

Outside Mullingar by John Patrick Shanley

New Zealand Première
7–28 February

Outside Mullingar.

By John Patrick Shanley



*Heart breaking, funny as
hell and deeply moving.*

School Resource Guide

Outside Mullingar

By John Patrick Shanley

Directed by Lisa Warrington

A word from Artistic Director, Lara Macgregor

John Patrick Shanley's play touched me on first reading. It is all the descriptives say it is – touching, funny and poetic. I felt the need to programme a love story to begin the year, but more importantly a tangible, real story that has the ability to speak honestly to our hearts.

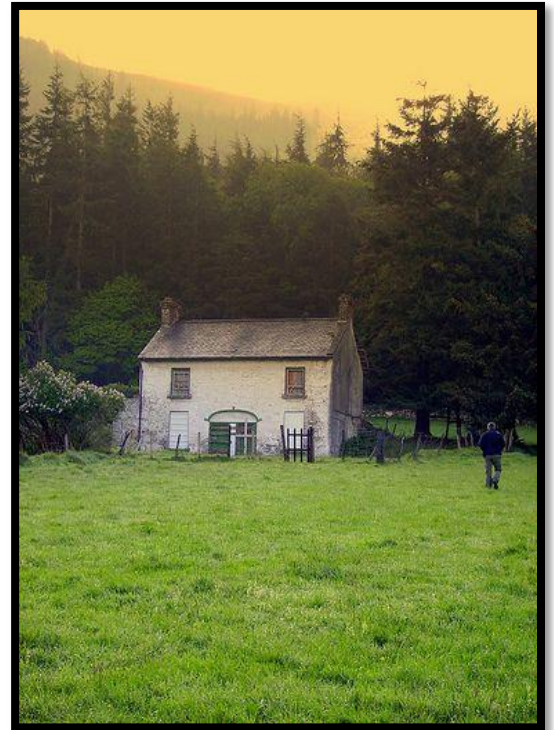
John Patrick Shanley himself says about the play, "It's about morality and love; the keen knowledge of the limited about of time you have to accomplish what you want in this world. And if what you want to accomplish is a truly loving, successful relationship it requires a certain amount of time and failure."

It's one thing to read the play of course, and another to play it, but thankfully Lisa Warrington's keen and tender eye has kept us true to the nuance of this script. It's a privilege to return to my acting roots for the first time on Fortune's stage, and to be working alongside Geraldine Brophy, Simon O'Connor and Phil Vaughan.

May *Outside Mullingar* touch your heart in ways you weren't expecting.

Arohanui,
Lara

Lara Macgregor as Rosemary with Phil Vaughan as Anthony



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Please contact me at education@fortunetheatre.co.nz with any thoughts, questions and feedback or if you are interested in becoming a Fortune School Ambassador.

Shannon Colbert
Education Liaison Officer



John Patrick Shanley



Nicknamed “the Bard of the Bronx”, John Patrick Shanley was born there in 1950 into an Irish-American family, his father a meat-packer and his mother a telephone operator. His early experiences in the Catholic education system were not auspicious. He was “thrown out of St Helena’s kindergarten, banned from St Anthony’s hot lunch programme and expelled from Cardinal Spellman High School” (though at the latter he did see productions of *The Miracle Worker* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* and these made an impression on him). Having completed his schooling at the Catholic-aligned private Thomas Moore preparatory school in New Hampshire, he then enrolled at New York University but left after a year to join the Marines, at the time engaged in the Vietnam War (though Shanley himself remained State-side).

After the war he had poetry published and wrote and destroyed a novel before returning to NYU from which he graduated as valedictorian in 1977 with an Honours degree in Educational Theatre.

Shanley made his theatrical debut as a writer on the off-off-Broadway fringe with programmes of sketches and short one-act plays such as *Saturday Night at the War* (1978) and *Welcome to the Moon* (1982). Of the 21 plays which have followed and been staged in medium-scale off-Broadway theatres the best known are a quartet involving relationships between working class Irish and Italian Americans (*Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* (1983), *Savage in Limbo* (1984), *The Dreamer Examines his Pillow* (1985), and *Italian American Reconciliation* (1986)), his satires on Hollywood’s production processes (*Four Dogs and a Bone* (1993)) and psychology (*Psychopathia Sexualis* (1998)), and the trilogy about the intersection of race, religion and ethics which commenced with his best known piece and Broadway debut, *Doubt* (Tony Award Best Play 2004), and was completed with *Defiance* (2005) and *Storefront Church* (2012). He

wrote the book and lyrics for the Henry (*Dreamgirls*) Kreiger musical, *Romantic Poetry* (2007) and the libretto for the C. Douglas Cuomo opera version of *Doubt* (2012).

In the cinema he is best known for his Academy Award winning screenplay, *Moonstruck* (1987), and for the 2008 movie version of *Doubt* which he directed from his own script (which won the Writers’ Guild of America Best Screenplay Award and an Oscar nomination). Other writing or adapting work for Hollywood includes *Five Corners* (1987), *The January Man* (1989), *Joe v the Volcano* (1990, also directed), *Alive* (1993), *Congo* (1995) and *We’re Back: A Dinosaur’s Story*. For television he wrote the Emmy-nominated script for HBO’s *View from Baghdad* (1992).

Outside Mullingar sees Shanley returning to the plot situation of several of his early works (protagonists struggling to establish a relationship) but this time he locates the story in Ireland, one of the few occasions he has used a setting other than American metropolises. The play premiered on Broadway on 23 January 2014, running until 16 March at the Samuel J. Friedman Theater in a production by the Manhattan Theater Club which starred Brian F. O’Byrne and Debra Messing and was nominated for the Best Play Tony Award.

Alister McDonald
(Fortune Theatre Dramaturg)

John Patrick Shanley’s message to us

I’m thrilled that *Outside Mullingar* will find life in New Zealand! I’ve had the good fortune to spend time with some New Zealanders, and know their humour, which is similar to my own, and to my Irish kin. It is a dry sharp sensibility, masking a warm heart.

I’m glad that via my play, I will get to visit with you!
My very best,

John Patrick Shanley

Turns Out His Blood
Runs Green

John Patrick Shanley on His Irishness and 'Outside Mullingar'

JAN. 9, 2014

I never wanted to write about the Irish.

When I got out of the Marine Corps in 1972, I was invited to a lunch of Irish-American writers. At a table of perhaps 10, I was conspicuously underaccomplished. I'd been brought along by my old professor Terry Moran (he was perhaps 37), because I was a poet. At the table, among others, were James T. Farrell and Jimmy Breslin. Farrell had 50 books to his credit, including, most famously, the Studs Lonigan trilogy. Breslin had reinvented blue-collar New York and maybe journalism.

I had a good time. Breslin held forth about Nixon. Around dessert, Farrell, who had downed several brandies, burst into tears, pointed at me, and said, "He's the one we should be helping." I tried to look less in need.

A waiter appeared. There was a call. It was my then wife, Joan. I'd just gotten an acceptance letter. Two of my poems were going to be published. I was 22.



John Patrick Shanley, author of the new "Outside Mullingar," on a relative's farmland in Ireland. Credit - Doug Hughes

Heading home on the F train to Brooklyn, I thought about what I wanted to do, big picture. And I decided right then, I didn't want to be helped, and I didn't want to be labeled an Irish-American writer. I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write about everybody. And for the next 30 years I did. I became a playwright and screenwriter. Italian-Americans were my particular specialty. I liked the way they talked. There was something free in it. This attraction resulted in plays and films with titles like "Italian American Reconciliation" and "Moonstruck," and not a lot of jobs for Irish-American actors.

I always knew I'd have to come home eventually. I'm Irish as hell: Kelly on one side, Shanley on the other. My father had been born on a farm in the Irish Midlands. He and his brothers had been shepherds there, cattle and sheep, back in the early 1920s. I grew up surrounded by brogues and Irish music, but stayed away from the old country till I was over 40. I just couldn't own being Irish.

