

Title and Deed at Print Room at the Coronet, W11

Sam Marlowe **\*\*\*\*** 22 Jan 2015

Home — is it a place, a memory, a sense of belonging, someone you love? Whichever it is, for the nameless man in this monologue by Will Eno it is very, very far away. Eno — the acclaimed American miniaturist whose dramas are somehow simultaneously wispy and weighty, puckish and profound — presents us with an existential meditation that teases, unsettles and provokes. It prods at the mind and the heart with a gentle persistence that leaves them both thrilled and bruised. Performed by Conor Lovett and directed by Judy Hegarty Lovett, husband-and-wife co-founders of the company Gare St Lazare Ireland, this is theatre of deep melancholy and rueful humour, soft-spoken and mesmerising. It's delivered with a simplicity that belies the intricacy of Eno's penetrating, desolate and, in the end, quite devastating reflections on the human condition.

Lovett's speaker is a foreigner. He says we've probably never heard of his country — "The old girl. The very old woman. The lying, dying, senile old mess" — and all he asks, politely, is that we do our best not to hate him. Delicately, mournfully, he traces the fault lines that divide us. The supposed warmth of the Welcome sign that greets him at the airport is deflected by suspicious officials and a wall of bulletproof glass. A friendship with a woman that should have flourished and intensified falters in the face of his isolating unhappiness, the loneliness that words, however tenderly handled, cannot surmount.

He is, he confides, roaming the world, "one foot in the grave, the other in my mouth, and how's anyone supposed to walk like that?" It's a Beckettian, bleakly funny summation of life. And the lyricism and self-conscious artifice of the performance — the curious, one-sided conversation he's having with us — points up all his, and our, failings in our quest for meaning and intimacy: our stumbling entrances and exits, our missed cues and dropped props. Relentlessly absorbing and achingly sad.