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# The Poor Mouth, Traverse Theatre, Review

By [Bill Dunlop](#) - Posted on **02 June 2013**[Show Details](#)**Venue:** [Traverse Theatre](#)**Company:** Blue Raincoat Theatre Company**Production:** Niall Henry (director), Jamie Vartan (designer), Barry McKinney (lighting designer)**Performers:** Sandra O Malley (Bonaparte O Coonassa), John Carty (Pig, Inspector, etc), Nicola McEvilly (Mother, Michelangelo O Coonassa, etc), Ruth Lehane (Martin O Bannassa, Inspector, Osborne O Loonassa, etc.) Ciaran McCauley (Old Grey Fellow, Policeman)**Running time:** 90mins

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To put on 'the poor mouth' is a Gaelic expression, meaning to complain unduly about your misfortunes. There are rarely any such where a Blue Raincoat Theatre Company production is concerned.

'The Poor Mouth' or rather 'An Beal Bocht' is possibly the most perfect satire on Gaelic Ireland ever perpetrated by its most penetrating part-time occupant, Brian O'Brien, otherwise Flann O'Brien.

Viewing Ireland from the other side of the Black Pig's Dyke can sometimes skew the perspective, so looking at the Gaelic world through the prism of O'Brien's vision is a useful corrective to both prejudice and sentimentality.

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's production is joyfully stylish throughout in its presentation of O'Brien's take of Bonaparte O'Coonassa, growing up in the townlands of Corkadoragha, and feeling the absence of his father who is 'in the jug'.

O'Brien's satire of Gaeldom and its attitudes (not to mention attitudes to Gaeldom) is trenchant and pithy and penetrates to the core of Irish sensibilities about Ireland. The original may well be his finest work, and Blue Raincoat certainly do yer man very proud indeed, reducing its essence down to ninety minutes of very nearly pitch-perfect theatricality with scarcely a stumble along the way.

Not a moment is wasted, and every one is replete with remarkable performance from a splendidly ensemble cast.

Although the storyline, whether presented or narrated may be slight to our supposedly sophisticated sensibilities, it's nevertheless possible to recognise both the pettiness and parochialism of those marginalised by overbearing neighbours and the narrowness of mind that is its concomitant in the gradual development of Bonaparte O'Coonassa, and the circumstances which lead to his downfall.

Yet despite the sharpness of his satire, O'Brien produces a dénouement which would not be out of place in the work of Dostoevsky and thereby confounds us all.

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It's always a joy to see actors working – I could watch them all day, myself – and in this case somewhat more so, as the entire company, but in especial Sandra O Malley as Bonaparte (O'Coonassa rather than Napoleon) wrestle mightily with O'Brien's masterly text.

They scarcely take a tumble, but this reviewer had a sense that at times the creature was being firmly held down in case it escaped, and now and then one wished it might, if only for a moment. Respect for the text can sometimes verge on the reverential.

That said, this is undoubtedly both a fine tribute to the work of a shamefully underrated author and an excellent piece of theatre in its own right.

Catch this production if you can, or cross the sea to Ireland and see the other goodies Blue Raincoat have lined up for later in the year; worth a trip to Sligo.

*Dates: 30 May – 1 June, 2013*

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