

O'Malley's Widow
Dramatic Comedy in Three Acts

by

Juan José Delaney

Plot Summary

The story takes place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Argentina when people from different cultures and origins immigrated to the country. The plot revolves around an Irish family living on a sheep farm. The family group is composed of the mother (the above mentioned widow) and her three children (two boys and a girl). The mother has a combative relationship with the children because of her strict Victorian principles and her authoritarian personality. A Spanish, Catholic priest is also part of this group, who being their spiritual advisor, visits them regularly.

Not only does the widow struggle against the ambitions of her eldest son, wanting to live on his own and against the relationship of her daughter with a Jewish boy, but she also feels that the mental deficiency of her youngest son is a terrible curse.

This boy does not speak throughout the play, with the exception of the monologue that takes place in the second act. He just listens to music and talks to the sheep, which he takes to pasture most of the day. When he communicates with the sheep he believes that his father is calling him as he used to when he was small: Be- bee- ben!

The story develops into the family's break up depicting the hypocrisy of the widow who continuously tries to justify her behaviour and enjoys flattery during the conversations and confessions with the priest. The story also describes how difficult it was for many Irish to become part of a completely different culture and learn the language.

In the end, the eldest son goes to Buenos Aires from where he plans to travel to Lois, in Ireland where his grandparents were from and which he had never visited but had often dreamt of. The daughter flees with her Jewish fiancé and the widow marries the priest who has renounced his priesthood. The story ends with the image of the youngest son listening to the music of the tango "El dientudo" being played on the phonograph and which is mysteriously played every time he appears to be threatened by reality. The play also starts with this music of the tango "El dientudo".

Characters

Mrs. Peg, widow of O'Malley, is in her forties. She is attractive and has a strong personality.

Father Lorenzo, who is in his fifties, is a Spanish Catholic priest.

Mrs. O'Malley's children: *Charlie* is twenty-one years old, *Brenda* is nineteen years old and Ben, who is retarded, is ten years old.

With the exception of the priest and the child, all the rest of the characters are dressed as farmers.

TIME

Winter and spring of 1926.

PLACE

A farm in Capitán Sarmiento, County of Carmen de Areco, flat countryside in the province of Buenos Aires.