



MEDIA PACK

Media Release Extracts Media Reviews Photos

A theater poster for the play 'The Poor Mouth' by Flann O'Brien, adapted by Jocelyn Clarke. The poster features a close-up photograph of an actor with a long, grey beard and a balding head, looking downwards. The background is dark. Text on the poster includes the title 'The Poor Mouth' in large, white, handwritten-style font, and 'Flann O'Brien's' in blue. The Blue Raincoat Theatre Company logo is in the top right. At the bottom, it lists the venue 'Project Arts Centre Dublin', dates '12 - 24 November 2012', and time '8pm'. A blue banner at the very bottom contains ticket prices and booking information. Logos for various cultural organizations are at the bottom of the poster.

Flann O'Brien's 

The Poor Mouth

Adapted by Jocelyn Clarke

 **Nominated**
BEST DIRECTOR AND
BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR
Irish Times Theatre Awards

Project Arts Centre Dublin

12 - 24 November 2012 8pm 

Tickets: €20 /€16 • Booking: 01-881 9613 Booking online: www.projectartscentre.ie

 Culture Ireland
Cultúr Éireann  Dublin City
Bairé Átha Cliath   



MEDIA RELEASE

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company presents the third part of the trilogy of the major novels of Flann O'Brien with the stage adaptation of *The Poor Mouth* at Project Arts Centre Dublin from 12 – 24 November 2012.

Bonaparte Coonassa is a resident of Corkadoragha - a remote region of Gaelic speaking Ireland where it never stops raining and where everyone lives in desperate poverty (and always will). Having embarked on a series of blood curdling adventures, Bonaparte has landed up in prison on a false murder charge. "Safe in jail and free from the miseries of life" he begins to write the most affecting memoir of our times.

An Béal Bocht (The Poor Mouth) is Flann O'Brien's Irish language masterpiece and remains amongst the greatest novels ever written in Irish, many of which it gently parodies. It was first published in 1941 and was the only one of O'Brien's novels written under his Myles na gCopaleen byline - a more anglicized Myles Na Gopaleen was his actual Irish Times pen name. The first published translation of An Béal Bocht into English was by Patrick C Power in 1973, several years after O'Brien's death.

The Poor Mouth sees Blue Raincoat Theatre Company complete a trilogy of original **stage adaptations by Jocelyn Clarke**, of the major novels of Flann O'Brien. The trilogy began in 2007 with *Third Policeman* and was followed in 2009 by *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Both preceding productions from the trilogy have enjoyed critical acclaim and continuing national and international touring success.

This production was **nominated for two Irish Times Theatre Awards**, Best Director (Niall Henry) and Best Supporting Actor (Bob Kelly).

CAST

Ruth Lehane Bonaparte O'Coonassa

John Carty Pig, Inspector, Gaeligore, Ferdinand, Policeman, Others

Ciaran McCauley Old Grey Fellow, Policeman

Nichola MacEvilly Mother, Michelangelo O'Coonassa, Sitric, Others

Jean-Marie Perinetti Martín O'Bannassa, Inspector, Osborne O'Loonassa, Gentleman, Others

Directed by Niall Henry

Design Jamie Vartan

Lighting Design Barry McKinney

Sound Design / Multi Media Joe Hunt

Make-up Artist Sharon McCormack

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company is supported by the **Arts Council**.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian O’Nolan was born on 5 October 1911 in Strabane, County Tyrone. He was an Irish novelist, playwright and satirist, considered a major figure in twentieth century Irish literature, namely the postmodern ilk. His English language novels, such as *At Swim- Two-Birds*, and *The Third Policeman*, were written under the *nom de plume* Flann O’Brien. His many satirical columns in *The Irish Times* were written under the name Myles na Copaleen and the Irish language novel *An Béal Bocht* under Myles na gCopaleen. He died on 1 April 1966.

EXTRACT

Flann O’Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Postmodernist

It is a serious lack of commitment in any direction that limits Flann O’Brien and ensnares him in the second rank, below Joyce and Yeats...

