Dramaturgy Handbook:

**The Cripple of Inishmaan**

Martin McDonagh

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.................................................................................................................................................. 2  
Guide to the Text ..................................................................................................................................................... 3  
Martin McDonagh: A Biography ......................................................................................................................... 8  
About Inishmaan and the Aran Islands.................................................................................................................. 9  
Life in Ireland, 1934 ............................................................................................................................................... 10  
Irish Etiquette and Social Customs ...................................................................................................................... 11  
Places Mentioned in The Cripple of Inishmaan ................................................................................................. 12
Guide to the Text

Act I, Scene 1

Ladeen refers to a small lad, or a small boy. In Ireland, many nouns used by English speakers become diminutive with the “-een” suffix. For example, a small block of wood would be a “blockeen.” Poteen, a type of Irish whiskey mentioned later in the play, gets its name from a small pot that it was made in.

Act I, Scene 2

Fecking eej is slang for “fucking idiot.” The “di” sound, in the Irish cadence of English, sounds like a soft “j,” and “eej” is merely an abbreviation.

Winkles refer to periwinkles, or sea snails. Not a very lively audience for Johnnypateenmike.

Robert Flaherty (1884-1951) was a renowned American filmmaker. Born in Michigan in 1884 to an Irish father, he was a pioneer in documentary film and using film as a form of visual anthropology. His first job as a railroad prospector in northern Canada inadvertently started his film career, as he brought a movie camera along for fun, soon realizing he enjoyed moviemaking. His first film, Nanook of the North, a documentary about life among the Inuits, premiered in 1922. This film gained him enough recognition to be sent to Samoa by Paramount to make a movie about the people there, which became 1926’s Moana. His film Man of Aran was shot in the Aran Islands in 1934, and inspired Martin McDonagh to write The Cripple of Inishmaan and set it during that time period. Flaherty also directed 1948’s Louisiana Story, a Standard Oil-funded film about life on an oil rig. His 1950 film The Titan: The Story of Michelangelo won him an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature.

Man of Aran is a documentary about life on the Aran Islands in 1934. Directed by Robert Flaherty, it depicted the daily lives of the islanders. It was not a strict documentary; rather, it was a fictional documentary meant to show the world the hardships of traditional life on the islands rather than observing actual islanders going about their daily lives. For example, the famous scene where the fishermen are paddling a boat in a gale while shark fishing was fabricated, and sharks had not been hunted by the islanders for over fifty years. In addition, the “families” shown were not blood related; they were merely islanders who were photogenic and bore some resemblance to one another. Still, it is regarded for its editing, cinematography, and depiction of a bygone way of life.

Mintios are a type of candy better known today as Mentos. The other candies mentioned (Chocky Top Drops, Fripple Frapples) were names created by McDonagh.

Cheesy praitie is an Irish breakfast pancake made with potatoes and topped with cheese. “Praitie” is an Irish slang word for “potato.”
Act I, Scene 3

A **curragh** is a small rowboat. It is usually spelled “currah,” reflecting the Irish pronunciation. It is used for fishing and transporting goods. In the Aran Islands, currachs traditionally had sails, although most other rowboats don’t.

**Tripeen** refers to a small trip. See the notes above, from ladeen.

**Kevin Barry** (1902-1920) was an Irish Republican executed by the British at age 18. A medical student and IRA member, he was arrested after opening fire on a British army truck. He was captured and tortured, but refused to name his comrades. He was executed by public hanging. After his death, he became a martyr symbolizing Irish loyalty.

**Jam roly-poly** is a traditional 19th century British dessert. It is made by rolling spongy dough called “pudding” around jam, similar to a jelly roll. It was also called “dead man’s arm” because it was sometimes prepared by being wrapped in a sleeve or trouser leg.

