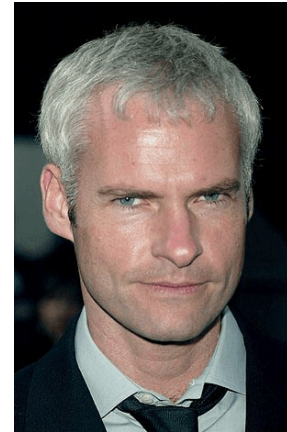


A Playgoer's Companion



Martin McDonagh was born March 26th 1970 in Camberwell, London, England. Though he has never lived in Ireland, his parents were Irish immigrants and he considers himself an Anglo-Irish playwright, frequently spending time visiting his relatives in Ireland. When McDonagh was 16 his parents returned to Ireland, leaving Martin and his brother in London, where they took on odd jobs and collected unemployment to pay the bills. Beginning his career by scripting radio plays – none of which were ever produced – McDonagh developed his skills in

storytelling and writing dialogue. By the age of 25, his first play, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, for which he won the 1997-98 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play, was being produced by the Druid Theatre Company.

"In the late 1990's, Martin McDonagh enjoyed the most auspicious theatrical debut since that of Oscar Wilde. Produced in thirty-nine countries in twenty-seven languages, McDonagh's plays were performed in North America in 2001, more often than those of any other playwright save Shakespeare." – Joan Fitzpatrick Dean

He quickly became known for his use of dark comedy, rough Irish dialect, and grim plot twists. Since then, he has been nominated for and won several other Drama Desk Awards, and four Tony Awards. He has also begun trying his hand at the film industry, working as a writer for *Six Shooter* (2005) and *In Bruges* (2008), and will be collaborating with his brother, James Michael McDonagh, on *The Guard*, to be released in 2011.

"McDonagh, a precocious Anglo-Irish playwright, is a natural storyteller. He can make an audience gasp. He knows how to twist a plot, how to reveal personality through gesture, and how to bring the set into play. He is also, incidentally, very funny." -- *The New Yorker*



The Cripple of Inishmaan and Man of Aran

This play touches on many aspects of Irish culture during in the 1930's. It is set on the remote island of Inishmaan, which is one of three islands making up the Aran Islands, off the west coast of Ireland. John Millington Synge described them in his journal (1907) as one of the most primitive places left in Europe. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is a

portrayal of a pure Irish life taken to a comic extreme. It is suddenly given meaning when the Hollywood film director Robert Flaherty and his crew of Americans arrive to shoot the documentary film *Man of Aran* on location. McDonagh's characters see in the filming only an opportunity to escape to Hollywood and the good life in America. To the islanders' amazement, Cripple Billy, the outcast and orphan of Inishmaan, is hired by Flaherty and travels to Hollywood for a screen test bursting with Irish clichés and stereotypes about the Irish and the disabled that sends Billy packing for home where in turn he (perhaps) unmasks the lies surrounding his birth and the death of his parents.

The film that is of central importance to this play was not simply invented to make the story work. *Man of Aran* (the cover of this Companion is a still from the film) was an actual movie that was shot just as it is depicted in the play. The film shows the harshness and rawness of this landscape that the people of Aran lived in and was captured in the play. This film shows just how rigorous the terrain actually was on this remote island. It also paints a picture of the kind of natural, social and environmental hardships the people who lived on these islands had to face every day.



"*The Cripple of Inishmaan* is as funny and sad and exhilarating a new play as I've seen for some time" – Elyse Sommer, *Curtain Up*

McDonagh and Irish Theatre

"Martin McDonagh is one of the most important figures in the new generation of British playwrights that emerged in the 1990s. Born and bred in London but of Irish parentage, he is often held to represent a new form of 'Anglo-Irishness' that repudiates familiar constructions of nationality while remaining indebted to a tradition of Irish drama initiated by J. M. Synge . . . McDonagh himself claims little first-hand knowledge of this tradition, however, and he might more accurately be said to inhabit a postmodern world in which traditions are mediated by popular culture, especially television situation comedy and American cinema. He typifies a generation of dramatists for whom American influences are more pervasive than those of either England or Ireland, and whose ideas have been shaped less by theatre than by television, film and music. McDonagh's plays thereby retain an ironic distance from the Irish writers he is sometimes said to imitate; the challenge instead will be to avoid too great an immersion in the popular culture of a newly 'globalised' Britain in which America is the dominant economic and cultural superpower." – Steven Price (University of Wales)

"The Quentin Tarantino of the Emerald Isle"
– *The Financial Times*

This document was researched by
The Cripple of Inishmaan Task Force:

Josh Underhill, Ang Moore, and Tyler MacLennan

and assembled and edited by the Editorial Team:

Kendra Murray, Kylee French, Laurie Anne MacKenzie,
Peter Morrison, and Russ Hunt

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