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Dramatic Publishing



AN IRISH PLAY

A Play in Three Acts

by

DAN O'BRIEN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(AN IRISH PLAY)

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A while drunk
A while mad
A while tearing harp-strings to shreds
Smoking tobacco, going insane;
This new fashion we practiced
And never will we part from it.

— *O'Carolan*

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Brown University Theatre, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, presented the premiere production of *An Irish Play* in April 1999. The production was directed by John Emigh and included the following artists:

CAST

Martha Connor SARAH COCUZZO PETERSIEL
Edward Deevey ANTONIO M. CABRAL
Declan O'Sullivan ADRIAN JEVICKI
Michael O'Shaughnessy DARIUS PIERCE
Cynthia Regan AVRIEL HILLMAN
Willie Boyle JOSH LANDAY
Joachim Sampson RUSS HAMMONDS

PRODUCTION STAFF and CREW

Set and Lighting Design / Sound Engineer JOHN R. LUCAS
Costume Design ANN SMITH
Technical Direction WILLIAM C. ROCHE
Stage Manager MADELINE DIAZ
Assistant Stage Managers JENNY GASKINS,
ANA CARMEN MARTINEZ-ORTIZ
Assistant Technical Director DAVID P. CROWLEY
Technical Assistants SANDY BARRACK,
JONATHAN DOUGHTY, REBECCA LEE, BEN SAMUELS
Dialect Work THOMAS CONWAY
Box Office Manager / Publicity KAREN LONGEST

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Biographical Note:

Brian Boru was born in 941 A.D. in Thomond near present-day Limerick. After the murder of his brother, Brian became king of Thomond in 976 and embarked on a campaign of intimidation, eventually "uniting" Ireland under his solitary rule. In 1002 he crowned himself high king of Ireland, instructing his scribes to sign his name "Brian Imperatoris Scotorum," or "Brian, Emperor of the Irish." The remaining years of his life were dedicated to fighting the Danes of Limerick and the Norse of Dublin.

On Good Friday in 1014, at the age of seventy-three, while his armies were engaged with the Norse outside Dublin at the Battle of Clontarf (a battle they eventually won), Brian was murdered in his tent by a Norse assassin known as Brodar the Black Dane, a Viking reputedly skilled in black magic. After Brian's death, Ireland once more fell into widespread political disorganization and clan warfare, leaving itself open to future colonization.

Brian Boru remains to this day a quasi-mythical figure, his story taught to children as both a Celtic hero and a Christian martyr.

AN IRISH PLAY

A Play in Three Acts
For 5 Men and 2 Women

CHARACTERS

MARTHA Connor the stage manager, 30s
EDWARD Deevey the director, 40s
DECLAN O'Sullivan an actor, early 20s
MICHAEL O'Shaughnessy ... an actor and playwright, 40s
CYNTHIA Regan an actor, 40s
WILLIE Boyle an actor, 60s
JOACHIM Sampson an actor, 20s

TIME: Early autumn, the present.

PLACE: A pub-theatre in Cork City, Ireland.

One interior unit set.

Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes.

For my father

ACT ONE

SETTING: *The lobby of a pub-theatre in Cork City, early evening, autumn. A bar dominates the upstage area, with three beers on tap: Heinekin, Murphy's, and another Murphy's. Behind the bar some shelves with liquor, bags of peanuts, crisps. The bar itself is cluttered with dirty glasses, ashtrays with cigarette butts, old programs and other refuse; this mess could be days or weeks old.*

The walls are papered with posters of past productions—mostly Irish and English writers (Synge, Yeats, Beckett, Wilde, Keane, Friel), though a few of more recent date read Miller, Williams, Mamet, Simon, etc. Portraits of directors, benefactors, and photographs from past productions hang on these walls as well.

There's an old pay phone inside a closet, L of the bar. R of the bar and set in the upstage wall, a doorway opens onto a stairwell and down to an alleyway; an unlit exit sign hangs above this doorway. DL, another door opens to a narrow spiral stair that climbs presumably to dressing rooms and bathrooms. DR, a set of double doors: "Quiet Please! Performance in Progress!" has been scrawled on a scrap of paper and taped to these doors.

