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**ŌŌDIPUS**

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A Druid Theatre Company production for Druid Performing Arts Ltd.

This production opened at the Druid Lane Theatre,  
Galway on August 12th, 1987.

Programme © Druid Performing Arts Ltd.

Druid Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the  
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# WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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*Yeats as a boy, a sketch  
by John Butler Yeats*



*Sir Hugh Lane, J.M. Synge,  
W.B. Yeats and Lady  
Gregory. A drawing 1907  
by Sir William Orpen*

William Butler Yeats was born on June 13th 1865 to John Butler Yeats, then a law student soon to become a barrister and Susan Pollexfen, daughter of a prosperous merchant from Sligo. In 1867, when Yeats was two, the family moved to London where his father studied to become a professional artist. Yeats's childhood memories, however, were of his holidays in Sligo and he admitted later that he remained "markably lonely for the West of Ireland".

In 1880, the family returned to live in Dublin. In 1883, he attended the Metropolitan School of Art and two years later, his verse appeared in print for the first time; two of his poems were published in the *Dublin University Review*. In 1886, his first dramatic poem *Mosada* was published and in 1887, his work was published in England. His circle of readers grew quickly and he made the acquaintance of such people as George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde.

In 1889 he met Maud Gonne for the first time and, as he was later to recall "the troubling of my life began". He was in love with her, and his love was hopeless. Maud Gonne liked and admired him but she was not in love with him. Her passion was lavished upon Ireland and while William joined the Nationalist movement, he did so partly from conviction but mostly for the love of Maud Gonne.

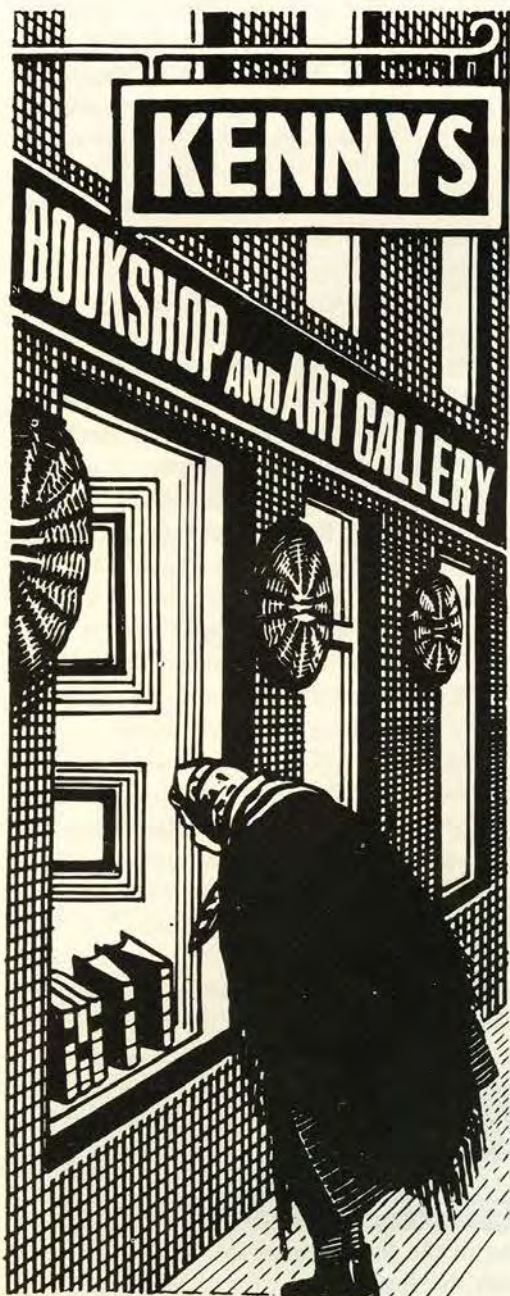
After the decline and death of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891, Yeats felt that Irish political life had lost its significance, that Irish feelings could not be roused in political terms. The vacancy left by politics could be filled, he felt, by literature, art, drama, legend and poetry. *The Celtic Twilight*, a volume of essays, first published in 1893 was a first offering towards this end. In 1896, he met Lady Gregory, an aristocrat who was to become a playwright and close friend. From 1897, he spent summers in her home in Coole Park, where she became his friend, counsellor and an understanding eye in the tumultuous and haunted places of his mind. In 1899, he asked Maud Gonne to marry him but she declined. Four years later, she married Major John McBride.

