

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**



On Cue
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE

Table of Contents

About On Cue and STC	2
Curriculum Connections	3
Cast and Creatives	4
A note from the Director	5
The Designer in Conversation	6
Synopsis	7
History and Context	8
Character Analysis	9
Themes and Ideas	12
Style	16
Set and Costume Design	18
Bibliography	19

Compiled by Jacqui Cowell.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Jacqui Cowell is the Education Projects Officer for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Jacqui on jcowell@sydneytheatre.com.au.

© Copyright protects this Education Resource.

Except for purposes permitted by the Copyright Act, reproduction by whatever means is prohibited. However, limited photocopying for classroom use only is permitted by educational institutions.

About On Cue and STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:
STC documentaries
Design sketchbooks

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 40 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

Curriculum Connections



SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 10 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama Stages 5 and 6

Drama Stage 6:

Links to Topic 6: Black Comedy (*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* by Martin McDonagh)

Drama Stage 5:

Dramatic Traditions and Performance Styles: Comedy

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENT

The Beauty Queen of Leenane

MAG FOLAN
Noni Hazlehurst

PATO DOOLEY
Hamish Michael

RAY DOOLEY
Shiv Palekar

MAUREEN FOLAN
Yael Stone

DIRECTOR
Paige Rattray

DESIGNER
Renée Mulder

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Paul Jackson

**COMPOSER & SOUND
DESIGNER**
Steve Francis

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Deborah Brown

**FIGHT & MOVEMENT
DIRECTOR**
Nigel Poulton

VOICE & TEXT COACH
Charmian Gradwell

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Kate Chapman

STAGE MANAGER
Todd Eichorn

**ASSISTANT STAGE
MANAGER**
Sarah Smith

**COSTUME
COORDINATOR**
Sam Perkins

**WIG & MAKE UP
AND WARDROBE
SUPERVISOR**
Lauren A. Proietti

LIGHTING SUPERVISOR
Andrew Tompkins

LIGHTING OPERATOR
Harry Clegg

SOUND SUPERVISOR
Ben Lightowlers

SOUND OPERATOR
Hayley Forward

SOUND TECHNICIAN
Lauren Peters

STAGING SUPERVISOR
Eric Duffy

AUTOMATION OPERATOR
Kate Mott

REVOLVE OPERATOR
Kane Mott

**PRODUCTION
PHOTOGRAPHER**
Brett Boardman

2 hours, 10 minutes
(including interval)

This production
premiered at Sydney
Theatre Company on
Friday 22 November,
2019.

PRODUCTION PATRON
W & A JOHNSON FAMILY FOUNDATION
AND JANE & ANDREW CLIFFORD



**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO**

A Note from the Director

Paige Rattray

I first discovered Martin McDonagh when I directed *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, his hilarious and grotesque reaction to *The Troubles*, at NIDA. I've always loved his writing but found it very male dominated. When I came across *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, I was obviously thrilled because it comprises two towering lead roles for women.

To me, this play also stands apart from McDonagh's other work because of its deep empathy. The writing shows a really precise and insightful understanding of the characters and why they do what they do.

This empathy is present in other McDonagh plays but *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* takes it to a more complex level. Maybe it's because the show's central relationship – between a mother and a daughter – is so relatable.

In fact, at the same time I was first reading the script, I was witnessing my mother caring for my ailing grandmother. Of course, their relationship was nowhere near as toxic as Mag and Maureen's, but I could recognise the huge burden that caring for someone who once cared for you places on a person. When Maureen says she's a, "blessed feckin' skivvy" it felt relatable –

I'd witnessed that dynamic, albeit in a very different, far less extreme way. It's this empathy, this deep understanding, that the creative team, the cast and I are trying to magnify in this production – we want to access that softer side of both of the characters. Too often, I think, Mag is portrayed as this 'monstrous old woman who is making her daughter's life a living hell'. But this fails to take into account the reality of the situation that Mag's in, she's totally dependent on her daughter, unable to survive without her, and is terrified at the prospect of her leaving. It also doesn't take into account the concern Mag has for Maureen's well-being, and she is concerned, how ever terribly she expresses it.

