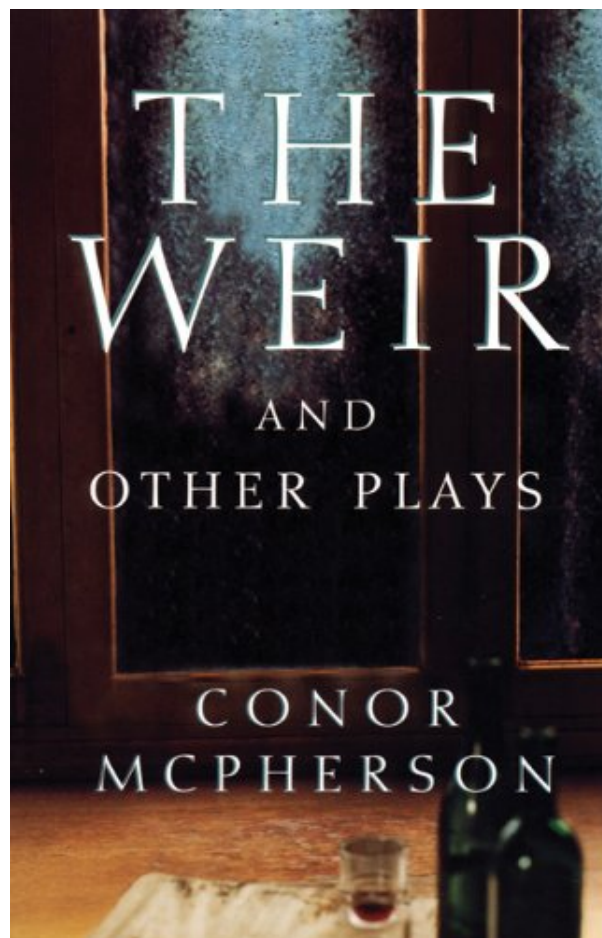


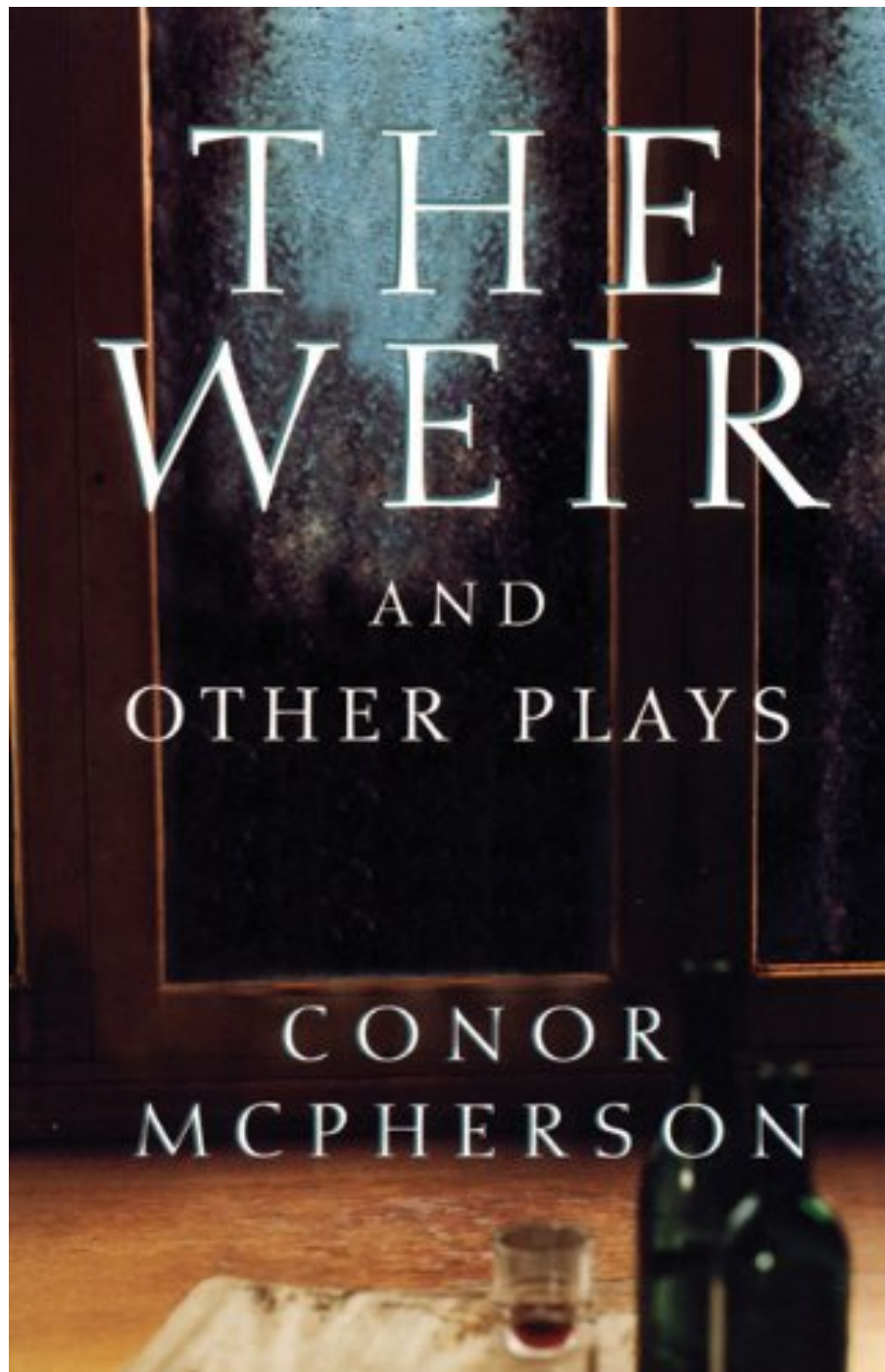
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The first U.S. collection of an extraordinary new voice in Irish drama.