**Puddings** as referred to in the script are not what Americans traditionally think of as pudding (a la Bill Cosby), but rather any starchy but sweet dessert. Chocolate pudding and custard do fall into this category, but known as “soft puddings,” they are only one type of pudding. “Savory” puddings include sweet foods with slightly harder, sliceable, pie-like consistencies, like spoonbread or polenta, and can even include meat, like the traditional steak-and-kidney pudding of Britain or haggis of Scotland. Another category of pudding is more cake-like, and contains desserts such as jam roly-poly (noted above) from Ireland; duff, a fruit-filled cake from the Caribbean; and the traditional “Christmas pudding” cake. Other traditional desserts with pudding-like qualities fall into the “creamy pudding” category, such as panna cotta, from Italy; flan, from Mexico; crème brulée, from France;

Act I, Scene 4

**Poteen** is a type of Irish whiskey made traditionally in a small pot.

**Skitter** is a slang term for cow feces.
Beetroot paella: Paella is a Spanish dish containing cooked rice, sautéed meat, and vegetables. Beetroot paella is probably the above dish containing beets.

Gasur is an Irish Gaelic word meaning “boy.”

Act I, Scene 5

“You’ll be for the high jump,” is a British slang term for “you’ll be reprimanded.”

A rake refers to, in this context, a bunch, as in “he’ll have a bunch more eggs if Helen doesn’t keep working for him.”

Act II, Scene 1

Plankeen, as above, refers to a small plank of wood.

Michael Collins (1890-1922) was an Irish revolutionary leader who was also briefly president of the Irish Republic.

“One of the fat ones” is a blanket term referring to “one of those important people.”

Act II, Scene 2

Banshees are spirits that, in Irish folklore, take the forms of women whose primary purpose is to wail and inform a family of an impending death. The word originally came from a combination of the Irish words “bean” (woman) and “sith” (fairy) or “sid” (fairy mound), so literally, it means “woman of the fairy mound.” Banshees have appeared in Irish and Scottish stories throughout history, usually at night and usually when someone is to die. Contrary to popular belief, a banshee doesn’t necessarily refer to an old hag – it can also take the form of a beautiful woman, or even an animal which makes crying noises, like a crow or a weasel. The mythological story of the banshee and her cries is also related to the ancient Irish tradition of wailing for the dead called “keening.” Since the banshee usually appears in white, the story is also thought to be related to the mythical Mexican weeping woman in white named “La Llorona.”

Colleen is the Irish word for girl.

“The Croppy Boy” is an Irish ballad written in about 1845 about the Irish Rebellion of 1798. It is about an Irish rebel who stops in a church to confess that he’s about to participate in an attack against the British, only to discover that on the other side of the confessional is a British soldier who arrests him after he exits the confessional. It was written by Carroll Malone.
A **croppy** was a nickname given to Irish rebels at the time of the rebellion in 1798. It refers to the hairstyle most soldiers preferred – a short, cropped look that went against the wig-wearing aristocrats. In later times, croppy was used as an insult and still is today. The term appears in two famous Irish songs, “The Croppy Boy,” and “Croppies Lie Down,” as well as the name of a park in Dublin and gravesite in County Waterford in Southern Ireland known as the grave of the “Unknown Croppy.”

**Ara** is a slang word used at the beginning of a sentence to mean “sure,” or “all right.”

**Pontius Pilate** was the judge at the Trial of Jesus. He appears in all four gospels and is often associated with the death sentence of Jesus.

“**Jesus drove a thousand pigs into the sea**” refers to a story in Mark, Chapter 5. From the New International Version of the Bible:

“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!”

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how
much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”

Act II, Scene 3

A **donkey jacket** is a short wool coat with leather shoulders and buttons.

**“Biggles Goes to Borneo”:** “Biggles” was a character invented by W. E. Johns for a series of children’s adventure books. A pilot and detective named James Bigglesworth, he appeared in a short story in the first issue of *Popular Flying* magazine in 1932 and became so popular that he was featured in 98 books of short stories, similar to the “Tintin” series by Belgian author Hergé. The series stopped in 1968 due to the author’s death, even though several of the 98 books were published posthumously. The *Biggles* books are noted for their adventurous mentality, “boys will be boys” spirit, and colorful British idioms. Oddly enough, there was a book entitled *Biggles in Borneo*, but it was written and published in 1943 – nine years after the events of *The Cripple of Inishmaan*.