Both characters' behaviour is obviously abhorrent but it's not enough to stop there. When abhorrent things happen, people tend to say things like, "Oh, how could that have happened?" But they're offering it more as a statement rather than a question – what they mean is "I would never do that". In this production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, we're trying to ask that question sincerely and find some answers.

Maureen and Mag are totally co-dependant, trapped with one another and shut off from the outside world. For Mag, the thought of going for a drive into Westport (which, for context, is a half an hour drive from Leenane) is the most exciting thing that's happened to her that year. As a result, images of isolation and incarceration are key this production. We've

brought the landscape of Leenane, with all its mournful, grey, damp loneliness, into the theatre in an attempt to heighten the feeling of remoteness.

In contrast, inside Mag and Maureen's cottage, life is prison-like. They basically exist on beige food - porridge, Complian (a savoury powdered milk drink), cod in butter sauce. There's nothing healthy about, with the grizzly Irish weather, they wouldn't be getting much sunlight.

The clever thing about this play is it manages to access the reality of Mag and Maureen's relationship while also using it as a symbol. The situation these characters are in is not limited to them. They're living in an Ireland that's suffering under 700 years of oppression and their psychologies are the extreme result of that. There's a fabulous moment, early in the play when Mag and Maureen argue about the issue of speaking English in Ireland and it's something that, no doubt, many people living with colonialism will identify with.

This production's brilliant cast and creative team have made the experience of uncovering this play's layers all the more interesting. They all bring such individual perspectives to the piece, whether it be insights into family dynamics or geography. As a result, we discovered something new in the text every day of rehearsal, exploring every aspect of the play down to the finest detail.

And, of course, the chemistry between the actors is palpable. The way that they drop into their characters, so that you really cannot see the performer within, is extraordinary.

This humanity, that the actors bring, that the creatives have worked into the production, is really at the heart of what we're trying to do. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is an incredibly witty pressure-cooker of a comedy that'll have you gripped to the last scene. But it's also something else, something that can sometimes be ignored: a call for kindness and understanding, a call to reach out to people who are so isolated, either by geography or circumstance or both, they can't ask for help.

"We discovered something new in the text every day in rehearsal"...

The Designer in Conversation

FORMER STC RESIDENT DESIGNER AND FREQUENT COLLABORATOR WITH DIRECTOR PAIGE RATTRAY, COSTUME AND SET DESIGNER RENÉE MULDER DISCUSSES THE UNUSUAL APPROACH SHE'S TAKEN TO BRINGING THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE TO LIFE.

*Tell us about your vision for this production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*.*

For me, this production started with a very early discussion I had with Paige Rattray, the director, about the idea of isolation. The two protagonists are isolated within the landscape in which they live, the hilly terrain of Leenane, a small and remote village on the West coast of Ireland. So, they're physically isolated, but they're really also emotionally isolated as well. That's why we wanted to explicitly include the landscape in design and use that to reflect the emotional unrest of the two characters. We wanted to set a scene that was bleak from the beginning.

What are some of the ways you incorporated isolation into this production's design?

We're conveying two spaces on the stage – the exterior landscape to Mag and Maureen's cottage and the cottage interior. We've pitched and angled the cottage into what seems a very tight corner of the stage. In doing so we're attempting to create a tension that forces the characters to live almost on top of each other, in this very co-dependent relationship that they have. The interior is like a pressure cooker, this tiny little environment simmering and bubbling on the inside, in contrast to a vast, depressing nothingness beyond.

How did you conceive of Mag and Maureen's costumes?

