

Violence and Humor in 'Lieutenant of Inishmore'

By [John Freedman](#)

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Padraic and Mairead kissing while others dismember bodies in "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," a dark comedy. **Yelena Lapina**

One way to overcome the violence of the world we inhabit is to embrace it eagerly and entirely. At least, that is one conclusion I took away from Alexander Suvorov's production of Martin McDonough's "The Lieutenant of Inishmore" at the Theater Yunogo Zritelya.

I'm tempted to say it's hard to imagine a more violent drama, although the popular Irish playwright himself has written plays that let even more blood than this one. Still, the violence that man and woman have a habit of visiting upon men, women and cats unwaveringly occupies a central position in "The Lieutenant of Inishmore." Suffice it to say that the action gets underway with a scene of bloody, screaming torture and more or less ends with a few dismemberments and a literal illustration of a kiss of death.

Oh, and did I say the play is hilarious? Yes, that one little thing – humor – is what debunks so

successfully everything that the play puts in motion.

The rivalries separating two splinter groups of the Irish National Liberation Army come to a head over a cat belonging to the fiery Padraic. When word reaches him that something is amiss with his beloved Wee Thomas, he drops the torture session he is conducting to race home without delay.

"The Lieutenant of Inishmore" is a finely tuned comedy of blunders, each committed in full seriousness by halfwits who solemnly swear their loyalty to the cause of freedom for Ireland, but don't bat an eyelash at the notion of crushing cats' heads or slaughtering friends, family and lovers.

It's hard to say where the humor is cruelest.

Is it when Padraic (Ruslan Bratov) tortures James (Anton Korshunov) by plucking out a few toenails and preparing to slice off a nipple with a razor? Is it when Padraic sends his father Donny (Pavel Poimalov) to his knees and prepares to shoot him in the back of the head for not keeping Wee Thomas safe? Is it Donny hacking up the bodies of Christy (Oleg Rebrov), Brendan (Alexei Alexeyev) and Joey (Alexander Pal) after it appears to be proven that they smashed out Wee Thomas' brains? Or is it the pretty Mairead (Sofya Raizman) pumping bullets point blank into Padraic's head after giving him the kiss of his life?

McDonough created an atmosphere of exaggerated violence and absolute absurdity. Hardly a gesture can be taken seriously even as the characters are ready to kill and die for every word they utter. It is a marvelous mash-up, a crunching collision of opposites in which mayhem and gore splatter up against stupidity, ignorance and incompetence of the highest degree.

As the self-composed, one-track-minded Padraic, Ruslan Bratov embodies this production's sense of humor.

He is dashing, intelligent and charismatic. He is both ironclad and ridiculous in his commitments, expecting utter and total fidelity to the cause of good, and always ready to slice off body parts of those who do not meet his high moral standards.

The others, with the exception of the dangerously star-struck Mairead, are less idealistic.

Christy is out to stop Padraic because the latter, on grounds of morality, put an end to the only source of income and entertainment available on the island of Inishmore – marijuana. The phlegmatic and unflappable Brendan is willing to set aside fighting at any time if there is food to be had.

Padraic's father Donny has lived a lifetime seeing men kill for good and bad reasons and it never occurred to him to question that. He doesn't bat an eyelash when his son prepares to blow out his brains, nor does he betray a sense of relief when his execution is stayed. It's all just how things are done here.

Designer Femistokl Atmadzas incorporates the backstage machinery and wings into his set, which consists primarily of Donny's worktable, and Suvorov emphasizes the theatrical, playacting quality of "Inishmore" by placing the audience in bleachers onstage with the actors. This makes you squirm when bloody acts are committed a meter from your seat,

but it also allows you fully to appreciate the deep irony and deadpan humor that every actor employs.

I wasn't convinced that twangs of surf and country music were a natural sonic accompaniment to this play's action. Nor did I understand the point of two onstage television monitors that constantly showed animated scene titles.

But those are minor quibbles. This "Lieutenant of Inishmore" serves up a full plate of violence then wipes it clean with laughter.

The Lieutenant of Inishmore" (Leitenant s Ostrova Inishmor) plays Nov. 13 and 21 at 7 p.m. at the Theater Yunogo Zritelya, located at 10 Mamonovsky Pereulok. Metro Pushkinskaya. Tel. 8-495-699-5360. www.moscowtyz.com. Running time: 2 hours.

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