

The Leys
Gernon Road
Letchworth
18.2.1926

Dear Mr. Joyce,

We went up to see Exiles on Monday. I postponed writing to you because I wanted to go up to the debate today. I found this impossible however.

I will now try to give you my impressions. As I received no request for notices from you, I presume you have obtained them from a press agent. I have seen "The Times", "The Morning Post," and the "Daily News". None of these critics seemed to have understood the play, to judge by the reviews. Neither, in my opinion, the English audience on Monday afternoon. They were wanting comedy, and several times they made occasions to laugh - in the same stupid manner in which the typical English audience forces a laugh when it considers that it has been made to think for too long a period. I was rather depressed by their stimmung; if that be the pick of the London intelligentsia, you will do well to remain in Paris.

It was not the fault of the actors. On the whole you had a good cast. Rupert Harvey was a good Richard. His make-up and general appearance was excellent, except that he did not wear glasses. Of course I had previously formed my own conception of Richard, based on what I have gathered from conversations with you, and there were occasions when Harvey did not quite satisfy me. Sometimes he seemed to lack the biting humour. But these occasions were few. On the whole he seemed to me to be Richard. He was especially good when he had to display anger, and good when he had to be in a dreamy mood. The scene between him and Bertha at the end of the first act was excellently played.

Bertha was a blackhaired lady' I wonder how you like this. My copy of Exiles does not specify what colour her hair should be. But she certainly played the part with a good deal of temperament. The fault of the average English actor is that he will not let himself go sufficiently and there were times when I thought that Bertha could have expressed herself with more vehemence. Pace and key were not always to my liking, but I put that down to the so called 'restraint' of the English artists.

I noticed that scenes flagged when Beatrice was on the stage. The Beatrice was the weak link in the chain. The young lady who played it looked a charming 18 instead of the 27 years you prescribe. Her manner

was kittenish and her behaviour infantile. Her voice was monotonous and lacked intelligence. In that respect I can forgive the critics and the audience for their mystification. Anyone who had not read the play would be at a loss to understand the relationship of such a Beatrice to the Rowan family. And the trouble was that Beatrice's lack of 'weight' (to use a trite theatrical expression), adversely affected the other artists. In dialogue with her they were unable to give due significance to their words. Using a 'lux non lucendo' as a standard of comparisons, I may say I never realised how important Beatrice is to the play until I saw her letting it down.

William Stack took up the part of Robert at very short notice instead of Henry Caine, and gave a first-rate rendering of it. In appearance he corresponded faithfully to your description, and the conversational tones he employed were very suitable. He was good in his passionate scenes, and consistent throughout. Agnes Thomas was of course good and the little girl who played Archie was quite masculine in appearance.

One fault affected the performances of all the bigger parts. Doubtlessly under Fay's direction, they endeavoured to impart a Dublin tinge to their voices. On the whole they kept it up pretty well, but occasionally they lapsed into stage English, noticeably. And here I observed a curious thing. When they omitted the Irish colouring they lost their temperament and became dull. When they picked it up again, they seemed to regain the Irish manner. The scene between Richard and Bertha always went well.

As regards the play itself, I would say that the close of Act I was particularly well played. The latter half of the first act is very dramatic; perhaps it provides the most dramatic situation in the whole play. Act II comes out rather unevenly and seems to flag a bit after Richard has left the stage. I wonder whether you have given the actors too hard a task. Act III is a very fine act from beginning to finish and the final curtain is most effective.

You will be amused to hear that Bernard Shaw was sitting in the stalls on Monday afternoon and seemed to be discussing the play very keenly in the intervals. I must add that the performance took place at the Regent, where his plays are being performed, and by a curious irony of fate 'John Bull's Other Island' was to be given in the evening. I

was almost inclined to stay for it but didn't.

It was easy to see that the audience did not understand the political note in Exiles; they were inclined to take the play as a triangle, pure and simple. Perhaps the actors were not quite sufficiently acquainted with the Dublin you picture. I could see that Fay had tried to get it into their minds, but had not completely succeeded.

I should like to see the play performed by the Abbey Theatre; and I should certainly like to see an intelligent French company do it. The last word has not been said on Exiles, not by a long way. But whenever and wherever the next performances of Exiles takes place, I hope you will be able to be present at some rehearsals, and I should like to be with you. This is no reflection on Fay, who in my opinion did his work very well.

I am sorry that you were unable to come over.

I hope your eyes are getting better. I should like to see you all again.

Yours sincerely,
Claude W. Sykes