(Bernard Benstock, ‘The Three Faces of Brian O’Nolan’, 1969)

Let us begin, in good post-modern fashion, with a paradox: *The Irish were postmodernist before they were modernist.* (Discuss.)

One consequence of Irish censorship culture was that modernism almost passed Ireland by. As the bigoted Mr. Deasy says to Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, Ireland was ‘the only country that didn’t persecute the Jews. Do you know that? No. And do you know why? ... Because she never officially let them in.’ Lest we forget, *Ulysses* itself was never officially banned in Ireland, simply kept out. In fact, I’ve heard it is said that Sligo County Library was the last state library to lift this unofficial ban, as late as 1966: the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising and the year of Flann O’Brien’s death.

Biographers of O’Brien love to point out, with monotonous and predictable glee, that he died on April Fool’s day – morbidity passed off as synchronicity. Biographers have a job to do, and good luck to them. I deliberately avoided that treacherous terrain when writing my own book because of a personal antipathy to the genre – ‘All biography is a novel that dare not speak its name’ – and a critical intuition that O’Brien’s work deserved a more rigorous textually-based critique. Flann O’Brien means more to me than an arbitrary



collection of chronological dates; like Wanderly Wagon, Marietta biscuits and Sligo Rovers, he was a part of my growing up. Certainly, amongst the 'Plain People of Ireland', 'O'Brien completes the Holy Trinity of Irish fiction: alongside Joyce the Father and Beckett the Son he remains the Holy Ghost in the Machine. Yet within the groves of academia this cult status was virtually ignored.

In the course of studying O'Brien's work it became clear that two broad strands of criticism seemed to exist, the indigenous and the international, or, not putting too fine a gloss on it, the insular versus the decontextualised.

With a few notable exceptions, Irish assessments of O'Brien tended to be rather self-congratulatory and anecdotal, and failed to employ any consistent critical model. It was rather like the long-ball game in Irish soccer: boot it up the field and pray you find the target, which only works if you have a big striker up front (the 'hump-it-and-hope' school of thought). In the meantime, while Irish academics were still chanting 'Óle, Óle, Óle, the short-passing critics of the European game had effectively run away with the ball. (To this day, some of the best critical accounts of O'Brien have come out of Germany, France, Holland and the Czech Republic.)

As an Irish critic I felt obliged to attempt a tribal revival of O'Brien that would replant him in a native context (post-colonial Ireland), but which of course would employ some of the interpretative strategies of modern literary theory. It is, of course, very difficult to talk about comedy in an earnest academic fashion – either you can tell a joke or you can't, and there's nothing worse than some dullard explaining the punchline. It became doubly problematic when the comedy in fashion – *The Third Policeman* – is a Menippean satire, i.e. a mocking of intellectual pedantry. I try to avoid that particular minefield by celebrating O'Brien as well as critiquing him, which is why my book begins with a fairytale (by my daughter) and ends with a short story (a mock footnote) in homage to O'Brien. Or to quote Mylesian scripture: 'I had no ecclesiastical ambitions, I was merely a spoilt Proust.' Here's part of the original introduction to that book, from 1995:

In an essay in 1973, J.C.C. Mays made the telling remark that O'Brien's 'alternatives in prose may be said to have been pointed to by Liam O'Flaherty and James Joyce: either to unsling the camera and follow over the dreary plain or to look abroad to the master of silence, exile and punning'.

From the beginning, the two towers confronting O'Brien were the twin legacies of Joyce's modernism and Yeats's revivalism – and he was nervously uncomfortable with both. For O'Brien, Irish literature was trapped within a Celtic twilight zone: a historical limbo of transitional flux and rapidly fading



glory. A Joycean acolyte, O'Brien was conscious that Joyce had irrevocably altered the modern literary map, although the Irish public in general seemed oblivious to this achievement. Meanwhile back at the ranch, the jaded idealism of Yeats's Celtic Twilight – or "Celtic Toilet" as Myles na Gopaleen dubbed it – had, in the aftermath of independence, inspired nothing more than a trenchantly insular and inherently rural literary consciousness, intimately bound to a restrictive Catholic ethos.