Something in me hated being confined by an ethnic identity, by any family. In addition, I have often found procrastination to be

an enriching exercise. Not saying increases what I have to say. Not writing about the Irish was building up a hell of a lot of pressure to do just that.

When I finally went to Ireland, I had to go. It was 1993. My father was finally too old to travel alone, and he asked me to take him home. When an old man asks you to take him home, you have to do it.

When I sat with my father in that farm kitchen, the one that he had grown up in, and listened to my Irish family talk, I recognized that this was my Atlantis, the lost and beautiful world of my poet's heart. There was no way to write about the farm, yet I had to write about it. I listened to the amazing language these folks were speaking as if it were normal conversation, and I knew this was my territory. But it was new to me. It was a time to listen, not to write.

It took about 20 years. When I turned 60 and flipped out (the number, the guy in the mirror with gray hair), I felt I had nothing left to say or do. I wanted to go on vacation some place warm for the rest of my life. I was miserable, dead barren and solitary. I moved to an apartment in Williamsburg where I could see the sun and the river.

My parents were dead now. It was just me and the river and the sun and time. A year went by. One quiet day, I sat down without a thought in my head and wrote a play about the farm.



From left, Anthony Shanley (the playwright's Irish cousin), with the director Doug Hughes and John Patrick Shanley, in County Westmeath. Credit - Scott Laule

The farm had become a place in my imagination where I had stored up so many things. My love for my father was there. Feelings of grief. My romantic hunger, my frustration with this unpoetic world. I had held back much for a long time, and I kind of erupted with language. I felt free suddenly, free to be Irish. Family stories, family names, changed by dreaming, mixed with my own long longings for love, and impossible happiness unfurled across the page. I had turned 60, and the knife at my throat woke me to the beauty of my own people, the fleeting opportunities of life, the farce of caution. I wanted to write a love story. I wanted to find *all* the words I had not been able to find because what I have been unable to express has caused me anguish, even as what I have given adequate voice has lent me peace.

I found a strange relief in the play. I called it "Outside Mullingar," a prosaic title perhaps to balance the poetry it contained. The script was a refuge and a consolation for me. Manhattan Theater Club signed on to do it, and we put a team together.

I decided to return to the farm and bring my son Nick. He drove me, as I had driven my father. He was taking me home now. And then the director, Doug Hughes, said, "I'm going to Ireland, too." And the designer, John Lee Beatty, said, "I'm coming as well, and bringing my partner." I announced I would make a documentary. (I always go too far.) My son, who's a photography major at Parsons, was drafted as cinematographer. And, of course, we never got around to that, but that's O.K.

My cousin Anthony was not perfectly delighted that I had written a play set on his farm and that the main character was named Anthony. And he was openly terrified when all these theater folk piled out of a couple of cars to photograph his home and *him*. But his good manners got the best of him, and he made us tea. Doug, exhibiting his considerable social skills, talked Anthony into a state of relative comfort, and we had a good chat. After, we went into the fields where my father had grown to manhood among the cattle, in the quietly overwhelming green fields.

I knew I was imposing. That is the artist's way. We take the real and

refashion it to our purpose. The desire is strong, and reality must give way. Anthony, me, my father, the farm, all of these things, my Uncle Tony, my Aunt Mary, all things animate and otherwise, existed only as materials for my use. I had a home being born in me, and I had to build it before the dream faded. I had written the play, but now, being on the farm, I held the script like tracing paper over the real and looked for gold in the differences. There was gold.

It was a strange week. Nothing was real to me, not the play nor this world as it is. I stumbled forward with a kind of double vision. The Irish side of my family is a patient lot and endured my interviews with grace. They trusted me, and they didn't. They knew I wouldn't be telling the truth about them. I'd be telling my own truth, using them. They watched as my designers photographed their stoves and sheds, their cattle and mangers.

I came back to New York and went into rehearsal. As the actors and director took the play, I watched the world I'd created leave me and felt the supreme loneliness of that. For a moment though, through the spell of storytelling, I had a home. I was Irish. And then the moment faded. That's how it is with writers. We keep getting evicted from our own imaginations. We are wanderers, dreaming, and then our dreams become real and push us out.

The play opens in New York shortly. The lights will rise on a farmhouse kitchen in rural Ireland. If things go well, my long-time traveling companions, the audience, will share with me something of my Uncle Tony, my Aunt Mary and my cousin Anthony. I'm glad.



John Patrick Shanley in New York

An extract from

John Patrick Shanley Talks About Love, Loss and His Latest Play Outside Mullingar.

By Marilyn Cole Lownes,
April / May 2014
Irish America

... Going back to *Outside Mullingar*, he says, “I enjoyed writing this play more than most of my plays. I finally had the permission to use all of the language available to me.”

He opines, “You can only write as well as the characters can talk. In other words, if you are writing about a middle-class guy in New York City he’s just not that eloquent. On the other hand, if you are writing about an Irish farmer, these are some of the most eloquent people in the world. And you have the permission because of that, you have *carte blanche* to write as well as you know how, as funny as you know how, and as sad and

true as you know how, because those people talk just that way.”

Describing a scene in the play when Anthony’s father Tony Reilly lays dying and summons his son to his bedside, one critic enthused that “the dying scene alone is worth the price of a ticket.”

“My uncle Tony,” confirms Shanley, “before he passed away, he called all his children to his bed and shook their hands one by one and said goodbye to them. These [leavetakings] actually can happen. They did and they can. It’s up to us,” he insists.

“I had an extraordinary father. When he was dying I got to say everything I had ever hoped to say to him. I had tears running down my face and he had tears running down his and I kissed him goodbye.

“This play is not only descriptive, it’s prescriptive,” Shanley continues. “In other words, we still could have these values. We still could live this way. We could still talk this way. It’s about what I love, what I value about being alive, what I think is worth passing on to my children. It’s about what makes families function rather than fall to pieces.”

These are very important ideas to Shanley but they are not necessarily Irish.

“I don’t know if it’s very Irish. A lot of different things happened in Ireland. The subjugation of the Irish by the British caused emotional repression, which is a curse that many Irish people still suffer from,” says Shanley. “It’s very difficult for them to say they love each other. The British were very controlling of Irish behavior in many ways; they even had edicts against poets. They took away the Irish language because they couldn’t understand what the people were saying. They were afraid of insurrection.

“[Put that together] with the priests who considered dancing provocative, and only allowed step dancing with arms stiff at the sides, because they were afraid of wild emotions.

“It’s no wonder that the Irish find it difficult to be tactile. Whereas with the Italians ‘it’s all out there,’ Shanley says. “When I was an altar boy, the Italian funerals were the most dangerous; invariably an Italian woman would go running down the aisle and throw herself on the coffin, screaming, ‘Don’t leave me!’ That would never happen at an Irish funeral,” he offers.

“With *Outside Mullingar* I wanted to write a love story,” Shanley explains. “I wanted to find all the words I had not been able to find, because what I have been unable to express has caused me anguish.

“If words fail people that is a painful meridian. If there is something in you that you cannot express it feels like a failing.”

And did his family react well to Shanley writing a play about them?

"My cousin Brendan said that when he was watching the play he felt like he was watching his parents. He wrote to me afterwards and said, 'Thank you for bringing my mother and father back from the dead.'"

And Anthony, on whom the main character is based, how did he react?

"My cousin Anthony read the play but he couldn't leave the farm to come over and see it. He has eighty animals to look after."

At the suggestion that perhaps the real reason for Anthony's absence on opening night was the fact that he might not be too thrilled that the character named Anthony in the play is not only a middle-aged virgin, but also a man who thinks he is a honey bee, Shanley smiles.

