

Dublin Gothic

by Barbara Bergin

Audio Description Introduction for the matinee performance in the Abbey Theatre Saturday 17th January 2026, at 1pm

Welcome to this introduction to **Dublin Gothic** by **Barbara Bergin**, directed by **Caroline Byrne**. Choreography and Movement is by **Meadhbh Lyons**. Set Design is by **Jamie Vartan**, with Costume Design by **Madeleine Boyd**, and Lighting Design by **Aedín Cosgrove**. The Composition and Sound Design is by **Giles Thomas**. Hair and Make-up is by **Leonard Daly**. The Voice Director is **Andrea Ainsworth**, and the Fight Director is **Ciaran O'Grady**.

This performance runs for three and a half hours, including two fifteen-minute intervals. Please note the earlier performance start time of 1pm. References in this performance include: violence, sexual violence, sex work, abortion, alcohol and drug use, addiction, STIs, mental health, murder, execution, death, forced adoption, suicidal ideation and depictions of suicide. The show also features some loud noise at points, including bass noise as well as flashing lights and haze.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Everyone has a story to tell. And Number 1 O'Reilly Parade is teeming with them, in this wild, exuberant ride through our capital's twentieth century. Over the course of a hundred years, generations of Dubliners share their joys, struggles and secrets in this bold, funny, and deeply moving new play.

Dublin Gothic celebrates the glory and the grime of Dublin. In this spectacular production, more than a hundred unforgettable characters will dance through time as they make their way through life in the 20th century. The play features nineteen actors, one hundred and fifty-eight characters, and four different eras as the epic of everyday plays out onstage, where we meet a glorious collection of endearing and dastardly Dubliners: the Gatelys, the Cummins, the Meehans, and their neighbours.

Dublin Gothic is nominated as a finalist for the prestigious, internationally renowned Susan Smith Blackburn Prize 2026 for female+ playwriting in the English language.

ABOUT THE SET

The action in this play takes place mostly in a single location, a three-storey building over a basement used as a tenement house in central Dublin. This is Number One O'Reilly Parade, and is shown in this production as the skeleton of a building - the construction of which has stalled. Its concrete frame takes up almost the entire width and height of the stage: just the floors and ceilings in concrete slabs, with metal ladders and stairways between the various levels. There are no side walls. For safety, three tension wires are fixed like railings at the front and back of each room up to hip height, with the ladders and stairs mostly placed on the sides of the building.

The building sits in a kind of amphitheatre: a semi-circle of four steps carved into dark stone, and curving around the whole stage. The characters often sit or stand on these steps watching the action that takes place in the main house in the centre. The pit in the middle of the amphitheatre is completely covered with brown soil. From time to time, the ensemble rummage in the earth and produce elements of their costumes, or props vital to the story. In this basement level there are four cement pillars, two of which have niches carved into them for holding candles to light the gloom. Shovels are left standing in the muck, ready for use.

This shadowy basement area also doubles as the the various back alleys and archways that dangerous characters lurk in. Haze hangs in the air, like a kind of smog, and the lighting streams in from either side of the stage, catching in the haze, and casting long shadows. Sounds echo through the old tenement building, like slamming doors, and flushing toilets, though no such doors or bathrooms appear onstage.

The largest room in the house is on the first floor, on the left, and has a small writing desk and chair placed in one corner. On the right hand side, there is a small crawl space, and then steps up to a mezzanine level, with a further set of metal stairs that lead up to the attic room. Up here in the garret is a small room with a single, metal-framed bed, with a few greying cotton sheets tucked around the thin mattress.

In the floor of the main room on the first floor is a trapdoor that opens upwards. A folding stairway is directly underneath, which gives access to the basement through the middle of the house.

On the steps over on our left is where drinkers gather for pints at the local pub, the Carter's Arms. The steps on the right-hand side become the classroom in St. Eithne's school.

When we move into the 1950s, the main room has the writing table in the centre, and stacks of books are piled on the floor, to be assessed for censorship. Two picture frames are now in this room, held up by cast members in front of their faces so that the voices of these moving portraits can join with the voices of the ghosts of previous residents.

A large sign is lowered in front of the building, reading "Emigration Office", as the basement is rented out for people awaiting boats to England.

Later, when we move to a bawdy nightclub, a giant marquee sign is lowered from the rafters, so that the word EMPIRE is written vertically in glowing lightbulbs, as the dusty floor of the amphitheatre becomes a dance hall.

As we move into the 1980s in Act 3, metal screens are added to the back and sides of the building, perforated so that the hazy light still spills in, and covered in graffiti in bright neon colours. A coin-operated payphone is installed on the landing on the first floor.

