Thomas Kilroy

DOUBLE CROSS

A new version

Gallery Books

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Double Cross
is published in October 2018.

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Double Cross receives financial assistance from
the Arts Council.

Characters

WILLIAM JOYCE, known as Lord Haw-Haw
BRENDAN BRACKEN MP, Minister of Information
A FIRE WARDEN
POPSIE, an upper class English lady
LORD CASTLEROSSE, gossip columnist
LORD BEAVERBROOK, proprietor of the *Express* newspapers
MARGARET JOYCE, wife of William Joyce
ERICH, an anglophile German and reader of W B Yeats
A LADY JOURNALIST
TWO NARRATORS, one male, one female

The play is so designed that two male and one female actors play all the parts with one actor playing both BRENDAN BRACKEN *and* WILLIAM JOYCE.

for Seamus Deane

PART ONE

The Bracken Play: London

Before the lights go up there is the sound of an air-raid siren in the distance and then the drone of bombers and distant explosions. The sounds are brought down.

A darkened stage. Upstage: built into the set, so that they become integral parts of the set when they fade, two video/film screens. Black and white newsreel-style images now appear on them, totally silent. First, in bold lettering '1940'. Then, images of the evacuation of Dunkirk by British forces and of Churchill as Prime Minister in London, followed by German bombers in night flight over Britain. Flashes of anti-aircraft fire and explosions. Fade out to blank screens. Full lights up.

Stage right: a living room dominated by an Adam fireplace with the Romney portrait of Edmund Burke above the mantelpiece. A window into the street. A 1940s vintage wireless. A whole array of differently styled, differently coloured telephone receivers of the period.

Stage left: various items, a desk for BEAVERBROOK, *a chair for* CASTLEROSSE.

Downstage: a round rostrum which becomes various settings.

ACTOR *and* ACTRESS *forward in neutral coats, standing impassively to either side.*

ACTOR Ladies and gentlemen, this is the story of two men who invented themselves.

One screen lights up, mute picture of the third ACTOR *as* BRENDAN BRACKEN. *Spectacles, touselled red hair, flushed face, morning suit.*

ACTRESS (*Pointing*) Brendan Bracken.

Second screen lights up, mute, the same actor appears as WILLIAM JOYCE, *now side by side with the picture of* BRACKEN, JOYCE *in black fascist shirt, ugly scar down one side of face, hair slicked black to the skull.*

ACTOR (*Pointing*) And William Joyce. Otherwise known as Lord Haw-Haw.

ACTRESS When a man wipes out his past and invents his own future he may have criminal or artistic tendencies.

ACTOR On the other hand he may simply be acting out a condition of the culture from which he is trying so desperately to escape.

ACTRESS Both men left Ireland in the nineteen twenties.

ACTOR At the precise time when Ireland declared its independence of England.

ACTRESS In England they both obliterated all evidence of their Irishness.

ACTOR When the bombs began to fall over Western Europe after 1939 Bracken was in London, by Churchill's side as Minister of Information.

ACTRESS Joyce was in Berlin, on the other side of the fence, broadcasting propaganda for Goebbels and Hitler.

Both screens go dead and BRACKEN *enters, rumpled tweed suit and polished shoes. He struts about, the master of his fate, picking up and checking the odd piece of paper.*

Before he died Bracken had created modern British financial journalism —

ACTOR Chairman of the Financial Times Group —

ACTRESS Elevated to the peerage —

ACTOR Although he never entered the House of Lords which he insisted upon calling the geriatric clinic —

BRACKEN (*Suddenly taking over*) Actually, I died of cancer. (*Indicating throat*) Somewhere about here. If you were to put your hand there, you would feel a lump —

He holds this a moment, then turns quickly, twiddling the knobs on the radio while the ACTOR *and* ACTRESS *disappear. Static and snatches of music, garbled voices come from the radio as he moves through stations. Then the clear calling code: 'Germany calling! Germany calling! This is Radio Hamburg and here is William Joyce with a commentary on today's news.'*

JOYCE (*Voice on wireless*) Today's report from the German Supreme Command announces the collapse of France. My friends, the war in the West is over. Only one enemy of Germany remains: England.

