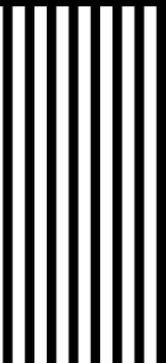


BLOOMSDAY

BY STEVEN DIETZ



DRAMATISTS
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BLOOMSDAY
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*To the memory, artistry and spirit of Scott Weldin.
Designer, Collaborator, Friend.*

BLOOMSDAY was originally produced by ACT Theatre (Kurt Beattie, Artistic Director; Carlo Scandiuizzi, Executive Director), Seattle, Washington, in September 2015. It was directed by Kurt Beattie, the scenic designer was Robert Dahlstrom, the costume designer was Catherine Hunt, the lighting designer was Duane Schuler, the sound designer was Chris Walker, and the stage manager was JR Welden. The cast was as follows:

CAITHLEEN Sydney Andrews
ROBBIE Eric Ankrim
ROBERT Peter Crook
CAIT Marianne Owen

BLOOMSDAY was commissioned and originally produced by ACT Theatre as part of the New Works for the American Stage, by Laurie Besteman and Jack Lauderbagh, Paul and Paula Butzi, Jim and Jane Lyons, Charlie and Benita Staadecker, and Jim and Kathy Tune.

BLOOMSDAY was developed in part at the Icicle Creek New Play Festival, Leavenworth, Washington.

BLOOMSDAY is the recipient of the 2016 Steinberg New Play Award Citation from the American Theatre Critics Association.

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CHARACTERS

CAITHLEEN (*pronounced “Kath-LEEN”*)—a young Irish woman, 20.

ROBBIE—a young American man, 20.

CAIT (*pronounced “KATE”*)—Caithleen at age 55.

ROBERT—Robbie at age 55.

TIME and PLACE

The present. And 35 years earlier.

Dublin, Ireland.

SETTING

Depicted: a series of intimate locales, simply rendered. Rooms—benches—cafe tables—alleyways, etc. Changes from one to another are fluid and immediate.

Conjured: the deep, rich, formidable allure of Dublin.

For me it will always be the first city in the world.

—James Joyce

*And I ask you now
Tell me what would you do
If her hair was black and her eyes were blue?*

—Steve Earle

BLOOMSDAY

ACT ONE

Dublin. Early June.

A 20-year-old Irish woman is revealed. She wears a coat. She is holding a well-worn book. A thick book. She checks her watch. This is Caithleen.

A 55-year-old American man is watching her, from some distance. This is Robert.

Robert speaks to the audience.

ROBERT. That one.

That one there.

That lovely girl will ask me if I'm here for the tour.

CAITHLEEN. (*Calling to him.*) Good morning. Are you here for the tour?

ROBERT. And today I will say yes—oh, yes—I am most certainly here for the tour—

CAITHLEEN. You're welcome. My name is Caithleen. If you'll just queue up with the others—we'll make a start at half-ten.

ROBERT. —but I have not come back to Dublin for the tour she is giving—no, certainly not—

CAITHLEEN. This tour is called:

ROBERT. I've no need to spend one more minute in what they like to call—

CAITHLEEN. (*To the unseen group.*) "James Joyce's Dublin."

ROBERT. As if the man built it. As if the hallowed old lecherous scribe created the town rather than cannibalized it.

CAITHLEEN. During the next ninety minutes we will see, first-hand, many of the very places Joyce depicted in his most famous novel—his masterwork—

ROBERT. His doorstep of an opus—

CAITHLEEN. —a book widely considered the most important novel of the twentieth century:

ROBERT. —a book he titled with typical hubris and pretension:

CAITHLEEN. *Ulysses*.

ROBERT. The most under-read and over-praised piece of doggerel ever hemorrhaged onto the world! Don't take my word for it.

CAITHLEEN. Joyce was a Dubliner by birth—

ROBERT. Ask half the critics and every college sophomore on earth.