Yeats devoted himself to drama and literature, and in 1904 was involved in the founding of the Abbey Theatre which opened with the first production of his *On Baile's Strand*. A hectic few years followed with Yeats defending the theatre and in particular Synge against accusation of being irreligious, anti-Catholic and therefore anti-Irish. He proved himself a formidable warrior.

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*KENNYS BOOKSHOP IS A WORLD  
OF IT'S OWN AND A KEY TO  
WORLDS UNKNOWN.*



Maud Gonne

In 1913, he spent some time in France with Ezra Pound as his secretary where he became greatly excited by the Nô plays of Japan which Pound was translating. His *Four Plays for Dancers*, he considered as an equivalent of the Nô plays. He thought of these plays as a new kind of drama, a harmony of word, mask and dance, the music and gesture symbolic rather than innotative.

In 1917, he asked Iseult Gonne, Maud Gonne's daughter to marry him. She refused. Some weeks later, he proposed to and was accepted by Miss George Hyde-Lees. They married and a daughter, Anne Butler Yeats was born in 1919 and a son, William Michael in 1921. He had by now purchased a tower and two cottages at Ballylee near Gort, Co. Galway.

In 1922, on the foundation of the Irish Free State, he became a member of the new Irish Senate and served for six years until 1928. In 1923, he was awarded to Nobel Prize for Literature. He was by now a celebrated figure and an acclaimed poet. During the 1920's, he published a *A Vision* (1925), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stair* (1933) and in 1926, a translation of Sophocles's *Oedipus*, *The King* which was presented at the Abbey Theatre in the same year.

The early 1930's were marked by poor health and the death in 1932 of Lady Gregory. He travelled abroad to avoid the damp Irish winters. He died on January 28th 1939 in Roquebrune in France. He was buried there until 1948 when his body was brought home and buried in Drumcliffe over which his own epitaph reads, *Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman pass by!*

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Yeats addresses the audience from the Abbey stage.

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*See you in  
Rabbitts after  
the show!*

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# YEATS' KING OEDIPUS

by Brian Arkins

One of the major scandals of the contemporary theatre is that the plays of our greatest poet Yeats, which in so many ways anticipate the mode of Beckett and others, are so seldom performed. So it is especially heartening that Druid, one of Ireland's leading theatre companies, have decided to stage Yeats' version of *King Oedipus* by Sophocles, the great Athenian dramatist who wrote more than one hundred plays. And all the more so, since this play of Yeats, together with its companion piece *Oedipus at Colonus*, has suffered almost total critical neglect at the hands of Classicists and English scholars alike.

For Yeats, Athens in the fifth century B.C. was where 'civilisation rose to its high-tide mark' and where 'The Greek Drama alone achieved perfection; it has never been done since; it may be thousands of years before we achieve that perfection again. Shakespeare is only a mass of magnificent fragments.' In formal terms, what links the theatre of Sophocles and Yeats is the highly anti-naturalistic mode of Greek tragedy, with its elaborate verse, its masks and buskins, its music, singing and dancing; while in terms of achievement, Yeats wrote that 'we might, had the total works of Sophocles survived . . . not think him (Shakespeare) greatest' and that his *King Oedipus* is 'the greatest masterpiece of Greek drama'.

This taut play of 1530 lines tells the story of how the chief religious authority of the Greek world, the oracle of the god Apollo at Delphi, predicts to the king and queen of Thebes, Laius and Jocasta, that their son Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother, these acts of parricide and incest being taboo, then as now. Laius and Jocasta attempt to frustrate the oracle by trying to ensure the death of the baby Oedipus, but he is rescued by a Theban shepherd, given by him to a Corinthian shepherd and then taken to Corinth, where he is brought up by the king and queen. Learning about the oracle, Oedipus tries, like his parents, to frustrate it, but in the process precisely fulfills it by killing Laius at a cross-roads and then marrying Jocasta, after solving the riddle of the Sphinx. When the play opens, Thebes, where Oedipus is now king, is visited by a plague and the plot focuses on his gradual discovery of the truth that he, parricide and incestuous, is the cause of pollution.

But what for Yeats, who produced versions of the two Oedipus plays and no other Greek drama, is the special attraction of Oedipus as a character? It is, I believe, the fact that Oedipus is the *archetypally dual figure of Western theatre*. For Oedipus is, like us all, an incredibly ambiguous person: king and beggar, saviour and scapegoat, detective and criminal, Theban and Corinthian, the solver of riddles who can't solve his own, sighted but ignorant and blind with insight, vacillating spectacularly between power and impotence, knowledge and ignorance, good fortune and ill. Which would surely be attractive to Yeats, himself vacillating between this world and the next, self and soul, swordman and saint.