A few low tables line the walls L and R, with maybe a dozen stools scattered about. The table tops are grimy and the stool-cushions worn.

There is one large and dirty window in the L wall that looks out on the alleyway; a lit sign outside reads, "Alley Club Theatre," the acronym "A.C.T." emphasized.

It's raining, of course.

As lights rise, MARTHA enters with a thoroughly closed umbrella which she quickly ducks behind the bar. She moves to a downstage table to unpack her hefty handbag. First, she takes out a script. Then something that looks like a journal or a sketchbook; a clipboard, a felt-tip pen (red); ten newly sharpened pencils bound with rubber band; a large bag of cheese'n' onion Taytos, a larger bag still of tortilla chips, a canister of Pringles.

She arranges these provisions on the table in front of her, then takes an empty glass out of her purse, a can of Coke and a large bottle of vodka, and fixes herself a drink. She opens her bag of crisps, eats a few. With only the slightest hesitation, she opens the script and begins to read.

ED enters from outside carrying an identical script—his perhaps a little worse for wear. He's wearing an old sweatshirt that reads "Alley Club Theatre," Greek tragic'n'comic masks screen-printed across his substantial gut. He hangs up his leather jacket, then, shaking himself dry, moves for the bar.

ED *(pulling himself a pint).* So? What do you think?

MARTHA. The truth?

ED. Would I ask for anything but?

MARTHA. Shite.

ED. Yeah...?

MARTHA. Complete and utter shite.

ED. Go away—

MARTHA. Shite on every page, can hardly get the pages unstuck.

ED. Ah now, Martha. You're just being kind.

MARTHA. Would I do that to you?

ED. That and worse. —What's wrong with it so?

MARTHA. It's fake. It's not the real thing. How can your man pretend to write a play about Ireland when he's from—(*inspects front of script*)—Detroit? Where is Detroit anyway? —Is that in New York?

ED. No, it's not in New York. Detroit is very far away from New York. It's in California. And besides we don't even know if he's from Detroit. That's just where he lives.

MARTHA. And how many people immigrate to Detroit, I wonder?

ED. Depends on where you're immigrating from.

MARTHA. Either way I don't think our man Mr. "Morton Lichtstein" is Irish, if you know what I mean.

ED. Ah well, there's no need to go anti-Semite on me now.

MARTHA. Anti-Semite? Me? I happen to be part-Jewish, if you must know.

ED. And which part is that?

MARTHA. A part you'll never see. I call it "the Gaza Strip." —What's wrong?

ED. What?

MARTHA. You look different.

ED. Are you hitting on me now, girl?

MARTHA. Have you lost weight?

ED. Since Tuesday? Do I look like I've lost weight?

MARTHA. . . . Christ! You're not smoking!

ED. Always had a keen eye, Martha. Keenest of keen. —The wife says I can't have the boy on the weekends if I don't.

MARTHA. She can do that to you?

ED. That and worse.

MARTHA. Well it'll be healthier for you in the end.

ED. Fuck do I care if it's healthy for me? I'm doing it for the boy. *(He moves to the stage doors, takes down the "Performance in Progress" sign, flips it over and writes on the back: "No Smoking.")*

MARTHA. We'll see how long that lasts.

ED. Don't start. . . . *(ED returns to his pint.)*

MARTHA. Why can't we do a comedy, Ed?

ED. It is a comedy. It's not funny like the tellie. It's funny like real life. Complicated like.

MARTHA. I know about real life.

ED. I know you do.

MARTHA. Are you saying I don't know about real life—?

ED. I'm not saying anything about you, Martha. I'm talking about the play—

MARTHA. Why doesn't Morton Lichtstein ring me up if he wants to know a thing or two about "real life"—I'll give him something to write about. This *(she drops her script)* is wank.

ED. Martha: Think of all the shite we've done in here. All the John B. Keane—all the Brits—you think we would've grown out of that by now. So what if your man whatchacallit is American? There aren't many plays about us, about who we really are, unless we're danc-

ing our toes off up in Donnegal, drinking poitín and puking poetry on our deathbed.