I wanted their costumes to speak to their psychology. In the beginning of the play, I tried to access that psychology through the daily rituals that happen between these two women. When we break that down, we initially see a daughter acting as a carer for her mother. For Mag, a frail, elderly woman. I asked questions like 'can she dress herself?' 'does she leave the cottage?' maybe Maureen helps her dress in the morning. For Maureen her role as carer seems all consuming, her clothes are therefore relatively practical and utilitarian.

As the play progresses, we see this relationship between the two characters disintegrate, so I'm reflecting that in the costumes too. One example of this is Mag, who begins the play in house clothes. We assume Maureen might help Mag dress into these clothes as part of their morning routine. As the relationship with her daughter continues to strain, the routine breaks down and Mag is then stuck in her nightie and dressing gown.

Tell us about the landscape of Leenane.

I try not to look at other productions while designing, but in doing a little bit of research on *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, it does seem that past sets show the interior of the cottage but not necessarily any external world. Landscapes like the one we've specified are incredibly challenging to build and aren't seen on theatre stages that often: It's quite mountainous, it's drab, it's grey, it's damp and boggy. The play is set in an economically hard time for Ireland and many people were travelling over to England to seek work. Pato, one of the characters does just that, and Ray, his younger brother, has dreams of moving out of the village altogether. Almost everyone in the play is trying to leave, trying to strive for a better life somewhere else.

Synopsis

In a small town in the Irish hills of Connemara, Maureen Folan lives a lonely existence with Mag, her aged mother. Their relationship is more arm wrestle than warm embrace.

Maureen is 40 and desperate for something – or someone – more, but between the constant demands, hostility to outsiders and nightly incontinence, Mag seems unlikely to allow that something to happen.

When local lad Ray arrives at their out-of-the-way home with a party invitation from his older brother Pato, Mag tries to keep it from Maureen, but Maureen finds out and is determined not to

miss out this time. Pato is visiting from London where he works as a labourer and seems pretty keen on Maureen, but when he spends the night with her after the party he finds himself in the middle of savage mother-daughter power struggle.



History and Context

MARTIN MCDONAGH & HISTORY

Martin McDonagh is one of the most celebrated Irish-British playwrights of recent decades. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is McDonagh's first play, which he wrote in under 10 days. The play was first produced at the Druid Theatre, Dublin in January 1996 as a co-production with the Royal Court Theatre. The play was also produced at London's West End, Broadway and off-Broadway. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is the most produced of all McDonagh's plays.

McDonagh is a second generation Irishman living in England. He is well known for writing the successful films *In Bruges* (2008) and *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017). His writing is not naturalistic but rather an impression of 'Irish life'. McDonagh follows a long tradition of Irish playwrights who have written about exile, religion, sex and Irishness (Blake, 2010).

McDonagh's writing is known for capturing the rhythms and cadences of rural Irish life (Moffatt, 1999). He wrote two trilogies - the first trilogy comprises *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, followed by *A Skull in Connemarra* and *The Lonesome West*. The three plays in the trilogy are set in Leenane, a small country town on the west coast of Ireland. The plays in the next trilogy are *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *The Banshees of Inisher* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, all of which are set on the Aran Islands, off the coast of Galway. McDonagh also wrote the successful play *The Pillowman* in 2003.

The actress Anna Manahan played Mag in the first production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* at The Druid Theatre. She was also in the production at the Royal Court which toured to Ireland and Australia. Manahan said in an interview about the play; "I couldn't believe it was a first play, and I also couldn't believe a young man of 25 as he then was could write so truly about a woman of 25 and a woman of 70. I don't like to throw the word genius around, but I think he shows signs of genius" (Manahan in Tallmer, 1998, p.14).

Character Analysis



MAUREEN

Maureen is described by McDonagh as a plain, slim woman of about 40. She has been worn down by living with her mother Mag who has tormented her since she was a child. Maureen has stayed behind in Connemara from a lack of opportunity, while her two sisters have left and married. Maureen is frustrated, mentally fragile and physically and emotionally trapped.

