

2004 [aidan-gillen.com](http://www.aidan-gillen.com) Q&A

<http://web.archive.org/web/20051218180342/http://www.aidan-gillen.com/qanda2.html>

1. **What is your favorite book? Is there any book that you have read that you would like to see made into a film that you would also act in?**

Different books from different times, some of which have been made into films already. "Post Office," "Women," "Hollywood," "Ham on Rye," all by Charles Bukowski. "Confessions of an Irish Rebel," and "Borstal Boy," by Brendan Behan. "The Book of Daniel," by E.L. Doctorow. "Serious Time," by Joe Ambrose. "Catcher in the Rye," by J.D. Salinger. I read a lot of biographies. "An Open Book," - John Hustons autobiography is really good. "Baby I Don't Care," by Lee Server about Mitchum is great. I read a great Montgomery Clift biography, I think it was by Patricia Bosworth. When I was a kid it was Roald Dahl, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," etc. One of the earlier books of Dermot Bolger, "The Journey Home," I actively tried to be in an adaptation of. I wrote to Dermot, sent him some tape of my work, nothing happened with that, but Dermot wrote back to me, "Fair play". There was what looked like blood all over the envelope too.

2. **How did you prepare the stammer in *Buddy Boy*? It was so convincing.**

Are you sure? Well thanks anyway. OK here's something about *Buddy Boy*: it wasn't really seen by many people, and last week some people started ringing up saying "What the fuck was that film on BBC2 the other night?" and it was *Buddy Boy*, airing on a pretty good Saturday night slot. And they liked it too. I can't remember method though, as far as the stammer goes.

3. **As an actor, you seem to enjoy taking risks and experimenting with the roles and characters that you play, which is incredibly refreshing. On that note, there has been some debate about the reservations some actors have with doing certain things on film, i.e. nudity/sex scenes, overt violence, etc. I was wondering, is there anything in particular that you have reservations about doing in film or on stage, or do you simply take things as they come and go from there?**

I will usually go for whatever it takes to make the drama work, but having done lots of nudity, violence, etc. I am wary of doing these things unnecessarily, but I will always take it as it comes. When I was doing *Dice* there was a particularly creepy scene where I was sitting with 3 young (very young) sisters as their father was preparing to kill them upstairs at my bequest, and while doing the scene I thought, "I'm totally into this scene but it's so wrong." But I got on with it anyway. My loyalty is to the character.

4. **As previously mentioned, apart from film and television you've also done a number of theatre productions. I've done background work in theatre myself and know how grueling and difficult it can be - and**

how rewarding the work is. Which medium do you prefer, or find the most rewarding?

Depends. I really prefer working with a camera. You're doing something different every day and (I) tend to put a lot of energy in when it's new. You can go as wild as you like cos you know you will be doing something different tomorrow. Also you don't have to shout your head off to reach the back row. And it's about the camera reading your thoughts, so once you actually have the thoughts, you can just be there...at the other end of the scale. If you find yourself in the wrong play at the wrong theatre it's not so nice, so I think you've gotta be really careful about your choices. I've been mostly lucky, and while sometimes I'd nearly have to be marched on stage at gunpoint, you usually get on and on the good nights it's really worth it and you feel like you've had a psychic workout. Or I do, anyway.

5. What is it like to remain silent for 30 seconds (referring to the opening of *The Caretaker*)?

As far as that first scene in *The Caretaker* goes, it's a very good set up for the drama, and the character. I don't think you really get to know what Mick is about until the last couple of minutes though. It felt good, and you're in a strong position. It unsettles people.

6. With which artist (film work, stage work) would you like to work with?

Theatre-wise I've been lucky but it's also planned. I did only new plays at places that do almost solely new plays (like The Bush, Hampstead, and Royal Court are all great places to work), or classics at The Almeida, which is a brilliant place to work too. Two stage (and film) actors I admired hugely died a few years back: Tony Doyle and Donal McCann. I love the work of Terrence Malick, Martin Scorsese, Neil Jordan, and loads of others too. I'm dodging the question of who I want to work with - I know it's just that it's never who you expect it might be.

7. On the commented QAF edition we learned that there had been some arguments (between you and Craig Kelly) concerning the ending of series 3. May we know which?

There were only 2 series. What did I say on the DVD? Must listen to that. Any arguments we had was just personal stuff and nothing to do with the scripts.

8. Last time around you named your favorite movies. What are your five or so favorite albums of all time and why?

Well, I can't narrow it down to 5, I'm sorry. I really like my music, these would all be on the short list: "Let it Be," "Tim," and "Don't Tell a Soul," all by *The Replacements*. My friend introduced me to this band with a compilation tape that had loads of songs on it and they were nearly all great. I went to see them in Dublin in '92 I think, not long before they split and I won't forget it. Three songs in and Paul Westerberg was pulling carpet off the

floor. This group walked it like they talked it, they were a dream and a nightmare to their record companies cos they were so unpredictable. When they performed live or on record, their nerves were exposed, and it was at times almost unbearably good. Check out the songs, "Androgenous," "Achint to Be," "Swingin' Party," "Unsatisfied," "Sadly Beautiful," "Skyway," "Sixteen Blue," and "Within Your Reach." Also, Paul Westerberg has done some pretty good stuff since: "Everybody is Fantastic," and "The Clock Comes down the Stairs," both by MicroDisney.

