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THEATER REVIEW | 'HOWIE THE ROOKIE'

## Blood, Guts and Poetic Words on the Mean Street Dublin

By [JASON ZINOMAN](#)

### Correction Appended

Some playwrights have an eye for detail. Mark O'Rowe has a nose for it. His band-and-guts-filled comic yarn "Howie the Rookie," a two-character play that received its New York premiere in an acclaimed but brief run at P.S. 122 in 2001, reeks of unpleasant smells wafting across the violent streets of working-class Dublin - body odors, pungent ointments, bad breath and several instances of passing gas. The play stinks - and that is high praise.

It is Mr. O'Rowe's rare gift to summon up an entire scene - even its scent - in a few choice words. Like his countryman Martin McDonagh ("The Pillowman") partial to baroque monologues climaxing in sudden, irresistible bursts of mayhem, "Howie," the best-known of his five plays, one gets the sense that there's always a crash on the way.

In the first of two monologues, the bruising lad Howie Lee (Mark Byrne) tells the story of his mission to beat up Rookie Lee (John O'Callaghan) - no relation - as a punishment for passing his scabies off on a friend's mattress. Rookie, who is having a very bad day, explains in the second monologue that he also owes money to the gangster Ladyboy, who, rumor has it, has three sets of teeth like a shark.

Mr. O'Callaghan, a gangly actor with floppy hair, plays Rookie with strutting cool. He nicely captures the play's black humor, mostly missing from the performance of Mr. Byrne, who seems much too tentative as the fearsome Howie.

While the play, which reveals the influence of David Mamet and Quentin Tarantino,