



[ABR Arts \(/arts-update\)](#) [Subscribe / Buy \(/subscribe\)](#) [ABR Online \(/abr-online\)](#) [About \(/about\)](#)

[Prizes & Programs \(/prizes-programs\)](#) [Support \(/support-abr\)](#) [Online Exclusives \(/abr-online-exclusives\)](#)

[Book Reviews \(/book-reviews\)](#)

[Podcasts \(/podcasts\)](#)

[Fiction \(/fiction\)](#)

[Commentary \(/commentary\)](#)

[Features \(/features\)](#)

[Interviews \(/interviews\)](#)

[Poetry \(/book-reviews/non-fiction/poetry\)](#)

[Reading Australia \(/reading-australia\)](#)

Ulster American (Traverse Theatre Company/Adelaide Festival)

font size

[Print \(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5382-ulster-american-traverse-theatre-company-adelaide-festival?tmpl=component&print=1\)](#)

[Email \(/component/mailto/?tmpl=component&template=ausbookreview&link=cd3585f551000dc7af5bafc3effc3d712ae9e4bo\)](#)

[Comment \(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5382-ulster-american-traverse-theatre-company-adelaide-festival#itemCommentsAnchor\)](#)

MICHAEL MORLEY ([/ABR-ARTS/AUTHOR/1087-MICHAELMORLEY](#)) Monday, 18
March 2019 Published in [ABR Arts \(/abr-arts\)](#)

In the program note for his most recent play, Belfast playwright David Ireland claims that 'he became a playwright after being unemployed and unemployable as an actor for three years, despite having trained as an actor for three years at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and performing with many UK companies ...' On the basis of *Ulster American*, it seems a pretty canny career move.

First produced at the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, this blistering satire on theatre, society, theatre and society, both Irelands, politics, Brexit, and narcissistic thespians grabs the audience from the outset and never lets up. In a modest, serviced apartment, an egotistical American-based actor of Irish descent and a fey, self-centred English director come together the evening before rehearsals are due to begin to talk about the script they are intent on turning into a West End hit – with or without the support of the author.

The \$12,500 *ABR* Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize ([/prizes-programs/elizabeth-jolley-story-prize/current-jolley](#)) is open!

2,000–5,000 words • Entries close 15 April 2019

[ENTER HERE](#)

[\(/prizes-programs/elizabeth-jolley-story-prize/current-jolley\)](#)

Search ...

Online Login

Username

Password

Remember Me

Log in

[Forgot Login?](#)

<https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/forgot-login>

[Sign up](#)

<https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/registration>

Enter the
\$12,500 *ABR*
Elizabeth
Jolley
Short Story
Prize



Does your
university
library
subscribe
to *ABR*?

All Issues



Robert Jack, Darrell D'Silvia, and Lucianne McEvoy in *Ulster American* (photograph by Tony Lewis)

It's a classic dramatic set-up: two characters are introduced to each other and the audience, the author moves them through a series of conversational and situational expositions, and all the time the audience knows that the third participant in the drama will at some stage appear and disrupt things even more. It's a device that Harold Pinter used to brilliant effect, and it's no accident that he gets a mention during the course of the at times urbane, at times hysterical, discussions of matters theatrical.

This is no tired reworking of a well-worn dramaturgical ploy, but an exhilarating ride which begins like a roller-coaster experience and plunges off the rails into something like an existential demolition derby. Along the way (or on the ride) there are coruscating exchanges, blistering attacks on every possible sacred cow, stripping away of social and personal veneers (pretty thin in the first place), and explorations of topics so taboo that politeness (and the wish to not give away either the jokes or the punchlines) prevents me from even attempting a summary. Well, that, and the fact that, without the careful pitch and shape of Ireland's dialogue and language, the force of the exchanges would come out flat in paraphrase.



Robert Jack and Darrell D'Silvia in *Ulster American* (photograph by Sid Scott)

On the other hand, there are epigrams and punchlines aplenty – rather as if we were watching an Oscar Wilde play after he'd spent some time boning up on the styles and topics of contemporary Irish playwrights such as Conor McPherson and Martin McDonagh – though there are areas in this play which, I suspect, not even they would have ventured into. But Ireland's gift for setting up punchlines yields some real gems along the way: for example, a discussion initiated by the ego-bound actor on the topic of James Baldwin culminates in the English director declaring, in bewilderment, that he was totally unaware of the fact that Alec Baldwin had a black, gay brother.