*Yeats with his two children  
Anne and Michael*



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Production Manager	Brien Vahey
Stage Director	Padraig O'Neill
Stage Manager	Moya McHugh
Set Construction	Arena, Dublin Alan Clark Dominick Lyons
Scenic Artist	Jack Kirwan
Costumes Constructed by Wardrobe	The Costume Shop Monica Ennis
Technician	David Murphy
Script Consultant	Brian Arkin
Publicity and Programme	Jerome Hynes
Poster	Kevin Scally
Production Photography	Amelia Stein

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## CAST

Oedipus, King of Thebes	MARIE MULLEN
Jocasta, wife of Oedipus	KATE THOMPSON
Antigone, daughter of Oedipus	MICHAEL SHANNON
Ismene, daughter of Oedipus	GER RYAN
Creon, brother-in-law of Oedipus	MALCOLM DOUGLAS
Chorus	MICHAEL FORD
Tiresias, a seer	ENA MAY
A Priest	RORY O'SULLIVAN
First Messenger	RORY O'SULLIVAN
Second Messenger	GER RYAN
A Herdsman	ENA MAY
Boy	MICHAEL SHANNON

---

DIRECTED BY FRANK CONWAY

DESIGN BY JOE VANEK

LIGHTING DESIGN BY ROGER FRITH

MUSIC COMPOSED BY ROGER DOYLE

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The play is performed without an interval.

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Yeats during his last years.



This duality is further stressed by the pervasive dramatic irony, which, necessarily, involves two levels of perception; by the imagery, especially that of light and dark; and by combining two dramatic roles in one character, the Theban shepherd who saved Oedipus as a baby being an eye-witness of Laius' murder, and the Corinthian shepherd who took Oedipus from the Theban one being the messenger who tells of the death of the king of Corinth.

But there is an even greater duality to be considered, that of general or cosmic irony. The characters of the play, and especially Oedipus, proceed on the natural assumption that the world, as we experience it, makes sense, that, in Greek terms it is a *kosmos*, an ordered creation. But the chaos of Oedipus' arbitrary doom — for we do not know *why* Oedipus is destined to kill his father and marry his mother — makes nonsense of that assumption and so of human life; as the Chorus says in *Oedipus at Colonus*, 'never to be born is best'.

But, on the other hand — for the Greeks there is always an other hand — at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is finally released from all the troubles of this world and goes to join the gods in the next.

Effectively Greekless, Yeats based his version of King Oedipus on the translation into English prose by Sir Richard Jebb. But when Yeats had produced a draft, he and Lady Gregory 'went through it all, altering every sentence that might not be intelligible on the Blasket Islands' and so ensuring that the 'half Latin, half Victorian dignity' of Jebb made way for much more direct and concrete language. At the same time, Yeats compresses Sophocles' short play even further, so that in the standard *Collected Plays* *King Oedipus* occupies only forty three pages (*Richard III* runs to one hundred and fifteen pages). The most important results of this are to make the play very taut and economical, and, due to the omission of eighty two lines at its end, to provide us with an Oedipus who indulges in substantially less self-pity than the Sophoclean original.

Nevertheless, we are talking about *tragedy* and we can leave the final word about the play to Yeats: 'In rehearsal I had but one overwhelming emotion, a sense of the actual presence in a terrible sacrament of the god. But I have got that always, though never before so strongly, from Greek drama.'

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Brian Arkins is a statutory lecturer in Greek and Latin at U.C.G. He is the author of a forthcoming book "Greek and Roman themes in Yeats" to be published by Colin Smythe.

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**F**RANK CONWAY is an honours graduate of the College of Art and was awarded an Arts Council Bursary in 1977 to study theatre design at the English National Opera. His work in Ireland includes *I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell*, at the Peacock; *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars* at the Abbey. In London, he worked as an assistant to Tanya Moiseiwitsch and designed the sets for *Touched* at the Royal Court and *The Rivals* at the Greenwich Theatre. He was Art Director on the films *Pigs* and *The Woman Who Married Clark Gable* and was Head of Design at the Abbey Theatre. In 1985, he became Associate Designer with Druid Theatre Company. In 1986, work includes *Death of a Salesman* and *Brighton Beach Memoirs* at the Gaiety and *Turn of the Screw* with the Opera Theatre Company. Most recent work with Druid includes *Bailegangaire* and *Conversations on a Homecoming* at the Sydney Festival 1987, and *Touch of the Poet* in Galway.