"I have no idea if Anthony is a virgin or not. As artists we take the real and refashion it to our purpose. The Irish side of my family is a patient lot and endured my interviews with grace. They trusted me, and they didn't. They knew I wouldn't be telling the truth about them. I'd be telling my own truth, using them. This is the artist's way," he insists.

"There is no impediment in writing about my family. The only play of mine I didn't want my two boys to see was *Where's My Money?* because I thought the subject was too dark for them at that age." (It was around the time Shanley and his second wife, Jane Haynes, were divorcing.) "As a writer you have to say what you nakedly feel, more for yourself than for other

people. For your own sake you must not gag yourself."

Asked about the last scene when Anthony tells Rosemary that he thinks he's a honey bee, Shanley explains, "There's a point in many plays, usually in the last scene when a secret is revealed that ties it all together. In Eugene O' Neill's *Iceman Cometh* it's when Hickey reveals that he gave his wife venereal disease, then murdered her, which is a bit extreme.

"In my play Anthony's secret was personal and eccentric. I based his secret on a true Irish story about a rich local man called Adolphus Cooke. Back in the 19th century, Adolphus thought he was a bee and had a forty-foot tomb built for himself in the shape of a beehive. It's very famous in Mullingar, there's even a disco named after it called 'The Beehive!'

"I'm surprised that none of the critics picked up on this," Shanley laughs. "We hold on to secrets because we feel we could not be loved if we reveal them and it's often the opposite in life, as it turned out for Anthony in the play."

Referring to a statement he made about being frustrated by "this unpoetic world," Shanley says, "So many people don't make the effort these days to express themselves. There is a

prosaic style with no particular way of fashioning language.

"In Doubt, I could write about Sister Aloysius in the way that I did because the nuns who taught me spoke very well."

Why do you think this loss of expression has happened. Can we attribute it to technology?

"It's because people are increasingly cut off from the earth," he says. "In the play Anthony says, 'Stars are suffocating in the sky and the earth is choking on itself.'"

"We have a shattered attention span today," Shanley says. "Peaceful contemplation of looking at the sun, at animals and fields, makes us more grounded. We are losing that way of life. The countryside is disappearing."

What is Shanley's current state of mind? Is he happier now that the play is doing well?

"Something happened to me this week," he announces seriously. "Roomba came into my life."

A new romance?

"Roomba is my robotic cleaner," laughs Shanley. "She even talks to me! Anthony has his metal detector on the farm, and now I have Roomba, my own 'modern madness!'"

<http://wp.tdf.org/index.php/2014/01/outside-mullingar-brian-f-obyrne/>



The Darkness of an Irish Morning

By JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY
New York Times, Opinion
Pages. March 8, 2013

MY father came from Ireland and he had the gift of the gab. Part of the reason the Irish developed the gift of the gab was simple. They lived on an island. They had to get along. Not that they did get along. But they had to try. So a style of speaking developed that allowed them to say awful things. With charm. I am not Irish. I am Irish-American. Some say I have the gift as well. If I do, it is because I listened to my father and my uncles and some of my aunts as they gave as good as they got in my living room in the Bronx. On many's the Saturday night, they would drink rye and ginger ale, and smoke and talk and sing and dance, and I would sing, too, and dance with my aunts, and listen through the blue air. And because I listened to so much talk and so much music, perhaps I was spared somehow from the truly unfortunate fate of being an uneloquent Irish-American. My father played a very particular accordion. It had his name spelled out in rhinestones, and emblazoned over his name, the crossed flags of Ireland and America, also in rhinestones. It was a wedding present from somebody, grandparents I think. All my grandparents were Irish and had died before I was born, so they melded in my mind into a kind of

This article is used as the Introduction in the script used for the Fortune production.

monolithic ancient green mush. My father played many Irish songs on this squeezebox, and Elvis Presley's "Love Me Tender." When he sang it, it was the most Irish song of all. When I went to Ireland for the first time, in 1993, I was 42. My father was in his late 80s, and I went with him to visit the family farm outside the village of Killucan, near the town of Mullingar, in County Westmeath. I had just gotten my New York driver's license a few weeks before, and I was a hideous driver. I had to drive for 100 miles on the wrong side of the road. Periodically, my father would say "Watch out!" as I was seconds from killing us both. By the time we got to the farm, I had lost a side mirror and was in a poor emotional condition. We turned into the rustic dirt driveway. The farm looked completely dead. I could see a couple of motionless sheep on a distant ridge — otherwise, nothing. I rolled my rented car down to the farmhouse and shut it off. The silence was so complete I could feel it on my skin. I knocked. The door was opened softly and with caution. Looking at me was my cousin Anthony. His eyes burned with a mad blue intensity. He greeted us quietly and in we went. In the house, which we entered by way of the kitchen, were stacks of people, all close relations. No sooner had we cleared the door than all hell broke loose.

My Aunt Mary was sitting by the turf stove, leaning on a cane. She let fly with a vigorous speech, not one word of which I could understand, though she was apparently speaking English. Her husband, my Uncle Tony, turned out in a Greek fishing cap, white shirt and weathered vest, was waving a pipe. He had electric blue eyes as well, the eyes of a malamute, and a crafty, gleeful expression. He, too, was holding forth, and although I could not understand a word of what he was saying either, his accent was utterly different than that of his wife. He spoke in a measured and forceful tone, while Mary's declarations came out at the rate of water gushing from a fire hose. The one linguistic quality they shared was emphasis. Each and every thing they said was said with an air of such conviction it seemed impossible anyone could disagree. And yet, they did disagree, and attempted to shout down and dismiss every statement made by the other. Uncle Tony and Aunt Mary weren't the only ones speaking in this small country kitchen, which smelled of brown bread, oatmeal, pipe smoke and turf. Several cousins were present and also speaking. Some were shouting that we must be exhausted, in shock from the severity of our journey, or hungry, or in need of a chair. At least, these ideas

were ones I thought I could pick out. My father watched all this with a serene expression. He had been coming here for many years, in addition to having been born here, and none of this, I suppose, was new to him. It was perhaps 10 in the morning. Miraculously, a gap appeared in the conversation, and my cousin Audrey managed to ask if we would like breakfast. My father said he would like a drink of whiskey and sat down. There was no lighting. That is, there were lights, but not one of them was turned on. One small window let in the few photons that had survived the rain and clouds. These heroic if anemic lumens shouldered the full task of illuminating the kitchen. It was not enough. Basically, what I was experiencing was a pack of Irish people shouting in the dark. I SAT down by my father in the gloom, refused a drink of my own in favor of tea and oatmeal, and asked if there had been a power failure. This set off a series of denunciations and exhortations about the light switch, which was finally thrown by my cousin Anthony as if he were setting fire to the national treasury or electrocuting the only woman he had ever loved. When the light came on, Anthony recoiled from its rays. He squinted and dropped his eyes to save his retinas, I suppose, from incineration. Unfortunately, this tactic caused him fresh disturbance. Because now he cried out in

horror that the floor was a disgrace, that it was crusted in muck and alive with dust. I looked at the linoleum floor and saw nothing. He got a broom and began to sweep like a demon, relatives leaping out of his way. I said the floor was perfect as it was. He told me that I was mad, nothing less than unstable and possibly dangerous. I decided to eat my oatmeal and shut up. My father sipped his whiskey with a peaceful expression. A dog named Flossie looked on in perfect contentment. Uncle Tony, sitting in a ripped vinyl chair that looked as if it had been salvaged from a demolition site, murmured to Flossie a nonstop stream of endearments while he scratched her ears and sucked on his pipe. From time to time, when the conversation threatened to become manageable, Tony would pause from doting on Flossie to shout down a son or daughter, observing that they had never had a single clear thought since being born. A cat walked through, her claws making sounds like tiny high