No one is safe from the characters' (and playwright's) attacks: we learn that the only thing the actor wants to read from a theatre critic is 'a fuckin' suicide note'; that theatre needs something

2001–2018 (/abr-online)
Enter the
Recent ABR Arts
 Ulster American (Traverse
 Theatre Company/Adelaide
 Festival) ★★★★★ (/abr-
 arts/101-arts-update/5382-
 ulster-american-traverse-
 theatre-company-adelaide-
 festival)
Elizabeth
Jolley
 Written by Michael Morley (/abr-
 arts/author/1017-michaelmorley)
Short Story



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update
 /5382-ulster-american-
 traverse-theatre-company-
 adelaide-festival)

A View from the Bridge
 (Melbourne Theatre Company)
 ★★★★★1/2 (/abr-arts/101-arts-
 update/5381-a-view-from-the-
 bridge-melbourne-theatre-
 company)

Written by Maxim Boon (/abr-
 arts/author/10200-maximboon)



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update
 /5381-a-view-from-the-
 bridge-melbourne-theatre-
 company)

Season Opening Gala
 (Melbourne Symphony
 Orchestra) ★★★★★ (/abr-
 arts/101-arts-update/5380-
 season-opening-gala-
 melbourne-symphony-
 orchestra)

Written by Elizabeth Kertesz (/abr-
 arts/author/9901-elizabethkertesz)



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update
 /5380-season-opening-gala-
 melbourne-symphony-
 orchestra)

Picaresque (Adelaide Festival)
 ★★★ (/abr-arts/101-arts-update
 /5378-picaresque-adelaide-
 festival)

Written by Ben Brooker (/abr-

other than 'two men talking about something other than another man' – a situation the playwright smartly avoids by then bringing on the young female 'Irish' playwright, who finds herself in what seems like a no-win situation with two males who 'love her work' but feel it needs a few slight alterations/additions to make it truly accessible, like, as the actor suggests, 'some Irish dancing' – an idea emphatically dismissed by the young author with the compelling reasoning that the principal character in her play is a Protestant, and 'Protestants don't dance.' Such a crucial point is cogently dismissed by the two males by arguing that 'that is precisely the right reason for putting it in: that way we are challenging archetypes, and authenticity is potentially alienating'.



Robert Jack and Darrell D'Silva in *Ulster American* (photograph by Sid Scott)

But the writing in this riveting, savage, hilarious exposé of pretensions, aspirations, and the world of the theatre would not be as electrifying, intelligent, and laugh-out loud funny as it is without the trio of standout performances and the beautifully paced direction of Gareth Nicholls. Darrell D'Silva's Jay Conway, the Oscar-winning, manipulative actor – at times bullying, at others mouthing self-serving apophthegms – gives a performance that manages to combine sound, fury, and doses of anodyne thespian 'Truth', when needed. Robert Jack as the slightly fey, accommodating director Leigh Carver is a perfect foil in a role which D'Silva's Conway could have steamrolled into the wings; and as the play progresses, this sheep in sheep's clothing turns surprisingly feral. Meanwhile, Lucianne McEvoy, as the young, initially poised playwright Ruth Davenport, establishes the character's strong sense of her identity from her first entrance. Sure of her opinions, she is not intimidated by the actor's numerous suggestions to improve her – already strong – text, and, in the last moments of the play, she shows that she is just as capable of fighting her corner as the two males.

I doubt whether a funnier, more caustic, brilliantly acted satire will be seen on Australian stages this year, or maybe even next – unless, of course, other Australian companies take it up.

Ulster American (<https://www.adelaidefestival.com.au/events/ulster-american/>) was performed by the Traverse Theatre Company 13–17 March 2019 as part of the Adelaide Festival. Performance attended: March 15.

