

An ingenious story of decay

LE SALON
TRAMWAY, GLASGOW
RUN ENDED
★★★★

A ONCE wealthy family disintegrates before our eyes in an increasingly shabby sitting room. As the materfamilias is taken away by a psychiatric nurse, shattered dreams, distorted fantasies and hard truths must be faced up to. The photographs on the walls speak to a sepia-toned nostalgia, the decaying decor and furniture look like a decomposing corpse.

Le Salon is a metaphorical contemplation on the post-imperial malaise of Belgium. Told through a combination of theatrical performance, dance, movement and song, the production, by Belgium's Peeping Tom company, offers a form of total theatre we see only rarely on the British stage.

The decrepit, ultimately incontinent patriarch (Simon Versnel) tries to hawk his absent mother's jewellery, in what is, surely, a powerful comment on privatisation. The precise and

symbolically discordant performance of mezzo-soprano Eurudike de Beul also contributes to the sense of decay. Her middle-aged character wanders the stage like a disconsolate faded glamour model, her ultra-sexuality now obscene, even to the oldest man in the house.

It is, however, the physical performances which provide the most memorable moments. A young man (the amazing Samuel Lefeuvre), strains every sinew in his body in what appears to be a hapless attempt at regeneration. A couple (Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier) with a young child kiss passionately, passing their little offspring between them. However, the baby is the only glue which keeps them together, and the young lovers succumb to the sourness of a family, and a society, which is rotting from the inside.

This is not, therefore, a production for Belgians nostalgic for the days when they ruled Congo, or, indeed, for British people with continuing dreams of empire. However it is an ingenious and affecting contemplation of European powers on the slide.