heels on the linoleum, her coat glowing like mink. Scarcely had I finished my oatmeal when Anthony said I should come with him. I obeyed and out we went through the yard and got in his battered Land Rover. He had offered to take my father as well, but the old man was comfortable in the warm kitchen, and it was a grim morning, chill and wet, out of doors. I had no idea where we were going, and mostly I didn't care. Anthony was about my age. His chest stood out with muscle from years of farm work. He was a strange mixture of calm and storm. In fact, all of them were. It was an odd fact that though they lived in the middle of nowhere, with utter silence around them as thick as mittens, they all seemed to be somehow overstimulated. The scene in the kitchen had been pandemonium. It had felt like some kind of riot. I was relieved to be in the car, with only Anthony's occasional comments interrupting the drum of the rain. We went through a little town and



pulled up by a church. We got out and Anthony led me around back to a graveyard. The rain was falling at a good rate, but he seemed not to notice. He had on some kind of threadbare field jacket. I followed him until he stopped at a substantial forbidding Victorian tombstone that looked like the door to rot and doom. It was engraved with my name: SHANLEY. I felt the letters like a verdict I would not survive. This was my grandparents' resting place. He invited me to kneel down in the rain and pray, and did so himself. On my own, this would not have been my first instinct. We knelt side by side, on black gravel, praying before a black stone that looked strangely like the slab in "2001: A Space Odyssey." I don't know what I prayed for or to. It may have been for an umbrella. I had never met my grandparents, so I had no image or emotional connection to draw on. But kneeling there in the rain, I felt a bond with something dreadful and grand, and I had this thought: *These are my people.*

OVER the course of days, I asked for stories about my grandparents. You would think that when dealing with people who talked this much, getting information would be easy, but no. When the subject of my grandparents came up, a sudden circumspection would overcome the source. Tony would look vague. My father would become reticent. My cousins would claim to

know nothing. Even my Aunt Mary, who talked like Proust wrote (that is, endlessly), even Mary had little to say. There was a reason. It seems my grandparents had been, at the very least, scary. My grandfather had gotten along with no one in his family except my father. Even the animals would run away from him. When he wanted the horse, he would have to hide in the house while one of his sons fetched the animal, because if the horse saw my grandfather, the horse would be gone. My grandmother was obese and quarrelsome. My grandfather constructed barns and furniture, and then my grandmother would gleefully criticize his work until he exploded. They fought constantly, throwing stools, buckets and whatever else was free. When my grandmother was presented her first grandchild, my sister Kathleen, she tore the pretty bonnet the baby wore off her tiny head, declaring: "It's too good for her!" When she died, they had to take the banister off the staircase from her bedroom. Such was her girth. It took many

conversations for me to gather this unfortunate news about my predecessors. My living family were solid people and thought it wrong to speak ill of the dead. This was the reason their talk became evasive and cloudy when the subject was raised. It was only over the course of many days that a portrait of the couple emerged. They had been poor, illiterate and vindictive. I wondered how such wonderful eccentric folk as I saw around me were able to spring from such impoverished ground. I never got an answer to that. Life holds its miracles, good erupting from darkness chief among them.

A version of this op-ed appeared in print on March 9, 2013, on page A17 of the New York edition with the headline: The Darkness of an Irish Morning.



The Designers Collaborate

At the first rehearsal, when all the actors, designers and crew come together for the first time, it is very clear how each element of design is intrinsically wrapped up in the others.

Take the rain for example. Rain is very important to the setting in this rainy part of Ireland. It rains for almost the entire play. (Making those rare moments of sunlight important.) Rain reflects the characters feelings, the events and mood of the play.

The set design includes water running down the stage right wall in leaks and drips, tapping on a piece of tin. The lighting design needs to create the look and feel of internal and external light on a rainy day. The sound designer has a library of rain sounds; heavy rain, drizzle, drips to put in at just the right moments. The costume designer needs to dress the characters for the wet weather and props is tasked with finding a paddling pool for the actors to stand in while they are rained on with a squirty bottle of water. This is just one example of the way the design team works together with the director to create a common vision.

Maryanne Wright-Smyth - Costume design

Maryanne talked about her collection of photos and a colour pallet inspired by the landscape.

Outside Mullingar Design Team

Set Design - Mark McEntyre

Lighting Designer - Martyn Roberts

Sound Designer - Matthew Morgan

Wardrobe Designer - Maryanne Wright-Smyth

Props - George Wallace

She said she has seen a lot of caps, wool, knit wear and gumboots or wellies. She talked to friends living in Ireland who said that though everything is very up to the minute, modern and fashionable in Dublin as soon as you go into the country the clothes are 25 years or more behind and traditional or timeless. There were stories and photos of farmers in suits with gumboots. She wanted to find all the clothes rather than make them, as she wanted nothing to look new. Maryanne also talked about the importance of collaborating with the other designers and the director and working with the actors once they were into the rehearsal process and had a stronger idea themselves about who their characters are and what they would wear.



Matthew Morgan – Sound Design

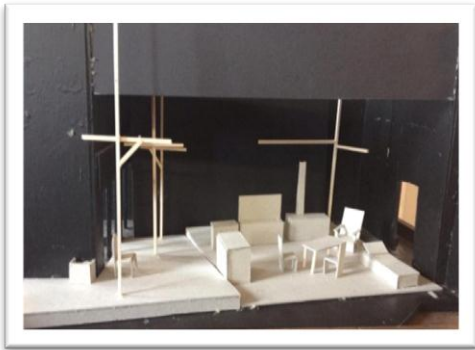
Matt created a soundscape of almost persistent rain, wind and farm noises. Listen out for tractors, dogs, horses and donkeys. He wanted a constant reminder of the rural setting. There is also the subtle but all important sound of bees and distant thunder every time the name Fiona is mentioned.

Wild Mountain Thyme is the song that Anthony's mother always sang, which is sung by Aoife and Rosemary in the play. Matt asked local musicians to rework the song and Dunedin actress Julie Edwards recorded the lyrics. This is heard between scenes and at the close of the play in keeping with the themes of the bonds of love and family and sets a gentle, Irish mood.



Mark McEntyre - Set Design

At the first rehearsal Mark McEntyre showed the working model of his set and told everyone how good it felt to be in the same room, working together, after starting work apart and how important collaboration was to his work.



The setting is integral to the play. The characters are bound to the land through family lines and the hold the land, itself, has on them. The land and the division of land also bind the characters together. So the set has to reflect that.

Although the play is set on the actual farm of John Patrick Shanley's very real cousin, Anthony, in modern day Ireland, many people have noted that it takes on an almost mythical feel.

Actor Brían F. O'Byrne, who was the first to play Anthony said, "It's not an Irish play. It's an Irish-American play, and that's not a negative thing... I don't think a playwright from Ireland would have written it this way. It's a Shanley world, a mix of Old World qualities that filters down through immigrants. And this gives it a sense of being almost a fable."

<http://wp.tdf.org/index.php/2014/01/outside-mullingar-brian-f-obyrne/>

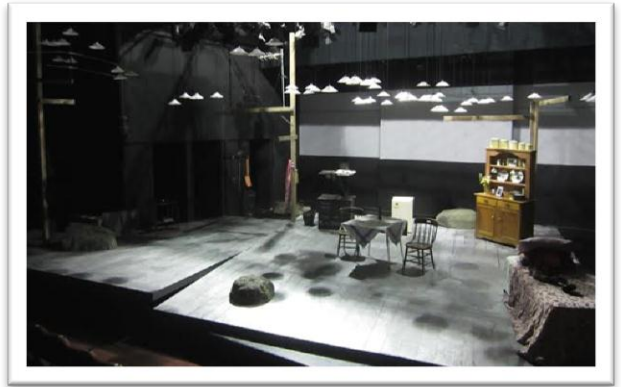
Mark McEntyre made a conscious choice to keep away from a "romantic landscape of a fairy-tale Ireland, with Irish green and thatched roof farm houses."

"I didn't want to represent an Irish cottage or anything else that is a given in the script, rather I wanted to develop a design concept from abstract ideas in the script."