Maureen is a virgin and has only kissed two men in her life. Throughout the play, we see her frustration, pain and despair. Maureen is sensitive and has suffered from mental illness in the past. Her mother makes a point of telling Pato about the time Maureen spent in the mental institution. Mag says this to make Maureen look weak and to taint Pato's opinion of her.

Maureen is trapped and constrained by her mother and by the small-minded people of Connemara. In the play Ray describes Maureen as being dowdy and wearing horrible, unflattering clothes. However, Maureen has intelligence and wit. Lonergan (2012) writes that Maureen uses a wider vocabulary than most of the other characters in the play and corrects Mag on her grammar.

Maureen, unlike Mag, has the capacity to change and she sees a glimpse of the possibility of a new life with Pato in America. However, this dream is ruined by Mag, who makes sure Maureen doesn't read Pato's letter, explaining his feelings and inviting her to join him in America.

Maureen briefly experiences romance and passion with Pato for one night, after dressing up in a new black dress and flirting with Pato at the party. The morning after their passionate night together, Maureen flaunts her night of passion in front of her mother, seeming more concerned with making a showing of her conquest with Pato, than spending time with Pato before he leaves. Pato has always had feelings for Maureen and calls her the 'Beauty Queen of Leenane', a title Maureen fleetingly hopes might be true.

Character Analysis

PATO DOOLEY

Pato is described in relation to Maureen as: “A good looking man of about the same age as her” (McDonagh, 1996, p.19). Pato is a construction worker who primarily lives in London. He is a simple, straightforward and kind man. When Mag talks about Maureen’s mental illness and time in the Difford Hall mental institution, he kindly says: “What harm a breakdown, sure? Lot of people do have breakdowns” (McDonagh, 1996, p. 30). Pato has been working in London for years as although it’s not stimulating work, it’s constant and reliable. When Pato returns to Leenane for his uncle’s party, he flirts and becomes intimate with Maureen. He always liked Maureen but never told her of his feelings until now.

Pato, an ordinary man, catalyses the tragedy of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. He offers Maureen a normal, ordinary life and an escape from the confines of her mother’s small and manipulative world.



Character Analysis



Noni Hazelhurst in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* © Brett Boardman

MAG

Mag is described as a stout woman in her early 70s. She is a mean spirited, cold, frustrated and callous woman. Mag complains about everything, from having a bad back to getting lumpy porridge from Maureen. Mag spends most of her day sitting in a rocking chair, ordering Maureen to serve her porridge and Complian (a powdered food supplement). She is childishly selfish, demanding and manipulative. Mag belongs to an old Ireland, scared of change and what's outside her front door.

Mag is scared of Maureen leaving her alone, so does everything she can to ruin her chances with Pato. She tragically ruins Maureen's chance to start a new life in America with Pato, throwing his letter into the fire. Mag shows no affection, love or interest in Maureen and her happiness. Mag lies when Maureen asks if Ray has visited. She keeps to herself the fact that she read then burnt Pato's letter, accidentally blurting it out to Maureen with dire consequences.

RAY DOOLEY

Ray is Pato's younger brother. He is the messenger in the play, coming to the house to invite Maureen to the party and deliver Pato's letter to Maureen. Ray ignores Pato's clear instructions to put the letter in Maureen's hand, handing it to Mag with a promise to give it to Maureen. He proves to be untrustworthy and selfish, leaving the letter with Mag so as not to stay with her in the house a minute longer as he feels stifled.



Shiv Palekar of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* © Brett Boardman

Themes and Ideas

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS, CRUELTY AND VIOLENCE

Maureen and her mother Mag are trapped in a mutually destructive relationship. They have tormented each other for years. Mag is a mean spirited, cold and callous woman. She torments her daughter, Mag, even though she has stayed in Connemara, while her other daughters have left, married and moved away.