**J**OE VANEK from 1972 to 1984, held Head of Design posts at three British regional theatres. In London's West End, designs have included *The Seagull* at the Duke of York's Theatre, and *Down an Alley Filled with Cats* (Mermaid). Elsewhere in London, he has designed for the Young Vic, Tricycle and Bush Theatres and most recently at Greenwich, a major revival of O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*. In Ireland, his major work has been seen at Dublin's Gate Theatre with *A Woman of No Importance* (Harveys' Award for Best Design 1984), *The Recruiting Officer*, *Heartbreak House*, and *Innocence* by Frank McGuinness (Harveys' Award 1986). Future projects in Ireland include *John Bull's Other Island* (Gaiety Theatre, Dublin), Opera Theatre Company's tour of *Così fan Tutte* and *La Cene Delle Beffe* for Wexford.

**R**OGER FRITH, was Resident Lighting Supervisor/Designer to the English National Opera for many years. SWO/ENO productions for which he has designed lighting include *The Ring Cycle*, *The Damnation of Faust*, and *Tristan and Isolde*. He has also worked at Covent Garden, the Boston Ballet, and is lighting consultant to the Jerash Festival in Jordan, numerous trade shows (IBM, BMW, Rank Xerox, Jaguar etc.) fashion shows and cabarets. He designed the lighting for *The Old Man of Lochnagar* at the Albery Theatre, London which can be seen on Channel Four on Christmas Day 1987. Recently, in Dublin, he designed the lighting for *The Fall of the House of Usher* at the Abbey. On returning to London, he will design the lighting for the opening of the New English National Opera production of *Salome*. Work with Druid includes *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and *Bailegangaire*.

**R**OGER DOYLE is a former scholarship student in Utrecht, Helsinki, the Hague and his native Dublin. He has also played the drums with a Jazz/rock group in the seventies. Four solo L.P.'s of his instrumental and electronic music have been released. In 1981, he formed the music-theatre group, Operating Theatre with Olwen Fouere, touring Holland in 1982 and taking Aidan Matthews' *The Diamond Body* to London in 1984. His most recent large scale work was an electronic chamber opera produced by Operating Theatre in the Project Theatre, Dublin; Garcia Lorca's *The Love of Don Perlimpin*. He has also composed the music for Bob Quinn's films *Atlanteans* and *Budawanny*. This is his third time working with Druid. He previously worked with the company on *Tis Pity She's a Whore* and last year, *Dracula*.

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**M**ARIE MULLEN, a founder member of Druid Theatre Company, was born in Sligo. Having played several roles in Dramsoc productions in UCG, she graduated from University in 1975 to help establish Druid and has, since then, played a vital role in its development. Her many appearances with Druid include both Pegeen Mike (1975) and the Widow Quinn (1977) in *Playboy of the Western World*, Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Graineuaile in *Island Protected by a Bridge of Glass*. In 1982, she played the Widow Quinn in *Playboy of the Western World* for which she received awards from both the Sunday Independent and Evening Herald as Actress of the Year and the Harveys' Irish Theatre Award as Best Supporting Actress. In 1985, she created the role of Peggy in Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* for which she received a Harveys' nomination as Best Supporting Actress and played Mary in *Bailegangaire*. Most recently she appeared in Druid's *A Touch of the Poet*.

**R**ORY O'SULLIVAN was born in Killorglin, Co. Kerry. He first worked with the company in 1977 in *Tom Paine* and roles at that time also included Humphrey in *There are Tragedies and Tragedies*. In the late seventies, he worked with the Irish Theatre Company in *Sharon's Grave* and played Callan in *Borstal Boy* at the Gaiety. He has been living in New York since 1980 and has appeared Off Broadway as Stanislaus Joyce in *Mr. Joyce is Leaving Paris* at the Harold Clurman Theatre, as Victor in *The Closed Door* at the Quai Theatre. His many appearances in the Irish Arts Centre include Rashers in *The Risen People* and Roger in *I Do Not Like Thee Dr. Fell*. Television work includes a role in NBC's *Cry of the Innocent* and recent appearances with Druid include Jimmy King in *Wood of the Whispering*, Captain Shine in *Famine*, and Patch Riley in *A Touch of the Poet*.