Mark talked more about **representation vs. abstraction**. He said he could have done a literal representation of an Irish country kitchen, but instead looked at the script and the director's vision to put those abstract ideas on stage. For example, he has used a split rake, with one side of the stage slopped (or raked) towards the audience and the other slopped away. He wanted these opposite rakes to show how the two families and Anthony and Rosemary in particular are connected and work both with and against each other. "This crack is like a rupture between the two families".

The script requires inside and outside settings and because the land and the people are so tied together, Mark wanted the set to weave the interiors and exteriors together, without distinct borders. He wanted it to feel like the characters brought the outside in with them.

He talked about using everyday objects in an abstract, rather than a literal way, like the "75 domestic lampshades" he has



used. The lampshades remind us of "domestic and interior spaces", but also the shifting lights of clouds and the external landscape. These lampshade clouds are also "lit to reflect the feelings of the characters and the mood of the scene".

He wanted strong vertical lines to work with the horizontal elements of the raked stage and lampshade clouds so used poles that feel like sign posts as well as reminding us of telecommunications with their old aerials and wires; perhaps reflecting how well or poorly these characters communicate.

Mark always came back to the importance of working with the director and the other designers on a common vision. In this play, he said, it was telling the story of these two families and their individual relationships with each other and the land, the idea of being caretakers of the land and being bound to the land by love and family. "The land feels like a weight around their necks but in fact it is the very thing that binds them through their love."

Mark said that although it is of course just a story, "truth exists in the moments between the actors and the audience ... As a design team we want to create a time and space where the audience can really feel that connection and that's your job as a designer working in a team with all the other creatives."

Director **Lisa Warrington** spoke to Claire Adams and Tania Robinson on Arts Hub at Otago Access Radio <http://www.oar.org.nz/podcasts-latest/>. She talked about the process of putting a show together and how she loves watching the actors explore their characters, the set being built and the world of the play slowly taking shape.

Lisa said when she first picked up the play she had no idea where Mullingar was. She did a lot of research into the area including finding the right sounding dialect for that part of the country. As luck would have it the actors were able to work with Georgina Dowd, who, being born and bred very near to Mullingar, was a wonderful resource as an authentic native speaker.

Lisa said the first person she starts to collaborate with is the set designer since the set is such an important concept for a play. The script requires several locations, two different farmhouse kitchens, a bedroom, plus several outdoor areas but Lisa said "I can't stand the kind of theatre sets where everything has to stop while people move the furniture around... So the idea was to find some brilliant composite that gives you the idea of inside, outside and different places – and I think we've cracked it." She said that Mark McEntyre worked with her and lighting designer, Martyn Roberts to create "a beautiful to look at, lovely to play on space, that is quite unusual."



After starting with the set design and researching the literal world of the play, comes working with the actors and "seeing what they bring to the table and between you all really building this world, and exploring the characters." Lisa says she loves being in the rehearsal room. "It's a very exciting process. It's why I still direct after all these years. It's my favourite bit. What the audience sees is the tip of the iceberg. The kind of work that happens in the rehearsal room I just find fascinating. And I love watching the sets grow from a tentative first offer to when it finally all comes together. Every part of the set is thought about at great depth. I don't think audiences always realise that... everything is in its precise place for a reason." Lisa did not want a set filled with clutter, "that you are never going to reference or use. In this play the set has been stripped back to a point where there is nothing in the space that is not touched, used or referenced by the actors."



She said the costumes have to fit into the world too. "The costumes have to be inhabited by the characters; you have to think: how much mud would be on a pair of boots? How scruffy would a shirt be? So they don't just look like freshly laundered costumes."

Meet the Actors



Geraldine Brophy spent her school years in Dublin not too far from Mullingar and Killucan. She said it was wonderful to be able to draw on her Irish culture and background and her family's Catholicism. She said to call her Geri so she wouldn't think she was in trouble and talked about her own Irish roots and how humour and faith work in the play.

"A lot of the phrases of the play come out of my mouth because they were put there when I was wee. And it's nice to revisit them, think about the humour of them and also to be affected again by the native poetry of being an Irish person. People who think in poetry, which they do - they are a race of great endurance, great tragedy and in this particular play you see how they triumph over things through faith. Not just a religiosity but faith in the goodness of humanity. They are good hospitable people and you see at their heart terrific soul and I think that's what John Patrick Shanley has managed to capture."

Geraldine talked about the humour in the play being "rooted in the truth of being Irish." She said as we know from the comedy/drama masks the other side of tragedy is comedy. "So whilst you are in the middle of something terrible like death, loss and grief, there is always going to be the absurd that's occurring to you. You can't always find dignity and integrity in every single moment and sometimes being able to laugh is what gives us the strength and courage to go on. And the Irish who have suffered a great deal over the years as a race, have developed humour as a way of actually bearing the unbearable. And thank goodness for that."

Geraldine said one of the most challenging things about playing Aoife is aging herself properly. She is 53 and Aoife is 70. "In our world, and this is a modern play, 70 isn't that old, but part of the difficulty in approaching the role is how I can make a 70 year old who is very, very sick with emphysema, convincingly sick with emphysema and not just sick with old age. I've had to think about things like how she walks. She has a pacemaker and emphysema so she is short of breath a lot of the time. Everything she does – stand – sit – costs her energy, which is precious." She said that there are many things, like this, to think about when she is building a character which all have to become unconscious when she is playing the role.





Geraldine Brophy (Aoife) is one of New Zealand's best known award winning actresses, working in Film, Theatre and Television. She has worked extensively as Actor, Director and Playwright for Downstage Theatre, Circa, Court Theatre, Centrepont Theatre, Fortune Theatre and Auckland Theatre Company and Bats.

Her own company, Number 8 Theatre, has produced and toured nationally with her own plays, most notably *Confessions of a Chocoholic*, *Ladies a Plate*, and *Floral Notes* about breast cancer.

She performed with the highly acclaimed *Auckland Theatre Company* production of *Bruce Mason's Awatea*, directed Gary Henderson's *Unseasonable Fall of Snow* at Bats and Circa, and took seven National tours in the last six years, of musicals and plays into the regions of New Zealand and Australia. This year she made two tours of Australia with the hilarious *Grumpy Old Women: 50 Shades of Beige*.

Direction highlights include *Doubt*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Under Milkwood* for Court Theatre, *Wednesday to Come*, *Murdoch* for Downstage, *The Viagra Monologues* and *Unseasonable Fall of Snow* for Bats and Circa, and commercial tours of *You Must be Joking*, *Grumpy Old Women* and *Oklahoma*.

From 1997 to 2001 she appeared as receptionist, Moira Crombie on *Shortland Street*.

She danced for Arthritis NZ, on the popular last series of *Dancing with the Stars*. Most recently she was commissioned to write and direct *Orange* a musical, for Arthritis NZ mixing professionals and young Arthritis performers.

Cinema includes roles in *In My Father's Den*, *King Kong*, *Waterhorse*, *Hook Line and Sinker*, *Seige* and *Eternity*. She won the 1998 New Zealand Film and Television Best Actress for "Home Movie" and the Qantas Film and Television Awards 2008 Best Actress in Film for the Kiwi box office hit, *Second Hand Wedding*.



2015 sees new films *Births Deaths and Marriages* and *How To Murder Your Wife* screen. Geraldine will be directing a national tour of *South Pacific* and her new stage comedy *Sleeping Around* premieres in Wellington.



Simon O'Connor said that the language itself and the rhythms of the dialect were the first steps towards characterisation for him. He said along with the dialect is a cultural way of looking at the world which he may find lurking "somewhere in the dark recesses of my ancestry". Simon has an Irish catholic background too.