MARTHA. This play isn't about us.

ED. Who's it about so?

MARTHA. Brian Boru. That's the most boring idea for a play I've ever heard. —Who cares about Brian Boru! You might as well do a play about Saint Patrick.

ED. We might as well, Martha! We might as well do a play about Saint Patrick. Brian Boru and Saint Paddy and Mick Collins even are all alive and well right here in our so-called progressive country today and we don't even know it! From the moment we're born we're taught: "Brian Boru, Emperor of the Irish, united Ireland a thousand years after the birth of Christ saved Christianity from the pagans fought to push the Vikings out of Ireland—(*a deep breath*)—and would have succeeded were he not so cruelly murdered in the black of his tent on Good Friday in the year of our Lord 1014." . . . Christ, it's like a litany! The Martyr, holy or not—it's in our fucking genes. That's what this play's about.

MARTHA. Genetics?

ED. It's dignified. I can bring my son to this play and not have to cover his ears.

MARTHA. You'll have to cover his mouth, he'll be snoring through the whole fucking thing.

ED. —If you don't want to do it, don't do it! I can get another stage manager, the place is thick with them. Don't give me your grief on this, Martha. . . .

MARTHA. I didn't say I wouldn't do it. . . .

ED. What were you saying so?

MARTHA. I was taking the piss like. You know I was just taking the piss, Ed. Of course I'll be your stage manager! What else would I be doing on a Saturday night?

ED. Charging fifty quid for around the world.

MARTHA. Fuck off with you! (*Slight pause.*) . . . Where's Rebecca?

ED. Don't know.

MARTHA. You don't know where she is?

ED. That's what I said.

MARTHA. You live with her.

ED. I'm not her fucking husband.

MARTHA. Is she coming?

ED. I cast her, if that's what you mean. She's in the play. I just don't know if she's coming tonight, that's all.

MARTHA. Who else is coming?

ED. Well, there's Willie Boyle, for one.

MARTHA. Willie Boyle?

ED. Willie Boyle, Willie Boyle. —What's wrong with Willie Boyle?

MARTHA. If you don't know—

ED. He's a killer actor, and he's the right age.

MARTHA. He's a drunk.

ED. Not anymore he's not. He's back with his wife.

MARTHA. His wife's got breast cancer.

ED. So?

MARTHA. So nothing. Statement of fact: Willie's wife's breasts got cancer.

ED. I don't know anything about Willie's wife's breasts. All I know is he can act.

MARTHA. If he's not puking in the jacks.

ED. —Now did you see *Taming of the whatchacallit*?

MARTHA. Which one did he play?

ED. Don't know, the whatchacallit.

MARTHA. Thanks, Ed.

ED. He was very good.

MARTHA. I did not see that particular whatchacallit.

ED. Well it's not like we're paying any of them. We can't expect Aidan Quinn to come waltzing in up off the street, begging for a part in *The Death of King Brian*.

MARTHA. I wish he would.

ED. You can keep your knickers on, girl, he's not coming.

MARTHA. I'm not wearing any knickers. You should know that if I'm to be your stage manager.

ED. —Did I mention Michael's in the play?

MARTHA. What do you mean by that?

ED. Only what I said. I cast him.

MARTHA. As what?

ED. "The Sleeping Boy."

MARTHA. Christ, that's a laugh!

ED. He's meant to stay up the night guarding Brian Boru from attack, but instead he falls asleep, paving the way for our whatchacallit, our Viking assassin who comes upon Brian in his tent and decapitates—

MARTHA. I know the fucking story!

ED. He's sort of a Greek chorus in the play. Michael's very good at exposition, don't you think? He's very good with words in general. He's got something about his face that makes him look more innocent than most.

MARTHA. There's nothing innocent about Michael O'Shaughnessy.

ED. Are you speaking from experience now, girl?

MARTHA. From observation. He's a wife and four kids and he's running around with anything remotely capable of lactation.