**Begora** (also spelled “begorra” and “begorrah) is Irish slang for “by God.”

A **shillelagh** is an Irish wooden club used as a walking stick or a weapon.

**Doolally** is Irish slang for “crazy.”

**Codding** is Irish slang for “joking” or “deceiving.”

**Gets** is an Irish slang term referring to silly older people.

**Curate** generally refers to a parish priest, but in Irish slang it refers to a man who works in a bar. Helen’s statement about “rupturing a curate at six,” could refer to her possibly kicking a man at a bar who tried to take advantage of her, rather than kicking a parish priest.

Further sources on Irish slang:

[http://www.irishslang.co.za/irishn_z.htm](http://www.irishslang.co.za/irishn_z.htm)

[www.slang.ie](http://www.slang.ie)
Martin McDonagh
A Biography

- **26 March 1970** – Martin McDonagh is born in Camberwell, a district in south London, to Irish parents.

- **The 1990s** – McDonagh writes two *trilogies* of plays, all set in *Ireland*. They are
  - **Trilogy 2**: *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1997), *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001), and *The Banshees of Inisheer* (Unpublished/unproduced)

- **2003** – McDonagh’s first non-Irish play, *The Pillowman*, is fully produced.

- **2005** – McDonagh earns his first *Academy Award* for his film *Six Shooter*.

- **2008** – McDonagh earns his second *Academy Award* for his film *In Bruges*.

- **2010** – McDonagh’s first play set in America (*A Behanding in Spokane*) premiers, earning actor *Christopher Walken* a Tony nomination.
About Inishmaan and the Aran Islands

Inishmaan is the largest of a group of islands known as the Aran Islands, which is located in the Galway Bay off the coast of County Galway in Ireland. The islands are known for their bucolic way of life, usage of Irish language, ancient ruins, and artistic traditions.

Inishmaan comes from the Irish words for “middle island”, Inis Meain. The island has a proud population of 160. In terms of nature, the island contains a large amount of ancient limestone (which is probably what Kate talks to). The island’s unusually warm climate allows for a wide array of plants to grow, from alpine to Mediterranean plants. Famous places on the island include Conor’s Fort, a stone fort shaped like an oval dating back to the pre-Christian era, and Synge’s Cottage and Synge’s Chair, sites pertaining to playwright John Millington Synge. Synge is said to have been inspired to write Playboy of the Western World and Riders to the Sea by the view from Synge’s Chair and his time spent vacationing on the island.

The Aran Islands are comprised of Inishmaan, Inishmore, and Inisheer. Inishmore is known for the Iron Age fort of Dun Aengus and one of the world’s tiniest churches, the 11th century Tempull Bheanain. In terms of people associated with the islands, Inishmore was home to author Liam O’Flaherty and poet Mairtin o Direain. The “Aran culture” of living “off the land” continued into the 19th century, almost freezing the islands in time – a phenomenon captured by outsiders such as John Millington Synge in The Aran Islands and in Robert J. Flaherty’s Man of Aran. Irish is still the primary language on the islands, even today. Popular activities performed on the the islands by locals and tourists alike are fishing, diving, and rock climbing on the island’s craggy cliffs. Traditional crafts still performed on the island include the knitting of Aran sweaters and shipbuilding, specifically, curraghs, or traditional canvas canoes used for fishing. There has also been a renewed interest in photography and landscape art depicting the island’s natural beauty. Most homes on the island bear thatched roofs – not only functional but a traditional art form as well.