He also said part of building his character was thinking about the age and health of Tony "He's a

little older than I am and he's -he's not at death's door - but he's quite -he's frail. And a lot of that has to do with his heart and his lungs - he's a little short of breath. And the accent and rhythms of language and shortness of breath - they naturally effect your physicality." He went on to say that when working on his physicality he also kept in mind that Tony would want to hide his frailty. "He is the sort of guy who plays against any physical infirmity, if he had a sore knee he wouldn't want to show it and same for the lungs - if it's difficult to breathe he wouldn't want to show that either. So it's just something that is there and catches him out every now and again. But that's all part of the background you use to build a character out of the words written on the page."

Simon O'Connor's (Tony Reilly) acting credits include Iago in *Othello* and Claudius in *Hamlet* (William Shakespeare), Ken in *Home Land* (Gary Henderson), Edwin in *Who Wants To Be 100?*, Harry in *Four Flat Whites In Italy* and Ray in *A Short Cut To Happiness* (Roger Hall), Henri in *Heroes* (Gerald Sibleyras/Tom Stoppard), Man in *Play* (Samuel Beckett), Harry in *Gifted* (Patrick Evans), and Alf in the film *How To Murder Your Wife* (Screentime Productions).

He was a researcher, co-deviser and performer for the verbatim theatre pieces *Hush* and *Belonging* (Otago University Theatre Studies programme) and he co-devised and performed in *One Day* (RBS Productions). Simon has also written for theatre, film and television. He is a past recipient of The Dominion Sunday Times Bruce Mason Award for Playwriting and he taught playwriting for several years in the Theatre Studies programme at Otago University. He has a special interest in theatre collaborations, including community theatre and devised theatre productions, and is a co-founder of Talking House (a community arts collective) and RBS Productions.



Lara Macgregor talked about the process of finding her character. She said sometimes it comes quite quickly and other times it takes right up to opening night. She said a good clue to finding Rosemary was the way she sits. *"I have to sit on a rock - and once I sat there and started smoking - Rosemary smokes and I'm not a smoker - just that feeling of the way she sits and how she spends time on her own started to inform me a little about her. Then when I went from outside to inside and started the scene where I deal with the two parents, even the way that I had been sitting on the rock outside informed the way I stood inside the house"*. She said Rosemary is developing slowly as she keeps finding new things.



Always go back to the script for clues to characterisation. Lara said that it was the line *"I'm older than all of you and have been since I was born"* that was a real key to discovering her character. She said Rosemary Muldoon *"knows what she wants in life. She's known what she wants from really, really early on and she is determined to go after it."* Rosemary has a lot of telling lines *"I am Strength – for now"*, *"No – I'm a swan"*.

Lara said that the dialect also helps with characterisation. *"It changes the placement of my voice in my mouth - it is much further forward in the mouth."* She also said that as Geraldine Brophy, who plays her mother, naturally has a very deep voice, so Lara consciously tried to *"lower the placement of my voice so I can become a little more attuned to her and highlight that relationship a bit more."*



Lara Macgregor (Rosemary Muldoon) has worked as an actor, director and drama coach in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. She studied in New York City with Uta Hagen, Anthony Abeson and Alec Reubin.

She is a member of the Actors' Equity Association, and has appeared in more than thirty productions throughout the United States.

Lara holds a Post-Graduate Diploma in Directing from The National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney and has directed productions in New York, Sydney and Melbourne.

She was Head of Drama at the Eastern Institute of

Technology Performing Arts in Napier in 2004 and in addition has coached students through audition preparation for National Institute of Dramatic Art (Australia), Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and Victorian College of the Arts, Toi Whakaari and UNITEC.

In 2008 Lara completed a twenty-five week Creative New Zealand, Artistic Direction Internship at The Court Theatre in Christchurch and in 2009/2010 became Associate Artistic Director. As Associate A.D. at The Court Theatre, Lara was instrumental in the development of new New Zealand work and directed shows such as *The Tutor* by Dave Armstrong, *Saving Grace* by Duncan Sarkies, *A True Account of the Regrettable Circumstances and Mysterious Demise of Edgar Allan Poe* by Jeff Clarke, *On The Rocks* by Amy Rosenthal and *The Perfumed Garden* by Dean Parker. She appeared as Thilde in Michelanne Forster's world première *Don't Mention Casablanca*, as Veronique in *God of Carnage* by Yasmina Reza alongside Mark Hadlow and Rima Te Wiata and most recently as Elizabeth in *When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell.

In 2011 Lara became the Artistic Director at Fortune Theatre. Some of Lara's directing highlights at Fortune Theatre are *Red*, *In the Next Room*, or *The Vibrator Play*, *Play*, *Tribes*, *Souvenir*, *The Caretaker* and *Ladies Night*.



Two weeks into the rehearsal process **Phil Vaughan** talked about his character. *"Anthony is a very sensitive, intense dreamer, who feels very connected to the land. He's quite intuitive and very soulful character."* He talked about Anthony's connection to the lush green farmland which he can relate to as it is similar to the hills around the peninsular and the port. *"That land affects him a lot because he is very connected to it - in fact he is much happier out in the fields than being inside a house. He is very much a land man."* He went on to say, *"Anthony got burned when he was 16. He got his heart snapped in twain by his childhood love Fiona. And since then there has been tumble weeds floating through the desert of his heart" ... "Anthony is hurt, scared and afraid of love."*

Phil said that he was still learning and discovering it was Anthony's posture that was helping him find his character. *"He is very much a man of the land, but he is quite open and he's always dreaming so he's looking skyward and is light on his feet - not a rugged individual. This all affects the physicality. I haven't completely found it yet - but it's on the way."* Phil said the forward placement and rhythms of the dialect help him with both Anthony's voice and movement. *"Anthony is so sensitive and gentle his voice is lighter, which naturally lifts his chest and head and affects your physicality".* Phil said he grabs on to moments during rehearsal when *"all of a sudden there is a moment when you respond in a certain way, and something comes over your body and you say - yes that's it - that's exactly what my character is like."* He said during the run of the show he always uses those key moments in his warm up, *"Which zones me right into the character viscerally."*

Phil Vaughan (Anthony Reilly) began his career in broadcasting as a radio and television presenter. For 15 years he hosted nationwide breakfast radio shows and presented various television programmes like *Good Morning, Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?*, *Mountain Dew on the Edge*, *What Now?* and he called the numbers on the Big Wednesday Lotto draw. He also concurrently worked behind the scenes for those 15 years in numerous television and film productions both in New Zealand and overseas for the BBC UK as a writer, production manager and first assistant director.

He has voiced radio plays and short stories for National Radio and appeared in a number of television commercials both in New Zealand and overseas. Television acting credits include *The Strip*, *Insider's Guide to Happiness*, *Girl vs Boy* and *Harry and Cosh* (BBC UK). After a chance meeting with a director "in a bind" who needed a reader to help Playmarket develop Dave Armstrong's play *The Tutor* at Circa Theatre in Wellington, he ended up being cast in the role for its premier season. Entering the theatre world became a complete revelation to him – he got injected with the acting bug, got a Chapman Tripp nomination for best newcomer and has been acting full time ever since. Leaving all the broadcasting work behind, Phil has since performed in theatres throughout New Zealand. Recent highlights include *The Motor Camp*, *August*; *Osage County*, *God of Carnage*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Boeing Boeing* and *The Pitmen Painters*. Phil's last appearance at the Fortune was playing a 10 year old boy and his best friend's father from Duvauchelle Bay, Banks Peninsula in the Dunedin Theatre Awards 2014 Play of the Year Peninsula.



Theatre View

By Terry MacTavish

8 February

Outside Mullingar, set in the Irish countryside, is as sweet as the delectable honey ice cream we are served as part of the cute themed supper.*

The lilting accents and the easy charm of the Irish – apparent even when they're grumbling, fighting or completely crazy – combined with a tender love story, make for a charming start to the Fortune's season, with the more harrowing True Grit plays reserved for the bleak winter days.