ED. I think you're jealous.

MARTHA. Jealous? Ha! . . . What have you heard?

ED. Only what's been coming out your mouth.

MARTHA. We're not playing around, if that's what you mean. He treats me like a sister—better than a sister, because some nuns are lucky enough to get flahed once in a while. When I was a girl, sure. Boys would take me to Blarney Castle, up in the dark, in the tower, with nothing but a flashlight. . . . *(Slight pause.)* Of course I've had a few lovers since. In far-flung places. Tahiti. . . . Of course, Michael's wife thinks we're having an affair! On account of all the talking we do, on the phone, mind you. Talk about poetry, artistic talk. She can't understand how a man and a woman can be friends without the sex involved. But we understand, don't we, Ed? *(She refills her glass with vodka and Coke.)* —Who else?

ED. Cynthia Regan.

MARTHA. Slut.

ED. Watch yourself, girl!

MARTHA. She is a slutty slut!

ED. I think Cynthia Regan is very whatchacallit, very sexy.

MARTHA. You would, you find psychosis appealing in women.

ED. As long as they've got big tits.

MARTHA. They often go hand in hand, psychosis and big tits.

ED. What have you got against Cynthia? She's a very good actor.

MARTHA. Oh aye, I see how she acts—around men. I see it because I'm a woman: Cynthia Regan is the kind of a woman who will never be friends with another woman because all she ever sees in them is competition. You

watch her, when she comes in: It doesn't matter which man, it only matters that they find her sexier than any other woman in the room. (*Pause.*) She's empty inside. (*Pause.*) I feel sorry for her.

ED. I didn't cast her because she was empty or full inside.

MARTHA. You cast her because of her tits.

ED. Correct.

MARTHA. Who's she playing so?

ED. The banshee.

MARTHA. Banshee? Yeah...? Always knew she was a screamer.

ED. It's not a substantial part, Martha. She appears to Brian in his tent—

MARTHA. Wearing nothing but a g-string—

ED. On the night of his death to warn him of his impending murder. It's a lot like *Macbeth*—

MARTHA. Shh!

ED. Oh, for Christ's sake, Martha. It's just a word.

MARTHA. Just a word—? Nothing is just a word!

ED. Would you rather I called it "The Scottish Play"? What a load of bollocks. Mac—are you nervous? I'm going to say it: Mac-Mac-Ma—! **MACBETH!**

MARTHA. Very funny. I wouldn't be surprised if you summoned Satan himself tonight and cursed our entire theatrical endeavor. (*ED gets up for another pint.*) Have you given Declan any thought?

ED. Speaking of Satan...

MARTHA. Did you cast him? —He needs a break, Ed. That boy is desperate for a good turn.

ED. He's fun to have around, I'll give you that, but there's something wrong with him. He's not a happy boy. He thinks life is a play, and he can't figure out why no

one's given him the lead yet. (*He returns from the bar.*)

And on top of that, he's not a very good actor.

MARTHA. What are you talking about? He's got brilliant timing!

ED. Not every play is a panto.

MARTHA. He's young. He reminds me of you, when you were that age.

ED. I could hit you for that.

MARTHA. You liked his father alright. We all did.

ED. Yeah, but Declan's father was a very different man.

He had a vision, ambition. —This was a whorehouse, if you remember.

MARTHA. I remember—

ED. And Frances O'Sullivan came in here and built some whatchacallit, some culture. He cast me in my first play, *Glass Menagerie*, 1974, and today I'm on the board of fucking directors.

MARTHA. Return the favor. Give Declan a part.

ED. Already did. Had to. Nobody else auditioned.

(*MARTHA opens her script and makes a note.*)

MARTHA. You won't be sorry: Declan O'Sullivan... Brodar, the Black Dane, Viking assassin extraordinaire.

ED. No, Declan's got a smaller part. He's Brian Boru's son.

MARTHA. —Who's playing Brodar so?

(*DECLAN enters, shaking himself dry. He's wearing jeans and a flannel and carrying a black gym bag which he slams down upon the bar.*)