Maureen, having endured Mag's wrath for years, retaliates with harsh comments and actions towards her mother: "You're oul; and you're stupid and you don't know what you're talking about, Now shut up and eat your oul porridge" (McDonagh, 1996, p. 6). Maureen makes Mag lumpy porridge on purpose and buys Mag the biscuits she hates in retaliation to the way she's been treated by her mother.

There is a dark and unsettling humour between the two women. Mag makes a joke about a man who killed a woman in Dublin coming to kill Maureen, to which Maureen replies, "If he clobbered you with a big axe or something and took your oul head off and spat it in your neck, I wouldn't mind at all, going first" (McDonagh, 1996, p. 6).

Mag is determined to ruin Maureen's chance of freedom and love. When Ray delivers an invite for Maureen from Pato to

go to their Uncle's going away party, Mag burns the letter in the fireplace. Maureen only finds out about the letter when she stops Ray on his way back from their house. The climax of the play comes when Pato writes a letter to Maureen after their passionate night together. He exposes his feelings for her and how he'd like Maureen to join him in America, suggesting she could put Mag in a home. Maureen never receives the letter, as Mag reads the letter then drops it into the range. This opportunity would have been Maureen's ticket to freedom and a new life. Mag makes sure Maureen never finds out about Pato's letter, until it's too late. Mag accidentally spills information about the contents of the letter to Maureen towards the end of the play. Maureen retaliates with anger and violence, burning Mag's hand with vegetable oil, then beating her to death with a poker.

Maureen shows no remorse as she kills her mother, a reaction to years of frustration and pain. "In *Beauty Queen*, the violence comes as a shock: we see the 40 year old Maureen torturing her mother, but we don't really expect the murder that concludes the play" (Lonergan, 2012, p. 4). Lonergan suggests that the violence in the play is not caused by evil, but by the 'texture' of the characters' lives. He describes the lack of love in the women's relationship and in their lives as a reason for the violence and ultimate death of Mag (Lonergan, 2012).



Themes and Ideas

FAMILY DISINTEGRATION AND LONELINESS

The Beauty Queen of Leenane is set in a small town in the Irish hills of Connemara. Maureen Folan lives a lonely existence with Mag, her aged mother, in her early 90s. Both women are lonely and isolated, living a life of drudgery and routine. Maureen has stayed behind to look after her mother out of obligation and a lack of opportunity. After she has killed her mother, Maureen delivers a macabre monologue starting with the lines, "To Boston, To Boston I'll be going" (McDonagh, 1996, p. 50). She is delusional, creating a story about seeing Pato at the station and how she'll be joining him in Boston to start their life together. During Maureen's monologue, the audience doesn't realise that Mag is dead until the end of her monologue when Mag topples from the rocking-chair, falling onto the ground. The last image of the play is Maureen also on the rocking chair after her Mother's funeral, symbolically taking her mother's place.

In her monologue, Maureen reveals how isolated she and her mother have been and the lack of family support:

What about your sisters so?'. Me sisters wouldn't have the bitch. Not even a half'day at Christmas to be with her can them two stand. They clear forgot her birthday this year as well as that. 'How do you stick her without going off your rocker?' they do say to me. Behind her back, like. (McDonagh, 1996 p. 50).

Family disintegration is a significant theme in *The Beauty*

Queen of Leenane. The theme highlights the breakdown of the contemporary family, which McDonagh and other Irish playwrights have tended to focus on in their work. This includes the physical and psychological violence that often accompanies the disintegration of the family unit and family values. Kip Williams in his program introduction for this production explains:

What follows is an intense study of the ways familial relationships shape and alter us. The play also uses this twisted family unit as a figurative stand-in for Irish society as a whole and so, explores the cultural impact of centuries of oppression, poverty and dispossession. (Williams in STC, 2019).