I played the first one over and over in about 1984 and still do. It's really atmospheric, it can sound tinny and there's drum machines, but it's all about what Cathal Coughlan (vocals) and Sean O' Hagan (guitar) are doing. This maybe is my favorite album. "The Clock Comes Down the Stairs" is from a couple of years later and has a more poppy and polished sound. And this is great when you listen to what he's singing about. There was also a great EP called "In the World," with a great track called "Loftholdingswood." Cathal Coughlan went on to form a band called *Fatima Mansions*, they had a really hard aggressive sound which I loved. Also did some fine ballads - "Behind the Moon," being one I liked. "North Atlantic Wind," is another. Saw them lots of times. Of particular note was the period when they would open with a song called, "Angels Delight, which had a sweet intro with bell-like keyboards and a particularly hard and banging chorus of "burn motherfucker burn". Cathal then released some great solo stuff, the albums "Black River Falls," and "The Skys Awful Blue," both have lots of great songs. Last time I saw him play he was on his own with a keyboard, playing to a small crowd, half of whom hadn't heard him before and it was a blinder.

"Before the Holyhead," by *The Stars of Heaven*. This is a band from Dublin who were around for a while in the eighties. Played a kind of country tinged pop/rock. Great lyrics. Stephen Ryan also sounded raw to me in that Westerberg way. Tracks "Rain on the Sea," "Sacred Heart Hotel," "Easier This Way," (recorded later in Stephen Ryans next band *The Revenants* and released on "Horse of a Different Colour," but this was a stars song). Their version of Richard Thompson's "Calvary Cross," and here's a song I love: "Never Saw You." I'm not entirely sure which songs are on which records though.

Bonny Prince Billy (aka Will Oldham) (aka Palace Music) (aka Palace Song) favourite records: "Viva Last Blues," "I See a Darkness," "Ease Down the Road," "Master and Everyone," "Hope" -- these are all great. "Grace," by Jeff Buckley, and stuff by Nick Drake. *Nirvana* particularly, "In Utero," and "Bleach". Some good ones on "Nirvana Unplugged" as well ("Man Who Sold the World," "Pennyroyal Tea," "All Apologies). OK, that's it for now.

9. Now that you've gotten a chance to do theatre in both the UK and the US, how would say the US audience and fans compare to those in the UK?

There's not much difference when it comes down to it, it usually depends on the kind of play and the kind of theatre.

- 10. Was it strange to go back to do the DVD commentary for *Queer as Folk*? Had you seen anyone since the show ended? How did you feel about revisiting it?**

Well, here's how that happened. I was completely broke, and was offered a couple of grand to go up to Manchester on the train and do it, so I said "Yes, I'd love to." It was strange. I was looking at the whole thing 10 episodes one after the other and I wasn't sure what I was looking at. Felt like I was looking at someone else. Didn't say much.

- 11. Parts like Lord Rathbone in *Shanghai Knights* and Ariel in *The Tempest* were very physical. Did you have to train rigorously to prep for these roles? Have you ever been injured on set or during a performance?**

I did train hard for that final swordfight in *Shanghai Knights*, first with a fencing master in Prague and then with Jackie Chan's stunt team. As a result I got to do so much of that scene myself. I didn't do any special training for *The Tempest* although I can tell you I was fit after it, even if the first thing I did when it ended was fall asleep in the theatre bar. I cannot go under water without thinking about *The Tempest* and swimming into my airlock. Haven't scored much injuries; witnessed the Chan Team give some rough ones and take 'em well too. I've given out a couple of injuries though, with poorly timed fake punches which then became real punches.

- 12. Five years and very diverse roles after *Queer as Folk*, do you still have any concerns about being typecast?**

You can only be typecast if you say yes to the roles. For example, I did get offers of characters similar to Stuart before and after QAF but didn't do them. I don't have typecasting concerns cos I decide what I do. You can't always be sure what you're going to get offered but you can decide about what to do with the stuff you are offered.

- 13. I enjoyed, and was impressed by, your role in *Final Curtain*. I didn't think it possible for any other actor to be able to match Peter O'Toole's capability of 'over the top' performances, but you pulled it off. In light of that performance, and the 'cartoon bad guy' role in *Shanghai Knights*, have you any interest in playing an outright comedy?**

I will take that as a compliment. Peter O'Toole certainly is a great man. Some of the first plays I did, notably "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (twice) I drew a lot of laughs and I think that's what encouraged me to go on with it. Don't know what they were laughing at though. So yeah, maybe.

