

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallage Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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von Ossietzky May Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka
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Duty, and other Irish Comedies

Seumas O'Brien

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DUTY AND OTHER IRISH COMEDIES

[Illustration: FROM THE DRY POINT STUDY BY P. GRASSBY]

DUTY AND OTHER IRISH COMEDIES

BY

SEUMAS O'BRIEN

1916

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DUTY

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

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SERGEANT DOOLEY *A Member of the R.I.C.*

CONSTABLE HUGGINS *A Member of the R.I.C.*

MICUS GOGGIN

PADNA SWEENEY

MRS. ELLEN COTTER *A public-house keeper*

DUTY was produced for the first time at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, December 17, 1913, with the following cast:

Head Constable Mulligan, R.I.C. ARTHUR SINCLAIR

Sergeant Dooley, R.I.C. FRED O'DONOVAN

Constable Huggins, R.I.C. SYDNEY J. MORGAN

Micus Goggin J.M. KERRIGAN

Padna Sweeney J.A. O'ROURKE

Mrs. Ellen Cotter UNA O'CONNOR

DUTY

Back kitchen of a country public house. Micus and Padna seated at a table drinking from pewter pints. Mrs. Cotter enters in response to a call.

PADNA (*pointing to pint measures*)
Fill 'em again, ma'am, please.

MRS. COTTER (*taking pints, and wiping table*)
Fill 'em again, is it? Indeed I won't do any such thing.

MICUS
Indeed you will, Mrs. Cotter.

MRS. COTTER Don't you know that 'tis Sunday night, an' that the police might call any minute?

MICUS (*disdainfully*)
The police!

PADNA
Bad luck to them!

MICUS Amen!

MRS. COTTER This will be the last drink that any one will get in this house to-night. [*Exit.*]

MICUS 'Tis a nice state of affairs to think that dacent men, after a hard week's work, can't have a drink in pace and quietness in the town they were born and reared in, without bein' scared out o' their senses by the police!

PADNA 'Tis the hell of a thing, entirely! I don't see what's gained be closin' the pubs at all, unless it be to give the police somethin' to do.

MICUS
The overfed and undertaught bla'gards!

PADNA As far as I can see, there's as much drink sold as if the pubs were never closed.

MICUS There is, an' more; for if it wasn't forbidden to drink porter, it might be thought as little about as water.

PADNA I don't believe that, Micus. Did you ever hear of a pint or even a gallon of water makin' any one feel like Napoleon?

[Mrs. Cotter enters and places drinks on table.]

PADNA *(handing money)*
There ye are, ma'am.

MRS. COTTER *(takes money)* Hurry now like good boys, for forty shillin's is a lot to pay for a pint o' porter, an' that's what 'twill cost ye if the police comes in an' finds ye here. An' I'll lose me license into the bargain. *[Exit.]*

MICUS One would think be the way the police are talked about that they had charge of the whole Universe!

PADNA An' who else has charge of it but themselves an' the magistrates, or justices o' the pace, as they're called?

MICUS
They're worse than the police.

PADNA
They're as bad anyway, an' that's bad enough.

MICUS *(scornfully)*
Justices o' the pace!

PADNA
Micus!

MICUS
What?

PADNA (*thoughtfully*)
There's no justice in the world.

MICUS Damn the bit! Sure 't isn't porter we should be drinkin' a cold night like this!

PADNA (*as he sips from pint*)
'Tis well to have it these times.

MICUS
The world is goin' to the dogs, I'm afraid.

PADNA
'T isn't goin' at all, but gone.

MICUS
An' nobody seems to care.

PADNA Some pretend they do, like the preachers, but they're paid for it. I do be often wonderin' after readin' the newspapers if God has forgotten about the world altogether.

MICUS
I wouldn't be surprised, for nothin' seems to be right. There's the police, for instance. They can do what they like, an' we must do what we're told, like childer.

PADNA
Isn't the world a star, Micus?

MICUS (*with pint to his mouth*)
Of course it is.

PADNA Then it must be the way that it got lost among all the other stars one sees on a frosty night.

MICUS

Are there min in the other stars too?

PADNA

So I believe.

MICUS

That's queer.

