

# Coffee-Table Notes

An archive of arts writing by Neil Cooper. Effete No Obstacle.

Tuesday, 4 June 2013

## The Poor Mouth

Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

4 stars

The likes of Brian O'Nolan's epic Irish-Gaelic novel probably won't be seen again, but the Sligo-based Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's audacious stab at bringing it to life is as probably as good as it gets. Although originally published as An Beal Bocht under O'Nolan's Myles na gCopaleen pseudonym rather than his better-known Flann O'Brien moniker, it's to O'Brien that Jocelyn Clarke credits his new adaptation.

Such a flirtation with multiple identities perhaps point to the roots of one Bonaparte O'Conassa, who narrates his own life story, from his messy birth in a fatherless household, to his eventual incarceration from whence he relates his solemn tale. Inbetween, director Niall Henry navigates his cast of five around Jamie Vartan's rural map of a set to lay bare an entire society in flux. With the performing quintet lining up to frame what follows with a disclaimer of sorts, O'Brien's story is transcended to become a thing of even greater marvels. Puppetry, a sweeping string-led score and all manner of physical tics are co-opted into the mix. All of which comes out irresistibly silly at times, like when the stealing of a pig resembles the kidnap of a silent movie starlet.

There are some serious points being made, however, about how Bonaparte has the Gaelic all but beaten out of him as he is forced to take on a name that isn't his own. At the show's centre is Sandra O'Malley's turn as Bonaparte. Sporting a backwards-turned flat cap, O'Malley's richly-voiced monologues lends things a gravitas heightened by Bonaparte's first and last meeting with his father, as the baton of misrule is passed between them.

*The Herald, June 4th 2013*

ends

Posted by Neil Cooper at 14:56 

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Sas said...

"it's to O'Brien that Jocelyn Clarke credits her new adaptation."

Jocelyn Clarke is a man.

6 June 2013 15:48

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### About Me

**Neil Cooper**

Coffee-Table Notes is the online archive of Neil Cooper. Neil is an arts writer and critic based in Edinburgh, Scotland, who writes regularly about theatre, music and art. Neil currently writes for The Herald, Map, The List and Line magazine, as well as recent articles for Scottish Art News and The Arts Journal. Neil has also written for The Wire, Plan B, The

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