

THEATRE REVIEW

The Poor Mouth ★★★★★

It's hard to believe the magic of Flann O'Brien's novels could ever be retained in a stage adaptation. But about half an hour into Blue Raincoat Theatre company's stage version of *The Poor Mouth*, I was completely won over. This is a charming production, which brings to life the classic send-up of the Gaelic-than-thou misery memoir. Perhaps it's not that surprising, given that Blue Raincoat have toured internationally with two successful O'Brien adaptations: *The Third Policeman* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*.

In *The Poor Mouth*, Bonaparte O'Coonassa (played by Ruth Lehane) narrates his childhood and upbringing in a lime-washed cottage in a corner of the glen in the through-the-looking-glass old Gaelic world of Corkadoragha. The fantastically mad account of his first year ('I cannot remember... the first six months, but doubtless I was alive') is helped along with the amusing use of a baby doll prop, and after that, well, things get curiously and curiously.

Between them, the cast of five take on all of the parts – of both human and livestock variety – each actor switching between characters of both sexes and all species, lending a dreamlike quality to the proceedings that perfectly complements



O'Brien's surreal vignettes. Amid all the role-switching, John Carty's lively performances (as a pig, a gaelgeoir and a seanachai called Ferdinand) were particularly winning.

Jocelyn Clarke's adaptation of the text preserves all the brilliance of O'Brien's original – the comical repetition of phrases, the gloriously dead-pan use of crazed superlatives. It might make you want to go straight home and re-read the novel, but it won't stop you enjoying the show, which, with its minimal set, imaginative staging and some deft use of music, casts its spell quite expertly. This production of *The Poor Mouth* doesn't just remind you how great Myles was, it's also a treat in itself.

Sheena Davitt

Until Sat, Project Arts Centre, 39 Essex Street East D2, 8pm, €16 to €20. Tel: (01) 881 9613/4. www.projectartscentre.ie