CAITHLEEN. —and in *Ulysses* he set himself the task of describing a single day in the life of three residents of Dublin: a young writer named Stephen Dedalus; his friend Leopold Bloom; and Bloom's unforgettable wife, Molly. The day he chose was June the sixteenth, nineteen oh-four. This day has come to be known as "Bloomsday"—a day when Dubliners and people 'round the world dress up in turn-of-the-century clothing and reenact moments from the novel, including Leopold Bloom's walk through Dublin. Today we shall walk in his footsteps.

ROBERT. And away they will go. And though I've already been on this tour once before, I will follow along. You see...

CAITHLEEN. Now—before we begin—are there any questions?

ROBERT. ...that girl there...and would you—would you please just for a minute—would you please see that girl there?...

The play stops here.

And along with Robert, we look at Caithleen.

...that is how she looked when I met her. Thirty-five years ago. She was twenty. A knowing, wise, and vibrant twenty. And I was also twenty. A stupid, clueless, and arrogant twenty. A boy she herself best described as a *feckin eejit*.

CAITHLEEN. Joyce believed that if the Dublin of his time were destroyed—it could be reconstructed, street by street, from his own writings.

ROBERT. The tour lasted for nearly two hours.

CAITHLEEN. To criticism that his novel was not worth reading, Joyce said: "If *Ulysses* is not worth reading then life is not worth living."

ROBERT. But I didn't hear a word of it. Because after she first spoke to me...something...something in me...happened.

And so that is the tour I am on today.

And that girl...she is the perfect guide. Because to her—and this is something she told me thirty-five years ago that I only now begin to understand—to her, Time is not a series of neat single notes called "the present"—one played after another. No, to her Time is a *chord*: many notes, past-present-future, all real...all alive...and all played at once.

A shift: Caithleen turns directly to Robert. The action is continuous.

CAITHLEEN. May I speak to you for a moment—

ROBERT. (*Still to audience.*) It's impossible, of course—to return to another Time.

CAITHLEEN. Yes—you there—I'm talkin' to you—

ROBERT. (*To audience, somewhat startled/amazed.*) And yet: *here I am.*

CAITHLEEN. —let's move over here—away from the others—

ROBERT. (*To Caithleen.*) Yes—of course.

CAITHLEEN. (*Calls off.*) DAVEY, WOULD YOU TAKE MY GROUP FROM HERE?—O'CONNELL STREET IS NEXT—I'LL CATCH UP WITH YOU.

Robert is waving goodbye to the unseen group.

ROBERT. Good riddance!—right? That was a pretty dull group, if you ask me.

CAITHLEEN. That "dull group" paid good money for this tour and got nothin' but interruptions and bluster from you.

ROBERT. Oh, believe me—I have no desire to interrupt the tour.

CAITHLEEN. You may be some great fan of James Joyce, but you can't just—

ROBERT. James Joyce is nothing but a trickster!—a charlatan peddling ten pounds of nonsense!

CAITHLEEN. Yes—you told that to my group!—

ROBERT. I'm sorry—can't help myself.

CAITHLEEN. —but the fact is we're a group of fourteen people who don't need your rather pompous thoughts on the matter.

She starts off.

ROBERT. Thirteen.

CAITHLEEN. What?

This stops her.

ROBERT. Without me, you're a group of thirteen. And I know that troubles you.

CAITHLEEN. (*It does trouble her.*) Yes—it's thirteen now—you're right...

ROBERT. I say let 'em go to the pub!—that's where they'd rather be anyway. They haven't read a word of *Ulysses*! Don't kid yourself—

CAITHLEEN. You don't know that—

ROBERT. (*Overlapping.*) —not ninety percent of the Americans here have read *Huck Finn* from start to end!—any more than the Brits have read *David Copperfield* or the Russians have read *War and Peace*—

CAITHLEEN. That is not the point—

He grabs her copy of Ulysses.

