



Shining City

Conor McPherson

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Shining City has been an unqualified critical success and quite possibly Conor McPherson's finest work. In Dublin, a man seeks help from a counselor, claiming to have seen the ghost of his recently deceased wife. But what begins as just an unusual encounter becomes a struggle between the living and dead—a struggle that will shape and define both men for the rest of their lives.

Also included here is the one-act, *Come on Over*, about a Jesuit priest sent to investigate a “miracle” in his hometown, where he re-encounters the woman who loved him 30 years before.

Conor McPherson was born in Dublin, Ireland, where he still lives. His plays include *This Lime Tree Bower, St. Nicholas, The Weir, Port Authority* and *Dublin Carol*.

Shining City Details

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From Reader Review Shining City for online ebook

Mak says

Terrible dialogue to read, but apparently fantastic as a live performance. The ending made me want to re-read, but I can't put myself through that again.

Patrick Grizzard says

I'm all in favor of naturalism but there are stretches of this play that are practically unreadable for all the pauses and "likes" and "you knows." I'm sure it's much better performed than read. That said, the rambling, meandering dialogue is punctuated with some really beautiful moments (the final scene, especially).

Olivia says

Scary good.

Rick Urban says

I can't really rate this adequately because it is meant to be performed, and I think the kind of stilted, stammering dialogue McPherson writes really begs for a dramatic reading. That being said, the plays here seem to be addressing the notion of belief and the rewards to be gained from faith and a spiritual life...but more importantly, the damage that a lack of faith (in institutions, religion, love, etc.) can have on an individual...provocative, but perhaps stronger in the subtext than the text.

tomwrote says

McPherson's play examines identity, sex, secrecy, repression in a confessional context that brings it into the realm of belief and loss of belief. The naturalism is perfectly portrayed, but placing it in the context of 'a ghost' and a break up adds a mirror to heighten the intensity. The psychological effect on both men is played out over an extended period of time, leading to a moving and unnerving denouement.

Cat says

I thought this play was really beautiful, and I loved the ending. The parallels between the two central male characters were striking, but McPherson also let them build without spelling them out...I love the silences and the incomplete sentences and the hesitations. I think the monologues would be even more powerful

performed (duh). I also liked the way the scenes connected with one another without being strictly drawn from one another. The audience is allowed to do a lot of their own psychological, associative work that way. There was a second play (called "Come On Over," maybe?) in the volume that I found very disturbing. This may mean it's a powerful, amazing play, but I haven't gotten beyond my disturbed reaction to that one yet. I thought "Shining City" offered more possibilities for redemption to its characters (and maybe viewers), and I responded to that more.

Dan R says

I've had mixed feelings about this text. When I first read it I was bored out of my mind. Then I read it again and saw a glimmer of something. I heard a scene read out loud and was amazed. I have a feeling that after I sit through and watch it 12 times in a row I will be bored out of my mind. Lucky for you, that's just me. You'll probably love it.

EmilyAnne says

I wanted to read this for a few years now, but once I graduated from Cuse I was over reading plays and dissecting them. I picked this back up and finally read it this morning. It was an interesting play in terms of the characters relationships and their secrets. It felt real to me; the dialogue is very Mamet-esque with the talking over one another and barely getting out a coherent thought. I think I'd still prefer The Seafarer over this play though.

Nathaniel Perrin says

Modern theater suffers from a small circulation of recycled tropes and formulaic character-types. There are several powerful moments in the script for this particular play, but it does not set itself apart as a masterpiece of theater whose vivacity carries over to the typed page.

Yourfiendmrjones says

I was thinking as I was reading it that this was one of McPherson's lesser works. Something where the supernatural element was so slight and the issues of the characters were too much in the foreground without his usual carefully wrought balance of the two.

Until the last page.

I will say nothing more except that this is on par with the two plays of his I love- The Weir and The Seafarer.

Leslie says

Ghosts stories told in therapy? Makes perfect sense, when you think about it.

This was the first Conor McPherson play I ever read, and I don't know why I waited years to read more.

I read it too long ago to review it in any detail. I do recall the music of the ice cream van being a surprisingly delicate and creepy detail.

Tom Romig says

I was fortunate enough to see the American premiere of this play put on by the Manhattan Theater Club in 2006. (Holly Hunter was in the audience, for what it's worth.) Brian F. O'Byrne, Oliver Platt, Martha Plimpton, Peter Scanavino. All the characters are struggling for purchase, just barely avoiding a slide off the deck into the tumultuous sea around them. They try, often painfully and ineptly, to manage their relationships. There are some small gains made, little victories that are still very tenuous.

Chad says

In scene three of Conor McPherson's play *Shining City*, John, a widower who believes his deceased wife's ghost is haunting him, confides to Ian, his therapist: "I just want to have a transaction where some normal rules apply again, you know?" John, like Ian, is battling with issues of identity, but McPherson intelligently connects identity with themes of sexuality and existence. For McPherson, these themes are not independent; therefore, to address one is to consider all. He focuses all three themes on one subject: religion.

The published text of *Shining City* also includes the short play "Come On Over." In the former, Ian is an ex-priest turned therapist, a man who has abandoned his girlfriend and their baby. He is a man who is on the cusp of living as an open homosexual but who ultimately cannot cross that threshold. In the short play, Matthew was once a priest of "strong" faith, but after he is brutally stabbed in the face by a young girl he was molesting, he loses his trust in God. With both Ian and Matthew's characters, McPherson raises complex questions about sexuality and the Catholic Church. Ian leaves the priesthood but although he comes close, he cannot live honestly with his sexual preference. Matthew in "Come On Over" seems to have repressed his sexual desires until he can no longer control them. For both Ian and Matthew, sexuality is a force---a power so strong and so long denied---that it damages innocent lives when it is finally released: Ian's wife and Patience, the young girl Matthew molested.

If you read both *Shining City* and "Come On Over," an alternative question also emerges. Is McPherson's purpose with Ian and Matthew to warn about the dangers of priests abandoning God? Is his intention grounded in more traditional Christian principles? Both Ian and Matthew abandon God as much as they feel abandoned by God, and the reality of this, as I've stated, is emotionally, physically, and spiritually violent to others. Indeed, Ian's life seems to lack substantial meaning after he leaves the priesthood. At the end of *Shining City*, John mentions that Ian doesn't believe in ghosts (the bridge to Holy Ghost is not a long one to cross here). Ian responds, "John, there was a time I would've given anything to see one. Just to know that there was...something else. Do you know what I mean?/Just something else, besides all the...you know...the pain and confusion. Just something that gave everything...some meaning, you know? I'm talking about God, really, you know?"

McPherson does not provide simple solutions in either play. He addresses religion as directly relating to how we see our existence in the world, and he does so in a thought-provoking, shocking, and surprisingly tender manner.

Dorothy says

So-so. Not as good as *The Weir*, but McPherson's dialogue is as natural and true-to-life as always. It's a play about the changing nature of relationships, how some emotional ties grow weaker over time, and others are destroyed through lack of care. As is usual for McPherson, there is a supernatural element that adds to the tension and urgency. Worth a read, but *The Weir* did it better.

Nelson Clark says

Had to read it twice to get where the author was trying to go. Got there, finally, but it was a trek. As a playwright myself, I understand the distance between the page and the stage, however, this ghost story seemed to have more dead air than dead people. But the final moment of the play was, in fact, a genuine hair-raising theatrical gesture.