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Five Stars

By Kent F.

Arrived early and perfect

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A great play

By A Customer

Annoyed though I am, as a young Irish playwright, to admit it, Conor McPherson's *The Weir* is the best Irish play of the Nineties. It's sharply observed (I love the jostling for position that the men do in the presence of the young woman), beautifully written - McPherson can make even ordering a drink into a loaded moment - and it's a gift to actors. His other work, generally in monologue form, is in my opinion less successful, but that's more due to the contradictory and frustrating nature of the form than the line-to-line quality of the writing, which is never less than excellent. Question is, how in the world does he make it look so easy?

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Five lively dramatic pieces +commentary

By John L Murphy

I haven't seen any of Conor McPherson's plays, but the five dramatic texts here--this a term more associated with Beckett, but I think applies here--work well enough on the page. Others have remarked here how "Weir" does or does not come alive in such a format; relying solely on the text, I think that it greatly depends on the non-verbal cues entirely absent from any of McPherson's work, that under direction (his?) would expand the potential locked into the words themselves. "Weir" takes its time starting and finishing, and the narrative arc that the various spooky stories create comes down well before the play's curtain. It'd take a

nimble set of actors for this play to work, with so many set-speeches, but I've heard it's been done!

The other plays here, of which little has been said, are all monologues. In the prefatory notes to "St Nicholas," the playwright directly confronts the problem of and the childlike fun with sitting down in a theatre and being told a long tale by one actor, not two, and so lacking the creation of make-believe action that could ensue. With only one figure up there, it's totally up to that person's conjuring power to bring the words into a shared reality with the listeners. A scary story about a theatre critic who leaves his family and serves as a procurer for vampires sounds as outrageous as the story sounds, yet in the hands of McPherson, it's plausible and even, after a time, mundane. We start to believe the teller, and keep going no matter where his convoluted but orderly narrative takes us.

Similarly, "The Lime Tree Bower" tells an even longer story but with three narrators, who only once engage in a very brief dialogue. The rest of the performance, they are only "aware" of the other two--I wonder what looks they keep on their faces as number three tells his installment? This story of a "perfect crime" attempted mingles (as McPherson's former English Lit professor at University College Dublin, Anthony Roche, explains in an essay on the playwright in a recent collection "The UCD Aesthetic," that McPherson also took a BA + MA in Philosophy) the figure of Ray with many references to utilitarianism and more current theories, by the way. If this does not sound like dramatic fodder, it's mixed with lots of chases and romances...

The next play--for one actor--also looks at a criminal action and its aftermath in a violent and poignant manner. "The Good Thief" provides thrills, chills, and thoughtful consideration added to an exciting storyline. The last one, "Rum + Vodka," details the downward spiral of a man about town--also solo on stage. I have to admit I enjoyed all five plays, but the last three the best, for these focus more on urban Dublin life where McPherson lives, and capture the 1990s restlessness with sustained jitters of growing up, or not, that his characters must confront after evading punishment and retribution for so long. Lots of hangovers and lots of vows to do better next time.

The notes added to this volume comment on each play from McPherson's rather scattered commentary on the making and staging of the five plays. You can hear the author in his prose voice, and I find that it differs little from his dramatic tone. After this, I'll seek out the film "I Went Down," for which he wrote the screenplay. While Martin McDonagh's more Synge-meets-Beckett--meets Pinter plays have grabbed more attention, the more circumspect McPherson may well have the stamina to go on creating even better work; that one of these five was written when he was twenty or so astonished me.

Four stars only because I hold that the best work of McPherson is yet to come. Meanwhile, this volume's a bargain. It's a valuable collection that entertains but also has you stop and ponder, while never falling into preachiness or the easy pose of moral indignation or holier-than-thou self-righteousness--no mean feat.

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