The lighting in this production is stark. Mostly the stage is bathed in the kind of warm glow that one might expect from gas lamps at the turn of the last century, but occasionally the stage is flooded with cold white light from behind, so that the ensemble are presented to us in silhouette. Other times, the stage falls into almost complete darkness, with just a flickering flame from a candle or two to draw our attention.

ABOUT THE CAST AND COSTUMES

The nineteen-strong cast play almost one hundred and sixty different characters between them, including the shared role of Narrator, as the inhabitants of Number One, O'Reilly Parade speak in ones, twos, or all at once, telling us the story of this dingy corner of Dublin. Each actor plays several characters over the course of the performance as well as being a part of the ensemble. Below we have descriptions of a selection of the more central characters, as well as the crowds that move and speak as one.

We begin in the Victorian era, Dublin in the 1880s, with women wearing large hooped skirts, and tiny-waisted fitted jackets. The men and boys wear greying cotton tops, or shirts under moth-eaten waistcoats, with trousers held up by braces, and heavy workmen's boots. Some wear peaked caps, others tie kerchiefs around their necks. Most are unshaven, with scruffy, stubbled cheeks. Their clothes are dark-coloured, dusty and dirty, often with light clouds of dirt lifting off them if anyone pats them on the back.

The women wear cotton shirts with billowing sleeves, tucked into waistcoats or neat shrug jackets, and ankle-length skirts with layers of ragged, fraying petticoats underneath. Some wear shawls or scarves wrapped around their shoulders and tucked into their waistbands. The women working as prostitutes in Tosser's Pot or Poke's Alley hitch their skirts up at the sides, allowing more of their underskirts to show, and offering glimpses of bare skin above their knee-high socks. Like the men, most are dressed in blacks and greys, in mucky clothes, with the only splash of colour coming from the red socks of one of the whores. The younger girls wear greying cotton smock dresses, sometimes with a pinafore on top. All are threadbare, and do little to keep the cold at bay.

Sarah Morris, a short woman with straight blonde shoulder-length hair, plays **Honor Gately**. Honor is a young girl when we first meet her, and we follow her life in the tenement house for the next few decades.

Her mother, **Florrie Gately**, is played by **Kate Gilmore**, a tall woman, with a minuscule waist, with long auburn hair tucked into neat rolls. Florrie wears a fitted jacket, and large hooped skirt, and dainty, lace-up ankle boots. Honor's grandmother, **Ma Gately**, is played by **Denise McCormack**, a middle-aged woman with curly, auburn hair pinned back.

A writer, **George Doyle**, is played by **Gus McDonagh**. Short and stocky, with a stubbly beard and receding hairline, George speaks with a pronounced lisp. Dressed like the other men of the time, he makes his mark with his florid language, and pours affection onto Honor.

Bridie Meehan, an opinionated neighbour in the tenement, is played by **Ericka Roe**. Her dark hair is pulled back into a severe bun at the nape of her neck, and she is dressed in black. She is a constant presence in the stairwells, watching the comings and goings of others.

Another neighbour, **Ned Cummins**, is played by **Barry John Kinsella**. Tall, with light brown hair, he wears a heavy moleskin jacket, and tends to tuck his trousers into his thick socks and boots to save them from his dirty work shovelling manure. He carries a copy of Marx's Communist Manifesto in his jacket pocket, and tries to rally his neighbours to call for better living conditions.

Ned's wife, **Lil**, is played by **Áine Ní Laoghaire**. A small, thin, delicate-framed woman with long brown hair tied in a loose ponytail, she wears a long, threadbare brown smock dress, and is almost constantly pregnant.

One of her eldest children, a daughter named **Josie Cummins**, is played by **Roxanna Nic Liam**. She has straight, light-brown hair in a low ponytail, and wears a grey smock dress. She stays close by her mother, and tries to help mind the younger babies as new siblings are born.

Karen Ardiff plays **Mamie Boyle**, the local midwife, a middle-aged woman with curly brown hair, who wears a brown leather apron over her clothes. Mamie divides her time between supporting the mothers of the tenements, and drinking in the Carter's Arms.

Two babies are born at the turn of the century, January 1st 1900, becoming teenagers just as this corner of Dublin is caught up in the Easter Rising. The first is **Arthur**, played by **Thommas Kane Byrne**. A very tall, broad young man, with bright blue eyes and a full head of curly brown hair, Arthur also speaks with a strong lisp. He is intelligent, and opinionated, and not afraid to speak his mind in all company.

The second is **Frankie**, played by **Emmet Farrell**. He is thin, and pale, with thick, dark brown hair, and large round, ocean-blue eyes. He skulks in the shadows, keeping his head hung low, and scurries though the short cuts and alleyways around O'Reilly Parade.