Playwright John Patrick Shanley, author of such successes as *Moonstruck* and *Doubt*, is Irish-American but did not visit Ireland until his father needed his escort. ("When an old man asks you to take him home, you have to do it.") He knew then that he must write about the family farm; that to do so would free him to be, at last, Irish.

Somehow, possibly through spawning so many great writers, Ireland has convinced the world that we are all a little bit Irish. If the black humour and swift transitions from laughter to tears seem Chekhovian, the family conflicts in *Outside Mullingar* are universal, and the feel for the land is surely Kiwi-as, whether involving the wrangle over a right-of-way or the vexed question of inheritance.

A friend of mine's life was nearly blighted by a killing over a right-of-way dispute between West Coast farmers, and in my own family I have seen generation after generation of farmers cope with the dilemma of who will inherit what could be either the



heart's desire or a terrible burden. "I want to do what's right by the farm," frets the patriarch of the Reillys. "The farm won't know!" retorts his Muldoon neighbour.

But old Tony Reilly has decided his faithful son, Anthony, is not worthy of inheriting the farm, being too like his mother's family and a bit odd. It will take the determined energy of Rosemary Muldoon, who has secretly loved Anthony since he pushed her over when they were children, to persuade him otherwise. Rosemary's agenda goes beyond this, of course, and the joy of this play is watching her slowly (very slowly!) reel in a forty-something man who has his own weird reason for holding off from a woman who is clearly perfect for him. And it is a very weird reason indeed, almost ludicrously implausible, except that, Shanley asserts, it has its basis in absolute truth. "He's Irish," is an excuse for almost anything.

That *Outside Mullingar* does not slip into an abyss of unacceptable absurdity, despite teetering on the brink, is due to the skill of director [Lisa Warrington](#) and the fantastic cast. Warrington keeps the mood light-hearted, ensuring moments of tragedy are treated

with gentle respect, never over-indulged. Her actors, all solidly believable in their roles and relationships, have grasped the essence of the style to perfection. We are kept in a ripple of amusement even while gasping at devastatingly blunt lines like: "The wife follows the husband – you'll be dead in a year."

The sheer fun of *Outside Mullingar* may lie in the characters, but Shanley is also a bit of a mystery writer and the hints we need to unravel certain aspects of the plot are subtly signposted. Watch, for instance, for "flying" where Anthony should have said "walking". (And there really is nothing you can do with an ex-wedding ring that isn't deeply symbolic or ironic. Tracing the path of the late Mary Reilly's ring is a fascinating game that will reveal both the ingenuity of Shanley and perspicacity of Warrington.)

Simon O'Connor has cornered the market in cantankerous but adorable old men since, I reckon, acting in his own script of *An Illustrated Death of Eddie Five Trees*, at least twenty years ago. As Tony Reilly he is completely credible and captivating, from the delightfully dry put-downs to the heights of



pure lyricism when recounting the touching story of how he fell in love with his wife. The scene that closes the first half, when he speaks from the heart to the son for whom – despite the constant carping – he has a deep affection, is one to remember and treasure.

Geraldine Brophy is all ebullient warmth as Tony's neighbour, the recently widowed Aoife Muldoon. She entrances the audience whether she is triumphantly staggering to her feet, shaking with laughter, or unselfconsciously wiping her eyes on her shawl. Her relationship with her daughter is beautifully realised with a sharp look here, a touch or kiss on the forehead there. Brophy and O'Connor are an especially good team, grumbling enjoyably over their respective offspring, together forming a splendid portrait of old people who have lived hard, facing up to mortality with cheerful defiance.

The play, however, really belongs to their middle-aged children, Anthony and Rosemary, awkwardly circling each other, as they stumble towards their destiny, and the casting here is a fair treat. Dunedin has been patiently yearning to see the Fortune's excellent Artistic Director on stage herself, and the four year wait has been worth it. Lara Macgregor, an actor with

an enviable national reputation, makes of Rosemary Muldoon an enchanting character. Odd, yes, but she is indeed a beauty, as Anthony shyly confesses, and Macgregor endows her with a clumsy grace that

justifies her father's assertion, after taking her to Swan Lake, that she is the White Swan, albeit one that could break your arm with her beak. The combination of strength and sweetness is very alluring, and the audience fairly seethes with impatience for the reluctant object of her affections to take her in his arms. More than once, indeed, we are united in an involuntary groan.

I don't understand why it should be, but knowing actors are playing out their actual relationship on stage seems to add another level of pleasure. Lara Macgregor's real-life partner, Phil Vaughan, is the eccentric but warm-hearted Anthony, and the chemistry between the actors is naturally efflorescent. Vaughan actually succeeds in making Anthony's bizarre behaviour understandable, and his blurted revelations in the final climax proclaim his brilliant comic timing. My guest, who has come to be cheered up (because really, we know from the start that all will end well) confides, "You can't help but forgive his ignorance and fall in love with him – you want to slap him and then suddenly he is gorgeous..." Well put.

The characters' clothes by Maryanne Wright-Smyth are, to her credit, so convincing as to be barely noticeable. The Fortune

stage is stripped back and looks surprisingly large. In Mark McEntyre's design the rooms are simply sketched in – wooden floorboards, an old stove, a rough kitchen table, a chair or two – and the lovely mellow lighting by Martyn Roberts shifts us easily to other rooms, houses, the outdoors even, which is marked by a few rocks. I am intrigued by myriad hanging lamps in groups over the stage – Irish clouds, I'm told, but they look like modest kitchen lights to me, and quite appropriate as such. The atmosphere is further enhanced by Matthew Morgan's sound design, the first act opening with dripping rain and cosy animal noises, the second with a buzzing insect. And throughout runs the winsome folk song both Reillys and Muldoons love, 'Wild Mountain Thyme'.

Altogether a fine production of a new play that, while not local, seems to resonate with us and certainly makes for a thoroughly satisfying evening. Lots of laughter, a little musing over life, death, love and family; and delightfully memorable characters. "I feel happier now," says my sad guest, while my neighbour on the other side tells us that *Outside Mullingar* is the first play she has attended, a present from her children. She is utterly enchanted, confiding, "I'll be coming back." Exeunt, humming: "So we'll all go together, to pick wild mountain thy-y-me..."

*Not only was there an ingenious Irish supper after the show, including Guinness jelly, created by Liz Christensen of the Inspired Pantry with Otago Polytechnic Food Design students, but also irresistible Irish folk music by Paddy's Pirates. "Will ye go, lassie, go?"

Good Irish Neighbourly Eruptions

Otago Daily Times

By Barbara Frame

Mon, 9 Feb 2015

Outside Mullingar has many of the elements we have come to expect of Irish plays: rural gloom, family feuds, inheritance anxiety, rain, mud, depression and grimly eloquent humour. But it spares us the darker peat-bog horrors, and has a softer centre than most.

There are two adjacent farms and good reasons to amalgamate them but, people being what they are, this has not happened. One of the farmers is Tony, a plodder and dreamer who does his farm's work conscientiously and joylessly while harbouring an odd fantasy about his own identity. He's socially inept and emotionally clueless.

The other farmer, chain-smoking Rosemary, has an equally complex personality, her habitual, willed coldness giving way to explosiveness and warmth. Because of Tony's general ineptitude, it's left to her to do the hard, patient work of bringing the farms, and their owners, together.

Under Lisa Warrington's direction, Lara Macgregor (the Fortune's artistic director, in her first acting role on this stage) and Phil Vaughan, as Rosemary and Tony, display great rapport and sensitive balances of awkwardness and ease, tenderness and outrage.

They are strongly supported in the first scenes by Geraldine Brophy as Aoife, Rosemary's mother, and Simon O'Connor as Anthony, Tony's father.

Their function is to provide background to the obstacles Rosemary and Tony face as romance painfully and improbably takes hold, but they are also crustily and perversely entertaining characters in their own right.

The play provides a vehicle for four such finely nuanced performances. Accent training from Georgina Dowd has ensured believable Irish accents throughout.