PADNA

Sure, everythin' is queer.

MICUS If the min in the other stars are like the peelers, there won't be much room in Hell after the good are taken to Heaven on the last day.

PADNA

The last day! I don't like to think about the last day.

MICUS

Why so?

PADNA

Well, 'tis terrible to think that we might be taken to Heaven, (*pauses*) an' our parents an' childer might be sent (*points towards the floor*) with the Protestants.

MICUS If the Protestants will be as well treated in the next world as they are in this, I wouldn't mind goin' with 'em meself.

PADNA

I wouldn't like to be a Protestant after I'm dead, Micus.

MICUS (*knocks with his pint on the table and Mrs. Cotter enters; he points to pints*) The same again, Mrs. Cotter.

MRS. COTTER

Indeed, ye won't get another drop.

MICUS

This will be our last, ma'am. Don't be hard on us.
'Tis only a night of our lives, an' we'll be all dead
one day.

MRS. COTTER (*as she leaves the room with measures in
hand*)

Ye ought to be ashamed o' yerselves to be seen in
a public house a night like this.

MICUS We're ashamed o' nothin,' ma'am. We're only ourselves
an' care for nobody.

MRS. COTTER (*turning round*) Well, this is the very last drink
ye'll get then. [*Exit.*]

PADNA

Women are all alike.

MICUS

They are, God forgive them.

PADNA

They must keep talkin'!

MICUS

An' 'tis only a fool that 'ud try to prevent 'em.

MRS. COTTER (*entering and placing measures on table*)

Hurry up, now, an' don't have me at the next Petty
Sessions.

[*Exit.*]

MICUS (*after testing drink*)

Nothin' like a good pint o' "Dundon's."

PADNA

'Tis great stuff.

MICUS May the Lord spare them long, an' they buildin' houses for the poor an' churches for God!

PADNA

An' all out o' the beer money?

MICUS Of course. What else could ye make money at in a country like this?

PADNA

'Tis a thirsty climate!

MICUS If all those who made money built houses for the poor an' gave employment, there 'ud soon be no poor at all.

PADNA You're talkin' what's called socialism now, an' that's too delicate a plant, like Christianity, to thrive in a planet like this. So I heard one o' them preacher chaps sayin' the other evenin'.

MICUS Well, be all accounts, we're no better off than those who heard St. Peter himself preachin'. The poor still only get the promise of Heaven from the clergy.

PADNA

That's all they'll ever get.

MICUS

The world must surely be lost, Padna.

PADNA

Nothin' surer!

MICUS If God ever goes rummagin' among the stars an' finds it again, there'll be bad work, I'm thinkin'.

PADNA

I wonder will it be a great fire or another flood?

MICUS
Tis hard to tell!

[A loud knocking is heard at the door.]

MRS. COTTER *(from the shop)*
Who's there?

VOICE
Police.

PADNA
May ye freeze there!

MICUS
Or trip over the threshold and break ye'r neck!

MRS. COTTER *(rushing into kitchen)* Quick! quick! quick! *(Points to a door)* This way, boys!

[Micus and Padna enter a small room off the kitchen. Mrs. Cotter locks the door and opens the street door for the policeman, the knocking getting louder meanwhile.]

MRS. COTTER
Wait a minit! Wait a minit! I'm comin', I'm comin'!

[Opens door. Enter Head Constable Mulligan, R.I.C.]

HEAD
You took a long time to open the door, ma'am.

MRS. COTTER I know I did, but it wasn't me fault, Head. I had the house locked up for the night, an' couldn't find where I left the kay.

HEAD 'Tis all right, ma'am. I can lose things meself. *(Looks carefully around)* 'Tis a lonesome thing to see the house so empty.

MRS. COTTER

'Tis Sunday night, Head.

HEAD Of course, of course! All the same I'd prefer to see it full—
of bona-fide travellers, I mean.

MRS. COTTER Thank ye, Head. How's Mrs. Mulligan an' the
childer?

HEAD

Wisha, purty fair. How's the world usin' yourself?

MRS. COTTER

Only for the rheumatics I'd have no cause to grumble.