- 14. Of all the roles you've played, which one was A) the most difficult to play, B) the performance you're most satisfied with, C) the one you wish would fall off the edge of the world?**

O.K. A) Platonov was difficult, it was also probably the most complex. This was a man, alone in the community, falling apart, watching himself fall to pieces, eluding a beautiful and bright woman who could be his saviour, and bringing tragedy on everyone. The script was fantastic, everything else about the production too. Jonathan Kent really is one of the best directors around. I identified with this character in lots of ways, understood what it was all about and where it was going. I'm not sure why completely, but I wasn't on top of it every night. I was some nights, and when it was on it was really on and I had the most thrilling nights I had yet had on stage. In a play there's always good nights and bad nights but the good night ratio has got to be high. B) I was very happy playing Ariel in *The Tempest* (again directed by Jonathan Kent). The whole play was so much more than I imagined it being. The design and production were visionary and I felt like I was part of a magic trick. Playing Skinny in *Mojo* (on stage) I felt like I left a lot of bags behind, and felt really alive on stage in a way I hadn't before. Also Mick in *The Caretaker* but there will probably be more on that later. In films/tv I felt good about *Safe*, *Mojo*, and *The Low Down*. I mean in *Safe* (BBC film from '93) my acting is messy but my heart was in it, and everyone gave their all in that one. C) It's never good to slag off stuff you're in, but there's a couple of years gone by now so I will say: *Gold in the Streets*, *The Darkling*, *Lorna Doone* and I take full responsibility for what I did in those productions.

15. Are there any specific roles (or work by a specific dramatist) you'd like to perform in the future - or are there any particular film directors you'd like to work with, if given the opportunity?

There was already a question like this but I will add a couple of names: I would like to do some of Tom Murphy's stuff at some point. Tom is an amazing Irish playwright, came into view 'round the same time as Pinter. When they did his play, "Whistle in the Dark" (about an Irish family in Birmingham) in London in the late 50's or early 60's one of the critics commented: "Anyone who wants to see what a nest of vipers we are nursing at our bosom should come and see "Whistle in the Dark" and then call for the immediate deportation of all the Irish from this land" (or words to that effect). And he's written many plays, he's a lot better known in Ireland than outside it, but has written a few really good ones in the last few years. "The Wake" and "The House" are among them. I just watched a film called *Ratcatcher* directed by Lynne Ramsey, and regardless of whether I ever work with her this is just a straightforward recommendation: see the film.

16. From your interview in the NY Times it sounds as though you didn't have any particular preconceptions about *The Caretaker*, so what attracted you to the role of Mick when you read the play?

I immediately saw the play as a kind of puzzle, and I saw Mick as a kind of puzzle too, and thought I could do the puzzle. The thing about Pinter plays is that they are telling us things and we are not completely aware of what's happening at the time. They are operating on more than one level, more than just the surface. People are having this conversation about one thing and you find yourself thinking about something else. You can be taken places unawares with these plays. They're also full of good gags, which is all part of the thing.

17. Being in *The Caretaker* in New York you were exposed to a new crowd of viewers. How do you feel it will affect your popularity here in the US?

I mean it went well etc, and it's noticed within the New York scene, but I don't know if it goes further than that. Although it did lead directly to what I'm doing now (series for HBO) so lets see.

18. If you could meet one person alive or dead who would it be?

Santa Claus (or Santy as we call him in Ireland). I'd like to ride with him in the sleigh at Christmas. Did you know St. Nicholas is the Patron Saint of Thieves?

19. How do you feel about your Tony Nomination?

Proud of it. It's an honour. I don't live for awards or nominations but it feels good when it happens, I suppose. I never really expect it. But the company you're in? Far out.

20. Would you ever consider doing a production of *Richard the III* (as you are made for that role)?

Well I don't know the play - I better read it - I wouldn't have any doubts about its pedigree. I've seen some of the Laurence Olivier film version, it looked pretty good. In the documentary about the Sex Pistols, "The Filth and the Fury" they keep juxtaposing images of Johnny Rotten (Lydon) and Laurence Olivier as Richard III.

21. Marlon Brando said: "To grasp the full significance of life is the actor's duty, to interpret it is his problem, and to express it his dedication." Would you agree?

Nice one, Marlon. Do these not apply to everyone? Certainly the third part is true, I mean an actor has to know what's going on and has to know how people are.

22. What is your favourite scenery in Ireland? Do you miss Ireland, and if so, what do you miss most? Do you wear any celtic jewelry?

A nice gentle question to round things off. Here's some beautiful places in Ireland: Connemara, Sligo, Kerry, the Burren...they're busy with lots of tourists but that doesn't make them any less beautiful. Go on a rainy day. I also like out of the way places in the Midlands. Islands are good too, like Inishboffin, Inis Meain. I do miss Ireland but I'm there a lot so it's OK. I have a big celtic brooch with the wild bull of cooley on it through my belly-button. No, I don't really. No jewelry at all.

23. Are there any actresses you want to work with in the future?

Hhmmmmnnnn....