The 1930's realist school had further consolidated this paradigm, or as the poet John Montague later expressed it in a Yeatsian parody: Puritan Ireland's dead and gone/A myth of O'Connor and Ó Faoláin. O'Brien too detested this cosy kind of realism, believing it to be sentimental and anachronistic, or as Myles sneered: 'stories about wee Annie going to her first confession, stuff about country funerals, will-making, match-making – just one long blush for an innocent man like me, who never harmed them'.

[...] In March 1939 the Longmans Green publication of *At Swim-Two-Birds* first appeared. After six months it had sold only 244 copies, by which time Longmans' London warehouse was bombed during the Blitz, and the book sank into obscurity for over 20 years. Longmans had initially accepted the novel on the strength of the wildly effusive report from its in-house reader, the English novelist Graham Greene: 'It is in the line of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*: its amazing spirits do not disguise the seriousness to present, simultaneously as it were, all the literary traditions of Ireland'. Greene was later quoted on the dust-cover blurb of the first edition, where he significantly pointed out the intertextual nature of its composition: 'It is a wild, fantastic, magnificently comic notion, but looking back afterwards one realises that by no other method could the realistic, the legendary and the novelette have been worked in together'. Although the term 'post-modernist' had yet to be coined, O'Brien's poetics anticipate it here.

[...] Although several established writers immediately declared *At Swim-Two-Birds* to be a masterpiece, the general critical reception derided (and misconstrued) its Joycean undertones, and condemned the work as inferior imitation. The *Times Literary Supplement* argued that the only exceptional aspect was its 'schoolboy brand of mild vulgarity', while the *Observer* critic remarked that 'it has been compared to *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*. It is not equal to either, and I should reluctantly put him among the bores'. Accusations of Joycean slavishness were the norm, with the *New Statesman* lamenting that its 'long passages in imitation of the Joycean parody of the early Irish epic are devastatingly dull'. Seán Ó Faoláin, one of the leading realists seemed to sum up the general consensus in that while it had its moments, the book had 'a general odour of spilt Joyce all over it'.



At Swim-Two-Birds had a small re-issue on the American market in 1951, but not until the MacGibbon & Kee edition of 1960 did it get a more favourable critical response. It has subsequently become one of the most revered works in the Irish canon, and something of a case study in scholarly discussions of metafiction (fiction about fiction). However, the tragedy of its erratic publishing history and the initial critical hostility left O'Brien rather embittered, particularly with Joycean comparisons. Ironically, Joyce himself had declared O'Brien to be 'a real writer, with the true comic spirit'. But when Samuel Beckett met O'Brien in Dublin in 1939 and passed on Joyce's praises, O'Brien already had enough of the Joycean debate, and reportedly snarled: 'Joyce, that refurbisher of skivvy's stories'.

O'Brien's second novel, *The Third Policeman*, was composed in 1939 and completed by January 1940, and in anticipation of a rejection slip he had already briefed his publishers that 'there will be no question of the difficulties or "fireworks" of the last book'.

[...] In fact, *The Third Policeman* was actually a more radical and intricate metafictional fantasy than *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and it was promptly rejected by his publishers: 'We realise the author's ability but think he should become less fantastic and in this novel he is more so'. Disheartened by a whole series of rejections, O'Brien concocted a surreal anecdote describing how he had lost the manuscript while on holidays, and shelved the entire project.

After his death in 1966, O'Brien's wife sent the typescript to MacGibbon & Kee, and it was finally published a year later. As Tom Kilroy wrote in the *Irish University Review* in 1968:

"The Third Policeman is a masterpiece. And here is a writer that makes nonsense of conventional categories. With Beckett, he is the only writer since the days of Yeats and Joyce who is of considerable international importance. It used to be said with a certain amount of native satisfaction that the man had failed to fulfill himself. Well, here it is, in case anyone still doubts, a beautifully written, terrifying, comic novel of the first order'.