HEAD 'Tis well to be alive at all these times. An' Ballyferris isn't
the best place to keep any one alive in winter time.

MRS. COTTER Or summer time ayther. Whin the weather is good
trade is bad.

HEAD That's always the way in this world. We're no sooner, out
o' one trouble before another commences. I always admire the way
you bear your troubles, though, Mrs. Cotter.

MRS. COTTER

I does me best, Head.

HEAD Just like meself! Just like meself! The Government makes
laws an' I must see that they're not broken. (*Rubbing his hands togeth-*
er) 'Tis a cold night, an' no doubt about it.

MRS. COTTER

Bad weather is due to us now.

HEAD Everythin' bad is due to some of us. Only for that shark of
an Inspector 'tis little trouble I'd be givin' a dacent woman like
yourself a night like this.

MRS. COTTER

He's very strict, I hear.

HEAD He's strict, disagreeable, a Protestant, a teetotaler, an' a Cromwellian to boot!

MRS. COTTER The Lord protect us! 'Tis a wonder you're alive at all!

HEAD *Wisha, I'm only half alive. The cold never agrees with me. (Looking at fire)* That's not a very dangerous fire, an' I'm as cold as a snowball.

MRS. COTTER *(with her back to the door behind which Padna and Micus are hiding)* There's a fine fire up-stairs in the sittin'-room.

HEAD *(draws a chair and sits down)* Thank ye, ma'am, but 'tisin't worth me while goin' up-stairs. As I said before, I wouldn't trouble you at all only for the Inspector, an' like Nelson, he expects every one to do their duty.

MRS. COTTER

'Tis a hard world.

HEAD An' a cold world too. I often feels cold on a summer day.

MRS. COTTER

That's too bad! Is there no cure for it?

HEAD

They say there's a cure for everything.

MRS. COTTER

I wonder if ye took a drop o' "Wise's" ten-year-old!
It might help to warm ye, if ye sat be the fire up-stairs.

HEAD *(brightening up)* Now, 'pon me word, but that's strange! I was just thinkin' o' the same thing meself. That's what's called telepattery or thought transference.

MRS. COTTER

Tella – what, Head?

HEAD (*with confidence*)

Telepattery, ma'am. 'Tis like this: I might be in America –

MRS. COTTER

I wish you were –

HEAD (*with a look of surprise*)

What's that, ma'am?

MRS. COTTER I wish for your own sake that you were in a country where you would get better paid for your work.

HEAD (*satisfied*) Thank ye, ma'am. I suppose min like meself must wait till we go to the other world to get our reward.

MRS. COTTER

Very likely!

HEAD Well, as I was sayin', I might be in America, or New York, Boston, Chicago, or any o' thim foreign places, an' you might be in this very house, or up in your sister's house, or takin' a walk down the town, an' I'd think o' some thought, an' at that very second you'd think o' the same thought, an' nayther of us would know that we were both thinkin' o' the same thing. That's tellepattery, ma'am.

MRS. COTTER 'Tis a surprisin' thing, surely! Is it hot or cold you'll have the whiskey, Head?

HEAD

Cold, if ye please.

[*Exit Mrs. Cotter. While she is away, he walks up and down whistling some popular air. Enter Mrs. Cotter.*]

MRS. COTTER

Will I bring it up-stairs for you?

HEAD

Indeed, I'm givin' you too much trouble as it is. I'll try an' take it where I am. (*Takes glass and tastes*)
That is good stuff.

MRS. COTTER

I'm glad you like it.

HEAD

Who wouldn't like it?

MRS. COTTER

I don't know the taste of it.

HEAD (*as he finishes contents of glass*) May ye be always so, though there's nothin' like it all the same. (*Handing coin*) I think I'll have a little drop from meself this time.

MRS. COTTER (*as she takes the money*)

Will I bring it up-stairs?

HEAD

Erra, don't bother! I'm beginnin' to feel meself again.

[*Fills his pipe until she returns.*]

MRS. COTTER (*entering and handing drink*)

Did you bring your overcoat with you, Head?

HEAD

Why so, ma'am?

MRS. COTTER Because the cold o' the rain is there. I wouldn't make any delay but go home immediately. You might get a wettin'.