ROBERT. (*Overlapping.*) —and so in our group there is only one of us who knows of the obsessive man with bad eyes from a poor family— all prick and no pence—the loner and jokester who will spend years of his life to create literature's One True Lasting Beast—with all its tangle of themes and its Homeric references and its debauchery and riddles and run-on sentences and the bad news for you is that in our group the one and only person who knows all this crap is me.

He hands the book back to her.

Here. Read me one phrase—anywhere at all.

(*Off her look.*) Go on. I'll show you. Believe me: I'm not proud of this—

CAITHLEEN. I need to find my group.

ROBERT. Please, Caithleen. Any page you like.

She looks at him—then turns to a page early in the book.

CAITHLEEN. (*Reads.*) “Behold the handmaid of the moon.”

And Robert—in a surprisingly good Irish accent—is speaking along, and slightly ahead of her. He is not reading.

ROBERT. “*In sleep the wet sign
calls her hour, bids her rise.
Bridebed, childbed, bed of death
ghostcandled. Omnis caro ad te
e veniet.*”

CAITHLEEN. “*In sleep the wet
sign calls her hour, bids her rise.
Bridebed, childbed, bed of death...*”

*Caithleen is reading along silently now—but Robert closes
the book in her hands, saying...*

Just listen. It’s for the ear. Not the eyes. Remember? You’re the one
who told me that.

He continues.

*“He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying
the sea...mouth to her mouth’s kiss.”*

Pause.

CAITHLEEN. We get a lot of you here. The so-called experts.
Making the pilgrimage.

ROBERT. Yes—

CAITHLEEN. Ready to catch us out.

ROBERT. —of course.

CAITHLEEN. And anyway I only say what they’ve trained me to say.

ROBERT. I think you’re quite good, actually—didn’t I tell you that?

CAITHLEEN. No, you didn’t.

ROBERT. I meant to tell you that this time around.

CAITHLEEN. This time around?

ROBERT. I teach that book, Caithleen! Twenty-plus years now and
pity the poor students who have to listen to me soldier on about
something I have grown to loathe. I wrote my *feckin thesis* on that
beast! And yes I know my kind is a dime a dozen—but, believe me,
it wasn’t always like this.

Before she can respond:

BLOOMSDAY

by Steven Dietz

"...to her Time is a chord: many notes, past-present-future, all real...all alive...and all played at once."

2M, 2W

Robert returns to Dublin to reunite with Cait, the woman who captured his heart during a James Joyce literary tour thirty-five years ago. Dancing backwards through time, the older couple retrace their steps to discover their younger selves. Through young Robbie and Caithleen, they relive the unlikely, inevitable events that brought them—only briefly—together. This Irish time-travel love story blends wit, humor, and heartache into a buoyant, moving appeal for making the most of the present before it is past.

"Dietz's keen wit and unusual format, and his compassion for his characters, make this special—more than the standard tale of an older couple reliving and (perhaps) reviving a lost love... With intricate cleverness, Dietz evokes, mocks, paraphrases and cannily integrates aspects of Joyce's [Ulysses] into BLOOMSDAY. ...And Joyce's manipulations of time and space, subject and object...ingeniously inform the script."
—Seattle Times

"BLOOMSDAY is filled with sweet charm...Dietz's convention of mixing the past with the present... works beautifully and when mixed with his signature rich characters makes for a wonderfully engaging time. ...there's an honest and sobering realism to the piece that takes this beyond a simple romantic comedy and places it in the realm of a tragic love story. ...BLOOMSDAY gives us a funny, touching and stark look at what it is to be in love no matter what stage of life you're in."
—BroadwayWorld.com

"...an ode to the ache of regret. ...[Dietz] lure[s] us into thinking we're getting something familiar in the first act, only to push us out of that comfort zone into a deeply moving meditation on lost time, on the painful dissonance that comes with memory."
—Memeteria.com

Also by Steven Dietz
FORCE OF NATURE
LAST OF THE BOYS
THE NINA VARIATIONS
and others

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