Blue Raincoat Theatre Company since 2001. Prior to this, Joe also worked with the Hawk's Well theatre on lighting and sound operation as well as stage construction. Joe is also involved in video and image design for Blue Raincoat Theatre Company.

BIOGRAPHIES

Jamie Vartan

Jamie Vartan's design work includes a number of productions at the National Theatre of Ireland (Abbey & Peacock Theatres), including *The Playboy Of The Western World* and the premiere of Colm Toibin's *Beauty In A Broken Place*, both directed by Niall Henry.

For Blue Raincoat Theatre Co., he has designed *The Chairs*, *The Third Policeman*, and *The Last Mile*.

He was involved for three years as designer and artist-in residence with the David Glass Ensemble on *The Lost Child Trilogy*, with residencies involving workshops, research and newly devised productions in Vietnam, Indonesia, China, the Philippines and Colombia. The *Trilogy* was later presented at the Young Vic. *The Hansel Gretel Machine* (part one of the trilogy) was selected for the 1999 Prague Quadrennial Theatre Design Exhibition.

His designs for opera include *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Salzburg Festspielhaus), *The Queen Of Spades* (La Scala, Milan), *Albert Herring* and *Death In Venice* (Salzburg Landestheater), *Don Giovanni* (Varna), *Manon Lescaut* (Teatro Regio, Parma), *A Village Romeo and Juliet* , *Aida* and *Carmen* (Teatro Lirico di Cagliari ; Premio Abbiati Award for Best Production 2006 ; selected for the 2007 Prague Quadrennial), *La Statira* (Teatro San Carlo, Naples) , *The Dwarf* (Teatro Comunale, Florence) , *La traviata* (Malmö Opera) , and *Il Pirata* (Opera Marseille). Future work in opera includes *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (Opera Marseille).

BIOGRAPHIES

JOCELYN CLARKE

Jocelyn Clarke is a freelance dramaturg and writer. He is a creative advisor on the Screenwriting programme at the National Film School in Ireland - as well as a member of the artistic staff of the Sundance Theatre Lab. He was the Commissioning and Literary Manager of the Abbey Theatre for four years, and lead theatre critic with The Sunday Tribune for nine years. He has worked as a dramaturg on several productions by The Blue Raincoat Theatre and has written three adaptations for the company - ALICE IN WONDERLAND, ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, and THE THIRD POLICEMAN. He has written four adaptations for Anne Bogart and the SITI Company - BOB, Alice's Adventures UNDERGROUND, ROOM, and SCORE. He is an Associate Artist with the New York based theatre collective The Civilians, and recently collaborated with the company on a new play BROOKLYN@EYELEVEL, which premiered in New York last December. His new version of ANTIGONE for the SITI Company was presented in New York in October, and his new play FINN for Mabou Mines will open in New York next March.

Flann O'Brien

Flann O'Brien (1911-1966)

Flann O'Brien was born Brian O'Nolan in Strabane, County Tyrone, on 5 October 1911, and was raised in Dublin. He was a civil servant for 18 years, and in the 1930s began writing a bi-lingual column for The Irish Times under the pseudonym Myles na Gopaleen (Myles of the Small Horses). He also wrote a column for The Nationalist and Leinster Times under the pseudonym George Knowall. His works include *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *An Béal Bocht* (Translated into *The Hard Life* by Patrick C.Power), *The Dalkey Archive*, *The Third Policeman*. In addition, many of his satirical and surrealist non-fiction columns for The Irish Times have been published as *The Best of Myles*. He also wrote a play, *Faustus Kelly*. He died in Dublin on 1st April, 1966.



Under the name Flann O'Brien, his published novels have attracted a wide following for their bizarre humour and Modernist metafiction.

As a novelist, O'Nolan was powerfully influenced by James Joyce. Indeed, he was at pains to attend the same college as Joyce, and Joyce biographer Richard Ellman has established that O'Nolan, fully in keeping with his literary temperament, used a forged interview with John Joyce as part of his application.

As Myles na gCopaleen, O'Nolan published a regular column entitled *The Cruiskeen Lawn* in The Irish Times, usually in English, but sometimes in Irish, and sometimes in Latin. The columns introduced a regular set of characters, such as the Plain People of Ireland, the Brother, and the Da, included a "catechism of cliché," and proposed numerous schemes for the improvement of the Irish nation. Flann O'Brien's writing has led him to be regarded as a major figure in twentieth century Irish literature.

EXTRACT

At Swim Two Birds in an Irish Literary context.

The Article below is an extract from *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* by Carol Taaffe, published by Cork University Press. Carol is a senior tutor in the School of English and Drama, University College Dublin.

Reviewing *At Swim-Two-Birds* in 1939, Jorge Luis Borges neatly described it as an exploration of 'the many ways to conceive of the Irish novel'. While *At Swim* is often read simply as a novel about writing a novel, it is more specifically a novel about writing an Irish novel of the 1930s. Its student narrator - a latter-day Stephen Dedalus - presents a work in progress which mixes parodies of the literary revival, Joycean modernism and Irish popular fiction, from the cowboy western to the Catholic morality tale. Combined with the seedy realism of the student's frame narrative, these literary parodies have bolstered Flann O'Brien's reputation as a representative figure of a disillusioned, post-independence generation – a subversive satirist who was wholly frustrated by social and intellectual life in the Irish Free State. Certainly, this novel is more than a simple collage of literary styles: it dramatises the writing process, demolishes the notion of original genius, and allows its characters to move between the roles of writer and reader, storyteller and audience. It also indicates that collaboration is an inevitable part of literary production, whether this is implied in the student's parodies or dramatised in the critical debates between his characters. And in making dialogue an essential element of the text, O'Brien acknowledged Dublin's oral culture as much as its literary heritage. The result of these clashing perspectives is that *At Swim* produces a curiously ambivalent image of contemporary Irish culture. O'Brien began writing the novel shortly after his graduation from UCD in 1935, and to a large degree its humour plays on the contradictions of the college's intellectual life at the time. If the student imitates the avant-garde literature popular among his contemporaries, he is also suspicious of its pretensions in a way that is typical of the Ireland of his day.

www.corkuniversitypress.com

EXTRACT

Since the central conceit of *At Swim-Two-Birds* is to expose itself in the process of being written, battles between storytellers and audiences are intrinsic to its development. True to the convention of the Fianna tales, Finn MacCool only tells stories when prompted by Conán. The torture of Trellis is passed from writer to writer. Even the student is criticised and goaded by the friends who read his manuscript; when Brinsley complains that the cowboys Furriskey, Shanahan and Lamont are indistinguishable, the narrator quickly devises a brisk memorandum of their '*respective diacritical traits or qualities*'. There are also more subtle influences at work throughout. Finn MacCool's account of mad Sweeny's leaps from tree to tree inspire a contemporary equivalent, the yarn about Jumping Craddock. Effectively, the romantic notion of the author as an original genius is thoroughly demolished in *At Swim*: each new digression embarked on in the novel is as a response to something else, and each new storyteller betrays the influence of his predecessors. Admittedly, each character recounts his tale primarily in the style suitable to his own genre, so *At Swim* often reads not only as a novel produced by committee, but as an experiment in assembly-line fiction – albeit with all the pieces inserted in the wrong order. There was a precedent for this: as a UCD student, O'Brien colluded with the poets Denis Devlin, Donagh MacDonagh and other friends in composing what one called 'the Great Irish Novel.' This was to be a parody of a generic best-seller, which would apply the principles of the industrial revolution to literature. Each contributor would write a chapter, and the book (with the working title, *Children of Destiny*) was to be constructed from a series of 'ready-made' fictional clichés. The shape of *At Swim* owes something to this project, as it does to the student magazine – the very model of chaotic composition. Arguably, the only structure this novel really has is that of a work in progress, and both O'Brien's playful intertextuality and the student's self-reflexive narrative suggest that the process of writing is a collaborative effort. O'Brien's model of the writer at work is not the bard alone in his cell, but the raconteur at large in the pub.

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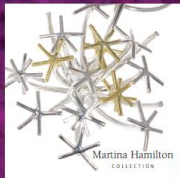
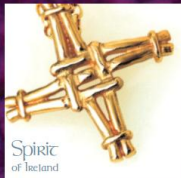
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