**K**ATE THOMPSON was born in Belfast and came to Dublin in 1974 to read French and English at Trinity College, Dublin. Since then, she has worked extensively as a freelance actress in theatre, television and film. Stage roles include Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Dublin Festival Company in Hong Kong; Sybil in Noel Coward's *Private Lives* (Gate); Mrs. Frail in Congreve's *Love for Love* (Smock Alley); and Geraldine in Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw* (Gate). Television work includes major roles in half a dozen plays for both the BBC and RTE; two drama serials for RTE — *The Anteroom* and *Bracken*. Appearances on Channel Four include Lady Flora in *An Irish R.M.* and Miriam in *Out of Time*. Films include the title role in Kieran Hickey's *Attracta*. This is Kate's first time to work with Druid. She is married to the actor Malcolm Douglas and they have a baby daughter, Clara.

**M**ALCOLM DOUGLAS trained in London following a short period with Trinity Players and returned to Dublin in 1978. He acted at the Project in *Says I, Says He*, and with Stage One Theatre Company in *Comedians*. Malcolm has been on three tours with the ITC, playing in *Our Town*, *Funeral Games* and *Twelfth Night*. He has appeared in *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Ring Around the Moon* and as the Gentleman Caller in *The Glass Menagerie* all at the Abbey. His television includes *Miracles and Miss Langan*, *Sean* and *The Bondage Field* and Paul in RTE series *Glenroe*. Malcolm has played Rita's husband Denny in the film *Educating Rita* with Michael Caine. Malcolm toured the country with the Smock Alley productions of *Love for Love*, *Frocks and Macbeth*. He also appeared in Druid's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. He comes to Druid direct from the highly successful Olympia production of *Deathtrap*.



**M**ICHAEL JAMES FORD studied drama at Exeter University and made his professional debut in the USA with the Robin Hood Players. He moved to Dublin in 1981, appearing in *Bent* at the Project and in many productions with Trapdoor Theatre. In 1983, he was in *Hamlet* at the Abbey and subsequent work with the Abbey includes *The Man from Clare*, and *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. This summer, he was seen as Charlie Milwall in Joe Dowling's successful revival of *Borstal Boy* at the Gaiety. He has also worked with the Gate Theatre *Innocence*, *Rough Magic* *Midnite at the Starlite*, Cork Theatre Company *Indian Summer* and the Focus Theatre *Success Woman*. Film and T.V. credits include *By Common Consent*, and *Children in Crossfire*. Michael also compiles and presents music series' for RTE, most recently *Wessex Tunes* and *The Bix Beiderbecke Story*. He first worked with Druid Theatre Company in last year's production of *Dracula*.

**G**ER RYAN was born in Dublin and has been working in theatre since 1985. She is a member of *The Passion Machine*, a theatre company based in the SFX Center, Dublin. Roles include Angela in *Wasters* and Belinda in *Spacers* by Paul Mercier, Marion and Deirdre in *The Birdtable* by Brendan Gleeson. She was Stage Director for *Drowning*, a rock musical and *Studs* by Paul Mercier. She has also worked with The Electric Blue Fringe Theatre Company appearing in *The Stronger*, *Pieces for Women* and *The Great Pretender*. More recently, she played Carol, Valerie, Lane and Chantal in *Rough Magic's Road* by Jim Cartwright at the Project. Other works includes *City Limits* (RTE) and a yet to be released feature film *The Courier*. This is her first appearance with Druid Theatre Company.

**E**NA MAY trained at the Stanislavski Studio at the Focus Theatre under Deirdre O'Connell. She has played in over forty professional productions; favourite roles have been Regina Giddens in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Mama in Marsha Norman's Pulitzer Prizewinning play, *Night, Mother*. In 1980, she was named "the most versatile actress of the year and in most memorable performance" for her work on Alexei Arhuzov's *Evening Light*. In that year also, she directed William Trevor's *Marriages* which received a Best New Play of the Year Award. In 1984, she wrote and directed *Out of the Beehive*. In 1986, she directed and co-wrote with Ruth Jacobs *That Fine Line*. She has just completed a full length play and is working on a collection of short stories which is due for publication next year. Her most recent television and film work includes the part of Mrs. Spode in *When Reason Sleeps*.

**M**ICHAEL SHANNON was born in Galway in 1971 and lives in Whitestrand Avenue. He is a pupil of St. Joseph's Secondary School. A son of Eddie and Ailish Shannon, previous performances include roles in An Taibhdhearc and in *My First Confession*, *The Monk's Play* and *The Pawn Shop*, all in Scoil Iognáid under the direction of Fr. McGoran. He has two brothers Geoffrey and Eamon and two sisters Mary and Lourda. This is his third appearance with Druid Theatre Company; he previously played Donail O'Connor in Tom Murphy's *Famine*, and Boy in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.

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