Themes and Ideas



EMIGRATION, IRELAND AND THE IRISH

McDonagh is an English - born playwright, director and producer who lives in London. He was born in Camberwell, London to Irish parents. McDonagh has been accused of misrepresenting Ireland and the Irish people in his plays, as he has never resided in Ireland. McDonagh created 'Leenane' as an imagined location, although it is a real town in Ireland. McDonagh states:

It's not that I don't consider myself an Irish writer. I just try to avoid any questions of nationality or nationalism. I've always felt kind of in between. I'm more of a London boy than anything else, but you can't help having those Irish leanings. (McDonagh in Puebla, 2012, p. 314).

Emigration is one of the main themes in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. The idea of emigration has connotations of positivity and hope. Lonergan (2012) described how the pictures of the Kennedys on the wall in Maureen and Mag's house are symbolic of an Irish success story. The Kennedy family left Ireland and within four generations had achieved huge success in American politics. However, the picture of the Kennedys are juxtaposed against the reality of Maureen and Mag's lives and the lives of many in the town. There is hardly any work in the town and most young people leave to start their lives elsewhere. There is a loss of Irish culture referenced in the play, with the characters watching Australian TV shows including 'The Sullivans'.

Pato and Maureen have both experienced leaving Leenane and moving to London for work opportunities. Pato works in construction in London. He tells Maureen how he is often homesick and lonely in London, mainly because of language barriers. He doesn't understand many of the colloquialisms the other men use including the term 'gangerman' which describes men on a construction site. Maureen also experienced racism and insults in London, because of the language barrier and not understanding the English colloquialisms and way of life.

Themes and Ideas



The cast of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* © Brett Boardman

EMIGRATION, IRELAND AND THE IRISH (CONT'D)

Pato describes not feeling at home in either London or Leenane:

When I'm over in London and working in rain and it's more or less cattle I am, and the young fellas cursing over cards and drunk and sick, and the oul digs over there, all pee stained mattresses and nothing to do but watch the clock...When it's there I am, it's here I wish I was, of course. (McDonagh, 1996, p. 26).

BLACK COMEDY AND MELODRAMA

McDonagh's style of writing is a combination of comedy and cruelty, with one illuminating the other: "He infuses the traditional melodramatic structure of the play with an array of comic ingredients: macabre humor, crude language and grotesque characterisations, facets of comedy that illuminate the darker sides of life" (Castleberry, 2007, p. 57).

Christabel Sved, in the Director's notes for STC's 2010 production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, states "McDonagh parodies, exaggerates and toys with Irishness through his outsider's gaze" (Sved, 2010, p.10). She describes *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* as a combination of melodrama and brutal comedy with deep emotions and psychology underneath the text.

Castleberry (2007) describes McDonagh's written style as an old-fashioned melodrama with fast-paced dialogue and a simple narrative. In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, his characters speak in short sentences, which are often banal and repetitive. This style of writing keeps the meaning on the surface level, preventing the characters from demonstrating any true depth of feeling and real communication (Castleberry, 2007).

Kip Williams, in his program introduction to STC's production (2019), describes McDonagh's language style as "sharp, idiosyncratic and pitch-black comedy" (STC Program, 2019, p. 2). He explains that even though the content of the play is grave, the language is quite the opposite. The language style of the play is Black Comedy. An example is the the characters' spiteful words and petty actions providing laughter for the audience. The audience experiences a catharsis by laughing at their banter, sly comments and violent actions towards each other. Blake describes the comedy as "deadpan humour, a nuanced depiction of domestic cold war" (Blake, 2010, p.12).

However, the real misery of the two women is apparent underneath their cruelty (Moffatt, 1999). The pain they have caused each other is evident; there is no love or hope in their relationship or their lives. The cruelty the women inflict on each other reaches a climax when Maureen pours hot oil on Mag and hits her with a poker, leaving her writhing in pain, bringing about her death. This climactic moment is a result of the constant psychological assault Maureen has experienced throughout her life. It is an example of what Payne describes as "A stark drama, humanising comedy; gut wrenching tragedy" (Payne, 1999, p. 1).