BRACKEN *snaps off the wireless and walks about, upset.*

BRACKEN That's Lord Haw-Haw, you know. Could never understand why they call him that. A jumped up little fascist from the Irish Free State. Sounds more like backstreet Brixton or Kilburn on a Saturday night, wouldn't you say? Actually, I only listen to the filthy little traitor as part of my job. As Minister of Information in His Majesty's Government I do have to listen to a lot of tommy-rot, I'm afraid.

He turns on the wireless again.

JOYCE Now is the time for all loyal Britons to call upon the government to resign, at once, to prevent further, useless slaughter. To rid ourselves of the warmonger Churchill and his craven supporters, the gangster Beaverbrook and that well known poseur and parasite, Mr Brendan Bracken —

He turns off the wireless again.

BRACKEN Did you ever? Did you hear that? My name! The nerve! Not going to listen to another word. Bloody twit. Knew the fellow well, you know, before he turned traitor with the Nazis. Vulgar little shit from Connemara, full of fight, ready to take on anyone. You know the kind of Paddy. Joined Oswald Mosley's blackshirts. British Union of Fascists, that is. Mosley eventually had to throw him out. Constantly beating up yids in the East End. The Irish are always being thrown out of something or other, aren't they? I'm absolutely convinced he's over there in Berlin, now, simply to be in the middle of the row. Coat off, sleeves up and bejaysus we're off. Dreadful chap, actually.

JOYCE *appears on the video/film screen: black shirt, tie.* BRACKEN *affects a studied indifference.*

JOYCE My friends, let me introduce the kind of crony who hangs around Churchill.

BRACKEN I'm not listening! (*He clearly is*)

JOYCE Take this specimen of outrageous masquerade, Mr Brendan Bracken, MP, Minister of Information, would you believe!

BRACKEN Not paying the slightest attention to any of this — certainly not!

JOYCE Who is this Brendan Bracken? Who is this creature who pretends to be a member of the English establishment? I will tell you, my friends —

BRACKEN Of course, Mosley did attract all the oddballs, you know — All marching about with stiff elbows and that constipated swagger of the Hun. Disgruntled grocers from Battersea. Proponents of cockfighting in Norfolk —

JOYCE He's the son of a Tipperary stonemason who was also a dynamite terrorist with the IRB. Didn't know that, did you? His Daddy a terrorist —

BRACKEN Liar! Not true! Not a word of it! (*He walks about frantically, hands to his ears*)

JOYCE He arrived in England with a cheque book, wangled his way into a minor public school for one year. From then on he claimed to be a public schoolboy. He memorized Burke's *Peerage* and back issues of the *Empire News* so that he knew the genealogy of every decent home in the country and the name of every significant clergyman in the Church of England. In this way he name-dropped his way to the top of the heap —

BRACKEN (*Anxiously*) People keep saying to me: Why bother about this creature, Brendan? Why are you so obsessed with him? Can't answer that — can't answer — can't answer —

JOYCE And this is the kind of man who now stands beside Churchill! Is it any wonder that England is in the most troubled phase of its history?

BRACKEN None of this is true — what I mean is — can't say this publicly — this man — haunts me — no other word for it — haunts me — day and night — There! I've said it — Haunts, haunts —

JOYCE Don't be misled, my friends, by the clownish demeanour of this individual —

BRACKEN Perhaps it is — loneliness? Don't, Brendan! Don't go that way! Keep your spirit up! Up! Up!

JOYCE Remember this is the man who is the confidant of Churchill. This is the man who controls Fleet Street. This is the man who censors and determines the flow of information to the British people during this quite unnecessary war.

BRACKEN (*Forced brightliness*) The question is, though: How did this chappie Joyce end up as Goebbels' right hand man on the wireless?

JOYCE The question is: What does it say about democracy if such a trickster can rise to the top?

BRACKEN Lord Haw-Haw, I ask you!