MICHAEL MORLEY (/ABR-ARTS/AUTHOR/1087-MICHAELMORLEY)

Michael Morley is Emeritus Professor of Drama at Flinders University. He has written theatre and music reviews and articles for a variety of publications, including *Theatre Australia*, the *National Times*, *The Australian*, the *Australian Financial Review*, *Opera News* (New York), the *Kurt Weill Newsletter*, the *Sondheim Review*, the *Adelaide Review*, and *Australian Book Review*. He has also contributed translations for the English edition of the collected poems of Alfred Brendel.



By this contributor

Memorial and human requiem (Adelaide Festival) (/abr-arts/101-arts-update/4696-memorial-and-human-requiem-adelaide-festival)

Michael Morley reviews 'The Political Orchestra: the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics during

arts/author/4135-benbrooker)



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5378-picaresque-adelaide-festival)

33 Variations (Comedy Theatre)

★★★★1/2 (/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5377-33-variations-comedy-theatre)

Written by Tim Byrne (/abr-arts/author/3530-timbyrne)



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5377-33-variations-comedy-theatre)

A Man of Good Hope (Isango Ensemble/Young Vic) ★★★★★

(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5374-a-man-of-good-hope-isango-ensemble-young-vic)

Written by Ben Brooker (/abr-arts/author/4135-benbrooker)



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5374-a-man-of-good-hope-isango-ensemble-young-vic)

Salome (Opera Australia)

★★★★ (/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5373-salome-opera-australia)

Written by Michael Halliwell (/abr-arts/author/4893-michaelhalliwell)



(/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5373-salome-opera-australia)

The Miser (Bell Shakespeare)

★★★ (/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5372-the-miser-bell-shakespeare)

Written by Steve Dow (/abr-arts/author/9863-stevedow)

(/abr-arts/101-arts-update

the Third Reich' by Fritz Trümpi, translated by Kenneth Kronenberg (/abr-online/archive/2017/208-june-july-2017-no-392/4138-michael-morley-reviews-the-political-orchestra-the-vienna-and-berlin-philharmonics-during-the-third-reich-by-fritz-truempi-translated-by-kenneth-kronenberg)

Wot? No Fish!!, Portraits in Motion, and Richard III (2017 Adelaide Festival) (/abr-arts/101-arts-update/3969-wot-no-fish-portraits-in-motion-and-richard-iii-2017-adelaide-festival)

More from *ABR Arts*

« A View from the Bridge (Melbourne Theatre Company) (/abr-arts/101-arts-update/5381-a-view-from-the-bridge-melbourne-theatre-company)

Tagged under *ABR Arts* (/arts-update/arts-update-recent-reviews)

ABR Arts Theatre (/arts-update/theatre) *Michael Morley* (/abr-arts/tag/Michael%20Morley)

Adelaide Festival (/abr-arts/tag/Adelaide%20Festival)

Traverse Theatre Company (/abr-arts/tag/Traverse%20Theatre%20Company)

Published in *ABR Arts* (/abr-arts)

Tweet



Like

Be the first of your friends to like this.

Leave a comment

Please note that all comments must be approved by *ABR* and comply with our [Terms & Conditions](https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/terms-and-conditions) (https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/terms-and-conditions).

NB: If you are an *ABR Online* subscriber or contributor, you will need to login to *ABR Online* in order to post a comment. If you have forgotten your login details, or if you receive an error message when trying to submit your comment, please email your comment (and the name of the article to which it relates) to comments@australianbookreview.com.au (mailto:comments@australianbookreview.com.au). We will review your comment and, subject to approval, we will post it under your name.

Message *

enter your message here...

Name *

enter your name...

Email *

enter your e-mail address...

Enter the words you see below

I'm not a robot

reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

Submit comment



/5372-the-miser-bell-shakespeare)

Studio 2
207 City Road
Southbank VIC 3006

Tel: (03) 9699 8822
Fax: (03) 9699 8803

abr@australianbookreview.com.au

- [About ABR \(/about\)](#)
- [Contact Us \(/about/contact\)](#)
- [Subscribe \(/subscribe\)](#)
- [Advertise \(/about/advertise\)](#)
- [Support ABR \(/support-abr\)](#)

[Terms & Conditions \(/terms-and-conditions\)](#) [Privacy & Security \(/privacy-and-security\)](#) [Site map \(/Itemid=283\)](#)

<http://www.facebook.com/AustralianBookReview>

<https://twitter.com/AustBookReview>