Pearse D'Alton, is played by **Seán Duggan**. A school-teacher, from St. Eithne's in Rathrockery, Pearse has dark brown curly hair, and wears an academic gown, while lecturing young boys about Irish history and their colonial struggle.

Dorothy Crothers, played by **Penny Morris**, has dark brown hair and is a wilful young woman of about twenty. She is the niece of the landlord at O'Rehilly Parade, and wears a black and grey check fitted waistcoat over a crisp white blouse and silk cravat, as well as a floor-length full skirt. She has a heavy charm bracelet on her wrist that jingles as she moves.

As time marches on, characters die off, or meet a more grizzly end. They join the ranks of ghost characters, wearing off-white versions of their living costumes, and placing thin, gauzy cloths over their faces, like veils. The ghosts join the ensemble in their narration too. Their voices, however, are amplified and given an echo, as though speaking from another place and time.

After the 1st interval we jump forward to the 1950s, with the ensemble dressed in neater, cleaner clothing. The women wear skirts, some fitted, others with a wide flare for dancing. All shades of blue are picked up in the costumes of this generation, from the sky-blue pleated skirt and matching cardigan worn by the innocent young **Nell-Nell**, to the royal blue silk lining of the black soutane worn by parish priest **Father Iggy**. The women all wear strapped beige court shoes with low heels and a blue toe. Some wear navy polka dot dresses, others vibrant blue fitted capri pants.

A music hall crooner, **Val Mooney**, is played by **Jonathan Delaney Tynan**. A thin, gaunt man, with dark brown hair, slicked into a side parting, Val wears a blue-and-grey check blazer that's a little too big, over a white shirt, blue bow-tie and matching cummerbund, with black trousers and leather shoes. He is timid, often avoiding direct eye-contact, particularly with pretty women.

The women of the ensemble become the chorus line of the Empire Theatre, called the High Kickettes! They discard their dresses and skirts onstage, revealing sparkling silver sleeveless bodysuits, with low-cut bodices, and shiny skin-coloured silk stockings with their heeled shoes. They fix silver, pleated bows to the back of their costumes with narrow belts, like a kind of bustle, and form a line to perform the can-can, grinning from ear to ear.

Another figure with literary aspirations emerges at this time – **Vincent Meehan**, played by **Dan Monaghan**. A young man, in his late 20s perhaps, and full of confidence, he is the grandson of Bridie Meehan, Honor's neighbour long ago. He has her sharp wit, and his father Suckie Meehan's voice.

A drinking man, he teeters and totters about the place, pausing to sing or to swagger, his mousey brown hair styled into a kind of quiff, and the collar of his shirt almost always unbuttoned.

In the 1980s, the tenement house remains a beacon for the fringes of society, with a middle-aged **Nell-Nell** playing host to returned emigrants, students, musicians, and addicts. No longer wearing the meek cardigan and pleated skirt in sky-blue, she lets her long blonde hair fall around her shoulders, and wears a purple cotton blouse over orange linen wide-leg pants, with grey felt Birkenstocks on her feet, and a colourful chunky-knit cardigan.

Her two teenage boys live with her. **Ferdia**, who is tall, broad and curly-haired, with an earring glinting in his left ear, and a red lightning bolt drawn on his temple. His brother, **Tiernan**, is pale and skinny, and both wear punky, paint spattered clothes – skinny jeans with zips and chains, and Doc Martins. They bear a striking resemblance to Arthur and Frankie from earlier.

Flix Kelly, played by **Joshua McEneaney**, is a local community activist who protests against greedy developers and drug gangs alike. A tall, broad-shouldered man, he wears a full-length army overcoat in military green, with paint-flecked Doc Martin boots, his curly brown hair in unruly tufts.

One of the last new characters to emerge is an unnamed woman, with long silver-white hair, and dressed in a white cotton nightdress. She is played by **Carolyn Donnelly**, and never speaks. She has also not played a part in the ensemble until her appearance deep into Act 3.

Clara Fitzgerald and **Kenneth Hudson** complete the ensemble, playing the brassers and street urchins, schoolboys and policemen throughout.

During the audio described performance, there will be a brief recap in the few minutes at the end of each interval before the next act commences, and to share extra information that may be presented over the course of the afternoon. Some of this information has been omitted here so as not to spoil the dramatic effect of certain plot points.

That concludes the audio description introduction to **Dublin Gothic**. It was prepared by me, **Bríd Ní Ghruagáin**, who will facilitate the Touch Tour at 11am before this performance, as well as provide audio description throughout.

Audio description at the Abbey Theatre is supported by The Arts Council, and Arts & Disability Ireland. ADI also provide updates about other audio described and captioned performances. To subscribe to their mailing list, text **ACCESSARTS** to **51444**, or head to **www.adiarts.ie** for more information.

Thank you. Go raibh maith agaibh.



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