In his introduction, playwright John Patrick Shanley writes, "Life holds its miracles, good erupting from darkness chief among them."

The audience's enthusiastic reception on Saturday night showed that we can all do with some of that.

Tale a touching theatre experience

The Star, 7 February

By Brenda Harwood

Lyrical, expressive language, spoken in a gentle Irish brogue, tells a story that is both quietly domestic and universal in *Outside Mullingar*

Written by multiple award-winning playwright John Patrick Shanley and presented by an all-star team, *Outside Mullingar* is a delightfully funny and deeply moving portrayal of family life, loss, and love.

Although it is firmly set in rural Ireland and steeped in the traditions of its place, the play also explores the universal and inescapable truth of families — that

generations must change with the passing of time. It is also a heartfelt and heart-warming, if decidedly off-beat, love story.

Directed by Lisa Warrington, the Fortune's production of *Outside Mullingar* combines the talents of Geraldine Brophy, Simon O'Connor, Lara Macgregor and Phil Vaughan, as the respective elderly parents and adult children of two neighbouring farms.

In the hands of this experienced ensemble, Shanley's characters shine with real heart and his delightfully odd tale is given room to breathe.

O'Connor and Brophy are by turns querulous, crafty, mischievous, and utterly convincing as two frail and elderly people facing the end of their lives with spirit intact.

Macgregor and Vaughan sparkle as the 40-something would-be lovers, wrestling with an uncertain future and paralysing shyness. Their performance sweeps the audience along on an emotional roller coaster.

The play is presented on a cleverly depicted domestic set, designed by Mark McEntyre, which beautifully evokes the old farmhouses, while also speaking of windswept hills and space.

The combination of a top notch script, skilful direction, and truthful performances make *Outside Mullingar* a wonderfully funny and touching theatre experience. Highly recommended.



Themes & Quotes

Director Lisa Warrington said the play is filled with the archetypal themes of land, love and family.

The themes of guardianship of the land, the hold of the land, blood lines, the love and obligations of family, grief, fate, love and longing are all intertwined with each other along with a good dose of spirituality. Here are some quotes that reflect those themes:

Tony: ...It's not in you to stand on your ground, Anthony. It has to be said. You never stood up on the farm like a king.

Anthony: I've been breaking my back for this place since I was five...

Tony: You don't stand on the land and draw strength from it as I did. Till Mammy died.

Tony: maybe you should emigrate?

Anthony: And what would you do with the land if I did?

Tony: Give it to the church.

Aoife: Well, don't do that.

Tony: If no one loves the land then why not?

Anthony: I love it.

Tony: You don't. I've seen you with your magazines. He's mad for machines. He'd sell the land and buy a helicopter if no one was watching.

Anthony: I'd love to get a helicopter. I'd ride it to the moon.

Tony: There. You see. You're not a farming man.

Anthony: ...You'd be bankrupt and the farm gone if it wasn't for my agricultural mind.

Tony: But you don't love it. There is no joy.

Anthony: Don't criticize me Daddy. Some of us don't have joy. But we do what we must. Is a man who does what he must though he feels no pleasure less of a man than one who is happy?

Rosemary: ... So is Tony right? Do you not love the farm?

Anthony: Love? I hate it for a prison. I came up out of it like a tree and here I am with it around me.

Anthony: ... My life is fixed down with a rock on each corner.

Rosemary: By what?

Anthony: There's the green fields and the animals living off them. And over that there's us, living off the animals. And over that there's that which tends to us and lives off us. Whatever that is, it holds me here.

Aoife: Sure she was love itself and Anthony was her baby boy.

Tony: I'm only trying to do what's right.

Rosemary: Right for who?

Tony: For the farm.

Aoife: The farm doesn't know a thing about right, and it won't know. You are trying to serve the Reilly's, at the expense of the Kellys, even if

doing so, Tony, would overturn the living issue of your one true love.

Rosemary: Do you know why my Da went to war with the crows, Tony? He was shaking his fist. His son failed to live, and he was shaking his fist. You have a son. You want more than that from the sky? Are you after being struck down? Well, are you?

Tony: All the days are alike on a farm, and yet of a sudden the drudgery I had known since birth lifted off me and a joy came up into me out of the land. Out of all of it. The cattle and the sky. And when I went home to the house, a moment came there too, where all of it, you, the girls, her, even the house itself, all of it came to life in me. But it started out there in the fields that had been lonely. When the sun shone on me. And I knew it was her. Mary. Somehow she was my way into the farm and all else besides. So I sold off the bit by the road to Muldoon for two hundred quid, went into town and bought her a real ring of gold, and took the brass one from her.

Anthony: But I wish you had married one of those men, my dearest, to end my torture, because I'm no good for nothing and no one.

Rosemary: You're good for me. You knocked me down in the yellow grass when I was six, and it was you from then. I've been cleaning this kitchen till my hands were glass, hoping the day would come

you would enter here and sit there. And now the day has come.

Anthony: That day has not come. Marry Adam. Go to America.

Rosemary: You really want me gone?

Anthony: Yes! I had a sign. I came to your door with me mother's ring three years past, but when I reached into the pocket, nothing. It was gone.

...

Anthony: If it was meant to be I'd have found it.

Rosemary: WE SAY what's meant, Tony! Life is here! We name it! Be bold for me!

John Patrick Shanley has written a beautiful script. Each line tells us more about the characters, the story and themes as well as making us laugh, cry and delight in his poetry. There are some wonderful and telling lines about the characters. Here are a few:

Anthony: Well, she'll catch pneumonia.

Aoife: No, she's crazy. The cracked ones never get sick. Her father's curse is hers. Stubborn to the point of madness.

Anthony: I never noticed it.

Aoife: That's because you never notice anything Anthony. You're famous all over Westmeath for what goes by you.

Aoife: No, thank you. The bottle tastes of glass.

Anthony: Does glass have a taste then?

Aoife: Glass tastes like teeth.

Tony: Oh the taste of glass sure I know it. It tastes like mirrors.

Aoife: I've come to think it's not me tasting the glass, but the glass that's tasting me. I see jaws and teeth and meself chewed up like poor Chrissy.

Rosemary: It's Anthony who loves those fields. Not you. So what if his love makes him suffer? You just want to go on and on. You're selfish.

Tony: And what are you?

Rosemary: I'm Strength. For now.

Anthony: ... When my mother died, Jesus, I couldn't see colors any more.

Rosemary: I've been older than all of you since I was born, and sure I ache for my own youth. I pray the day may yet come, but not at the price of now... When a person knows what will be, and I have always known, the like of you

should stand aside.

Rosemary: Since Mary died, your judgment, which was never good, has faltered worse.

Aoife: She's right about that Tony.

Tony: ...Can you forgive me Anthony?

Anthony: For what? Selling the right of way? It's nothing.

Tony: Yes. But more. For having no faith you would find your own way, be your own man. And most of all for making light of your good heart. *(Takes his hand)* Am I proud of you too late?

Anthony: ... I have the Kelly madness. Don't make me say it. Me own Mam said don't say.

Rosemary: and yet you will say. I've sat here in this house for more years than my grandmother LIVED, waiting for you to notice my heart lighting up the way down the old boreen* to you. Tell me why you haven't come.

*Borren - road or country lane.



Discussion Questions

1. What was your first reaction to Anthony's revelation of his bizarre secret? Is there danger of breaking willing suspension of disbelief here? Are we switching to the absurd for just a moment? Does it work? Why does it work? How do you think the audience reacted?
2. How does the set represent the all-important farms and land? Does the designer evoke the hold the land has on these characters?
3. What design elements are used to indicate a change of location and time?
4. The first two scenes take place after the funeral of Chris Muldoon. Aoife and Rosemary are grief stricken but there are very funny moments. How do the actors keep that balance between humour and real moments of grief?
5. How does Mary's wedding ring work as a symbol of love and tool of fate in the play?