And so it is.

Extract: Keith Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 28-52. © Keith Hopper is a native of Sligo town. He currently teaches Literature and Film Studies at the University of Oxford. A revised edition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Postmodernist* was published in 2009.



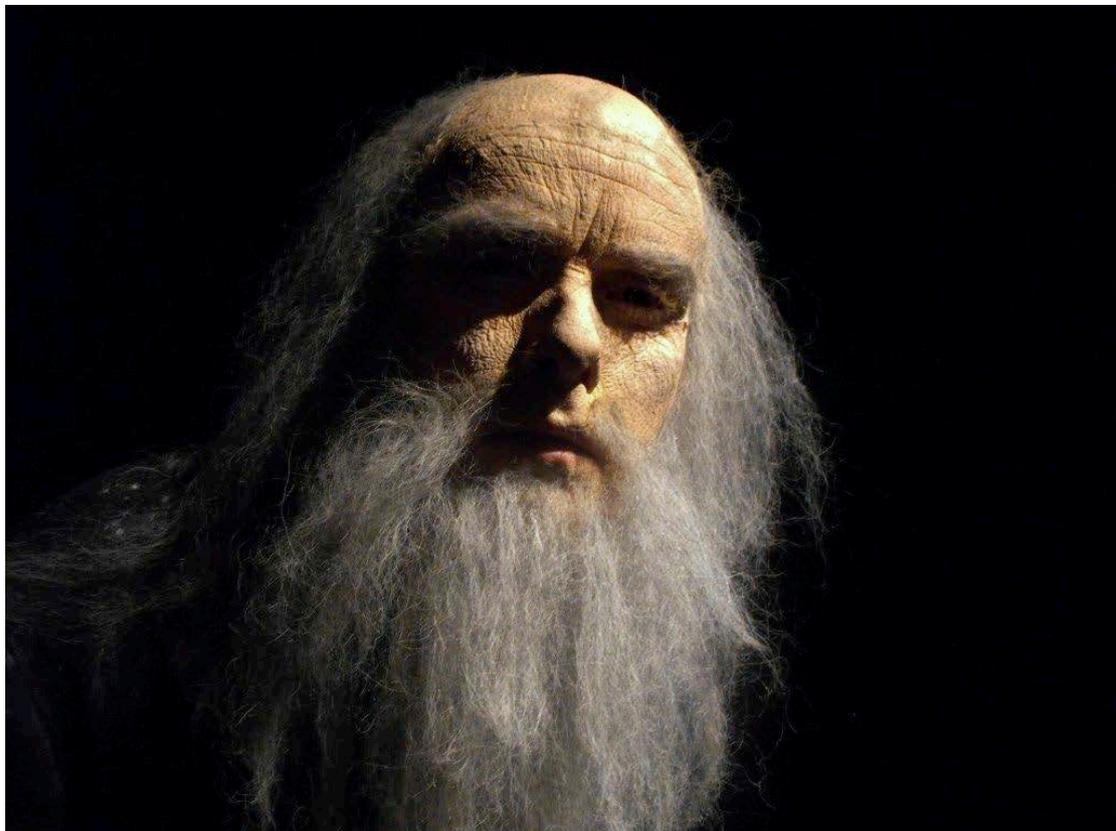
MEDIA REVIEWS

Blue Raincoat's existing stage adaptations of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (2007) and *The Third Policeman* (2009) continue to garner international acclaim and touring success.

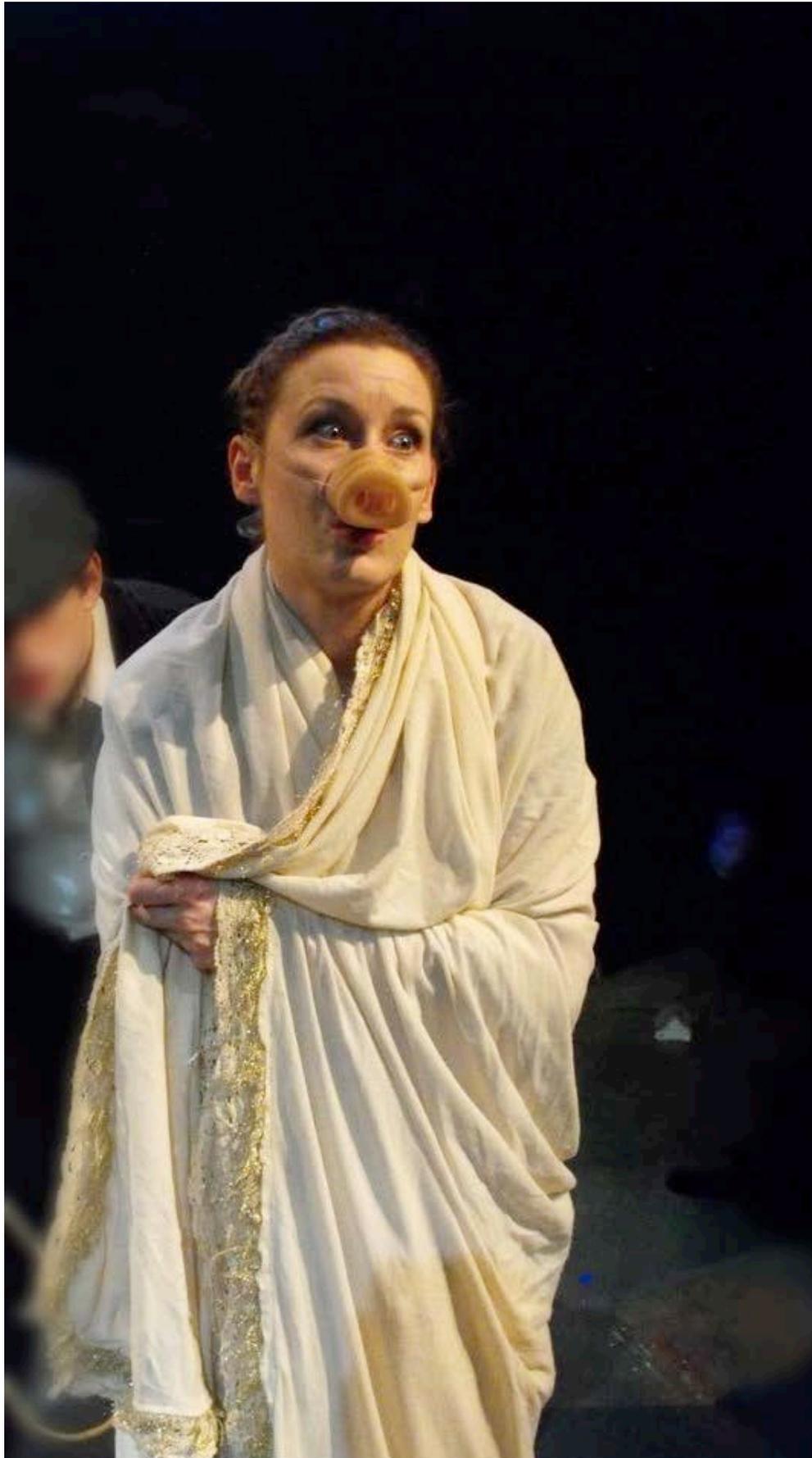
Blue Raincoat come as a welcome reminder that the human imagination knows no bounds ... a completely surreal belly-laugh Joyce McMillan - Scotsman reviewing *At Swim-Two-Birds*

Blue Raincoat transform Flann O'Brien's comic novel 'The Third Policeman' into remarkable theatre Bill Dunlop - Edinburgh Guide reviewing *The Third Policeman*

PHOTOS



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