



# The Art of Billy Roche: Wexford as the World

*Kevin Kerrane*

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Billy Roche – musician, actor, novelist, dramatist, screenwriter – is one of Ireland’s most versatile talents. This anthology, the first comprehensive survey of Roche’s work, focuses on his portrayal of one Irish town as a microcosm of human life itself, elemental

and timeless. Among the contributors are fellow artists (Colm Tóibín, Conor McPherson, Belinda McKeon), theatre professionals (Benedict Nightingale, Dominic Dromgoole, Ingrid Craigie), and scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. Essays and interviews illuminate Roche’s musicality, his poetic use of Wexford dialect, his mythic imagination, his preoccupation with love and loss, and his relation to other Irish dramatists. Posters and photographs help to clarify Roche’s inventive use of stage space and his fictional transformation of town space. Two selections by Billy Roche himself exemplify the range of his work. His first play, *A Handful of Stars*, which helped pave the way for other Irish playwrights in London, is represented here by a key scene featuring teenage rebel Jimmy Brady. And from *Tales from Rainwater Pond*, Roche’s recent collection, the poignant story ‘A Lucky Escape’ is reprinted in full.

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