Cliffs of Inishmaan

One style of roof-thatching
During the time of the events of the play, Ireland was known as the Irish Free State. This state did not include the counties now known as Northern Ireland. The Irish Free State was established in 1922 and lasted until 1937, when a referendum to the constitution made the country the Irish Republic, or Ireland. There were three positions of political power in the Irish Free State; in 1934, the monarch was George V, the Governor-General was Domhnall Ua Buachalla, and the President was Eamon de Valera. De Valera’s actions during the Easter Rising of 1916 gained him enough popularity to be elected as President in 1918, initially representing the Sinn Fein party, but in 1932 he created the Fianna Fail party, a centrist-right party which controlled Ireland’s government through the rest of its tenure as the Irish Free State and through much of modern-day Irish history. De Valera’s major accomplishments were relieving Ireland of its allegiance to the British crown, return of Irish control of Irish ports, and scaling down the Irish National Debt. One latent effect of Ireland’s relationship-cutting with Britain during this period was that of its role in WWII: since Ireland’s economy no longer largely supported Britain’s and there was no longer any British military presence on the island, the Germans were uninterested in interfering and Ireland found itself given the option of neutrality.

The population of Ireland in the 1930s was roughly 3 million, and most lived in countryside poverty. The country was still suffering from 1929’s economic downturn, and the average farm worker’s salary was 15 shillings a week. Cooking was done in a bastible, or pot oven, heated by peat drawn from bogs. Peat was placed atop a pot, and fire beneath it. Bacon was the most available and popular meat, and in coastal areas such as Inishmaan, fish were plentiful. Currant cake was a popular dessert, especially at Christmastime. School attendance was mandatory for all children up to age 14 for a minimum of 190 days a year. For fun, people played sports like hurling and Gaelic football, danced, listened to gramophones and played cards. Women kept busy by weaving baskets and knitting. Cinema and radio were available, but only five percent of the population had access to either medium. The first radio transmitter was opened in Athlone in 1933.
Irish Etiquette and Social Customs

- A handshake is an appropriate form of greeting. Close friends and relatives will often embrace when greeting each other.

- Rather than point with a finger, the Irish will nod or jerk their heads or chins to the object being discussed.

- Men should open doors for women and stand when a woman enters the room.

- Topics that a visitor should refrain from initiating include politics, religion, and any criticism of Ireland.

- Avoid speaking to anyone with both hands in your pocket. It can be construed as unmannerly behavior.

- Irish etiquette requires that your wrists be kept above the table when dining. Dining is generally Western-style with the fork held steadfastly in the left hand and the knife in the right hand.

- A sure way to lose respect with Irish acquaintances is failure to buy a round of drinks when you've been accepting drinks from others. The Irish do enjoy their drink especially as it is a way of expressing camaraderie with each other. Neglecting your duty in buying rounds is an insult to them. (Naturally, this is a generalization and should be regarded as such.)

Via CountryWatch
Inishmaan (in red) is the island where the play takes place.

Dublin (in yellow) is the capital of Ireland. In Irish, the city’s name is Baile Atha Cliath meaning “town of the hurdled ford.” The modern name comes from Dubh Linn, meaning “black pool.” Today, it is home to a half-million people.

Antrim (in blue) is a city in Northern Ireland today. It was the location of a major battle in the Irish Rebellion of 1798. It is twenty miles north of Belfast, the largest town in Northern Ireland.

Leenane (in orange) is a village in County Galway north of the Galway Bay. It is also known as Leenaun. It is the setting of Martin McDonagh’s plays The Lonesome West and The Beauty Queen of Leenane.

Rosmuck (in purple) is a village in County Galway near Galway City. Known today as Rosmuc, this settlement dates back to 400 and was named for an Irish term meaning “pig’s head peninsula.” It is known today for being a center for Gaeltacht, or traditional Irish language and culture.

Connemara (in green) is a district in County Galway. Leenane and Rosmuck are both located in this district. The region is renowned for the Connemara pony, a breed of horse, and being the landing spot of the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic.