The Beauty Queen of Leenane

by Martin McDonagh

Theatre Pro Rata
January 8-24
Performing at Park Square Theatre
Andy Boss Thrust Stage
The Beauty Queen of Leenane
The time: the early 1990s. The place: Leenane, a small village in County Galway, in the west of Ireland. Maureen Folan, a middle-aged woman, shares a cottage with her aging mother. The two women have a fractious relationship that moves into an even more dramatic phase when Pato Dooley returns from London to his home town and Maureen senses the possibility of both love and escape. This darkly comic melodrama, which tweaks many conventions of Irish drama, was first performed in 1996 at the Druid Theatre in Galway. Shortly thereafter, it transferred to the Royal Court in London. McDonagh was named the “most promising newcomer” at the George Devine Awards at the end of 1996. The play opened on Broadway in 1999, where it was nominated for four Tony Awards.


Martin McDonagh

Martin McDonagh was born in London in 1970; both his parents were from Ireland, and he spent many summer holidays visiting his parents’ families in Galway and Sligo. He quit school in 1986, and worked at a variety of jobs in the late 1980s; he began writing in the 1990s, creating short stories, films, and radio plays before trying his hand at stage plays. Garry Hynes, Director of Galway’s Druid Theatre, read the three plays of The Leenane Trilogy (Beauty Queen, A Skull in Connemara, and The Lonesome West) in 1996 and immediately optioned them; all three were produced and toured by the Druid Theatre. His other plays include: The Cripple of Inishmaan, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, The Pillowman, A Behanding in Spokane, and most recently Hangmen, which opened in London in fall 2015. In 2005, he wrote and directed a short film, Six Shooter, which won an Oscar for best short film. In 2008, he wrote and directed the feature film In Bruges, for which he was nominated for the best original screenplay Oscar. His second feature film, Seven Psychopaths, was released in 2012.

More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_McDonagh
September 2015 interview:
McDonough’s language

“McDonagh has spoken occasionally about his use of Irish speech, and has always seemed keen to emphasise its artificiality . . . ‘I wanted to develop some kind of dialogue style as strange and heightened as [Mamet and Pinter’s],’ he told Fintan O’Toole shortly before the premiere of The Leenane Trilogy. But that style needed to be ‘twisted in some way so the influence wasn’t as obvious . . . And then I sort of remembered the way my uncles spoke back in Galway, the structure of their sentences. I didn’t think of it as structure, just as a kind of rhythm in the speech. And that seemed an interesting way to go, to try to do something with that language that wouldn’t be English or American.’”

Patrick Lonergan, The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh (2012)

Leenane, Galway, Ireland (http://leenane.galway-ireland.ie)

The beautiful village of Leenane, snugly situated at the head of Killary Harbour, is often aptly described as the ‘Gateway to Connemara’. The roads from Maam, Clifden, and Westport meet at this point. Killary Harbour extends ten miles inland and with the mountains rising steeply on either side provides
what is probably the best scenery in Ireland. Walkers have access to Mweelrea, Sheefry, Partry and Maumturk Mountains.

Just what is Mag eating and drinking?

Kimberley Biscuits (from http://www.cooksinfo.com/kimberley-biscuits)

A Kimberley Biscuit is a biscuit (cookie, to North Americans) made by the Jacobs company and sold primarily in Ireland.

A Kimberley consists of two small, brown round biscuits that are mildly-ginger flavored and quite soft, with a soft marshmallow filling in between them. There is a crust of sugar granules on the edge of the marshmallow filling. Some people don't like the texture of the biscuit. They compare it to wet MDF board in texture, and taste, and think that they must have been sold a pack that was stored poorly.

Chocolate Kimberley Biscuits are coated in chocolate and called a Chocolate Kimberley. They are individually wrapped and don't have the sugar granules on the marshmallow (which is coated in chocolate, instead.) These chocolate ones used to only appear at Christmas. Now, they are sold year round. The chocolate ones don't make for good dunking biscuits, as the chocolate coating keeps the tea away from the inside.
A powdered milk energy drink.

Critical comments

“McDonagh’s Ireland is postmodern in its grotesque exaggeration, in its isolation in a globalized world, and in its knowing nods and winks at Irish culture. The fragmentation of modern society, implies McDonagh, encourages violence: people lash out because they no longer control their lives.”


[on Mag and Maureen]

“Although mother and daughter speak to each other in a form of shorthand, and they seem set in their ways, there is a very strong sense of something additional going on evident in how they speak to each other, as if it is the unsaid that binds them but also keeps them apart. This strange blend of interdependence, loyalty, dutifulness, excessive expectation, deceitfulness, harassment and guilt creates a good deal of frustration and negative reward for both parties.”


“. . . the country in which McDonagh’s play is set is pre-modern and postmodern at the same time. The 1950s is laid over the 1990s, giving the play’s apparent realism the ghostly, dizzying feel of a superimposed photograph. All the elements that make up the picture are real, but their combined effect is one that questions the very idea of reality.”

Fintan O’ Toole, *Irish Times*, 6 February 1996