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Dublin Theatre Festival 2015: you could do worse, and better, than "Hooked!"

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Hooked! by Gillian Grattan

Rating: ★★★★★

Somewhere in the south east of Ireland a small, rural community are about to encounter a blow-in named Lydia. Dublin born and bred, Lydia's the troubled girl all the bad boys want and without even trying has men jumping to fix her fence, paint her house and praise her paintings. The women are less impressed. Particularly Mary, whose list of Lydia's faults is almost as long as her own, except she doesn't have any. What she has is Tom, a man who likes to spend his me time indulging his passion for fishing and his penchant for underwear. The silky, lacy, feminine type. Rural manners, or the lack of, are given comic treatment in Gillian Grattan's "Hooked!" a comedic slice of rural life that's big on laughs with great performances offering an enjoyable, if never a memorable, night out.

Grattan's script always aims for laughs with some well-timed and very funny lines, but with few

really funny moments. Delivered as a series of monologues with short sequences of interaction, action is generally thin on the ground. Words do most of the work but are rarely funny or smart enough to make "Hooked!" into something memorable. What plot there is struggles to generate any real stakes and at moments, such as running to the river in the rain, stretches its own credibility. There's enough back story to make the characters interesting, with a healthy sprinkling of secrets and tragedies to offset the humour a little. Indeed at times "Hooked!" almost strays into something meaningful, touching on issues of domestic violence and the challenges of motherhood, but there's always a laugh to be had and "Hooked!" invariably heads off in that direction looking for the next funny line. By the time the end comes the resolutions are neatly trotted out, but they don't bear too much scrutiny.

Directed by Don Wycherley, proceedings get off to a slow start as characters sit rotating monologues. Visually things become much more interesting as they begin to interact and move about, but poor timing with lighting, bumpy transitions and long spells of sitting sapped the pace and energy a little. Wycherley's real strengths are as an actor's director and here he elicits three excellent performances from his three strong cast. Tina Kelleher as the acerbic Mary, scrutinizing everyone else's faults but her own, is terrific in her nastiness. Seána Kerlake as the struggling mother Lydia who makes all the men hot to trot, especially her neighbour Tom, is captivating and compelling. Steve Blount as the shy and set upon Tom, is absolutely fabulous every moment on stage, giving a masterclass performance. Indeed all three showed impeccable comic timing with laughs being generated as much by their excellent delivery as by Grattan's humorous lines.

Like Eugene O'Brien's excellent "Eden", "Hooked!" heightens the often vicious, back biting, insularity of a rural community told through interwoven monologues. Unlike "Eden," there's no real payoff. Its laughter may be shallow, but "Hooked!" is still enjoyable, due in no small measure to its three excellent performances.

"Hooked!" by Verdant Productions, at The Axis, Ballymun, September 26th goes on tour as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival on Tour

For information on tour dates, times and tickets visit [Dublin Theatre Festival](#)



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