

A bloody cat's tale about the way violence chases its own tail

In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Martin McDonagh, the playwright, addresses the themes as the futility of Republican Ireland's cycle of violence and the absurdity of splinter-group extremism. It is a black comedy which marries revenge tragedy with farce.

What's the best way to deal with terrorists? Well, laughing at them is one option. Humour may not defuse bombs, but it can prick the inflated egos and romantic delusions of the fools who think blowing up chip shops with kids inside makes them "freedom fighters". Martin McDonagh's splatterfest is a gleefully gruesome calling to account of the men, and women, who cannot get their priorities right, placing a love for cats above putting a bullet through human heads.

TONE of the play

A sort of spiralling insanity that wears its morality lightly but indignantly, while piling on the violence. McDonagh's style has a purpose - to form a bridge over the sorrows; moments of humanity cannot survive in such a blighted world. Normal code of conduct and rationality have been turned on their heads.

CREATING MOMENTS

The play works with a traditional structure but it is a play which uses "moments" to drive home its themes. These "moments" are points the action moves to and from.

Characters and their relationships create moments of both humour and discomfort by juxtaposing feelings of love and loss and yearning against frustrated, tragic lives. Arbitrary events become justification for the most extreme actions

Eg

Moment 1: the James torture scene (Sc 2)

Padraic describe his torture of James as being "at work". His tone is sympathetic and rational, playing more as a teacher or father disciplining a naughty child. What he says is at odds with what he is doing physically torturing James who is guilty of no-more than supplying marijuana to local college students.

Moment 2: Donny and Davey are discussing methods of sawing through a spine, as they hack apart the bodies of the splinter group.

The mere brutality and unsettling nature of dismembering a body, by hacking it apart is set against the comedic aspects of the conversation and its absolute absurdist nature. This is discomfiting and humorous for the content of this section sits against the casual nature of the conversation.

What other moments can you find where the dialogue works against the action?

The New Theatre production 2018

The play was written in the early 90's but not performed until 2001 by the RSC – some suggest out fear. Although originally set in 1993, our production is less tied to that particular decade. I felt the universality of the themes in a post 911 world made this a play for the 21st century and wanted to re-style it for theatre of the 21st century. So the setting and time references are vague and much of the action and props are stylized.

The set design is a metaphor, reflecting not only the wild, ragged coastline of Inishmore but also the jagged, fractured nature of relationships and the ropes and chains of ideology which bind them. Characters move in and out of darkness. Donny and Davey's space is invaded by the outside world.

It appeared to me that Donny and Davey were *Waiting for Godot* styled characters, or a Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – trying to make sense of the world in which they want to live without violence. But the world won't leave them alone to live peaceably and they are forced to participate. I do not see Davey as an idiot – he is the one who offers the audience perspective on the action. His observations are ours.

There is a casual nature to the confronting dialogue and actions of this play. The challenge has been to underscore how the comedy and violence are combined in a darkly funny portrait of rivalries among terrorists for whom killing, torturing and bombing are just day-jobs.