Noñi Hazelhurst in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* © Brett Boardman

IN YER FACE THEATRE - STYLE OF 1990'S IRISH AND BRITISH WRITING

Castleberry (2007) points to Irish and British playwrights of the 1990s refusing to ignore the more sordid and violent aspects of life. He explains how theatre critic Alex Sierz coined the phrase 'in-yer-face theatre' to encapsulate the intensity and the deliberate relentlessness of British and Irish Drama of the 1990s.

Castleberry (2007) discusses features of Irish and English plays of this era as crude language, blatant sexuality and excessive violence. He explains that these elements came about because of the social revolution of the 1960s, the weakening of the Catholic Church, the rise in popularity in American film and the coming of age of the postmodern generation (Castleberry, 2007).



The cast of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* © Brett Boardman

Set and Costume Design

COSTUME DESIGN

This production takes inspiration from the time period in which the play was written. Influences from the grunge culture of the 1990s, such as *Trainspotting*, can be seen through the characters' clothes and hairstyles. The costumes also reflect the realities of the characters' daily lives, incorporating practical elements such as gumboots and coats for weather protection.

Maureen buys a black dress for her night out with Pato, and the dress becomes a symbol for her unmet desires, and a tool through which Mag shames her. Maureen appears desperate in her new dress, which makes the ways Mag taunts her all the more tragic.

SET DESIGN

Described in the script as 'the living room/kitchen of a rural cottage in the west of Ireland' (McDonagh, 1996, p. 1) the set is a very idiosyncratic, domestic world. There is a kitchen window "looking out onto fields" (McDonagh, 1996, p. 1) and in the opening scene the characters talk about the rain. This small amount of information is highly evocative and the design of this production captures it accurately.

Designed by Renee Mulder, the set focuses on the stifling internal world of the characters and emphasises their isolation. Surrounded by the detritus of their everyday lives, the characters are trapped under ever-growing piles of their own refuse, both physically and metaphorically. The toxic relationship between Mag and Maureen is reflected through the actual piling up of rubbish in the space. Surrounded by a mossy peat bog reflective of the Irish countryside, the cottage is a very 'real world' space.

The set employs a revolve to show the inside and outside worlds alternately and is activated at times to effectively convey the different worlds of the characters.



Yael Stone in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* © Brett Boardman

Reference List

WEBSITE

- Brantley, B. (2017). Review: *'The Beauty Queen of Leenane': Oh Gosh, I've turned into my Mother*. New York, NY: New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/15/theater/the-beauty-queen-of-leenane-review.html?searchResultPosition=1>
- Blake, J. (2010). *Apron strings become a noose for daughter trapped in domestic blitz*. Retrieved from STC archives.
- Loneragan, P. (2012). *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*. London, England: Methuen Drama.
- Sved, C. (2010). Director's Notes, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. STC Ed Program.
- Tallmer, J. (1998). *Beauty and the Beast*. Roundabout Theatre Company, Criterion Center, 98 (5), p. 8. Pure Theatre Online, page 14. Retrieved from https://transcription.si.edu/transcribe/15195/NMAAHC-2011_45_31_008
- McDonagh, M. (1996). *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. London, England: Methuen Drama. https://www.theatermania.com/off-broadway/reviews/the-beauty-queen-of-leenane_79710.html
- Puebla, E. (2012). *Performing the Real and Terrifying Domestic Crisis in Martin McDonagh's The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. University of Seville, 307-322.

PROGRAM

- Sydney Theatre Company. (2019). *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. Sydney, Australia: Sydney Theatre Company.
- Sydney Theatre Company. (2019). 2019 Education Brochure. Sydney, Australia: Sydney Theatre Company

PLAY

- McDonagh, M. (1996). *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* Sydney, London: Methuen Drama.